

new **Horizons**

Vol 17 No 5

September/October 2013

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

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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

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

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new Horizons

Issue No 101

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Is Jesus Christ a myth? Is He a man who became God? Here's evidence that He truly is God

After the death of the twelve apostles and Paul, controversy raged for centuries as to the real nature of Jesus and his relationship with the Father and the holy Spirit. It came to a head in the so-called 'Arian Controversy'. An exasperated Emperor Constantine finally knocked Episcopal heads together at the Council of Nicea (321AD). The outcome - which didn't satisfy everyone—was the enshrinement in Christian theology of the doctrine of 'the Trinity'. It was a compromise, and to this day it is acknowledged that there is no Scriptural basis for the doctrine. [See our article *Understanding the Trinity*]

One God

Although largely ignored today, the matter of the 'pre-existence' of Jesus prior to his birth in Bethlehem was well established among theologians of the nineteenth century. [Our article, *One Mediator* provides some evidence from Scripture] For most contemporary Christians, however, this concept doesn't appear above the horizon! But many, notably the Jehovah's Witness movement, maintain a modified Arian understanding. Others propose that Jesus was the Archangel Michael.

The Bible is quite clear that 'God is one', confirmed by Jesus in Mark 12:29; '*...the Lord our God is one Lord*'. Indeed Monotheism is the bedrock of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, and any suggestion otherwise is considered as polytheism. (Hence the 'mystery' of the 'Triune God'.)

Divine Names

God is known in the Scriptures by a variety of names, mainly descriptive of a functional aspect of His character—eg God Healer. He is introduced to us in His role of Creator in Genesis 1:1: '*...In the beginning God [Heb elohim] created the heavens and the earth*'.

In His relationship with mankind he is JHVH—Jehovah, popularly (Genesis 2:7). As Jehovah He continues to oversee His dealings with mankind, often appearing and speaking to us. Yet there is an anomaly in that we are informed that '*... No one has seen God at any time*' (John 1:18). Nor, says Jesus '*...have you heard His voice at*

with God.

God With Us

It's a truth stated in Hebrews, the author applying the Psalm (45:7) to Jesus: '*...to the Son [God] says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever"*' (v.8). Foretelling the birth of our Saviour the 'angel of the Lord' tells Mary she: '*...shall bear a son, and you shall call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins. Now all this happened so that might be fulfilled that which was spoken of the LORD by the prophet, saying, "Behold, the virgin shall conceive in her womb, and will bear a son. And they will call His name Emmanuel," which being interpreted is, God with us*' (Matthew 1:21-23).

Jesus Is God!

any time nor seen His shape' (ch 5:37). Something of a conundrum!

The Creator

To add to the mix, in the New Testament we are taught that *Jesus* was the Creator! Hear Paul, to the Colossian Christians: '*...For all things were created in Him, the things in the heavens, and the things on the earth, the visible and the invisible, whether thrones or dominions or principalities or powers, all things were created through Him and for Him*' (ch 1:16).

Witnesses to this are the apostle John (ch 1:3) and Paul in Hebrews 1:2. So we are faced with the assertion that *God* created all things—and so, too, did *Jesus*, equating him

Confronted by the resurrected Jesus, one of the apostles, Thomas, '*... answered and said to Him, My Lord and my God! Jesus said to him, Thomas, because you have seen Me you have believed. Blessed are they who have not seen and have believed*' (John 20:28).

A 'mystery' confirmed by Paul to Timothy (I Timothy 3:16).

Arius (b.256 AD) was an early fourth century African bishop. His claim to infamy was his assertion that Jesus was a created being, though created before all else.

He calls this '*...the mystery of the faith*'! And as Moses says: '*...The secret things belong to Jehovah our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our sons forever, so that we may do all the words of this Law*'.

Unity of God

The 'unity' of God, then, has to be reconsidered, 'monotheism' redefined, in the light of the divine reve-

lation in the Scriptures. In no way is this polytheism in the accepted sense. For the Godhead (Romans 1:20) is in every respect one—united in thought and purpose.

