

new **Horizons**

Vol 16 No 1

January/February 2012

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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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 e-mail Newsletter OUTREACH, the 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

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new Horizons

Issue No 91

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With the world seemingly adrift on a sea of indecision—who, really, is in charge?

Doesn't it feel, sometimes, that we simply have no control over our life? Decisions that adversely affect us—personally and indeed nationally—are taken without consultation. Elected governments as in Greece and Italy are overthrown by dictat by an unelected Commission.

Or, as with the so-called Arab Spring, by some shadowy Islamist conspiracy. As writes the Psalmist in a fit of depression: *'...Even if you look, you won't see anyone who cares enough to walk beside me. There is no place to hide, and no one who really cares'* (Psalm 142:4 CEV). There's a sense of helplessness.

Yet when we look at the wider picture there is an apparent failure of effective leadership. Writes a leading historian: *"...with the world crying out for leadership...it is hard to suggest that Western nations are being governed by leaders remotely capable of matching the hour...the crisis of leadership across the Western world [faces] the greatest challenges in generations"*. And where there is strong leadership it is too often authoritarian, brutal, oppressive, self-serving.

Democratic Leadership

We might ask what is the role of leadership in a democracy, *'...the worst form of government—except for all the others'*. In theory we should all have our say, which—given the multitude and variety of desires—would bring chaos. Therefore a democratic Government tries to balance the democratic principle with practicality: what will work with a minimum of resentment from the governed?

Such an approach to government, however, isn't universal. The 'Arab Spring' is an on-going example, for some will, whether by nature or nurture, tolerate an authoritarian regime. The quality and nature of leadership, however, is crucial. History demonstrates such a regime tends to dic-

Who's In Charge?

tatorship suppress that inevitable resentment. For there resides in us the desire for freedom—sometimes, fuelled by oppression, leading to open rebellion. Hence the crack-down. Hence Tihar Square. Hence Martyr's Square. And Syria, Bahrain, Tunisia, Crystalnacht, even.

In past millennia and even in our lifetime great leaders have emerged—often in challenging times. They have harnessed to the common cause the many conflicting strands of human interests—

political, personal, religious—yet have stood up to the nay-sayers. So too in business, in religion, in social matters. But now where are they?. It reflects the words of the Creator through Isaiah: *'...I will destroy the wisdom of those who claim to know and understand'* (Isaiah 29:14 CEV).

The nations of the world, with exceptions, may not yet have descended to the level of ancient Israel. Isaiah again: *'...Your head is badly bruised, and you are weak all over. From your head to your toes there isn't a healthy spot. Bruises, cuts, and open sores go without care or oil to ease the pain. Your country lies in ruins; your towns are in ashes. Foreigners and strangers take and destroy your land while you watch (ch 1:5-7)*. But without doubt we are facing huge challenges at every level of society. Again—where are the leaders? Is anyone in charge?

I'm In Charge

There's a clue in the words of the prophet. For he is simply relaying the words, the mind, of the Creator! It is *God* who is in charge. The early 7th century BC Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar came to understand: *'...he does according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth: and none can stay his hand, or say unto him, What are you doing?'* (Daniel 3:35). Indeed God's sovereignty is the essence of prophecy! He is

the Mover and Shaker of world events. He overthrows and replaces national governments: Daniel again ‘...*You control human events-- you give rulers their power and take it away, and you are the source of wisdom and knowledge*’ (ch 2:21 CEV).

Mere humans like to think we pull the levers of power. That, as thought King Canute, we can roll back the tide of history—and get re-elected or hold on to power. *But only with permission—from above!*

A Living God

Of course, how you respond to the concept of a God who is actively involved in human affairs is crucial. A non-believer must ‘work out his own salvation’, being subject to the flow of events modified only by his own exertions.

The believer, however, is confident that history and events—no matter how bad they look—are under control. That we are not flotsam on a raging sea, not aboard a Titanic headed for destruction but secure in the knowledge that ‘...*underneath are the everlasting arms*’.

Jesus warned of trouble ahead in the time following his ascent to the heavenly realm. And becoming worse, just before his return. But, he said, ‘...*If God doesn't make the time shorter, no one will be left alive*’ (Matthew 24:22 CEV). But accompanied by the promise that he *will* shorten that troubled time.

God is alive and well and actively involved in human affairs.

