

FRIENDS OF THE NAZARENE©

An on-line Biblical Studies Magazine

“They Follow the Lamb No Matter Where He Goes”

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STATEMENT OF PURPOSE: Nazarene Saints Publishing© is a Bible research group for a better Scriptural understanding. We are dedicated to the preservation and publishing of Christian writings which aid Friends of the Nazarene© to "follow the Lamb no matter where he goes." (John 15:14; 3 John 14; Revelation 14:4) The Friends of the Nazarene© are a spiritual community of Messianic Christians. We are apologists dedicated to the defense of the truth that "God is One" and not three. The Bible is our creed. We view this "God-breathed" Book as inspired alone, while the thoughts of men about it are not. We wish to show respect for our multitude of Christian brethren. (1 Peter 3:15)

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

- ?? **FRIENDS OF THE NAZARENE SPRING ASSEMBLY:**
1. MEMORIAL APRIL 18, TUESDAY, 2,000, 7 PM
 2. Devotional & Discussion Group April 18, Wednesday 7 PM
 3. APRIL 20, FRIDAY: ELDERS' SEMINAR
 4. APRIL 21, SATURDAY: DEDICATION DAY [Water baptism]
- ?? **APRIL 22, SUNDAY: PUBLIC LECTURE: *Who Will Lead Mankind in the Third Millenium?***

FAITH PERSPECTIVES

A Forum for Contributing Expressions of Faith and Thoughts

THOUGHTS ON CHRISTMAS

[Brothers among the *Friends* “Research Associates” were asked for their views on Christmas.]

Friends –

Though I do not celebrate Christmas myself, I do celebrate family, giving to the poor and needy, and bringing joy to other Christians. Many sincere Christians feel they can observe Christmas without any injury to their own conscience. Though they are aware much about Christmas is pagan, they wish to “put Christ back into Christmas.” Though they are aware the god Greed runs rampant among Christian celebrants, they use this time of year for “special giving.” My own encouragement to Christians who celebrate Christmas is to use half of the money they would normally spend on the holiday in giving to the poor and needy. The Xmas decorations – and the electric power to run them – alone could feed and care for an enormous number of orphans and widows. [James 1:27]

Mark Miller, California
Mas Christos!

Dear Brothers:

I feel celebration of Christmas is a matter of conscience. I personally don't celebrate it for it's clear pagan origin. But I won't condemn anyone who would do. I don't mind having reunion with family members and relatives who believe in its spirit. Its like when a relative is getting married in a church. I can enter the church building, stay at the back and observe the ceremony without being bothered by my conscience for I am not entering to do an act of worship.

Regards,

Arnel, USA

My biggest contention is that it goes counter to the spirit of the practice of the wise men/magii. I'd like to see Christmas consist of giving solely to Jesus... in our case to the needy (e.g a glass of water)

The other points about the time of year are valid too. I think the concept could be salvaged by getting away from the pagan influences and changing it to giving to the needy.

Andy Weeks, Chicago USA

I myself wouldn't celebrate Xmas. There's, as all of you know, no Scriptural reason why I should. When my wife and I were still studying with the JW's, we had braced ourselves for bringing our daughter (Elliot wasn't born yet) up without celebrating any "pagan" pseudo-christian dates. When we stopped having contact with the JW's (or rather they stopped having contact with us) primarily my wife (we were still together at the time) was greatly relieved to be able to have

Elizabeth do all the things other kids did throughout the year. And I joined in, mainly because of the great need kids have to conform. It seems to be one of the greatest driving forces in their lives (after all conforming is how they learn). I would now consider forcing them to be different for no pressing reason, to be cruel. When the time comes and they will be old enough to understand, I will tell them what I really believe and will then leave them to make up their own minds. As far as participating in pagan worship is concerned, what have I got to fear from that? According to the bible, I can even eat food sacrificed to pagan gods if I wanted to. But as I said in the beginning, if it wasn't for the kids, I personally wouldn't see why I should celebrate Saturnalia.

