

## CHURCH WARS

**The Church is at war on two fronts—with itself, and also with God**

*The New Horizons  
Newsletter*

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That ‘war’ was an issue in the early church, is witnessed by James in his letter: *...From where do wars and fightings among you come? Is it not from this, from your lusts warring in your members? You desire and do not have. You murder, and are jealous, and are not able to obtain. You fight and you war, and you do not have, because you do not ask* (James 4:2) .

It is a powerful predictive indictment of the church in later centuries, when gross immorality and even murder was

common. And apparently not unknown to James who writes to Christians (*ch 2:1*) in his day, including the *‘... twelve tribes scattered abroad’*. And don’t we have Jesus’s words referencing the end-time: *‘... then shall many [disciples] be offended, and shall betray one another, and shall hate one another* (Matthew 24:10).

We may consider ourselves more ‘civilized’ today—but recall the recent Bosnian war when thousands (over 97,000) were slaughtered by *Christian* Serbs. Faith is fragile.

### Division

The New Testament records such *‘wars and fightings’* in various local assemblies as the various

factions—notably in Corinth—sought to impose their doctrinal stamp on others. More civilised spats over teaching—or carpet colour or procedure or choice of hall!—are not unknown in modern church circles, where many still ‘bite and devour one another’. Such provoked the apostle Paul to pen his famed ‘love chapter’ to the Corinthians (*ch 13*). Indeed it is a theme he hotly pursues in other churches. The Thessalonians, for example, in face of persecution and martyrdom, were commended for *‘...abounding in love’*.

While there are legitimate reasons for some diverse understanding of the Scriptures, yet ‘love’ as expressed by humility, tolerance, willing service smooths the path to harmony in the assembly—and with other assemblies that have taken a somewhat different path.

Christendom embraces a range of often conflicting denominations, and indeed some bear little resemblance to the ‘package’ unveiled by Jesus and the apostles in the Scriptures. It is when those same Scriptures are cast aside in favour of tradition or intuition or imagination and feelings that the war with God becomes apparent.

The Scriptures—the Old and the New Testaments—provide clear guidance as to the mind of God on the fundamentals of our relationship with Him. He encourages us to understand these principle as best we can—but doesn’t expect us to always get it right. Many have been martyred (even with incomplete knowledge) for their allegiance to Christ. *But there’s a limit!*

## Open War

It's a bold step to take on God! But that's what the church did in the centuries following the death of the apostles. In the early fourth century they defied Him on several battle-fields: the observance of the *Passover* and God's appointed *day* for worship, for example. They understood the options and were free to choose—God's way or their own.

In succeeding centuries the church drifted further from those founding principles becoming less recognizable as God's church, notably veiling the truth from the people—many sincerely thinking they were following Christ—by banning access to the Scriptures and exalting their own contrary paganized traditions. They succumbed to the devious teachings that lead inexorably to the open worship of the 'god of this world'.

It is noteworthy that Jesus warned his disciples: '*...Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes shall be they of his own household*' (Matthew 10:35-36).

Many aspects of the church, both Catholic and Protestant, embarked on war—against believers and thus against God Himself. It was ever the same—for it was the Jewish *leadership* who were Jesus's focus on corruption in the (OT) church: '*...The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat: All therefore whatsoever they bid you observe, that observe and do; but do not you after their works: for they say, and do not. For they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers*' (Matthew 23:3-4).

And that's not just 'history' and to be forgotten. For Christendom today is replete with men and women dressed ceremonially in their 'phylacteries' - their colourful garments, their dog-collars, their crosses and their mitres, their black garments. Brethren are still oppressed with 'heavy burdens' that negate the grace of our God and our Saviour, Jesus.

The war has been raging since Adam sinned, and the church is now preparing for the final battle. The global agenda will briefly triumph to be speedily overthrown by the return of the King of kings and LORD of lords and the establishment of the true global—and everlasting—Kingdom.Ω

## Letter from England

*Greetings all,*

Where Sarah and I are privileged to live, despite being near the centre of town, couldn't be much more peaceful: it's quiet, there's birdsong and there are trees, the neighbours are friendly. We give thanks daily for it. You don't know of course, what goes on behind closed doors, but all our neighbours seem to lead a law-abiding lifestyle. Certainly there isn't—as in ancient Israel—obvious idolatry. But has idolatry ceased? I think not.

