

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

Harvest Time

No—not that one! For in Israel in Bible times there were *two* harvests—spring and autumn. Here we are concerned with the *spring* harvest.

The spring harvest—of barley, wheat—culminated in a festival day, *Pentecost*, also known as the *Feast of Weeks*. Its curious name derives from the term signifying in Greek *fiftieth*. It was held fifty days after the weekly Sabbath during God's seven-day festival of *Unleavened Bread* (also called *Passover*). It is one of several God-appointed annual festivals—holy days when normal business activity is to cease (Leviticus 23).

Among Christians, however, the symbolism of the festival has been all but lost, though many Christians have come to recognize its true significance, and joyfully observe it as a holy day every year.

Within Biblical Judaism the day was just a celebration of harvest home. Grain harvest began at *Passover* and continued for seven weeks, ending early summer. So why do we as Christians observe the festival?

Spiritual Harvest

The theme of 'harvest' is central to the festival. Indeed Jesus used it to symbolize the ingathering of believers: '*...He said to them: A large*

crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. Ask the Lord in charge of the harvest to send out workers to bring it in' (Luke 10:2). He himself is called '*the firstfruits: '...now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept'* (I Corinthians 15:20).

It's a 'harvest'—Jesus first (after his resurrection), and '*...afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming'* (v.23)—also resurrected. Or, as says James: '*...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).

Choice Crop

Christians, note, are begotten '*...of his [the Father's] own will'*. It's a theme scattered

throughout the Scriptures. The apostle Paul reminds us: '*...all those who were designated for eternal life believed'* (Acts 13:48). Jesus said: '*...No-one can come to me except the Father draw him'* (John 6:44). And, '*...All that the Father gives me shall come to me'* (v.37).

[All are special to the Father, but rarely harvested from the elite of this world! (I Corinthians 1:26-29)]

These seven Pentecostal weeks of harvest, then, represent this early spiritual harvest. The 'reapers' were the *cont'd p.3*

Of all God's prescribed annual festivals, *Pentecost* alone is not on a fixed (Hebrew) calendar date. The date has to be calculated.

Pentecost is observed almost universally within Christianity. It is also known as Whit(e) Sunday from the widespread tradition of baptising penitents in white garments on that day.

Where Is David?

He's '*...a man after mine own heart*', God says. Of all Bible characters you would expect King David, Israel's second king—whatever his faults—to be now safely face-to-face with God, with Jesus. And in heaven.

It's the hope of most Christians, that when we die we instantly are transported to heaven to be '*...ever with the Lord*'. But is that what we are told in the Scriptures?

Some seven weeks after Jesus was resurrected the apostle Peter addressed the Jews of Jerusalem.

'David' he said. '*...did not ascend into heaven*' (Acts 2:34). So where was he? '*...he both died and was buried, and his tomb is among us until this day*', Peter says (v.29). Which raises some questions: If 'he' is buried, is that merely his body? Is his 'soul' somewhere else? And where is his 'spirit'?

Life After Death?

The body of David, of course, is no longer with us—having decayed during three millennia.

David's spirit, we're told, '*...returns to God who gave it*'. It is in His protective care until the time he will be resurrected from the grave. Whoops! But his body has decayed!

Just before his death Jesus committed his own spirit into God's hands, while his body remained in the tomb. Divine power reunited body and spirit three days later. As for David, his spirit retained the 'template' for his physical body—the latter to be restored and re-united with his spirit only at the 'first resurrection', at Christ's return.

In the meantime David's remains rest in 'hell'. (In the Hebrew that is *sheol*, in Greek *hades*.) There he joins everyone who has

ever died, both the good and the bad. 'Hell' is simply a notional location for death—it could be a grave (usually), tomb, at sea, or anywhere ashes were scattered. It (*sheol, hades*) is in fact a state of non-existence. [Though it has been suggested that it is where the human spirit abides (inert) safely in God's care until the first or second resurrection. It is *not* a place of punishment.]

But what of David's 'soul'?

The Grave

In the *King James* Old Testament the 'grave' is *sheol, hades* in the New.

It is where everyone ends up at death. We 'go down' to the grave as most of us end up 'in the heart of the earth', *ie*, buried. You can 'dig into' it (Amos 9:2), and sheep are buried there (Psalm 49:14). The weapons of dead warriors can be buried there (Ezekiel 32:27).

