

## *The New Horizons Newsletter*

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## **The Divine Model**

The pandemic the world has just experienced and the draconian measures imposed to quell it have highlighted the loss of the much-cherished liberty we all crave. The restrictions—for as long as the populace views them as necessary—have been generally embraced.

Governments, whatever their protestations, are ever ready to crack down on their citizens, and hold on stubbornly to any new powers. The security and the success of any society is secured by boundaries—hence the ‘law of the land’ and the forces to implement it. Different administrations strive to achieve this by a variety of means, and with varying success, from a light touch through to violent dictatorship.

Given the recurring universal crises mankind experiences it’s clear that no nation has yet hit the jackpot of a perfect society. The United States with its *Constitution* and *Bill of Rights* is a valiant attempt to ensure the liberty of its citizens. There isn’t a written Constitution in the United Kingdom but it has presided over a vast freedom-loving empire for hundreds of years. There is more or less success elsewhere.

All such, however, have flaws. The lighter the touch of government the more dependent order is on co-operation and willing compliance by the populace. And that is not an instinctive characteristic of the average human being!

## **Role Model**

We can learn from history, and there is a perfect role model detailed within reach of most people on the planet—the much ignored Christian Scriptures, the Bible.

Having delivered the people of Israel from Egyptian tyranny, God united their twelve clans as one nation with its own Constitution - or *Covenant*—(the ‘*Book of the Law*’ Deuteronomy 30:10) and its own legal system. Its laws were the practical application of the primaevial ‘law of love’, the guidance built into Adam’s spirit at his creation, his conscience: ‘...*what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*’ (Deuteronomy 4:8).

## **Heart Trouble**

But ‘...*finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant*’ (Hebrews 8:8). There simply wasn’t a willing heart in the bulk of the nation. A radical transformation of human nature was called for—a ‘*new covenant*’. A different constitution by which the same content was followed from the heart, voluntarily and joyfully. When we comply with the law we are not subjected to its penalties.

Given mankind’s innate hostility to the divine way *more* was needed. Our rejection of it, our sin, separated us from the Creator and had to be removed—only possible if someone perfect, someone with an unblemished record, *someone sinless, someone divine*, would have the capacity to take on the

burden of the sin and pain of all mankind and pay the penalty for all.

Jesus—our Creator, co-equal in the Godhead—willingly chose to be born in human flesh as the first-born Son of God, to suffer at the hands of mankind and to die cruelly on a Roman stake. All for us. To pay the penalty—*death*—for our sin.

God thus made it possible for us to be reconciled to the Godhead and to escape eternal death. Not through anything we can do but out of His compassion, His mercy, His limitless grace.

When we finally recognize the utter horror of our personal sin with its awful consequences and in repentance turn to Jesus Christ for forgiveness the Father then welcomes us into His spirit Family.

### Consequences

Sin—the transgression of law—has marred and defiled all of us. It has separated us from our Creator thus negating the very purpose for which we were created. God's design is to prepare each of us, with our co-operation, to become part of His Family, to cast aside our human limitations, to live endlessly with unlimited power, to be incorruptible, to reach the stars.

Such a stupendous future becomes available with

### Letter from England

I think the authorities—government, medical, media—seem intent on destroying any glimmer of hope we may harbour of a full recovery from the pandemic. A turgid stream of doom and gloom.

It is therefore a blessed relief that we, as Christians, have a *real* hope. Not the doubtful '*I hope so-and-so will happen*' but a total certainty. The goal we have in our sights is rock-solid. It is for ever. It is under guarantee: '*...[God] has also sealed us, and given the earnest [pledge] of the Spirit in our hearts*'.

To think about it blows the mind. For now, though, we may suffer; we, in common with all mankind often experience pain and loss and disappointment. But, writes Paul: '*...what we now suffer I count as nothing in comparison with the glory which is soon to be manifested in us*' (Romans 8:18).

The apostle himself had near-death encounters: '*...We are*

### A Universal Law

The universe and all in it is created in accord with *law*. Every physical and every chemical interaction adhered to universal law—most of which man does not yet fully comprehend.

There is, too, a *spiritual* law, barely understood. It governs all human behaviour, working through our inborn spirit. Transgress it ('sin') and there are unavoidable negative consequences, notably illness, injury, poverty, more—and ultimately physical and spiritual *death*.

a simple first step. Once aware of what severs us from such an outcome—our personal sin—we must determine to forsake it and to invite Jesus Christ to carry our burden, to henceforth govern our life. We seal that commitment by being baptized—symbolic of the death of our former life. We have now become a child of God, perceived by the Father as clothed with the perfect righteousness of Jesus, the sinless Son of God.

