

Finding Our True Identity

Has Britain truly lost its identity and sense of nationhood, as some have suggested? If so, is it important to recapture it? And is there an even more important identity we should seek?

The Archbishop of Canterbury could hardly have expected such a negative response from so many quarters when he suggested that aspects of Sharia law could be allowed in Britain. Many in the media reacted very sharply to the prospect of the British legal system absorbing part of Islamic law.

After describing serious social and political problems in Britain today, David Selbourne wrote in *The Spectator*, 'With such retreats, many from moral cowardice, there has necessarily come lost identity and lost sense of nation. Indeed, in these times of misjudgment, sense of nation is now as if under taboo, to civil society's peril.'

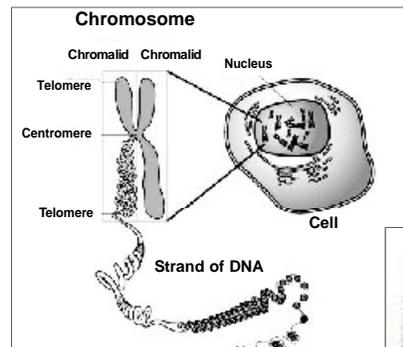
Overall our country has been pretty accommodating towards those wanting to move to the UK and share its benefits. But now Britons seem to be experiencing an identity crisis, as we can no longer identify what makes us British. Our culture and the make-up of our people are changing. The most popular meal in Britain is no longer our traditional roast beef and Yorkshire pudding or fish and chips.

Losing national sovereignty

Many British people are increasingly worried about the European Union, even though we have experienced peaceful relations for 60 years in

Western Europe. Co-operation and legal presence across borders are providing some protection for the environment and enabling better crime fighting. Mergers are apparently making companies more efficient and more competitive. But now we see mega-mergers across country borders that portend fears of what could happen with further political unification of Europe.

Could we ever see the total loss of national sovereignty and lack of control over our own affairs? Europe, the scene



Fingerprints and strands of DNA are part of our personal physical identity. More important, however, is our spiritual identity.



of what Winston Churchill called 'our finest hour' in 1945, is now heavily influenced by a re-united Germany. With its population approaching 100 million, Germany has greater political influence than either Britain or France. Many

Britons fear that what was not accomplished by two world wars could gradually be taking place under the guise of co-operation with our European partners.

Just as occurred in Rome towards the end of the Roman Empire, the inhabitants of London are increasingly cosmopolitan. In the *Financial Times* Maurice Saatchi describes how we see the effects of pressure put on more than just the public services, housing and health service. 'Naturally, the Englishman also worries about his language, his culture and so on . . . He also sees the other point of view. Immigrants bring wealth; immigrants do lowly jobs; immigrants built America; and against all odds, immigrants often rise to great heights – a feat much admired by all good Englishmen' (6 February).

Another aspect of this overall picture is that more and more Britons are moving out of the UK to places like the Costa del Sol in Spain. Five million British passport holders live abroad, citing cheaper living conditions, lower taxes, a better lifestyle and better weather.

Newspaper and magazine headlines state: 'Thousands more Britons join the exodus to live and work abroad,' and, 'Uneasy rich planning exit from high-cost Britain.' On the other side of the coin, 'One in five primary children [in

Britain] is foreign,' and 'one in ten of the British population was born overseas.' One bank has posters in Polish reflecting the desire to capitalise on just one of the new groups of inhabitants.

The watering down of traditional moral standards is yet another important reason why many Britons are opting to leave their homeland. David Selbourne wrote in *The Spectator* of 26 March: 'The right to choose has been increasingly applied to moral as well as material choices. Worse, there is today no alternative set of norms, whether political, cultural or religious, which is of equivalent strength to that of the "right to choose" [meaning the right to choose wrongly]. Free societies are under increasingly destructive internal pressures.' Crime, promiscuity and disappearing family values all contribute to an overall unease in our land.

The lost identity syndrome

Perhaps these trends and events are symptomatic of the 'lost identity' many Britons are feeling. At the beginning of the 20th century the British navy ruled the seas and 'the sun never set on the British Empire' as it stretched around the world. At the end of World War II, the United States assumed the role of the dominant world power. Since that time America and Britain have mostly been staunch allies.