God in History

Writes the Psalmist: ‘...*Your throne is established of old: you are from everlasting*’ (Psalm 93:2). A God also of the past. There before the beginning. A continuing active presence in the affairs of His creation throughout time—and now.

Seventeen centuries after man entered the historical record, God intervened to save us from annihilation. Human destructive behaviour was about to destroy all life. Survival hung on the thread of a single family: ‘...*And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually*’ (Genesis 6:5). He had to start again with the one remaining family loyal to Him (v.8).

Barely eight centuries later a leading nation—the Amorites—had again plunged the depths of depravity. God had been keeping an eye on them (Genes 15:16) for four hundred years before His judgment fell. As with the nation of Egypt: ‘...*that nation [Egypt], whom they [Israel] shall serve, will I judge*’ (v.14). That judgment, around 1500BC, is well known!

God's Hammer

Zoom forward another eight hundred years and we witness God in action again. Israel—the ‘apple of God's eye’—had sunk to new depths, God's warnings going unheeded. The prophet Amos has this to say: ‘...*You only have I known of all the families of the earth: therefore I will punish you for all your iniquities*’ (ch 3:2).

The prophet Isaiah describes how: ‘...*O Assyrian, the rod of mine anger, and the staff in their hand is mine indignation. I will send him against an hypocritical nation, and against the people of my wrath will I give him a charge*’ (ch 10:5-6). Here is God exercising control of one of the

most powerful of nations! And later punishing it for its cruel and excessive use of its military power (vv.15ff).

Later, Amos confirms God's control, His authority, to move whole nations (ch 9:7). The apostle Paul confirms: ‘... *[God] made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation*’ (Acts 17:26). Even national boundaries—no matter how they may be formed—are determined by God! ‘*Your will be done in earth, as [determined] in heaven*’.

In the sixth century BC Israel's sister House of Judah was exiled and came under the rule of Babylon,. Their prophesied seventy year captivity was coming to an end. A hundred and fifty years before this (Isaiah 45:6-7, 13) God had singled out His chosen instrument for their restoration—Cyrus, whose kingdom would succeed Babylon . He even named him. And, of course, so it was (Ezra ch 5-6). God had ‘raised up’ Cyrus for His own purposes (ch 1:1)

Unseen Powers

What, then, of today? Nations are in turmoil. On July 9, 2011 after years of fighting and civil war, the Republic of South Sudan declared its independence from Sudan and became Africa's 54th state. There have been twenty-nine new independent nations since 1990—not without bloodshed! A spirit of independence is sweeping the globe—sadly, accompanied by violence. and mayhem.

Daniel (ch 10) provides insight to the unseen world that controls events. While praying and fasting he was visited by an angel despatched by God to give him a prophecy of the coming of the Messiah. [The ‘Seventy Weeks’ prophecy.]

cont'd p.8

Much focus is on December 2012 as 'the end of the world'—a date disputed by others. What should you make of it?

The current economic crisis affecting so many of us—coupled with 'the Arab Spring', excess world population, acute shortages of food and water and rampant disease have generated a rash of articles on prophecy—in and out of the Bible.

One certainty of prophecy that is writ large in Scripture, however, is that 'the age of man' *will* draw to a close. Since records began humanity is the 'lord of misrule' of our planet. Whether our environment or our social structures or our legal systems—all have, despite good intentions, have miserably failed.

But that misrule ends soon. The Messiah, Jesus, will return to establish the rule of the Kingdom of God over all the earth: '*...And the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one*' (Zechariah 14:9).

End Time

The Bible maps out for us a God's eye view of the end time. In essence our meddling with fundamental spiritual laws provokes chaos physical and economic and political and personal. (Yes, spiritual neglect affects the ground under our feet, our health, our well-being!)

And to solve the problem world leaders are taking a lead from Jesus—*globalisation!*

The prophecies are clear that Jesus will return as King of kings and Lord of lords, imposing a unified worldwide political and religious system.

Except, of course, that man's vision of globalisation will lead to enslavement to a cruel world-ruling religious and political dictatorship with its instruments of oppression. All opposition mercilessly eliminated. Mil-

lions hounded to death for daring to resist.

Missing Factor: when?

Such factors are in plain view in Scripture—and indeed are highlighted by most who write about prophecy. Often with a barely-suppressed sense of glee!

