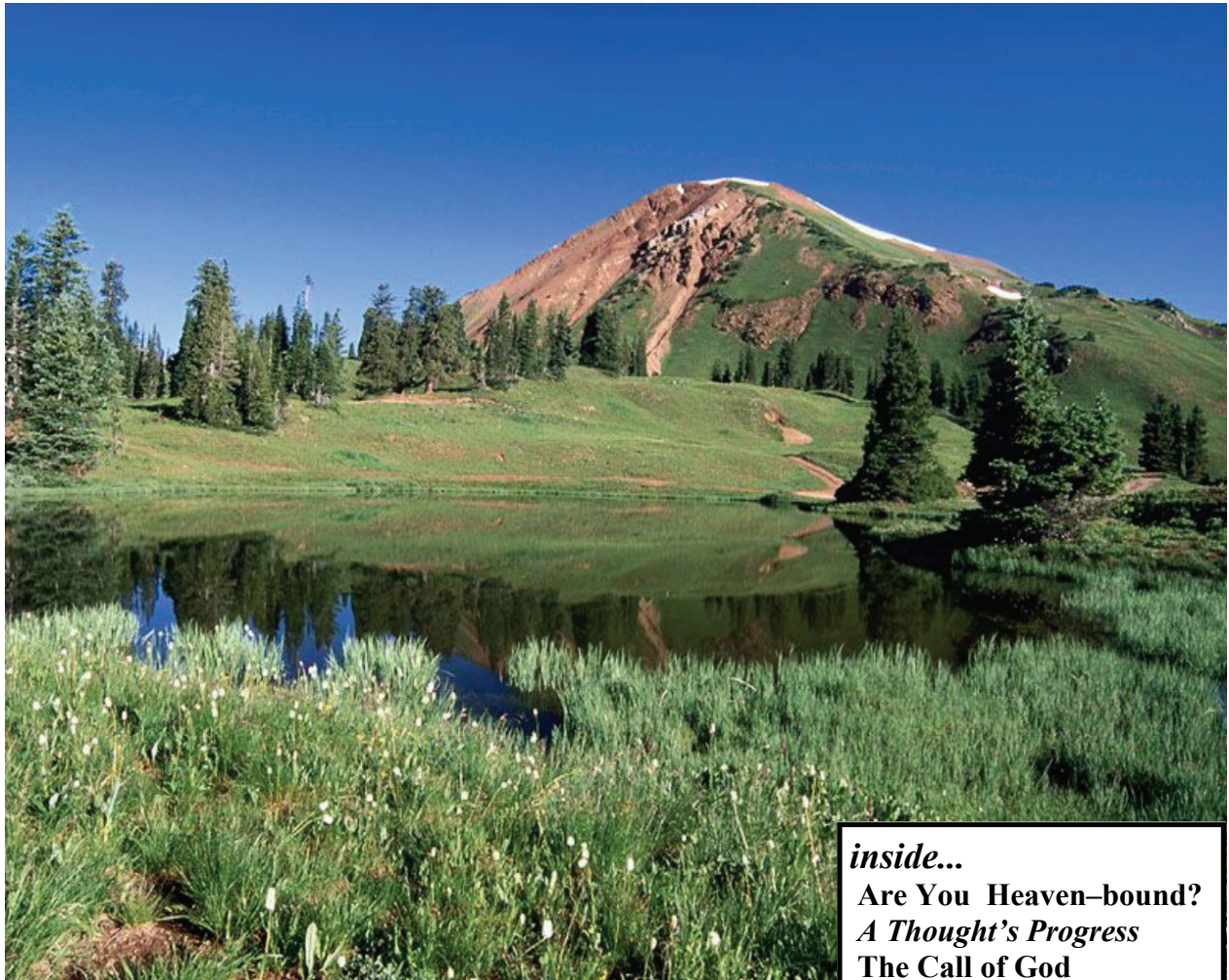


new Horizons

Vol 15 No 1

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addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



inside...

Are You Heaven-bound?

A Thought's Progress

The Call of God

The Past is Future

Feast of Purim

Is Hell Real?

CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by His apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature - eg our bi-monthly Newsletter OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and the 32-lesson Study Course. The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - and individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses or from our web site www.cgom.org. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

It is distributed free on request, being a co-operative voluntary effort financed by the members and friends of the *Churches of God*. We also welcome the financial support of all who benefit from our publications and who wish to labour with us.

If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* please request it from any of the addresses listed

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What happens when Christians die? Is Heaven their reward?

For Christians, it's a comforting thought to contemplate a deceased much-loved family member as safely with Jesus in Heaven. Life's struggles are ended and gone is the pain, the daily stresses. Peace at last, and endless opportunity to praise the Saviour. Your pastor or priest assures you the deceased now has his reward for being a fine person, a good Christian.

