

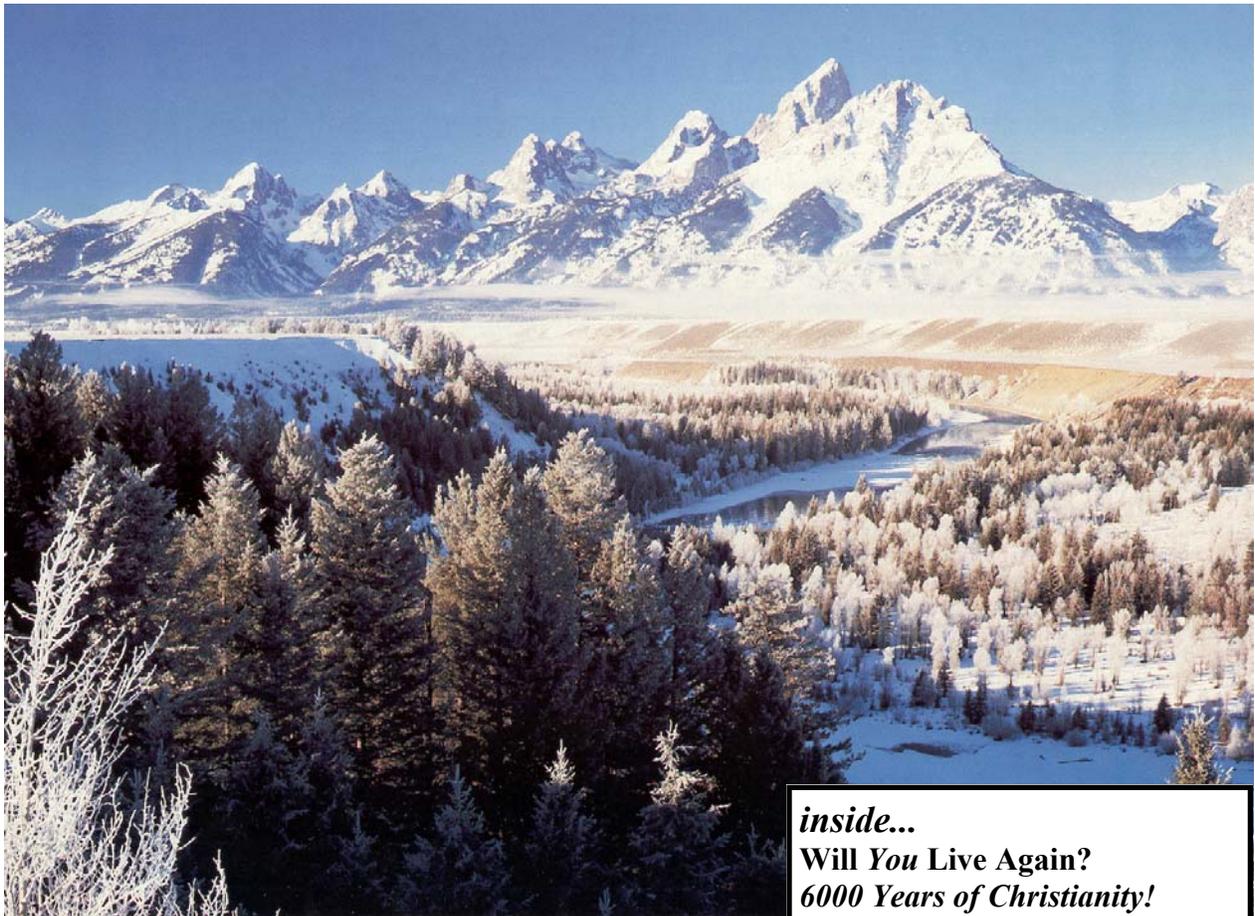
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Horizons

Vol 7 No 6

November/December 2003

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

Will You Live Again?

6000 Years of Christianity!

The People Cry Out

Going To Church - Why Bother?

Riders In The Sky

CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

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new Horizons

Issue No 42

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Billions believe they will after death return for another life. Is there anything to 'reincarnation'?

Reincarnation. It's an idea not generally accepted in the West. But in Hinduism and Buddhism - and increasingly among 'New Agers' and show-biz folk - there's a belief that they will after death return in the flesh.

Reincarnation ('re-fleshing') embraces a number of interpretations. Most popular is the Hindu notion that the quality of your return to life depends on your spiritual progress in this life. You may return in human form and in, for example, a different caste. Or perhaps in an animal form.

But has the idea of reincarnation any reflection in Biblical teaching?

Tricky Questions

Almost universally mankind believes there's a part of themselves that never dies - the 'soul'. In the accepted fundamentalist Christian tradition death initiates a separation. If you are a Christian when you die you reap the reward of an eternity with God in heaven. Those adults who have never 'accepted Jesus' are consigned eternally to torment in 'hell'.

