

## *The New Horizons Newsletter*

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*Matthew 28:19-20*

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## **The Whole Word**

As a Christian, would you be comfortable with some preacher who tells you that you don't have any obligation to follow 'the whole Word of God'? (That, by the way, is not an expression found in the Scriptures.) Surely we sincerely want to do what our spirit Father and our Saviour require of us?

But stop and think what that means. Do we sacrifice an animal? Must adult males be bearded and circumcized? Do we go to our 'priest' for clearance from an infectious disease? Should we worship only in Jerusalem? May we buy a slave, or sell our daughters? What about phylacteries or writing the commandments on the door-posts?

Clearly not. We live in a different era, and however necessary these regulations were under the terms of the agreement (the 'Old Covenant') between God and Israel—such are no longer applicable. Not wrong, but not applicable. But why so?

Anyone who chose (or chooses) to live under the terms of that former covenant ministered through Moses is, of course, obliged to observe all its terms as recorded in the Scriptures. Jesus made this clear to his hearers (Matthew 5:19-20).

But since the first-century ministry of Jesus our world has been 'turned upside down'. Jesus himself sums up the change: *'...an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth. For the Father also seeks such, the ones worshipping Him'* (John 4:23). Not just murder, for example, but hatred. Not just adultery, but lust.

### **Template for Nationhood**

Following the Great Flood some eight centuries before his time, Moses was enlisted to work with a slave people just emerging from an idolatrous captor nation—a world sinking to the

depraved behaviour of Noah's day. Israel was chosen to become a model nation, provided with the perfect legal system, the perfect religion—and with the Creator as its Mentor and Protector.

From man's beginnings the original faith was preserved down the centuries in the hearts and actions of faithful men and women. It was a matter of the human spirit. While most of mankind strayed from the true path there always remained a faithful remnant who resisted the pressures to embrace idolatry and its accompanying destructive debauchery.

To preserve that faith the nation of Israel was formed, the divine instructions (Heb. *torah*) being enshrined as its Constitution. The spirit of the true faith was protected by physical ordinances that constrained the Israelites in the right way. By virtue of the fact that these required effort—diligent observance was burdensome—its importance was etched into the mind of each Israelite.

The rewards for obedience, however, far surpassed the inconvenience of pilgrimages and sacrifices. God's side of the Covenant held Him to abundantly bless the nation through the fruits of the land, through clement weather, through health, through peaceful relationships with surrounding nations, through prosperity. As long, that is, as Israel kept its side of the agreement!

### **A New Agreement**

The former agreement (the 'Old Covenant') was material, designed for a nation, a physical people. Through a process of on-going corrective measures the LORD kept the flame of truth burning. Blessings for obedience, 'cursings' for neglect. But this was merely a step towards the ultimate goal.

In process of time the next stage of God's plan inexorably unfolded with the life, death and resurrection of 'God become man', Jesus the Messiah. Until he rose from the dead (confirming his deity—Romans 1:4) the forgiveness of sin under the old agreement looked forward

to that moment. Now, by confession of our sin (to God) and forsaking it, we enter a new relationship with God—by means of a ‘new covenant’.

Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the sacrifices necessary under the old agreement. Through him our sin is purged. In him was fulfilled the ritual elements—elements that had inner significance—that guided and governed Israel. But now the covenant is inward, in the minds of those who choose to commit to it. Not physical but spiritual. You could be a full participant even if incarcerated in a lightless dungeon not knowing time or date!

The terms of the new covenant are clear: ‘...*this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, says the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*’ (Jeremiah 31:33). God’s Law, His instruction, note, is not abolished but ingrained in our minds to be followed from the heart. Just as Jesus said (Matthew 5:17-18).

### A Personal Covenant

This new agreement between us and the Father mediated through Jesus requires us to say, as did ancient Israel, ‘... *all that the LORD has spoken we will do*’. Upon our repentance the divine mind, God’s Spirit, is implanted in us, motivating us to become more and more Christ-like, increasingly complying with the will of our Father.