I used to believe that. Then some questions began to bother me. Can Dad up there in Heaven be truly at peace and happy when he sees the path his wayward son has pursued? Isn't his tranquillity disturbed by Mum's tearful sorrow over his death?

Then I wonder about that old rogue, Uncle Tom—is he also 'up there'? (The Pastor did preach him into heaven.)

What about all our world's distress—the disease, the famine, the violence between individuals and between nations? Is he isolated from all of that, blind? Is that the reward for the Christian? Isn't much of Christian belief based on the idea that our loved ones 'in heaven' are looking out for us? (Some believers pray to them). It doesn't make sense.

Texts of Hope

The truth about life after death—as presented in the Scriptures—is liberating. Open the Christian Bible and a different scenario presents. Consider the following texts:

- *'We know that we will die, but the*

dead don't know a thing. Nothing good will happen to them—they are gone and forgotten' (Ecclesiastes 9:5 CEV)

- *'[Man's] breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish'* (Psalm 146:4)
- *'The dead are silent and cannot praise the LORD'* (Psalm 115:17)
- *'If I die, I cannot praise you or even remember you'* (Psalm 6:5)
- *'Work hard at whatever you do. You will soon go to the world of the dead, where no one works or thinks or reasons or knows anything'* (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

our dead.

The implication, of course, is that as in sleep we will wake up! The patriarch Job had something to say on this: *'... we [humans] fall into the sleep of death, never to rise again, until the sky disappears'* That's how it looked on first thoughts. But he adds: *'...If a man die, will he live again? all the days of my appointed time [ie, in the grave] will I wait, till my change come. You will call, and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands'* (ch 14:14-15).

Paul echoes the same thought: *'...I will explain a mystery to you. Not every one of us will die, but we will all be changed. It will happen suddenly, quicker than the blink of an eye. At the sound of the last trumpet the dead will be raised. We will all be changed, so that we will never die again'* (I Corinthians 15:51-52).

Nor can we neglect what Jesus said: *'...Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the tombs shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life, and they whose actions have been evil to the resurrection of judgement'* (John 5:28-29). So—a future resurrection from their graves. And for everyone. Unnecessary, mind you, if you are already in Heaven!

In sum: Christians living and dead will receive their reward at the same time—at the 'last trumpet sound'. Or as wrote Paul: *'...When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall you also appear with him in glory'* (Colossians 3:4). He appears on Earth at that trumpet blast!

Are You Bound for Heaven?

Asleep - for a while

So, according to Scripture, when we die we are 'dead as a door-nail'. Out thoughts perish and we can't work or think or know anything. And—surprisingly for someone resident in Heaven—we can't praise God or even remember Him.

Sounds more like the apostle Paul's description of death—a sleep, eg I Thessalonians 4:13,15: *'...For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [ie, precede] them which are asleep'*. The term *sleep* is applied to death throughout the Scriptures and is an apt description of the state of

Given this clear teaching of Scripture it is strange that virtually all of Christendom embraces the false notion surrounding death, that upon our demise we go straight to either Heaven or to Hell (or, for some, into Purgatory).

The Source

Strange—but perhaps not surprising. For the whole world, according to Jesus, is deceived (Revelation 12:9). Paul adds: ‘... *the god of this world has blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them*’ (II Corinthians 4:4). And most of Christendom has embraced Satan’s foundational teaching!

Way back in Eden, Satan—the ‘father of lies’ (John 8:44)—deceived Mother Eve, telling her ‘...*you shall not surely die*’ (Genesis 3: 4), God had informed the pair otherwise (*ch* 2:17). And like Eve most people today—of any faith—believe the lie. ‘Die—but live forever, either in heaven or in hell’.

Jesus, you will recall (John 3:16), contrasted those who perish (the unbeliever) with those whose life will continue endlessly (the believer) Death or life. Extinction or life unending. Opposites.

But isn’t that man ‘(... *a man after mine own heart*’: Acts 13:22), King David, in Heaven? Well, hear how the apostle Peter addressed his Jewish audience six weeks *after* the resurrection of Jesus: ‘...*[David] is not ascended into the heavens*’ (Acts 2:34). Note also the comment of Jesus to Nicodemus: ‘... *No one has gone up to heaven except the Son of Man, who came down from there*’ (John 3:13). Not Enoch, not

Elijah, not even Noah or Abraham—or King David: ‘... *These all died in faith, not having received the promises*’ (Hebrews 11:13).

Not the End

Spirit in Man

The human spirit (Heb. *ruach*) is the sum total of our physical and mental characteristics, our personality, our character. When we die it is preserved—inert, asleep—until our resurrection. It is not in itself immortal (‘immortal soul’) but, like the wind (also *ruach*), is ephemeral.

For Christians the human spirit is now linked with God’s indwelling Holy Spirit, ensuring our immortality at the first resurrection (Revelation 20:5).