This view raises tricky questions. What of all those who died prior to the death of Jesus? Or the living billions who have yet to hear that he is '*the way, the truth and the life, neither is there salvation in any other name*'? Or all those millions in 'Christian countries' who have no

time for Christianity? And all those who have consciously turned their backs on it? Heaven will be an empty shell, hell brim-full! It raises, too, disturbing questions about the character of God.

What Is Man?

Such questions are swept away when we examine the true nature of man - based on God's revelation in the Bible. "*You are made from dirt*", said God. Every body atom is '*of the earth, earthy*'. Having formed the 'clay model' in His own image and likeness, the Creator animated it by adding the breath of life - and Adam

'became a living

WILL YOU LIVE AGAIN?

soul' (Hebrew: *nephesh*) in common with all the other air-breathing creatures God had created.

Our first parents could have lived on endlessly in their perfection had they followed God's guidance. There was a tree in the Garden which - at least for the time being - was barred to them. They were instructed "*In the day you eat of it you will surely die*". But they *did* eat and the process of bodily decay immediately began.

Visiting the Garden was an Adversary intent on the ridiculous notion of upsetting God's plans. "*You shall not surely die*" he said. In other words, disobey the Maker's instructions, do as you please, and you will still live for ever. That was, of course, a lie. It spawned the universal Satanic notion that we each harbour within an 'immortal soul'. It's a lie hoovered up

by every major religion - including Christianity - and a lie totally foreign to the Scriptures. And a lie that has caused untold misery through the millennia.

Will You Live Again?

So - no immortal soul. And therefore nothing beyond the grave? It's a fact of death that when you die you have no conscious existence. '*Rest In Peace*' is true - for everyone. No heaven. No fiery hell. No purgatory. Just a dreamless sleep.. It is true for Adam, true for Elijah, true for the apostles and true for all mankind. [Request the free booklet *Where Are Enoch and Elijah?*]

If such were the case - *ie*, death ends all - then God would have unfinished business. We are told, however: "*It is appointed to men once to die - but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). Every human being that has drawn breath has opportunity to live for ever. That's a paradox. When our last breath goes and we are truly dead - yet we can live eternally!

Note the words of Jesus:

You, then, have a choice. You may

For as the Father has life in Himself, so has He given to the Son to have life in himself; and has given him authority to exercise judgment also, because he is the son of man. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come forth; they that have done good unto the resurrection of life and they that have done evil to the resurrection of judgment (John 5:26-29)

in this life '*do good*' or you may '*do evil*'! Which? *[cont'd over*

Resurrection

Jesus in this discourse spoke of *two* resurrections. The apostle John amplifies, and mentions '*the first resurrection*' (Revelation 20:5). These "*lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years*" (v.4). They are resurrected to life, and are those through the ages who have lived by the Spirit of God. They are raised from the dead at the return of Jesus to the earth (I Thessalonians 4:16).

What, then, of the rest of mankind - those billions who have walked the planet through the millennia? Clearly, Jesus hasn't written them off, for they, too, will be resurrected. He calls them '*evil*' in the sense that - however decent and helpful - their lives are not guided by His Spirit. Nor have many of them had access to that one saving name, Jesus.

John to the rescue again: "*The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished*" (ch 20:5). Two resurrections - one before the 'millennium' and one after it is completed.

There's a further vital distinction. Those in the first resurrection are raised not as flesh and blood but in spirit bodies. Paul describes it:

Now this I say, that flesh and blood can not inherit the Kingdom of God, neither does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all sleep but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. For the trumpet shall sound and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruptible, and this mortal must put on immortality

(I Corinthians 15:50-53)

What about 'the rest of the dead'?

Divine Plan

It's ludicrous to think that the all-powerful Creator God left the outcome of Eden to blind chance. In his perverted choice, Adam lost the di-

Soul

The soul is the life principle of all breathing creatures and is sustained by the circulating blood. It has no existence beyond death. The notion of an '*immortal soul*' is not Biblical but is shared by all the major religions.

Purgatory

In Roman Catholic theology: "The place and state in which the souls of the dead suffer for their sins before being admitted to heaven. Those in *Purgatory* may be assisted by the prayers of the faithful on earth"

Hell

Hell in English Scripture translations has two main meanings. Hebrew *Sheol* is simply the grave - the state of being dead. The Greek *Gehenna* derives from *Ge-Hinnom* or *Valley of Hinnom* - the Jerusalem rubbish dump. It is the place where the dead bodies of the unrepentant wicked will be burnt up

Heaven

The spiritual dimension inhabited by the Father, Jesus Christ and the created angelic beings

rect presence of the divine. For the next four thousand years or so God had to be approached indirectly through sacrifice and mediators. But sacrifices "*possess no power whatever to strip off our sins*" (Hebrews 10:11). In effect they looked forward to the sacrifice of Jesus: "*Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*" (I Corinthians 5:7).

Access to the Father is now freely available to those who have accepted that sacrifice of Jesus. And the others?

The Rest of the Dead

Christian theology - and indeed that of the other major faiths - consigns mankind on death to heaven, hell, purgatory, limbo, paradise. Or to a return to Earth in another form. In Biblical fact, the latter has a germ of truth!

