

outreach

The New Horizons Newsletter

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Prophecy in Perspective

Bible prophets are an enigma. Why take up all that print—around one-third of the Bible—to tell us about long-ago events, seemingly irrelevant for this twenty-first century. Yet it's there—in detail. Accounts of the rise and fall of ancient nations apparently no longer with us. Records of God's intervention to lay them low.

The apostle Peter provides some insight. Addressing a crowd that had gathered following a miraculous healing he tells them: '...*Samuel and all the other prophets who came later also spoke about what is now happening*' (Acts 3:24). Paul, citing Israel's experience in the wilderness, adds: '...*all of this is an example for us, to warn us not to desire evil things, as they did, nor to worship idols, as some of them did*' (I Corinthians 10:6-7).

Presenting His credentials as the one and only God, the LORD challenges the useless so-called 'gods':

'...Produce your cause, says the LORD; bring forth your strong reasons, says the King of Jacob. Let them bring them forth, and show us what shall happen: let them show the former things, what they be, that we may consider them, and know the latter end of them; or declare us things for to come. Show the things that are to come hereafter, that we may know that you are gods' (Isaiah 41:21-23)

Isaiah is telling us that history is a platform from which to launch us into an understanding of the future. It is a pattern for future events.

Take the prophet Zephaniah. Apart from an interesting insight into the life and times of the Middle East in the early seventh century before Christ—what value is it for us, today? The prophet's immediate interest is the harassment by surrounding nations, and the imminent destruction of, the House of Judah. The latter was in a state of national breakdown, with corruption extending into the Royal palace and the priesthood. They had, too, while outwardly worshipping the

LORD, yet tolerated and had sunk into the idolatrous practices of the alien nations in their midst (*ch* 1:4-6).

Down the centuries the LORD has influenced nations to choose the ends that *He* wants, to fulfill *His* purpose, to comply with *His* time-frame. It may lead to their disappearance from the world scene—or to a dominant place at the 'top table' of nations. (Always they are held accountable for their stewardship—Isaiah 10: 6-15.) The prophet Daniel: '...*He changes the times and the seasons; He causes kings to pass away, and sets up kings*' (*ch* 2:21), adding (*ch* 4:35): '...*He does according to His will among the army of Heaven, and among those living in the earth*'.

Changed Times

Zephaniah may have puzzled over elements of the words God had given him. As Peter relates: '...*Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and...searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you: Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you*' (I Peter 1:10-12).

Having dealt with the immediate future, the prophet enters a new time zone (*ch* 3:9ff). It is a time when all nations will unitedly pray to one God, a time when Israel will no longer be encompassed by hostile enemies (v.13), a time when the LORD will dwell in the midst of Israel (v.15), a time of peace (v.13), a time of restoration of the true worship, the Bible festivals (v.18, Zechariah 14:16f).

Other prophecies pin-point this time as the end of human misrule when Jesus Christ returns to take the reins of global government. In the fullness of time, as predicted by Jesus: '...*there will be great affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world* **cont'd p.4**

'Israel' embodies two 'Houses' - of Judah and Israel. *Israel* represents the Anglo-Saxon nations, *Judah*, the Israelis.

The Ceremonial Law

Commentators on the Scriptures are prone to differentiate between the ‘Ceremonial’ (which is ‘done away’) and the ‘Moral’ Laws therein. The latter is summed up in the ‘Ten Commandments’ (Exodus 20), and most would accept these as a framework for civilized human behaviour. Indeed they are reflected in all ancient codes of conduct and were written into the mind of man from the beginning: ‘...[the Gentiles’] conduct shows that what the Law commands is written in their hearts. Their consciences also show that this is true, since their thoughts sometimes accuse them and sometimes defend them’ (Romans 2:15).

‘God’s Law’ [Heb. *torah*] in essence is the pattern of behaviour the LORD implanted in man at his creation as the guide to a balanced and successful life. To disregard any part of it is to upset that balance, to suffer adverse personal—and national—consequences.