No—when we die we are well and truly ‘dead as a doornail’. We do indeed ‘rest in peace’. Those we leave behind need have no fears as to the fate of a loved one, secure in the knowledge that in God’s time the righteous will be raised from the grave to everlasting life (Colossians 3: 4).

In His carefully-designed plan the people of God will be

raised to reign with His Son *on Earth* (Revelation 5:10) for a thousand years, free from the malign influence of that father of lies, Satan (Revelation 20:3).

It is that time when the Messiah, the risen Jesus, will rule the nations in a godly manner:

The Fate of the ‘Unsaved’

Non-Christians face a different fate. But it’s not what you think!

Request the article:

When Someone Dies

CALL... *cont’d from p.5*

opportunity to form a familial relationship with Him through Jesus Christ, to become truly a child of God.

Those not now invited will, after the Millennium be resurrected—in the flesh—for their chance to commit to Jesus (Revelation 20:5) God has predestined an eternal

It shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the LORD’S house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it.

And many people shall go and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: ...neither shall they learn war any more (Isaiah 2:1-4)

And after the thousand years? Eternity in the service of God.

The Rest of the Dead

That’s for Christians—those in whom, in this life, is the Spirit of God. But what of wayward Uncle Tom? Or of the billions who never even heard the Gospel? Or babes in arms? Or all those on whom the message fell on spiritually deaf ears? Well—that’s also in God’s Master Plan.

The Creator is well aware of human weakness. He understands that having from the beginning rejected His way of life that we have submitted rather to the rule of ‘the god of this world’. They are not ‘the forgotten dead’ but will be raised to physical life with opportunity to become a part of the Family of God. **Ω**

future for all who come to Him through Jesus the Messiah, who receive His Spirit, and who remain faithful until death.

‘whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified’ Ω

A Thought's Progress

Steven Kieler

The book of Proverbs is invaluable for everyone from the child to the parent to the grand parent. Herein we review one of its more important themes. Thanks to God and to Solomon for this marvellous, life-saving wisdom

Many things in life, both good and bad have a logical progression. It is said:

- That which can be thought can be spoken.
- That which can be spoken can be heard.
- That which can be heard can be accepted.
- That which can be accepted can be implemented.
- That which can be implemented, in time, can become the norm.
-

Here is a scriptural example that seems partially to illustrate that progression of thought as viewed from the scripture advising us how to avoid an excursion to destruction.

*"The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: *pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate."*
Proverbs 8:13

Let's trace this scriptural progression. Its actual starting point is with *knowledge*. Our path begins there as we see how these traits, are incorporated.

Knowledge

Thoughts, what we know, can be right or wrong and can be used for good or evil. (Genesis 2:9) A poignant example is nuclear power. Einstein opposed the use of nuclear weapons, but he feared what might happen to the world if Germany discovered the technology before America. He decided to proceed and I think the result, as terrible as it was, showed it to be the correct course at the time.

The real lesson here is that even though he could have made either choice, he deeply thought about the end result of his decision. What a different world this would be if we would all do the same. There are three things to consider in the

application of knowledge: *Attitude*: this seems to be paramount in determining whether the application of knowledge is good or evil.

Wisdom: (Proverbs 3:19) Wisdom is the application of knowledge in accord and compliance with pre-ordained laws. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* quotes Smend, a German officer resistance fighter in World War Two, who said: (*Wisdom is*) "*the art of reaching one's end by the use of the right means.*" This is opposed to the common philosophy - "*the end justifies the means.*" In other words, wisdom is truly in accord with a higher and perfect set of principles and ethics. Foremost of these laws is the law of love, considered next.

Love: (1 Corinthians 8:1) The application of your knowledge, without concern for those who may be affected, can produce bad or hurtful results. The misuse and abuse of knowledge is prime; it is loveless and leads to the next step in our progression.

Pride: (Proverbs 16:18). When we reach this juncture, it becomes more volatile; as relates: "*Pride goeth before destruction,....*" Destruction is a fracture, break, or burst. Things are ready to break out. The Russian writer, Alexander Solzhenitsyn, says; "*It has become embarrassing to appeal to eternal concepts, embarrassing to state that evil makes its home in the individual human heart before it enters a political system.... Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened.*"

When pride is in bloom, the malady has been primarily internal, barely detectable to others, but it is ready to burst forth into a haughty spirit. He is saying that evil incubates internally, in the heart, before it is revealed, externally, into society. As it sprouts, it can be noticed by others as it expresses itself in attitude and actions.

The Stiff Neck

Sometimes listing the synonyms gives us a real sense of the subject; here are some for "stiff-neck:" *stubbornness, hard-headed, hard-hearted, rebellious, stubborn, obstinate, intractable, wilful, pig-headed*. Can you detect any of these in your own character?

Knowledge can lead to a 'stiff neck'.

This may precede knowledge—at least true knowledge.