After the millennium most of those who never heard of or accepted Jesus Christ will be raised from their graves (or be 're-constituted') to an extended *physical* life. (Some will have been dead - maybe for six thousand years.) During that post-millennial time they will be exposed to the Gospel and given opportunity to become a part of the Family of God, to live eternally. It's unlikely many will refuse! There are, however, exceptions.

Government of God

The millennial reign of Jesus will be a time of peace. But it is a *Kingdom* and as such will be ruled not only by God's Spirit indwelling converted individuals but by a system of law. Even though Satan is safely restrained, yet human nature will still have its way. National ambitions and aggression will be restrained - but individuals will sin, cheat, be violent and even need temporary restraint in prisons. Not everyone will be motivated by God's Spirit!

Ezekiel, in his 'millennial chapters', outlines the legal system: "*[The priesthood] shall teach my people the difference between the holy and the unholy, and cause them to discern between the unclean and the clean. In controversy they shall stand as judges and judge it according to my judgments. They shall keep my laws and my statutes in all my appointed meetings, and they shall hallow my Sabbaths*" (ch 44:23,24).

Note that the *resurrected Christians* will at that time be 'a Kingdom of priests' (Revelation 5:10). They will exercise oversight on human administration of the divine Law. As the apostle Paul told the Corinthian brethren: "*Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? Do you not know that we shall judge angels?*" (I Corinthians 6:2,3)

Jesus in one of his discourses referred to the nature of the Kingdom (Matthew 25). Christians will be resurrected (or changed) at the return of Christ - thus separating them from *[cont'd p.7*

“True Christianity is about six thousand years old”. Even if our school history is long forgotten, most of us would raise eyebrows at that statement! Yet it is, in a manner of speaking, quite true

Jesus Christ, of course, lived and died about two thousand years ago. Didn't he found what we call "Christianity"? Don't we trace our faith back to the first century of our era? Wasn't that faith handed on down to us today?

Surprisingly, the multitude of brands packaged as Christianity at the close of the twentieth century bear little resemblance to the religion of Jesus and Peter and Paul! None of them would recognize it as the religion they daily practised. Yet today's denominations all claim the Bible, largely, as their religious source. Some take away part of its text, some change it, some add their own writings.

But few believe - *and do* - what the Bible says!

And what it says is alien to much twenty-first century Christianity. Every first century Christian would indeed recognize the modern variety. *But it is the religion they left behind to become Christian!* Indeed they would see in modern Christianity the practices of contemporary mystery religions, especially Mithraism!

The Jewish Messiah

However painful it is to some, Jesus the Messiah was a Jew, and he perfectly followed the religion of the Old Testament. So, too, was Peter. And Paul. And while they rejected all the human and pagan additions to Biblical religion added by the Jews, yet they did not leave the true Biblical faith. Indeed what they taught and lived would have been clearly recognized by Abraham (the "father of the

faithful") who lived long before Moses. And recognized by Moses, David, Daniel and Ezra!

But they would all - from Adam to Paul and John - be appalled by what today passes as God's religion ("Christianity"). The Bible terminology is there, of course. But not the substance.

By the time of Jesus the Jews had added to "*the faith once delivered*". Judaism was no longer the Bible faith. So much so that Jesus and Paul had to deal with it vigorously. Many humanly-devised traditions had been coupled with imports from pagan religions. But such is the power of false religion (it appeals to our human nature) that not many years passed before the true religion taught by Jesus and the apostles was swamped and all but lost.

Jesus Christ himself fought for the only religion God ever revealed. He called it "the Law", and said that none of it would become obsolete (Matthew 5:17). It was the same Law - instruction, Torah - which was known to Adam, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Moses. Contrary to what the former Archbishop of York has said, the Law (and the entire Christian Bible) has as much relevance today as at any time in human history. Perhaps more so.

And each of us - including the Archbishop - will be judged by its standard!

Judgment To Come

A major purpose of the coming of Jesus as Messiah was to reconcile all mankind to God. We need that, because every one of us has walked all over His Law! The fruit of such a walk is death. And only the death of one who was sinless and whose life

6000 Years Of Christianity!

was greater than the sum of all mankind could reconcile us to God.

Jesus of Nazareth fulfilled that unique role. He had been an integral part of the God family - but gave up all the glory. He lived as a man and never once transgressed that Law, never sinned - not even inwardly. By his death he purchased forgiveness for us who have sinned from birth. Our judgment would otherwise be inevitable.

Without the sacrifice of Jesus Christ we would face eternal death. But his sacrifice is effective only if we first repent. Which means we turn our lives around and live by the ancient Law!

This is not a "gospel of works", for no-one can "buy" salvation - even by perfect law-keeping. We are "saved by grace" - God's limitless love and mercy and favour. But the mark of our conversion is that our lives begin to express God's Torah as fully as we are able.

