

new **Horizons**

Vol 22 No 1

January/February 2018

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 a 32-lesson **BIBLE 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* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: **www.cgom.org**

Publisher:
Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA

e-mail: information@cgom.org
phone: 1-800-611-8080

Editor:
James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

England:
The Churches of God, UK
Unit 14356, PO Box 4336
Manchester M61 0BW
England
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

Canada:
Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476
Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4
Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

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new Horizons

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There's widespread confusion as to the nature of God and our relationship with Him. The reality is portrayed in the Scriptures

God. His existence is acknowledged by almost all of earth's seven billion inhabitants, even in the world's largest population, communist China. Under myriad guises some form of divine being draws the worship of mankind.

Yet—*confusion!* As wrote the apostle Paul, *'...Even if there are so-called "gods," whether in heaven or on earth, and even though there are many of these "gods" and "lords" and he continues, "yet there is for us only one God, the Father" (I Corinthians 8:5-6). There's a panoply of so-called divine beings out there, each with its retinue of dedicated followers. But, logically, there can be but one!*

The Divine Nature

Indeed these 'gods' are devils (Gk. *daimoniois*): *'...what is sacrificed on pagan altars is offered to devils, not to God' (ch 10:20).* The apostle expresses continuity with the Old Testament writings: *'...they sacrificed unto devils, not to God; to gods whom they knew not, to new gods that came newly up, whom your fathers feared not' (Deuteronomy 32:17).*

The Unchanging God

The origin of our planet as seen by the ancients is a confusion of competing myths, of gods in conflict, of gods in sexual relationships. There are dismembered giant gods, brother and sister

gods, tortoises, elephants, river gods, gods emerging from an egg. Confusion indeed. Only the Biblical God, in contrast, makes perfect and consistent sense.

Elohim is presented in the Christian Bible as the one and only Creator, with a clear plan for human life. The Deity is reliable, dependable: *'...I am the LORD All-Powerful, and I never change' (Malachi 3:6).*

Rather than being seen as a 'trinity' of beings (a reflection of pre-Christian beliefs), the Godhead (the Deity) is better understood as a 'Family'. This imagery is scattered throughout the Scriptures. Thus there is the *Father*, the *Son* and the New Testament refers repeatedly to the *'children of God'*, to *'my sons and daughters'*.

Such imagery widens the prospect for mankind's eternal future: *'... his divine power has given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that has called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature' (II Peter 1:4).*

Children of God

There are an estimated two billion of us labelled as 'Christian'. We go to church, we pray, we participate in the rituals of our church— and some are martyred

for their faith. However, as the apostle points out, it is the 'divine power' that enables us to become part of the divine Family, to be *'...partakers of the divine nature'*.

That divine power is the *Holy Spirit* of God, without which we cannot be called 'Christian': *'... you are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his' (Romans 8: 9).*

Simply 'going to church' or conforming with church doctrine, then, doesn't make us part of His Family. We must become a 'new creature': *'...if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new' (II Corinthians 5:17).* It is a process, a radical change of heart..

A New Birth

Jesus flummoxed a leading Pharisee by telling him that he had to be 'born again', rightly understood by him as the result of a birthing process (John 3). As wrote Peter, *'...God and Father ...has begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you' (II Peter 1:3-4).*

As 'begotten' children of God Christians are in the 'womb' of the church but not yet 'born again'. Note the words of Jesus: *'...That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit' (John 3:6).* As

Paul told the Corinthian brethren: *'...flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption'* (I Corinthians 15: 50). As long as we are alive in the flesh (ie 'corruptible') we are clearly not 'born again'!

When a man or woman humbly repents before God, and is baptized (immersed) in water, the Father 'begets' them with His Spirit, so that *'...The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God'* (Romans 8:16). We truly become spirit 'embryos' to be born into His Spirit Family.

That 'new birth' is, as wrote Peter, our *'inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled'*, for we shall then *'... be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God'* (Romans 8:21), to reign eternally as the brethren of the resurrected Jesus: *'...both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren'* (Hebrews 2:11).

With the Spirit indwelling each Christian we are indeed 'children of God'. Wrote the apostle John *'...now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is'* (I John 3:2).

What a day that will be when *'...In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump[et]: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed'* (I Corinthians 15:52)! We shall then be *'...ever with the Lord'*, and entering into our eternal inheritance in incorruptible bodies.