Another thing that I've been thinking about as far as that subject is concerned is, where do you draw the line as far as abstaining from pagan practice is concerned. What's in, so to speak, and what's out, and why the one and not the other. Why no Xmas, but use the roman (pagan) calendar in everyday life. Why call the day that marks the middle of the week by Odins other name, or honor Freya on friday, why wear pagan outfits, why not wear a beard as the Jews did, but shave as the Romans did. Do we wear a tie because we are on the side of the Romans in their war against the Croats. If you follow the thought through, all the way back, then yes, we probably do. But does that make us Roman pagans at heart?

I think our personal walk with God, is something we should really be concerned about. If we really tried to avoid all pagan influence. we'd have to make it a profession, in order to achieve it. After all, we are of the nations. We were born into the nations and I personally thought, that this particular issue had been satisfactorily answered way back when it became clear, that those Christians that were not Jewish didn't have to be circumcised. In other words, to be of the nations is ok. And as the Bible tells us, what makes us pure, is having our hearts made over. The Bible doesn't tell us that we should outwardly become like the Jews, but that a pure heart makes us become the new sons of Abraham, the new Jews. It's the circumcision of the heart and not that of the flesh that makes us his subjects.

And frankly as far as I see it, that's hard enough a thing for me to worry about. Whether to celebrate Xmas or not seems to me almost trivial when compared to that.

All the best

The difficulty I have with celebrating Christmas is not so much the "pagan" adornments, since of course I can include or exclude as many of these as I would care to. My difficulty with it is simply that it's certainly NOT the

day Jesus was born, and it seems somehow silly or disingenuous to celebrate HIS BIRTH on that day. (Irrespective of ancient associations with December 25, which mean nothing to me in any case.)

This is not to say I would ignore December 25 altogether. It makes perfectly good sense to me to use the world's celebration of Christmas as an occasion to do good for others, especially those in need. Any occasion the world provides for that is okay by me!

RW, USA

Dear Brother:

Since leaving "The Society" I have been trying to deprogram myself. At the same time I have noticed that some who leave the JW's have what I call the whiplash effect and go totally the opposite way, believing in a trinity, etc. However, I have been trying to reevaluate everything and this issue of holidays is something that I am continuing to take an objective look at; if that's possible.

In answering your question I would like to make it an issue of religious holidays, at least for my answer. There seems to be different categories for holidays: religious, national, personal & social. For the category of religious I would expect our heavenly Father and or His son Jesus to inform us of which ones to have or perhaps give us some guidelines. For instance:

John 4:24 – *“God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth.”*[ASV]

Hebrews 13:18 – *“Pray for us: for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.”*[KJV]

If in worshipping God truthfully and in good conscience I can not celebrate a religious holiday that is based on lies (pagan god's, wrong birth date, Santa, etc.) and on selfishness, greed, and commerce. I feel that at some point I must make a stand for what is right in my view of the bible regardless of how my relatives feel (most of whom are celebrators) or how much peer pressure I receive. As John Adams said there are only two groups of individuals, those with conviction and those without. That is where conscience comes in for me, especially when I think of the future for religion.

Revelation 18:15 – *“The men who did business with these things stood far away. They had gotten rich because of her, but now they were afraid. She was being punished. They were crying and feeling sorry. 16 They said: ``How horrible this is! How horrible this is for you, O great city! You were dressed with fine cotton, purple, and scarlet cloth. You wore gold, precious jewelry, and pearls. 17 Such wealth was destroyed in only one hour!”* [Revelation 18:15-17 Simple English]

John, USA

The following link is to a Christmas poem that I pray will touch every heart as it has touched the hearts of each member of our family.

<http://www.voicenet.com/~gospel/christx.htm>

The following article is a bit lengthy, but my prayer is that all who are truly seeking to serve God will at least read it in its entirety, with an open mind and heart.