But today Britain is also a member of the European Union, which is striv-

ing to transform its economic power into a global political power. To accomplish this, the EU wants to establish a type of government that can speak and act for all of Europe. This could well mean further loss of national sovereignty, so it is little wonder that throughout the British Isles we are not sure where we are going as a nation.

True historical roots

In fact our ancestors had already lost much of their identity even before the Roman legions invaded England, prior to the time of Christ. The Bible and portions of secular history describe how the northern 10 tribes of the Kingdom of Israel were taken captive to a region near the Black Sea by the Assyrians in 721-718 BC. (The southern Kingdom of Judah remained in Israel near their capital city of Jerusalem for another 135 years before their captivity by King Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians.) Then, supposedly, the 10 tribes of ancient Israel simply disappeared from history.

Yet some of their peoples retained limited knowledge of their earlier migrations from the Caucasus mountain range near the Black Sea towards the north-west. (This is probably why the term Caucasian was applied to them.)

History shows that some became known as Celts, and they carried with them many of their original Hebrew customs and values. In *The Barbarians*,

a series shown on BBC television, the popular historian Terry Jones compared the positive protection the Celtic peoples gave to their lame, sickly and poor to the brutal treatment by Romans towards such people. How is it that the laws of our land so often reflect aspects of those laws practised by the ancient Israelites of the Bible?

Our national future revealed

Threaded throughout the earliest history of the British Isles, and then on across the Atlantic to America, you will find groups who kept the seventh-day Sabbath as the ancient Israelites were instructed to do. To a degree they were showing signs of their origins.

Today their descendants are feeling a sense of the loss of identity. More and more national 'icons' are being removed for the sake of political correctness as the memory of an Empire fades away. Our ancestors were also lost from history, obscured by the mists of time. But our roots are traceable, our identity is clear and our future is already known by those familiar with Britain and America's biblical roots.

You can read the whole story with its implications for the modern world in our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*. Today Britain's ebbing moral standards seriously threaten our national security, prosperity and civilised way of life. But the Bible predicts a time when the descendants of all the tribes of Israel will be restored to greatness, and then they will abundantly reflect God's way of life (see Jeremiah 23:2-6; Amos 9:13-15; Micah 4:3-4; Zephaniah 3:20).

Jesus Christ will personally oversee the fulfilment of these biblical promises at His second coming. Our finest hour is yet ahead! (To understand more, request our free booklet *You Can Understand Bible Prophecy*.)

Today's multifaceted troubles and problems will then pale into insignificance. At that future time our peoples will be truly re-educated and taught God's spiritual laws.

Peter Hawkins
Regional Co-ordinator
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The Israel of God Today

What can be done by people who recognise the need to honour and obey God now?

The true Church today is called the 'Israel of God' (see Galatians 6:16). It is obedient to God (Acts 5:32) and consists of the firstfruits of God's spiritual harvest (James 1:18; Romans 8:23). This group is called now to live righteous lives in advance of the second coming of the Captain of their salvation, Jesus Christ. The firstfruits of God are presently recapturing the true moral standards and values that have been perfectly exemplified by their Saviour.

Their calling and spiritual identity is pictured by the Day of Pentecost,

an annual biblical festival which falls during late May or early June. The Old Testament Scriptures call it the Feast of Firstfruits. It not only pictures the arrival of the Holy Spirit (see Acts 2), but also the fact that the firstfruits from many nations are called to salvation during this age of man. This yearly festival looks forward to the autumn Feast of Ingathering when the divine spiritual harvest will become virtually universal and the whole world will then be covered by the knowledge of the true God.

To understand more, request our free booklet about *God's Holy Day Plan*.

Do You Believe the Truth?

How important is biblical truth? Does it have any connection to Church doctrine? How will the truth affect your salvation?

Not so long ago I listened to a BBC radio programme about the resurrection of Jesus Christ. A panel of professional people discussed the subject and a moderator was present. A brief summary of their views follows:

- A Jewish representative said that Jews usually emphasise this life rather than the next.
- A mainstream Christian said it was a physical resurrection.
- Another talked very vaguely about a cosmic triumph over death.

Not a single member of this august panel really knew and understood the biblical truth about Jesus' resurrection to eternal life as a spirit being. What each person, including the moderator, expressed was human opinion rather than what the Scriptures actually teach. (To understand the real truth about the resurrection, request or download our free booklets *Jesus Christ: The Real Story* and *Who Is God?*)

Who can understand?

