

outreach

GET READY!

It's not unusual for a title such as the above, in a Christian context, to be a clarion call for the faithful to 'get ready—for Jesus could come at any time'. Maybe tonight. Indeed, for we all ought to be ready to face him. But there's more to preparation than this—however important his return may be—for all of us.

In the context of the annual Lord's Supper, the apostle Paul urges his readers in the Corinthian church to examine themselves, put themselves to the test, before the memorial of Jesus' death—that's preparation.

In that context the apostle had noted that the Corinthian brethren had fallen into a careless attitude in regard to this solemn observance. They must each examine their attitude and behave in a worthy manner.

A Changed Life

Preparation for Christ's coming is also a life-style choice. Yet how many of the world's two billion Christian-professing people give it a thought? How many heed the warning of Jesus himself,

'...Not everyone who calls me their Lord will get into the kingdom of heaven. Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in.

On the day of judgment many will call me their Lord. They will say, "We preached in your name, and in your name we forced out demons and worked many mira-

cles." But I will tell them, "I will have nothing to do with you! Get out of my sight, you evil people!" (Matthew 7:21-23 CEV).

That is an awesome statement. Even though his followers have been 'prophets' (ie, conveyed/expounded God's Word) who spoke in the name of Jesus or expelled demons or performed real miracles—yet Jesus excludes them. His words should cause all who profess him to pause and reflect: *am I truly prepared?*

Clearly there's more to Christianity than charismatic preaching or spectacular exorcisms. Such are not confirmation of the true faith of Jesus. Note Jesus words: *'...Only the ones who obey my Father in heaven will get in'*. That means a change of life-style. Not just going to church, or carrying a Bible or Prayer Book, or attending a Christmas carol service. No—it's root and branch change.

New Christianity

'Give me that old-time religion' is more significant than you might think. Apply the words of the hymn to the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, however, and you are due a shock. For that true old-time faith has been replaced by a new Christianity. Jude warned: *'... contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered unto the saints'* (v.3).

It's not 'new' in the sense of recent, but was given birth even in apostolic times. Slowly, subtly, the new teachings swamped the faith

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PO Box 2525
LINCOLN
LN5 7PF
England

e-mail: coguk@aol.com
web-site: www.cgom.org
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Festival Relevance

Death and taxes are certain. So, too, is the undoubted fact that mankind is ‘flesh’, that we have a limited life-span, that we are subject to time and chance., that we inhabit a troubled and imperfect world

But there’s a constant search for ‘the elixir of life’, a potion, a procedure, that will extend life indefinitely. Some even pay heavily to be frozen at death with the—most unlikely—opportunity of being restored to life by future science in a perfected world. And medical advances hold the promise of life for all beyond a hundred.

All such concepts—human frailty and destructiveness and death, long life, a return to life following death, utopia—all are embraced by a series of festi-

GET READY ...cont’d

of Jesus until held by but a faithful few—often to the point of martyrdom.

This new faith is worldwide, all around us—in the churches of both Protestant and Catholic persuasion. It is embraced sincerely by almost all of Christendom—but it is not what Jesus taught, not what he learned from the Father. Jesus again: *‘But the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it’* (Matthew 7:14 CEV).

Preparation, then, means a return to the *real* ‘old-time religion’. You might ask yourself a few relevant questions. Use your Bible—all of it—to answer them:

- Am I a Christian because born into it as a baby?
- Will I go to heaven when I die?
- Do I have a ‘soul’ that survives my death?
- How hot is ‘hell’?
- What happens to those who die ‘unsaved’?
- Is God ‘three in one’?
- How do you identify the one true God?
- What is God’s prescribed day for worship?
- What and when are His annual festivals?
- Who is this world’s god?

The answers from Scripture will surprise you!

vals introduced to mankind upon his creation by the LORD. Moses calls them ‘...the feasts of the LORD’ (Leviticus 23:2).

The relevant festivals are, appropriately, held year’s end, in the autumn. There are four:, named by the Creator as Trumpets, Atonement, Tabernacles and Closing or Eighth Day.