The missing factor, however, and the factor that has caused most confusion among the pundits is: *when?*

It's a question that intrigued even Jesus' most intimate disciples. And a question Bible students to this day ask and ask again. Jesus' answer was simple: *that's not your business*. Only the Father knows when the time will be ripe to call a halt to mankind's madness.

There are indications in the Scriptures, but not a firm date in sight. All are speculative, mere guesses.

Prophetic events engulf our shores in waves. Generation after generation gears up for the return of the Saviour—only to die without experiencing that momentous event. Another wave now laps the shore. Is this 'it'? Is this 'the end'?

Be Vigilant

Jesus *will* return—in the Father's perfect timing (Mark 13:32). The date *you* anticipate may or may not be the one—it's a guess, no matter how intricate your time charts!

Jesus outlined various signs, events to come in the last days. Times more distressing than previous tidal surges of destruction encountered throughout our history. Thankfully, the Father will intervene to shorten them! What Jesus said was '*...Be vigi-*

Prophetic Caution

lant' (Matthew 25:13). Don't fall asleep, he told the disciples—and us (Mark 13:33). The end will come *unexpectedly*. Writes the apostle Paul: '*...Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober. For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation*' (I Thessalonians 5: 6-8).

Be vigilant Be prepared. Pray. Stay spiritually awake. Hold fast to the true faith. Don't let your love grow cold.. Serve. Be patient. Ω

Law of Life...cont'd from p.7

resurrected 'saints' reign alongside the Messiah. And the people, too, will be changed. Hear Jeremiah: '*See. The days are coming, says the LORD, when I will make a new covenant with the House of Israel and the House of Judah; not like the covenant I made with their fathers in the day that 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*' (ch 30:31-32).

God 'married' Israel but, because of their infidelity, 'divorced' them. But He will re-marry! The first marriage covenant (Exodus 19-23) clearly demonstrated that man's - and not just Israel's - innate hostility to his Creator hindered sustained submission to the terms of the covenant, and cut them off from its blessings.

In the 'new covenant': '*I will put My Law in their inward parts and upon their hearts will I write it*' (v.33). The *Law of Life* - just as with true Christians today and as with all God's faithful throughout the ages - will then be imprinted on the minds of all Israel and of all mankind. Ω

Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms

Earthquakes and Other Shaky Things

by Steven Kieler

Now, we cannot positively say, of any individual circumstance or calamity, that God caused it but we can say that if He did not cause it, He certainly allowed it. Could it be, that if we had not forgotten God and petitioned Him with prayer and fasting, that He would have intervened? Must we not then share some of the responsibility and maybe even blame. One of my favorite quotes is from Russian dissident Alexander Solzhenitsyn:

"It has become embarrassing to appeal to eternal concepts, embarrassing to state that evil makes it's home in the individual human heart before it enters a political [or religious] system... Men have forgotten God; that's why all this has happened."

We read those words, or similar advisories from Scripture, and may say or think: "Look at the problems in high places; the leadership is corrupt" (I speak of the world and the church). And it may be so; but I have learned to take the image test with my imaginary pocket mirror and I see that the leadership reflects me and everyone in society. That is precisely what Solzhenitsyn said. More importantly, we may ask, could I have prevented it? After all, *"...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much"* (James 5:16). Interestingly, the first part of that verse says: *"Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed...."* And Strong's defines 'fault' as a side slip; sure sounds like an earthquake to me. Although it is open to debate, I consider the healing, mentioned in James chapter 5, to be more than just physical. I see it as making whole the entire person and, I believe, ultimately the whole nation or church.

How does an earthquake begin? A little pressure here, a little shifting, a

weak point and suddenly the entire earth moves violently across the fault line.

How do you stop an earthquake? I suppose it is nearly impossible with men but *"...with God all things are possible."* (Matthew 19:26, Mark 10:27) Then again, perhaps God was not entreated at the first tremor by the watchman and, it seems to me the pawns in a chess game are usually the first line of defence; the "grunts" in battle are first to defend, to be aware of enemy movement and raise the alarm, unless they are asleep at their post - a court martial offence. Wouldn't you think that, if the situation were very dangerous, those in the trenches would cry out to God to deliver us, to save us? Haven't we been given that warning? Check out these verses:

"Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: 9: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, ..." (1 Peter 5:8-9)

"Take ye heed, watch and pray: for ye know not when the time is." (Mark 13:33)

"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit [behave] you like men, be strong." (1 Corinthians 16:13). *"But the end of all things is at hand: be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer"* (1 Peter 4:7).