Do you, with Paul, accept that the Law is "*holy and just and good*" (Romans 7:12)? Do you believe, as Jesus taught, that those who reject the Law and teach men to reject it are regarded as "the least" by those in God's Kingdom (Matthew 5:19)? Do you, with David (a man after God's own heart) say "*I love your Law; it is my meditation all the day*" (Psalm 119:97)?

God's Law never changes. For a time a sacrificial system was added which teaches us much about the coming Messiah. Each sacrifice "preached the Gospel"! Once he (Jesus Christ) came those sacrifices were suspended. (They will be reinstated after his return) [*cont'd p.9*]

THE PEOPLE CRY OUT

Few would claim perfection for any human system for the administration of justice. What has gone wrong?

A pornographer rapes a baby and gets a paltry five years imprisonment - out in three years. An abortionist is murdered and his assailant is executed. Is there a happy medium? Or have we got justice upside down?

Proper justice demands a fair trial. Witnesses tell the truth and their evidence is unshakeable. Police enquiries are rigorous and impeccable, and not biased for or against the accused. All jurors are sharp-minded and 'wise' and are protected from intimidation from interested parties - and from lawyers. Cross-examination is focused on finding the truth and not the exploitation of technical legal points.

Good justice hangs on such!

It's not like that, of course. Witness evidence is too often one-sided, partial, half-blind and biased. Police are not unknown to further self-interest - promotion, falsifying evidence, corruption. Juries are scooped in part from the incompetent and discarded if they show signs of strong opinion. They are often swayed by media generated emotion. The legal team - prosecution and defence - wants to make a name for itself. And underpinning every trial is the cultural norm. Is it surprising there are 'miscarriages of justice'? But, of course, human justice reflects our perverse human nature.

Culture

The administration of justice varies from culture to culture. What is acceptable in, for example, Saudi Arabia - public execution for various behaviours seen as crimes - may be anathema in the USA or the United Kingdom. And the 'cultural climate' can change within a nation. Once upon a

time you could, in Britain, hang for sheep stealing. In Texas it would be horse theft. Perhaps a bit extreme - but remember those animals were someone's livelihood. In modern Nigeria you can be stoned for adultery (at least, the women can).

Enter the twenty-first century and the culture has changed. Take capital punishment. It is now *illegal* in the United Kingdom for any crime, thanks to the adoption of European Union law. In the United States opinion is divided - illegal in some States, legal in others.

Attitudes vary. Most citizens of the United Kingdom support the death penalty for murder. The cultural elite, however, reject it outright. Especially in the USA, perhaps surprisingly it is Christians who in general support execution for murder. But not for adultery or sodomy or occult practices which have become culturally acceptable - even among Christians.

And not for the taking of unborn life - abortion is, for most, culturally acceptable.

Capital Crime

Given the confusion as to what merits what punishment, and given the abject state of the administration of justice, it is inevitable that thinking people reject the ultimate and all-too-final penalty - death.

What if the witnesses were suborned, or simply lied. What if conviction was on mere circumstantial evidence. What if the police had a slovenly investigation. What if the prosecuting lawyer was smarter than the defence. What if skin colour was a factor. Or social standing or wealth - or lack of these. Since we can't trust the justice system - *why risk executing the innocent?* Do you want innocent blood on your hands?

Yet the taking of a life is a heinous crime. Murder, that is - *not* death in battle and *not* a legitimate execution. What can atone for the deliberate taking of another human's life? Abortion is sufficient evil. (What if Beethoven or Churchill - or Jesus - had been aborted?) The human mind is capable of the most grotesque and evil acts upon fellow humans. Serial killers leave a serpent's trail of despicable deeds. Surely they deserve no less than death itself.

Consequences

Instead we lock up sex fiends, rapists, serial killers - and rarely throw away the key. After a decade or more of 'appeals'. Most, however, are freed, many to repeat their evil actions. While 'inside' they are slaves to the system - get up when you're told, slop out when told, wash when told, eat, exercise, go to bed. Sometimes for years - a university of evil. An early experience of 'hell'. How much better to purge the nation of such evil - permanently, and by speedy public execution.

Wrote King Solomon: "*Because sentence on a crime is not executed at once, the mind of man is prone to evil practices*" (Ecclesiastes 8:11). Let him - or her - get away with it, and

he will simply perfect the criminal habit. Allow a mugger or a burglar to get away with it - even the first offence - and the pattern of criminality will be reinforced.

Failure on the part of the justice system spawns petty street crime, unsafe cities, fear, insecurity. Gangs of immature restless youths make life intolerable. The elderly barricade themselves indoors at night and increasingly in the day. The security industry burgeons. Inadequate policing encourages vigilantes and the taking of personal vengeance. And too often it's the victim who is prosecuted.

Divine Image

To be effective, justice must be seen to be done. The man-in-the-street knows that there are degrees of criminality and that punishment must be proportionate. If it's ten years for money laundering - is ten years adequate for a rapist or a cold-blooded serial killer or child molester? Sadly, the Executive and the Judiciary don't seem to know! What John Doe thinks, however, is in harmony with natural justice. And that natural justice is a reflection of the criminal code outlined in the Christian Bible - and largely understood in cultures worldwide.

