

# *new* **Horizons**

*Vol 20 No 5*

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*addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow*

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**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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# new Horizons

Issue No 119

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## The focus of the Christian Bible is 'Israel'. Who are they? Do they have a role in the divine plan for today?

Mention 'Israel' and most in this twenty-first century think in terms of the isolated tiny nation of Israel situated in the Middle East. Vilified by Muslims, by the United Nations, by vocal Western protest groups and subject to economic boycott it struggles to maintain its nationhood.

The Israeli state, of course, is 'Jewish', a nation of some eight million plus which includes a substantial Arab population (20%) and occupies a tiny portion (21,000 sq.km) of real estate in the midst of the all-encompassing Islamic states.

with one—that of Joseph—later becoming two, Ephraim and Manasseh. [see **A Family Tale**]

The clan of Judah (*ie*, the Jews), located in the south of Palestine, separated from the (northern) clans after the death of King Solomon. They formed two separate governmental systems.

### Exile

Israel's occupancy of the land of Palestine ('Canaan' was so-named by the Roman Emperor Hadrian—117-138AD) was dependant on their compliance with God's covenant with them. Exile was the penalty should they fall into idolatrous ways—which they later did.

mankind with purpose, and is actively involved in the outworking of that plan. In essence, His plan is to select and shape a people who would come to reflect His character, and who would reign with Him throughout eternity—in brief, 'salvation'.

During man's early years on Earth, named individuals co-operated. Notably, Abraham was faithful to the plan, and God chose the descendants of his son Isaac—Israel—to become a model nation to showcase the divine way. To them He assigned in perpetuity the Holy Land, variously named Canaan and Palestine. When they became idolatrous they were evicted—but it was to remain theirs pending their national return to the LORD.

## ISRAEL...abandoned by God?

### Origins

Originally approved by the United Nations (which now seeks to undermine it), the modern Israeli state was established in 1948, though its roots lie in the Balfour Declaration of 1917 which promised a homeland for Jews. The area has hosted a Jewish population for thousands of years. The land has since been transformed from a virtual wilderness as the population has burgeoned from just thousands in the late nineteenth century.

### Mistaken Identity

The term 'Israel' applied to the nation today is, however, misleading. For the Jews are just one branch of the people first named *Israel*. They are the descendants of the patriarch Abraham (who is also 'father' of the Arab peoples through Ishmael). As it grew in numbers, Israel divided into twelve separate 'clans' or 'tribes',

First, the northern *House of Israel* was removed from the Land by the conquering Assyrians [who replaced them with Gentiles—they became known as *Samarians*], in the early eighth century BC. The *House of Judah* soon followed, taken into exile by the Babylonians in the early sixth century (580s).

The latter were exiled in Babylon for seventy years, returning under King Cyrus. Their descendants were the people who inhabited the Land continuously until 70AD and were then subdued by the Romans, with but a few remaining there. Jesus, as a direct descendant of King David (of the House of Judah) was resident there with his family.

### Divine Purpose

Far from being remote and hands-off, God created the universe and

### Restoration

The apostle Paul puts paid to the now fashionable notion that God has finished with Israel, with the Jews. Addressing the Roman brethren he writes: '*...I say then, Did not God thrust away His people? Let it not be! ...God did not thrust away His people whom He foreknew*' (ch 11:1-2). He continues: '*... I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, of this mystery, so that you will not be wise [in your own sight], that a partial hardening has happened to Israel, until the full number of the Gentiles has come in, and so all Israel will be saved, just as it is written, "The deliverer will come out of Zion; he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is the covenant from me with them when I take away their sins"*' (vv. 25-27, Isaiah 59:20-21).

There will, then, be a restoration



of 'all Israel' to God's blessing. It's also what was prophesied through the Old Testament prophets, whom Paul echoes. Jeremiah, for example, had this to say: '... *Alas! For that day is great, for none is like it. And it is a time of Jacob's trouble, but he will be saved out of it. For it shall be in that day, says Jehovah of Hosts, I will break his yoke from your neck, and I will burst your bonds. And strangers will not again enslave him; but they shall serve Jehovah their God, and David their king, whom I will raise up to them*' (ch 30:7-9).

As with much of prophecy, the immediate setting is the prophet's contemporary circumstances—here, the seventy-year captivity of the House of Judah by Babylon. But the prophet makes clear that there is a long-term fulfillment: '...*in the latter days you will understand it*' (v.24). That time, in other words, when man's day, man's rule over planet Earth., will draw to a close with the direct intervention of Jesus from Heaven.

### End of the Age

At present, 42% of world Jewry (about six million) live in Israel, most having migrated there (*Aliyah*) since 1948 when the State of Israel was founded.