Now that we have addressed the "rank and file", what about the leadership? Should not all the responsibility apply doubly at that level? It seems evident there is a major breakdown there.

Is the church to follow the trends of the world? That way is to vindicate, justify and excuse ourselves, often using "trial by media" (the web, TV, etc); who can get the best spin or press, who can most loudly and extensively proclaim their innocence or righteousness, or who can amass a following or a list of names. *"But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and*

being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:13) What can be done once the earth begins to tremble under our feet? The human response is to muster all resources and power against the threat --but shaking and shouting only adds more tremors and fuel to an already unstable situation. The following poem and comment give a better approach:

Keep About Your Work

by Dr. H.M.S. Richards

The Lord has given to every man his work. It is his business to do it and the devil's business to hinder him if he can. So surely as God has given you a work to do, Satan will try to hinder you. He may present other things more promising, He may allure you by worldly prospects, He may assault you with slander, torment you with false accusations, set you to work defending your character, employ pious persons to lie about you, editors to assail you, and excellent men to slander you. You may have Pilate and Herod, Annas and Caiaphas all combined against you, and Judas standing by ready to sell you for thirty pieces of silver; and you may wonder why all those things come upon you. Can you not see that the whole thing is brought about through the craft of the devil to draw you off from your work and hinder your obedience to God?

Keep about your work!

Keep about your work, that God has given you.

*Do not flinch because the lion roars;
Do not stop to stone the devil's dogs;
Do not fool away your time
chasing the devil's rabbits.*

Keep about your work!

Let liars lie,

Let corporations resolve,

Let the devil do his worst;

*But see to it that nothing hinders you
from fulfilling the work that God has
given you.*

Keep about your work!

*He has not commanded you to get
rich.*

*He has never bidden you to defend
your character.*

He has not set you at work cont'd p.8

Sport academies abound. Tennis, football, athletics, swimming - all have their special training schools. So, too, does God!

Top-notch sportsmen and sports-women don't reach the pinnacle of their chosen sport by mere chance. Take football, for example. Teenagers - sometimes younger - are headhunted by scouts from the big clubs. Maybe a score are in any one year selected for training in the Club's academy. There's intensive training. Physical and mental health are assessed, bodies strengthened, minds oriented to success on the field. Skills are honed by expert professional trainers. There's supervision - and further selection. Indeed it's possible only one trainee may graduate to a team place. The outcome is his exciting rise to prominence and acclaim as a 'star'.

Selection

It's commonly assumed that becoming a Christian is virtually random. Tom 'gets religion' after attending a revival meeting with sister Jane. Derek, however, seems impervious to all matters spiritual and shies away from anything 'biblical'. Then there's the great mass evangelistic campaign during which, night after night, thousands 'become Christian'. Roughly, out of earth's six billion souls some one in six are Roman Catholic and a similar number sign up to one or other of the Protestant faiths. Two billion Christians. For some their faith is one of total dedication. Perhaps the majority, however, don't allow their beliefs to interfere with the daily grind.

It may come as a surprise that God has *His* own Academy - but it's not based on a campus. It is in Anytown, Anystate. The oldest in the world, it has been functioning for some six thousand years. And every true Christian is enrolled.

Perhaps surprisingly, God isn't at this time in the business of saving the

world. For God's undergraduates, too, undergo a selection process.

The apostle Peter informs us about Jesus Christ: "... *there is salvation through no-one else; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12). Ultimately, our eternal life beyond the grave is to be united with the Father of Jesus. Not many earthlings know that! Said Jesus himself: "*I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no-one comes to the Father but through me*" (John 14:6).

But it's the Father Himself who makes the initial selection: "*No-one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him*", said Jesus (John 6:44). That's personal - and it could be *you*..

