

outreach

The New Horizons Newsletter

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November/December
2020

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Matthew 28:19-20

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The Growth Factor

The brother of Jesus, Jude, urges the church to ‘...earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints’ (v.3). It is, surely, sound teaching! What—or who—could improve on what Jesus taught personally and has recorded through his chosen apostles and prophets.

Identify and follow his teachings and we would all be one big happy church family. As Paul wrote: ‘...I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you’ (I Corinthians 1:10). I wish!

That didn’t happen, for human ambition and pride assumed they knew better—at least, better than they had been taught. The foundation faith was embellished, gradually emerging as the patch-work of denominational diversity that graces the modern church scene.

The Dawning

During the ‘dark age’ of Christianity the crystal clear teachings of Jesus became lost in a fog of ancient idolatrous fable. The candle of truth flickered dimly, often brutally suppressed by church-inspired pogroms. It’s legacy is the sanitized version of the faith of modern Christendom.

The darkness slowly became illuminated by pin-points of light as God—who is sovereign—influenced individuals to see elements of truth previously submerged. Not ‘all’ the truth, but glimpses suitable to their situation—just as in the conquest of Canaan by Israel the ‘inhabitants of the land’ were driven out slowly: ‘... the LORD your God will put out those nations before you by little

and little: you may not consume them at once, lest the beasts of the field increase on you’ Deuteronomy 7:22). And as told Daniel: ‘...shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased’ (ch 12:4). We can only take so much at a time! Or, as the apostle Peter wrote: ‘...grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ’ (II Peter 3:18).

In other words, true knowledge is unveiled little by little—we grow into it, both individually and corporately. When we first covenant with Christ our knowledge may be quite incomplete. We learn.

Trouble often arises, however, in the ‘corporate’ sphere, in an established denomination. A ‘new truth’ is added and becomes the hallmark of that denomination. For them, they now have ‘the faith once delivered’. Their beliefs are now written in stone, immutable. Deviate (as a member) and you may be excluded from fellowship.

The Church of Rome prides itself on being *semper eadem*, always the same, unchanging.

Time for Change?

It’s a time of danger. Lacking an outlet, frustration arises in the members and in some of the eldership, and what might be additional enlightenment is suppressed. Dissent, as Paul noted, spreads—with perhaps a new denomination formed!

Such an outcome is less likely when the church unit is a single independent congregation rather than a centralized multi-church denomination.

Doctrinal change is a serious matter, demanding prayerful research and cooperation with other assemblies—and time. It mustn’t be stifled but explored, for unchanging truth is a treasure house not yet exhausted. Ω

The Last Days

Prophetic events are often assigned in scripture to occur in ‘the last days’. Do we know when that is?

That era is usually assigned to the years just before the return of Christ. But it refers also to another time period. Understanding when each fits in history is essential to place the prophecies in proper perspective.

Jesus made clear that massive changes on the pages of history would indeed occur prior to his coming again, and he sets out an array of ‘signs’ to prepare us (as in Matthew *ch 24 etc*). Of course, many of these have reference to the state of the Jewish nation in the land of Canaan in the years following his resurrection, and culminating in 70AD with the destruction of the existing Temple.

In our day many Jews are intent on preparations to build another Temple—which Jesus predicted will experience the same fate as its predecessor, destroyed by the invading armies as in 70AD (Luke 21:6-7, 20). As said Jesus: ‘...the hour is coming, when you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father’ (John 4:21).

When Jesus died on the cross the veil of the temple was split apart—the Temple and its services were no longer relevant (but continued). The Jews rejected the Messiah, and to this day remain, apart from a remnant, in rebellion to the Messiah. Apart from its symbolism the Temple has no value in divine service. The House of Jacob was cut off from the olive tree (the ‘Israel of God’) because of their unbelief (Romans 11:20). But ‘...it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, *You are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God*’. They can *through faith* be restored.