A society which follows Bible principles of justice is a society at peace with itself. Property crime was punished by the victim being fairly compensated. The perpetrator was 'indentured' (*slavery*, in Bible terms) to the victim until the matter was settled - and not locked as a slave in prison as today, while no 'sentence' lasted more than seven years.

Every person, in the divine judicial system, is sacrosanct. Man is created in the divine image, each with a place in the divine plan with the potential of living forever.

Long before Moses, God explained the principle to Noah: *"Whoever sheds a person's blood by man shall his blood be shed; for God made man in His own likeness"* (Genesis 9:6). To cut short a life, to defile a child, to rape, to mar the divine image in a person cries out for a capital punishment. The shedding of life-giving blood (*'the life is in the blood'*) cries out for atonement - possible only through the shedding of blood.

What Is a Crime?

Crimes against the person are to be dealt with justly - the *'eye for an eye'* principle. Agreed equivalent compensation was substituted and the convicted individual had to finance the treatment of the injured party. Manslaughter was serious and the

God's Prescription for crime

- Eliminate corrupt practices - by police and lawyers
- Deal with witness and jury intimidation
- Crack down on perjury
- Let justice be swift
- Match the punishment to the crime
- Execute murderers speedily

killer was taken into protective custody for a time ('asylum') - not in a prison but in a working township or 'city of refuge'.

But some crimes were so heinous - and still are - that nothing short of the death penalty was to be imposed: premeditated murder, for example, or rape, or abduction. When proven killers are executed *consistently and speedily* it is a deterrent. And it is God in His wisdom who demands it. It is the system consistently promoted throughout both Old *and* New Testaments.

God holds the government of the day responsible for the administration of justice. Wrote Paul:

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God. Therefore whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers are not a terror to good works but to evil. Do you want to be unafraid of the authority? Do what is good and you will have praise from the same. For he is God's minister to you for good. ut if you do evil be afraid for he does not bear the sword in vain [ie the death penalty], an avenger to execute wrath on him who practices evil (Romans 13:1-4)

And it is *God's* standards He expects *them* to uphold. Failure on the part of the Government leads, ultimately, to anarchy. Inadequate justice begets personal revenge. A warning to today's bleeding hearts!

The teaching of Jesus and his apostles upholds these principles.

Given that our societies have sunk into a quagmire of evil, it is unlikely that our national leadership will restore true justice. Our people cry out for leaders who will not bow before the idol of perverse liberalism which rejects the divinely revealed pattern of a society at peace with itself.

Change Now!

God extends to us the mercy of time to change our ways. Ancient Israel sank to similar depraved depths - and after years in which God withheld His judgment they suffered invasion and exile of its people - scattered around the world..

That same fate awaits all nations that walk all over the divine Law. Paul, in Romans 13, urges Christians to be subject to the great *Law of Love* - obedience to the Commandments (vv.5-10). Whatever our leaders dictate.

Prophecy indicates an end-time worldwide proclamation - to *'every nation, tribe tongue and people'* - of the true Gospel by a divine messenger (Revelation 14:6). All of us will be without excuse. On the heels of this message, to emphasise it, follow the 'seven last plagues' (*ch* 16) - in face of which many will still refuse to repent (vv.9.11).

Now is the time for *you* to yield to the great Law-giver, Jesus Christ. □

If you would like to talk about any matter related to your Bible studies or to your personal challenges our elders are happy to be of service. They may be contacted through any of our offices

in strict confidence

GOING TO CHURCH ...why bother?

"DIVINE WORSHIP, 11.00am"

It's part of the Christian culture worldwide. But is that the central purpose of a Christian assembly?

The familiar sound of hymn-singing filters through closed doors. Style varies from dour unaccompanied psalms to 'happy-clappy choruses': arms upraised, eyes closed, swaying bodies. A robed choir - sober or animated. An instrumental or vocal solo. Strobe lighting, movement, vivid colour. Sometimes, even, dancing in the aisles by professionals. Is it worship - or is it entertainment? Whatever the style it is considered to be 'worship', and deemed essential for every Christian meeting.

True Worship

Such worship forms are the accepted norm in today's Christianity - perhaps an attempt to encourage more 'sinners', more youth, through the doors, more brethren to swell 'annual events'. But pack in the crowds - as in a crowded sports stadium or pop concert - and mass euphoria, even hysteria, results.

Delve into New Testament practice, however, and a different picture emerges. There, the emphasis isn't the pagan notion of 'bringing God down' or 'working up the Spirit' through corporate hymn singing and chanting or prayers or tongues-speaking. The New Testament writers are blind to such a concept of worship.

For the Christian, worship is *how we live our lives*, twenty-four seven. How we think. How and what we say. How we treat our children and spouse, our neighbours, our friends, our work colleagues. How we react under pressure. How we resist temptation. It's the way we interact with other Christians. It is 'instant prayer'.

It is submission to every Word of God. Our whole being, in other words, reflects the mind of Christ and our Father, as revealed in the Scriptures.

