

new **Horizons**

Vol 23 No 6

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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 terms clear to those who have 'ears to hear' - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond.

Who We Are

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

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

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature—eg our bi-monthly Newsletter **OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson **STUDY COURSE**.

The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of Independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

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

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

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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**

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new Horizons

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God's purpose, His grand design for mankind, continues to unfold

The Creator conceived and then brought mankind to reality several millennia ago. We were created not by random whim but with clear purpose and provided with every tool necessary for us to achieve His purpose.

The Christian Scriptures (the Bible) are, uniquely, a record of that creation, a record of that purpose and a consistent record of how the plan has unfolded down the ages. Its development has been slow but has matured inexorably step-by-step to near fruition. And always on time.

Divine Purpose

The apostle Paul sums up that purpose: *'...it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory [magnificence], to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings'* (Hebrews 2:10). Or, as was revealed to Moses: *'...God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them'* (Genesis 1:27).

We humans are unique in all creation, formed out of the common elements of the soil yet in the very image of the Creator with His spiritual characteristics in embryo and the potential to become like Him: *'... [God] shall change our vile [ie insignificant] body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby*

he is able even to subdue [subordinate] all things unto himself' - Philippians 3:21).

Paul adds some detail: *'...So also the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body'* (I Corinthians 14:42-44).

What a project! What an awesome privilege! As is recorded in the Book of First Samuel: *'...He raises up the poor out of the dust,*

RECRUITING FOR ETERNITY

and lifts up the beggar from the dunghill, to set them among princes, and to make them inherit the throne of glory: for the pillars of the earth are the LORD'S, and he has set the world upon them' (I Samuel 2:8).

Covenant Condition

The perfect environment in which our first parents were settled ensured that they could live endlessly. It was, however, contingent on their adherence to foundation principles. They were created in conformity with inexorable physical and spiritual laws, and compliance alone ensured their continuing existence as living entities.

As rational beings endowed with the freedom to choose their own pathway—God's way or 'my way'—they chose the latter and alienated themselves from the Creator and from eternity. Man embarked on a course of self-destruction and we continue in the twenty-first century to reap the poisonous fruit of their choice.

God's Remedy

Having anticipated such an outcome God had advance plans *'...before the beginning of time'* to redeem the situation: *'...He saved us and called us to be his own people, not because of what we have done, but because of his own purpose and grace. He gave us this grace by means of Christ Jesus before the beginning of time...He has ended the power of death and through the gospel has revealed immortal life'* (I Timothy 1:9-10).

Our first parents reaped the consequence of their action, *death*. Through the death of the incarnated Son of God, Jesus, anyone of us by accepting God's terms can have life restored—*life everlasting*.

These foundation principles for a right relationship with God were universally known in the earliest ages—but almost universally ignored. Some individuals aligned themselves with God and His way ('love')—or, having personal choice, chose the way advocated by the Adversary ('hate'). As penned the Psalmist: *'...the mercy of the*

LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them (Psalm 103 17-18)

Training Programme

One man stood out from the world-encompassing rejection of God's way of life—Abraham. The Scriptures record why God chose his grandson, Jacob (renamed Israel): *'...because Abraham listened to My voice and heeded My charge, My commands, My statutes, and My laws'* (Genesis 26:5).

Four centuries later, Israel's offspring had become viable as a nation. Their choices had resulted in becoming subject to foreign rule and God had to deliver them from slavery in Egypt.

Under the command of Moses their twelve clans were united as one confederation and they were settled in the land of Palestine with the divine Law—a summary of God's foundation principles—as their national Constitution. Although they themselves transgressed that Law they became its guardian, preserving it into our day.

One By One

Generation by generation a few faithful freely rallied to the divine way—Abel, Enoch, Noah, Shem, Abraham and David *for example*. The vast majority of mankind sank ever more deeply into rank idolatry and enmity towards the one true God. Even Israel, chosen by God as the torch-bearer for the way of truth, became submerged in the same mire.