Spirit Body

The living human being encompasses our flesh and bones and our life-blood—all subject to change and decay, all destined to 'return to dust'. Our life force derives from the energy circulated in the blood—called in the Scriptures, the *soul*: *'...the blood is the life [Heb. nephesh] ; and you may not eat the life with the flesh'* (Deuteronomy 12:23), for *'...the life of the flesh is in the blood'* (Leviticus 17:11).

But there's more to us, much more. Each is endowed with what the Scriptures term *'...a spirit in man'* (Job 32:8) which gives us our individual characteristics. It mirrors the divine image in which man was first created (Genesis 1:26f), enabling our higher senses and setting us apart from the lower creation. (They, too, have a spirit, giving them their individual unique qualities, Ecclesiastes 3:21.)

The *spirit in man* is our link to the Creator by which we can communicate with Him and He with us (Romans 8:16). It is active when in the body but is otherwise inert. When we die the human spirit passes to God's care: *'... Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it'* (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Jesus recognized this, saying: *'...Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit: and having said thus, he gave up the ghost [expired]* (Luke 23:46). The martyr Steven, too:

'...they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit' (Acts 7:59, also Revelation 11:11).

Judgment to Come

In each of us the spirit carries an imprint of all we are and, perhaps scarcely, of all we think and do (see Luke 12:2-3). It returns to God (but on occasion can return to the body—Luke 8:55), and will be restored to life through a resurrection: *'...it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment'* (Hebrews 9:27).

There's no escape! : *'...For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he has done, whether it be good or bad'* (II Corinthians 5:10).

That means a return to life by means of resurrection. *All* of us—the people of God *and* all who are in this life not related to the Godhead *via* the Spirit. Our human spirit will be activated in a body, either a fleshly body or a spirit body: *'...There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body'*, wrote the apostle Paul (I Corinthians 15:44).

Those in whom dwells God's Spirit will be raised incorruptible at the return of Messiah, to die no more. The *'...rest of the dead'* will at the end of his thousand year reign be raised in a physical body for a period of **cont'd p.4**

Festivals 2018

Lord's Supper	29 March (Thurs evg)
Unleavened Bread	31 March-April 6
Pentecost	May 20
Trumpets	September 10
Atonement	September 19
Tabernacles	September 24-30
Eighth Day	October 1

God carefully selects those whom He adds to His spirit Family

It's the life-blood of every church—proclaim the Christian message to all and sundry, with the aim of drawing everyone to Christ *via* their church. The 'how' is as diverse as each preacher. The 'why' is largely misunderstood.

Many of us drift into our parents' church—at least initially. (It's the thing to do on a Sunday!) Most, perhaps, need nudging, and that's where preaching comes in. To prepare our hearers for 'heaven' or save from 'hell' is accepted as the 'why', though some sects will seek to lure members to its denomination to boost its financial status. For others it's 'come to Jesus to solve all life's challenges'.

It is vital that we examine what Jesus himself tells us, for it turns out that with all its simplicity salvation isn't quite so simple!

Salvation

'Heaven' may be attractive—especially if the alternative is 'hell'! (Both, incidentally, as generally portrayed are false concepts.) But the divine purpose truly transcends our imagination.

Salvation is the goal and is sought by all Christians of every hue and in some form or other by every major faith system. But the goal isn't 'heaven'. It isn't Paradise. It isn't Nirvana or any other imagined end.

God's purpose is to bring humanity from our present mortal state to become part of His immortal spirit Family, to work with Him throughout eternity. Created in His image mankind (represented by Adam) chose the path of self-

determination, choosing to reject the way of life God set before him.

Brought before the bar of justice ('...*what have you done?*' Genesis 3) guilt was established and the appropriate sentence passed on each of the involved parties. The death penalty passed on Adam, and as representative head of mankind it passed to all his descendants: '...*since by man came death...in Adam all die*' (I Corinthians 15:21-22). Elsewhere he notes: '...*Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression*' (I Timothy 2:14). Both had sinned.

Go...

The foundation, of course, for evangelism is the 'Great Commission' from Jesus to his disciples: '...*Go, then, to all peoples everywhere and make them my disciples: baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey everything I have commanded you*' (Matthew 28:19-20). He had earlier told them: 'I will build my church and not even death will ever be able to overcome it' (ch 16:18).

But he himself said that '...*what I have commanded*' is no easy ride—a concept not widely understood by Christianity's two billion adherents (one-third of the global population). Note his discourse with the disciples: '...*Enter through the narrow gate, because broad is the gate and spacious is the road that leads to destruction, and there*

Selected...one by one

are many who enter through it, because narrow is the gate and constricted is the road that leads to life, and there are few who find it! (ch 7:13-14).

