

# outreach

## The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Regd Charity No 283358

JANUARY 2003

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Matthew 28:19-20

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### WHERE ARE THE PROPHETS?

You probably expect a prophet to be ancient, bearded, wild-eyed - a bit like the caricature of Elijah. Not, of course, the usual Biblical picture of one. Jeremiah for example was a fresh-faced youngster when he began to deliver God's messages for his nation - and for our world today.

Nor were the prophets always a 'religious'. David was a king. Amos a shepherd. Hosea possibly a baker. Isaiah traditionally of royal blood.

A mark of God's prophets is that they were *always right* in their predictions. Otherwise they were 'false prophets'. Even Balaam couldn't force himself to prophesy error. So where are the prophets today?

We could look in the media. *What* - a journalist as a prophet? They do often have more moral sense and perception than our national - and religious - leaders! But we usually look to the churches for our prophets. Are there any *there*?

#### Prophets Today?

A prophet - in the Old Testament sense - conveys a direct word from God predicting future events, a message that may or may not be fulfilled in his or her lifetime. It also includes a warning of the consequences of present behaviour - a call to repentance. Prophecies from God may have an immediate fulfilment, but more often they also refer to events centuries later. And they don't fail.

Some men and women in our day are considered by their followers as 'prophets'. But are they bringing that *direct word from God*? And is it a *new word*? That is, not their own thoughts on an existing prophecy written in Scripture.

We've had literally thousands of the latter down the years. And usually they are wrong! Their *time frame* is wrong - a host of dates predicting the return of Christ have come and gone, and other dates are even now being set. *National identities*, too, have proved to be in error. And

*specific individuals* have been wrongly assigned their place in prophecy - *eg* as 'the Beast' or the 'false prophet'. *Wrong again.*

So if a latter day 'prophet' (acclaimed, or self-acclaimed) fails in his or her predictions - doesn't that indicate a *false* prophet? Get it wrong once and can their *future* 'prophecies' be guaranteed?

So there is a difference. A very few real prophets directly inspired to bring a message from God. And thousands of 'prophetic interpreters' - *uninspired*

Daniel, now, was a *real* prophet. But he was also an interpreter of prophecy, having researched the inspired prophecies of Jeremiah about Judah's captivity in Babylon. Daniel, however, got it right (*Read Daniel ch 9, especially vv.2-4.*)

But too many religious people slip into the self-proclaimed role of prophet. And too many sincere folk promote them as divinely inspired.

There's nothing wrong with the study of prophecy - as long as there's the humility to present the interpretation as just personal speculation. Sadly, whole denominations have been built around wrong prophetic interpretation. And don't we go for it! Countless hours expended on convoluted articles and multi-coloured charts often based on historical fantasies and chronological coincidence.

#### New Testament

There were real prophets in the early church - Jesus, notably. But the term is also applied to those - gifted by Christ (I Corinthians 12:7, 10) - who speak before the brethren *for their upbuilding, encouraging and comfort*' (ch 14:3) and *'that all may learn and all may be comforted'* (ch 14:31). That's what Christian prophets are supposed to do!

But if one of the brethren announces, for example, that there will be a severe famine in a specific location - *and if it happens* - then he's a real prophet on that occasion. 'By their fruits shall you

## NEW HORIZONS

Readers of *OUTREACH* are invited to request our free bi-monthly *New Horizons* - which can be mailed anywhere worldwide. It addresses, from a Biblical perspective, issues facing Christians in 2003. Other articles examine cherished beliefs in the light of the Scriptures.

Send your street address for a *free* paper copy to any of our addresses. Subscription places you under no obligation (except to think!) and no-one will call on you uninvited.

*New Horizons* may be viewed on-line at  
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## PROPHETS...?

know them! What is their track record?

It's fine - as did Daniel - to study the Biblical prophecies. As long as it doesn't become an obsession, pursued to the exclusion of personal spiritual growth into Christ-likeness. But to interpret prophecy, first immerse yourself in the original prophetic language, the history of the times, the ancient culture! And, like Daniel, seek *God's* interpretation. (ch 9:4-22).