At the appropriate moment, the divine (incarnated as Jesus) became flesh, and alone He lived the perfect sinless life, taking on the

penalty of death in our stead. Those who covenant to enter a relationship with him become part of the 'Israel of God', and heirs of God's promises. Over the past two millennia individuals—often through persecution, torture and martyrdom at the hands of the apostate church of Rome—were added to that number: *'...a book of remembrance was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that thought upon his name. And they shall be mine, says the LORD of hosts, in that day when I make up my jewels'* (Malachi 3:16-17).

Criteria

As with any recruitment drive—and *Eternity* is a far greater enterprise than any transient business empire!—key personnel are selected with care. The Father, too, selects: *'...No man can come to me [ie Jesus], except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day'* (John 6:44).

The Psalmist sketches the 'job description': *'...the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children's children; To such as keep his covenant, and to those that remember his commandments to do them'* (Psalm 103:17-18):

- respect for God and His enduring and unchanging righteousness
- active participation in His covenant
- faithful observance of His every relevant instruction

It is God's desire that all of mankind bond with Him in a spiritual relationship in accord with these principles. Jesus, however, states the reality:

'...Go in through the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and many are the ones entering in through it. For narrow is the gate, and constricted is the way that leads away into life, and few are the ones finding it' (Matthew 7:13-14).

Matthew 13 offers some reasons why this is the case, as we obstruct God's universal invitation to become His children: blinded by the Adversary, cares of this world, illness, lack of persistence, persecution by enemies of the Gospel—even by family.

Our Commission

The church of God is commissioned to relay Christ's message to the world—something we have often failed to do though spending billions on a false Gospel or through inactivity, or the so-called 'social gospel'.

The prophet Isaiah, in another context says *'...you shall be gathered one by one, sons of Israel'*. He could well have been referring to God's recruitment plan, for those who respond to the Gospel message He draws to Jesus as the one and only Saviour of mankind. They are invited to commit to him by the covenant of baptism, and will receive the holy Spirit as their guide for the remainder of their life journey.

'Commitment' means to confess to him our sin, to confess we have been *'...at enmity with God'* (Romans 8:7) and to ask for forgiveness—followed by heartfelt changes, over time, of our lifestyle in accord with God's Word.

The choice is ours. Listen to the 'still small voice' of God's invitation—and become one of God's team for Eternity. **Ω**

The thought of losing a child—through illness or accident or stillborn—is abhorrent. We expect the ‘grim reaper’ to call sooner or later—but for one so young? Talent wasted. A future gone. Family ties unravelled. A gap—ing void. ‘Why?’ challenges us.

For many such an event provokes anger or bitterness. ‘God’ is blamed. Could he not have intervened? Isn’t he portrayed as ‘...gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The LORD is good to all: and his tender mercies are over all his works’ (Psalm 145:8-9)? It’s a puzzle.

Destiny

The default position of most Christians is that children who die ‘go to heaven’ or are not, at least, ‘suffering in hell’, and they derive comfort from that thought. After all, Jesus himself said: ‘...allow the little children and do not prevent them to come to Me, for of such is the kingdom of Heaven’ (Matthew 19:14).

The prophet Isaiah addresses it so: ‘...the righteous one perishes [surely including infants - Deuteronomy 1:39], and no one lays it to heart; yea, merciful men are gathered, with no one discerning that the righteous is gathered from the face of evil [adversity]’ (Isaiah 57:1). Nevertheless, soothing words don’t compensate for the sense of perpetual loss.

Reality Check

This sense of loss follows every passing of a loved one, heightened—as far as deceased adults are concerned—by concern as to their eternal destiny. Good—*okay*. But what if they weren’t ‘good’? That’s when bereaved Christians worry.

There is a misunderstanding here, almost universal throughout Christendom. It is that the dead are not really dead, but existing for ever in some conscious form and con-

signed either to ‘heaven’ or ‘hell’. *Not so*—not according to Christianity’s source book, the Bible.

Note the words of King Solomon: ‘...the living know that they shall die; but the dead do not know anything; nor do they have any more a reward, for their memory is forgotten’ (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Or the Psalmist: ‘...The dead are silent and cannot praise the LORD’ (115:17). When we die—we are truly dead. But that is *not* the end.