### Commitment

Having taken that first step through this 'narrow gate', ahead lies a rough track—and not knowing what obstructions it holds: '*...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it.*' (Matthew 7:14). Or, as said Jesus: '*... whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, sits not down first, and countsh the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him*' (Luke 14:27-29).

That foundation is the message Jesus brought—the 'Gospel' as elaborated by the Christian Scriptures; every Word of God. It is a message distorted by millennia of human manipulation, and each new believer has to sift the Scriptures for the original word of Jesus. We are urged to '*...consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as you see the day approaching*' (Hebrews 10:24-25). Instruction by competent teachers of the Scriptures is essential for all Christians.

### 2021 Festivals

|             |              |
|-------------|--------------|
| Pentecost   | May 16       |
| Trumpets    | September 7  |
| Atonement   | September 16 |
| Tabernacles | Sept 21-27   |
| Eighth Day  | September 28 |

*We are happy to respond to any questions you may have*

*troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed*'. Paul continues: '*...For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory; While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal*'.

We now have but glimpses of what's 'unseen'; but it's fullness is far beyond our present comprehension. And it is our sure and certain hope.' *...the 'anchor of the soul'*

*James*

## Reflections...

The annual round of festivals often provokes a closer look at cherished teachings. The sound foundation remains—the basic structure of the festivals remain inviolate—but we sometimes come to a deeper appreciation of their significance.

Fundamental to Christianity is the understanding that in no way can we ‘earn’ salvation. None of our activities no matter how useful to mankind or how pleasing to God can compensate for our sin. When carried out motivated by love (Gk. *agape*) our ‘works’ contribute to our reward in God’s Kingdom but do not secure our place there. That stems solely from God’s mercy, His grace, His unending love for us.

Christians have had a radical ‘heart transplant’. God has implanted His mind, His Spirit, in us. All that ancient Israel did as a physical nation was subject to law and its prescribed penalties, but for us is a matter of our *choice*—choice motivated by our love for Him, our desire to serve Him, our thanksgiving—to conform to His divine character as witnessed in the life of our Saviour.

### True Sacrifice

Adam’s sin excluded him from God’s intimate presence, and he could thereafter fellowship with Him only through the mediation of sacrifice—usually of an animal, and the shedding of its blood at prescribed intervals. (All mankind once knew this, but have deviated from His guidance.) The true sacrifices were maintained by the faithful down the ages—Abel (Genesis 4:4), Noah (Genesis 8:20-21), Melchizedek (*ch* 14), Abraham (*ch* 22), Israel in Egypt (Exodus 5:3).

The LORD delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt, celebrating it with a seven day festival (Exodus 12:1-15) named *Passover* (Luke 22:1) in a joyful annual reminder of their deliverance. The Israelites were protected from the judgment on Egypt by the shed blood of a sacrificed lamb—referencing those sacrifices made by Abel and other faithful. In the New Testament it

On the night of his betrayal Jesus and the Twelve met for a meal. Opinion varies as to whether or not this was a Passover service (eg none of the terms used are specific to Passover). Following the meal Jesus introduced the symbols of bread and wine ‘...in memory of me’ as a continuing annual memorial of himself as the Passover lamb, sacrificed ‘...for the sins of the world’ (I John 2:2).

is revealed as symbolic of the sacrifice of our Saviour: ‘...*Christ our passover is sacrificed for us*’ (I Corinthians 5:7).

For those ‘in Christ’ all the physical sacrifices under the Law are now redundant through him. *Jesus* is the fulfilment of all the sacrifices—notably the sin-offering. They are a type of the ultimate sacrifice of his own life: ‘...*who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world*’ (Galatians 1:4).

### Spring Festival

As this year’s festival, the *Days of Unleavened Bread* pass we enter the fifty days leading to *Pentecost*. For the Twelve apostles it was a time of comprehensive instruction in the ways of the Kingdom by the resurrected Jesus himself (Acts 1:2-3). The apostle Paul later had a similar experience (Galatians 1;11-12). Together they preserved the one and only Gospel message: ‘...*you should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints*’ (Jude 3).

The apostle Paul had some guidance for the Corinthian brethren on the observance of both the *Lord’s Supper* and the *Days of Unleavened Bread* (*ch* 5;11)—evidence of the festival’s continued relevance in the church some twenty years after the resurrection.

A couple of weeks after Jesus left them the apostles were—at the feast of *Pentecost*—empowered by the Spirit to take that message to the world. It is perhaps an example for us—during the days leading to this festival—to intensely learn from them in personal diligent prayer and study of the Scriptures. As Peter wrote ‘...*be ready always to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear*’ (I Peter 3:15). And the apostle Paul to Timothy: ‘...*from a child thou have known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture 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).

