

The New Horizons Newsletter

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Christianity...

...just a philosophy?

No 'Christian' country exists—nor ever has. That is, no national entity has ever fully embraced the teachings of Jesus Christ. To uncover the reason we need only contrast the pattern for governance that He will inaugurate at His coming return as King of kings, as in Isaiah *ch.2*.

The Kingdom (Family) of God will at that time establish its rule over every nation, the guiding principle being the divine Law as outlined in the Christian Scriptures. It will be written into each nation's Constitution, and become the basis for its peace and prosperity. Nowhere and at no time has that ever happened.

But Christian values *have* spread their benign influence over many nations. The malign influence of mediaeval Christianity abated as the Christian Scriptures were freed from the manacles imposed by the Church.

Slowly—two steps forward, a step back—civilisation has over centuries benefitted from the teachings of Jesus. Ancient foul, destructive and degrading practices have been marginalised—though still festering in dark corners of humanity.

Sadly, subjected to weak leadership—in politics *and* religion—society at large is now trending in opposition to those values, while paying mere lip service to the Christian faith (though millions privately still seek to live by those values).

Law Not Enough

Law, however, does not usher in Utopia. The example of ancient Israel suffices as evidence. Having been subject to the perfect all-embracing Law (of divine origin, and for their good—Deuteronomy 10:13) they flouted it—and suffered the pain of foreign invasion and loss of their national territory as they uprooted the protective hedge of law-keeping.

What, then, is the remedy?

Outside the realm of dictatorships we generally accept and obey those laws imposed—also, supposedly, for our good—by a civilised government. Yet over two million offenders are incarcerated in American jails and a further almost five million are on parole. In the UK over 85,000 are in prison. Man's law doesn't stop law-breaking—just check the evening news!

God recognizes this, but His master plan requires that many generations be provided with the opportunity to accept His way of life—a life *led by His Spirit*. His agreement (covenant) with Israel evidences the fact that humans need help: '*...if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*' (Hebrews 8:7-8).

Following the chaotic times that will herald the end of man's rule, a mere fraction of mankind will survive. The Israel nations will not escape the mayhem, and the LORD will lead them to recover the Land (Palestine) that He had deeded to them because of Abraham's relationship with Him.

That 'new covenant' is—unsurprisingly—law-based. It's not, however, the Law written on scrolls or carved in stone—but '*...this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people*' (Jeremiah 31:33).

It is the indwelling Spirit of God that will motivate Israel—and eventually all people then alive on the planet—to live a law-abiding life in **cont'd p.4**

TRIBULATION FACT

The concept of an end-time persecution of Christians—billed as ‘The Great Tribulation’—features high on most prophetic scenarios. There are confusing (and conflicting) interpretations, as disputes often arise about *timing*. Will it last ‘seven years’? Or, is it half that. When does it begin? Or about *location*—where will Christians be: heaven, or in an earthbound ‘place of safety’ or somewhere in-between? Or, will all Christians have to suffer it, or just some—or none?

Further—and importantly—it is widely assumed that the ‘tribulation’ is God’s punishment on His sleepy church. Is this supported by the Scriptures? Jesus addresses these events to his brethren (the church) within the context of a *worldwide* ‘tribulation’.

What We Know

A microcosm of this terrible yet future period was played out back in 66 to 70AD, in Jerusalem. Jesus’s warning to Judah to return to their God (and their rejection of him as Messiah by the Jewish leadership) went unheeded; Josephus describes the awesome atrocities committed against the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem by the Roman military, and as was prophesied by Jesus in Matthew chapter 24.

Clearly, however, there remains a re-enactment of these prophecies by Jesus—and on a grander scale—in the years just prior to his return. Note the time-line he laid down: ‘...*In those days, right after that time of suffering [KJV: tribulation, Gk. thlipsis], "The sun will become dark, and the moon will no longer shine. The stars will fall, and the powers in the sky will be shaken." Then the Son of Man will be seen coming in the clouds with great power and glory. He will send his angels to gather his chosen ones from all over the earth* (Mark 13:24-27).