Listen, pay attention to, what Jesus actually said: ‘...God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone believing into Him should not perish [be fully destroyed], but have everlasting [perpetual] life’ (John 3:16). He offers us alternatives: choose unending life, or choose extinction.

He told his hearers: ‘...Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment’ (John 5:28-29). Your destiny - the destiny of all of us—is to be resurrected, brought back to life, from wherever—or whenever—we finally come to rest. For a period of judgment [assessment].

There is indeed ‘...a spirit in man’ (Job 32:8). When we die our human spirit is reserved—inert, unconscious—until recalled to life through a resurrection. It is not bound for heaven or hell or limbo or purgatory. No suffering, no joy, but ‘asleep’. When we die we are truly ‘at rest’. Our human spirit preserves a record of all that we are (eg our DNA) and all we have become throughout our lifespan (our ‘character’), and by means of it we are restored to life.

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

Rest in Peace

But the human spirit is *not immortal*! Immortality has to be ‘...put on’ (I Corinthians 15: 53), for ‘...[God] only has immortality [Gk *athanasia*; deathlessness]’ (1 Timothy 6:16). When resurrected the spirit is united to a body, either spirit or material. Those with the indwelling Spirit will have a spirit body (I Corinthians 15:44), and the rest will be restored to life in a physical body for a period of judgment (Revelation 20:5).

Divine Plan

Contrary to common belief, the Creator is not intent, at this time, on trying to save everyone. He makes salvation [*ie* becoming part of his spirit Family] available to all but selects only those who have ‘ears to hear’. Should you encounter the Creator you have a choice—shrug it off, or respond by dedicating your life to His service: ‘...All that the Father gives to Me shall come to Me, and the one coming to Me I will in no way cast out’ (John 6:37).

The Father, when you meet His terms, ‘begets’ you with His Spirit: ‘...if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his’ (Romans 8:9, I John 5:18). We are not born with it, but every new-born is assured of a restoration to life beyond the grave.

Your Choice

You can make a difference. A lifetime of ‘good works’ will not buy this inestimable gift of the Spirit. It is freely available to us only through the sacrificial death of the only person to have walked our planet without sin—Jesus, the Messiah and God’s Son (John 14:6). *It is a gift.* But a gift so precious it can only be given to those who have been made pure through the blood of that sacrifice, whose sin is forgiven.

That means you must commit to the way of life pioneered for us by Jesus. It is called ‘repentance’. The way is sometimes arduous (Matthew 7:13-14, II Timothy 3:12)—but it is the *only* way to live forever. **Q**

Should You Be Baptized?

Across most Christian denominations baptism is seen as the “admission ticket” to the faith. Is it free? Or is there a price attached?

Baptism is one of the “rites of passage” in many religions, not least in Christianity. The rite was practiced, for example, by the Sumerians (3rd millennium BC). It was integral to those embracing Judaism. And, of course, is particularly known to the Christian world through “John the Baptizer”. Jesus, himself baptized by John, commanded his disciples “...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptizing them...” (Matthew 28:19). And from the earliest beginnings of the Christian church the rite was enjoined on all converts to the faith. The apostle Peter on the first Christian Pentecost urged his hearers to “...repent, and be baptized” (Acts 2:38).

In Roman Catholicism baptism is one of the seven “sacraments”, and is administered almost always shortly following the birth of a child into a Catholic family. Most denominations today baptize infants. But it wasn’t always so. Peter’s hearers, for example, were mature adults.

Lesson From History

During the first couple of centuries of the Christian faith, baptism of adults was the sole practice. To become a Christian was a serious life choice. Jews who accepted Jesus as the Messiah were ostracized from the community, with loss of job, status, family ties. They were even beaten in the synagogues. Peter’s hearers were entirely Jews (or proselytes) gathered from around the world

in Jerusalem for the age-old festival of *Pentecost*. They were totally committed to the divinely revealed faith of Israel - to the observance of the weekly Sabbath and the annual holy days (see Leviticus 23) and to the precepts of the “Law of Moses”. *But something was missing.*

At Sinai, some fifteen hundred years before Jesus’ birth, Israel had entered into a covenant with God. They would, in return for obedience to God, be “...a special treasure to Me above all people” and they would be “a kingdom of priests and a holy nation” (Exodus 19:1-8).