Jesus Our Saviour

In praying to his Father near the end of his earthly life Jesus acknowledges his life with the Father before being sent on his mission on Earth: ‘...Father, glorify Me with Yourself with the glory which I had with You before the world was’ (John 17:5). He is ‘...the image of the invisible God, the First-born of all creation’ (Colossians 1:15), and ‘...in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily’ (ch2:9).

Thus, only because he shared the Godhead is he able to say ‘...You [Father] have given Him authority over all flesh so that He should give eternal life to all You have given Him’ (John 17:2).

Our first parents began life in perfect communion with God. In process of time, and influenced by Satan, Adam willfully chose to exercise his God-given freedom of choice contrary to the way of life revealed to him.

Instead of experiencing life in a perfect body while, over time, he developed Godly character, he chose death, facing almost a millennium of challenge in mortal flesh and bequeathing death to all his progeny—us. [Compare the experience of the perfect man, Jesus: ‘...though being a Son, yet He learned obedience by the things which He suffered [experienced]’ (Hebrews 5:8)]

It was a terrible choice—so shocking, so sinful, that nothing but the death of a divine being could restore communion. Until that event man could approach God only through symbolic sacrifice: ‘...without shedding of blood is no remission’ (Hebrews 9:22). Jesus, Jehovah, did that for us.

Humility

One partner of the Godhead—they are always in harmony (John 10:30)—voluntarily chose that role: ‘...[Jesus] being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men. And being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross’ (Philippians 2:6-8). In Hebrews it is recorded ‘...Since, then, the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He also Himself likewise partook of the same’ (ch 2:14). [Request the companion article **Is Jesus God?**]

Only God, surely, can ‘...give eternal life to all You have given Him’! It is through the sacrifice of Jesus we are saved: ‘...His dear Son; in whom we have redemption through His blood, the remission of sins’. Recalls Peter: ‘...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, silver or gold, from your vain manner of life handed down from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot’ (I Peter 1:18-19).

Family of God

In the beginning of God’s revelation we find that ‘God’ is represented as a plurality: ‘...Let Us make man in **Our** image, after **Our** likeness’ (Genesis 1:26). (Note: God alone has immortality—not angels, not humanity—’Us’ excludes angels.) Centuries later God—Jehovah—visits earth to inhibit mankind’s attempt at unrestrained destructive development: ‘...Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language’ (Genesis 11:7).

Recall that we are introduced to God as *elohim*—a Hebrew word that appears throughout the Scriptures some

Jesus Not an Angel

In some circles Jesus is considered to be an angel, sometimes presented as the archangel Michael. The Bible, however, informs us: ‘...[God the Father] has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds, who being the shining splendor of His glory, and the express image of His essence, and upholding all things by the word of His power, through Himself cleansing of our sins, He sat down on the right of the Majesty on high, being made so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they. For to which of the angels did He say at any time, “You are My Son, this day I have begotten You?” And again, “I will be to Him a Father, and He shall be to Me a Son?” And again, when He brings in the First-born into the world, He says, “And let all the angels of God worship Him.” (Hebrews 1:2-6).

three thousand times in the plural. It’s one of those words that is singular yet can include multiple elements. ‘Committee’ is an example. Or ‘family’.

This latter, is appropriate as we are assured throughout the Scriptures that God is indeed a Family. God is Father. Jesus is the firstborn Son (Colossians 1:15), Christians are sons and daughters (II Corinthians 6:18), we are ‘children of God’ and ‘heirs’ (Romans 8:16-17, James 2:5), and of the ‘household of God’ (Ephesians 2:19).

Upon repentance and baptism we are begotten by God’s spirit, to be born as spirit entities at the resurrection upon the return of Messiah. All familial terms. God is spirit, holy spirit (John 4:24), and Christians by virtue of God’s indwelling spirit become part of that Family.

The idea, then, that God is a unitary Being and that Jesus was at some time created has, in the cont’d p.8

unsigned articles are by the Editor

An intensely spiritual observance?
A secular holiday? A
pagan festival? Here's some light
on the celebration of the
birth of Jesus

"becoming
flesh" of the
Creator God go
unnoticed, un-
celebrated? Of course not!

