

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Beyond the Millennium

'...Your kingdom come...as it is in heaven'. Wow! Can we begin to imagine what that will be like? There, in heaven, all is perfection. There—no sin. Perfect righteousness. Holiness. Immortality.

And all of that will '*...come on earth*'. It is the goal to which we, as Christians, aspire. It is why we apply all diligence to become Christ-like in our thoughts and in our behaviour. Why we turn aside from worldly pursuits, endure loss of friendships, experience alienation, loss of jobs.

We are, however, secure in our understanding that all of life is subordinate to a divine plan. The plan is symbolized by the annual festivals appointed by God (*see side-bar*, Leviticus 23).

That Kingdom clearly does not as yet exist on earth. It is a spirit Kingdom. It is eternal—but now there is imperfection, decay, suffering and death. Then '*...God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor crying out, nor will there be any more pain; for the first things passed away*' (Revelation 21:4).

That certainly is not what the apos-

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tle Paul calls '*...this evil world*'. Nor, may we note, is it the world that is coming, when Jesus Christ returns as King of kings, and Lord of all lords—Master of the political and the religious realm, and to reign for a thousand years.

For at that time, death will still reign. There will be sickness. People will sin. They will build houses, plant crops, tend to their animals. Much as it is today—but under the careful shepherding of Jesus and his resurrected saints all mankind will live guided by divine Law. No more corrupt and incompetent politicians and businesses. No confusion of multiple faiths. Just God's way.

The Plan

So *stage one* of the Father's plan is now being worked out as He invites individuals to commit their life to Jesus, to be his servants in a corrupt world, to be trained in the way of truth, the laws of the Kingdom.

The *second stage* is during the millennial reign of the Messiah, during which the way of salvation will be opened to all mankind. All will experience the way of the Kingdom and will be invited to become part of the Family of God.

Stage three begins as the millennium ends: '*...the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended*' - Revela

tion 20:5. All others who have walked the earth since creation will be raised from the dead to experience a period of testing, and given opportunity to embrace the Gospel message—to become part of the divine Family, to ‘...partake of the divine nature’ (II Peter 1:4).


This sees the completion of ‘mankind in the flesh’. Should any continue to reject the mercies of God, their life will be ended and their body consumed in what the apostle Peter describes as ‘...the present heavens and the earth being kept in store by the same Word, are being kept for fire until the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men’ (ch 3:7).

Eternity

The stage is now set for the realization of God’s ultimate purpose for His creation! It’s the final stage of His present plan.

At man’s creation ‘...God created man in His image; in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female’ (Genesis 1:27). Perfect DNA. Healthy. Reasoning. Rational. Competent. And in perfect communion with Him. Perfect, yes—but with the capacity to choose.

And the purpose? That His Spirit-led offspring may become ‘... heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ’ (Romans 8:17). That, surely, is mind-blowing—that we will share Christ’s inheritance of the Universe! The Father will by then have taken up His residence on a renewed Earth: ‘...the tabernacle [dwelling] of God is with men, and He will dwell [tabernacle] with them’ (Revelation 21:3). There will be, writes Peter ‘...a new heavens and a new earth, in which dwells righteousness’ (II Peter 3:13). That is, no more death, but immortality. A new beginning when all will have been transformed as Spirit. And—‘...we shall be like him’ (I John 3:2).

The immensity, the vastness, of the Universe will be the stage for the next phase of the divine plan. Our puny minds cannot begin to envisage what God has in store—for eternity! For now, we get but a glimpse. 

Is Britain a ‘Christian Country’?

Recently the British Prime Minister, in a balanced and measured statement, claimed that we are a Christian country—only to be attacked by a few eminent atheists in an open letter organized by the British Humanist Association. Who is right?

It is fact that attendance in the main Christian denomination (the Church of England) has declined. Yet not far short of two-thirds, in the official 2011 census, claimed to be ‘Christian’ - for many, of course, it is purely nominal while for many others there is a wide range of denominational Christian affiliations. Non-Christian religions still are a minority, though growing.

Biblical Christianity is represented by a tiny minority in the UK.

We wonder, however, how many of those professed atheists would prefer to reside in a third-world country. And why would that be? Surely it is because the laws, institutions and culture of the United Kingdom is firmly rooted in the Christian Bible, while those other nations owe their civilisation, such as it is, largely to Anglo-Saxon influence.