The know it all (I Corinthians 8:2). I'm sure you have all encountered people who "know it all", and yet, even though they may be very intelligent, cannot apply common sense, logic, or righteousness. Sadly, you and I have probably shared that malady a time or two ourselves.

This may be related very closely to the sin of presumptuousness which is roundly condemned in scripture. It is the mindset, not just that I know more than my parents, my teacher, my boss, or even God—but it smacks of the attitude that they are just ignorant.

The self-willed (II Peter 2:10). Commentator Albert Barnes nails it when he says: "It is one of the effects of religion to produce respect for superiors; but when men are self-willed, and when they purpose to give indulgence to corrupt propensities, it is natural for them to dislike all government. Accordingly, it is by no means an infrequent effect of certain forms of error to lead men to speak disrespectfully of those in authority and to attempt to throw off all the restraints of law. It is a very certain indication that men hold wrong opinions when they show disrespect to those in authority and despise the restraints of law."

Looking back, I am ashamedly guilty of this very thing. Furthermore, I fully recognize that all men often resist authority and even speak evil of dignitaries; dignitaries refers to all those in authority over you." The prophet Zechariah describes this stiff-necked attitude without using the word—*ch 7:8-14* Then follows, a description of their fate—*scattering and desolation*. The description seems to match the people's attitude today; will this fate be ours?

A stiff neck is the attitude: "nobody is going to tell me what to do" or "I know more than you?" When added to knowledge it has therefore been called "the seat of pride."

Haughty Spirit

A haughty spirit (Proverbs 16:18) seems to come naturally after pride. It is the first external manifestation of our progression. A fall is a tottering, stumbling, a wavering. It is an act of gravity (pun intended).

You have leaned too far and recovery becomes more difficult as each degree of angle you lean. That is where, like an alcoholic, you sometimes hit bottom and, if you survive, you may be able to enter a recovery program. If left unchecked, at this point it intensifies from a personally destructive behavior to a threat to other individuals and even to society as we accelerate to *arrogance*.

Spoken Words

Speaking can, of course, be good or evil by content or intent or a combination. For example: a good thought with a good intent, a good thought with a bad intent, a bad thought with a good intent or a bad thought with a bad intent. Since we are concerned herein with the path to destruction we must, for the moment, keep our focus on the three combinations containing the bad qualities. Speaking is the outward expression of the inward thought.

Arrogance

The step up to arrogance (or down, if you prefer) is the change from "*nobody's going to tell me what to do*" to "*I know it all and I'm going to tell you what to do.*" There are motivating factors driving this; greed and power among them.

The line crossed here is that knowledge, confidence, and well-meaning are admirable. But if one stops his ears from differing opinion, the possibility he may be wrong or there is another way, arrogance can creep in. Don't let that door crack open because there is yet another pit to fall into: *hubris*

Hubris

The contemporary definition is: *overbearing pride or arrogance*. But the original Greek (*hybris*) means: "wanton violence, riotousness, insolence; outrage; arrogance" It is borrowed from *hybristikos*, "insolent, wanton", and from *hybrizein*, "to insult, to act outrageously"

Note that we have advanced from internal thoughts and feelings to external speech and control to physical coercion. The action described is: "the excessive pride and ambition that usually leads to the downfall of a hero in classical tragedy." The deep meaning of the word is to use nefarious and evil means to reach your own desires, even to the point of doing physical harm. I describe it as "*arrogance with an attitude*," an attitude

of a mix of anger, hate, added to all the points we have just reviewed.

Contrast that with applying knowledge with an attitude of love, doing what is beneficial for others even at your own inconvenience. To quote Smend again, it is: "*the art of reaching one's end by the use of the right means.*" To totally understand hubris one must study its synonyms. The following are chosen from Thayer's definitions:

hyperēphania: the character of one who, with a swollen estimate of his own powers or merits, looks down on others and even treats them with insolence and contempt

hyperēphanos: showing one's self above others, overtopping, conspicuous above others, pre-eminent with an overweening estimate of one's means or merits, despising others or even treating them with contempt, haughty

hubrizō: to be insolent, to behave insolently, wantonly, outrageously; to act insolently and shamefully towards one, to treat shamefully; of one who injures another by speaking evil of him

Don't blame God when you are tempted! God cannot be tempted by evil, and he doesn't use evil to tempt others.

We are tempted by our own desires that drag us off and trap us. Our desires make us sin, and when sin is finished with us, it leaves us dead James 1:13-15

hubris: insolence; a wrong springing from insolence, an injury, affront, insult; mental injury and wantonness of its inflection being prominent; injury inflicted by the violence of a tempest

hubristēs: an insolent man; one who, uplifted with pride, either heaps insulting language upon others or does them some shameful act of wrong

Study each word in the concordance and once you get the total impact of this malady, you can readily apply it to Biblical characters, even to past and present prominent people and politicians. But the point is, can you observe it in yourself? If

you reach this point it is nearly impossible to see and change except by the grace of God.

