

outreach

The New Horizons Newsletter

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Matthew 28:19-20

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OUR FAITHFUL GOD

Trust, surely, is a virtue we value highly. Certainly within our families we nourish this quality. We like to think, we hope, that we can trust our neighbours (as most of us do—and as we do ours!). If we commission a task we trust the plumber, the electrician, the company, the driver to deliver as promised. And it is frustrating when the trust is broken.

That, however, is not our God: ‘... Commit your way unto the LORD; trust also in Him, and He will bring it to pass’ (Psalm 37:5). The LORD doesn’t change, ‘...the same yesterday, today and for ever’ (Hebrews 13:8). ‘...I am the LORD. I don’t change’ He says (Malachi 3:6). He is our Rock, the solid foundation of our life as Christians.

The LORD, in other words, is dependable, consistent, principled. All His actions are in accord with His unchanging Laws, with His revealed principles for life.

The Scriptures are a record of that faithfulness. Our first parents proved to be fickle, yet God patiently stayed with His plan—a plan He has consistently applied through six millennia, a plan that has been in place ages ago: ‘...In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began’ (Titus 1:2, II Timothy 1:9).

Through the centuries a few believing men and women embraced that plan, and God responded: ‘...You [the LORD] will show faithfulness to Jacob, mercy to Abraham, as you have sworn unto our fathers from the days of old’ (Micah 7:20).

A Covenant God

God entered into a covenant relationship with Abraham (as He had done with Noah) and then with Israel—who initially accepted His terms. A covenant, however, is a ‘two-way street’ - and the terms must be observed by both parties to remain valid: ‘...Know therefore that the LORD your God, he is

God, the faithful God, which keeps covenant and mercy with them that love him and keep his commandments to a thousand generations’ (Deuteronomy 7:9).

As Christians we, too, through repentance and baptism, enter into covenant relationship with Jesus, making that same reciprocal commitment: ‘...all that the LORD has spoken we will do’ (Exodus 19:8). In his instructions to his apostles he said, ‘...teaching them to observe all things, whatever I commanded you. And, behold, I am with you all the days until the completion of the age’ (Matthew 28:20).

We do as Jesus asks—and he will faithfully be with us in support: ‘... Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me’ (ch 11:29).

Dark Times

In the West we at present live in relative peace, though each of us at times passes through rough seas. We have the assurance that our faithful God carries us every step of the way. In a dark moment of Israel’s history the prophet exclaims: ‘...It is of the LORD’S mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is your faithfulness (Lamentations 3:23).

Times will come, however, when Micah’s prophetic words become relevant: ‘...Don’t trust anyone, not even your best friend, and be careful what you say to the one you love... Your family is now your enemy.’ (Micah 7:5-6). And the prophet’s response? ‘...But I trust the LORD God to save me, and I will wait for him to answer my prayer’.

Whatever may befall us, our covenant relationship with Jesus Christ will ensure we can rely fully on his faithfulness on our behalf. He will ‘...deliver us from evil [hurtful experiences]’.

Ω

An Evolutionary Puzzle

The complex web of evolutionary theories is indeed a puzzle to the average layman. But there's a situation that puzzles even scientists: *why humans live so long*. Biologists at Edinburgh University recently stated: '*Why we live beyond fifty has long puzzled scientists*'.

According to these folk the unusually long lives of humans was an 'evolutionary puzzle', and that '*natural selection cannot directly favour continued living in post-menopausal women and elderly men*'.

Most of us, I guess, are happy to live well beyond fifty—an age when we are only halfway through a potential lifespan, and with still much to offer our world and our family. So why the scientific confusion?

When it comes to the nature of our place in the order of things most scientists seem to bury their heads in the sand, blind to other possibilities. What the apostle Peter comments about attitudes to the return of Christ, or concerning the fact that God once judged and destroyed almost the entire race by a flood, applies more widely: '*...they are wilfully blind*' (II Peter 3:5).

The Plain Truth

Why grandparents? As says the meerkat—'*simples*'! Science won't find answers to such questions until they acknowledge that man is not some quirk of evolution. We humans are not animals, but special beings created in the image of God. Our first forebear spent perhaps years studying the lower creation so he could name them appropriately. And he could not find one to which he could relate as a life companion. We are different from the animal kingdom. Vastly so.

Whether we live seventy or a hundred or more years it is precious time given us to understand the world around us and to improve it. The altruism of the animal world is limited. But as humans build their knowledge and resources—not often before fifty!—they have the option to support the younger generation, to leave a legacy or a business. Animal life doesn't.

As followers of Jesus Christ we embrace our lifespan, however long or short it may be, to prepare ourselves for our part in the Family of God, having been accepted by our heavenly Father through the grace of our Saviour. Ω

...a piece of bone

Are we more than the sum total of our body tissues?

That's the contemptuous description, inflicted on us by the President of the Royal College of Genealogists, Professor Lesley Regan, of an unwanted embryo or foetus, comparing it to a bunion. Her perhaps laudable desire is to remove the stigma of criminality from those who abort a child—not that charges are often brought.