From before the beginning of human life, the Creator knew there was trouble ahead with His creation. Although Adam was 'perfect' yet he was able to choose - for God didn't create zombies. Because of Adam's choice, sin entered the world and a dark night settled over his progeny. Blinded to the true path by their choices and abetted by Satan, they sank into apostasy and rejected God. Demonic forces encouraged a smorgasbord of false religions which further blinded mankind to the divine plan. The prophet Isaiah wrote of "*the veil which is upon all peoples and the shroud that covers all nations*" (ch 25:7). It's an obscuring veil that

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GOD'S ACADEMY

won't be lifted until Jesus' return to Earth.

The New Testament writer Paul enlightens us further: "*You too were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you conducted yourselves in line with the ways of this world system, controlled by the prince of the aerial powers - the spirit of the one now working in the sons of disobedience*" (Ephesians 2:1-2). And adds, "*If our gospel has been obscured it has been obscured in the case of those perishing, in whom the god of this world has blinded their unbelieving minds to prevent the illumination of the gospel of the glorious Christ, who is the likeness of God, from penetrating*" (II Corinthians 4:4).

By his choices and by his intellectual vanity and arrogance, man excluded himself from the divine training programme. He 'de-selected' himself. But God breaks into this universal mental darkness to choose 'students' for His Academy.

Who Is Selected?

As the divine Sovereign He picks and chooses (Romans 9:10-18)! Paul, again, tells us more about who God chooses. To the Corinthian brethren he writes: "*Simply consider your own call [selection] brothers; not many of you were wise, humanly speaking, nor many mighty, nor many of nobility; but God has chosen the world's unschooled to shame the learned; and God has chosen the weak of the world to shame the strong.. God also has chosen the world's lowborn and contemptibles and nobodies in order to annihilate what amounts to something, so that all humanity may be boastless in the presence of God*" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).

From out of all nations (v.24: 'Jews and Greeks'), then, God enrolls individuals with whom He **cont'd p.8**

The Law of Life

A living stream connects all eras of human existence. There's a hidden continuity that makes history make sense

The course of history seems haphazard. Yet from a divine perspective man exists in five distinct - and connected - eras. We pass from *innocence* to *reason* to *Law* to *Christian liberty* - and, yet future, the earthly *reign of the Kingdom of God*. Underlying all is the same fundamental 'law of life'.

The Earliest Age

Human life began as a direct divine creation by the ever-living God. Mankind in all his complexity was created fully prepared and capable of controlling his environment. It was a time of innocence. The man and his wife were in perfect harmony with the Creator God, the Word - who had a close personal relationship with them. Along with the rest of creation '*God saw that all He had made was excellent indeed*'. Everything was in perfect harmony and environmentally balanced. Mankind, the pinnacle - and the purpose - of creation was 'perfect' and lived in harmony with the divine will.

Implicit in the divine instruction was the promise of unending life for our first parents. They had unfettered access to 'the Tree of Life'. Only by deliberate rejection - 'perfection' included freedom to choose - of God's revealed *Law of Life* would they taste death. There's no record of how long this 'innocence' lasted - some say a few hours, more likely a period of years - seven, says some Jewish tradition. But innocence came to an end.

Paradise Lost

By choosing to reject the *Law of Life* Adam and Eve, goaded by Satan, lost their paradise and condemned themselves to a life of unnecessary toil -

over and beyond what God had assigned to them. Because they chose to discard divine guidance in favour of human reason God predicted the consequences: earning a living would be unnecessarily difficult; children, despite the joy they bring, would cause sorrow in their rearing; Satan would continually try to make them stumble; no longer did they have direct access to the LORD - only through blood sacrifice. They had entered the era of *Reason*. Almost all mankind is there, still.

God, while retaining His Sovereign right to oversee His creation, left mankind to the consequence of his choices, while leaving on open door to Himself. As time rolled on the *Law of Life* was increasingly neglected. A few '*walked with God*', but after a mere sixteen centuries there was but one family - that of the patriarch Noah. Only Noah and his wife, sons and their wives walked in the divine pathway. But the pattern repeated. Over the next thousand years God had to intervene repeatedly to prevent human depravity leading to self-destruction - at Babel and at Sodom, the Amorites, the Egyptians, the Canaanites. And still does on occasion.

Neglect of the *Law of Life* inevitably leads to destruction. - personally, nationally, globally. It's a lesson the modern world has yet to learn, for most of humanity still lives in that Age of Reason. Since Adam's choice of this way, the human race has a mind-set hostile to God. We can devise means to avoid the effects of gravity (*eg* the aeroplane) - but the *Law of Life* is a solid wall that cannot be breached without serious long and short-term damage. But it doesn't have to be that way.