The Evil Way

All of these attitudes are found in the progression and, once it has culminated in hubris, it is perfectly ingrained in the character. At this point, the person has not only assimilated the evil way completely but has systematically and simultaneously rejected the good path. He is dangerously close to destruction.

The Froward Mouth

Almost as an afterthought, Proverbs 8:13 adds to the progression, the froward mouth. "*The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate.*" Frowardness, also called perverseness, is described in Pro 6:14: "*Frowardness is in his heart, he devises mischief continually; he sows discord.*" It is someone who is constantly looking for trouble or to find fault.

Remember the first progression: "That which can be thought can be spoken"? Thoughts, ideas, imaginations, good and bad, will come. They must be pondered, evaluated, and sorted out, and then, almost as an afterthought, Solomon says to "consider the froward mouth." It follows pride, arrogance, and the evil way in the verse but it is first in expression in the progression of a thought. Those negative, even evil thoughts must be suppressed and rejected at the root and never allowed to progress to the point of speaking of them as though they were an idea or the ideal. In effect, this verse is saying: I hate, not only the evil way, but every step that leads to it including its first outward display, the froward mouth which is speaking evil.

Solutions

.At what point can this progression be stopped? Certainly, after each step it becomes more difficult as the behavior becomes more entrenched.

How do you stop the madness—and it can only be labelled madness? It depends on what degree the thought has reached.

Knowledge: Of course knowledge can be used for good or evil and some are hard choices --- like atomic power. Albert Einstein grieved over that moral dilemma. Before you think, say **cont'd p.8**

The Call of God

God's actions can be a puzzle. Why does He call some and not others? Is He unfair?

The charge that He is a 'respector of persons' is sometimes laid against God. For example, He loved Jacob but hated his twin Esau (Romans 9:13). Unfair?

Again, He ordered the 'ethnic cleansing' of the Amalekites—man, woman and child and even their cattle (I Samuel 15:3). Then there was the 'extermination' of all mankind except for one family (Genesis 6-9).

Yet God showed extreme favour to the family of Jacob—Israel. The precious '...apple [pupil] of His eye' He calls her—and woe betide anyone who meddles, He says! (Zechariah 2:8). Why? Is God unfair?

Some Are Called

Forward to New Testament times and we find some people are 'special', especially selected by the Father. Peter notes of Christians: '...you are God's chosen and special people' (I Peter 2:9). The apostle John records the words of Jesus: '... No man can come to me, except the Father which sent me draw him' (John 6:44).

It is foolish to imagine God is partisan. No, He is even-handed just as He expects His people to

be even-handed: '...if you have respect of persons, you commit sin, being convicted by the law as transgressors' (James 2:9).

Can we discern from the Scriptures the basis of our calling? Why me and not someone else?

A Good Birth

God has insight into our being 'from our womb'. He told Samuel: '... the LORD sees not as man sees; for man looks on the outward appearance, but the LORD looks on the heart' (I Samuel 16:7). Our characteristics, inborn and acquired, are an open book to Him.

Bad Genes

Genes can mutate, become corrupt, degenerate, as Jeremiah understands. He notes: '... how then are you [Israel] turned into the degenerate plant of a strange vine unto me?' (ch 1:22).

Again, God had chosen and called Saul—'goodly', kind, considerate, humble—for kingship (I Samuel 9-10). But he changed (mutated) and became arrogant, rebellious, violent—and forfeited his high calling.

Hear the LORD's message to Jeremiah: '... Before I formed you in the belly I knew you, and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you' (Jeremiah 1:5). Paul, too: '...it pleased God, who separated me [set apart] from my mother's womb' (Galatians

1:15). And David: '...You covered [or, protected] me in my mother's womb...My frame was not hidden from you, when I was made in secret' (Psalm 139:13,). Surely, Jesus had this calling before his birth (cp Isaiah 49:1). While such had a special calling the principle applies to all.

Speaking symbolically, God says of Israel: '...I had planted you a noble vine, wholly a right seed' (Jeremiah 2:21). Jesus, too, speaks of '...good seed' (Matthew

13:24)—something any farmer will recognize. In modern terms, God uses the symbolism of DNA ('seed') applied spiritually.

It is well-established that behavioural characteristics—in animal and human life as in agriculture—are genetically transmitted, though modified by environmental factors.

For the analogy to hold, Israel also had 'good genes' physically; God differentiated between Jacob (Israel) and Esau before their birth, predicting Jacob's pre-eminence—borne out by the history of both men and their progeny (Romans 9:11). Writes the Psalmist: 'with your own eyes you saw my body being formed. Even before I was born, you had written in your book everything I would do' (Psalm 139:16).