Selection

No employer would long tolerate an employee who is a mere hanger-on and unproductive. Yet most occupants of church pews are there due to parental example or solely by habit and with no direct involvement beyond the collection plate. An easy ride indeed.

Yet Jesus makes clear that God is *selective*, that He chooses with whom He will work—in this life and throughout never-ending eternity. Said Jesus: '... *People cannot come to me unless the Father who sent me draws them to me*' (John 6:44). And once they enter into a new covenant relationship with him—with all that entails, '...*Everyone whom the Father gives to me will come to me, and the one who comes to me I will never cast out*' (v.37). Enrolled for eternity!

How Shall They Hear?

How, then, does God convey His invitation? Writes Paul: '...*faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*'. And to achieve that, '...*how shall they hear without a preacher?*'. God gifts individuals to herald His message '...*in all the world*', and those who '...*have an ear to hear*' that message He leads along a path to Jesus, the one and only Saviour: '...*there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12).

The apostle Paul exemplified the energy that must be exerted, in

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

face of all opposition, to make that message available to those who ‘hear’. His life was a living sacrifice so that others could hear: *‘...in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings’* (II Corinthians 6:4-5).

False News

Our bombardment by ‘false news’ is not limited to politics. Jesus warned us about it! After outlining the difficulties of the path to the everlasting Kingdom of God he said this: *‘...beware of false prophets [preachers], who come to you in sheep’s clothing, but inside they are plundering wolves’* (Matthew 7:15). Sincere some may be—but often sincerely wrong.

The apostle Paul picked up this same theme: *‘... I wonder that you are so quickly turning back from the One having called you*

by the grace of Christ to another gospel, which is not another’ (Galatians 1:6-7). Just as we read in the papers, what we hear from the pulpit must be carefully sifted—taken with ‘a pinch of salt’. As said Jesus—what matters is *truth*: *‘...an hour is coming, and now is, when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and in truth’* (John 4:23).

To summarize: We *don’t* preach so our hearers feel good about themselves. We don’t preach to amass members. We don’t preach to house the homeless or build hospitals. We don’t preach to ‘save the world’. Nor to bring in world peace.

What we *do* preach is the announcement of God’s invitation to everyone who has ears to hear that they may choose to join the Creator at the top table—as an integral member of the Family, the Kingdom, of God. And to participate with the Father in His plans for eternity. Ω

Divine Nature... *cont’d* from p.2 General Resurrection

testing (judgment). (Revelation 20:5,12). Jesus had said that *‘... the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [judgment]’* (John 5:28-29). The apostle John, in Revelation, tells us when this ‘second’ resurrection occurs: *‘...the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished’* (ch 20:5).

The apostle continues’ *... the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works’* (vv.12-15). Should an individual, then in

a restored physical body, at that time ‘fail the test’ and reject a relationship with God, they prove themselves to be unfit for eternal life in God’s Family. Consequently they die, their bodies then consumed in fire. This is called *‘...the second death’* (v.14).

The ‘spirit in man’ within them is then destroyed. It does not roam the universe forever more! *Death* and not *life* is the wages of sin! [see side panel]

Why are we here? Our purpose is to *‘...partake of the divine nature’*, to live for ever in an expanding universe as our Father unfolds His plans for eternity. Therefore *choose life!* Ω

Mortal spirit

The (human) spirit *is not immortal*. As with the lower creation and as with Satan and his angels they are *not* composed of immortal spirit. The holy Spirit who is God is alone immortal: *‘...the one who alone possesses immortality [Gk .athanasia]’* (I Timothy 6:16).

This ‘spirit in man’, different from angelic ‘spirit’, functions only when in a sentient being. Upon death it is in a state of hibernation—inactive, asleep: *‘...the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing’* (Ecclesiastes 9:5). The Psalmist adds: *‘... [Man’s] breath [or spirit; Heb. ruach] goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish’* (146:4).

[Surprisingly, a tenet held by the 14th century Pope John XXII!]

The Spirit’s presence in the Christian following baptism ensures *their* immortality: Wrote Paul *‘...when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory’* (I Corinthians 15:54).

Ezekiel envisages the ‘King of Tyre’ as Satan. The latter had been one of the cherubim and had been in Eden, a perfect, created spirit being—until *‘...iniquity was found in you’* (ch 28:12-19). But, says the LORD, *‘...you have sinned: therefore I will cast you as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy you’* (v.16). John, in Revelation, adds that *‘...the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone’* (ch 20:10).

What happens at 'the end of the world'?

