

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Biblical teaching
Matthew 28:19-20

representing



The Kingdom of God

Jesus the Messiah came with a message, summed up by Mark: ‘... after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God’ (Mark 1:14). And in his discourse on the end of the age he predicted: ‘...this gospel of the Kingdom shall be preached in all the world...then shall the end come’. (Matthew 24:14).

The message is consistent, and his parting instruction to his chosen apostles was that they ‘...teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you’ (Matthew 28:19-20).

It’s certain they followed his instructions. Paul for example: ‘... there came many [Jewish leaders] to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets’ (Acts 28: 31). So it is vital that we in this end of the age understand what is that message, this ‘Gospel of the Kingdom of God’. His message—1 Corinthians 2:2)

Missing Factor

For some it means a somewhat nebulous teaching about a new birth leading to a reward in heaven upon death. Others focus on a future earthly Kingdom ruled

over by Jesus and the resurrected saints. There is a ‘new birth’ and their will be such an earthly Kingdom—but is that the whole story?

A Witness Only

It should be noted that Jesus said this message is to be heralded to all mankind ‘...as a witness’ Not, in other words, to convert the world. Past generations have heard this Gospel—but they are long gone, and millions more are born by the hour. Indeed it is only through today’s communications blitz that it is even possible to witness to one whole generation.

Kingdom of God

We should recognize that the Kingdom of God is ‘...an everlasting dominion, and [whose] kingdom is from generation to generation’ (Daniel 4: 34) It is the Family of God—a spiritual Kingdom that endures perpetually—and long precedes the material creation.

When Messiah returns as *cont’d p.2*

- The Kingdom of God is the Family of God—a spiritual Kingdom
- the ‘Gospel’ is the pathway by which we may become a part of the Kingdom of God
- The Father is not inviting everyone into His Kingdom *at this time*
- By His choice many are invited, but have free choice to accept or refuse
- Those who remain faithful will be resurrected to reign with Messiah at his coming
- All others will be raised from the dead and invited to become part of the Kingdom—after the Millennium

At that point this earth-bound phase of expansion of the Kingdom of God will be complete.

Letter from England

Hello all,

Soon we will enter the new Holy Day season, starting with the Lord's Supper on Thursday, April 5 after sunset. It is, of course, the Christian's remembrance of the suffering and death of our Saviour.

Variouly observed in different ways and at different times it is a constant for those who are followers of Jesus the Messiah. The Sabbath-observing Churches of God, however, observe it annually on the evening before the seven-day Passover observance begins.

The time of the observance is '*...in the night in which he was [being] delivered up*' (I Corinthians 11:23). That is the evening before his death as the Passover lamb. Indeed Jesus died at the time the lambs were sacrificed in the Temple. It's a memorial of his suffering and cruel death, and not a time to rejoice—as is the seven-day Passover season.. The apostle Paul chastened the Corinthian brethren for their 'partying' at the Memorial service (*ch* 11: 20-22, 34).

In face of the awesomeness of our Saviour's work it is appropriate that we precede the observance with a time of personal reflection and introspection, giving due weight to the spiritual significance of the bread and the wine. Paul tells us that, having thus examined our life '*...If we estimated ourselves aright, we should not be judged. But when we are judged by the Lord, chastisement follows, to save us from being condemned along with the world*' (vv.31-32).

In observing the Memorial we are in fact renewing the covenant we made at our baptism.

Brethren should seek out an assembly of like-minded brethren with whom to observe the Memorial. In essence it is a 'family' service—the family of those who have thus committed their life to the LORD and to His service through repentance and baptism.

[An outline service is available for those brethren who cannot attend an assembly.]

Warm regards
James

Memorial Service 2012
Thursday 5th April
after sunset

Kingdom ...cont'd

King of kings, joined with Him will be the faithful down the millennia and resurrected from their graves at His coming (Colossians 3:4). They will be partners in that spiritual Kingdom—no longer flesh and blood—and will '*...reign with him a thousand years*' (Revelation 20:6). The Kingdom of God will establish its rule and laws universally (Isaiah 2:1-4, Psalm 103:19).

After the general resurrection following the millennium the present phase of the divine plan will be complete and all humanity who so choose will have been transformed into the Family, the Kingdom, of God : '*...when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all*' (I Corinthians 15: 28). Paul tells the Colossian brethren: '*...The Father has '... delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated [removed] us into the kingdom of his dear Son*' (Colossians 1:13). While we remain faithful we are part of the Kingdom of God—for His Spirit dwells in us.

At this time those who have responded to the Father's call and forged a relationship with Him through Jesus the Messiah have been begotten by His Spirit (Romans 8:9)—sometimes, wrongly, called 'born again'. They are in a sense 'in the womb of the Family of God', and awaiting birth at the resurrection (Colossians 3:4)...*If any one is in Christ, he is a new creature: the old state of things has passed away; a new state of things has come into existence*' (II Corinthians 5:17).