‘Ceremonial’ Law—obsolete?

The term ‘ceremonial’ is a misnomer, for no God-given ‘Law’—eg of sacrifice—is for show or for mere ceremony but teaches valuable lessons for the godly life, and references the life and work of Jesus Christ. Every supporting regulation (as type of animal *etc*) has significance.

There are, too, laws regarding the Tabernacle and Temple. God dwelled therein and they are ‘holy’ places. The regulations protected that holiness from defilement and emphasized that our approach to the Almighty Creator demands respect and awe. Hence various washings, exclusions and purdah. Lessons can be learned, but while no Temple exists such are redundant and in abeyance, even for those who practice Judaism.

Then there are laws, certainly not mere ceremony, to safeguard the nation’s health. They include what foods are suitable (Leviticus 11), quarantine for infectious diseases, laws relating to hygiene and public safety. Another tranche of laws deals with civil disorder, another with regulation and protection for the family.

Civil Law

Together they are a comprehensive system of civil regulation, for these laws form the Constitution of the newborn nation of Israel (around 1500BC). Indeed they are a template of good government, a model for all nations—and have never been surpassed: ‘...listen to what the LORD your God demands of you: Worship the LORD and do all that he commands. Love him, serve him with all your heart, and obey all his laws. I am giving them to you today for your benefit’ (Deuteronomy 10:12-13).

The failure of nations (Romans 13:1-4) to heed and apply these principles leads to their decline and ultimate downfall. Liberal sentiment has replaced a true

Q. Should Christians, the New Testament priesthood, follow the Old Testament practices—eg phylacteries, special clothing, beards?

Undoubtedly such practices had important significance for ancient Israel, embedded as they were in an idolatrous era where such symbols had significance in idol worship (eg Zephaniah 1:8).

A key principle is explained by Jesus, speaking to the Samaritan woman: ‘... the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth’ (John 4:23). No longer, in the Christian era, are we tied to the Temple worship—we can worship God anywhere (v.21) without the rituals associated with it.

The symbolism of the various symbols is (should be!) expressed in the lives of each Christian. For example, God’s Law is ‘written in the heart’ and not on the door-post or worn on the forehead.

Similarly, the *form* of our worship (the weekly Sabbath and the holy days) continues but, for example, the location for their observance is a matter of convenience, determined by individual assemblies. Ω

Definitions:

Wicked (Heb *rasha*):

A person who does not serve God

263 occurrences in *KJV* (252—wicked)

Contrasted with *righteous* (Genesis 18:23)

you shall again see the difference between the righteous and the wicked, between him who serves God and him who does not serve Him
Malachi 3:18

understanding of human nature—has blinded national leadership to the need for the merciful application of firm justice, and has allowed criminal behaviour to flourish, and immorality to undermine good governance. Christian leadership, too, has failed.

Each Christian is urged to learn (not just read about!) lessons from Israel’s God-given *torah*: ‘...All scripture [ie the Old Testament] is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works’ (II Timothy 3:15-16). God’s Law is a treasure house of guidance as we navigate a world steeped in lawlessness and idolatrous behaviour.

Without guidance from God law and order disappear, but God blesses everyone who obeys his Law
Proverbs 29:18

the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth
John 4:23

Insight from Paul

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

Under a variety of titles—Eucharist, Lord's Supper, Communion, Christian Passover *etc*—this solemn memorial of Jesus is universal within Christendom. How it is observed is, however, variously understood in the different church organizations—from the simple to the complex. The *time* for the observance also varies widely, and presently there is discussion on this within Christendom. The apostle Paul, addressing the (Gentile) Corinthian church, sheds light on it.