A Beacon of Hope

In His mercy and compassion the Creator has throughout history provided for us a beacon of hope. Most

of the race sank more deeply into the mire. But the light of divine truth was passed from generation to generation by men and women who resisted the pressures of society. They '*called on the name of the LORD*'. Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Gideon, David, the Prophets, numerous nameless men and women - all carried the torch of the true faith in their generation.

It's a matter of record that Abraham by faith '*...minded My voice, kept My charge, My orders, My rules and My laws*' (Genesis 26:5). Through the godly line of Abraham's firstborn, Isaac, God promised to raise up a model nation. Virtually overwhelmed by the heathen culture of their slave masters, his descendants - the children of Jacob-Israel - were spectacularly rescued (around 1500BC) in 'the exodus' from Egypt under the guidance of Moses.

The rest of the world continued their downward trek while Israel - the 'Twelve Tribes' - embraced a national Constitution which had the same *Law of Life* at its heart. Moses told the people: '*What great nation is there that possesses such righteous statutes and ordinances as this whole Law that I am setting before you?*' (Deuteronomy 4:8). Never since has any legal system surpassed it. As a model of good governance it ought, to be written into every national Constitution!

Fatal Flaw

Israel gladly embraced it. In a spectacular and emotional acceptance of the Covenant they called out: '*All that the LORD says we will do*'. Fine words - but God knew their hearts: '*O that there were such a heart in them*' He said to Moses, '*that they would fear [reverence] Me and keep all My commandments always that it might be well with them and their children for ever*' (Deuteronomy 5:29). Their adherence to the covenant - and its *Law of Life* - waxed and waned for a millennium. They

had barely left Egypt when they slipped back into idolatry. It was a pattern to be repeated time and again. On the heels of idolatry came conflict - invasion by surrounding hostile nations. They then cried out to God for deliverance, and He heard.

But that wasn't God's fault. There was nothing wrong - and everything right - with His Law and Covenant. But: '*...finding fault with them [ie the people]*' (Hebrews 8:8). A covenant has two sides : 'I do this and you do that'. The people dropped the ball and brought on themselves invasion and ultimately exile.

Israel had become - and continues to be - indistinguishable from the surrounding nations who were '*without God*'. Only the Tribe of Judah retains its Israelite identity.

So, *innocence* died. Mankind in general set about devising its own way of life derived from human *reason* contrary to the divine *Law of Life*. God's model nation, Israel, incorporated that *Law* into its national Constitution but all too often set it aside with dire consequences. The stage was set for a new era.

Christian Liberty

The divine plan moved on, unchanged. Satan persuaded Eve - and Adam followed - that to ignore God's guidance would be without consequence: '*you shall not surely die*', he told her. Disobey, but you can still live for ever. It's the ultimate lie that even now tangles mankind in its web. But God promised a champion who would '*bruise Satan's head*'. It's a blood-red thread that permeates all of history.

At the appropriate historical moment God stepped into our world in the person of Jesus. He lived as a man but without sin, being sacrificed for our sin at the hand of the religious and secular authorities.

The disciples were commissioned by

Jesus to take his message to all the world - a task renewed generation by generation. But it is a tough message and few are ready to fully embrace it. Those who do and who remain faithful until death will be associated with Jesus in the next phase of his plan.

In the age of *Law*, in the nation of Israel, the *Law of Life* was imposed as a legal system with just penalties administered with mercy by the Judiciary. Given human nature the 'Justice Department' of Israel's Government failed. As with all the faithful since Creation the *Law of Life* would now be imprinted in the human heart. Submission to it is not imposed by authority - secular or religious. On our willing change of spiritual direction and our baptism God implants His mind in us - the '*gift of the Holy Spirit*'. The Spirit prompts and energizes us - with our active co-operation - to submit to the divine will - to live by the same *Law of Life*.

Jesus, in the *Sermon on the Mount* (eg Matthew 5-7), made it clear that God's Law was not abolished but now pierces even to the human thoughts - no longer mere external obedience induced by penalties. As long as that Spirit dwells in us we are assured of eternal life. The degree to which we each voluntarily submit to the terms of the *Law of Life* determines our role in the Kingdom of God.