The ‘man of sin’ represents a succession of church leaders culminating in a powerful leader in the end-time’. He is the ‘little horn’ (ie kingdom) (Daniel 7), and arises within the Roman Empire (the fourth beast’).

An Apostacy

The apostle Paul also sheds light on these ‘last days’. He warned the Ephesian elders: ‘...of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things [diverting from the established teaching], to draw away disciples after them’ (Acts 20:30). As witnessed also by John and Peter and Jude a destructive apostacy set in early in the church of God. Paul had earlier alerted the church in Thessalonica: ‘...Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away [Gk *apostasia*] first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition’ (II 2:3).

As stated, that apostacy had begun in the mid first century. Paul notes that there would be a restraining influence but that we must expect a false leader to arise in the church (the ‘man of sin’). To Timothy the apostle warns: ‘...in the latter times some shall depart

from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron’ (1 Timothy 4:2). That is the history of Christendom.

The apostacy focused in the church in Rome, which by the sixth century had assumed both spiritual and secular dominance, a combined Church and State, a lamb and a wild beast. It has left its imprint, its mark, on all of Christendom, within which is planted the faithful ‘Israel of God’, the ‘children of the promise’, who are each known only to God. In contrast to God’s mark, ie His Sabbaths (Exodus 31:13), Christendom observes Rome’s mark of authority, Sunday and the ancient pagan observances of Christmas and Easter *etc*.

That era will end. Man’s adversary uses the cloak of apparent ‘righteousness’: ‘...Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their work’ (II Corinthians 11:14-15). That outer cloak will be torn away. Zechariah has this to say: ‘...I will cause the prophets and the unclean spirit to pass out of the land’ (*ch 13:3*). At his return as King of kings Jesus will dethrone the man of sin and restrain the Devil and his cohorts for a millennium.

For centuries Rome has dominated Christendom. Its leader has ‘sat’ (the pope speaks *ex-cathedra*) in the ‘temple’—Christendom—claiming virtual equality with God (‘*Dominus Deus noster papa*’: ‘Our Lord God the pope’). He has imposed on multiple millions a Babylonian cauldron of false teachings, and changed spiritual laws set by God while brutally torturing and murdering faithful Christians. He will lead the final conflict against the returning Christ—and be crushed (Revelation 19:20)..

The Papacy commanded armies and overthrew emperors and nations. As the end approaches we are observing its increasing influence over all faiths and national leaders. We will see an accumulation of its temporal power concluding in an attack on Jerusalem: ‘...I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle’ (Zechariah 14:2). The man of sin will marshal the armies of the nations in a final act of rebellion against Messiah. His demise is assured.

Spiritual Temple

The real ‘temple’ (‘...made without hands’ Mark 14:58) is the church Jesus is now building, of which faithful believers are the building blocks, each now being carefully shaped by his loving hand for their role in it. As Jesus told the Twelve: ‘...I go to prepare a place for you’ (John 14:2).

With eyes firmly fixed on our exciting role in the Kingdom we on whom ‘...the ends of the world are come’ must each live a life that reflects our Saviour, and resist the pressures exerted by the world, remaining faithful to the end. Ω

The Universe, the Soil, the Man

It's a mystery—even to scientists. Where did our existence materialize? And when? And how did 'something' arise from 'nothing'? What's the origin of all those vital physical laws?

With the theory of evolution science believes it is on firm ground. But as with the other questions, life's origin remains for them a matter of faith. *'Don't worry, we will get the facts later. There's plenty of time'*. For Christians, too, it is a matter of faith, for we start with the assumption that the all-powerful God is there, here and now—and always has been: *'...without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is [he exists], and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him'* (Hebrews 11:6). Of course, when we do 'diligently seek' we find abundant evidence to prove His reality.

Bible Insight

Outreach takes the Bible seriously. It isn't a mere book of stories and it reflects modern physics without the benefit of current scientific experiment. There is a curious statement in the book of Hebrews (written before 70AD) which gels with today's science: *'...Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear'* (Hebrews 11:3). These invisible particles are an aspect of the mysterious 'dark matter' that still puzzles science.