As a nation, they failed to keep their side of the covenant and lost God’s protection. The separate *House of Israel* and the *House of Judah* were taken from the land of promise and exiled to Assyria and Babylon. Only the *House of Judah* returned, and chastened by seventy years of exile they were diligent in observing the Law.

But the general ethos of the nation in the time of Jesus - as today - was one of *outward* observance. Just as today, there was lip service paid to “being good”. But the hearts of most people festered with self-serving which surfaced in violence, greed, oppression, tax fraud, aberrant sexual behaviour. John, Jesus - and the apostles - challenged this.

Change of Heart

The challenge of the teaching of Jesus demanded a fundamental *change of heart*. Not just the outward obedience of the Ten Commandments but a new personal relationship with the Law-giver.

The guilt associated with all human sin could, in Israel, be removed through the tiresome round of divinely prescribed animal sacrifices. But these could never bring forgiveness of sin: “...For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and goats could take away sin” (Hebrews 10:4).

The awfulness of human sin demanded a greater sacrifice. But now in Jesus, the divine representative, all sin could be forgiven. He is “...the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world” (John 1:29).

God’s Grand Design

In further revealing God’s grand design for mankind, Jesus unveiled a new covenant. Now the same divine Law would no longer be written on stones but in the human heart. The power that enabled Jesus to live in perfect harmony with the heavenly Father was now - through his sinless life, death and resurrection - made available to humankind. God would dwell in us by means of His Spirit and we could literally become His sons and daughters, and brothers and sisters of Jesus His Son.

But it required “repentance” - a genuine sorrow for our transgression of the divine Way which results in a changed life. Repentance demands mature reflection on past and present behaviour. It demands an understanding of “sin”. It demands a readiness to count the awesome cost of discipleship - to the point of martyrdom, if need be.

It required, too, the knowledge that only the sacrifice of “the Lamb of God” - Jesus of Nazareth, God’s appointed victim - was sufficient to bear away all the sin of mankind.

Baptism, then, is possible only for someone of mature mind.

A Watery Grave

In the Scriptures there is but one form of baptism. That's by the *submerging* of the repentant individual in water. The apostle Paul describes it as a watery grave: "...Do you not know that as many of us as were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore we are buried with him through baptism into death" (Romans 6:1-11). And emerging from this watery grave - we would drown if we stayed under the waters! - is symbolic of our resurrection as "...a new creature in Christ" (vv.4-5). Mere sprinkling - or hosing - fails to convey this significance!

Rising out of the water, every sin has been forgiven. We are clean! The Lamb of God, Jesus of Nazareth, has taken all the sin of each of us upon himself through his suffering and his sacrificial death on the hill of Golgotha - "the place of the skull". Lanced by a Roman spear, His life-blood poured from his lacerated body.

Until Jesus returns (unlike the sacrifice of the Passover which will be observed after he comes back), baptized Christians *annually* observe a memorial of his suffering and death in the Lord's Supper '*...on the night he was betrayed*' (I Corinthians 11: 20-26).

Also significant in baptismal symbolism is the concept of being washed - again perfectly represented by immersion. Paul was confronted by Jesus for persecuting believers. He said: "*Arise and be baptized [Gk immersed], and wash away your sins*" (Acts 22:16, Hebrews 10:22). The water here is symbolic of Christ's blood shed for us: "...to him who loved us and washed us from our sins in

his own blood" (Revelation 1:5).

Your Choice

Every one of us - all mankind - has "...*fallen short of the glory of God*". His plan for each of us is that we share in His glory - a process that requires we become spiritually mature. By nature God is absolutely pure, and none of us can enter the divine Family loaded with our sin. God's love for us has in Jesus the Messiah provided a path to forgiveness. In baptism we acknowledge our determination to change our inborn hostility to God and His law ("repentance"), emerging from the water clean in His eyes through the righteousness of Jesus.