Feast of the Nativity

Christmas-time has etched itself into our calendar. For some it's an intensely religious experience. To others a welcome mid-winter break. And an opportunity, for some, for a good knees-up! Overall, it has become an almost universal festival observed even by non-Christians.

Most 20th century Western Christians, however, realize that the trappings of Christmas are transferred from ancient pre-Christian worship. It's common knowledge in our sceptical age. Whether it's the tree, or "the holly and the ivy" or the trinkets inside the pudding, or the over-indulgence in food and alcohol, or even the cheery "Merry Christmas" - all are in direct descent from pre-Christian practice.

How on earth could such elements have been grafted onto the pure religion of Jesus Christ? Those who oppose the celebration of Christmas point to the medieval compromises of the Church: bring the heathen into the church by Christianizing their customs. Make it easy for them to convert. And multitudes did.

It's certainly an important reason. But is it sufficient to account for the

universal distortion of this much celebrated of festivals? Could there be some hidden grain of truth around which gathered the mythical pagan practices?

It's a recognized historical fact, confirmed by all treatises on the matter, that the early Christians did not have Christmas celebrations in late December. It entered the calendar only around the 5th century. But does this mean that there was no recognition of this momentous event? Could the

Nativity Festival

In fact, the time of the birth of Jesus Christ was a festival observed, in anticipation, possibly from the beginning of human existence!

Notice what the noted author John Brady had to say back in 1815. Having explained that the Roman calendar calculations were seriously adrift in the time of Christ, he writes:

Hence arose the inaccuracy, which has been so often and so pathetically lamented, in keeping the day of our Lord's Nativity; which it is now settled, by arguments incontrovertible, did not take place on the 25th of December, but at the time the Jews kept their Feast of Tabernacles

[*Clavis Calendria*, v.2, pp. 340-341]

The scholarly Dr Bullinger confirms this: "Without the shadow of a doubt...[the Saviour's] birth took place on the 15th Ethanim [or Tishri - the first day of the *Festival of Tabernacles*]" (*Companion Bible*, Appdx. 179).

You will find an exposition of this ancient Festival in Leviticus 23. It

was one of the three variously-named annual harvest festivals celebrated throughout the ancient world, and very likely instituted by the Creator in the time of Adam. They assumed various forms as the centuries rolled by.

Foretold In The Stars

The birth of a future Saviour was announced to man even before he was ejected from the Garden of Eden because of his sin! Notice Genesis 3:15-16: "I [God] will put enmity between you [Satan] and the woman; also between your offspring and her offspring; he will bruise your head and you will bruise his heel". A hu-

man descendant of Eve ("born of a woman") would be injured by Satan. But ultimately would be the Victor.

That offspring was Jesus, the longed-for Messiah, the "desire of all nations". He was temporarily "bruised" in his death. But he rose triumphantly from the grave to conquer and (yet future) destroy the Devil! The birth of a Saviour was in the mind and plan of God before even the foundation of the world!

Indeed the very configuration of the planets was arranged with this in mind. During the week of re-creation, God said "Let there be lights in the firmament of the heavens to separate the day from the night; and let them be for signs and for seasons and for days and years" (Genesis 1:14).

Let's look more closely at that statement. The "... seasons [*Heb moed*]" is the very word used to describe the festivals listed in Leviticus 23, including, for example, the *Festival of Tabernacles*. Written into the very fabric of the heavens is the magnificent plan of God for a Deliverer to come to mankind!

Truly "The heavens declare the glory of God"! As the psalmist continues: "Day after day pours forth speech, and night after night declares knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Yet their line [voice - *LXX*] goes out through all the earth, their words to the ends of the world" (Psalm 19:1-4).

We are here told that although the heavens are silent - yet they carry an eloquent message to discerning man. Included in that message of the stars, and transcribed into the annual round of agricultural festivals, is God's plan

for a Saviour of mankind! It is God's unwritten *torah* [instruction] (vv. 7-9).

An Unlikely Story

But as John Brady states, and as confirmed by numerous others, December 25 is perhaps the most unlikely time for the birth of Jesus!