It's not surprising, then, that God can 'inspect' the genetic make-up of every individual 'from the womb'. He can discern their future characteristics and can predetermine their potential for eternal life: 'For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son' (Romans 8:29). Once called, our purpose is to become Christ-like. No room, then, for boasting!

Master Plan

What, then, about all those the Father 'discarded'? Are they excluded from eternal life?

Far from it. For God '...is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance' (II Peter 3:9). He has a master-plan by which everyone—of every nation, every creed—will have had

cont'd p.2

The Past is Future

Twenty-first century man ought to listen to the past, for history will repeat itself

Henry Ford reputedly stated that 'history is bunk'. And indeed what record we have of the past is filtered through the ideas of current historians—often without all the facts.

Then there are those who re-write history to fit present political circumstances—or to cover their own misdeeds. (Compare recent dictatorships and even democratic leadership.) Others seek to deny the verifiable record. (The false Islamic claim on Jerusalem springs to mind.)

History does, however, tend to repeat. Wrote wise King Solomon: *'...Is there a thing whereof men say, See, this is new? it has been already, in the ages which were before us'* (Ecclesiastes 1:10).

Prophecy

What, then, do we make of Bible prophecy, which patterns the future on the past?

The past is often used in Scripture as a model for the future. And—if you believe in God—His word is sure. Note what He claims: *'...Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done; saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure'* (Isaiah 46:9).

Jesus understood this repetitive pattern of prophecy, and predicted:

'...When the Son of Man comes, things will be just as they were when Noah lived' (Luke 17:26).

Dramatic events shattered the peace in late 2nd century BC Israel. Antiochus

Epiphanes desecrated the Temple and dedicated it to the god Jupiter Olympus, erecting its statue therein—as

prophesied through Daniel. Jesus then predicted the general pattern of this awesome event would be repeated, duly carried out by Rome in 70AD.

That, however isn't the end, for in his final long prophecy relating to the end-time, Jesus foresaw this will occur again shortly before his return, and warned his followers to be aware and prepared to act (Matthew 24:15, 27).

Recall, too, that the LORD delivered Israel from Egypt (Exodus), restored the Jews to the Land from their Babylonian exile (eg Nehemiah), and will restore both Houses of Israel to the land of Palestine after a future exile:

'...the Lord shall set his hand again the second time to recover the remnant of his people, which shall remain, from Assyria, and from Egypt...' (Isaiah 11:11).

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The Same Again

Moreover, God's principles of judgment are unchanging: always with long patience, merciful, just, with compassion for the offender, and even-handed. He doesn't change from age to age or with fashion.

We may, then, expect a similar fate for similar offences. Jump from a plane free-fall and you receive the same consequence! Israel has always

been a model nation—for good and for bad. What befell them we can expect to befall *any* nation—especially modern

'Israel'—that follows the same path of disregard for divine instruction (which is always for our good).

Moral Decay

Despite perceived advances in civilisation, mankind is unchanged at heart. The same moral decay that brought destruction to Noah's generation will afflict mankind in the 'end-time'.

Jesus predicted—of the time prior to his return: *'...This will be the worst time of suffering since the beginning of the world, and nothing this terrible will ever happen again. If God doesn't make the time shorter, no one will be left alive'* (Matthew 24 21f).

It is suffering that we have brought on ourselves. We were created physically, mentally, spiritually to function in accordance with a pre-set moral compass—in fact, the way Jesus Christ lived. He is the standard of perfection, and all deviation incurs a degree of suffering in consequence.

The general pattern of history does repeat—because our nature doesn't change. Without the transformed character that stems from God's indwelling Spirit it cannot change. That comes only through our responding to God's call to fellowship with Him—to universal repentance. **Ω**

The annual Feast of Purim commemorates God's pursuit of justice to avenge His people

In Judaism *Purim* is a celebratory festival held in late February/early March (Adar 14/15 on the Hebrew calendar). It isn't mentioned in the *Torah*, but is observed by most Jews, and celebrates the deliverance of the Jews from their enemies in fifth century BC Persia. The events are recorded in the Bible book of *Esther*—a book notorious for not having any mention of God. Yet *Esther* has a vital role in God's plans, and it records the culmination of a thousand years of history.

[As *Purim* is not a festival appointed by the Lord to highlight His plans, as in Leviticus 23, it is not incumbent on Christians to observe it.]

Corrupt Genealogy

It's clear that this is a world of inequalities. The Bible account has all created equal—but with varied skills and aptitudes. Very few people groups do not have adequate resources both material and intellectual—but many have failed to exploit them, or they squandered them.

All of us shared the original human gene pool (Acts 17:26), but individual choices and external factors corrupted some to the point of destruction. Indeed humanity as a whole at one point became so corrupt that they fractured the spiritual bond between man and nature—resulting in a universal all-destroying flood (see Genesis 6-9). Humanity survived solely because of the faithfulness of a single family (1 Peter 3:20).