Most of us would like to know what lies ahead. You can make your choice from a range of end-time dates, events, scenarios in the super-market of Bible prophecies. Each may have its merits. Each also has its critics. The one selected here makes sense to me!

The failure of past predictions for a time smothered enthusiasm for many churches—but the present state of the world has re-ignited interest. The general assumption is that we are now living at that 'end-time'. The cautious will recall our world in turmoil often down the centuries!

Jesus said that none but the Father knows when He will send Jesus back as King of kings. We will therefore steer clear of dates and stick to the process.

Divine Plan

It's a given that God isn't a 'god of confusion' but has a clear-sighted plan that He is pursuing—however flexible it may seem to us. It is reasonable that he has shared that plan with us—however obscure to our blinkered eyes.

It may be that the plan is there in the Scriptures for all to see but our prejudices and ignorance and distance from the original text hinders our understanding. It is fuzzy round the edges. We ought therefore, to 'sit loose in the saddle' ready to jump off our prime scenario!

Christians do, however, need to stay ever alert. The predicted end will come like a bolt from the blue, suddenly and surely. Said Jesus: '*...be you also ready*' (Matthew 24:44).

Saga of Sevens

First, let's home in on a statement by Paul as he addressed this question: '*...In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump[et]: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*' (I Corinthians 15:52). We are clearly at the resurrection of the saints and the return of Jesus.

Notice that the apostle's focus is on '*...the last trump[et]*'. Where in the Scriptures do we find a series of trumpets being blown, of which this is the 'last'? Only in the book of *Revelation*. Here, over several chapters, is laid out God's plan for the end-time. Each trumpet initiates a series of events on the world stage: '*...that Day may suddenly catch you like*

a trap. For it will come upon all people everywhere on earth' (Luke 21:34f).

That *last* trumpet is noted in *chapter 11:15*: '*...the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever*'.

Seven Seals

We can now trace back to the *first* trumpet—where we find it is part of what is called the '*seventh seal*' (*ch 8:1f*). Again, '*seventh*' implies others! John saw, '*...He opened the seventh seal... And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets*'.

[John's prophecies were written on a scroll, each section separated by a 'seal' which Jesus broke open to reveal the prophetic events (Revelation 5:1)]

History—again

Calamities have been 'normal' for most of earth's history—the *distortion of the Bible's age-old teaching, wars, famine, disease*. These four have been our companions for two millennia. So the first four seals (the so-called '*...four horsemen of the apocalypse*') likely implies their intensification at the 'time of the end'. These four on-going events are represented by the first four seals.

Jesus predicted that these will be followed by a time of serious persecution and martyrdom of many who hold to the Bible's teachings, and a time of trouble worse than any that has preceded it: '*...for in those days shall be affliction, such as was not from the beginning of the creation which God created unto this time, neither shall be*' (Mark 13:19). It is represented by

An End-time Scenario

the *fifth* seal.

Unsurprisingly, the focus of these awesome '*seal five*' events is Palestine—the modern Israeli state. It's the focus—but the conflagration will engulf all mankind: '*...for as a snare shall it come on all them that dwell on the face of the whole earth*' (Luke 21:35).

Cosmic Chaos

Next, said Jesus, is what the apostle John calls '*the sixth seal*' - disturbances of the natural order. (It follows on the heels of this time of persecution of the saints—Matthew 24:29.)

According to Jesus '*...there shall be signs in the sun, and in the moon, and in the stars; and upon the earth distress of nations, with perplexity; the sea and the waves roaring; Men's hearts failing them for fear, and for looking after those things which are coming on the earth: for the powers of heaven shall be shaken*' (Luke 21:25-26). Not a situation that will go un-noticed! And Jesus, at that point in the prophetic future, *has still to come, nor are the saints 'raptured'*—at the still future seventh trumpet. Lots of clues, then, about the end-time. But are we there yet?

Clear Warning

We can't rely on the vagaries of chronology with the assumed six thousand years assigned for human civilization. The Bible record includes overlaps and gaps. (Judaism, guardians of the calendar, say this is year 5778!) *Caution* is the watch-word'.

We could dislocate our grey matter attempting to unravel the complexities of the prophecies! Suffice us to be aware of the pattern outlined here. There have been endless (failed) attempts over the centuries to pin them down—and still we wait.

The Bible prophecies, however, are certain and will be fulfilled to the letter in God's timing: '*...Remember the former things of old: for I am God, and there is none else; I am God, and there is none like me, Declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times the things that are not yet done, saying, My counsel shall stand, and I will do all my pleasure*' (Isaiah 46:9-10).