The Israeli population is diverse and includes Jews from many nations—including India, Russia, Ethiopia. The 'clan of Judah' also incorporates other clans—Benjamin (eg Paul) and Levi, the priestly class, together with a tiny scattering from the other Israelite clans. Not all are, strictly, Jews, as there are strict rules to define Jewishness. But all, including the large Arab segment, are subjects of the 'House of Judah', the governmental authority which—perhaps loosely—governs by the Hebrew Scriptures. All citizens, including Arab, are guaranteed equal rights by law.

[The House of Judah also included a tiny number of individual families from the other northern tribes—eg Luke 2:36)]

It is common currency among those who seek to understand the prophecies that the present *Aliyah* fulfills these prophecies. And certainly the Scriptures place Judah in the Land at the end time. Jesus, for example, to his disciples: '... *Then when you see the abomination of desolation, which was spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing in the holy place (the one reading, let him understand), then let those in Judea flee into the mountains*' (Matthew 24:15f. see also v.20).

Clearly a time of 'Jacob's trouble'! Indeed the predicted end-time is one of trouble, tribulation, suffering. But have they, just like ancient Israel, made this move to the Land presumptively? Having refused entrance to Canaan God deemed them unfit to enter and tested them in the wilderness (Numbers 14): '...*Moses said, Why do you now transgress the mouth of Jehovah, since it will not prosper? Do not go up, for Jehovah is not in your midst, and you will be defeated by your enemies*'. They ignored His instructions and were defeated in battle. God, however, didn't abandon them but continued to care for their interests for the next forty years—just as He has time and again delivered the modern Israelis.

### Final Deliverance

It's the focus of Israel's Arab neighbours and their allies (the modern descendants of ancient Assyria) to exterminate the Jews, a threat repeated time and again—echoes of a prophetic Psalm: '...*They are sly, and they plot against those you treasure. They say, "Let's wipe out the nation of Israel and make sure that no one remembers its name!" All of them fully agree in their plans against you*' (Psalm 83:3-

5). The Psalmist lists several of Israel's modern neighbours as complicit.

Yet the Scriptures portray the Israelis as returning to the Land in the end-time *from a time of enslavement*. Not only so, they also return in the company of a remnant of the 'lost ten tribes', House of Israel or 'All Israel', with whom they in our day share divine condemnation. Further, they will be truly repentant and will be ruled by '...*David their king, whom I will raise up to them*', together with the resurrected Twelve apostles of Jesus (Matthew 19:28, Jeremiah 30:7-9).

Hard times lie ahead for the various people groups of Israel. They remain '...*the apple of [My] eye*' but have despised His covenant and trodden all over His perfect Law, His manual for life.

Does God not weep for the annual death toll of millions of unborn living beings. For the cruel neglect of the elderly and defenceless children.

For the broken families, the distortion of sexual relationships, the unpicking of cherished social norms. For unchained criminality and perverse judgments. For the obscenely rich who lord it over the man-in-the-street, oppress their underlings.

### A Lesson from History

The apostle Paul alerts us to be careful to learn from past events as recorded in the Scriptures: '... *all these things happened to those [Israel] as examples, and it was written for our warning, on whom the ends of the ages have come*' (I Corinthians 10:11). The message: *our behaviour has consequences.* Ω

## Ancient history impacts the world of today—and tomorrow

Nations don't spring out of thin air! They begin with a founding family. They grow as grows the family, and over years and decades and generations and centuries occupy real estate (at times migrating), formulate laws and customs, make alliances, change language and develop into full-blown nationhood.

Nineteen hundred years before the birth of Jesus Christ the germ of a nation was born. The patriarch Abraham had a son, *Isaac*, whose twelve grandchildren some two centuries later united under a common constitution, common laws, a shared faith and customs. They are known in history as the *Sacae* as they trekked from the Black Sea west through Europe.

As the nation of *Israel* they occupied the land of Canaan for some half a millennium, initially as a theocracy and then as a Kingdom ruled for about eighty years by the dynasty of David, a scion of one of the clans, and his son Solomon and grandson, Rehoboam.

### Two Nations

An excess of taxation provoked rebellion leading to a division, with ten of the clans appointing a new leader, the nation dividing (c.930BC) into two separate governments—the *House of Judah* (reigning from Jerusalem) and the *House of Israel* (reigning from Samaria).

They initially shared the ancestral common faith, but Jeroboam (effectively Solomon's 'Prime Minister' and now leading the House of Israel), established rival centres of worship which soon deviated into idolatrous foreign religious practices presided over as priests by anyone who wanted the job!