They are firmly linked to the final harvest of the year in ancient Israel, though now celebrated worldwide in Judaism and by thousands of Christians. In brief they signify:

- **Trumpets** refers to ‘the beginning of the end’—a time of extreme turbulence for both the Jews and for the Israelite nations and indeed for the entire world. It also signifies the start of God’s restoration plan—when the saints from down through the ages are resurrected in spirit form to share with Jesus the task of bringing order and salvation to mankind
- **Atonement** is the purging of sin generally and the cleansing of Satanic influence over mankind in preparation for the coming of God’s New World Order
- **Tabernacles** represents mankind in the flesh—subject to decay and death, temporary, with limited tenure of the planet. In the context of the ‘end time’ it has special relevance to the ‘millennium’. The last day of this seven day festival fulfills that ‘cryogenic dream’, for, as the 1000 years ends, all will be raised from their graves (as flesh and blood) to face a final time of testing and judgment—the ‘Great White Throne’ (Revelation 20:11-14)
- **Eighth Day** festival follows immediately on Tabernacles. It represents the ‘new beginning’ when God becomes ‘...all in all’ (I Corinthians 15:28). Mankind in the flesh will be history, replaced by a new life in the spirit: life everlasting as the reigning Kingdom of God. The next stage of the divine plan begins—Revelation 21-22 Ω

FESTIVAL DATES 2010

Trumpets	September 9
Atonement	September 18
Tabernacles	September 23-29
Eighth Day	September 30

The Seventh Day

Since New Testament times it has been suggested that the seven-day week is symbolic of the divine plan—six days (millennia) of human works and self-rule, followed by a rest day (a thousand years) when Jesus reigns on earth as King of kings and LORD of lords. The ‘thousand years’ (the Millennium) of Revelation 20 is also thus specifically symbolized, by the weekly Sabbath. Ω

Israel in Crisis

These are tough times for the tiny nation of Israel—and not least for its embattled Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu.

Surrounded by hostile neighbours intent on its destruction, Israel is a focal point for condemnation by Islamists, by hitherto friendly nations and, it seems, by the United Nations. On her is heaped responsibility for the lack of progress in attaining a ‘Middle East Settlement’.

Israel’s concern—reasonably—is to be left in peace, as does any sovereign nation. And, just as does any nation, it has the right to defend itself—though not, apparently in the eyes of its neighbours. Just like the United States it has defended itself beyond its borders, but was willing to trade conquered lands for that elusive peace. (An example is the exit from Gaza—repaid by continuing rocket attacks from its extremist Hamas Government.)

A peaceable solution having proved impossible to achieve Israel resorted to an arms blockade against Gaza (*cp* the 1962 US blockade of Cuba).

At the same time the Israelis weekly allow as much as 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid’ into Gaza, rightly insisting that all foreign aid be vetted for weapons and goods that will forward the enemy plans. Weapons are often smuggled in through tunnels on the Egyptian border (bypassing the Israeli-built barrier), and Iranian weapons, by sea, have been intercepted.

Roots

To understand the so-called ‘Middle East Problem’ eyes must be cast long before Israel’s land grab when attacked by neighbouring nations (the ‘Six Day War’). In fact as long ago as four thousand years! Both Israelis and Palestinians have intermittently been at odds for that long.

As Sovereign Creator of Earth and all it contains, God has the right to dispose it as He will. All those millennia ago, the patriarch Abraham cast aside the widespread idolatrous worship of false gods and committed to YHVH, the LORD (Genesis 26:5). The LORD entered a covenant

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with him by which He deeded an extensive area of the Middle East (from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates) to Abraham and his heirs through Isaac, his promised son (Genesis 17:19, Galatians 4:22-31).

Before Isaac’s birth Abraham had another son—but from his wife Sarah’s maid. He, too, was blessed by God—but the promise was to remain through Isaac, father of Jacob whose twelve sons became known as *Israel*. Ishmael also had twelve sons—forebears of the Arab nations who are largely Islamic.