It is personal. We each ‘...*work out [our] own salvation*’. Like children we begin our spiritual journey to Christian maturity as ‘babes in Christ’, initially knowing little but being nourished by God’s Word (the Christian Scriptures), learning what our Father desires of us individually—a process termed ‘sanctification of the Spirit’ (II Thessalonians 2:13).

To this end we need to access the guidance of godly teachers, skilled in the Word of God, taking care to ascertain that they are truly reflecting that Word.

Wherever we may be along the Christian pathway each of us is fully a child of God and joint-heir with our Saviour of ‘all things’ (Romans 8:17), destined to serve with him throughout eternity. In this life we will never know, much less apply, every nuance of God’s will for us, for our life-span will never be long enough for us to know every thing of God’s will for us.

We must, however, heed the message of Hebrews 5:12: ‘...*By now you should have been teachers, but once again you need to be taught the simplest things about what God has said. You need milk instead of solid food*’. Rather: ‘...*solid food is for the mature, who because of practice have trained their faculties for the distinguishing of both good and evil*’ (v.14).

We must grow, for there’s a world to teach! Ω

## The Return (*Aliyah*)

There has always been a Jewish presence in ‘Palestine’ - the land of Israel. But since the late nineteenth century there has been an influx of ‘the *diaspora*’ - Jews from around the world arriving, often in waves following persecutions.

**Aliyah**  
Literally to ‘go up’. Originally to ‘go up to Jerusalem’ for the festivals.

Three-quarters of the population of Israel (about 6.25 million) are Jewish, and almost two million in addition are of Arab or Christian extraction. (There are, interestingly, about 150 Jewish-Christian — ‘Messianic’ — congregations in Israel.) While Israel is officially a ‘Jewish State’ there is—in common with other Western nations—a rising tide of secularism.

### Prophecy

Israel has always excited students of the Bible prophecies—and there are multiple interpretations of them! All, however, agree that the Jewish people are predicted to return to Palestine in the end-time, but will dispute as to when this is. Will it be *before* the return of the Messiah? (The most commonly held view.) Or, will the return be led by the returning Jesus? It’s our understanding that the latter scenario is the case. We base this in part on a prophetic outline contained in the book of Revelation, with other strands from the prophets.

*[Note: The choice of interpretation is human. Events will unfold in accord with the divine plan no matter what we may believe!]*

### Two Nations

It is often overlooked that the nation formed at the exodus from Egypt (Israel), around 940BC separated into two groups of nations—the *House of Judah* (two tribes) and the *House of Israel* (ten tribes). In the 8th century BC the tribes forming the House of Israel were exiled from Palestine and over the ensuing centuries grew to become separate nations, taking on different names, acquiring different languages and different locations.

They are considered by many to have been dispersed—‘lost’—or to have been absorbed as ‘Jews’. Yet we find in the prophecies that they exist at the return of Christ, and named separately from the House of Judah: ‘...*The days come, says Jehovah, that I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt (which covenant of Mine they broke, although I was a husband to them, says Jehovah). But this shall be the covenant that I will cut with the house of Israel: After those days, declares Jehovah, I will put My Law in their inward parts, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people*’ (Jeremiah 31:31-32).

Elsewhere (Ezekiel 37) we are told the two groups of nations will become one again: ‘...*[the LORD] will take the sons of Israel from among* *cont’d over*

## ***The Return ...cont'd***

*the nations, there where they have gone, and will gather them from all around, and will bring them into their own land, and I will make them one nation in the land, on the mountains of Israel, and one King shall be for a king to all of them. And they shall not be two nations still. And they will not be split into two kingdoms any more.' But when?*

Our studies lead us to agree with the widespread understanding that the 'Ten' are by no means 'lost', but that they have mushroomed to full-blown nations with a current combined population of some half a billion. Certainly they are not confined to Palestine—already overcrowded! Their return must therefore be *future*.