Be sure you are spiritually prepared! **Ω**

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is for many a
'Book of Mystery'

unsigned articles are by the Editor

Centenaries...

2017 was a year of Remembrance

2017 was a year of some significance, presenting us with three special anniversaries. Five centuries ago—1517—Martin Luther lit the fuse of the Protestant Reformation, igniting the flames of sectarian conflict. And one century ago—1917—the ‘Balfour Declaration’ had a similar effect in the modern world, notably on the Middle East. That year also saw the rise of communism. All continue to profoundly impact our world, both instigating widespread conflict, both of significance for the future of our world.

1517

Centuries of moral filth had by then overflowed from the church in Rome and, in the words of Cardinal Bellarmine, ‘...had almost eliminated Christianity’. The long-time avarice and foul immorality of the Popes and clerics (as highlighted by ‘indulgences’) incensed Martin Luther to his actions. He was excommunicated three years later.

[The back-drop to the history of the times was the six century-long Inquisition which oversaw the heinous torture and murder of ‘heretics’. Reportedly, its work ended in the late nineteenth century. The current holder of this active office is the Spanish Archbishop Ferrer, a Jesuit.]

Paradoxically, the work of Luther and other ‘protesters’ saved the Roman church from implosion, initiating a partial clean-up through the long drawn out *Council of Trent*.

Unfinished Business

Luther’s devotion to the Bible led

to repudiation of age-old and ingrained teachings—not only on indulgences and the idolatrous Mass but also other matters relating to salvation. But Luther left an unfinished revolution. Perhaps because of a latent prejudice against Jews he failed to restore the primitive church’s observance of the ancient Biblical seventh-day Sabbath and holy days—practices which he recognized as authentic from Scripture.

It is notable that the Roman church continues to view all other Christian denominations

not as ‘sister’ churches but as her ‘children’. Patiently, as the different denominations enter into alliances with Rome, she is softly softly gathering them into her bosom!

Nations, too, are in this present century increasingly under the influence of Rome. A stream of world leaders parade to do obeisance to the Pope in the Vatican, and the present Pope Francis, himself the first Jesuit to hold Papal office, is seen as a role model for all of us.

Given the historical protestant—and Biblical—view that the Papacy is ‘the Anti-christ’ it is incumbent on all Christians to thoroughly know and hold fast to the Scripture teachings, and not be swayed by benign appearance.

1917

It was a world in turmoil. The Great War ground on with millions dying in a sea of mud. Revolution was brewing in Russia. There were pogroms of Jews in the Crimea. Governments eyed the spoils of war—and Britain

eyed the territories of the Middle East with its oil reserves and opportunity to consolidate its position following the defeat, after four centuries, of the Islamic Ottomans.

The British Cabinet included several for whom the Bible was a reality—notably the Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour. He was disposed to listen to the request of the scientist Chaim Weitzman who also desired a safe homeland for the Jews. In November 1917 was issued the ‘Balfour Declaration’ offering such a homeland.

The *Declaration*, however, had written-in vagueness which laid the foundation for Jew-Arab conflict—to this day.

‘Palestine’

By a Roman decree the ‘Promised Land’ was known throughout the centuries as ‘Palestine’. In the late nineteenth century it was sparsely inhabited by roaming Arabs with some scattered Jewish villages, and the land poorly managed. In 1874 Jerusalem had some 60,000 Jewish, 4,000 Arab and few Christian inhabitants (*Baedeker*).

Following the Great War the Middle East was carved up (carelessly, ignoring tribal and religious differences and animosities!) by the major powers, but until then there were few national boundaries, the various tribes simply roving wherever they wished.

On December 11th 1917 British General Allenby walked into Jerusalem freeing it from four centuries of Ottoman Islamic rule. The authorities assigned portions of the territory to Jewish and to Arabic (the ‘West Bank’, ancient Samaria) control. It remains in dispute. Each group draws on the ambiguity of the *Declaration* to support its own entrenched position. *cont’d over*

All three senior positions in the Roman church are now occupied by leaders of the *Society of Jesus*

The Arab populace were *not* known as ‘Palestinians’, a term coined by the Egyptian activist Yasser Arafat in the 1980s

Bible Source

Nineteenth century writers had long predicted 1917 [1335 years since Islam was founded] as a key date for Jewry, the Biblical *House of Judah*. Gratton Guinness, using Bible chronology, predicted the restoration of Judah to the land of Palestine and cited 1917 as the focus.

When King Solomon died the nation of Israel (in 'Palestine') divided, with ten of the tribes forming one unit, the *House of Israel*, and the other two forming the *House of Judah*. Israel occupied largely the so-called West Bank, Judah the South.

