

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

PO Box 2525
LINCOLN
LN5 7PF
England

e-mail: coguk@aol.com
web-site: www.cgom.org
Editor: James McBride

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providing
leadership
information and
Biblical teaching
Matthew 28:19-20

representing



Spring Harvest

With the seven days of the *Unleavened Bread* festival now passed, Christians enter the symbolic seven weeks of harvest.

The agricultural year in Palestine was used by the Creator to picture, through the annual festivals, His plan for mankind. The barley and wheat crops matured earlier than in the UK—harvested, usually, by the end of May.

In the beginning of the (Biblical) year in Spring, *Passover* represents our release from sin through the sacrifice of Jesus, God's Messiah. It introduces the seven days of *Unleavened Bread*—typical of our replacing our unrighteousness ('leaven') with the character of Messiah.

On the morning after the Sabbath during these seven days there took place a Temple ceremony, the *Wavesheaf Offering* (Leviticus 23:11). A sheaf of grain (it was the barley harvest) was reaped by the priests as Sabbath ended and next morning was presented before God in the Temple.

This first sheaf of barley heralded the beginning of harvest. It has great significance for Christians. For the cutting of the sheaf as that Sabbath ended coincides with the resurrection of Jesus after his three days and three nights in the tomb. (Jesus was, in fact, crucified on Wednesday afternoon.) Next morning—again represented by the wavesheaf—he was presented before the Father in acceptance of his

awesome sacrifice, the sheaf being waved before the altar.

During the *Unleavened Bread* week Christians are particularly mindful of his resurrection (especially on the Sunday morning of the *Wavesheaf*), our minds focused on his perfection and its implementation in our own lives.

[Note: the *Unleavened Bread* festival doesn't always coincide with Easter, its timing being attached to the date of Passover—*Nisan 14* on the Hebrew calendar. This year, 2011, it did.]

Harvest Time

The *Wavesheaf* initiated the barley harvest, which continued over the next seven weeks and culminated in the *Festival of Pentecost*.

The Biblical instruction is to count, mark, take note of (Leviticus 23:15) seven complete Sabbaths from that Sabbath, with Pentecost following the next, the 'fiftieth', day. [The word means *fiftieth*.] It is also known as the *Feast of Weeks* and the *Feast of Harvest*. Unlike all other Bible annual festivals, which are on fixed dates, Pentecost has to be calculated from a moveable date.

Firstfruits

On the afternoon following his resurrection, Jesus endowed the eleven Apostles with the Holy Spirit (John 20:22). It was the 'birth' of the New Testament church, though it was on the day of Pentecost that the Spirit was visibly manifest in power (Acts 2).

The seven weeks following the

A Question of Sexuality

There's a curious anomaly in regard to the practice of homosexuality. It is suggested that this aspect of human sexuality is genetically determined. The only way for reproduction by homosexuals, then, is by definition *via* artificial means—IVF, surrogate parentage *etc*. These are processes which require considerable effort and expense, and are therefore limited in number, usually hitting the headlines.

Biologically, given that it is claimed to be genetically determined, homosexuality should die out in a generation. Yet if we believe the published statistics the number of homosexuals is increasing.

Questions arise. Is the impulse to homosexuality cultural, a matter of personal choice? Or, since it is self-limiting by the fact of partners being of the same sex, does it result from an unidentified cause for mutation of the responsible gene(s)? There are implications for both questions.

Divine Perspective

An unbiased reading of the Christian Scriptures (and indeed those of other faiths) leads to the clear conclusion that 'God' doesn't like it and has taken steps throughout history to control it. The implication is that He considers it detrimental to society—and to His purpose.

The divine purpose from the beginning, on the physical level, is human reproduction. The Creator told our first parents: '*...be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth*' (Genesis 1:28). This, however, was for an over-riding *spiritual* purpose: the selection of a community of faith to share, ultimately, in His divine glory, His Spirit Family. Such a purpose would be frustrated should physical reproduction be restrained as through homosexuality or celibacy (I Timothy 4:3).

If homosexuality is cultural and a matter of personal choice, then a re-orientation through cognitive therapy is possible. If it results from an adverse mutation then the material cause for such a change should be sought.