God's "glory" is not some ethereal pie-in-the-sky. He offers us the choice of extinction - or of living for ever in partnership with Him as joint-heirs with Jesus Christ in

a real material universe in which the divine plan will develop endlessly.

The example of Jesus, himself immersed by John, and the example of the practice of the early church confirms that baptism is the prescribed path into the Body of Christ, his church. It is symbolic of our death to the 'old man' - that nature we brought into the world with us. It is symbolic of our 'resurrection' as a new creation in Christ. It is symbolic of the washing away of our sin - our falling short of the glory of the Creator - in the shed blood of our Saviour.

If you are willing to pay the heavy price of discipleship, you must counsel about baptism. Each of us is faced with a stark choice of living for ever - or death.

God wants you to choose life! Ω

Broken Brexit

As of writing, the governance of the United Kingdom wallows in chaos and abject confusion. The Judiciary have ignored precedent and grasped the reins from the elected Government amid cries of subversion from the electorate—which in 2016 voted to sever ties with the European super-state (the EU).

That vote, of course, was a heart-cry from 17.4 million (52% of voters) UK citizens to restore sovereignty to Queen and Country, for forty years ceded to an unelected government in continental Europe.

The Supreme Court ruling overturns the established order and has the effect of further delaying our exodus from the EU—re-scheduled for October 31 but probably still

unresolved when you read this!

It's in our nature to want to control our personal destiny, and this is no less so at the national—the family grown large—level. Hence the expressed public anger that Parliament frustrates democratic choice. Hence the desire to retain (or regain) sovereignty. Hence the widespread antipathy to 'globalism' borderless states and rule by a faceless elite.

Given the rising tide of immoral and criminal behaviour engulfing the United Kingdom it shouldn't surprise us if we are entering a prolonged period of political and economic disruption. Our polity is firmly grounded in the Bible and it sets out a pattern whereby the jettisoning of sound moral principles is inevitably followed by a prolonged period of correction, a time of chaos, an era of confusion and civil unrest.

With a radical change of Government likely, it's perhaps time to 'batten down the hatches'. Ω

unsigned articles are by the Editor

God's New World Order

Man's failed systems cry out to be replaced. The Creator has over millennia been preparing His new world order

We have sampled every conceivable system from anarchy to socialism to capitalism to tyranny—and each may be briefly effective, only to eventually implode from within.

Behind the scenes shadowy elite world leaders seek to revive an ancient dream—a unified world ruled by a one world government, a 'new world order'. In due time it will be implemented, but at the expense of the shed blood of millions, a time of persecution and the elimination of all opposition. It, too, will be short-lived, succeeded by a millennium of divine rule.

Bible prophecy portrays this ruling elite as a combination of religious and secular powers. The mayhem inflicted on the world by the medieval church will pale into near insignificance as this dual leadership imposes its will, crushing all opposition. Jesus predicted that it will be the worst our world will have experienced.

The utopian dream, however, will dissolve into a horrific nightmare as the nations are mustered by this evil cabal to resist an invasion from space. Not aliens but the returning King of kings as He prepares to overthrow the Satanic new world order.

Few Men Left

The consequence of this great planet-embracing conflict between good and evil is a world decimated of its population. Devastating wars, natural disasters

and the fanatical elimination of all opposition. As wrote the prophet Isaiah: '*...Therefore has the curse devoured the earth, and they that dwell therein are desolate: therefore the inhabitants of the earth are burned, and few men left*' (ch 24:6).

Perhaps billions from all nations will perish in these closing years of man's inept domination of earth. The surviving remnant will inherit a planet wrecked by human destructiveness and faced with the rebuilding of a ruined civilization.

A New Government

The earth-shaking return of Jesus Christ accompanied by his army of angels and resurrected saints heralds the dawn of a new era, destined to last a thousand years.

Since mankind's beginning God has been preparing this spirit army. The Christian Scriptures record the names of many of them gathered over the millennia, men and women who remained faithful to His way despite hardship, despite persecution.