Since the UK 1967 Abortion Act millions have died by abortion of the foetus. In the United States the 1973 Act of the United States Supreme Court struck down every federal, state, and local law regulating or restricting the practice of abortion.

There are an estimated 56 million induced abortions worldwide *every year*, among women of childbearing age.

Bio-mystery

In the opinion of Professor Regan, to abort is just like trimming unwanted bony growth from a bunion. It's a view not shared by the Psalmist: '*...When my bones were being formed, carefully put together in my mother's womb, when I was growing there in secret, you knew that I was there--- you saw me before I was born. The days allotted to me had all been recorded in your book, before any of them ever began*' (139:14-16).

As science delves ever more deeply into human biology it increasingly stands in awe at the complexity of life, the genius of the myriad interactions even within a single cell—and especially the reproductive cells. For the union of just two living cells has the potential to rise to human greatness during a lifetime—and ultimately to immortality.

Surely such a precious 'piece of tissue' cries out for respect! But blinded by the shackles of evolutionary biology many see such a miracle as merely a piece of tissue on which to experiment, or to destroy wholesale, or for convenience. We ask—is there a difference in killing a baby *after* its first breath, and *before* birth?

And they do: for just short of two hundred thousand (a *recorded* 190,046 in 2016) are aborted annually in England and Wales alone; and worldwide, those fifty-six million.

Thousands of childless couples

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Letter from England

Hello

More than seventeen million UK voters mandated the Government to separate the nation from the increasingly bureaucratic and federalist European Union. The 'yes' vote came despite intense opposition from many in Government supported by influential voices in politics, religion, the media and business. Eighteen months post-Referendum the contention continues, with varied visions of our future—mostly negative.

A sovereign nation is praiseworthy, and fits the Biblical pattern. Britain became dominant as it wielded its resources and power worldwide—however imperfectly. But I wonder if our venture into independence will restore the glory days of yore.

The nation has experienced a steep decline over the past forty years—since we linked our destiny to Europe and as we ceded control over our affairs and laws to a foreign power. We cannot, however, 'blame' it all on 'Europe'. For we no longer understand the driving force behind our previous world dominance—when 'the sun never set' on the British Empire.

That dominance resulted from a promise given to one man some four thousand years ago, to Abraham. He committed to believe and diligently follow the Creator, the LORD, and his descendants were selected by God to become a model nation—Israel. They covenanted with Him to follow Abraham's footsteps: '*...all the LORD has said we will do*'. And in return, for His part, God would bless them—with health, wealth, peaceful borders, safe childbirth, abundant crops. See Leviticus 26 for the details—and for the (familiar) adverse effects, a 'curse', of their breaking the covenant.

It is concerning that so much of the adversity is reflected in the condition of our modern Anglo-saxon nations. Don't we appear to be coming under this 'curse' - the inevitable result of our failure to acknowledge the source of our success, and follow His guidance?

We have been warned: '*...you must never think that you have made yourselves wealthy by your own power and strength. Remember that it is the LORD your God who gives you the power to become rich. He does this because he is still faithful today to the covenant that he made with your ancestors. Never forget the LORD your God or turn to other gods to worship and serve them. If you do, then I warn you today that you will certainly be destroyed. If you do not obey the LORD, then you will be destroyed just like those nations that he is going to destroy*' (Deuteronomy 8:18-20).

The God of the Christian Bible features little in the daily lives of most of our indigenous citizens. Indeed we are too often shamed by the standards set by the 'strangers' in our midst. It doesn't bode well for the outcome of our bid for independence. As dedicated followers of Jesus Christ we must truly let the light of his truth shine wherever we may have influence.

James

Just a Bit of Fun?

Kids love it! Dressing up. Annoying the neighbours and pestering their parents. Ghoulish masks, spiders, skeletons. Scary carved-out pumpkins. Witches and ghosts. It's that time again—'Hallowe'en'. But *is* it just harmless fun?

It is held the even(ing) before *All Saints Day* (November 1st), a Christian festival celebrated by most Christian churches in honour of all Christians dead and alive. But at sunset on October 31 begins the high Sabbath within paganism, *Samhain*. It is also the beginning of *All Saints Day*.

'*Samhain* is known by most folks as Halloween, but for many modern Pagans it's considered a Sabbath to honor the ancestors who came before us, marking the dark time of the year. It's a good time to contact the spirit world with a seance, because it's the time when the veil between this world and the next is at its thinnest.'

Just another example, then, of Christians adopting pagan customs, as it does with Christmas and Easter. Yet the God of Christianity has this to say: '*...take heed to yourself that you not be snared to follow them [the heathen] ...and that you not inquire after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? And I shall do so, even I. You shall not do so to Jehovah your God*' (Deuteronomy 12:30-32). Ω

A piece of bone ...cont'd

fruitlessly haunt adoption clinics for a child to nourish and cherish. Yet Government opens the nation's doors to immigrants while encouraging the death of our unborn potential future workforce.