Given the Palestinian climate which dictated agricultural practice, no sheep are likely to have been out on the hills at that inclement time of year. Nor would the authorities impose a census in mid-winter. Nor was a young full-term woman likely to tackle a ninety-mile journey through wild hill country.

That very time of year, however, did have great significance for the majority society of that era. Again, the heavens had a part! For towards the end of December the sun reached its lowest point, and visibly began once again to climb daily higher in the sky. The cycle of nature was being renewed! A time for celebration indeed.

And what better time for the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2) to first become flesh - but as a fertilized ovum in the womb of His mother Mary!

It is also significant that nine months later as the Prince of Peace (Isaiah 9:6), Jesus visibly entered our world - as a baby - in the very Festival, the Festival of Tabernacles, which portrays the future reign of the Messiah over a world at total peace!

God With Us

Follow this. Since Jesus was born at the Feast of Tabernacles - which was always in September/October - when would He have first become flesh? John tells us that "*The Word became flesh*" (John 1:14). Human gestation, the time from conception to birth - is about forty weeks. Jesus gave up his heavenly status as a part of the divine Family to become flesh - *'Immanuel*,

God with us' (Matthew 1:23). He took on human life as a male sperm cell, at that moment prior to conception becoming human flesh. Nine months later, at the beginning of the *Festival of Tabernacles* (late September) Jesus was born in Bethlehem, near Jerusalem.

[Interesting that JHVH—who became Jesus—appeared to Abraham as a perfectly normal human. He ate and drank with him, accompanied by angelic beings. (Genesis 18.)

John completed his sentence: "...*the Word became flesh* [at the latter part of December] ... *and dwelt* [*Gk* = tabernacled"] *among us*" (ch 1:14). Two separate events - conception, and birth.

Clearly, it would be impossible to be specific about the time of *conception*. Who could prove it! How could the specific day be pinned down for observance! For example, over the past ten years the conception of Jesus (working on the assumption of forty weeks gestation leading to the first day of Tabernacles) fell on the same day only twice. It varied from December 17 to January 11 on our present calendar.

And never once on December 25!

Observed Today!

But the birth of a child is obvious to all - and a time for celebration, a joyous time. Especially, the birth of the Son of God is certainly a time for the greatest rejoicing, in company with all the heavenly angels.

The pagan Saturnalia feast, now called Christmas, serves to befoul the beautiful plan of God, and to obscure the most momentous event in history - the Word of God becoming flesh (in His human conception) at that time of year. And nine months later, at the Festival of Tabernacles, his birth as the Saviour of mankind (Luke 2:8-14).

The *Church of God* has long observed this festival. Indeed it was observed annually by the apostolic church. Notes John Brady: "The first Christians...on the day of the *Feast of Tabernacles* ornamented their churches [this was long after the era of the apostles - there were no "churches" as such for many decades after their death!] with green boughs, as a memorial that Christ was actually born at that time" [*Clavis Calendaria*, v.2, p.341].

In fact, this is how ancient Israel observed this Festival some fifteen hundred years before the time of Jesus (Leviticus 23:40)! This body of research is today studiously avoided by most church leaders!

Modern Saturnalia

The apostle Peter may have had the Roman *Saturnalia* - the pagan feast at the same time as the modern Christmas - in mind when he wrote: "*Let the time that is past suffice for doing what the Gentiles like to do, living in licentiousness, passions, drunkenness, revels, carousing and lawless idolatry. They are surprised that you do not now join them in the same wild profligacy, and they abuse you*" (1 Peter 3:3-4).

Christians avoided those celebrations. But what an excellent portrait of modern Christmas celebrations! And of the abuse meted especially to Christians who refuse to "join in" the dissolute festivities!

Many dedicated Christians, of course, avoid the excesses of the Christmas season. They quietly celebrate it as the birthday of Jesus. How much more satisfying, more authentic, to note this vital historical moment in the way God prescribed, and at the time He appointed.

Peace On Earth

God has given the perfect time to honour the birth of His Son into our world - at the Festival which He long ago appointed for *cont'd p.8*

Despite the millions of ‘seventh day’ observing Christians, many still consider it an obsolete practice. What does the New Testament tell us?