Some failed to learn the lessons of their history and repeated the pattern, again becoming corrupted. Among these, in the days of Abraham, were the Amorites, descendants of Cush (Genesis 15:16). God foresaw the continued depraved decline of this people. They would later be subdued by the incoming Israeli armies.

A Familial Feud

Another corrupted individual was *Amalek*, a grandson of Jacob's brother Esau by a concubine, reportedly (Jewish tradition) both Eliphaz's daughter and his sexual partner. Amalek has a history that ties him to the events recorded in *Esther*.

Amalek proved to be an implacable enemy to the descendants of Jacob. He would be well aware of the deceptive events that excluded his grandfather Esau from the first-born blessing of Jacob.—and resented it. But God, well aware of potential character (see box), had chosen Jacob (Romans 9:13).

They first confronted Israel shortly after the Exodus from Egypt. Despicably, they attacked the 'feeble' from the rear of the advancing Israelites (Deuteronomy 25:17-18), thus incurring God's wrath: '...you must wipe out Amalek so completely that no one will remember they ever lived' (v.19). Allied to various tribes, the Amalakites attacked Israel time and again, notably defeated by Gideon (Judges 6 and 7). King Saul (1 Samuel 14:48) led a large army against them, defeating them once again..

But the Lord didn't forget this ruthless people and their deeds. They attacked again, and God had had enough: '...Thus says the LORD of hosts [to King Saul], I remember

The Feast of Purim

that which Amalek did to Israel, how he laid wait for him in the way, when he came up from Egypt. Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass' (ch 15:1-3).

The King destroyed all before him though to his detriment he spared the royal line - the Agagites. It was a mistake that would sound down the centuries. Elsewhere other Amalekites remained, many slain by David (*ch 27:8*). At this time (eleventh century BC) Amalek. became part of a ten nation Middle East conspiracy against Israel, with the slogan '...Come, and let us cut them off from being a nation; that the name of Israel may be no more in remembrance' (Psalm 83: 1-9). That has a familiar ring, being the call of Israel's enemies to this day. (The Psalm may have prophetic significance.)

Judgment Executed

Forward six centuries and the exiled Amalekites and their ilk remain a problem, this time concentrated on the Jews exiled in Persia. (the rest of Israel had long since dispersed westwards). The account is in the book of *Esther*. cont'd p.8

Genetic variation—eg by selective breeding of animals—is a major factor in behavioural and physical outcomes. As recorded in the Scriptures, marriage partners were carefully selected to retain and perpetuate specific characteristics—eg in the priesthood (Leviticus 21:15)..

Genes ('seed')—both good and corrupt—are transmitted to following generations. They may be corrupted by mutations, ill-matched cross-breeding.

Why 'Purim'?

Haman used *Pur*—ie cast lots—to find the most auspicious day in which to attack the Jews throughout the Empire.

How he did this is not now known. It's a superstitious practice widely used in ancient times in varied forms.

It is a 'spirit of divination' condemned in Scripture, and quite different from the lot cast by the High Priest in Israel.

God may have intervened to ensure a late date was selected, giving the Jews almost a year to prepare for the attack.

Esther 9:26

Thought ...cont'd

or do anything, ask for wisdom, a proverb directive, and at least consider the long term effects. It is easier to prevent an evil thought or intent if you stop it before it gains momentum.

Speaking: There are three things that apply here; all are found in Ecclesiastes 5:2

"Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few."

Stiff neck: Psalm 19:13 *"Keep back thy servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."* Ask God to remove these sinful thoughts from your mind.

Pride: The antidote is a good dose of humility. But can humility be self-induced or must it come from other sources? Proverbs 11:2 *"When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom."* It seems that we play a part in it, as Paul says in Romans 12:3 *"For I say... to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, ..."* However, remember that if you won't humble yourself, God will!

Haughty Spirit: This is the time when our pride is vocalized. Anyone who is self-aware can recognize it but it is also very easy to hide from the truth. Remember the froward mouth in Proverbs 8:13? It is echoed again with the preventative step needed in Proverbs 21:23 *"Whoso keepeth his mouth and his tongue keepeth his soul from troubles."* Stop here and you will save much grief later. I am still haunted by a few stupid remarks I made to others decades ago.

Arrogance: Hannah gives this advice: 1 Samuel 2:1,3 *"And Hannah prayed, and said,... 3: Talk no more so exceeding proudly; let not arrogance come out of your mouth: for the LORD is a God of knowledge, and by him actions are weighed."* It looks like, in verse 3, that this is still under the (self) control of the individual.

Hubris: It is near impossible for the person to rescue himself at this point. I would suggest he eat grass! That may sound stupid but he could either do it voluntarily or God can arrange it. Remember Nebuchadnezzar? Daniel 4:33: *"The same hour was the thing fulfilled upon Nebuchadnezzar: and he was driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws."* If he would have just 'eaten grass' (been humble) - maybe he could have avoided the rest of his discomfort.

