

outreach

The Newsletter of the Churches of God, UK

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Matthew 28:19-20

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Road Map for Israel

Sometimes we humans do things that God doesn't want, that He never asks. It applies to the irreligious, and to Christians, and to Muslims. Surely no-one would dispute that. It applies to each of us as individuals and it also applies to nations.

'The chosen people', Israel, are not exempt. They sometimes get it wrong. Not just in personal morality, for the Israelis are in this sense no better than the rest of us. And as a nation their history records many clashes with Jehovah, with the LORD.

For example, Israel's forty years in the wilderness resulted from disobedience. On that occasion they were told to enter Canaan, but ran scared and refused (Numbers *chs* 13, 14).

Later they were clearly instructed not to attempt to enter Canaan. They did, and were defeated in battle (Numbers 14:40-45).

Again, six centuries before Christ Judah faced invasion from Babylon (Jeremiah 43). Very specifically they were warned by the LORD not to flee to Egypt to escape. They did, and suffered the consequences (*ch* 44:12-14).

The Scriptures, however, tell us that there will be a time in their national experience when Israel willingly obeys God's call to return to the Land.

Most Christians who think about it believe that time is now. And indeed in the last sixty years millions of Jews have returned to 'Palestine' claiming it as their inheritance. The return

(*aliyah*) has not been a happy one, as a series of wars - not least the current

conflict with terrorists in southern Lebanon - testifies.

Signs of Return

The prophecies tell us, however, that when the Jews return to their inheritance in Palestine they will '*dwell safely*'. (See Ezekiel 38:11) That certainly is not the case now.

They will return accompanied by 'the House of Israel' - the so-called 'lost tribes'. (See Ezekiel 37:19-22) That has not happened.

They will return with the LORD JHVH at their head. (See Jeremiah 23:6-8). Certainly not now.

They will return, a mere remnant of *both* Houses, freed from a time of enslavement - largely from throughout the Islamic world and from 'the north' It will surpass the darkest days of twentieth century Europe - a time

called '*Jacob's trouble*'. (See Isaiah 11:11-12, Matthew 24:21). *That is yet future.* ['Eurabia': Islam has 120 million adherents in Europe - including Turkey]

Autumn Festivals 2006

Trumpets....September 23

Atonement...October 2

Tabernacles.. October 7-13

Closing Day.. October 14

They will return 'broken-hearted' - sorrowing for their sin. Not so now.

Spiritual Dimension

Historically, Israel's security has had a spiritual dimension. As a unique nation - God's model nation - they covenanted to be in submission to JHVH, to follow His Laws. That's where their security lies. No longer, it seems.

Today Israel is 'like the nations around them'. Writes a former Speaker of the Knesset: "*The Zionist* *cont'd p.4*

The Art of Stewardship

Money - we need it. The accumulation of wealth can be good, for we all need to save for 'a rainy day'. Earth's bounty is a divine gift to provide resources for increasing mankind's prosperity. Human skill and ingenuity can turn 'earth' into an object of beauty, a practical device, comfort, health. Fair work deserves fair reward. There is no limit, it seems, to economic growth.

Yet 'the economy' preoccupies the minds of humble treasurers, business people, mortgage holders, shareholders, you and me - and Chancellors of the Exchequer. An army of accountants swarm in every nation, probing every tax loophole, every tax haven. In every nation there flows, like sewage, a stream of scavenging men and women intent on gain by any means.

Whole nations, Big Business (remember Enron, the 'internet bubble?'), industry giants, banks, stock dealers - charities even - thrive in a culture of fraud and sly dealing. The man-in-the-street isn't averse to shady deals, to unquestioningly accept what 'fell off the back of a lorry'. The Internet swarms with scams intent on robbing you and me of our assets. The 'black economy' - avoidance of taxation - undermines good financial governance. The urge for a 'fast buck' and high taxes combine to fuel widespread financial criminality. Yes, money does indeed make the world go round.

A Quick Fix

Increasingly, true values are discarded. VAT fraud has this past year cost European Exchequers a whopping €100billion. Insurance miss-selling has undermined the financial stability of countless savers. Pension funds have collapsed projecting bleak retirement prospects.

Despite all this financial complexity the cause is neatly summed up in four words: *'You should not covet'*. It could also be summed up in the words of one writer concerning the area in which he now lives: *'People are, in a material sense, poor. In terms of their life-style, however, they are among the world's super-rich'*. Or, hear the apostle Paul: *'But godliness with contentment is great gain. For we have brought nothing into the world, and it is plain that neither can we carry anything out. But having food and clothing, we will be satisfied with these'* (1 Timothy 6:6-8, Ecclesiastes 5:13-15). Translated into cold northern climes it means we should be content to have food in our bellies and a roof over our heads.