The 'grave' in the Scriptures is a notional term for wherever our bodies end up after death.

'Hell' in the *King James* version has several underlying Hebrew and Greek words.

The Soul

King David himself tells us, '*...if I make my (death-) bed in sheol you (God) are there*' (Psalm 139:8). Indeed, when Jesus died his soul (Gk *psuche*) was in *hades* (Acts 2:27,31). The King says, of himself but with a prophecy of Messiah: '*...my flesh shall also rest in hope. For You will not leave My soul in Sheol*' (Psalm 16:10).

The human spirit (the 'spirit in man') continues, though it remains inert, to the time of judgment. The soul, however, will dissipate with the physical body—it is the life-force of the body, the breath of life.

While 'in the grave', in *sheol/hades*, the soul is inert: '*...For there is no memory of You in death; who shall give thanks to You in Sheol?*' (Psalm 6:5). Or as David's son Solomon states: '*...there is no work, or planning, or knowledge, or wisdom, in Sheol, there where you go.*' (Ecclesiastes 9:10). And when we die: '*... [man's] breath will go out, he returns to the earth; his thoughts perish in that day*' (Psalm 146:4). Ω

Request the free articles:
When Someone Dies
What Is Hell?

Harvest Time ...cont'd

twelve apostles but, said Jesus: ‘...*I do not pray for these alone, but for those also who shall believe on Me through their word*’ (John 17:20). And so down through the ages, until his return, those invited to be part of the harvest labour to make known Jesus’ message.

Autumn Harvest

When Messiah returns, those He has chosen, who have responded to the invitation,—who remain faithful—will be ‘harvested’ by a resurrection to unending life as a true child of the Father in His ‘household’, His spirit Family. For the following thousand years these will sow and nurture and reap the ‘autumn’ harvest.

The destructive horrors of the years immediately before Jesus returns will leave a despondent but humbled remnant of mankind—a remnant who will be taught by them the true values based on the revealed Word of God, lessons—often hard!—they are now learning in this life as God’s ‘elect’.

Then comes the end, when the vast majority of mankind will be raised from their graves—invited to enter that same relationship with the Father through that same Gospel message. The harvest will be complete, and God will be ‘...*all in all*’ (I Corinthians 15:28)

Pay Attention!

But for now, at this time, it is the ‘spring harvest’. For now, this message—the good news that you may be reconciled to God—is a call, an invitation, to those ‘...*with ears to hear*’ to respond, to learn from Jesus: ‘...*take my yoke on you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls*’ (Matthew 11:29).

With the power of God’s indwelling Spirit that yoke is indeed easy, for ‘...*No temptation has taken you but what is common to man; but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted above what you are able, but with the temptation also will make a way to escape, so that you may be able to bear it*’ (I Corinthians 10:13).

And you will become part of that ‘spring harvest’!

Ω

Youth Bible Lessons

You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, and when you walk by the way, and when thou lie down, and when you rise up

This popular website contains a series of *Youth Bible Lessons* and associated *Activity Sheets* for children (aged 5-13) and for teenagers.

It was created for parents to use freely as a resource to teach their children about God’s Plan for mankind and His revealed way of life.

Read or download from:

www.myyouthbiblelessons.com

Provided courtesy of Lynn Meakin

Letter from England

Hello from Lincoln

There’s no doubt that many of our leaders—secular and religious—are ‘smart’, have great intelligence. (Indeed one has been called ‘two-brains’.) But is that enough?

Repeatedly decisions are made (affecting all of us)—and high-lighted by the ‘prophets’ of the secular media—that are plain silly. It could be tackling crime, or the criminal justice system, or the ‘war on drugs’, or marriage, or child care. Or the economy.

Indeed one very smart man, the newly appointed Archbishop of Canterbury, has in a recent speech missed the point on the economy. As our leading churchman he should have a powerful message about the big question of our time: *why are we in a mess financially?*

Greedy bankers certainly have had—are having—their part. And the hands-off regulators. And interfering ministers. And the avaricious public intent on maxing out their credit. And the global economy.