It wasn't that these professionally educated people who sat on the radio panel lacked intelligence or the required intellectual curiosity. Their credentials were impressive. What they demonstrated in their discussion is all too characteristic of our present modern age.

Just before his martyrdom the apostle Paul prophesied what our age would really be like (2 Timothy 3:1). He graphically described the conditions that would mark our time today. One aspect in particular is the incredible irony of *'always learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth'*

(verse 7, emphasis added throughout). From a biblical viewpoint, why should this be so?

Another apostle helps to clarify. John explains that the Holy Spirit is the spirit of truth that *'the world cannot receive'* (John 14:17). Our Creator must first call us and supernaturally open our minds to understand His truth. There is no other way in which we can comprehend it. It is revealed to *'as many as the*



Pontius Pilate asked Jesus, 'What is truth?'
(Painting by Giotto, 1305)

Lord our God shall call' (Acts 2:39). We cannot approach the Son unless the Spirit of the Father first draws us to Him (see John 6:44, 65).

The apostle Paul tells us that *'the god of this age has blinded [those] who do not believe'* (2 Corinthians 4:4). In fact Satan has deceived the world as a whole (Revelation 12:9). He is *'the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience'* (Ephesians 2:2).

Belief and obedience parallel one another

Disbelief and disobedience go hand in hand. The opposite is also true. At the end of the day, true belief and obedience to God are inseparable Christian qualities. Belief may precede obedience, but if someone is divinely led to understand basic biblical truth, obedience will surely follow in due time.

Notice what Paul mentions in Romans 2:8-9: *'To those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish on every soul of man who does evil.'* So the truth must be obeyed as well as believed.

The apostle Peter commended those to whom he was writing, saying, *'You have purified your souls in obeying the truth'* (2 Peter 1:2). Paul expressed the same principle in terms of biblical doctrine. *'God be thanked that though you were the slaves of sin, you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered'* (Romans 6:17). Biblical doctrine corresponds to biblical truth. A scripturally based doctrine is a fundamental truth! In actual practice doctrine and truth are largely synonymous.

Obedience to the truth leads to everlasting life in the Kingdom of God. *'Eternal life [will be given] to those who by patient continuance in doing good, seek for glory, honour and immortality'* (Romans 2:7). But to define the nature of truth even more clearly, we turn to Jesus' encounter with Pontius Pilate, just prior to His crucifixion.

'What is truth?'

Pontius Pilate had asked Christ if He was a King. He replied: 'You say rightly that I am a King. For this cause I was born and for this cause I have come into the world, *that I should bear witness to the truth*' (John 18:37). But Pilate didn't understand and he simply asked: *What is truth?*' (verse 38).

Pilate was not privileged to be present when Jesus prayed to His Father in earshot of His disciples and future apostles. He had previously prayed: 'Sanctify them [the apostles] by your truth. *Your Word is truth*' (John 17:17). Biblical truth includes both the writings of the Hebrew Bible (or the Old Testament) and of course the New Testament (John 10:35; Luke 16:17; 21:33). Jesus Christ Himself added an important dimension to God's Word, and that dimension is preserved in the 27 books of the New Testament (see Isaiah 42:21).

One helpful principle to remember is that *the Bible interprets the Bible*. One portion of Scripture often clarifies another. Paul told the evangelist Timothy to 'be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing [correctly handling, NIV] the word of truth' (2 Timothy 2:15).

Discerning truth from error

Paul mentions two individuals in particular who had allowed themselves to fall into doctrinal error, and then influenced other brethren very negatively. He strongly cautions Timothy: 'Shun profane and idle babblings, for they will increase to more ungodliness [the opposite of truth]. And their mes-

sage will spread like cancer. Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort, *who have strayed concerning the truth*, saying that the resurrection [of human beings] is already past; and they overthrow the faith of some. Nevertheless, the solid **foundation of God stands . . .**' (verses 16-19). **These two didn't really understand truth.**

Perhaps 1,000 years before Paul's time, the psalmist said: 'I hate every **false way**' – every doctrinal departure from the truth of God (Psalm 119:128). Some passages later he plainly stated: 'Your righteousness is an everlasting righteousness and *Your law is the truth*' (verse 142). Also: 'All your **commandments are righteousness**' (verse 172).