Jeroboam was written into the annals as the one who led Israel into undermining the established faith (it underpinned the State)—a pattern repeated throughout their subsequent history. They thus lost sight of the foundation

principles on which they had been founded—a perfect legal system.

### Consequences

As Israel lost its moral compass the nation descended into chaos. Violence increased until '*...blood touched blood*'. Foreign alliances drained the national treasury and foreigners flooded in. The national currency devalued, business practice became corrupt.

Writes one observer: '*...Once your judges were honest and your people lived right; now you are a city full of murderers. your silver is fake, and your wine is watered down. Your leaders have rejected me to become friends of crooks; your rulers are looking for gifts and bribes. Widows and orphans never get a fair trial*'.

Another eyewitness: '*...Cursing, dishonesty, murder, robbery, unfaithfulness—these happen all the time. Violence is everywhere...you are foolish because of too much pleasure and too much wine... you would rather be vulgar than lead a decent life*'. Bread and circuses! Welfare and entertainment!

In the end the eighth century *House of Israel* was so weakened and distracted it was invaded by a powerful neighbour, and most citizens deported into slavery, no more to return to their homeland. They were replaced by the people who became known as the Samaritans.

Nearly a century and a half later the *House of Judah*, too, sank into a moral cess-pit. All the old and tried values were overturned and they suffered as did their sister nation—invasion and deportation. The populace was exiled for seventy years before being permitted to return. Those who did were the racial stock who peopled the Holy Land in the time of Jesus—the Jews. They occupied the land from the fifth century, coming under the yoke of Rome until 70AD when they were largely slaughtered by the might of the Empire.

### Dispersion

The fate of the dispersed Jews down succeeding centuries is well known.

## The Seed of Isaac

The fate of the dispersed people of the House of Israel, however, is obscured by the fog of history.

Their continuing existence is testified to by a first century letter: '*... From James: Greetings to the twelve tribes scattered all over the world.*' But their migrations have been charted extensively over the centuries since their dispersion seven hundred years BC.

Josephus (1st c.) wrote: '*...there are but two tribes in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans [ie the Jews], while the ten tribes are beyond Euphrates till now, and are an immense multitude and not to be estimated by numbers*'. The 'church father' Jerome (4th c. AD) stated: '*...Until this day the ten tribes are subject to the kings of the Persians, nor has their captivity ever been loosed*'.

They were at first settled in the mountains and cities of Media (modern Iran), migrating over the centuries around the Black Sea and on into Europe. During this time they lost their national identity but each clan retained its structure and distinct culture, variously known in history as *Getae*, *Massagetae*, *Sacae* and *Scythians* ['wanderers', cf Hosea 9:17).

As they encountered other people movements they became further morally debased, the sad remnant of their original faith coalescing with further pagan practices. 'Jehovah', for example lost out to Odin who had many of the same characteristics—eg Supreme Creator and Father. Many other practices directly reflected their Israelite origins. Yet they continued to display distinct Hebrew characteristics in their form of worship.

Commenting on the ten tribes the author of II Esdras notes: '*...they took counsel among themselves that they would leave the multitude of the heathen* *cont'd over*

# What Would Jesus Eat?

**Artist's versions of the Last Supper have mushroomed over the centuries, most notably that by Leonardo da Vinci, reproduced by the thousand. What is curious in the different versions is what is placed on the table!**

Leonardo's, for example (recently restored), has placed a dish of eels garnished with oranges. Others have depicted leavened bread, crayfish, pretzels, roasted guinea pig—even a suckling pig. The artist, presumably, making some form of symbolic statement or reflecting contemporary culinary tastes.

## The Reality

The 'Last Supper' of course, is the final meal shared by Jesus and his disciples the night before his crucifixion. It was the evening before the annual Passover, and likely would have included those foods appropriate to that observance. (Jesus makes clear that he would never change those observances as recorded in the Scriptures.)

For Passover the central dish would be the roasted lamb together with unleavened bread—*ie*, bread made without a raising element, yeast. Various herbs accompanied them, each symbolic. They commemorated the events surrounding the nation's freedom from enslavement in Egypt, a time to rejoice. For Christians, too, the Passover symbols have special significance (*eg* I Corinthians 5 and 11).

There are, however, other fundamental reasons for the false portrayal of the Last Supper's elements as described above to be in error. What *would* Jesus have eaten?

## Eat to Live

Our physical health and mental well-being are influenced by what we eat—witness the endless stream of dietary advice (which changes from day to day!).