The Law of Life

Since mankind's beginning, then, this *Law of Life* has flowed through every age - a cleansing stream that can refresh every nation, every individual that drinks of it. God's Law - His instruction, His Manual for the conduct of life - is as vital to human well-being today as it has been since man first walked the Earth. Failure to heed it, failure to write it into national law, failure to voluntarily submit to its provisions will exclude us from God's richest temporal material and spiritual blessings.

At the heart of this Law lie the much maligned 'Ten Commandments'. All of its provisions may be traced scattered throughout the Bible - *before* Moses was handed them by God engraved in stone as the foundation document of Israel's Constitution. As wrote the apostle Paul: '*the law is holy, just and good...[and] spiritual*'

The story, however, doesn't end there. The God who instructed Adam, who taught and guided Abraham, who talked face-to-face with Moses, who became man to die for our sin and continues to walk in the midst of his church - this same will return to establish this Law over all mankind.

And yes - that same *Law of Life* will continue to be applied. How could it not when Jesus himself gave it such an accolade!

A New Beginning: God Reigns

A period of 'shock and awe' is predicted for modern Israel - both Houses. The survivors, however, will have a new beginning initially in what is today known as 'Palestine' - but a territory enlarged to extend from the Nile to the Euphrates.

The Prophets give further insight. Ezekiel, for example. He passes on God's message that the LORD will one day re-unite both Houses of Israel - separated since the time of Solomon's successor, Rehoboam: '*Observe. I am taking the children of Israel from among the nations whither they are gone, and will gather them from every quarter and bring them into their own land. One king shall be king over them all. They shall no longer be two nations, and no longer divided into two kingdoms. Neither shall they defile themselves with their idols, their foul practices and all their other transgressions; for I will save them from all their sinful apostasies*' (ch 37:21-23). But *change* is vital. There will, at long last, be perfect incorruptible Government, as the

cont'd p3

Academy ...cont'd from p.5

can work to shape into the divine image.

Academy of Life

As with any sports academy, not everyone graduates' to God's first team. Many are invited to enroll - but turn down the invitation. And of those selected for the course not all remain faithful - 'called, picked and loyal' (Revelation 17:14). It can be tough! The apostles said: "We must enter the Kingdom of God by way of many afflictions" (Acts 14:22). and (Paul) "If we have hope in Christ for this life only then of all people we [Christians] are most to be pitied" (I Corinthians 15:19). For God expects more from those whom He is actively shaping for eternity.

Daily, those in God's Academy are being shaped by the master potter: "We are the clay; you are our Potter; we are all the work of your hands" (Isaiah 64:8). All true Christians - as Sons and Daughters of the almighty God - are subject to His caring discipline:

And to the Roman disciples: "I reason that this temporal suffering is of no account in view of the glory that is to be revealed in us" (Romans 8:18).

Whatever life throws at us - and Christians are no less subject than others to life's trials and difficulties - is filtered through God's loving concern for His children. Citing the failings of ancient Israel, Paul told the Corinthians:

You see, God needs you to reveal your heart! As He told ancient Israel: Every individual chosen by God to be part of His training for eternity may be in for a rough ride. But on 'graduation' each will be rewarded with a place on God's First Team.

First Team

Some may be shocked when that 'little old lady from down the street' bursts from her grave, resurrected at Christ's return to 'shine as the brightness of the firmament'. She may be one of those who will become 'as the stars for ever and ever' (Daniel 12:1-3). She will be among those who are 'royalty and priests for our God and shall reign over the earth' (Revelation 5:10) alongside Jesus Christ in his millennial reign.

Lifted from obscurity - as men see it, but not in the eyes of God - she and all those who have faithfully persevered through the years in God's Academy will be resurrected to God's First Team. All will be 'stars'. All will receive a winner's crown:

And the Rest?

And the rest of mankind? Those *not* now chosen will, resurrected to a physical life, have the veil and the blindness and the hardness of heart removed. If you are not now enrolled, that little old lady may one day be *your* teacher. **Ω**

[see the Mini-Study on p.9]

In Charge?...cont'd from p.2

The angel reveals that his mission was hindered by a powerful spirit—the Prince of Persia'. The angel's limited powers were strengthened by the archangel, Michael, who came to his aid.

Wrote the apostle Paul: '...For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places' (Ephesians 6: 12).