Jesus since his first coming continues to expand this 'army' by building his church (*Gk ecclesia, an invited group*). Each receives the holy Spirit and their life's mission is to become Christ-like, learning to live by his standards in accord with his guidance in the Scriptures. Remaining faithful to him they will be resurrected from death and will under Christ's direction oversee (judge) the new earth.

Jesus, addressing the Corinthian church, gives us an example of this function: '*...Do you not know that the saints will judge the world?*' (I Corinthians 6:2). And to the Twelve apostles, '*...You who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel*' (Matthew 19:28).

The Twelve Tribes

Note that the implication is that the modern physical descendants of ancient Israel will exist at the beginning of the millennium, and will be judged by the 'saints', the resurrected faithful from all ages.

As the end of man's rule draws near, these 'twelve tribes' will experience mass destruction at the hands of their enemies, a mere remnant of both Houses of Israel surviving. But the prophets predict that it is this remnant, guided by the resurrected saints, who will be assembled from wherever they were scattered and led by Christ to the 'land of promise' as the foundation for his earthly Kingdom.

Note what Jeremiah says: '*...I will gather them out of all the lands, there where I have driven them in My anger, and in My fury, and in great indignation. And I will bring them again to this place [Palestine], and I will cause them to live in safety. And they shall be My people, and I will be their God. And I will give them one heart and one way, that they may fear Me all the days, for good to them and to their sons after them. And I will cut an everlasting covenant with them, that I will not turn away from them, to do good to them. But I will put My fear in their heart, that they shall not depart from Me*' (ch 32:37-40).

The twelve tribes of Israel, however, are but the vanguard of the new world order. Portions of other nations will also survive the horrendous last days.

We learn from Isaiah that ‘...in that day Israel shall be the third with Egypt and with Assyria, a blessing in the midst of the earth’ (Isaiah 19:24). Once hostile nations will, under the rule of Christ, and imbued with that ‘...one heart and one way’ become co-operative:

...in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the house of the LORD shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and people shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. (Micah 4)

It’s a glorious era during which ‘...the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah, as the waters cover the sea’ (Habakkuk 2:14). Jesus described it to his disciples in Matthew ch 25: ‘...when the Son of Man comes in His glory, [the time-setting] and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. And before Him shall be gathered all the nations [all people who have survived the end-time terrors]; and He will separate them from one another, as the shepherd separates the sheep from the goats (vv.31ff).

All mankind, during this millennial period, will worship the one true God, as the resurrected saints carry the true faith to all corners of the planet. All will worship the

uncertainty!

Our world is presently—as so often—in a state of turmoil. Globally, nationally and too often personally we are in uncertain times.

There are hot conflicts in the Middle East and in Africa, imminent trade wars on several fronts, border tensions in the Americas. The Euro-zone teeters on the brink of recession. And we continue to experience political and economic uncertainty here in the United Kingdom and in the United States of America.

World leaders gather in a whirl of summits on the economy, on crime, on the predicted climate change—but nothing changes: *same old, same old talking shop*. Davos, the ‘Google Camp’—opportunities to exchange weird ideas, to party, to preen self-importance.

But personally we scour the press and the media for answers to our personal challenges—our finances, our health, our security. And the ‘pound in our pocket’ continues its shrinkage. The violence and criminality in *our* street goes unchecked.

Meanwhile our grasp of spiritual values becomes ever weaker. ‘A tree is known by its fruit’ and we are gathering baskets of rotten fruit—not fit to eat, aspects of our society not fit for purpose: justice perverted, the elderly neglected, children abandoned in care, financial institutions untrustworthy. No wonder we are largely on edge, anxious, uncertain, depressed!

The Reason Why

I don’t believe our ruling authori-

ties will ever implement the measures required for a good society. In past times they at least paid lip service to the principles of good government, but that has long been abandoned in favour of experimental theories.

Our society has had a shift of its foundations. In the past our institutions were based, however loosely, on Christian principles, now long eroded as even the established churches cast off what they consider to be the constraints of Bible morality, the Decalogue trodden underfoot.