In Sincere Christian Love,
Michael USA

http://www.swrb.com/newslett/actualnls/Xmas_ch1.htm

THOUGHTS ON 1 CORINTHIANS 1:10

I believe that Christians should all speak in agreement regarding things pertaining to our Lord Jesus Christ! For instance what if some of us believed in the Trinity Doctrine and the other friends in the ecclesia believed in the strict Unitarian belief that God is one! Wouldn't we be divided on how we interpret Scripture? Wouldn't that disrupt unity? Of course Paul was talking about those who said they belong to him others to Appollos others to Cephas even something like that was causing a division! I'm not trying to say that to claim to follow a certain man isn't a big deal! But my point is if something like that can disrupt the unity enough for an apostle of God to reprove them on such thinking then how much more could doctrine such as the nature of Yehowah and Yeshua disrupt the peace of God's people. I don't believe that Christians are robots or puppets. I don't think that they will all agree on every thing like voting or taking blood ect.....But I do believe that Christians should speak in agreement concerning Gods word. We have an obligation to teach what the scriptures teach! If we give way to inspired utterances of Demons then how can we say that we are really rendering a sacred service to our Lord and his Son? Our God is a God of truthful things that the Scriptures make real clear are what we should obey and believe, things that the Scriptures are not clear on i feel we should appeal to others Scriptures that might shed light on the one at hand! But if we are still unclear than i think we should pray and leave it in Gods hands until he makes it clear to us! But when it comes to birthdays or voting or blood transfusions, etc. I believe that Christians should use discernment from what they fill the Scriptures teach and go with there conscience. God bless. Love. [Jason W, Southern California]

Dear Brothers

:

I think Paul meant stop trying to divide yourselves into sects, which lead to false pride and idolatry. We see this a lot now. Whoever baptizes you is who you are. ... When we are baptized into Christ we belong to him and the one who baptized us does not take Christ place. We must follow the teachings and commandments of The Word of God. Simply love God with all our heart, soul, and mind, love our neighbor as our self, and a new commandment that we love one another. Love. [Henry S USA]

==== END ====

WHERE WILL CHRISTIAN'S SPEND ETERNITY?
On Earth or in Heaven?

Paul writes that the Church has “one hope.” [Ephesians 4:4] While most Christians throughout the Gospel Age have believed this hope is heavenly, there are some Bible students who believe this hope is earthly. Where will Christians spend eternity? On earth or in heaven?

What is “Heaven”?

The first occurrence of the English word “heaven(s)” in the King James Version is, of course, Genesis 1:1, *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* It is to go in the Old Testament to use “heaven” in Genesis 45 times, Deuteronomy 46 times, and most often in Psalms, 76 times for a total of 776 times in the whole Bible. In the Christian Bible [New Testament] “heaven” occurs most often in Matthew [88 times] mainly in the phrase “kingdom of the heavens.” The word occurs a total of 317 times in the entire Christian Bible.

The Hebrew word usually rendered “heavens” is SHA-MA'YIM [it is always plural] and means essentially that which is high or lofty. [Psalm 103:11; Proverbs 25:3; Isaiah 55:9] The Greek word is OU·RA·NOS'. The origin is obscure but some believe it stems from an Indo-European word referring to rain. The verb is anciently used also for what is godlike or divine. From Homer onward OURANOS is used of heaven's vault, or the firmament, meaning the celestial lights. [Dictionary New Testament Theology, Volume 2, page 188ff] The English word “heaven” [heaved up] also suggests the firmament or “covering” of the earth.

In the Bible the “heaven” is used it at least ten different ways. However, the primary uses deal with three essential aspects: a) the firmament with its shining lights [Genesis 1:1; Deuteronomy 4:19; Isaiah 13:10; 1 Corinthians 15:40, 41; Hebrews 11:12]; b) the atmosphere where birds fly and from where come rain, snow, and hail [(Genesis 1:8; 27:28; Job 38:29; Deuteronomy 4:17; Proverbs 30:19; Matthew 6:26; Psalm 78:26; Luke 17:24; Joshua 10:11; 1 Kings 18:45; Isaiah 55:10; Acts 14:17); and, c) the place of God's dwelling. [Isaiah 40:22] This may be what Paul calls the three heavens in 2 Corinthians 12:2. Some consider the phrase “heaven of the heavens” to refer to the complete stellar cosmos or universe. [Deuteronomy 10:14; Nehemiah 9:6] Even these cannot “contain” God. [1 Kings 8:27]