The apostle Paul makes clear that it is possible, through the action of God's Spirit for such (along

Spring Harvest ...cont'd

Wavesheaf represent the 'church era'—the time in which we live. This was the start of the spiritual 'spring harvest', the calling out of disciples, potential members of God's Family.

As noted, Pentecost was also known as the *Feast of Firstfruits*. Writes Paul '*...now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*' (I Corinthians 15:20).. Christians, he adds (Romans 8:23), have '*...the firstfruits of the Spirit*'. And James confirms saying, '*... Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*' (James 1:18).

Pentecost, then, represents the 'harvest home' of the firstfruits, those who have responded to the Father's invitation and who follow the Messiah. They will be resurrected from the dead (or transformed if alive) at '*...the last trumpet*' I Corinthians 15:51-54), at the return of the Christ. Then begins the 'fall harvest', a thousand years when the saints labour with Jesus without the malign influence of the Adversary.

Call to Action

During the seven weeks following the resurrection of Jesus, the disciples learned from him all that was needful of pure doctrine which they were to pass down the centuries—to us. It would be appropriate for us during these seven weeks to immerse ourselves in that same Word as recorded for us in the Scriptures. Ω

Pentecost: June 12 2011

New Horizons

The articles in **OUTREACH** Newsletter are sometimes expanded in our bi-monthly **New Horizons**. You may view it on our website, or, print copy is

with adulterers and idolaters) to become part of that divine Family (I Corinthians 6:9-11). Ω

Letter from England

Whose feet would you not wash?

That, for some of our readers, may be a strange question. But if you are familiar with the Gospel of John you will recall that Jesus, on the night of his betrayal, washed the feet of the disciples (*ch* 13).

Jesus invites us annually to remember his suffering, and to renew our commitment to him through the bread and wine of the memorial supper. During the memorial he tells us to follow his example: ‘...*If I then, your Lord and Master, have washed your feet; you also ought to wash one another’s feet*’ (v.14).

It’s a simple act, and highly symbolic. But it’s more than a form of words, more than a brief physical activity. By it we commit ourselves to one another in loving service. Not just to ‘my group’ but to *all* our brothers and sisters through Christ.

.So—whose feet would you *not* wash?

Are there brethren who would not in your view ‘qualify’? A person, a particular ‘denomination’? Who will you exclude from ‘your group’ memorial service? Of all Church activities surely this one is for all of us to be together.

Understandably, we have differences—but for most Churches of God they are minimal, often down to personalities. What will Jesus say?

And if all are welcome—why not fellowship together regularly, *every Sabbath* service? (It’s not unknown for two groups to meet in the same hall—at the same time!) Ω

God’s Calendar, or...

Those church denominations (or individuals) who follow the Bible annual holy days use a variety of methods to determine the date of each on the calendar. Each claims their choice is ‘God’s calendar’, and are urgent to impress their choice on all. Even to excluding all others from salvation.

Some, for example, base their calculations on the first sighting of the new moon—locally (*eg* as in Australia), others at Jerusalem. Or, the ‘astronomical conjunction’ of the new moon. Then some groups will apply varied ‘postponements’. There’s a variety of computation. The vast majority, however, of those who observe the festivals apply the ancient calendar in use within mainstream Judaism.

Insight from Paul

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

Most folk suspect that there are unseen forces in our universe. If not a ‘god’, or angels (good and bad) then perhaps aliens, force lines or other mysterious powers. The apostle certainly had a strong position. God and angels, of course. But also malevolent forces intent on the destruction of mankind. These unseen powers had impact on his—and on our—day-to-day life.

Indeed he attributes the almost universal spiritual blindness to ‘... *the god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*’ (II Corinthians 4:4). Before we were turned to Jesus Christ we ‘...*walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience*’ (Ephesians 2:2).

That spirit—whom the apostle identifies also as Satan—is *real*, no figment of a heated religious brain. And Christians are in a daily battle with him though too often unaware of his influence. No wonder, for even ‘Christian’ teachers can be Satan’s messengers. Paul again: ‘...*men of this stamp are sham apostles, dishonest workmen, assuming the garb of Apostles of Christ. And no wonder. Satan, their master, can disguise himself as an angel of light. It is therefore no great thing for his servants also to disguise themselves as servants of righteousness*’ (II Corinthians 11:13-15).