Obedience to God's law helps us to hold fast to right doctrines and to distinguish truth from error. Jesus stated: 'If anyone wills to do His [the Father's] will, He shall know concerning the doctrine, **whether it is from God**' (John 7:17). Later in his first letter to the brethren, the apostle John clearly stated: 'We are of God. He who knows God hears us; he who is not of God does not hear us. By this we know the spirit of **truth and the spirit of error**' (1 John 2:21).

God has enabled His true Church to distinguish truth from error, good from evil and right from wrong.

The firstfruits of God understand truth now

Ultimately God wants all peoples to know and believe the gospel truths of the Judaeo/Christian Bible. He 'desires all men [and women] to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth' (1 Timothy 2:4). But just as ancient Israel became the firstfruits to God prior

to the other nations (Jeremiah 2:3), so 'the Israel of God', defined as the Church (Galatians 2:16), constitutes the firstfruits of God's salvation during this Church age (James 1:18; Romans 8:23).

This biblical truth is exemplified by the Day of Pentecost or Feast of Firstfruits. During this present time the Creator is only calling the firstfruits, a little flock of God, as Jesus described it (Luke 12:32). But after Christ's second coming, God will give the whole world an opportunity to obtain salvation – entirely devoid of the devil's work of deception. (To understand much more, request our free booklet *God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*. It shows how the annual festivals and Holy Days reveal God's divine plan for humankind in seven basic steps.)

Jesus Christ told the Samaritan woman He encountered at the water well: 'You worship what you do not know. **We know what we worship**' (John 4:22). Prior to Christ's patient instruction, she had no clue as to what truth is. But Christ explained to her – and to us today: 'God is Spirit and those who worship Him must worship Him in **spirit and in truth**' (verse 24).

In this article we are only able to scratch the surface of a big subject. But the United Church of God publishes a number of booklets. We specifically recommend the following supplementary reading:

*The Church Jesus Built
Is the Bible True?
Is There Really a Devil?*

Please request them by name or download them from the Internet.

John Ross Schroeder

How our literature is funded

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Talked to God Lately?

We all make time for what we value the most. Are we praying to God on a regular basis? The Scriptures have some valuable instruction and encouragement.

When asked about our prayer life, we might answer, 'What prayer life? I don't have one, I'm too busy!' Yes, we are all quite busy, but is that a legitimate excuse? Several years ago, a good friend passed on a phrase that his father used to tell him: 'You make time for what you value most.'

What do we value most? If what we value most is a relationship with God, our Father in heaven, then we will set aside time to pray to Him.

Others might say: 'But I don't even know how to pray! What am I supposed to pray about?' That's a fair question. The 12 disciples asked the same of Jesus. On one occasion they saw Jesus praying, and when He finished, 'His disciples said to Him, "Lord, teach us to pray"' (Luke 11:1). The instruction Jesus gave them we can call the model prayer.

This sample prayer (Matthew 6:9-13 and Luke 11:1-4) is not intended to be continually repeated when we pray to God. Rather it is a general outline of the topics we may cover as we come before God in *daily* prayer (Psalm 55:17; Daniel 6:10). Let's look at what the various phrases in this model prayer mean.

- **Our Father in heaven** – Jesus Christ tells us to pray to God the Father. In the introductory part of our prayers, we are to acknowledge His greatness. We should express our thankfulness for His role in our lives as a loving and involved Father. We can discuss with Him how He works with and helps us just as a human father looks after the needs of his own children. Reflect with

Him about His glorious throne where He sits in heaven. Read passages about God's throne in all its majesty such as in Ezekiel 1 and Revelation 4.

- **Hallowed be Your name** – Revere and hallow God's name. He is described in many ways by His various titles. As we talk with God about the greatness of His name, it helps us consider the vital significance of commandment number

God wants us to ask Him to look after our needs. He assures us that He will, but He still wants us to ask.

three: 'You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain [in an empty, useless or meaningless way], for the Lord will not hold him guiltless who takes His name in vain' (Exodus 20:7).

God's names give us a better understanding of our Father's majesty and greatness. (Please see the accompanying sidebar on page 6 about God's names.) We are to honour Him, remembering His great office as 'Lord of heaven and earth' (Acts 17:24).

- **Your kingdom come** – Pray that God will soon send Christ to establish the government of God on this earth (2 Peter 3:11-12; Matthew 6:33). Talk with Him about why we need His Kingdom, giving specific situations that we see occurring in the world, in our own lives and those of friends and family (Ezekiel 9:4).