Note the sequence—a time of suffering (*thlipsis*), disruption to the sun and moon and *then* the return of Jesus followed by the resurrection of the (scattered worldwide) ‘chosen ones’, the elect. The universal suffering will surpass anything yet experienced on earth (*cf* the Aleppo atrocities) and only the timely intervention of Jesus will end it (vv.19-21).

But this time the affliction will spill far beyond the Middle East. It will be worldwide, affecting all of mankind. Writing to the church in Philadelphia (in Asia Minor)—representative of all true believers—Jesus said:

‘...*Because you didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial [adversity], that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try [test, examine] them that dwell upon the earth*’ (Revelation 3:10). [see side-panel]

Gk. *ek* ‘from’: The preposition implies, not a keeping *from* temptation, but a keeping *in* temptation, as the result of which they shall be delivered *out of* its power. Compare John 17:15.” *Vincent Word Studies.*] The concept is illustrated by the Psalmist—Psalm 91.

‘tribulation’ def.

Gk: *thlipsis*—affliction, trouble, tribulation, anguish, burdened

- *Christians can experience it* John 16:33, Acts 14:22
- *An effect of evil behaviour*
- *Character building* Romans 5:3: 12:12
- *Christ is aware of it* Rev 2:9-10
- *For unrepentant believers* v.22
- *THE great (ie this climactic time of intense affliction)* Rev 7:14

Time Sequence

Follow the sequence that Jesus outlined (Matthew 24 and Revelation 6) and we see this troubled time follows deception, worldwide war, disease and famine escalating to the inevitable consequence—the described time of affliction. Addressing his disciples, Jesus said: ‘...*Then they will deliver you up to affliction [Gk. thlipsis, tribulation], and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name*’. This is the *fifth* Seal. (Matthew 24:9, Revelation 6:9).

Direct intervention by God doesn’t happen until after the *sixth* seal (Revelation 6:17). The ‘tribulation’ is not a divine punishment (on sinning and unrepentant mankind *or* on the church of God) but the inevitable cumulative consequence of depraved human activity here on our planet and in the skies over our heads. Its effects continue through to the seventh trumpet—heralding the return of Messiah and the resurrection of the saints (Revelation 11:15).

A time, then, of universal persecution of those who stubbornly remain faithful to Christ in the midst of all the mayhem—even to martyrdom: ‘...*You will be betrayed by your own parents, brothers, family, and friends. Some of you will even be killed. Because of me, you will be hated by everyone*’ (Luke 21:16-17).

Yet, ‘... *A hair of your head shall in no way perish*’, he continues (v.18). They may, literally, ‘lose their head’ (*cp* the Islamic practice) but *cont’d p.4*

Each successive ‘Seal’ event is the natural consequence of the previous one: spiritual and political deception and incompetence—war—famine—disease—chaos [*thlipsis*]. Jesus noted this same sequence (Matthew 24:4-7). It has been a regular pattern throughout human history!

The complex on-going interplay of world events will merge with this underlying pattern. There is no specified start-date, but it will be cut short—‘...*for the elect’s sake*’.

The universe and all its inhabitants were divinely created according to eternal principles (laws). The inevitable consequence of transgressing those laws is what the Bible calls ‘tribulation’.

Insight from Paul

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

During the Middle Ages there was a 'famine of the Word', the Scriptures forcefully excluded by the church authorities from the so-called 'laity'. Get caught translating the Scriptures into the common language and you faced being tortured, incinerated, or 'hanged, drawn and quartered'.

The apostle Paul would have been incensed. The text was available, in his day, in the vernacular and for all to read or to listen to. A couple of disciples encountered Jesus and commented: '*...did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?*' (Luke 24:32). To other disciples he says: '*...beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded unto them in all the scriptures the things concerning himself*'.

The foundation, the bed-rock, of the Christian faith is those same Scriptures—the Old and (now) the New Testaments. Writing to Timothy, Paul said: '*...All scripture is given by inspiration of God*'. It 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*'. It (the 'Old' Testament) had to be read! It had to be studied! It had to be applied personally!