Isn’t it curious that two people living next door to one another—even in the same house!—can hold radically different views on the same topic. How can that be?

Assume these two are Christians, presumably drawing their views from the same Bible. Why, for example, does Mr A observe Christmas while Mr B avoids it. Or one goes off religiously to church every Sunday while the other works his garden that day having worshipped the previous day. Or, in another home, one is a Christian and the other perhaps is of the Islamic faith.

Not only are we ‘children of our times’—reflecting the prevailing culture—but we, initially at least in childhood, assume the beliefs of our home environment: my parents are Methodist so I embrace Methodism. Yours are Anglican so you are Church of England.

As we encounter the wider world we absorb ideas new to us, fitting them around and into our own belief system. Sometimes we have the odd idea of our own!

And what a smorgasbord of beliefs and philosophies there are from which to select. It’s said that if you have two economists you have at least three opinions. It is no different in matters of religious belief—there are more theological positions, it seems, than there are Christians!

One Faith

It could be said that only in the Bible is there ‘one pure faith’, but given the diverse background of each Christian total unanimity of belief is not within reach, even after two thousand years of intense debate. A case can be made for some diversity, for there are indeed ‘...things hard to be understood’ (II Peter 3:16)—and not just in the writings of the apostle Paul.

The foundation teachings of the Word, however, are in plain sight. So why are they, too, so often misunderstood?

Those factors mentioned—upbringing, outside input, culture, personal analysis—shape our beliefs, so that what we read in the Bible is individually interpreted against the backdrop of these factors.

Take, for example, the almost universal belief (across all the major faiths) that imbedded in each of us is an ‘immortal soul’. That when we die we are immediately brought before the bar of God and judged, ‘rewarded’ - with Heaven or Hell or Purgatory. Or perhaps re-assigned to earth in another form, a different status. Where held, that belief—the im-

The Enigma of the Seventh Day

mortal soul—inevitably colours our approach to life. And our interpretation of Bible texts—as in Philippians 1:23: ‘...*For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ*’.

Here’s another common example. Raised as a Methodist or Anglican or Baptist—indeed almost any Christian denomination—you inevitably will focus your life around the weekly observance of Sunday. It’s not something that daily exercises your mind. You just, without question, go to church on Sunday, on the *assumption* that’s what Jesus has appointed.

Questions

But Sunday observance is *not* the backdrop of New Testament teaching. Underlying all of the New Testament is the unspoken age-old observance of the seventh-day Sabbath—Saturday. The LORD introduced it before ‘the Fall’ and His faithful have ever after observed it. Jesus observed it. His apostles observed it. The first Christians, for several centuries observed it. And it is widely observed today around the world.

Ordinary church-goers and theologians, however, question every aspect of the Sabbath.

Despite six thousand years of seventh-day observance ‘Sunday’ is the norm in Christianity Yet have you ever heard your pastor *prove* Sunday observance from the Bible? Ever heard him question which day of the week is the sev-

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enth? Or, ‘how can you be sure that Sunday is the original *first* day of the week’? Or, ‘when does Sunday begin’? Or, hear him prove from the Scriptures that Jesus rose from the dead on Sunday morning (he didn’t)? Has he clearly demonstrated *from Scripture* that Jesus changed the Sabbath to Sunday?

Such questions are demanded of the Sabbath!

New Testament Observance

The Gospels were mainly written a couple of decades after the resurrection of Jesus. Their testimony is that Sabbath was *still* the day before Sunday.

Here’s what Matthew says: ‘...*After the Sabbath, in the early dawn of the first day of the week, Mary of Magdala and the other Mary came to see the sepulcher*’ (Matthew 28:1).