That's true worship. It isn't confined to the couple of hours a week spent in the presence of brethren. *It is our way of life* - a continuous act of worship. "*Worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness*", says the Psalmist" (Psalm 96:9). *Holiness* is separation from all that offends God. Wrote the apostle Paul: "*...do everything to the glory of God*" (I Corinthians 10:v.31) That, surely, is the purpose of worship! Why, then, 'go to church'?

Why We Assemble

From its inception, the church understood the purpose for meeting together. "*They attended steadfastly in the apostles' instruction, and in fellowship, and in the breaking of bread and the prayers*" (Acts 2:42).

That is, instruction in God's Word, interaction with one another, sharing, prayer.

The prime purpose of our meeting together is that we may be built up in the faith. That's why Jesus gifts individuals:

"[*Jesus himself*] gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists and some pastors and teachers for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying [ie building up] of the Body of Christ" (Ephesians 4:11,12). Hence the emphasis on 'apostolic teaching'.

Wrote Paul to the evangelist Timothy: "*Till I come, give attendance to public reading, to exhortation, to teaching*" (I Timothy 4:13). This reflects the practice in the synagogues where it was the custom of Jesus and the apostles to assemble on Sabbaths and holy days. There was a public reading of the Law followed by 'exhortation' (*see aslo*, for exam-

ple, Acts 13:15). The 'exhortation' was an exposition of the texts of the Law and Prophets just read (and interpreted from the Hebrew). 'The teaching', in Christian assemblies, included God's revelation through the apostles and New Testament prophets. The emphasis, in other words, was what God has to say to us. The modern chorus '*When the praise goes up, the Glory comes down*' puts the cart before the horse!

Fellowship

Interaction with other Christians is, too, vital to our walk with God. *Fellowship* is *sharing*. Paul puts it in a nut-shell: "*Let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the day approaching*" (Hebrews 10:24-25). (He goes on, note, to connect such neglect with wilful sin - v.26.)

There are clear principles involved here. *Consideration of the brethren* is at the heart of an assembly. The purpose? To "*stir up love and good works*". Assembling together is opportunity to exercise our spiritual gifts - showing mercy, encouragement, a shoulder to cry on, discovering and attending to needs. We meet, surely, to be ministered to - *but also to minister to others!* Notice all those '*one another*' texts - most effective when we are physically present with one another. And *in times of stress*, says Paul, such interaction becomes more important. Of course, if your physical presence isn't possible (poor health, finance, distance etc) it's vital that you find other means to positively minister to fellow-Christians.

Let's Eat

The *breaking of bread* is a term foreign to the Western ear. It simply means 'let's eat!' Anciently in Bible

lands, daily food had a certain 'sacredness' attached, and ever-present was the understanding that, though they had to work to eat, yet the ultimate source was God.

Friends gathered to eat, the meal 'sanctified' by prayers. An example was the 'last supper' shared by Jesus and the apostles - a practice continued by the disciples. To share a meal was saying in essence, 'we are bound together by a solemn covenant' - a natural for the early disciples. By extension, the brethren "...were together and had all things common, and sold their possessions and goods and divided them among all as anyone had need." (Acts 2:44-45).

Steeped as the first Christians were in the Synagogue, it isn't remarkable that *the Prayers* drew heavily on the liturgy of the Synagogue. 'The Prayers' were not an insignificant tag-on to the assembly meeting - 'bless this service' kind of thing. In the Synagogue, and as recorded by early Christian writers, the term included praise and thanksgiving and intercession, with special use of the Psalms.

Luke's summary in Acts 2 is a likely template for church gatherings. First,

Live Again? ...cont'd

the rest of mankind. Jesus referred to *subsequent* years when "...the Son of man comes in his glory and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory" (v.31).

The Dark Side

Then - that is, throughout the Millennium - Jesus Christ will separate the nations (v.32) on the basis of how individuals live and their attitude to what will then be the one universal - and only - faith (vv.33-46).

Further, those who - having heard the worldwide open proclamation of the 'everlasting gospel' by a divine messenger before the time of the 'last

WHO WE ARE

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "Shepherd...feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based + *Newsletter, Fountain of Life*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - or individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.

Trumpet' (Revelation 14:6) - remain unrepentant, will be destroyed by plagues administered by divine messengers (*ch* 15:9,11; II Thessalonians 1:7,8). Recall that the return of Messiah is not until the seventh - and last - symbolic Trumpet.

Another exception to the 'rest of the dead': those who, having lived

*[Request the free booklet **The Key to the Book of Revelation**. It explains the symbolism of the seven Seals and seven Trumpets]*

God spoke to the brethren through His Word and its exposition. There followed *interaction* between the brethren in fellowship and a shared covenant *meal*. And *prayers* of praise and thanksgiving, with intercession for one another - *our* approach to God. All was expressed in reverence coupled with joy.

