

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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WHY ARE SO FEW 'SAVED'?

more widely, though not
universally, available.

*At best, only a quarter of mankind
'fly the Christian flag', and for most
of these 'Christianity' is just a loose
label. Is this God's plan?*

God sometimes shocks by the
manner He enters our world. We
may, for example, have witnessed His
intervention in the Iraq war. Nearly
two thousand years ago He made His
presence known in power to the
people of Judah. It happened in
Jerusalem - presently the focus of
world attention (and increasingly to
become so).

One hundred and twenty
of the followers of Jesus,
gathered in Jerusalem for
the annual *Festival of
Pentecost*, experienced a
very public display of
divine power. It was
witnessed by the multitude
of Jews and proselytes from around
the world gathered for the Festival
(Acts 2).

Suddenly there was what sounded
like a violent hurricane, rattling
everything in the building. Then what
seemed like a flame settled on each
disciple. It didn't end there, for each
disciple - to the amazement of
onlookers - spoke in a language he or
she didn't understand, but which was
perfectly understandable to its native
speakers in the audience.

Truly an amazing experience, and an
international one. It was the
appropriate time - *Pentecost* - and
place for God to make His salvation
known beyond the land of Israel. The
divine Spirit - without which no-one
can be saved - was no longer confined
to specific individuals, but made

Divine Plan

In its beginning the *Festival of
Pentecost* was a celebration of the
early summer harvest. But it clearly is,
in the divine plan, of high spiritual
significance.

The festivals described in Leviticus
23 are, in fact, an outline of God's
salvation plan for mankind, pictured
by the harvest seasons in Israel. The
spring harvest festival portrays
Christ's death, resurrection and his life
reflected in each believer. Next is

Pentecost, the early
summer harvest. It
typifies the 'church
age' during which the
Father calls some - a
relative few - to
prepare them for the
Kingdom.

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[The remaining festivals
will be addressed in *OUTREACH* later in the
year]

Jesus was crucified late on a
Wednesday afternoon, and resurrected
three days and three nights later - at
the end of the weekly Sabbath. Next
morning - Sunday - he presented
himself in heaven before the Father as
'the firstfruits from the dead' (I
Corinthians 15:20, 23).

In the Temple ritual, that Sunday
began with the presentation before
God of the firstfruits sheaf of wheat -
the 'Wavesheaf'. It marked the
beginning of the seven-week summer
harvest season in Judaea, which
concluded with the *Festival of
Pentecost*, the celebration of the
'harvest home'. (This year it is **Sunday
June 8th.**)

Pentecost represents the firstfruits

FEW SAVED?...cont'd

spiritual harvest of lives for the Kingdom of God. Jesus is the firstfruits, while Christians are 'a kind of firstfruits' (James 1:18), chosen by the Father. Said Jesus: "No-one can come to me except the Father which sent me draws him" (John 6:44).

The Father seeks men and women in whom to implant 'the seed of the Word'. Not all are receptive - some hearts are resistant, some have little depth and the Word withers, others hear the message - but life gets in the way and they 'become unfruitful'. But others are 'fertile soil' and the Word of the Kingdom flourishes in them, producing fruit (Mark 4:1-20).

Many, in other words, are given opportunity to commit to Jesus Christ and the true faith but only a proportion will respond positively at this time of firstfruits harvest. As Jesus commented 'Many are called, but few are chosen'. In the vernacular, 'life's a bitch' and comparatively few of us have been prepared by circumstances to commit to 'the narrow way'. Satan snatches away God's call through his malevolent influence in all the world's institutions - including its religions, education establishments etc. All who don't respond - or the vast majority of them - will, however, have that opportunity for salvation in the general resurrection.

Jesus clarified this: "Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear his voice and will come forth - those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment" (John 5:24-29). The Scriptures make clear that these two resurrections are many years apart.

Final Harvest

Pentecost represents this 'church age' harvest. A later festival points to the final harvest ingathering from all mankind, when "[the LORD] will destroy on this mountain...the veil that is spread over all nations" (Isaiah 25:7). For now 'Satan deceives the whole world'. And as Paul notes: "But even if our gospel is veiled it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them" (II Corinthians 4:3-4).

God's harvest-based plan is on schedule.

Request the free article
How To Count Pentecost

FINANCES (COGUK) - Jan-May 2003
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A SHEPHERD'S GUIDE

Sheep easily fall on to their backs ('couped') and must have help to regain their footing. While on their back gases gather in the rumen - and suffocates them. Birds peck out their eyes, scavengers attack.

Sheep stray - a sign they are sick, weak, hungry or diseased. *When healthy their preference is to be an integral part of the flock.*

Others will develop foot rot which affects their walk, prevents foraging and leads to starvation and death.

These and other conditions require constant alertness by the shepherd. Get them quickly on their feet - but remain with them till the blood flows, balance is regained, confidence restored. Return strays to the flock. Trim away hoof damaged by infection. from *Cheering Words*

Land - does it matter?

National boundaries are set by various means. Invasion, certainly. Conquest. Occupation of an empty land. Civil war. The passing of time clouds the origins, and boundaries become permanent. Government and sovereignty is established. The people come to see it as 'our land'. And they are ready to fight to protect it.

Whatever the outcome, however, all land rights are subject to divine sovereignty. And central to God's division of land among the nations is His nation of Israel. To Moses, God said: "When the Most High divided their inheritance to the nations, when He separated the sons of Adam [ie mankind], He set the boundaries of the peoples according to the number of the children of Israel. For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the place of His inheritance" (Deuteronomy 32:7-9).

Any nation or individual that usurps the sovereignty of Israel or hands over control of the levers of power to foreign powers is seriously meddling: "...he that touches you touches the apple of His eye" (Zechariah 2:8).

Take the modern Israeli nation, the descendants of ancient Judah, as an example. The prophet continues with God's message: "And the LORD will take possession of Judah as His inheritance in the holy land" (v.12). It's a message for our day - and certain to be accomplished - referring to the time immediately following the return of Jesus as King of kings! And for those with ears to hear God's care applies not only to the land of Palestine but equally to those nations which are the modern descendants of the ancient House of Israel - including Great Britain and the United States.

Nations may be invaded, the people killed or enslaved - but those national leaders who violate or give away the sovereignty of God's nations, God's lands, will face serious consequences.

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