No wonder Jesus—who himself was daily engaged in combat with Satan— *Cont’d p. 4*

Clearly such variations—which alter the festival dates—is a cause of disunity, brethren observing a day or days—even a month—apart. Confusion!

The assumption is that there’s a ‘Bible calendar’, that there is sufficient fact therein to construct a calendar. There isn’t. The wide variety of calendar systems held by sincere Christians is good evidence of this.

Could it be that we ought to ask, *Is it God’s calendar...or is it, simply, the man-made calendar God uses to pin-point His festivals?* (The dates can be readily transferred). If so, as long as it is applied consistently there’s no reason for brethren to disrupt our unity in fellowship. The calendar in use for many centuries is sufficient for all. Ω

Birth of a Kingdom

The Creator, in the Christian Scriptures, has set the human birth process as an analogy for His plan and purpose for mankind.

The prospective mother in her early years is prepared by nature for bearing children, her body equipped to create and nourish the newly created embryo to its full-term. The ovum is fertilized by a single male seed out of potentially thousands, and the new conception shares the genetic make-up of both parents.

This mirrors the process by which the Father creates sons and daughters for His own Family. Having been 'begotten' by the Father the newly-conceived Christian is implanted in the 'womb' of the church where he or she is nourished to spiritual maturity. That maturing process continues until our death.

Man, created in the image of his Creator, by means of the human spirit—the 'spirit in man'—was equipped to interact with the divine Spirit from God the Father—a process known as 'conversion'.

Resurrection Life

It is a spiritual conception. As in a human family, the Father chooses with whom He wishes to interact in this way, drawing them to His Son—Jesus the Messiah. Through Jesus God's Spirit is ministered to those chosen, and a new spirit embryo is conceived—a combination of the human spirit and the divine Spirit. The Father commits them into the care of His church.

Death, however, is not the end. Our body may lie in the grave and decay into dust—perhaps over centuries—but the matured unborn spirit 'infant' is preserved until raised from the tomb, resurrected by the returning Saviour, Jesus. Bursting from the grave at 'the last trumpet' each—a blend of human character with godly character—will enter unending life as a Spirit-born child of God, no longer constrained by fleshly limitations.

Mother Earth

The analogy can be extended. For 'Mother Earth' itself can be viewed as a 'womb'. The planet was created and prepared to bear life, its sole purpose to prepare a people for eternity.

Insight...

warned the disciples about false teachers! He told them: '*...Beware of the false teachers--men who come to you in sheep's fleeces, but beneath that disguise they are ravenous wolves. By their fruits you will easily recognize them*' (Matthew 7:15-16).

The Christian's daily walk is fraught with danger! To the Ephesian brethren the apostle lays out our battle plan: '*...Put on the complete armour of God, so as to be able to stand firm against all the stratagems of the Devil. For ours is not a conflict with mere flesh and blood, but with the despotisms, the empires, the forces that control and govern this dark world--the spiritual hosts of evil arrayed against us in the heavenly warfare. Therefore put on the complete armour of God, so that you may be able to stand your ground on the day of battle, and, having fought to the end, to remain victors on the field*' (Ephesians 6:11-13).

Paul then proceeds to set out our armoury:

'...Stand therefore, first fastening round you the girdle of truth and putting on the breastplate of uprightness as well as the shoes of the Good News of peace-- a firm foundation for your feet. And besides all these take the great shield of faith, on which you will be able to quench all the flaming darts of the Wicked one; and take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit which is the Word of God. Pray with unceasing prayer and entreaty on every fitting occasion in the Spirit, and be always on the alert to seize opportunities for doing so, with unwearied persistence and entreaty on behalf of all God's people Ω

A physical model of the Creator was brought forth from earth's elements—mankind— and surrounded by all necessary systems to support physical and spiritual life. Those systems included a Manual to guide us—physical and spiritual 'laws' (later summed up in the Ten Commandments) to protect life, if followed. And the freedom to choose to follow—or not.

Who ever heard of such a thing or imagined it could happen? Can a nation be born in a day or come to life in a second? Jerusalem is like a mother who gave birth to her children as soon as she was in labor. The LORD is the one who makes birth possible. And he will see that Zion has many more children. The LORD has spoken (Isaiah 66:8) Ω

[Internet users are referred to the article **Premature Birth** by Bill Glover. It is available on the web site: www.thelivinggodministry.org/]