The observance is rooted in the Passover—the ancient memorial of the deliverance of the people of Israel (it is not exclusively 'Jewish') from Egypt, '*...the house of bondage*'. It is observed annually in early spring—the 14th of the first month (Nisan) of the Hebrew calendar (our March/April) and immediately succeeded by a seven day festival (known as '*Unleavened Bread*' and also '*Passover*' - Luke 22:1). It is a time of celebration in Judaism.

For Christians the Lord's Supper is a solemn memorial of the sacrifice of Jesus as our Deliverer, our Redeemer from the 'bondage' of sin. He is '*...Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us*' (I Corinthians 5:7).

The Passover lamb was sacrificed in the Temple on the afternoon of the 14th (the 'ninth hour', around 3pm), prepared, roasted, and eaten before midnight of the 15th Nisan, the first day of the *Unleavened Bread* festival. ('Days' began at sundown in Bible times.)

This memorial was, in the early church and according to the apostle Paul, observed annually—as is usual with memorials—'*...in the night in which he was betrayed*' (ch 11:23). That is, the night before Jesus was crucified, dying next afternoon around 3pm—the time of the evening sacrifice, and of the symbolic Passover lamb.

The apostle also advises us that the first Christians followed the Lord's Supper by next evening beginning the observance of seven days of *Unleavened Bread*: '*...purge out [thoroughly cleanse—from their homes] the old leaven [ie, the physical leaven, yeast] so that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. Let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and of evil, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*' (I Corinthians 5:8).

Christians are to remove the physical leaven from their homes for seven days in this annual celebration, yet bearing in mind the symbolic meaning—the removal from our lives of all that defiles. Ω

Letter From England

Greetings from Lincolnshire

Things change. No surprise in that. Much *has* changed, of course, and for the better. But it's expected that we oldies will look back in anger at the transformation of society since our glory days. The 'good old days'.

Fifty years ago the church of God was thriving. The annual festival of Tabernacles hosted sometimes multiple thousands of brethren gathered around the world for worship, fellowship and exposition of the Scriptures. Here in England there were weekly Sabbath assemblies in the major towns and cities.

Now? A recent note sums up the current situation: '*The church here in is fairly stagnant*'. And in Britain and in many nations where we once made an impact. Assemblies here are few, poorly-attended and divided around a handful of denominations. Yet huge sums continue to be ploughed into 'evangelism'. *Why? Where is the fruit?*

Multitudes tune-in to the message on television and radio, subscribe to a range of glossy magazines and pamphlets, access the internet. But—*where is the fruit?* Has the 'scattered seed of the Word' simply blown away? Is it, as said Jesus, that '*...when they hear, Satan comes at once and takes away the Word having been sown in their hearts*' (Mark 4:15). No curiosity. No sense of sin or need of salvation. Distracted—by work, by family, by entertainment, the '*...cares of this life*'.

Even the converted have fled: '*...because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of the many [the majority] will grow cold*' (Matthew 24:12). So—apathy, and a 'quenching of the Spirit', flirtation with the world, a neglect of public worship: '*...Let us not give up the habit of meeting together, as some are doing. Instead, let us encourage one another all the more, since you see that the Day of the Lord is coming nearer*' (Hebrews 10:25). Jesus, note, linked these conditions with his imminent return, adding '*...but if you keep on being faithful right to the end, you will be saved*'.

Time, then, for our Christian readers to '*...stir up the gift [of God's Spirit] that is in them*'. Time to '*...hunger and thirst after God's Word*' to nourish the 'new creature' begotten in us at baptism.

Time, also, for those of our readers who 'perch on the fence' to commit to our Saviour. The Gospel message isn't mere 'pie in the sky when you die' but a worthwhile life-time commitment in preparation for an eternity serving with the Father in the furtherance of His plans throughout His universe.

The church proclaims the Gospel, the Father draws to Jesus those who respond—and Jesus responds: '*...the one coming to Me I will in no way cast out*'.