'Did dark matter always exist in the Universe, or was it created at some later time? This is one of the deepest questions we know how to ask, and we [scientists] do not know the answer'

The whole of creation was formed by the Word of God (Jesus Christ): *'...by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: and he is before all things, and by him all things consist'* (Colossians 1:16-17). The physical creation and the (usually) invisible spirit creation—all were created by him. And it was founded on divinely-devised laws—laws slowly being uncovered by science.

Diversity of Spirit

According to NASA *'...[Dark matter] is still one of the great mysteries of science'*. They add: *'...Dark matter may not be made up of the matter we are familiar with at all. The matter that makes up dark matter could be different. It may be filled with particles predicted by theory but that scientists have yet to observe'*. These particles permeate space and are the ultimate building blocks of all matter. It's still one of the great mysteries of science.

God reveals Himself as 'spirit' [Gk. *pneuma*] (John 4:24) and he is everywhere and always present. By means of His spirit power, *and from His own substance* God—who alone is *immortal* spirit (I Timothy 6:16)—has created these particles. They are the build-

ing-blocks of all life and permeate the entire universe. As spoke Ezra: *'...you [LORD] quicken [give life to] all things'* (Nehemiah 9:6). The Psalmist adds: *'...Whither shall I go from your spirit? or whither shall I flee from your presence? (ch 139:7-13)*. And said Jesus: *'It is the spirit that quickens; the flesh profits nothing: the words that I speak to you, they are spirit, and they are life'* (John 6:63)

The Creator formulates this mysterious substance in a variety of ways to create angelic substance and matter (the universe), to give life-giving energy to the soil, to animals—and to humanity, the pinnacle: *'...Who knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth?'* (Ecclesiastes 3:21).

The apostle John (ch 1:14) explains that immortal Spirit [Gk. *pneuma*] can be transformed into physical reality: *'...the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us'*. And he opens his first letter *'...that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life [ie Jesus]; For the life was manifested, and we have seen it'* (ch 1:1-2). Jesus became human, touchable—just like us. Notice also that the holy Spirit manifested as a dove at the baptism of Jesus. The multiplication by Jesus of the loaves and fish may also exemplify this, or the restoration of a withered hand.

Without the spirit the material creation could not interact in living harmony (see Genesis 1:2):
soil→vegetation→

Humanity

Out of the earth (*ie* its elements) God created the 'clay model' of the first human, animating him and by the *'spirit in man'* (Job 32:8) providing God-like qualities by which we could have a relationship with Him. It sets us apart from the lower creation (though they, too, have spectacular qualities!).

Life passes for all of us, and the 'spirit in man' retains all there is to know about us, and goes into a state of 'hibernation' in *sheol* until re-animated by Christ—in either a spirit or a physical body. Those raised physically will face a period of judgment n th end of the thousand year earthly reign of Christ. Should they reject the salvation offered they will die and be burned, their spirit absorbed into the universal substance that permeates the universe. This is the 'second death' (Revelation 20:11-15).

The 'torment' of the Devil and his angels is their anticipation of their coming everlasting destruction and permanent loss.. The 'lake of fire' is the 'second death' (Revelation 21:8). He knows he has but a 'short time' (ch 12:12).

This same fate awaits man's adversary, the Devil and his retinue of unclean spirits—also created beings, (v.10, Romans 16:20, Genesis 3:15). Ω

Insight from Paul

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

The world Paul inhabited was—apart from the oasis of Israel—immersed in gross idolatry with all its attendant debauchery and antagonism to the way of God. In his letters he takes a strong stand against its encroachment into the church, and includes it in guidance to other assemblies. ‘...*We know*’, he said, ‘*an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is no other God but one*’ (ch 8:4). They ‘*sacrificed to devils*’ And he warns us, ‘...*Flee from idolatry*’ (I Corinthians 10: 14).