Decline

Even the best of nations is defective—for we all are subject to the consequences of defective human nature—man’s problem since the beginning of civilisation. Our laws are designed to curb its excesses!

So while we have as a nation a strong Christian heritage it has over the years trickled away, eroded by the tampering of ‘enlightened’ politicians. For all their trumpeting about ‘equality’, true equality—everyone equal under one law for all—no longer holds. And most of our legislation fails to promote true Christian values –respect for life (from conception to the grave), support for traditional marriage, sexual propriety, national sovereignty and security, financial fairness.

A Christian nation?

Those same Christian values have underpinned the responsibility for personal restraint that has marked Anglo-Saxon civilisation—unlike the mayhem that sweeps Middle Eastern nations. But as that influence is eroded through secularism and so-called liberal values we can expect increasing civil unrest

We never have been truly Christian! True Christianity is a matter of the heart, and unless there is national repentance and a return to Biblical values we cannot apply that precious Name to our society. 

Request the related article:
Tabernacles—mankind in the flesh

‘...as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first-fruit, and afterward they who are Christ’s at His coming; then is the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God, even the Father; when He makes to cease all rule and all authority and power. for it is right for Him to reign until He has put all the enemies under His feet. The last enemy made to cease is death’
(I Corinthians 15:22-26)

Pentecost

Pentecost, one of the annual festivals appointed by the LORD (Leviticus 23:2,15-21), continues to be celebrated throughout Christendom. In the Old Testament it is known as the *Feast of Weeks* (Exodus 34:22 *etc*) from it being the culmination of seven weeks from the time of the *Wave-sheaf* offering.

In the time of Jesus it was also known as *Pentecost* (*Gk, fiftieth*), as it was held on the fiftieth day. On that day the disciples of Jesus were empowered by the Holy Spirit, and the day is credited with being the 'birthday of the church'.


The rhythm of the festivals is agricultural—and the *Feast of Weeks* was a celebration of the conclusion of the barley harvest, and the beginning of the wheat harvest.

As with the other festivals *Pentecost* has significance for Christians. The seven weeks since the *Passover* represent the firstfruits harvest—those who have accepted the invitation of the Father to commit to the Saviour, Jesus Christ, who is '*...Christ the firstfruits*' (I Corinthians 15:23). He is the 'firstfruits' by virtue of his being '*...risen from the dead [as spirit] and become the firstfruits of them that slept*' (v.20).

The reference here ('*...them that slept*') is to all who die having the Holy Spirit, and are '*...a kind of firstfruits*' (James 1:18). These are the first, in order of time, to receive God's Spirit, having responded to God's call (John 6:44) and followed the guidance of the apostle Peter on that first New Testament Pentecost: '*...Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 2:38).

A Time Limit

The 'seven weeks' of (spiritual) harvest indicate that God is working to a plan, and that the harvest will at a certain point in time (the Father's sole decision), be complete. Many have heard that invitation from the Father—but have ignored it or not become fully committed. As said Jesus: '*...many are invited but few are chosen*'.

As of now there is still time to respond to Peter's call, and to make that commitment. 

Wave-sheaf

As the third day of Jesus' time in the tomb ended (*ie* the weekly Sabbath), the Law required that a sheaf of the first-ripe barley be harvested and prepared for an offering the following morning.

This harvesting coincided with the resurrection of Jesus, who is the firstfruits, while the wave-offering on Sunday morning coincided and symbolized his presentation to the Father in Heaven.

Pentecost 2014
Sunday, June 8

Letter from England


The religious world—and spilling into the secular—is awash with doom-laden expositions of 'the end of the world'. For some it's the roller-coaster events in Middle Eastern politics. For others it is 'blood moons' and their relationship to the Biblical holy days. For many it is Bible chronology with the culmination of 'six thousand years' of history as it relates to prophecy. And we can add the perceived fulfilment of the 'signs of the times'.

The past hundred years especially has spawned many interpreters of prophecy—and not only within Christianity. These gurus came and went along with their failed prophecies. But their successors continue to churn out precise predictions.

Such predictions, however, confuse us. Crank into the mix a medley of dates, cycles, jubiles, calendars, ancient languages and customs, world events, Bible translations—and we throw up our hands in despair. Who do I believe? Could I miss out on the return of Christ? Will I be 'left behind'?