Clearly, such a pattern would be impractical in a large congregation. But of course the first Christians usually met in independent small groups, in the homes of the brethren. As Luke records in his account of the first days of the church, "...*breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people*" (Acts 2:46-47). As the apostle Paul told the Ephesian elders: "[I]...*taught you publicly and from house to house*" (Acts 20:20).

'Divine service' in many churches has departed from the simple assembly of the first century. The focus ought to revert to the original intent - the building up of the brethren through God speaking to us by means of His Word. As that Word impacts our lives we truly worship Him in spirit and in truth and in holiness. □

through the latter days of Christ's millennial reign, choose to revert to Satanic deception are destroyed by divine fire (Revelation 20:7-9). No excuse for them about the nature of the Gospel!

By the time that Jesus hands over the Kingdom to the Father (I Corinthians 15:25-28) all mankind will have been given ample opportunity to embrace the Gospel - to repent, to accept the shed blood of Jesus to wash away sin, and to receive God's Spirit which alone gives entrance to His everlasting Kingdom.

Will you be among those in the first resurrection? □

Two white horses. Two agendas. Will you be deceived?

John Morton

Jesus Christ attracted a lot of attention with his miracles. He healed the sick and raised the dead. When word spread, thousands flocked to hear him. He preached about the Kingdom of God and promised a world at peace. He was the Messiah of whom the prophets had spoken – destined to rule.

Christ's Return

Before he died Christ told his disciples that he would return with power and great glory. He is pictured in the Book of Revelation on a white horse, returning triumphantly to rule this earth:

Imagine the impact on the world if some-

"Then I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except himself. He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and his name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed him on white horses. Now out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And he himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God (Revelation 19:11-15)

one calling himself the son of God suddenly appeared, performing great miracles and putting the fear of God into the hearts of men. Would you, like millions of others who have been praying for God's Kingdom think your prayers have been answered? What if his arrival was not quite as spectacular as described above? And instead of heavenly armies he worked together with a powerful nation or group of nations using their armies as international 'peacekeepers' to enforce and maintain world peace. How would you react?

Two Riders

The sixth chapter of the Book of Revelation describes an event similar to that in Chapter 19. It begins by saying - *"And I looked, and behold, a white horse. And he who sat on it had a bow; and a crown was given to him, and he went out conquering and to conquer,"* (Revelation 6:2).

Although the description in chapters 6 and

19 both seem to describe the return of Christ they actually refer to entirely different events. Undeniably the rider in chapter 19 is Jesus Christ who returns to earth after the martyrdom of the saints and the heavenly signs described in Matthew 24:9-10 and 29-30 take place. But the rider of Revelation 6 arrives before the martyrdom of the saints and the heavenly signs take place, clearly indicating quite separate events (Revelation 6:2, 9-17). So who does the rider in chapter 6 represent?

Mystery Rider

Make no mistake, Jesus Christ is coming with great power and authority to depose his enemies and he will rule over the earth. But Satan, whose time is running out, is not going to stand back and wait for that to happen. He plans to preempt Christ's return with a carefully staged counterfeit that will deceive the world, turning them against the real Christ when he does arrive. Jesus warned us to expect such events. He said, *"For false Christs, and false prophets will arise, and shall show great signs and wonders, so as to deceive if possible even the elect,"* (Matthew 24:23-24).

We know that Jesus is the Lamb of God (John 1:29, 36). But there is another described in Revelation who is *"like a lamb"*. A counterfeit who is *like* Christ, who has authority and *"performs great signs, so that he even makes fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men. And he deceives those who dwell on the earth by those signs,"* (Revelation 13:11-14).

This is none other than, *"the son of perdition, who opposes and exalts himself above all that is called God or that is worshipped, so that he sits as God in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God,"* (II Thessalonians 2:3-4). He is also called the false prophet, *"Who worked signs in his presence by which he deceived them that received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image"* (Revelation 19:20, 16:13).

World Peace

The Beast mentioned in both Daniel 7 and Revelation 13 appears to be symbolic of a powerful world leader with whom no one would want to make war (Revelation

13:4). Billions deceived by the false prophet's power, signs and lying wonders will eagerly support an alliance between this leader of the beast power and the false prophet (II Thessalonians 2:3-9, II Corinthians 11:14-15). Together they will crush all opposition and John's vision in Revelation 6 reveals how this will be accomplished.

Following hard on the heels of the rider on the white horse of Revelation 6 is a rider on a red horse brandishing a sword symbolising military power (Revelation 6:3-4). The ability "to take peace from the earth" indicates that the threat of war will be enough to maintain a form of peace. Recent acts of terrorism have already heightened the desire in the minds of many for a global military force to maintain world peace. Whether this is accomplished by an aggressive coalition of nations or by a single, powerful nation with huge military resources remains to be seen.

Global Resources

A third rider on a black horse portrays a worldwide scarcity of basic food resources (Revelation 6:5-6). The pair of scales indicates that the beast power will be in control of the world's vital food resources and will measure out grain for a price to those nations who need it. That 'price' could well be their submission to the beast's authority. The words, "do not harm the oil and the wine" indicate that the nation, or nations, in control are prepared to provide much needed grain as long as their own standard of living is not compromised.