Personal Change

Society may be thrashing about on a storm-tossed sea of relative values and uncertainty. But *we* don’t have to! In our personal lives we can choose to stand on that solid rock of sound divinely-approved Christian teaching. Not a constraint but a release from the shackles of human reasoning that is adrift from divine guidance.

The teachings of Jesus are writ large for anyone to apply—with success—in their day-to-day living. The essence of his teachings, however, penetrate to a deeper layer of our being—into our spirit.

Change of Heart

It requires an acknowledgement that we do *not* presently have a relationship with the Creator, that we are excluded from His presence because of our heritage and because of our perhaps unconscious rejection of His requirements. It requires a transformation of our world view, *a radical and personal change of heart*. And that can result only from a direct intervention by the Spirit of God as we acknowledge our sinfulness—and commit to Him. Ω

Almighty God of the Christian Scriptures in accord with God’s revealed pattern (*see* Zechariah 14:16). All will be assessed according to the fruit they bear, how they respond to

‘...my (Christ’s) brethren’ - Matthew 25:35-40. The survivors and their descendants will people and renew the planet guided by the benign rule of God’s *New World Order*. Ω

...on the nature of God

When I was a child 'God' was always there—in the background, part of the scenery, shadowy and ill-defined. I didn't think not to 'say my prayers' at bed-time—*'save Thy little lamb tonight. God bless mummy and daddy. And in church we warbled 'Jesus loves the little children'.*

He did not, however, come across as anything other than what the Psalmist describes: *'...You, O God, are God, full of pity; and gracious, longsuffering and rich in mercy and truth* (Psalm 86: 15).

That was a comforting backdrop to my early life. Though of course mature thought added further dimensions: His glory, His power, His concern for His grand master-plan to *'...bring many sons to glory'*, to share Creation with Him and with His Son, Jesus. And we understood He has love for all His creation.

A Distorted Perspective

That, however, isn't how everyone pictures the God of the Christian Scriptures. For some He is a fun figure with a long white beard, for others a genocidal monster. Shocking as it may seem, for centuries many bearing the Christian label—the mediaeval church—so misunderstood His nature that they resorted to torture and murder in His Name. It reflects the words of Jesus to his disciples: *'...They will put you out of the synagogue, but an hour is coming that everyone killing you will think to bear a service before God'* (John 16:2).

What a despicable perversion of the character of a loving Father and His Son! But the Roman church isn't the only culprit, for a doctrinal plank common within

Protestantism—but usually hidden—is that the 'wicked' and the 'unreached' burn endlessly in 'hell fire'. Nor is *their* record of fires and executions for heretics praiseworthy.

True Love

'God is love'. That is, He desires to form long-term personal relationships with us by covenant—it's the very reason He created mankind, the reason Jesus gave his life for us, that we might be one with him. In the beginning the Creator walked and talked with us providing every facility to nourish that relationship. We spurned it aided and abetted by the Adversary, choosing self-will—a path we have since trodden to our lasting detriment.

Down the centuries a few individuals were faithful to this relationship with Him, often in face of difficult times. In God's good time came Jesus Christ, the epitome of love and a perfect reflection of the divine character—true love, the perfect relationship.

Jesus on his final encounter with the disciples told them: *'...In that day you shall know that I am in My Father, and you are in Me, and I am in you'* (John 14:20). It's the perfect melding of two beings and a reflection of the perfect marriage bond by which two become 'one'. As wrote the apostle Paul to the Ephesian brethren: *'...For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh This is a great mystery: but I speak concerning Christ and the church'* (ch 5:31-322).

True love indeed, and to be emulated by all of us 'in Christ'. And isn't it the perfect remedy for the ills of our world. **Ω**

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MiniStudy**Linked Worlds**

Therefore shall the land mourn, and every one that dwells therein shall languish, with the beasts of the field, and with the fowls of heaven; yea, the fishes of the sea also shall be taken away (Hosea 4:3)

In these days of mass hysteria over concerns for global warming, the predictions cited here by the prophet Hosea should resonate with all of us. Strangely, to the modern ear, his take on the cause differs radically from ours. No mention of fossil fuels or carbon emissions or coal. No recourse to wind farms or solar panels. His reasons for the causes of the land mourning are as relevant today as they were then—despite the differing culture, despite the vastly increased population.