Mankind didn't materialize from thin

air but from the hand of the Creator as He shaped the elements of the earth to produce a living creature that is '*...fearfully and wonderfully made*'. In our beginnings—perfect, and provided with a diet perfectly adapted to the needs of the body as then constituted. The Creator instructed: '*... I have given you every plant seeding seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree in which is the fruit of a tree seeding seed; it shall be food for you*' (Genesis 1:29). God made clear that on this regime they would continue endlessly in their physical existence.

One tree was forbidden to them, and clear warning was given as to the awesome consequences of eating its fruit: '*...in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die*' (Genesis 2:17). Death was twofold: they 'died' spiritually, and the physical death process that moment invaded their bodies.

## Transition

*Sin* had enveloped mankind, and God introduced His remedy—sacrifice. Abel, on God's instructions, brought a lamb to sacrifice. and as part of the ceremonial he would participate in eating a portion (Leviticus 8:31). Their 'new' changed and decaying bodies—and the increased work-load—now required to be nourished by the inclusion of animal flesh. The weakened bodily constitution is also testified to by the shortened life-span post-flood. It's clear from the record that the patriarchs had been taught which of the diversity of animals were

suitable for consumption: '*...Of every clean beast you shalt take to you by sevens*' (Genesis 7:2). They already knew the difference between clean and unclean.

The LORD included this instruction in Israel's national Constitution, given under Moses, clearly defining it for them in their written code of Law (*eg* Leviticus, 11, Deuteronomy 14). Jesus, himself of the House of Judah, fully conformed to this code. As he explained to John the Baptist who had questioned Jesus' desire for baptism: '*...Allow it now, for it is becoming to us this way to fulfill all righteousness*' (Matthew 3:15).

The Middle Eastern diet (and that of Israel) included the consumption of animal flesh within the confines of the 'clean and unclean' restrictions. Indeed we note that Jesus ate fish in the company of his disciples (Luke 24:41-42). As Moses stated: '*...you are free to kill and eat your animals wherever you live. You may eat as many as the LORD gives you. All of you, whether ritually clean or unclean, may eat them, just as you would eat the meat of deer or antelope [ie 'clean']. But you must not eat their blood* (Deuteronomy 12:15-16). This latter reflects the guidance given to Noah (Genesis 9:4).

What Jesus ate conformed fully with custom *and* with God's instructions concerning food suitable for consumption. Christians—and indeed all of mankind—would do well to follow his example. As the apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, edible foods are '*...sanctified [set apart] by the Word of God*' (I Timothy 4:5), the Scriptures. **Ω**

**Seed of Isaac ...cont'd from p.3**  
*and go forth into a further country where never mankind dwelt* (ch 13). Their journeyings took them by various routes across Europe to the shores of the North Sea and the Atlantic—known as Danes, Milesians, Jutes, Angles, Saxons, Belgae *etc*.

The varied people groups settled in North-West Europe and in the 'isles of the sea'—the British Isles—just as prophesied in the Scriptures. **Ω**

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

**A central theme of the Christian Scriptures is the story of Israel. They disappeared—but where?**

The apostle Paul, proudly, was an Israelite—specifically of the tribe of Benjamin (collectively, with Judah, known as ‘Jews’). As an ardent Pharisee he was steeped in the Scriptures—in his time, the ‘Old Testament’. He believed it. It was written into his spiritual DNA. It underpinned his theology.

Not surprising, then, that he had a fundamental understanding of what God has revealed regarding His plans for mankind—and, specifically, for Israel. What did he see is their role now that Messiah had come? Was Israel now consigned to the dustbin of history, useful in their time but now redundant to His plans?

### **Messiah Rejected**

Christians, notes the apostle Paul, are a ‘...wild olive tree’ grafted onto the stump of the true olive tree. ‘Spiritual Israel’ is the Israel of faith and all God’s chosen are grafted into it (Romans 11:16-21). But has God abandoned physical Israel?

Here is Paul’s summary: ‘...God has not cast away his people which he foreknew’ (Romans 11:2). The Jewish people ‘...by many infallible proofs’ were presented with their long-awaited Messiah—but rejected him (cp Acts 13:46). [The word implies ‘willful violence against conscience’] They were then, says Paul, cut off from the true vine, faithful Israel—though even in Paul’s day and to this day, some few embraced the Gospel.

### **The Nations Converted**

Following the rejection of the crucified Messiah by the House

of Judah the Gentile nations then had the opportunity to embrace the same Gospel message. That time period has its limits.

The apostle Paul preached powerfully to the Jews in Antioch—a message they rejected: ‘...*It was necessary for the Word of God to be spoken first to you; but since you indeed thrust it away and judge yourselves not worthy of eternal life, behold, we turn to the nations [ie the non-Jews including many of the migrating House of Israel]*’ (Acts 13:46, cf ch 26:20).