Take a typical day in season and it seems the whole nation bows low before a spherical idol. Together with a range of other activities the god of *soccer*—and entertainment in general—consumes the country's wealth and energy and time. This 'god' isn't alone but is one of an entwined trio of gods worshipped almost universally.

Also vying for our attention and worshipped with religious fervour is the god of *health* with its thousands of altars and its high priests and its blood-soaked sacrifices of the unborn. Both of these gods are linked with the malign god of *finance* before which all bow, a god fuelled and sustained by human greed.

Underlying the worship of these deceptive all-pervasive gods is the almost universal rejection of the one true God—who, by setting aside a specified weekly memorial, the seventh day, identifies Himself for us as the God of all creation. Ignore Him and the dangerous pathway to idolatry opens wide.

It is prudent, of course, that we 'lighten up' with entertaining diversions. And that we pay attention to our health and to our finances. As Christians it is our duty to nourish body, soul and spirit as guided by the Word of God which encourages us to '*...let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand*'.

As Christians we worship the one true God our Creator in the manner He prescribes. We follow His prescription for health of body and health of mind. We curb our exuberant desires for 'more'—more things, more space, more prestige. As wrote the apostle Paul to the young evangelist, Timothy '*...godliness with contentment is great gain*'. Let us examine ourselves to ensure we are not drawn to these subtle 'gods'.

*James*

## Israel Identified

The Middle East is never far from the news headlines, with special reference to ‘Israel’ and the Israelis. They are widely recognized as being Jewish. But who they really are is much misunderstood.

Empires come and go, but the people of Judah have persisted recognizably through four millennia. They are the offspring of Abraham’s great grandson Jacob whose name was changed to Israel. Judah was one of his twelve sons.

Refugees from a severe famine they migrated to Egypt, where one, Joseph, became the Prime Minister. From the original seventy persons they multiplied, becoming a danger to the Egyptian authorities and were enslaved. Delivered by God’s direct intervention (c.1500BC) they were established as a nation in Canaan (‘Palestine’). The twelve ‘tribes’ persisted as an entity for five hundred years under various administrations.

### A Nation Divided

After Solomon, king over all the tribes, died civil war erupted and Israel divided (c.950BC) into two independent national groups—known as the *House of Israel (Samaria)* and the *House of Judah*. (Jerusalem). There is a clear distinction between the two Houses (governments). They continued on separate paths, not always harmoniously, and both experienced deportation from their territory—Israel to Assyria (721BC), Judah to Babylon (586BC).

The Scriptures do not call the people of Judah ‘Jews’ but *Judaeans*. ‘Jew’ is the term used by the *KJV* translators.

*Judah* returned to their land after 70 years and remained until 70AD when they were expelled by Rome. They have since been scattered worldwide, retaining their identity. There are now about fifteen million of the faith worldwide.

### Dispersion

The *House of Israel*, by contrast, lost its identity,

### 2021 Festivals

Trumpets	September 7
Atonement	September 16
Tabernacles	September 21-27
Eighth Day	September 28

*We are happy to respond to any questions you may have*

assuming various names over the centuries (eg Massagetae, Sacae, Asae, Saxon, Angli), but maintained their statutes and customs (largely idolatrous, until mitigated by Christianity). Their paths since have been traced by various researchers.

Mid 5th century BC Esdras notes: ‘...*the Ten Tribes [then captive in Media/Iran] took counsel that they would go forth into a further country where never mankind dwelt*’. James (1st century) wrote his letter ‘...*to the twelve tribes scattered abroad*’, noting (ch 4:1) their ‘*wars and fightings*’. His contemporary, Josephus, states: ‘...*Wherefore there are two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans [ie Judah/Benjamin], while the Ten Tribes are beyond Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude, and not to be estimated by numbers*’.