The Gospel

What, then, is the Gospel, the 'Gospel of the Kingdom' we are to proclaim? It is, simply, the pathway by which we become part of the Family, the Kingdom, of God. Through repentance (*ie* our willing submission to God's Law), baptism and continuing commitment to His Word we come to reflect the mind of God as revealed to us in the life of His Son.

Call it 'born again', or salvation or conversion—we become part of His Kingdom. And, yes, that Kingdom *will* establish itself on earth at 'the end of the age'. After the millennium the Father will come from Heaven to the birth-place of His new-born Family (Revelation 21:3f).

Ω

Insight from Paul

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

At the heart of our communication with our Father is prayer, and Paul certainly was a 'man of prayer'. For him, prayer was a spontaneous response to need—his own, for the church generally and specifically for individual brethren. His prayer life is a pattern for all Christians. His prayers reflected the instruction of Jesus to avoid what he called 'vain repetition'—they were from the heart and not mere rote.

In his work of mission he asked the brethren in Rome to pray for his protection—in this case from religious fanatics (*ch* 15:30-31). And of the Ephesians he sought their prayer support that he would guidance in how he proclaimed the Gospel (*ch* 6:18-19). There is an obligation, then, on Christians to bear up in prayer those directly involved in God's service—for their safety, for their guidance (Romans 15:30). And that 'doors' would be opened for outreach (Colossians 4:3).

Paul prayed, too, for healing—personal, and even (as did Jesus) for the healing of the 'unconverted' (*eg* Acts 28:8). He had a burden of prayer for the salvation of his unbelieving compatriots (Romans 10:1). And for the needs of fellow Christians.

For Paul, prayer erupted anywhere, any time as the need arose: '*...pray without ceasing... instantly*', he urged (*cp* I Thessalonians 5:17). We don't need a 'special prayer position'! Prayer isn't sleepy time; it is energetic, supplication, expectant (Hebrews 5:7).

It's a pattern of prayer for all of us. Ω

Sabbath Joy

not preclude some food preparation—though not on the scale of festival days.

Manna was like a seed and to become edible had to be ground like other grains before cooking (Numbers 11:7-8). What they gathered on Friday didn't rot on Sabbath morning as it would, if uncooked, during the week. Clearly, it would still need some preparation to be edible. When to prepare is a personal decision.

Sabbath, then, is a joyous time for fellowship and spiritual instruction—restricted only by the written Word and not bound by unnecessary tradition.. Ω

don't forget to read...

New Horizons
available on line or in print

Sabbath in Nazareth

From the vantage point of the twenty-first century it is difficult to imagine first century life

It's late on the Sixth Day, Friday (the sixth day), towards evening. The narrow unpaved streets of Nazareth are buzzing with activity as preparation is made for Sabbath. The carpenter lays aside his implements while across the road the blacksmith finishes sharpening a scythe. In a few courtyards the oven still smoulders, the final batch of bread baked. The potter's wheel is stilled. Agricultural workers (most of the population) scurry from the field.

Nazareth itself covers barely six acres, a tightly-packed community of tiny homes perched on a hillside some 1200 feet above sea-level, and clustered around the synagogue. It is a small agricultural village with an estimated population of around 200—unwalled, the population mainly poor, most houses one-roomed, simple, barely-furnished with hard-packed mud floors and a flat roof.

Sun-down

As the sun passes its zenith at midday the final countdown to Sabbath begins. Women and girls draw water from the well, prepare the Sabbath meal—eaten around sundown (about 6pm nearly all year). An array of simple foods is spread on the low table—almost the only furniture in the room. Everyone washes hands (food is eaten by hand) and recline on straw mats spread on the floor. Women and children eat separately from the men-folk. It's the best meal of the week, with bread, fruit, meat sometimes.

The room is now dimly lit by a couple of flickering oil-lamps set in wall niches. It is dark, now—so bed time, and the rolled-up bed pallets are pulled from storage. Adults and children, in their day-wear and covered only by their cloaks, snuggle in until dawn. In one corner—livestock.

Sun-up

Sun-up (around 6 am) and life renews, beds stowed away, animals taken out. Synagogue is at the heart of today's activities. The entire village will be there—perhaps several times. Public prayers, readings from the Scriptures out of the carefully preserved scrolls, an address from the resident or visiting Rabbi, and open discussion (*cp* Luke 4:14-21).