James

Prophecycont'd from p.1

until now, no, nor ever will be. And except those days were shortened, not any flesh would be saved [ie, saved alive]. But on account of the elect, those days will be shortened' (Matthew 24:21-22). Mankind will implode in an orgy of self-destruction, saved only by timely divine intervention.

When that will be is unpredictable. It is in the purview of the Father alone—as Jesus warns: '...It is not yours to know times or seasons which the Father placed in His own authority' (Acts 1:7, Matthew 24:36). Whenever that will be he adds '...be ready; for in the hour you think not, the Son of Man comes' (Luke 12:40).

Perspective

Israel (both Houses), despite its faults, has since its inception been '...the apple of My eye', chosen as a people through whom God could work to deliver mankind from its innate destructiveness. As such it has been the target of demonic forces bent on its destruction, but has been shielded by divine mercy. They rose to prominence in the nineteenth century, civilizing much of the world. Successive administrations have undermined that 'shield' (ie God's Laws), and 'Israel' is sliding towards anarchy, national humiliation and foreign domination.

The template of sixth century BC Israel is, by Zephaniah (and other prophets), laid on a time in his distant unseen future. Basic human nature doesn't change and we repeat past error—failing to learn from the past.

The return of Jesus the Messiah will break that innate pattern of human destructiveness as He writes His perfect Laws in the hearts and minds of His model nation—and to all of surviving mankind: '...this shall be the covenant that I will cut with the house of Israel: After those days, declares Jehovah, I will put My Law [My way] in their inward parts, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people' (Jeremiah 31:33). Israel will become 'a city set on a hill', a light to all nations. Ω

The fate of nations isn't random. All people on earth have one origin (Acts 17:26) and God provides for all. But some fail, having in their beginning made wrong choices, ever after experiencing adverse consequences.

Not so the 'fathers' of Israel (eg Abraham). They chose to follow the divine path and entered a covenant relationship with the LORD. They have ever since reaped the fruits of that choice.

Their part in the covenant is to follow a godly path. When that is abandoned God no longer protects.

Battle for Sovereignty

Citizens of the United Kingdom have been given the challenge of determining the nation's future. A referendum will provide the opportunity to determine whether we remain subject to European Union laws or to again become a sovereign nation.

The Prime Minister has brokered a deal which he claims secures our sovereignty as part of the Union, while those who wish to leave our political association with Europe believe little has been achieved. Big political and business 'guns' have lined up on opposite sides.

Sovereignty—'not being subject to the authority of another State'—is the argument wielded by both sides, and surely must be at the heart of the discussion. The 'ins' claim we won't lose it. The 'outs' claim we have already lost it. But the 'S' word hasn't really been at the heart of the argument, the focus instead being on the economy and the relatively small benefits factor.

The nation state is a divine institution. Nations form from original family units that have grown large, each developing its unique language, culture, traditions (see Genesis 11). Each has a unique treasure house of God-given intellectual and economic resources and an assigned (by God) geographical territory (Daniel 4:25, Acts 17:26).

There is, however, a transcending factor that eclipses such factors as sovereignty, economy or benefits. It's the God-factor: '...Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a shame to any people' (Proverbs 14:34).

'Righteousness': in the context of nationhood that's the application of divinely-revealed law. Begin to tamper with that foundation and—whether the United Kingdom chooses 'in' or 'out' there will be an on-going deterioration in all aspects of life. The economy. Law and order. Destruction of the family. National security: '...When the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?' Ω

NOTICE!

We will continue with the publication of OUTREACH but must now, to preserve funds, suspend publication in print form. It will continue **on-line on-ly**. Our apologies for the inconvenience.

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Festivals 2016

| | |
|------------------|---------------------|
| Lord's Supper | April 21: Thurs evg |
| Unleavened Bread | April 23-29 |
| Pentecost | June 12 |
| Trumpets | October 3 |
| Atonement | October 12 |
| Tabernacles | October 17-23 |
| Eighth Day | October 24 |

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