Certainly ‘the church’ should speak out on the economy. But how? Not to bleat about ‘cuts’. Not banker bashing. Economic prosperity is no substitute for godliness (Proverbs 11:4). A ‘day of wrath’ is coming as a consequence of our national sin, our failure to live according to the divinely-revealed way of life.

That’s what our leaders—and especially our church leaders—should trumpet loudly and clearly: *turn away from greed, from adultery, from corrupt practices, from injustice. Turn to our God and He will bless and prosper us.*

James

The ‘Last Days’ - When?

The ‘last (or ‘latter’) days’ is mentioned many times in the Old Testament, and in the New. It’s a term beloved of Bible prophecy students—yet to pin-point the era referred to raises questions. In fact, it is a catch-all term understood only within the context of the particular prophecy.

For example, the first occurrence—Genesis 49:1—refers to a prolonged period from the entry to the promised Land (*eg. v.7*) until the appearance of Messiah (*v. 10*). In King Nebuchadnezzar’s dream (Daniel 2:28) ‘*latter days*’ covers millennia of history from this King’s reign to the Millennium. Balaam’s prophecy (Numbers 24:17) refers to the second coming of Messiah. Again, the reference in Isaiah 2:2 and Micah 4:1 is clearly to the period of the Millennium.

One occurrence of the term has generated several interpretations—that by the apostle Peter in Acts 2:17) ‘*...And it shall be in the last days, God says, I will pour from My Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams*’ (Acts 2:17).

Does Peter refer to the time just before Christ’s return? Or after? Or to the ‘church age’? Perhaps even to the *end* of the Millennium. As perhaps does Ezekiel (*ch 38:16*)?

The modern Pentecostal church refers the apostle’s words, on the first Christian Pentecost, to *our* time, *before* Messiah’s return. So his reference to Joel’s prophecy justifies their theology. But Peter doesn’t make clear as to *when*, pointing merely to ‘*...in the last days*’. However, clarity returns when we turn to the source of his quotation—Joel 2:28-32. From the context of Joel’s prophecy we learn that he refers to the time *after* Jesus returns—the beginning of the Millennium.

Selective Call

God’s Spirit has *not* been ‘*...poured on all flesh*’. Not yet. For at this time the Father is selecting individuals (John 6:44, 17:6) from among mankind—Jew, Israelite, Gentile—to receive His Spirit, in preparation for that future ‘pouring out’ of the Spirit on all mankind.

Peter quoted from the prophet Joel, and the context (Joel 2:14ff) is the *early days of the Millen-*

What have we learned in 2000 years?

"The budget should be balanced, the Treasury should be refilled, public debt should be reduced, the arrogance of officialdom should be tempered and controlled, and the assistance to foreign lands should be curtailed lest Rome become bankrupt. People must again learn to work, instead of living on public assistance." --
Cicero 55BC

One Church?

‘*All one body we*’—unity—is the buzz word. The World Council of Churches promotes it. Indeed the new Pope has already made overtures to both the Eastern and Russian Orthodox branches of the church. But *are we* ‘one body’?

In one sense, of course, we are. For every converted person in whom dwells the Spirit of God is part of that one Body, is in a filial relationship with the Father.

Yet the Churches of God persist in pursuing the concept of ‘The Big Church’—a single organization supposedly representing ‘the one true church’.

But that’s not the New Testament pattern! There we find those who respond to the Gospel assembling in independent assemblies, but co-operating with one another. That minimizes the effects of centralized authoritarian rulership, minimizes bureaucracy, encourages the use of our God-given gifts. Ω

Read our article: The Small Church

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/TheSmallChurch.pdf>

nium, just after the return of Jesus as King of kings. It will, writes Joel, be a time of global turbulence, a time when judgment has been upon the unrepentant of mankind, when the nations of Judah and of Israel have turned to God, when God has ‘had pity’ and is restoring prosperity and peace, when He will be in their midst in the Person of Messiah.

In this instance, then, Joel’s (and Peter’s) prediction will have its perfect fulfillment only in the ‘last days’ when Jesus Christ reigns over all human government. Until then, gifts of the Spirit are in the gift of the Head of the Church: ‘*...the one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing separately to each as He wills*’ (I Corinthians 12:11. *See v. 1-11*). Ω