When God in His timing draws a line and ends the time of the Gentiles’ opportunity, the Jews will once again be ‘...grafted in’. In Jesus’s words: ‘...*Jerusalem will be trodden down by nations, until the times [Gk kairos: opportunity, set time] of the nations are fulfilled*’ (Luke 21:24). That is, when Messiah reigns from Jerusalem.

Writes Paul: ‘...*blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness [full complement] of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:*

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

## **Israel—lost forever?**

### **Some Background**

Around 900BC the children of Israel divided into two distinct groups of nations—the *House of Judah* (largely Jewish) and the *House of Israel* (ten tribes). Both Houses later experienced exile at the hands of foreigners, with Judah alone returning to the land of Promise—some four centuries before Christ.

The ten Israelite tribes each retained their cohesion but over ensuing centuries lost their collective name of *Israel*. They did, however, remain in loose association with one another as they migrated from what is now Iran (where they had been captives from 721BC)—westward into what then was sparsely inhabited Europe. They acquired new names such as Getae, Goths, Britons, Angles, Saxons, Danes, Normans etc.

*For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins* (vv.26-27, Isaiah 59:20). Not just the House of Judah but also ‘all Israel’.

### **Israel Reunited**

It is the time foretold by Israel’s prophets—a time when the *House of Judah* (the Jews) and the long lost (lost in name yet large on the present world stage) *House of Israel* (collectively they are ‘Jacob’) will be gathered from around the world where they have been dispersed and will be established in the Land of Promise.

It is after Jesus has been enthroned in Jerusalem (‘Zion’). It is when ‘...*Violence shall no more be heard in your land, wasting nor destruction within your borders*’. Note that Paul, with Isaiah, sees this restoration and the Deliverer as yet future. It does not refer to ‘the Gospel age’—and clearly not today’s world where violence is endemic, not only in the modern nation called Israel!

When God has attained to ‘the fullness’ of the Gentiles, or *cont’d p.8*

## A Family Tale

A modern 'craze' is for individuals to research their 'family tree'. Where have I come from? Do I have anyone famous—or 'notorious'!—lurking in the branches? Far less of interest, and rarely asked, is *Where does my nation come from?*

Of interest to Bible readers is the story of the nation of Israel, a story that is central to both Testaments. And there is indeed a detailed family tree that leaves no doubt as to their origins.

The modern Jew will, of course, cite Moses as their national hero, but Israel's origin lies with a man who lived several centuries before him—Abraham. The patriarch was in the line descended from Shem, son of Noah, and was on first notice living in Chaldea, modern Mesopotamia. We are given his story minutely. But first, the big picture.

### Beginnings

Mankind was no random creature that climbed out of a swamp, but a specific creation of the one and only God, and *created with purpose*—to populate the earth and provide offspring for God. To that end a 'special people' had to be 'engineered', with selected physical and spiritual qualities suitable to become a blessing to all mankind.

Less than four centuries before Abraham mankind had been all but wiped out due to our descent into violence and corruption, but by his lifetime idolatry had again flourished with only Abraham's lineage remaining faithful.

In Abraham, God noted a man of integrity and faith, a candidate to fulfil His purpose. Yet here he was nearly a hundred years old and childless, his wife also aged and barren. The promise was there: *'...in Isaac your Seed shall be called'*, and Abraham believed, despite *'...the deadness of Sarah's womb'* (Romans 4:19). It was a miraculous conception, genetically selected by the LORD, His purpose ever in mind.

The next generation, from Isaac, produced twins—Esau and Jacob, but both deeply flawed. The latter, however, repented and valued the divine promise of becoming *'...a great nation'* to spring from their family line.

### The Birthright

Esau despised his birthright (Hebrews 12:16). Jacob was chosen to carry the plan forward, on Isaac's instructions marrying a blood relative, Rachel: *'... Isaac called Jacob. And he blessed him and commanded him, and said to him, You shall not take a wife from the daughters of Canaan. Go up, go to Padan-aram, to the house of Bethuel your mother's father. And take a wife for yourself from there, from the daughters of Laban the brother of your mother. Gen 28:3 And may God Almighty bless you and make you fruitful, and add to you; and may you become an assembly of nations'* (Genesis vv.28,29). Jacob later proved himself, earning from God the new name, Israel.

### End-time Status

On his death-bed Israel (Jacob) prophesied the end-time status of each of his sons: *'...Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the latter days'* (Genesis 49:1). He outlines their strengths and weaknesses and predicts their role as the saga of mankind rolls to a close.