The world overflows with tragedies, and God wants us to occasionally reflect on the pain and sorrow, so we can vividly see the need for Him to send Jesus Christ to set up His government

that will yield peace, joy and abundance.

- **Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven** – Here we continue to let Him know that we want what He wants. We ask Him to help us seek what He wants for us. And we ask that He do the same for others. We can also ask for God's blessing on His work being done through the Church.

This section of prayer prevents us from becoming self-absorbed. It helps us realise, 'It's not all about me.' It's about God, His plan and His purpose. Under heavy temptation, Jesus

Christ sought God's will, not His own, as He prayed to God before His trial and crucifixion (Matthew 26:39). We must do the same, never forgetting that God always has our best interests at heart (Romans 8:31; 1 Peter 5:6-7).

- **Give us this day our daily bread** – God wants us to ask Him to look after our needs. He assures us that He will (Matthew 6:25-33), but He still wants us to ask (Matthew 7:7-11; Philippians 4:6).

It is not selfish to discuss our specific needs with Him. It's acceptable and appropriate to persist in asking for something if we are seeking His will (Luke 18:1-8). Some of our needs include protection at work and school, in the car and at home; guidance in what we say and do; an income for food, clothing, shelter and so we can be in a position to help others in need; strength to ward off the pulls of the world and the influence of Satan (1 John 2:15-17).

- **And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors** (or, forgive us our

sins as we forgive those who sin against us) – Ask God’s forgiveness for specific sins. We ask Him to help us see areas in our lives where we don’t even realise we are sinning. We confess our sins, how we fell short, what we did or didn’t do that got us in trouble in the first place (read Psalm 51).

Thank Him for Jesus Christ whose sacrifice enables us to be cleansed of our sins – while committing to change. Talk with God about our plans to keep ourselves from sinning in that area again. We should ask for His guidance in implementing those plans.

We should also solicit His aid in helping us to forgive those who have sinned against us. Ask for His help to ‘let the hurt go.’ Forgive and ask for forgiveness!

- And do not lead us into temptation [or sore trial], but deliver us from the evil one – This is where we pray for God’s spiritual guidance and protection in our lives and in the lives of others. Again, we are to be specific. We know what we and those close to us are battling, and can talk to God about these spiritual battles. Ask for His help in developing a plan. Claim the promise of James 4:7, which is a strategy for victory over Satan’s influence.
- For Yours is the kingdom and the

power and the glory forever – We began with praising God’s greatness, and we end doing the same. This portion of our prayer reminds us again that we are not the focus – God is. He is great, He is love, His will is going to be accomplished; and we are thankful that He has given us a part to play in His wonderful plan. Of course, we can’t talk to Him about it unless we first know what it is. Read passages such as Revelation chapters 21 and 22 that reveal a much different future than what we are experiencing now. Ask that He would help keep us mindful of that magnificent plan so we don’t lose the vision as we experience trials in our lives.

- Amen – ‘Amen’ means ‘so be it’. We conclude our prayers in Jesus Christ’s name, just as He instructed the disciples to do in John 14:13-14. He makes it possible for us to pray directly to the Father.

Extra tips for effective prayer

- Become ‘conversational’ with God, being always mindful of honouring Him. Jesus referred to the Father as ‘Lord of heaven and earth’ (Matthew 11:25).
- Read God’s Word, the Bible. One-way-only conversations don’t work. God converses with us as we study.

- Pray in a private place at a time when there will be minimal distractions (Matthew 6:6).
- It’s a good idea for us to clear the ‘cobwebs’ from our eyes before we pray. A dash of cold water can help when we arise from a night’s sleep.
- We must strive to become totally dependent on our relationship with the Father to the point that we feel like we can’t survive without Him. In reality, we can’t.
- Make time for prayer daily. It becomes habitual as we stick with it. Do we value the opportunity we have to develop a strong, lifelong relationship with our spiritual Father? If so, we should pray daily. Remember, we will all make time for what we value the most.

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also pastors United Church of God
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Mississippi*

Recommended Reading
Active faith is closely associated with effective prayer. You may wish to request our free booklet *You Can Have Living Faith*.