However, the big prophetic events lie on the surface, for those with eyes to see.. The present apostasy from the true faith. The visible return of Christ. The resurrection of the people of God to unending life. Satanic power bound. The rule of Messiah over all the earth as King of kings. *Etc.*

Let's get prophecy - and so-called prophets - into a proper perspective. ف

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## JEALOUS...cont'd

to their god - *the sun god*. And didn't God say, 'I don't change'?

## Consequences

The observance of Christmas - and indeed the other holidays associated with Christianity - may seem harmless enough, since 'Jesus' is supposedly their focus. However, they are an abandonment of God's direct instructions and an open door to further idolatry. Paul urges us to 'keep clear of idolatry' (I Corinthians 10:14) - it is a 'work of the flesh' (Galatians 5:20) with dire consequences. ف

[You are invited to request the free article  
**Babylon - Fountain of Error**]

## HOLY DAYS 2003

Lord's Supper.....April 15

(Tuesday evening)

Unleavened Bread.....April 17\*-23\*

Pentecost.....June 8\*

Trumpets..... September 27\*

Day of Atonement.....October 6\*

Tabernacles.....October 11\*-17

Closing Day.....October 16\*

\* Annual Sabbaths begin the previous evening

## A JEALOUS GOD

With **Christmas** behind you for another year it may be useful to take stock. What did it mean to you?

Few now attempt to find a Christian meaning. Christmas has become 'secular', and many even *revel* in the knowledge that the trappings originate in an anti-God pre-Christian mix of religions - 'paganism'.

Whatever Christian symbolism *you* may attach to snow or evergreens or lights or tree-top angels or gifts or Santa - what does *God* think of them and of Christmas? The answer isn't pretty!

For, since humanity was created by the God of the Scriptures He has made it known that He is very jealous of how He seeks our worship. (Just look at the first four of the Ten Commandments. Could any real Christian want to 'do away' with them?) And given His awesome power and majesty and generosity such worship is certainly due. Our Creator has given clear guidance - not mere 'suggestions' - on how and when and why we are to come before Him. *And nowhere in His Word does He sanction Christmas!* Didn't He say: "...*be on your guard lest you be lured into imitating [the Gentiles], inquiring after their gods saying, How did these nations worship their gods?" so that you may do the same.... Everything I am commanding you, you shall do. You must not add to it or take from it*" (Deuteronomy 12:28-32).

## Penalties

There are divinely-imposed penalties for observing any different form of worship. The ancient Canaanite inhabitants of 'the Land of Promise' had evolved a foul distortion of divine worship - a 'faith' that included child sacrifice, bestiality, homosexuality, idol worship. So vile indeed that God had the nation destroyed. Israel followed the same path of perverting Godly worship. The fledgling 'House of Israel' changed the time of the divinely-appointed autumn Festival of Tabernacles - an aspect of the 'sin of Jereboam' - which launched the nation into rebellion and ultimately expulsion from their land. Next, the 'House of Judah' abandoned the Sabbaths and were as a consequence themselves evicted into a seventy-year Babylonian exile (II Chronicles 36:20-21).

God's form of worship is clearly detailed in the Scriptures. *Israel* abandoned it and suffered. Then *the early church* abandoned it, instead substituting Sunday and Easter and Christmas and a host of 'saint's days'.

## Festival for the World

Modern Christianity is now unrecognizable in face of the teachings of Scripture! By 'thinking to change sacred seasons and the law' (Daniel 7:25) Christianity allies itself with powerful spiritual forces which are intent on eliminating the true God from human worship.

Most religions, derived as they are from sun worship, have a 'winter festival'. None is more widely observed - even by non-Christians - or more heavily promoted worldwide than Christmas. It isn't beyond possibility that all will unite as a future 'festival for the world' observed in the dark days of the Christmas season. It is the time set aside by the ancient religions to pay special honour [cont'd previous column]

FINANCES (COGUK) - December 2002

INCOME.... £135     OUTGOINGS... £104