*Joseph* is singled out for special notice, his sons having a special blessing (*ch* 48). Jacob is inspired to designate a special future for them—as a *nation and a company of nations* which would be a channel of blessing for all mankind. Israel's name and the birth-right promises were passed to Joseph's offspring, Ephraim and Manasseh; *'...I am a father to Israel, and Ephraim is My first-born'*, God says (Jeremiah 31:9). They became the dominant clan among the ten.

### Character

National characteristics are acquired over generations of experience—and remain embedded indelibly. Israel, under divine guidance, was shaped

by its divinely-inspired national constitution—a constitution that incorporated God's perfect Law, the 'Ten Commandments', the 'law of liberty' (James 1:25).

The Israelites initially lived and breathed it, becoming, in the time of King Solomon, the greatest of nations: *'...[Solomon] was greater than any of the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom; and all the earth was seeking the presence of Solomon, to hear his wisdom that God had put into his heart'* (I waKings 10:23-24).

The choice of Joseph to bear the name of Israel was by no means a mark of favouritism by Jacob. Joseph displayed throughout his life godly characteristics that fitted him for the task of implementing God's promise of Israel becoming a blessing to the world. He was attuned to God's ways: *'...how should I do this great evil and sin against God?'* (Genesis 39:9).

His abilities were early recognized as referenced by the award of the 'coat of many colours'. His talents and his integrity propelled him to become 'prime minister' (and saviour) of Egypt, the greatest civilization of his era. His personal integrity shone in his wise dealings with the errant wife of a high Egyptian official, and in his forgiving attitude to his brothers (who had, remember, sold him into slavery). Joseph was to the end of his life sensitive to his inheritance in the land of promise, Palestine.

They were in ensuing centuries the accepted leaders of the northern *House of Israel* (called 'Ephraim'). But leaders, too, in departing from the true God, abandoning His Sabbaths and adding the destructive idolatrous practices of the nations they encountered.

Groomed by God the house of Joseph remained distinct among the nations, known as the Anglo-Saxons and in modern times becoming *'...a nation and a company of nations'*.

Truly a thrilling family tale.

Ω



**The church of God today projects as a collection of competing denominations. In reality it is one community**

Whatever your label, all those in whom actively dwells the Spirit of God are members of the Body of Christ, the church of God. Whether you are united or continuing or philadelphian or living or 'of Christ' or eternal or worldwide or inter-galactic—whatever—you are a begotten child of the Father, a true Christian.

That label has been imposed on you—or you chose it—to make you different from 'the others'. It provides identity and locks you in to a predetermined set of teachings—some right but some disputed. It locks you in to having your energy and material resources absorbed—and often mis-spent—'solely for us'. It locks you in to a myopic and antagonistic approach to other parts of the Body with the unstated insinuation that 'we are the one true church'.

### Differences

But are we not? *'...all one in Christ Jesus'*? Do not Jesus and the Father indwell each of us by the Spirit? Are we not all brethren in Christ? Are we not all led by Him?

Add up all the diversity of teachings and I imagine it doesn't amount to a hill of beans. *Sabbath?* We all believe that. *Holy days?* Minor differences. *Immortal soul?* Tick. *Clean and unclean?* Me too. *Heaven and hell?* More ticks.

Then there's *prophecy*. Whoops! Now that really does differentiate us, doesn't it. We all believe Jesus will come again as King of kings. But when? You say 2017. He says 2021, while he claims it is 2023/4.

But don't I remember 1975 as a firm date? Others said 1844 or 1914. Or 2023/4. So the date isn't in any era relevant. (Our Father says *He* will decide. I trust Him.) Not a cause for trumpeting our preferred date and certainly no cause for division. Nor a date on which to base our strategy for evangelism.

Then there's the end time and

all the prophetic witness as to what will unroll on our world. Can our speculative foraging in the texts change any of those events? They *will* come about—but most likely in a manner that surprises even the most dedicate Bible student. Are they a reason to separate ourselves from equally sincere brethren of a different (also equally speculative) view?

### The Source

It would be an error to imagine that the first Christians had perfectly harmonious relationships. The letter to the Corinthian brethren holes that argument. The apostle Paul berates them for their division—in this case internal division. [Each local assembly was autonomous, but acted in harmony with the others.]

'Babies' he calls them, needing to be fed on milk (v.1): *'...where among you is jealousy, and strife, and divisions, are you not fleshly and walk according to man? For when one may say, Truly I am of Paul, and another, I of Apollos; are you not fleshly?'* (1 Corinthians 3:2-4).