As Sabbath isn't a fast day, at some point a meal was prepared and eaten. We catch a glimpse of the disciples in the presence of Jesus ignoring Rabbinic rules about food and work. (This was on the second Sabbath of the Pentecost season: Luke 6: 1-2) . As the sun declines and darkness falls Sabbath ends. Another week. Ω

Sabbath Joy

While zealously seeking to do God's will, some Christians fail to heed the advice of wise King Solomon: *'...don't be overmuch righteous'* (Ecclesiastes 7:16). In modern terms: *lighten up*, and a wise saying. We should consider it, for example, in regard to our observance of the Sabbath.

Some, whether they observe Sunday or Sabbath, bind themselves by a collection of rules: *don't shave, don't cook or eat out, don't switch on the light, don't watch TV*—and a dozen other don'ts. It's a series of negative commands that blight what God has said is a day of joyful rest from our daily business, a day of fellowship and recuperation, a day for focusing on the reality of our existence—the spiritual.

Tradition

Much of the misunderstanding about Sabbath observance derives from a blind acceptance of Rabbinic strictures—the 'tradition of the elders' which Jesus despised. An added factor is that it is seen by some church organizations as a means of control. For example, *'We are not blessed and we don't grow because of our lax Sabbath observance'*.

Jesus faced down such Rabbinic interpretation of the Law: *'... laying aside the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things you do. And he said unto them, Full well you reject the commandment of God, that you may keep your own tradition'* (Mark 7:8-9).

Jesus and the disciples were censored by the Pharisees for dining with the non-religious, for healing the sick on Sabbath, for not fasting, for encouraging a healed man to carry his bed-roll. In their ardent desire to protect the Sabbath—neglect had resulted in national exile—religious leaders had boxed it round with restrictions not commanded by God—making it burdensome: *'...they bind heavy burdens and grievous to be borne, and lay them on men's shoulders.'* (Matthew 23:4).

Each Christian independently and informed by God's Word must determine how he or she observes the Sabbath. Wrote Paul: *'...Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind'* (Romans 14:5).

[Request our article [Delight in the Sabbath](#), free from our offices or on our web-site]

It is proper, of course, to prepare carefully for the Sabbath on the 'day of preparation', Friday: Gather ingredients (*ie shopping!*), do any heavy time-

consuming tasks, complete unfinished regular work *etc.* Leave ample time, in other words, for fellowship, prayer and instruction from the Scriptures

Sabbath Time

Another example of Sabbath blight—the timing of Sabbath. Some who observe the seventh-day Sabbath (Friday evening through Saturday evening) intently watch 'sunset' to the precise second, perhaps consulting Internet tables for the astronomical moment. It flies in the face of practical reality. For those living in the far north, it stays dark for months, while in contrast, sunset varies little in Palestine, being around 6pm to 7pm all year. We must each decide, being consistent, exercising our liberty in Christ.

Paul warns against this pickiness: *'...you observe days, and months, and times, and years'* (Galatians 4:10; *see also* Mark 3:2—'watched'). 'Observe' (Gk *paratereo*) means to *scrupulously* observe, intently, in detail. *'... I'm afraid for you'*, he told the subverted Galatian Christians (v.11). Sabbath is the time for our spiritual refreshment and reflection—a day of joy.

Another misunderstanding is the 'Sabbath day's journey' (assumed to be 2000 paces, just under a mile) Again, a Rabbinic tradition. not in the Law of Moses.

To Cook—or Not

Culinary habits are vastly different today than in Bible times. But here, too, there are unnecessary restrictions. The essence of Sabbath is 'cessation'—and we do not carry on our regular business affairs on this special day. Sabbath isn't a day like the annual holy days—Unleavened Bread, Pentecost *etc*—when we are encouraged to enjoy sumptuous meals. (Yes—God wants us to enjoy food and drink!)

In light of the command not to work, the weekly Sabbath isn't a time for heavy duty cooking. The basis followed by many for not cooking at all is the miracle of *manna* (Exodus 16:23-26). However, a close study of this passage does [cont'd p.3](#)

To morrow is the rest of the holy sabbath unto the LORD: bake that which you will bake ['today' is not in the text] nhat you will seethe; and that which remains over lay up for you to be kept until the morning. And they laid it up till the morning, as Moses bade: and it did not stink, neither was there any worm therein. And Moses said, Eat that to day; for to day is a sabbath unto the LORD: today you shall not find it in the field. Six days you shall gather it; but on the seventh day, which is the sabbath, in it there shall be none
Exodus 16:23-26

"They were to bake and boil as much as was needed for the day, and keep what was over for the morrow, for on the Sabbath they would find none in the field.

Keil & Delitzsch:
Commentary

"the sense being plainly this, that they might take and boil what they would, and dress as much of the manna as they pleased, and eat what they would, but not that they were to bake and boil for the next day; for it is clear, by what follows, that the manna of the next day was not dressed either way, for then it would be no wonder that it did not stink" Gill: Commentary