Jerome (4th century AD) records: ‘*Unto this day the Ten Tribes [ie the House of Israel] are subject to the kings of the Persians; nor has their captivity ever been loosed....The Ten Tribes inhabit at this day the cities and mountains of the Medes*’. During following centuries they migrated to the north-west. As noted in the Jewish Encyclopaedia (1905) ‘...*if [the Ten Tribes] have disappeared they must exist under a different name*’. It states that otherwise the prophecies cannot be fulfilled.

Although expectations in Jewish and Christian communities as to their future are high, the prophets predict for both Houses (and for Sabbath observers everywhere) a time of turbulence before the coming of the longed-for Messiah. It is a time to which Jesus referred, a time when both Houses will be united under His kingship: ‘...*other sheep I have [ie Israel], which are not of this fold [ie Judah]: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd*’ (Matthew 10:16). Judah as a whole remains alienated from their Saviour, but they will upon their conversion be restored as an example for all. Ω

## Insight from Paul

*The apostle Paul's letters shed a bright light on our walk with God*

In his role as an enforcer for the Pharisee establishment, Saul (renamed Paul) initiated severe persecution of the infant church, killing believers and torturing some as he tried to make them renounce Christ ('blaspheme'). Not only did he believe he was doing a work for God, but he also had a personal animosity towards the brethren (he was 'mad' at them). See Acts 26:9-11. Yet, to his amazement, God forgave him!

Musing on his past life he says: '*...[I] was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious: but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus*' (I Timothy 1:13-14). He picks up the theme elsewhere, showing that there is no sin God won't forgive. All it takes is sincere authentic repentance—ie, abandoning the offensive practice: '*... Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, Nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God*'

But he continues: '*...And such were some of you: but you are washed, but you are sanctified, but you are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God*' Coupling our will with the help proffered by God through His indwelling Spirit, we can put away any form of besetting sin.

As a Christian the apostle experienced horrendous challenges, years of torment from both Jew and gentile—whipped several times and often being close to death (see II Corinthians 11:23-28). Yet he is able to say: '*...I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might shew forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting*' (I Timothy 1:16).

As Christians we have been warned, notably by Jesus and by Paul, that we will inevitably experience 'tribulation' (pain, sorrow, even martyrdom; Acts 14:22) for the faith. The apostle here encourages us to use our experiences to help others who also may suffer. We have all sinned, but we rejoice in the grace and mercy of God who by His Son has freely forgiven us—no matter our past. Ω

## The Shepherd and his Sheep

It's the nature of government to seek to control the populace—perhaps understandable given that the governed also want to be in control, but in control of their *own* lives. Indeed all states learn the need for a legal framework to maintain order. It's a matter of observation that most nations tend to impose strong control—a practice now being avidly adopted by governments of the Anglo-Saxon nations, previously advocates of personal freedom.

Control, however, is a feature not unknown in modern Christendom, as witnessed by the various cults that arise imposing heavy discipline on the brethren through fear—of expulsion or purgatory or 'hell-fire'.

But such control is remarkably absent in the New Testament churches, where discipline was imposed only for gross immorality or disruptive behaviour. There, order was maintained through the personal responsibility of each member, encouraged by the words and conduct of the leadership and with God's Spirit indwelling each. While there may have been non-brethren present (I Corinthians 14:23), yet the congregation as a whole were begotten of God and motivated by the Spirit. (Otherwise chaos reigns.)

Jesus provides our example of good governance: '*...I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine*'—a principle echoed by the apostle Peter: '*...Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind; Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being ensamples to the flock*' (I Peter 5:2-3). And Jesus again: '*...I am among you as he that serves*'. True 'love'.

Addressing a squabble among the disciples about leadership in the church, Jesus tells them: '*... You know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you: but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister [diakonos]; And whosoever will be chief among you, let him be your servant [slave]*' (Matthew 20:26-27).

'Church' is not a secular government nor is it a business enterprise. Order stems from within each member, from the peace inspired by the indwelling Spirit and, especially, from the Christ-like example and guidance of true servants at the helm of the assembly. Ω