It would be imprudent to confine this attitude to the first century. It, division caused by allegiance to an individual (or to an organization other than your local assembly), arises in the twenty-first century from that same source—our human nature. *'...carnal'* [our 'animal' instincts] the apostle names it, shaming us. It stems from our 'flesh', from that part of us as yet unconquered by the Spirit.

### Roots

The majority of those now loyal to a specific Church of God denomination have roots in the now defunct Worldwide Church of God. As it collapsed under corrupt leadership and some dubious teachings many brethren migrated to an increasing variety of off-shoots each led by a man who claimed to have the answers, who alone claimed to be 'doing God's work'—and drawing a segment of the brethren to their cause.

Jesus himself encountered it—among

## The Church Community

his own disciples. During their meal the evening before he died they argued over authority—who is the greatest (*ie* leader): *'...there was also a dispute among them who of them seems to be greater'* (Luke 22:24-27). It wasn't the first time, for two of them had already sought to have top table in the Kingdom (Matthew 20:20ff)! They wanted leadership, in other words, to wield authority or impose their will.

### Not a Business

Jesus's response?: *'...The kings of the nations lord it over them, and those exercising authority over them are called benefactors. But you be not so, but the greater among you, let him be as the lesser; and the one governing as the one serving. For who is greater, the one reclining, or the one serving? Is it not the one reclining? But I am in your midst as One serving'*.

The nature of leadership is vital. The church of God is nether a nation nor a business. It's underlying philosophy reflects a different ethos.

Jesus thus set the pattern for leadership in the church he was about to build. It was one of loving service by those who would, in each assembly, lead it. The story is told of someone seeking a church pastor (attired, of course, in his finery) only to find him among his flock sweeping the floor.

The apostle Paul foresaw this challenge in the Ephesian assembly: *'... For I know this, that after my departure grievous wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock; and out of you yourselves will rise up men speaking perverted things, in order to draw away the disciples after themselves. Because of this watch'* (Acts 20:29-31). A stern warning to the church of God today!

What hasn't changed, however, is structure, the urge to control—the very underlying cause of the 'mother' church's challenges. It remains unaddressed in the surviving larger COG denominations. **Ω**

## Israel ...from p.5

when they have failed to respond to his call to repentance (Revelation 9:20-21), the scene is set for Christ, returned as King of kings, to issue from Zion to gather his people of Israel—both Houses: ‘...*Behold, the days come, says the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah...After those days, says the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people*’ (Jeremiah 31:31-33).

The prophet Ezekiel confirms that the two nations will be united as one: ‘...*I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the [ten] tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in my hand*’ (ch 37:19).

He continues: ‘...*I will take the children of Israel from among the heathen, whither they be gone, and will gather them on every side, and bring them into their own land: And I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel and one king shall be king to them all: and they shall be no more two nations, neither shall they be divided into two kingdoms any more at all: Neither shall they defile themselves any more with their idols, nor with their detestable things, nor with any of their transgressions: but I will save them out of all their dwelling-places, wherein they have sinned, and will cleanse them: so shall they be my people, and I will be their God. And David my servant shall be king over them*’.

Israel, wherever they may at that time be dwelling around the globe, will be led back by their Messiah to reclaim the inheritance decided to the father of their nation, the patriarch Abraham.

### Prophetic Warning

As shown elsewhere in this issue, Israel’s trail leads us firmly to the western shores of Europe in the early

Christian centuries’ - and on to ‘the isles of the sea’.

In the British Isles the good news flourished, only to be (almost) smothered - at the Synod of Whitby (664AD)—by the Roman perversion of the true faith. For another eight centuries the Bible was a banned book—then the embers burst into flames and the Scriptures, in face of martyrdom and persecution, began to exert their benign influence.

God’s promises of world greatness to Israel were, after a long dark night, about to be fulfilled.

Those promises once attained, however, could be retained only as the nations conformed to God’s guidance, that His Law sits firmly at the heart of government and the citizenry. Ignore the divine Law and His protective hedge is progressively removed. How do we fare?

### Test of Time

Over the past hundred years ‘Joseph’ has lost an Empire—an empire that once encompassed the globe, an empire that on balance was a positive force in our world, that civilized people

groups sunk in utter depravity, that spread the knowledge of the Gospel worldwide. As global policemen we rode high in the estimate of world powers and time and again experienced divine intervention.

Slowly, almost imperceptibly, the moral tide turned (not that we were ever perfect!). God was relegated to the ante-room of government, the influence of divine Law diminished and secular values enthroned at the heart of the nation.

The vulnerable—the elderly, the sick, the disabled, the poor—dispatched with a Giro cheque. Criminality, corruption in government, in business, in religion allowed to run riot. Family values undermined—the foundation stone of a stable society crumbled under the weight of broken marriages, the almost universal acceptance of ungodly and perverse sexual practices. Property rights are trampled underfoot as lax justice overlooks most offences and greed drives up public and private debt.