Ezekiel prophesied more than a century after the

House of Israel had been taken captive eastward, yet he addresses his prophecy to them although they had by then been scattered farther afield. Through him the LORD predicted that these people would face a time of depopulation prior to their re-union in the land of Palestine under the leadership of Jesus himself, with but a remnant remaining to fulfill the prophesied return (Ezekiel 5).

The coming of Messiah and the return of a remnant of the two Houses of Israel, then reunited, will initiate the thousand year reign of Jesus (the 'Millennium') and the resurrected saints from every era of mankind.

The Gospel message points the way for any who choose to embrace it to reign with Messiah in those days—and throughout eternity. Ω

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## ***Letter from England***

*Hello from Lincolnshire*

It's that time again. The autumn festivals are almost upon us—a time to celebrate God's plan for mankind and to reflect on our privileged part in it.

New readers of OUTREACH may like to know that in the *Outreach Ministries* we observe the festivals outlined in Leviticus 23. They are '...the appointed seasons of Jehovah'. (*see below* for this year's dates). Although commonly—and erroneously—asccribed to an innovation by Moses around 1500BC, they were in fact handed down by the LORD (JHVH) to be preserved by the people of Israel along with the weekly seventh-day Sabbath. And together with the weekly Sabbath the festivals have roots in man's beginning—the most ancient form of worship.

When you look in the New Testament writings it may surprise you—in view of modern Christian practice—to discover that the first Christians continued, under the inspired guidance of the apostles, to observe these same holy days. They keyed into that '*...faith once for all delivered to the saints*' (Jude 3), and abandoned the degrading observances of the surrounding culture—the worship of Tammuz in the early spring, the worship of the sun-god in late December and other practices abominable to the holy God of Creation. The God-inspired festivals by contrast were pure, symbolic of God's plan for us, and prophetic. *Trumpets* (the 'last trumpet' I Corinthians 15:52), for example. Pinpoints the relative position in end-time events of the 'first resurrection' of the saints, the last in a series of seven such markers (Revelation 8:6).

The next, *Atonement*, references the reconciliation of all mankind with the Father through Jesus, and the banishment of adverse spirit influence over mankind (II Corinthians 4:4). Then follows *Tabernacles* which reminds us of our temporary nature, that we are but pilgrims in this temporary physical lifespan—an era that concludes after all mankind has had opportunity

to respond to the Gospel message (to become a Spirit-born child of the Father), for '*...The Lord of the promise is not slow, as some deem slowness, but is long-suffering toward us, not having purposed any to perish, but all to come to repentance*' (II Peter 3:9). God will then be '*...all in all*' (I Corinthians 15:28).

The concluding *Eighth Day* festival (the 'Closing Day'), an annual Sabbath, looks beyond this temporary existence to the fulfilment of the divine plan (*see Revelation 21-22*). The Father will take up residence on a renewed Earth to unveil His plan for eternity. He '*...will tabernacle with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them as their God*' (Revelation 21:3).

What a magnificent plan—of which we in this physical life get but a glimpse!

I would encourage our readers to thoroughly research in your Bible this vital aspect of worship. Our website lists a number of related articles for you to assess, and we are pleased to address any questions that may arise.

A number of churches of God around the world annually observe these festivals. Should you wish to experience their services we can often direct you to a convenient location.

*James*

### ***Autumn Festivals 2015\****

<b>Trumpets</b>	September 14
<b>Atonement</b>	September 23
<b>Tabernacles</b>	September 28-October 4
<b>Eighth Day</b>	October 5

*\* Holy days begin the previous evening*

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## Days of Destiny

Since man's beginning God has prescribed how He is to be approached in worship. As He is Creator of the vastness and complexity of the universe we, His creation, bow before Him in awe of His majesty and glory and power. As part of that worship we come before Him formally on the days He has prescribed. (They are listed in Leviticus 23). These 'holy days' are, too, an annual reminder of God's plan for mankind.