Moral Decay

Meanwhile, the nation sinks into the swamp of moral torpor. Secularism reigns supreme. Sexual promiscuity goes unchecked, encouraged by the school curriculum, by the entertainment media and by falsely so-called 'celebrities'. And, sadly, by the church. Adultery is tolerated as an acceptable lifestyle. STD's often blight the hopes of conception, with many becoming sterile following an abortion, often with subsequent miscarriages and mental health challenges.

A decision to abort may arise out of tough circumstances; it may seem there is no other way. But this prevailing moral decay has blinded many to the preciousness of life. It is strange, however, that a mother who wouldn't think to take the life of her newborn would be content to do so to her *unborn* baby.

But what do you expect? With God and His perfect plan for our lives (laid out clearly in the Scriptures) jettisoned—sin goes unchecked. Christian values—once instilled in our children at home and in the now almost redundant Bible and Sunday schools—are viewed as useless relics of a past age.

It is time to nourish and cherish the most precious gift of all—*human life*. Ω

GOD'S SEAL

Emerging from the mists of time is the custom for a dignitary—Monarch, President *etc*—to authenticate a decree or official document with a ‘seal’. The insignia is embossed on a hard substance (*eg* clay, wood) and the imprint is made by pressing into soft wax, thus sealing the document. The seal usually includes three elements: *name or title*, *jurisdiction* and *emblem*.

Embodied in its use is the individual’s implied authority to issue the decree. When a new governing body assumes power they use their seal to authorize all new laws or Acts—because it now has that authority (elected or stolen!).

Seal of God

The LORD, too, has His ‘seal’. It is the *mark of His authority*, and is clearly defined for us in the Scriptures. The LORD spelled out His laws to Israel for that new nation’s Constitution. It was a summary of those moral principles that have existed since man’s beginning—laws observed by the faithful (*eg* Genesis 26:5): the ‘Ten Commandments’. Their observance is His mark, His seal.



The elements of God’s seal are written into the *fourth* commandment: ‘...Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy; For in six days the LORD [name] made [title: Creator] heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is [jurisdiction], and rested the seventh day’ (Exodus 20:8-11).

He repeats the instruction: ‘...Israel shall keep the sabbath, to observe the sabbath throughout their generations, for a perpetual covenant. **It is a sign** (Heb. *oth*) between me and the children of Israel for ever: for in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested, and was refreshed’ (*ch* 31:16-17).

The prophet Ezekiel adds: ‘...I gave them my sabbaths, **to be a sign** (a banner, evidence) between me and them, that they might know that I am the LORD that sanctify them’ (*ch* 20:12). God’s seal—the seventh-day Sabbath—identifies *Him* (JHVH) as God. It tells us which God we are to worship—*ie*, the One who is identified by the *seventh-day Sabbath*. All other worship is idolatrous.

Perfect Precepts

Acceptance of these ‘laws’ (Heb. *torah*: precepts) was Israel’s part in the covenant between them and God (Exodus 24:7). As long as they adhered to them the LORD would bless and protect them:

‘...My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips’ (Psalm 89:34).

These precepts were written into mankind’s core being at our creation and carried an automatic ‘curse’ when disregarded (*eg* Deuteronomy 27:26). This lesson was driven in to Israel by means of penalties administered through its legal system.

Changed Laws

The *torah* reflects the perfect will and mind of God for us. It is unchanging as He is unchanging: ‘...I am the LORD. I change not’ (Malachi 3:6, Hebrews 13:8). Indeed throughout the coming millennial reign of Jesus this same *torah* will govern all mankind (Micah 4:2).

But dark clouds have since enveloped the Christian world obscuring the light shed by the Messiah two thousand years ago. As predicted through the prophet Daniel, out of the failing Roman empire a ruler would emerge who will : ‘...speak great words against the most High, and shall wear out the saints of the most High, and think to change times [seasons] and laws [decrees]’ (*ch* 7:25).

A succession of leaders (‘...diverse from the first’—religious, not secular) has introduced such changes. The papacy over the centuries has absorbed traditional pagan beliefs that fly in the face of the divine *torah*. It replaced the ‘...feasts of the LORD’ (Leviticus 23:2) with pagan festivals (Easter, Christmas, *etc*) and changed the weekly Sabbath law to Sunday—all on the usurped authority of the papacy. History testifies that it has persecuted the faithful ‘saints of the Most High’.

As Daniel indicates, the papacy’s time is limited (*Daniel* 7:26). Until then it will increasingly assume world-wide authority both secular and religious, universally and violently imposing its own ‘mark’ of authority.

The coming of Christ will end this idolatrous system: ‘...But the judgment shall sit, and they shall take away his dominion, to consume and to destroy it unto the end. And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him’.

We must be diligent not to be deceived. Ω