Both governments reneged on their covenant with the LORD, consequently losing their right to the Land and both being forcibly removed and scattered. God, however, had made an irrevocable promise to Israel's ancestors, Abraham and his offspring through Isaac—repeated by later prophets. Repent and they could return.

Through Jeremiah, for example, He said '*...He that scattered Israel will gather him, and keep him, as a shepherd does his flock*' (ch 31:10). Ezekiel adds: '*...[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*' (ch 37:21-22).

Recorded in Matthew 24, Jesus foresees a Jewish presence in Palestine just before his return (eg v.16). He also predicts: '*...they shall fall by the edge of the sword, and shall be led away captive into all nations*' (Luke 21:24). This is just prior to the return of Jesus (v.27, Zechariah 14:2).

According to Zechariah it will be a time of turmoil around Jerusalem (ch 12-14). Yet Jeremiah envisions a return of *both* Houses in a repentant state and having just escaped from their captors (ch 30:9-10). Twenty-first century Jerusalem is a divided city and far from holy. The

...keep the feast

Brethren of the church of God commit to the observance of those festivals appointed by the Creator and outlined in the Scriptures (eg Leviticus 23). Besides the weekly (seventh-day) Sabbath there are seven annual festivals when we assemble for worship, fellowship and instruction from the Scriptures.

These assemblies are 'harvest' festivals—spring, summer, autumn. That was the sum of their significance for the Israelites, but continuing revelation has provided insight of a more spiritual and prophetic nature.

The LORD had revealed a system of rituals and sacrifices which they carefully followed. In the light of the New Testament teachings we can see beyond these to their true spiritual significance. While maintaining the observance of the festivals we, for example, no longer sacrifice, their symbolism having been fulfilled in the life and mission of Christ.

The autumn festival ('Tabernacles')

prophet Joel (ch 3) predicts a time when, after having been '*...scattered among the nations*' (v.2), Jerusalem will be 'holy' and Judah (the Jews) shall thereafter '*...dwell [in the Land] for ever*' (v.20).

The implication is that the Jews' present hold on the Land is tenuous and that they face further severe trials including a form of ethnic cleansing at the hands of their (now) Islamic neighbours and a union of nations (vv.1-7).

The present return may not be the *aliyah* God plans! Ω

Spring Harvest

An example of these rituals is the 'wave-sheaf offering' by which a sheaf of the firstfruits barley harvest was presented before God in the Temple. It is fulfilled in Jesus who is 'Christ the firstfruits'

was in Israel observed as a 'feast of ingathering' of the autumn harvest. During this seven day festival the Israelites left the comfort of their homes to live in booths as a memorial of their forty-year wilderness wanderings and of God's provision during that epic time. This they observed *only* in the environs of Jerusalem.

Tabernacles has a range of important meanings for the Christian. For many years in the churches of God the focus was on just one aspect: the festival was seen as a picture of the Kingdom of God on earth. In turn this was pictured as a time of opulence and prosperity.

Its observance became for the brethren a week of living 'high off the hog'! Far-off luxurious locations were (are) sought for and expensive hotels booked. For some it became a time of excess and seen as holidays and not holy days. Indeed for some church groups it was an opportunity to increase church income (*via* 'second tithe')!

The practice is, of course, extra-Biblical! In the early church *Tabernacles* was observed in their local area at or near their usual place of assembly. The emphasis was on the spiritual significance of the festival. Jesus noted: '*...you shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem,*

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What does it take for us to become part of the Kingdom of God? It may appear fairly obvious, but it seems there's a deal of misunderstanding among the brethren.

Many of those who claim to follow Jesus Christ will, of course, believe you just 'believe' - without understanding the meaning. But my post-bag highlights the fact that many Christians in our own tradition also misunderstand 'what is necessary for salvation'.

Let's explore it.

The starting point has to be Jesus Christ. *"There is no other name given among men whereby we must be saved"*. It is through Jesus alone that mankind can enter the Kingdom of God. Forget Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism - and 'Christianity'. All represent man's effort to find a way round *God's* method of salvation. Through Christ, then - and only by God's grace, His favour, His mercy. Nothing we can do will ever *earn* salvation - not in a million years.

Why, then, put ourselves through the hoop by losing our job, putting the family's back up - because we observe the Sabbath and the Biblical holy days?

Many brethren have decided just that: Sabbath, holy days, unclean meats - doctrine even - simply don't matter. *'In Christ I am free'* is the cry. So if such observances don't matter where is the dividing line? It's okay to keep Sunday (some now do), and Christmas (some do), eat pork (and some do). If that doesn't mean anything why not keep Friday and Ramadan? Or Tuesday.