Genetic modification, hailed by many including the Pope, as the answer to the world's food problems may be the means of gaining control over world food resources. Genetically modified crops with 'built in' sterility will require growers to purchase their seed annually. Whoever controls the seed source controls the world's grain resources.

Many world leaders and their advisors believe fervently that globalisation holds the answers to their problems. They envisage a single world government con-

Riders in the Sky

RIDERS... cont'd

trolling finances and resources for the 'greater good of the world'. Control of strategic oil resources has already provided the incentive for a number of wars especially in the Middle East. Total control of resources is becoming increasingly more achievable.

Opposition

The fourth rider pictures the fate of those nations that do not submit to the beast power. They will either be crushed by superior military forces or left to starve. Revelation 6:7-9 indicates that one quarter of the world's population will die at this time through military action or from hunger.

In summary the four riders of Revelation 6 symbolise how a Christ-like religious leader allied with a powerful world leader will, in the name of God, gain global control through military superiority (John 16:2).

Many will be deceived into thinking God's Kingdom is being set up here on earth. Any who dare to oppose this concept, including the saints, will be persecuted (Revelation 6:9-11, 13:7). At the same time the false prophet is exercising his miraculous powers and prophesying about world peace, there will be two witnesses sent by God to give testimony against the false prophet and beast. Although they too will have power to perform miracles and to prophecy they will eventually be killed (Revelation 11: 3-10). So powerful will the false prophet and the beast become they will even dare to oppose the real Christ when he does return (Revelation 19:19).

YEAR'S BIGGEST EVENT!

Love it, loathe it - Christmas is coming. You have been warned, for since August ads for various products - from cards to hampers - have tumbled through the letter box.

Most folk join in, however reluctantly. But do you ever give a thought to the surprising reasons for a Christmas celebration?

Our booklet *Plain Truth About Christmas* explores the origins of 'Xmas' from a Biblical perspective.

Request a free copy, now

End-time Prophecy

End time events described in Revelation, were given to John in visions similar to those described in Daniel 7 and 8. These prophecies, heavily laden with symbolism, define roles to be played and events yet to occur. They do not predict precisely when they will occur, nor do they reveal who will fill the various roles. They were written in terms applicable to the times in which the writers lived. Each generation has tried to interpret the prophecies to fit current events, often assigning end time roles to individuals and nations that exist in their own times.

While it is interesting to speculate as to who will do what, it is important to understand that not all has been revealed (Daniel 8:26-27 also Revelation 10:4-5). Some things may not occur as predicted by those who have attempted to interpret the end time prophecies (II Peter 1:20). More recent events are making it increasingly difficult to make their interpretations fit and today a whole new world order could emerge very rapidly.

Warnings

Satan is very subtle and incredibly clever; he is the master of deception and if it is possible he will deceive the elect (Matthew 24:24, Revelation 12:9). Make no mistake, he will try every trick possible to convince us that the rider of Revelation 6 is the real thing. Remember Jesus himself said, "If any man shall say to you - Lo here is Christ or there, believe him not" (Matthew 24:23). He also said, "Take heed that you be not deceived. For many will come in my name, saying, 'I am he,' and, 'The time has drawn near.' Therefore do not go after them" (Luke 21:8)

We have been warned that great deception will take place. Already many are deceived! Even if world events do not unfold as we expect it is important to maintain a close relationship with God. Remember, Christ is our Rock - our Salvation and he will defeat the false prophet and beast when he returns (Revelation 17:14, 20:10).

In the mean-time we must watch our spiritual condition, praying always for truth and *proving all things* by God's word. Let no one deceive you! When it comes to riders on white horses. Make sure you back the right one! □

6000 Years... cont'd

But the basic Law of God is eternal. Jesus did not change it. Paul did not change it. Godless men changed it.

Unchanging God

Since man first walked the earth, the essence of God's way for us has not changed. The guidance He gave

Adam - summed up in the Ten Commandments - remains to this day the only sure guide to life. As a Christian, can you see anything wrong with them? Examine the Commandments one by one - a prescription for the perfect way of life!

James tells us that the Law is a unit. Break one point, he says, and it falls apart. A bit like a machine - remove one part and it quits working. Yet most Christians will at least pay lip service to the Commandments. Who would agree to adultery, perjury, murder, taking God's name in vain or placing other gods before Him?

Why, then, despise the Law? In fact it's only one Law that is rejected: "Remember the Sabbath day to keep it holy. Six days shall you labour and do all your work, but in the seventh day rest".

The religion of Christ, then, is as old as Adam. Follow it!

Let's all take earnest heed to the truth of God's Word. □

TWO NATIONS...

An event of immense prophetic significance took place nearly three thousand years ago. To understand the prophetic Scriptures you need to read what happened to ancient Israel.

Our guest writer has made available for *New Horizons* readers his article explaining the twenty-first century outcome of this God-appointed event that is shaping modern history.

Request a free copy of *Two Nations*

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