Finally, take to heart the words of Isaiah. Isaiah 13:11 *"And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogance of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible [fearful, tyrannical]."*

Certainly the "terrible" applies to those filled with hubris. So, while we can take comfort in the demise of the proud, arrogant and the terrible, we must be constantly aware and on guard from our knowledge - to our thoughts - to our speech - to our actions.

I hope this helps us to know and be aware of the progression of an evil thought, and go to God in prayer for restraint and

PURIM ...cont'd

The Persian King sought to replace his disgraced wife. An orphaned Jewish girl was presented as a candidate at the behest of her guardian Mordecai, also of Judah. She became Queen—Esther.

Mordecai reported a plot to overthrow the King and relayed the news to the King via Esther—a fact recorded in the Royal Chronicles. He was resented by Haman (a recently-appointed aide to the King) for imagined 'disrespect'. In short, Haman, having learned that Mordecai was a Jew, obtained an edict to kill every Jew throughout the Empire (127 Provinces from India to Ethiopia!).—the massacre to begin on Adar 13. Why such racism?

In fact, Haman belonged to the Amalekite Royal Family—an *'...Agagite., the enemy of all the Jews'* (Esther 9:24), *'... the adversary and enemy'* (ch 7:6). This was a continuation of a millennium of Amalek's animosity towards Israel.

The outcome? The King relented and gave permission to all Jews to defend themselves. (He could not go back on his word to Haman.). Haman himself was hanged for his treachery (ch 7:10).

Assisted by all regional officials (ch 9:3) the Jews avenged their enemies—*'...those that hated them'* (ch 9:5). That is, all those of Amalek throughout all the provinces—including Haman's ten sons whom the King hanged with their father.

Queen Esther issued a decree that in perpetuity all Jews and those who associate with them should observe Adar 14 and 15 as a day on which to rejoice and to celebrate this victory (ch 9:21-32). It is so observed in Judaism to this day. So ended a blood-drenched saga extending for over a thousand years. Ω

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MiniStudy**IS Hell REAL?**

*“And be not afraid of them that kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (Matthew 10:28)
And Jehovah God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7)*

The 14th century *Dante's Inferno* firmly set in the human psyche the concept of 'hell' as a raging fiery furnace in which is confined the unsaved—tormented for all eternity. It has served to cement in the mind of many the notion of God as a callous monster. Others justify it as proper punishment for failing to accept Jesus as Saviour. If true, then the vast majority of human kind are destined for billions of years of horrendous torment. What about the billions alive today who reject Christianity or have never even heard the name *Jesus*. Or the countless men, women and children alive before his coming. Will they suffer the same awful fate? Is this what the Scriptures teach?

- First, it must be understood that for every human being who ever lived there will come a time of just judgment before the bar of the just but merciful God (John 5:28, 29)
- *But hell is real!* There's no escape from this teaching in the Christian Scriptures. What's unreal is the widely accepted meaning of the word. In fact, the concept is represented in Scripture by more than the one word *hell*, and in different original words
- It perhaps shocks to know that Jesus himself rested three days and nights in hell. Indeed his 'companions' there included faithful Abraham, Moses, David - and the murderer Cain - together with every individual who had died until that time (Acts 2:29-31)
- The Hebrew word for hell is *sheol*, the grave and related words. The equivalent Greek is *hades*. It represents the resting place of all the dead—buried, on land or sea, or cremated for no matter how long
- Another Greek term is *gehenna*. This word indeed refers to a fire - the final post-judgment outcome for the unrepentant. The term derives from *Ge-Hinnom* - the Valley of Hinnom, where Jerusalem's waste was burned or consumed by worms (Isaiah 66:34)
- At the time of Jesus no human had been to Heaven (John 3:13). How come?
- In fact, the whole concept of the unsaved being consigned at death to a burning hell derives from the first ever lie. Most religious folk believe that 'Hell' is the domain of Satan. Our first parents would have remained alive as long so they didn't sin. Satan, the father of lies, taught that even if you sin you won't ever die (Genesis 3:4)
- Man was created from earth's elements (Genesis 2:7). God animated the clay model '*...and man became a living soul*'. The soul (Heb. *nephesh*), we are told, can die (Ezekiel 18:4)
- Upon death we (eventually) return to the soil (Genesis 3:19), without conscious existence (Ecclesiastes 9:5)
- At the return of Jesus all those in whom dwells God's Spirit will be resurrected to eternal life. All others will be resurrected (in a material body) after the Millennium to face a period of judgment (Revelation 20:5). The ultimately unrepentant de, their bodies then consumed by fire in *Gehenna*, *hell* - eternal annihilation
- '*But the day of the Lord will come as a thief; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall be dissolved with fervent heat, and the earth and the works that are therein shall be burned up*' (II Peter 3:10; Revelation 21:8)

Ω

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