The majority of Moslems and Hindu and Buddhists are good enough people. They look after their own, worship diligently and no-one can doubt their sincerity. The ecumenical movement would have us embrace all religions as 'just another way to God'. But that, of course, isn't Christianity; not *Biblical* Christianity.

On the other hand, some Christians see 'keeping in the faith' as something of a tight-rope walk. Wobble just a little and - well, unless you repent you fall off. Is that the teaching of Jesus or the Bible generally?

One Christian believes we ought not to observe *birthdays* while for others that's okay. Both claim Biblical support. It's the same with *make-up* (for women, that

is!). Or the weightier matter of *military service* - some say fine and some see serving in the armed forces as a salvation issue. And both camps supposedly base their relative position on the Scriptures. Another contention is a '*place of safety*' - protection from a 'Tribulation'. *Evolution v Creation* is a further contentious point, with Christians defending both - and supposedly from the Bible.

Then there are disputes over the Biblical *holy days*. When should we observe the Lord's Supper? Or Pentecost? There are, too, several differing dates offered each year for the holy days, depending on which 'inspired' calendar you espouse.

In all these matters there are Christians - and Christian organizations - out there who robustly defend their peculiar view as essential for all Christians. *The tight-rope again*. If they are correct, then we had better believe it! However, we need to ask, is our eternal life so precarious, so dependent on doctrinal perfection? What does God require of us?

The Bible has many examples of men and women whose behaviour should shock. (Not, of course, a licence for any of us to do as we please.) Yet they 'lived by faith' and they are 'after God's own heart'. These godly people shared a couple of characteristics: *they worshipped the true God, and they were willing to change their wrong personal behaviour*. In other words, they 'loved God' and they 'loved neighbour as themselves'.

Consider the first generation of Christians - largely Jews. As Jews they were as widely divided as today's church, yet sharing common foundation teachings. The apostles didn't have to teach them, for example, who God is or which day is Sabbath or on which days God prescribes that they assemble annually to worship Him or about the mortality of the 'soul'. In their diversity they were all 'the Israel of God'.

But to be part of the new Israel, the church of God, required an added dimension: *Jesus Christ*.

Convinced by the prophetic Scriptures, by their personal guilt at having caused the death of Jesus, and by their urgent need for forgiveness of sin (see Acts 2:14-39) they urgently enquired about what they should do. The apostle Peter's reply was that they must have the indwelling divine nature, the Holy Spirit -

A Letter to the Churches

through repentance and baptism.

And that remains the key to salvation.

A mere behavioural change isn't enough - many outside Christ have radically altered their lifestyle, had a 'make-over'. All Peter's hearers had the externals of true religion. But that wasn't enough - *there has to be a change of heart*. Christ, by faith, has to be living his life in us. And like babies, we have to grow up and through experience to become mature.

If Christ is active in us we have salvation assured. No matter what our doctrinal deficiencies, no matter how young - or old - in the faith. For he, internally, urges us to a greater understanding of the divine will. Truth grows in each of us at varying rates!

Over the centuries, however, men and women have sought to carve a name for themselves by overlaying these basic truths with a tangle of doctrinal debris. It results in such anti-Christian pursuits as the Inquisition, the medieval religious wars, persecutions. No less the tendency to condemn all who disagree with 'my' private sectarian viewpoint.

When the Spirit of Christ is working in us there will be one major visible characteristic: *'By this they will all know that you are my disciples - by your love for one another'* (John 13:35). *Jesus's reference is to Christians!*

That love grows out of a heart filled with the divine Spirit, the mind of Christ. Working in us it produces all those attitudes and behaviours that are revealed by God in His perfect Law and as expressed by Jesus. It's a spirit of tolerance, concern, patience, mercy, humility and obedience to the divine will. Destructive heresy - self-willed opinion leading to sectarian division - stems from opposing qualities.

What, then, does it take to be 'in the Kingdom'?

The unfolding expression of the perfect mind of Jesus Christ dwelling in us through a repentant attitude (and baptism) from which flows willing and active submission to the divine Law according to individual conscience. *Maturing spiritual fruit*, in other words. And it is Jesus Christ - and he alone - who ultimately will judge us.