But there is no room for complacency. Jesus said that at the time of his return the world would be '*...as it was in the days of Noah*' (vv.37-38). That was? *Complacency!* Life carried on as usual—nobody cared about the wickedness, about the depravity that enveloped society, with no room for God (Genesis 6:5). It had crept up on them—here a little, there a little—*just like today!*

And herein lies danger for the Christian, for Jesus—having just told us that false prophets would abound—warned us that '*...because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of the many will grow cold*' (Matthew 24:12). So we each have a personal responsibility to keep building our relationship with the Father and with our Saviour.

But as to the time of 'the end'? '*No one knows the day or hour. The angels in heaven don't know, and the Son himself doesn't know. Only the Father knows*' (Matthew 24:36). When Jesus returns is determined by the Father. With precise timing He will intervene to stop human destructiveness, to end the incompetent, godless management of our precious planet. And not one of His true servants will be 'left behind'. 

Eternity—a new beginning

'Where will you spend eternity' is a common query by evangelical Christians. And there is a Biblical answer—though the *how* is more important than *where!* *Here is the Plan.*

For eternity is the very reason God created mankind. It is the new beginning when we leave behind our temporary dwelling in fleshly bodies and acquire a new spirit body: '*...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body* (I Corinthians 15:44).

For some—those *now* invited, in this age—that transformation takes place at the return of Jesus Christ to reign for a thousand years (the 'millennium'). Those who physically survive into that era—after the chaos of the 'last days'—will have the opportunity to also become spirit. While for the rest of mankind—from every age of man since his beginning—there will, after the millennium, be a resurrection to physical life with the same chance to take on the same spirit body: '*...the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished*' Revelation 20:5).

Outline Plan

The entire plan has been outlined for us in the series of 'feasts of the LORD' (Leviticus 23). There are seven of these, but in the autumn there are four with reference mainly to the end times—and beyond. One of these is the seven-day *Feast of Tabernacles*. Although it has wider significance, it specifically encompasses the events from the return of Jesus until the end when, '*...he [Jesus] shall have delivered up the kingdom to God*' (I Corinthians 15:24).

Tabernacles references our temporary pilgrimage in the flesh, dwelling in our temporary bodies. It is pictured by the Israelites dwelling in booths (temporary dwellings) for the seven days of the feast: '*...You shall live in booths seven days*' (Leviticus 23:42), after which they could return to their houses (John 7:53).

Nehemiah fills in some detail: '*...Also day by day, from the first day unto the last day, he read in the book of the law of God. And they kept the*

feast seven days; and on the eighth day was a solemn assembly, according unto the manner' (ch 8:18). Note here: Nehemiah records that 'the last day' of the feast is the *seventh* day of *Tabernacles*. The *Modern KJV* translates John 7:37: '*...the last day of the great feast*'.

A New Beginning

There is, however, a final annual festival immediately following on *Tabernacles*. This 'eighth day' completes the outline plan, and can only refer to eternity. For all flesh has by then been either consumed by fire or transformed as spirit: '*...Behold, the tabernacle of God [the Father] is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away all tears from their eyes. And there will be no more death, nor mourning, nor crying out, nor will there be any more pain; for the first things passed away. And He sitting on the throne said, Behold, I make all things new*' (Revelation 21: 3-5).

The Eighth Day

The symbolism of the eighth day (Leviticus 23:39) of the autumn festival focuses on *eternity* - God's 'end game'.

The number 'eight' - mentioned eighty times in Scripture - is associated with new beginnings, a new order. Examples are the 'eighth day' - the first day of a new week. Jesus, following his resurrection as the *eighth day* was beginning (the first day of the week, Sunday) presented himself before the Father on that day in his new spirit body. Eight persons survived the Great Flood to enter the new world. God's people were covenanted through circumcision on the eighth day of life. Even in physics - for the eighth note on a musical scale is the same as the first note, *etc.*

Within Judaism, this eighth day - following the seven days of *Tabernacles* - is 'a festival in itself'. It is a time of exuberant jubilation - a veritable marriage feast. "...it is this day which above all expresses the joy of the Jewish religion" (*Teach Yourself Judaism* p.188).

Each of the 'holy days' God has revealed is an important guide to the divine plan for mankind - for now and for eternity. Not least is this *closing day* of the festival year, pointing us to the culmination of His magnificent plan.

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7000 Years

The seven day week is symbolic of the seven thousand year notional plan for human life—one day representing a thousand years. It indicates that God works to a time-table, and that man's time in the flesh is limited.

The seventh day of the week—the Sabbath—represents the thousand year reign of the Messiah, Jesus.