Idols represented the various heathen gods. Each embodied its own manner of ‘service’—its rituals, its sacrifices, its observances. They worshipped the heavenly bodies especially the sun, with fires—candles, today), sun-rise services *etc.* The apostle reflects God’s warning to Israel; ‘...*enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise.*’ (Deuteronomy 12:30).

He was ignored, for over the centuries the church absorbed such festivals as the pagan Saturnalia (end of December), pagan spring festivals *etc*—meanwhile abandoning the festivals appointed by the LORD (Leviticus 23:1f) as a guide for His people.

He also gets specific, warning that we be aware of the ‘*teaching of devils*’ (I Timothy 4:1-5). as they spread lies, distort God’s word, disrupt families, turn us aside from the truth. His words reverberate today. Ω

Letter from England

Greetings to all our readers,

Well, it has been an unusual festive season! But the same spirit prevailed despite the best efforts of our leaders to undermine it. As Jesus pointed out (John 4), we don’t, no matter how helpful it may be, need to gather in one place to worship the LORD. Jesus accompanies us at all times, everywhere.

Despite the privations of COVID or the dark days of winter or our personal trials the awareness of God’s continuing presence is worthy of our attention. King David understood this well (eg Psalm 139). It becomes more of a reality as we immerse ourselves in His Word and in a focused way refer every action to His scrutiny through regular communication in prayer. Jesus did nothing without the Father’s blessing.

With God at our side we have no need to fear what life throws at us. As deepening darkness envelops the world remember that God shapes world events to achieve His end purpose. The ‘pieces’ are still a jumble but the final picture will be perfect!

James

Spring Holy Days 2021	
Lord’s Supper	March 26
Unleavened Bread	March 28-April 3
Pentecost	May 16

Live the Life

Jesus was concerned about the state of his church in the years just prior to his return: ‘...*when the Son of man comes, shall he find faith on the earth?*’ (Luke 18:8). This is echoed in his words to John in regard to the church of Laodicea—a warning for every church century: ‘...*because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue you out of my mouth*’ (Revelation 3:16). In that same era we find that Jesus commends the Ephesian church for their readiness to expunge error. But it was a sterile faith for, he says ‘...*you have left your first love*’ (v.4).

A Jewish scribe once accosted Jesus. He asks ‘*which is the first commandment of all?*’ (Matthew 12:28). He received a two-fold reply, Simply, *Love God, Love neighbour*. It’s guidance that stretches back to the beginnings of human life and understood by Moses through the instructions handed down by the LORD (Leviticus 19:18). *But how?*

John gives an outline answer: ‘...*this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous*’ (I John 5:3). Love for God, then, is expressed through our obedience to the principles of holy living as in God’s commandments. We find them expressed through the Scriptures, through His Word which is truth.

What of love for neighbour? John again: ‘...*let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth*’ (I John 3:18). God exemplifies this to Moses (Leviticus 19: 9-18) summarizing it with: ‘...*You shalt not avenge, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbour as yourself: I am the LORD*’ (v.18).

But ‘love’ didn’t arrive on the scene in the first century or with Moses. As said John, it was there in the beginning. When Adam was created he was the acme of perfection. He was endowed with the nature of the Creator, which *is* love. He was in perfect communion, fellowship, with the LORD. Only when he chose to follow his own way was it necessary for God to spell out what it needs in real practical terms.

As nations evolved they became aware that curbs were required on human behaviour. Each, drawing on tradition and experience, developed its own set of rules ranging from helpful to despotic. Israel received their laws direct from the hand of the one and only God. It was written in stone, with prescribed penalties (Exodus 20), as part of Israel’s national constitution,

Aside from Israel, God put governance in the hands of mankind (Romans 13;1-2): ‘...*until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed [ie no governmental imposition of penalties] when there is no law*’ (Romans 5:13). Endowed with God’s Spirit, however, Christians are in process of implanting love—the divine Law—at the core of our beliefs and our behaviour. The written Law is our guide. Ω