Ω

MiniStudy

The Feast of the Passover

**'... purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened.
For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. So let us keep the feast...' (I Corinthians 5:7-8)**

Firmly entrenched in the Christian calendar is the 'Easter season'. Annually in the Spring is celebrated perhaps the highlight of the ecclesial year, even - for the believer - eclipsing Christmas. 'Easter' includes both the final suffering of Jesus ('Good Friday') and a celebration of his resurrection on 'Easter Sunday'. Its observance is not without controversy. For most of Christendom Easter replaced the Biblical *Feast of the Passover*.

- Perhaps a surprise for most modern Christians, the festival of Easter was not observed by the first Christians. It was introduced in the second-century of our era by the church in Rome - at least in part to distance itself from the Jewish Passover observance on which the festival's timing is now based. The word 'Easter' appears but once in the King James Bible and is a translator's interpretation of the Greek *pascha* - Passover: '*...intending to bring [Peter] up to the people after the Passover [KJV: Easter, GNB Passover]*' (Acts 12:4). 'Easter' is a late introduction and the name derives from the Assyrian mother goddess *Ishtar* - also worshipped anciently as Diana, Cybele, Isis *etc*
- The *Feast of the Passover* - in the New Testament also called the *Days of Unleavened Bread* (Acts 12:3, 20:6, John 13:1) - is perhaps the oldest continuously-observed religious festival. In embryonic form (eg Exodus 5:1) it predates the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt, when they were delivered from slavery by divine power. Each family (or a group of families) set aside a lamb on a specific date, placing the blood of its sacrifice around the door of their dwellings: '*... And I will see the blood, and I will pass over you*' (Exodus 12:13). By this means they escaped God's awesome judgment on the Egyptians, who had murdered all Israel's new-born boys.. It is this which is commemorated annually in Judaism as *Passover*
- *Passover* is a seven-day festival: '*...you shall have the passover, a feast of seven days; unleavened bread shall be eaten*' (Ezekiel 45:21)—the first day and last day of which are holy days.. Israel was instructed to observe it '*...throughout your generations*'. It will, unlike the Christian Lord's Supper, be observed even after the LORD returns (I Corinthians 11:26). A representative lamb was sacrificed in the Temple at the time of the evening sacrifice (3pm-4pm) on Nisan 14 (Hebrew calendar, our March/April)
- In the beginning, under Moses, families brought their own offering of a lamb, a portion of which was eaten as darkness fell on Nisan 15. '*And they shall eat the flesh in this night, roasted with fire, and they shall eat it with unleavened bread and bitter herbs*' (Exodus 12:8). It was observed at the beginning of the Hebrew year, in early Spring: '*In the first month, on the fourteenth day of the month, at evening* you shall eat unleavened bread, until the twenty-first day of the month, at evening*' (v.18). *Note: As there are but seven days of unleavened bread, and as the festival ends on the 21st, this clearly refers to the end of Nisan 14, approaching sunset. This is confirmed by noting the timing of the *Day of Atonement* which is held on the tenth of the month: '*...It shall be unto you a sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall you celebrate your sabbath*' (Leviticus 23:27, 32). Note: time designations were, as today, fluid - evening merges with night
- At the Exodus the instructions for Passover were practical: *unleavened* (ie unyeasted) *bread* because they didn't have time to allow the dough to rise (it was made daily). *Bitter herbs* (*Heb* bitters) may have been a nutritional ingredient. In succeeding observances the blood, flesh, unleavened bread and bitters took on *symbolic* meaning
- The seven-day *Feast of the Passover* was - along with the remaining festivals (see Leviticus 23) universally observed by the first Christians, both Jew and Gentile. The symbols are perfectly adapted to the Christian faith. The *lamb*, clearly, is Jesus (John 1:29, I Corinthians 5:7). *Leaven* represents false teaching (Matthew 16:6-12), hypocrisy (Luke 12:1), and as Paul adds: '*So let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and of evil, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*' (I Corinthians 5:8). Note: (v.7), the Corinthian brethren (largely Gentile) were at that time 'unleavened' (Gk *azumos*) - ie, they were observing the festival both physically and symbolically. Yeasted products were - are - removed from the home for the seven-day period of the festival. (The practice is similar to the six week Lenten period on the Christian calendar - but at God's designated time and in the manner He prescribes)
- The implication for Christian observance is that by eating, during the seven days of the festival, only bread that is *unleavened* (alongside other foods) we are, in symbol, 'putting on' the character of Jesus: '*But you have not so learned Christ; If so be that you have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus: That you put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness*' (Ephesians 4:20-32). With 'Christ in us' we are truly celebrating his resurrection. In contrast to the memorial of Christ's death, the festival is a joyous occasion

* On the Hebrew calendar days begin when the sun is setting (cf 'Christmas Eve')

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