Underlying all is the thought ‘*God isn’t bothered. He has gone off somewhere and has lost interest*’. Don’t bank on it!

### God Lives

The longsuffering God who, four millennia ago, chose Abraham and Isaac and Jacob—and Joseph—has overseen their destiny, and actively worked to fulfill His plans. He has blessed Israel. And He has chastened Israel.

The ebb and flow of prosperity and calamity goes largely unheeded as, in the footsteps of past empires, we sink more and more deeply into the cesspool of hedonism, of ‘bread and circus’. Unless we turn to the true values outlined in the Christian Scriptures the last vestiges of that protective hedge will be torn up

The prophetic message is that *there is hope*. But only upon our national repentance. Only as our leaders and our people put the God of the Bible and His Law at the heart of national and personal life. Ω

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## MiniStudy

### God's Global Plan

*He made every nation of men of one blood, to live on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons and boundaries of their dwelling' (Acts 17:26)*

*'When the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance; when He separated the sons of Adam, He set up the bounds of the peoples, according to the number of the sons of Israel' (Deuteronomy 32:8)*

Slowly, but with seeming inevitability, our world creeps toward 'global solutions for global problems'. For some this is a move towards a world without conflict, a world of equality and a world of utopian perfection. Others fear globalism will lead to totalitarianism, the subjection of mankind to an elite cabal of dictatorial tyrants. There can be little doubt that the pooling of resources can work material benefit for our world. As 'many run to and fro' - easy travel, access to information at the touch of a button (sometimes!), imports of the rich variety of goods produced from earth's bounty - all combine to add 'spice' and variety to our lives. How will the nation state fare?

- As the texts quoted from the Scriptures (Acts 17:26, Deuteronomy 32:8) demonstrate, the Creator God reveals clear guidelines for the orderly conduct of mankind. They involve the formation of defined nation states, as recorded in Genesis chapter ten: *'...These were the families of the sons of Noah, by their generations, in their nations. And from these the nations were divided in the earth after the flood'*—the seventy founding nations of the world today. Each familial nation was genetically inclined to specific characteristics
- In essence, a nation is simply a family grown great. An original pair over centuries increased in number, the familial descendants all holding to family traditions, economic philosophy, an identifiable culture and claiming sovereignty over a God-defined territory—acquired by conquest or by occupying empty land or by international agreement (*cf* the troublesome artificial boundaries set by the major powers in Africa and the Middle East)
- Not long after the great flood Nimrod [Heb: *we shall rebel*] was born. He became a despot seeking to frustrate God's plan for nations harmoniously co-existing: *'...Cush fathered Nimrod; he began to be a mighty one in the land. He was a mighty hunter before [in opposition to] Jehovah; so it is said, Even as Nimrod the mighty hunter before Jehovah. And the beginning of his kingdom was Babel, and Erech, and Accad, and Calneh, in the land of Shinar. From that land he went forth to Assyria and built Nineveh, and Rehoboth the city, and Calah, and Resen between Nineveh and Calah, which is a great city'* (Genesis 10:8-12). A conqueror who sought to unite the world's first global empire by force. It's a form of control echoed down the ages. Human nature divorced from divine wisdom perverts harmony, and mankind soon conspired to frustrate God's plan for populating the planet: *'...let us build us a city and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth'* (ch 11:4). But we should understand: *'...that the living may know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men and gives it to whomever He will. And He sets up over it the lowest of men'* (Daniel 4:17)
- As the widespread use of good English testifies—in personal and international relationships, in science *etc*—language is a key feature for maintaining harmony, reducing misunderstanding, furthering knowledge. Post-flood everyone spoke the same language: *'...the whole earth was of one language, and of one speech'* (ch 11:1). Yet they remained as distinct nations: *'...These were the families of the sons of Noah, by their generations, in their nations. And from these the nations were divided [apportioned] in the earth after the flood'*. So important is nationhood that God intervened to prevent this globalism: *'...the LORD said, Behold, the people is one, and they have all one language; and this they begin to do: and now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do. Go to, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech. So the LORD scattered them abroad from thence upon the face of all the earth: and they left off to build the city'* (vv.6-8)
- The concept of nationhood has ever since underpinned human relationships—and will continue so under the benign rule of the millennial Kingdom: *'...he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up a sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more'* (Micah 4:3, Isaiah 60:3). Each nation will continue to contribute its particular strengths to the welfare of all. There will be but one faith—the 'way' revealed by the Creator, and one Law, which He will administer

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