Money of itself, of course, isn't a problem. It is prudent to - legally - increase our wealth, to diligently and wisely exploit our talents and hone our skills for profit. Wealth lawfully gained by our efforts is a gift

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from God - and to be enjoyed in a godly way - for family, for charitable purposes, for service to God. (see Deuteronomy 8:18, Ecclesiastes 5:19, Proverbs 13:11, 22, Job 20:10.) Over-zealous Christians can violate this principle by 'giving all to God's work'. The apostle Peter, however, makes clear (Acts 5:4) that it is our personal responsibility to determine how we apportion *all* our resources (money, time, assets, self) in the light of God's Word.

Conspicuous Consumption

What hurts, on the other hand, is the dedicated pursuit of money. Paul again: *'For the love of money is a root of all evils, by means of which some having lusted after it were seduced from the faith, and they themselves pierced through by many pains'* (1 Timothy 6:10). And especially those *not* 'in the faith', where there isn't the restraint of the teachings of Jesus. The urge to acquire a larger home or the latest mobile phone or tv or hi-fi or new-model car, or to satisfy a craving for nicotine or so-called 'recreational drugs' or harlotry or gambling - all conspire to fuel Britain's trillion pound plus debt mountain. Such activities do indeed bring 'pain', for *'the payback from sin is death'*.

Such behaviour demands money and is, in the Scriptures, called *'covetousness'* [the desire for more than needed]. God warns against it in His guide to human happiness: *'You shall not covet'*. Jesus, too: *'And he said to them, Take heed, and keep yourselves from all covetousness: for a man's life doesn't consist in the abundance of the things which he possesses'* (Luke 12:15).

Financially, the world is in a perilous state. As Christians we ought to practice, to set the example of, good and prudent stewardship of all our resources. 

BLUEPRINT FOR UNITY

Unity is a strange animal. It *is* possible to have total unity - but at what price? Stalinism is an example. Saddam Hussein once claimed that 100% of Iraqis voted 100% for his return to office. What price.

The history of Christianity includes examples of this 'hundred percent-ism'. The medieval church with its Inquisition sought to enforce it - with the rack and fire and sword. Modern Christianity seeks by more peaceful means to unite the various denominations.

This desire for organizational unity is a cultic feature affecting much of the church of God (*see* I Corinthians 14:20-25). Unlike the first century church which was open to everyone, converts or not, such assemblies are a 'closed shop'. Co-operation with other denominations is spurned and an attitude of exclusivism instilled in the brethren..

The desire for internal harmony is praiseworthy. Who would not love all members to '*speak the same thing*'. Wouldn't the leadership cheer that!

In the Beginning

Larger towns, in the beginnings of Christianity, hosted several congregations - as, for example, in Rome (Romans 16), just as there may be, today, a dozen Baptist or Methodist or Anglican congregations in a city. Yet, anciently, each was part of the same 'church of God', each shepherded by its own elder.

As recorded in the New Testament, even such individual assemblies generated their own challenges. Look at the church of God in Corinth - a church dubbed as 'the church in Vanity Fair'. The apostle Paul had to urge them to be more structured, to get a grip on their individual enthusiasms. He rebuked their squabbling and their focus on personalities as 'carnal'.

Try, however, to unite all congregations in a city or region or worldwide and organizational unity is impossible - *unless* there is suffocating draconian control exerted by a hierarchy of subservient bishops, priests, evangelists, elders *etc.*

To maintain external unity a sharp distinction had to be made between 'clerics' and 'laity', the latter relegated to praying, paying, obeying - and staying. Such 'unity' wasn't long coming, and in a few decades the early church was sundered by power struggles and the forming of a hierarchy based on Roman civil government. The Spirit moved out. And there was one oppressive universal church, with but a remnant of true believers.

The first assemblies of the New Testament church were not like that. Meeting, usually in small groups, *all* the brethren added their special spiritual gifts to the work of the assembly. It wasn't just a 'lecture'. Under the guidance of a protective shepherd all brethren equally had opportunity to interact with one another, to pray for one another's needs, to comfort and to build up one another, to present new concepts. And to freely

express doubts and concerns.

The Church Today

Contrast the modern church of God movement. Within a dozen square miles there could well be several 'denominations' and independent assemblies. Different names, different structures, different leadership, different culture, different ethical stances. And all too often animosity, competitiveness, duplication of effort. Yet teachings not a thousand miles removed from each other.

Getting the structure right is important for Biblical unity. The more we reflect in principle the apostolic model the more successful we will be. *But there's more than that to unity.*

Led by the Spirit

The visible church embraces 'wheat and tares' - a mix of the converted and hangers-on. The 'true' church is made up only of those with the Spirit of God. That means we have implanted in us the mind and attitude of God. That means we express the '*fruit of the Spirit*' (Galatians 5:22). But do we? If not, *why not?*

When we are truly '*led by the Spirit*' we are doing God's will. We are behaving as would our Father, as did Jesus. Led by the Spirit, brethren would walk side by side in harmony - whatever their denominational label. So why the cold shoulder? Why the protective shield we erect around 'us'? Why exclusiveness?