Another relevant insight is in his letter to the church in Thessalonika: '*...I conjure [urge] you by our Lord, that this epistle be read to all the holy brethren*' (I Thessalonians 5:27). The apostle was concerned lest the church leadership (to whom the letter was sent) were to hold back the message—or some of it. Whether with good or evil intent.

There's a tendency—not unknown in the church of God—for those 'in control' of any organization to be secretive in an attempt to wield power ('I know more than you'). The Gospel is not a 'mystery'! It is open to all. It isn't a secret. It is transparent. It doesn't require a doctorate to understand. Paul wished all he said to be shared with *all* the brethren.

Writing to Corinth (I Corinthians 6:1-6) the apostle urges them to have open court for grievances between brethren. It reflects the instruction of Jesus: '*...if your brother shall trespass against you, go and tell him his fault between you and him alone. If he hears you, you have gained your brother. But if he will not hear you, take one or two more with you, so that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it to the church [the assembly, the ekklesia]*' (Matthew 18:15-17). The local assembly was an open society and not held in thrall to an overbearing leadership.

Paul's openness was a reflection of God's instruction to Israel through Moses: '*...when all Israel has come to appear before Jehovah your God in the place which He shall choose, you shall read* **next column**

Letter from England

Hello

There's a widely-held sentiment that God has abandoned His creation—has gone off somewhere and is no longer interested in our world. The Psalmist puts it like this: '*... [the wicked] has said in his heart, God has forgotten; He hides His face; He will not see forever*' (Psalm 10: 4, 11). Does he, then, 'turn a blind eye' to all human activity? Is He unaware of 'who's who' on the world stage—or what we are up to?

Notice, though, that the Psalmist says it is 'the wicked' who think like that—those who ignore God's revealed Word. The hullabaloo over last year's elections in the leading 'Joseph' nations—Great Britain and the United States—has seen millions expressing displeasure. Even Christian believers (including the Archbishop of Canterbury) have joined in, some quite angrily. Yet the Scriptures clearly teach that the God of the Christian Scriptures is fully in control—even of the most powerful nations, and that we are safe in His hands.

The apostle Paul has this to say to us: '*...Obey the rulers who have authority over you. Only God can give authority to anyone, and he puts these rulers in their places of power. People who oppose the authorities are opposing what God has done, and they will be punished*' (Romans 13:1-2). And the prophet Daniel notes '*...You [God] control human events-- you give rulers their power and take it away*' (ch 2:21).

But a note of caution. A nation or a person thus placed in power is not necessarily beneficial but may be God's instrument to achieve His purpose—perhaps for correction. 'Joseph' has abandoned God's way and, as with ancient Nineveh, unless we return to Him such correction may be due. Anciently (Exodus 9:16) God promoted the Egyptian Pharaoh to his exalted position to facilitate the deliverance of His people, Israel. And later He raised up the Assyrian nation to correct His people (Isaiah 10:5-6).

He is indeed 'God the Interventionist', both globally and personally, but—if we are in a covenant relationship with Him through Jesus—in our turbulent times we can take comfort in that thought. Said Jesus: '*...I will be with you always, even until the end of the world*'.

James

this Law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people, men and women and the little ones, and your stranger who is within your gates, so that they may hear and that they may learn and fear Jehovah your God, and be careful to do all the words of this Law' (Deuteronomy 31:11-12). Similarly, '*... Ezra the priest brought the Law before the congregation, both of men and women, and all that could hear with understanding*' (Nehemiah 8:2ff).

'...*this Law*' is a comprehensive manual for successful national and personal life—and of equal value to the modern world, and to the church of God.

No secret conclaves, then. No closed committees. No dictatorial dogma. No personal fiefdoms or empire-building. Just the building up of the brethren, and the open proclamation of the divine Word to the world. **Ω**

Lord's Supper

Call it 'Lord's Supper' or call it the 'Christian Passover' the church of God will be observing the memorial of Jesus's suffering on **Sunday evening April 9**. '...the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread...' wrote the apostle Paul, giving us the time-frame. Jesus would be crucified the next day at the time the Passover lamb was slaughtered in the Temple. Jesus is '...Christ our Passover, sacrificed for us'. That evening 15th Nisan begins the seven days of *unleavened bread* during which Christians eat no leavened products (I Corinthians 5:7) - symbolic of a life of holiness.