Relations between the two—and their descendants through the centuries and to this day—have been difficult, often breaking out in open war (*see* Genesis 21:6). ‘Ishmael’—largely Islamic, based on the ancient faith of Arabia—claims the promises to Abraham were for them and not for Israel or the Jews. Hence the present insistence that Jerusalem belongs to Islam.

Despite God’s warning (Zechariah 12:3), nations continue to meddle in Israel’s affairs—and the division of Jerusalem is predicted (*ch* 14:1-12). The Psalmist (Psalm 83) sings of a group of Middle Eastern nations whose slogan is ‘...*let us cut them [Israel] off from being a nation*’. As God says: ‘...*don’t meddle with Jerusalem*’. Ω

Are You There, God?

Does prayer work? Does God answer? Or is prayer illogical, ‘all in the mind’?

If, of course, you are a convinced atheist for whom the very idea of a ‘God’ is preposterous—then prayer makes no sense, it is contrary to all logic, all human reason. Anyway, an essential ingredient of prayer is *belief, faith, trust* that there exists a divine Being with power to effect change, affect the order of events both personally and globally: ‘... *But without faith no one can please God. We must believe that God is real and that he rewards everyone who searches for him*’ (Hebrews 11: 6 CEV)

For the believer, then, there remain those opening questions, and their experience is that prayer does work and that answers come—and they defy logic. The outcome, however, is not always what we ask for! How often do parents deny our children’s ‘prayer’, their request? Why? Because what they ask may not be in their best interest.

Misunderstanding

So, too, with God’s response. It may be a resounding ‘NO’—an often overlooked response by many. The apostle Paul experienced a ‘no’ when seeking relief from a ‘messenger of Satan’: ‘...*Concerning this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it [he] might depart from me. And he has said to me, My grace is sufficient for you: for my power is made perfect in weakness*’ (II Corinthians 12: 8-9).

The lesson? Every response to our entreaty is motivated by God’s loving concern for our long-time spiritual welfare: ‘...*For the eyes of the LORD run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show himself strong in the behalf of them whose heart is perfect toward him*’ (II Chronicles 16:9).

A ‘no’ response to our requests, though, should not stop our asking! Paul again: ‘...*Don’t worry about anything, but pray about everything. With thankful hearts offer up your prayers and requests to God. Then, because you belong to Christ Jesus, God will bless you with peace that no one can completely understand. And this peace will control the way you think and feel*’ (Philippians 4:6 CEV).

Notice that the apostle doesn’t say you will necessarily get what you ask in prayer. Rather, so-doing will bring the peace of mind to accept His will—as it did for Paul: ‘...*Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may rest upon me*’.

The Divine Will

There’s another lesson here. By all means, pray—about matters large and small. But in the process of persistent and fervent prayer *we seek God’s perfect will—’...your will be done*’ (Matthew 6:10). We should in time come to see our request in the light of that perfect will, which may or may not coincide with our desires, no matter how fervent our prayer! (The discerning of God’s will results from our ‘spiritual exercises’—prayerful study of His revealed Word in the Scriptures).

Again, God’s response to prayer may be ‘*Not yet. Yes—this is what I want for you, but now is not the time*’. That builds character. The prophet Isaiah points out: ‘... *But now, O LORD, you are our father; we are the clay, and you our potter; and we all are the work of your hand (ch 64:8)*. Remember, our spiritual welfare is His over-riding purpose—for each of us and for the *kosmos*, His world.

Worship

In writing to the Philippian Christians Paul urged prayer ‘...*with thankful hearts*’. (KJV ‘...*with thanksgiving*’), and prayer is often associated with worship.

Why so? Is God really so egocentric that He needs our praises? Clearly not. But consider that all we have or own—air, nourishment, environment, possessions, life itself—results from the bounty that derives from His creative hand. Surely a cause for thanksgiving and praise that acknowledges that bounty.

And not only so, for as the Creator of all things—the vastness and majesty of the Universe, the intricacy of the smallest particles, the variety and beauty of earth—we can but be awestruck with His power and His readiness to share it with all who truly believe.

He *is* there—and waiting for us to trust Him for our needs and for our life beyond death. Ω