The church of God is not a box of yellow pencils. We each bring our own personality, our own talents, our own spiritual gifts. The work of the church is enhanced when all these are used in common purpose. But all of us are to have the same mind - the mind that was in Christ. That means we suppress all those negatives that hinder togetherness. The Bible word for it is *love*. Proper expression of love - the light of Christ shining in me - is my witness to the change being wrought in me 'since Jesus came into my heart'.

Family, neighbours, friends, colleagues have to see that light in us. What if they discover they would not be welcome at your assemblies - because 'not converted'? That you are at war with your brother or sister? That you cross the street when they approach? That your chief difference is that they use a different hymnal, promote - or prohibit - the use of a different Bible text, prefer a morning service? That a brother from another church is excluded because of a minor doctrinal difference? When God's Spirit dwells in them?

Work Together

It's time to embrace one another. Time to accept one another. Time to work together in harmony in fulfilling the Great Commission, while accepting honest differences, different programmes, different emphases. Time to demonstrate our conversion through our love for one another.

But there's more. Each assembly of the Church of God, whether independent or part of a denomination, serves Christ uniquely. The blending of its spiritual gifts with other assemblies - '*a three-fold cord is not quickly broken*' - enhances the vital work to which we are called. Ω

Read: **Leadership Guide No 6:**
How Do People Learn?
The Small Church

HIV Statistics Show

Dr. Daisy Stern of Kiryat Arba, the initiator of a medical statistical study presented to the Health Ministry [in Israel], quotes European researcher Francois Hamers. Hamers is an advocate of surveillance of sexually transmitted infections at a continental level, because of their sharp increase in many European countries.

The 22% increase of HIV diagnoses in 2002, for instance, was "largely driven by the UK," Hamers writes, but "increasing trends were also noted recently in most other countries...Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland and especially Ireland, where the rise has been even more striking than in the UK." Except for Belgium, these countries were the sites of large international gay pride events.

Similarly, Stern writes, a study in Rome found that new HIV infections increased between 2000-2003 - right after "half a million gays and lesbians revelled there in a week-long homo-lesbian extravaganza."

Furthermore: In Germany, new HIV diagnoses among men who engaged in homosexual activity almost doubled from 2001 to 2004 - more than twice the increase of previous years.

"If one correlates the figures of new incidence of HIV in the various years and localities where EuroPride, WorldPride, and such events occurred," Dr. Stern writes in her six-page study, "there is no doubt that the correlation with new cases of positive HIV... is striking. Add to that the dramatic rise in associated sexually transmitted diseases, the increase in high risk behavior, the use of recreational drugs, the mobility from country to country, and the fact that Israel, of all 'European' countries, has the largest relative rise in new HIV cases, and the recipe for an absolute disaster [is clear]." [Ω](#)

Israel...cont'd

Revolution has always rested on two pillars, a just path and an ethical leadership. Neither of these is operative any longer. The Israeli nation today rests on a scaffolding of corruption and on the foundation of oppression and injustice. As such the end of the Zionist enterprise is already on our doorstep. There is a real chance that ours will be the last Zionist generation".

(This judgment applies equally to what James - ch 1:1 - calls 'the twelve tribes scattered abroad'. He wrote in the first century. They are still scattered to the four corners of the world.)

It should not surprise us that the 'Israelis' seem to have lost their way. The 'last days' are predicted to be a time when the Middle East - and especially Israel -

Did Israel Fail?

Many commentators in Israel wonder why their nation seemingly failed to eliminate the Hizbullah threat. Here's one analysis, from Emuna News:

"Look at the most highly irrational facts:

"Is it logical that 3,000 guerillas - equipped however well they were equipped - defeat a major international power? Is it logical that the same 3,000 guerillas, with not-state-of-the-art Katyusha missiles, baffle Israel's defenses and destroy the north? Is it logical that the Hizbolla, despite numerous IDF declarations of victory, returned repeatedly to draw IDF blood in Bint Jbeil and Aita-al-Shaab?

Is it logical that thousands of IAF sorties that threw hundreds of tons of bombs on the Hizbolla's head barely scratched them? Is it logical that Israel has been unable to defend its major cities? Is it logical that Israel hasn't achieved a single one of its prewar goals?

Is it logical that such a diverse government that can't agree about anything passes, 24-0, the UN Resolution calling for an empty cease-fire with only meaningless promises on paper unanimously?

"Blame everything on Hashem" [Ω](#)

[*Emuna News* views Israel's uncharacteristic apparent failure in the recent conflict with Hizbullah as correction from God (*Hashem*) for rampant sin in Israel. It calls for national repentance. That is also very much needed in 'the West']

will dominate world news. Egypt, Iraq, Iran, North Africa (all Islamic) are predicted to seek the end of the tiny nation of Israel. They will succeed, but only for a short few years.

While the Scriptures tell us to expect the House of Judah to be settled in Palestine in the end-time, yet what we now see is not the *aliyah* that is so vividly foretold in the Scriptures.

Israel, however, remains in God's care. [Ω](#)

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