Note that Jesus expected the brethren to be observing Sabbath when Jerusalem fell to the Romans some forty years after he returned to the Father (Matthew 24:20). Recall also that he calls the Sabbath ‘the Lord’s day’: ‘...*the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath*’ (Matthew 12:8), as did the apostle John towards the end of the first century (Revelation 1:10). [Though John may refer it to ‘the Day of the Lord’]

The Source

Many of those who heard the Gospel proclaimed were more open to the apostles’ claims. For example Paul’s hearers in Berea ‘...*Day after day they studied the Scriptures to see if these things*

were true’ (Acts 17:11). That’s the source of our belief and practice as Christians. Jude writes that we must ‘...*earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints*’ (Jude 3). To Timothy, Paul writes: ‘... *what you heard from me commit these things to faithful men, such as will be competent also to teach others*’ (II Timothy 2:2).

We would expect, then, that God requires us to tread carefully! We must ‘study the Scriptures’ to confirm our beliefs—no matter how well embedded is our traditional belief. Take, for example, the assumption that Jesus or the apostles changed Sabbath observance to Sunday, the first day of the week.

Yet there’s not a trace of the change in all Scripture. Instead we are confronted time after time with the apostles observing the *seventh* day. [An apparent exception is in Acts 20:7: ‘...*On the first day of the week, when we had met to break bread, Paul, who was going away the next morning, was preaching to them, and prolonged his discourse till midnight*’ (Acts 20:7). This, of

course, was *after sunset* on *Saturday*, for in Bible times the ‘day’ began around sunset.]

In Memory

Every faith has its observances, from the simple to the intricately complex. For Christians God has left two memorials of the work of Jesus. In one Jesus says: ‘...*this do in remembrance of me*’ (Luke 22:19), ‘...*until he come*’ (I Corinthians 11: 26) an annual observance known as the *Lord’s Supper* in recollection of his redemptive work.

One in Seven?

I own seven houses and you want to buy one of them. I offer you the end of the row—No 7, the *seventh*. You accept. I come round when you are moving in—only to find you occupying No 1. I need to explain to you that ‘*the seventh*’ is not just ‘any one in seven’.

The other memorial is ‘*the Lord’s Day*’ - the day that commemorates his work of Creation. It’s a theme echoed by the apostles *and* in the book of Revelation.

The LORD told Israel : ‘...*in six days Jehovah made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore Jehovah blessed the Sabbath day, and sanctified it*’ (Exodus 20:11). **The** (not ‘a’) seventh day alone serves to point to JHVH as the awesomely powerful Creator of Heaven and Earth.

The apostles and the early church were acutely aware of this: ‘...*with one accord did lift up the voice unto God, and said, ‘Lord, you art God, who did make the heaven, and the earth, and the sea, and all that are in them*’ (Acts 4:24). And an angel, speaking to John decades later: ‘...*Fear God and give glory to Him! For the hour of His judgment has come.*’ **cont’d p.8**

Request our free booklet:

Why Do You Observe Sunday?

In it we discuss the texts that mention the ‘first day of the week’

Korah, Uzza, and the Rock Island Line

Steven J. Kieler

Korah

Korah of the tribe of Levi and his co-conspirators Dathan, Abiram, and one of the sons of Reuben gathered two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, and confronted Moses and Aaron. They challenged their authority to lead Israel saying, "...You take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift you up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?" (Numbers 16:3).

What a masterful, manipulating, thing to say. They were able to appeal to the vanity of the wannabees," those who desired power and authority equal to Moses and Aaron; and, at the same time, not relinquish one bit of their own influence. Here we have the sin of presumption and its evil twin, arrogance, blatantly displayed.

Moses' reaction is recorded in Verse 4 "And when Moses heard it, he fell upon his face."

Is the working of pretenders, usurpers, false prophets, and deceivers subtler today, or are we less able to discern? Either way, the problem must be squarely faced. Paul addressed the persistent problem in his day thus: (I Corinthians 4:1-9) his directive is truly important. I would highly recommend an in-depth study of these verses, because it is said that Paul's writings are hard to understand:

What If?

What would happen if we had a Moses, or a Paul, or a Jeremiah in the Church today? Would the modern day Korahs persist in their prideful positions? Would their followers "see the light" and escape as many did when Korah and company were swallowed by the earth? (Numbers 16:34) "And all Israel that were

round about them fled at the cry of them: for they said, Lest the earth swallow us up also."

Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not my own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judges me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God. And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that you might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another. For who makes you to differ from another? And what have you that you didst not receive? Now if you did receive it, why do you glory, as if you had not received it? Now you are full, now you are rich, you have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God you did reign, that we also might reign with you. For I think that God has set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

Uzzah

Now we come to the disturbing story of Uzzah being smitten for touching the ark.

"And when they came to Nachon's threshing floor, Uzzah put forth his hand to the ark of God, and took hold of it; for the oxen shook it. And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Uzzah; and God smote him there for his error; and there he died by the ark of God." (II Samuel 6:6-7)

*Request the free article:
Tabernacles: humanity in the flesh*

David was distraught, as we are, at this well-intentioned act to protect the Ark from damage. There are many lessons here, but one that may escape us is that the Ark was the protective container of the law. Even the Levites had strict regulations regarding its protection and administration. It would appear that Uzza's intentions were good, but no one was allowed to touch it (or tamper with it), not to gain power, for gain, out of pride, and not even for good intentions. God is perfectly capable of protecting (interpreting) His property or specifically appointing person(s) to have limited powers. He didn't need Uzzah and He doesn't need you or me. If there are any questions, go back and read the account of Korah.

There was a song written many years ago, when the railroads were mighty, that makes a great parallel and a very good lesson between how a railroad and a church functions best..

The Rock Island Line

"The Rock Island Line is a mighty good road.

The Rock Island Line is the road to ride.

The Rock Island Line is a mighty good road.

And if you want to ride it

Got to ride it like you find it

Get your ticket at the station

On The Rock Island Line."

If you get a ticket to ride, that doesn't give you the throttle, make you a switchman, brakeman, or conductor. You don't even get to throw a little coal on the fire.

Is that any way to run a railroad? You bet it is.

Is that any way to run a religion? I think so. Rather, each of us must uncover our own spiritual gifts and use those to serve and enhance our church.

A train recently crashed in Japan.

Rock Island ...cont'd

Presumably, the engineer was a very young and inexperienced lad who had taken a curve too fast trying to make up thirty seconds he was behind schedule.

My dad (who worked on the railroad,) said: "There are too many chiefs and not enough Indians". Perhaps we can also observe that there are too many who wish to be engineers without knowing the throttle from the brake, or the function of each member of the crew.

Could that be an accurate analogy of what has happened, and can again happen, in the church of God ? Ω

Seventh Day ...cont'd

And worship Him who made the heaven and the earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters' Revelation 14:7).

Worship—when would they honour Him who made the heavens and the earth? The Sabbath alone fits the bill! The God-appointed memorial of creation was still extant at the end of the first century! Over the centuries there have been at least a remnant of believers who have continued to observe it.

Today, despite opposition from the established main line churches, there are around twenty million believers who observe the seventh-day Sabbath. They have 'searched the Scriptures' and concluded that the God-appointed day of worship—for Christians—is indeed the *seventh* day of the week, Saturday. Ω

Jesus Is God ...cont'd from p.2

light of the Scriptures, to be reassessed. It is a notion firmly rooted in tradition and not—in its accepted sense—in the Scriptures.

Only following the restoration of planet Earth after the millennial reign of the King of kings, after Satan has been removed from his destructive influence, will the Father become known—be seen and heard by His spirit-born Family in a new heaven and a new earth: '*...I heard a great voice out of Heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they will be His people, and God Himself will be with them and be their God*' (Revelation 21:3).

Jesus is God, our Creator! Ω

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Nativity...cont'd from p.4

His people. But like ancient King Jeroboam (I Kings 12:32), Christians have shifted the observance to an inappropriate time of year.

The *Festival of Tabernacles*, however, celebrates what Christians daily pray for - the fulfilment of the Kingdom of God on earth. A time of "*peace on earth among men in whom he is well pleased*".

It was the beautiful song of the heavenly angelic host who announced the birth of the Saviour (Luke 2:14) on that quiet early autumn night in ancient Judaea!