The Spring festivals lay a foundation for growth. During *Unleavened Bread* the removal of physical leaven gives impetus to self-examination, to address sinful habits in our lives. Diligent study and application of the Scriptures in the seven weeks to *Pentecost* shines a piercing light on our shortcomings while we draw on the power of God’s Spirit in us to conquer them. Ω

## The Second Death

It's the one sure event of our brief sojourn on earth—*death*. Few welcome it, though it does come as a relief to those experiencing extreme mental or physical pain. For most of mankind it is not welcome, and every effort is made to delay it.

Many turn to religion for solace—though the 'comfort' of their belief is confined to the living. But after our life ends? Well, it can get scary. Who wants to return post-death as a reptile or a bat? Who wants total annihilation and a lifetime wasted? Christians take refuge in a fictional 'heaven' as a reward—but hanging over them is the Damocles sword of judgment and the possibility of burning endlessly in 'hell fire'. In Islam '*Hell is a real place that is prepared for those who reject the truth after it became apparent to them and do evil deeds*'. According to the Quran some will '*never leave the fires of hell*'.

Underlying every major faith is the concept of an 'immortal soul' that upon death leaves the body for its eternal reward or its punishment. It is a view unsupported by the Christian Scriptures, for each of us is activated by the 'spirit in man'—a temporary spiritual entity that is a record of all we are and all we do and think. It leaves us at our death and remains in God's care until called back to life for judgment in a spirit or a physical body

That spirit, however, is *not* immortal—a quality unique to God. From conception we are animated by physical processes (our 'soul'; Gk *psuche*) sustaining our physical life through our body organs. The human *spirit* (Gk *pneuma*) imparts our intellectual and spiritual resources, inter-acting with the physical processes and when it leaves us life ends, the spirit remaining in God's care awaiting judgment (but is inert, and without consciousness—'asleep').

When mankind's allotted 7000-yr existence ends (ie after the 'second resurrection') all who are 'in Christ' will no longer be subject to death. The rest, having rejected the opportunity to become part of God's family will die the 'second death' and their dead bodies consumed by fire. (the Bible term is 'hell' Gk *ge'henna*), and the spirit then disperses.

Jesus, with pictorial language, used the analogy of the unproductive branches of fruit trees or vines. Notice, they are first cut off the vine (ie 'killed') and then they are disposed of by being burned: '*...If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast them into the fire, and they are burned.*;' (John 15:6). He elsewhere said: '*...The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire*' (Matthew 13:41-42).

***ge'henna (the Valley of Hinnom) was Jerusalem's rubbish dump where all was consumed by decay and ever-burning fire***

## Insight from Paul

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

It would be surprising if the young—perhaps thirty—Saul (later named Paul) were not in Jerusalem on that momentous Passover and first 'Christian Pentecost' following the resurrection of Jesus. The Jews came annually from many nations to, first, celebrate the seven days of Passover and then remain in Jerusalem for the six weeks until Pentecost (*cp* Acts 2:8-11).

The city still bubbled with excited talk of the empty tomb, and as a respected budding Rabbi it surely made him think—'*who is this man?*'. It's a question he asked again when Jesus dramatically intervened in his life on his way to Damascus to arrest the believers: '*...he said, Who are you, Lord? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom you persecute: it is hard for thee to kick against the [goads]*' (Acts 9:5). Since Steven's violent murder his participation had preyed heavily on his conscience.

Saul immediately responded: '*...what do you want me to do?*' Jesus, in some manner, has touched each of us, and Saul's exemplary response is a 'goad' that should motivate all of us. For we have been endowed with spiritual gifts, gifts that we must nourish—and which we must apply in the service of the brethren.

Mostly, these gifts are not spectacular (to us, but not to God!) and are 'behind the scenes': works of service, prayer for the brethren and for those ministering, discernment of the needs—physical, mental, spiritual—of other brethren, financial stability.

The greatest gift by far, however, is that of the holy Spirit, bestowed on each of us after our baptism. The fruits of that Spirit, listed by Paul (Galatians 5:22-23), are but seedlings that must also be carefully and actively nourished, worked on—inwardly transforming us through life's experiences and our effort into the image of Christ. They are the truly vital 'good works' urged on us by the apostle. We are to be '*...changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord*' (II Corinthians 3:18). Ω

The prophet Malachi, too, may reference this ultimate end of 'the wicked': '*...all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch...you shall tread under the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day which I am preparing, says Jehovah of Hosts*' (Malachi 4:2-3).

Another example may be that of Ananias and Sapphira—who, perhaps trying to buy their way into the church, (Acts 5) committed the grievous sin of attempting to deceive God—and died on the spot. It was the sin from which there can be no repentance (Matthew 12:31, I John 5:16). Ω