God does indeed 'work in mysterious ways'. There is a spirit world. An unseen world controlled by the Creator God. He has a purpose for the human race—a purpose determined before man's beginning, and no hu-

Earthquakes ...cont'd from p.4

to contradict falsehoods about yourself, which Satan & his servants may start to peddle.

If you do those things, you will do nothing else.

You will be at work for yourself & not the Lord.

Let your aim be as steady as a star.

Keep about your work!

You may be assaulted, wronged, insulted, slandered, wounded, and rejected;

You may be abused by foes, forsaken by friends, and despised and rejected of men.

But see to it with steadfast determination, with unfaltering zeal,

That you pursue the great purpose of your life and object of your being until at last you can say:

"I have finished the work which you gave me to do!"

Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Matthew 11:28

The Plan

While we ALL wait patiently on God to right all wrongs we can sigh and cry (Ezekiel 9:4) and fast and pray and, as we think on the words of Solzhenitsyn, let's not forget the power of our God.

The worst thing you can do is run ahead of the lead of the Holy Spirit. Wait on it. Sound like a good plan to you? **Ω**

man, no contrary spirit, can frustrate that purpose—a purpose born out of His love for us: '...I am sure that nothing can separate us from God's love—not life or death, not angels or spirits, not the present or the future, and not powers above or powers below. Nothing in all creation can separate us from God's love for us in Christ Jesus our Lord! (Romans 8:38-39 CEV).

We—you, me, our world—are in the safest of hands. **Ω**

MiniStudy

What happens to those who die 'unsaved'?

The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were completed (Revelation 20:5)

Christianity claims that only through a relationship with Jesus Christ can anyone have eternal life. Excluded, therefore, would be those who lived before Jesus suffered, died and resurrected; those through the centuries since - the majority - who never came in contact with Christianity; and the couple of billion now living who haven't so much as heard of him. Yet we read that God *'is not willing that any should perish'*. In fact the eternal welfare of all these billions throughout the ages is a key part of the divine plan. All mankind of all ages will have, by the end, opportunity to *'choose life'*

- God's loving concern is for all mankind. We are created with purpose. At the heart of the divine plan is His desire to increase His Family - to transform men and women into the divine image.
- we are created with the seeds of divine character - not least being our *freedom to choose*. A devastating effect is that in general man has rejected the 'instruction manual' by which we are designed to optimally function. The consequence is poverty, squalor, disease, personal and intra-national violence, confusion in religion and in education, economics, politics. And the inevitable rejection of the true Creator God
- locked into a culture of atheism or religion (eg Hinduism, Islam, voodoo) whole nations have excluded themselves from the divine plan. 'Christianity' is not exempt, for it has wandered far from the pathway of its Founder. Overseen by Satan, *'the god of this world'*, the world's systems have served to blind mankind to the way of the Creator (Isaiah 25:7, II Corinthians 4:4)
- scattered within the nations are individuals to whom God reveals Himself. They may be genetically disposed to listen to His invitation. They may simply be battered by life. They will not, usually, be the 'strong or noble or wise': *'...but God has chosen the world's unschooled to shame the learned, and the weak to shame the strong. God has also chosen the world's low-born and contemptibles and nobodies...'* (I Corinthians 1:26-29)
- God prepares these folk - those who respond to the invite - for leadership in His Kingdom . (Just as personnel are carefully selected for management of a multi-national.) He first draws them to Jesus Christ - and then as the Master Potter He shapes them to spiritual maturity to reign with Jesus
- but God hasn't forgotten the vast majority of mankind - the 'unsaved'. The time is coming when the prime mover of man's troubled existence - Satan - will be removed from his position of influence. For the ensuing one thousand years (the 'Millennium') the survivors of the coming holocaust and their descendants will learn to follow that Instruction Manual (Micah 4:1-7)
- but that still leaves those unsaved billions from the past. Again - not forgotten. In the divine plan they will all - after the Millennium - be returned to physical life by a resurrection from the dead. Jesus told the Jews who accosted him: *'...the time comes when all who are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come out; those who have done good to the resurrection of life [ie, at Jesus' second coming] and those who have practiced evil for the resurrection of judgment'* [ie, after the Millennium]. At that time they will be judged by the same standards that God is applying to those He calls now . They will be able to exercise choice without the malign influences of Satan and *this world* **Ω**

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