Hear the prophet Isaiah:

It shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the House of the LORD shall be established as the highest of the mountains... For out of Zion shall go forth the law and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations and shall decide for many peoples; and they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more Isaiah: 2:1-6

That longed-for era is coming!

Let's not "*learn the way of the heathen...*" (Jeremiah 10:2) by keeping "*the [feast] days of Baal*". Let's keep the Feast (of *Tabernacles*) in celebration of that momentous event - the nativity of mankind's one and only Saviour, Jesus of Nazareth the express image of God our Father. Ω

Autumn Festivals 2013

Trumpets	September 5
Atonement	September 14
Tabernacles	September 19-25
Eighth Day	September 26

MiniStudy

Religion: myth and reality

'...in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men' (Mark 7:7)

There are two world-views: one assumes there's no God, the other that there is a God. For the former, all religion is a figment of human imagination, our attempt to explain life. For the believers - again two camps. For some, man has evolved ways and means to contact and please God. Others recognize that God has determined how He should be approached, and all deviations from that original faith are human distortion. How, then, did 'religion' begin?

- Uniquely among the major faiths, at the heart of Christianity is the claim to represent the one and only way to God the Father. Said Jesus: *'...no-one comes to the Father but through me'* (John 14:6). And Peter: *'...Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved'* (Acts 4:12). Exclusive! Jesus, Christians claim, is the sole channel that leads to God. The superficial Christian observer, however, may focus on the glaring similarities between his belief system and that of other faith systems - Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Mithraism. The circumstances and sayings of the god (or gods) are often seen to parallel the life and teachings of Jesus
- Perhaps Judaism and Islam are readily explicable, since both have roots in the Bible. *Judaism*, for all its additions to the Old Testament text through oral tradition better reflects the original true faith. *Islam*, because of its 'moon-god' antecedents, includes elements foreign to the Scriptures though recognizing Jesus as a 'prophet' and even as a Messiah. But what of the *other major faiths*? Kersey Graves (*d.1883*), for example, details many similarities between Krishna and Jesus - though researchers have discarded many of them
- From the perspective of the Christian Scriptures, the Father through the Word created the material universe, setting man as the pinnacle of His creation. Our first parents initially had face-to-face contact with the Creator, YHWH, carrying out their appointed function and worshipping Him through lives dedicated to Him. He taught them the way of life - later incorporated in Israel's legal system - which perfectly reflected their physical, mental and spiritual nature. That intimate contact ended because of their sin, but JHWH provided a way to maintain contact - the beginning of true 'religion'. It was maintained through the millennia by individuals such as Abraham and the prophets in face of worldwide apostasy (Genesis 26:5)
- Mankind retained knowledge of the Creation event and its sequence. But the reality became distorted, the revealed way of life was abandoned and man descended - into ignorance. We should know better, for: *'... the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse'* (v.20).
- Literary history spans some six thousand years and the Old Testament includes some of the earliest written historical records (*eg* Genesis 5:1) and 'wisdom literature' (*eg* incorporated in Proverbs). These records and sage sayings were also incorporated into emerging religions such as Buddhism and Hinduism. And, of course form the backdrop to the teachings of Jesus
- As the years rolled by *'...they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature [what was created] rather than the Creator'* (Romans 12:25). Bizarre religious practices were conceived, practices based on the primitive revealed truths. Modern Christianity has itself - contrary to Scripture - absorbed much of this distorted version of the divine revelation, especially from Mithraism from which, as an example, were taken Sunday worship, 'communion', Christmas, sun symbolism
- The true account of creation (Genesis 1:1) became wrapped in weird myth. The promise of a Deliverer (Genesis 3:15) was relayed through generations of confused ignorance. Powerful rulers arose (Genesis 10:8 *ff*), were deified and were worshipped by their cowed subjects. Divine ordinances (*eg* animal sacrifice - *ch* 3:21) were debased (*eg* human sacrifice). They *'...changed the glory of the incorruptible God for the likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed beasts, and creeping things'* (Romans 1:23)
- The modern supermarket of religions was formed from the original material but woven into sometimes barely recognizable patterns. It's time we returned to the original faith as magnified by Jesus and his apostles

Ω

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