TAKE CARE...

In the UK, £18,000 is annually spent on the National Health Service for each person, and in the USA there's an estimated \$1.207trillion cost (to 2025) of Obamacare. Add in dental costs, over the counter medicines and a variety of proven and unproven health treatments—and we have one measure of our massive health crisis. Need it be so?

Decaying teeth, obesity, liver failure, lung cancers *etc, etc*—all largely preventable—afflict millions. And few of us escape even if we exercise, diet, go under the knife or guzzle pills, for we all succumb in the end.

Health has always occupied mankind's attention. Look back to 1500BC and we find attention given to it in the Hebrew Scriptures—with valuable lessons for our own time. Take note of some of the provisions the LORD God gave the Israelites through Moses, their leader. As part of the legislation (including penalties) embedded in their Constitution and guidance throughout the text of Scripture the new nation was constantly made aware of wise provisions for health.

- Strict physical hygiene
- Exercise, in the form of manual labour
- 'Health and Safety' regulations
- Mental hygiene: a personal responsibility—eg anger management, 'love your neighbour'
- Care for the environment
- Meditation
- Homosexuality
- Quarantine
- No 'sleeping around'
- Monogamy
- Care of the elderly
- Restricted divorce
- Animal welfare
- A weekly rest day
- Worship: annual holy days
- Dietary guidance
- Positive mental outlook

Recent decades have witnessed a steady decline in health and social responsibility—aided and abetted by the increasing ignorance of these Bible texts. Decline of Sunday schools, Bible classes and church attendance during the past half-century coupled with the lack of sane national leadership has laid the foundation for our national health and welfare crisis.

Every aspect of God's creation at all levels operates by law. The steps listed above are the positive expression of that law in regard to our health, and are vital to its maintenance.

Modern man in general will ignore such wise and practical guidance and will experience the adverse consequences. But each of us can carefully analyse these well-documented (in the Scriptures) principles of well-being and apply them personally. They won't 'cure all' but will go a long way towards more robust health for you and your family. *Make this a personal study!* Ω

Christianity...cont'd from p.1

joyful submission to the Creator of the Universe.

The Narrow Way

'Christianity' in its current distorted form is viewed by most as little more than another philosophy to live by—at least when it doesn't become inconvenient for personal ambition or plans. For others it is just a Sunday habit with little impact on daily life. It is, however, *much more*.

Preachers too often present the Christian faith as the soft option, paving the way to 'Heaven' and cushioning our path through life. Jesus said 'No': '*...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it. Watch out for false prophets [teachers]!*' (Matthew 7:14-15). Not, then, for the faint-hearted. The apostle Paul warns: '*...all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*' (II Timothy 3:12).

The way is indeed 'very narrow' and 'hard to follow', for the invitation (John 6:38, 44) to become a disciple of Jesus Christ leads to 'salvation', to acceptance into the Family of God, to participate in '*...the divine nature*' (II Peter 1:4).

The Goal: Eternity

The journey for each of us may be long or short—but the goal is to prepare the Christian to become '*...an heir of God*': '*...The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*' (Romans 8: 16-18).

It is the indwelling Spirit that will transform individuals now and, in the coming new world order under the rule of Christ, all of mankind. Ω

Festivals 2017

Lord's Supper	April 9 Sun evg
Unleavened Bread	April 11-17
Pentecost	June 4
Trumpets	September 21
Atonement	September 30
Tabernacles	October 5-11
Eighth Day	October 12

TRIBULATION...from p.2

before their physical body perishes they will rise in an immortal spirit body to reign eternally alongside our 'Spirit Family', the God-head.

But whatever befalls in those (or any) dark times,

'The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms' (Deuteronomy 33:27) Ω