- Our world and all its interconnecting natural systems is mind-bendingly complex. As science develops the tools to explore the universe it is increasingly astounded. Even if we had all the materials at hand no way could we have the capacity to build a planet nor to 'create' life—nor a single living cell. But, of course, it all began with 'creation from nothing'. Simple! The Scriptures sum up that beginning: *'...In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth'* (Genesis 1:1)
- We have throughout our history experienced awesome destructive forces that continue to shape the planet: earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, floods. Our coastlines are eroded daily. Volcanoes erupt sometimes forming new islands or destroying populations. Once verdant areas have become desert (eg the Sahara) and civilisations have disappeared—because of 'climate change'. So it has ever been. 'Mother Nature', it appears, has a mind of her own and there's little man can do to challenge her
- Not that it began that way, for our universe was created 'very good', the perfectly balanced eco-system. So what happened? The creation of the Earth had purpose—to provide an environment perfectly fitted for mankind to grow into the image and likeness of the Creator (Genesis 1:27). The planet was stored with fuel and mineral deposits for us to use to God's glory To achieve and maintain that image, however, was conditional on man remaining in an intimate relationship with the Creator
- For as long as the relationship was maintained God was committed to prolong mankind's life in the flesh, for *death* was the consequence of separation from Him (Genesis 2:17). Our physical and spiritual health are intimately bound with the foundation principles by which He formed us. Transgress those principles and body and soul die. Our first parent willingly transgressed and in that moment all changed. His physiology was transformed and he was destined to die, with catastrophic effect on all of nature. Earth now yielded her bounty only through hard manual labour, and wildness entered the animal kingdom. As the 'head of the (human) race' Adam's choice affected all his as yet unborn progeny and *'...death passed on all men'* (Romans 5:12)
- The apostle Paul observes that *'...we know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now'* (Romans 8:22). He acknowledges the degradation of creation from the pristine state of the original creation, that our relationship with God profoundly affects the physical creation. The prophet Hosea (*see above*) echoes this, referring to Israel: *'...there is no truth, nor mercy, nor knowledge of God in the land. There is lying, and swearing, and killing, and stealing, and the committing of adultery; and blood touches blood. Therefore the land shall mourn'* (ch 4:1-3). Surely such behaviour is reflected in today's world! In the time of Noah, too, (over four thousand years ago) mankind was almost eliminated by a stupendous flood as nature reacted to the almost universal apostasy from God by mankind. It was succeeded by a relatively brief ice age caused, perhaps surprisingly, by global warming
- It must be noted that the Scriptures ascribe earthly events to be 'caused' by God. In reality they are often the result of human sinfulness and misuse of resources. We are provided with the resources (coal, mineral wealth etc) and the intellect to properly use them—we are assigned to *'...dress and keep'* the resources (Genesis 1:28). Instead we have befouled land, sea and air—and our own bodies—with the inevitable consequences
- Moses warned the new nation of Israel of the consequences of fracturing their relationship with the Creator. What he terms 'curses' would swamp the nation—blighted cities, rampant physical and mental disease, their cattle diminished, infertility, disturbed weather patterns, severe drought (Deuteronomy 28:15ff), summing up the latter as *'...your heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth that is under you iron'* (v.23)
- As the 'end of the age' approaches it is predicted that men will 'blaspheme' God, refusing to heed His final call to repentance. Inevitably 'mother nature' reacts: *'...An angel poured out his vial onto the sun. And it was given to him to burn men with fire. And men were burned with great heat'* (Revelation 16:8-9). Paltry human efforts won't avert this judgment. Only a worldwide return to the great I AM—the God of the Christian Scriptures—can avert such a fate and save our planet. Can we heed that angel, that messenger from God? **Ω**

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