To the modern believer, however, we are faced with an alien calendar on which these days are placed. When, for example, is 'the first month' (v.5). Elsewhere in Scripture it is called *Abib* and also *Nisan* (In Babylon, *Nisanu*). It isn't January! In fact on the calendar then widely in use in the Middle East it begins in early Spring, usually March/April. How, then, can we know when to observe the holy days?

### Divine Sovereignty

Jesus Christ, in his prior eternal role as Jehovah, had authority over all of creation. Within the Godhead '*...He [the Father] also gave authority to Him to execute judgment*' (John 5:27). As such he delegated various roles to his creation, mankind.

Thus we were given authority over our environment, to care for it, develop it (Genesis 1:28). Into our hands was given the system of justice (Romans 13). Failure to rule by His guidelines has inevitable consequences!

Relevant to our discussion on the holy days and their timing, is a further aspect of life on earth, for Jehovah delegated specific functions to His people Israel: '*...whose are the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the Lawgiving, and the service, and the promises; whose are the fathers, and from whom is the Christ according to flesh, He being God over all, blessed forever*' (Romans 9:4-5).

Note that word *service* (Gk *latreia*). Matthew Henry's *Commentary* on this verse says it means '*...[Gk. latreia] They had the ordinances of God's worship among them - the temple, the altars, the priests, the sacrifices, the feasts, and the institutions relating to them*'. That includes responsibility for the calendar on which the holy days, the feasts, fall. *See also* Hebrews 9:1,6.

### Ancient Calendar

Israel's calendar is radically different from the one we use daily almost everywhere in the modern world, and to pinpoint where we are on it requires an understanding of its complexity. This knowledge has been preserved within Judaism, and tables have been published linking the two calendars.

As noted, authority was given by God to the people of Israel over this '*latreia*' or *service*. Most Churches of God use it, but objections have been raised to the use of these tables by some observers of the Bible's holy days—largely on the grounds that the Jewish authori-

ties, because they rejected the Messiah, have lost the right to oversee the calendar.

Commenting on the state of Judaism in his day, the apostle Paul states that the Jews: '*...have the form of knowledge and of the truth in the Law*' (Romans 2:20). Although they had the externals, the form, of God's Law, yet he shows they were far from being in submission to it. Their behaviour, in other words, doesn't affect their responsibility as custodians of the Law—including the calendar. He adds (*ch* 3:2): '*...unto them were committed the oracles [Gk. logion] of God*'.

Jesus had the measure of the religious leaders and trend-setters of his day: '*...The scribes and the Pharisees sit on the seat of Moses. Therefore do and observe everything that they tell you, but do not do as [they do]*' (Matthew 23:2-3).

The apostle writes further: '*...what if some did not believe? Will not their unbelief nullify the faith of God? Let it not be! But let God be true, and every man a liar*' (vv.3-4). And, '*...It cannot be said that God broke his promise*' (CEV *ch* 9:6).

### Change

In sum, the holy day-observing churches of God observe the LORD's festivals in accord with the calendar overseen within mainstream Judaism. In the event of the Jewish authorities in the future calculating the calendar differently the churches would conform—but probably not without challenge

The first king over the Ten Tribes, Jeroboam, became notorious in Israel for changing the holy days. He thereby '*...caused Israel to sin*'. Using the same calendar as the legitimate Jerusalem authorities he inaugurated a new idolatrous festival on a different date (I Kings 12:32f): '*...Jeroboam made a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month...in the month that he devised out of his own heart*'. God's *Feast of Tabernacles* was observed in the seventh month.

Judaism has acted similarly in that they changed the date of the movable *Feast of Weeks* (also known as *Pentecost*) to a fixed date (Sivan 6). This has not, of course, affected the underlying calendar, and the churches of God, with a few minor exceptions, now observe it always on a movable date, always Sunday, as God appointed. Ω

#### more about Tabernacles...

Read our article:

#### Tabernacles—humanity in the flesh

<http://www.cgom.org/Publications/Articles/TabernaclesHumanityInTheFlesh.pdf>  
or, available in print