God’s Names Reveal a Merciful Nature

The Lord’s prayer tells us to honour God’s name. The Bible uses a variety of names for God. He calls things what they are, and He calls Himself what He is. Some of His names describe His attributes and characteristics. Others are His titles of position, power and authority. The Bible calls Him ‘the Ancient of Days’ and ‘the Most High’. He is revealed as:

- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| Our Creator | Our King |
| Our Father | Our Healer, |
| Our Provider | Our Redeemer |
| Our Lord | Our Saviour |

He also says: ‘I am merciful’ (Jeremiah 3:12)

To understand the importance of the meaning of a divine name, let’s examine the most significant name for God in the Old Testament. In Hebrew it is Yahweh, often

translated LORD (in capital letters). The Bible tells us that the name *Yahweh* designates ‘the Everlasting God’ (Genesis 21:33). In meaning it is similar to ‘the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End, the First and the Last’ in the Greek language (Revelation 22:13). It can be translated into English as as ‘the Eternal’. This name distinguished Him from the false gods of other nations. It set Him apart as the living, true God to the people of Israel.

These descriptions of God clearly express that our merciful Creator has always existed and will always exist. He not only has everlasting life in Himself (John 5:26), He also has the power to grant immortality as a gift to those who are reconciled to Him (by repenting and receiving forgiveness of sins) through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and then by living a life of overcoming that is pleasing to Him.

Questions & Answers

Q Does the Bible teach universal salvation? The last pope seemed to believe it does? Please answer this question.

D O, Republic of Ireland

A Thank you for looking to God's Word for the answer to your question. We are told, 'All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work' (2 Timothy 3:15-16, emphasis added throughout). Right doctrine is defined by biblical truth, not man's ideas!

Revelation 21 and 22 are the final two chapters in the Bible. Verses 7 and 8 of Revelation 21 are decisive in answering your question: 'He that overcomes shall inherit all things, and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters and all liars shall have their part in the lake of fire which is the second death.' After having been given every chance by a merciful God, some will decide to persist in their evil thoughts and wicked deeds and therefore will not receive salvation.

The apostle Paul expressed similar thoughts to those revealed in Revelation 21:7-8. 'Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the Kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the Kingdom of God?' (1 Corinthians 6:9-10).

So even though God wants all to be saved (2 Timothy 2:4), not all will choose to follow the path to eternal life. Paul goes on to say to Church members at Corinth: 'And such were some of you.

But you were washed [in the waters of baptism], but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the [Holy] Spirit of our God' (verse 11). A loving and merciful God grants human beings repentance from sin (Romans 2:4).

So human beings can repent of transgressing God's spiritual law (1 John 3:4), receive the Holy Spirit of God and be saved (see Acts 2:37-38).

When we put all the relevant Scriptures together properly (see 2 Timothy 2:15), it becomes clear that while universal salvation is not taught by the Bible, the vast majority of mankind will nonetheless be saved.

Ezekiel 37:1-14 tells us that the whole House of Israel (most of whom never really accepted God or understood His ways in their lifetimes) will be resurrected to a physical life, given God's Holy Spirit upon real repentance, and be saved.

The apostle Paul tells us in Romans 11:26 that 'all Israel will be saved'. The word *all* in the Greek language does not include every single individual, but rather the overwhelming majority.

In His systematic plan, God has chosen to save human beings in a definite time order. The annual Holy Days and festivals of God explain the divine plan of salvation. During this age of man God the Father is calling relatively few to salvation. It is 'as many as the Lord our God will call' (Acts 2:39; compare John 6:44, 65).

The annual festival of Pentecost or Feast of Firstfruits throws light on this basic biblical principle. In the Holy Land there was an initial spring harvest, and then different crops were harvested throughout the year, culminating in the autumn.

Notice Exodus 23:16: 'The Feast of Harvest [or Feast of Firstfruits], which you have sown in the field.' This important passage mentions an earlier harvest

in the Holy Land.

But another harvest follows in the autumn. Continue this Exodus account: 'And the Feast of Ingathering [or Festival of Tabernacles] which is at the end of the year, when you have gathered in the fruits of your labours from the field' Exodus 23:16 constitutes an important key to understanding God's divine plan for human salvation.

Several passages in the New Testament help to explain. In speaking of Church members, the apostle James describes them 'as a kind of firstfruits of His [God's] creatures' (James 1:18). Paul refers to Church brethren as those 'who have the firstfruits of the [Holy] Spirit' (Romans 8:23). He also alludes to several first-century Church members as the firstfruits of God's calling to salvation (Romans 16:5; 1 Corinthians 16:15).

We don't normally think of anything being 'first' unless there is at least something coming 'second'. The autumn Feast of Ingathering (or Tabernacles) pictures a future millennial period when the vast majority of human beings will be saved. It will be the time of a great autumn spiritual harvest, a period when practically everyone will know God from the least person to the most influential (Jeremiah 31:34).

The final annual Holy Day of the year (the eighth day immediately following the seven-day Feast of Ingathering or Tabernacles) pictures the great resurrection to physical life where those resurrected have the opportunity to obtain eternal life. This corresponds in time to the events described in Ezekiel 37:1-14 and Romans 11:26, when the vast majority of human beings will be saved.

In summary, the Scriptures plainly show that universal salvation is a false doctrine. Yet God's divine plan reveals that the vast majority of humankind will be saved.



Letters From Our Readers

'From Elizabeth I to Elizabeth II: Is Britain Returning to Obscurity?'

Thank you for your recent article about the two Elizabeths by Melvin Rhodes. It was so true that just like after Elizabeth I, England may find herself standing alone should the relationship with the European Union disintegrate. I thought that the article was absolutely spot on.

C B, Bradford

Subscriber letter responses

I could not have agreed more on your comments about Rowan Williams. Is Europe about to take us over? Will the Roman Empire return? What about a cashless society and the chip? So many questions! The Bible records tomorrow's headlines in the media. I study prophecy and just wonder how long God can hold back His wrath with what is happening in the world.

H P, Derbyshire

I must comment that in the letter with this card, you spoke more sense than all the rantings in the newspapers and on television by the so-called experts. Thank you so much for allowing me the joy of your teachings.

J R, Bude, Cornwall

The United Church of God is truly revealing the mind of God towards mankind at this end-time when world systems are collapsing. Almighty God will continue to strengthen your association.

E A, Athy, Republic of Ireland

The Good News

I was just reading your *Good News Supplement* and I am interested in your *Bible Study Course*. I find your maga-

zines extremely interesting and thought provoking.

D K G, Camberley, Surrey

Bible Study Course

I am grateful to Almighty God for making it possible for you to send us such a comprehensive *Bible Study Course*. I am actually gaining much insight and understanding into His word.

B O, Manchester

I am really enjoying this *Bible Study Course*. Now my family is also getting involved. After I circle my answers on the test page, I then put the questions to them, even though they don't read the Bible. It is a good way of getting them involved and they are enjoying it.

Mrs P B, Cheshire

This is a wonderful course that makes me aware of God's plan for humanity, His purpose and how to reach His ultimate goal. I still want my answers on the test page to be marked as an encouragement to carry on with the course. The booklets are also simple and easy to read and understand.

Mrs C A F, London

'Dealing With Abuse'

I was wondering if the reprint article 'Dealing With Abuse' would help my 17-year-old son. At the age of eight he was, very sadly, sexually abused. He has struggled since then with different emotions, mainly anger and forgiveness. If you feel that this reprint article would help, please send it and any others that might help him or me in dealing with this very sad and delicate situation.

Reader from East Anglia

• *The United Church of God has prepared a number of articles under one*

overall title ('Dealing With Abuse') to inform, educate and provide understanding of a wide range of abuse issues. We have posted the reprint to the reader along with a personal letter, seeking to be of help. Other interested readers are welcome to request a free copy.

Helping to spread the gospel

I'm just saying thank you for your time and effort. It is really a blessing and I pray that God continues to bless you as you continue to be instruments to spread the gospel and further this message.

R A, Romford, Essex

These are just a few brief lines to say how much I appreciate your booklets and the Bible studies. Many thanks and may our Lord bless your ministry. Please accept this cheque. I am a UK taxpayer, so please 'gift aid' it.

Miss E M P, Deal, Kent

Please accept the small donation to your wonderful work. I eagerly devour your well informed articles on science, evolution and DNA. A Church of England member most of my life, I have never before encountered the challenges that your literature poses.

Mr A R B, Boston, Lincolnshire

Grateful Church member

I am truly grateful to God my Father, for introducing me to the true Church of God. During the past 12 months I have been consistently fed the truth of God's Word. May God richly reward all for their teaching, fellowship and prayers for me. May many more people seek the truth through the United Church of God.

C M, Leighlinbridge, Republic of Ireland