However, Yehowah is described as having His own dwelling place, possibly beyond the stellar universe. Solomon describes God's residence as *“... from the heavens, your established place of dwelling.”* [1 Kings 8:30, 39] It seems clear from the Bible that God does not dwell on earth with mankind but in a lofty abode. Thus Isaiah uses the analogy: *“Heaven is Your throne and the earth your footstool.”* [Isaiah 66:1] From his Divine Habitat God “looks down on humanity.” [Psalm 14:2; 102:19; 113:6]

Solomon seems to affirm that God cannot literally dwell on earth when he asks the rhetorical question: *“But will God truly dwell with mankind upon the earth? Look! Heaven, yes, the heaven of the heavens themselves, cannot contain you; how much less, then, this house that I have built?”* [2 Chronicles 6:18 NWT]

There is also an angelic heavens where the celestial beings live. (Jude 6; Genesis 28:12, 13; Matthew 18:10; 24:36) The expression “army of the heavens,” often applied to the stellar creation, sometimes describes these angelic sons of God. [1 Kings 22:19; Psalm 89:5-7; Psalm 103:20, 21; Daniel 7:10; Luke 2:13; Luke 15:7, 10; Revelation 12:12; Revelation 19:14] These seem to be organized into governments, authorities, and lordships. [Ephesians 1:21; 6:12] In Daniel the millions of angelic beings are seen before the Divine Presence. [Daniel 7:10]

Like Daniel, the beloved apostle John is also exalted above the earth into the heavenly Throne-Room of God Almighty. Revelation 4:1-3 describes this Divine Habitat:

Next I looked, and behold, a door opened into Heaven and a trumpet-like Voice called to me, 'Ascend up here!' ... Then at once I was under the influence of the Pneuma. Behold, a Throne located in Heaven. There was One Person seated upon the Throne. Now this enthroned Person had the appearance of a sparkling diamond and also a blood-red gemstone. Encircling the Throne was an emerald aura."

A study of Revelation, where the word heaven occurs 52 times, will show that "heaven" stands in great contrast to the earth – heaven highly exalted above the earth. Celestial beings ascend and descend between heaven and earth.

What is the Future of the Earth?

God's original purpose is a given based on Genesis 1:28 and the record in Eden: a global paradise people by ever-living perfect human beings.

God's purpose remains unchanged according to Isaiah 45:18: *"For the LORD [YHWH] is God, and he created the heavens and earth and put everything in place. He made the world to be lived in, not to be a place of empty chaos."* [The Living Translation]

The hope of ageless human life on earth is the hope of the majority of humankind following their judgment.

In a little while, the wicked will disappear.
Though you look for them, they will be gone.
Those who are gentle and lowly will possess the land;
they will live in prosperous security.
The godly will inherit the land
and will live there forever. [Psalm 37:9-11, 29 The Living Translation]

The earth will never be destroyed but remains forever generation after generation.

You placed the world on its foundation
so it would never be moved. [Psalm 104:4 The Living Translation]

Generations come one after another, but the earth remains forever. [Ecclesiastes 1:4]

Some conditions in that future New Earth are highlighted in Isaiah 65:17-23:

¹⁷"Look! I am creating new heavens and a new earth—so wonderful that no one will even think about the old ones anymore. ¹⁸Be glad; rejoice forever in my creation! And look! I will create Jerusalem as a place of happiness. Her people will be a source of joy. ¹⁹I will rejoice in Jerusalem and delight in my people. And the sound of weeping and crying will be heard no more.

²⁰"No longer will babies die when only a few days old. No longer will adults die before they have lived a full life. No longer will people be considered old at one hundred! Only sinners will die that young! ²¹In those days, people will live in the houses they build and eat the fruit of their own vineyards. ²²It will not be like the past, when invaders took the houses and confiscated the vineyards. For my people will live as long as trees and will have time to enjoy their hard-won gains. ²³They will not work in vain, and their children will not be doomed to misfortune. For they are people blessed by the LORD [YHWH], and their children, too, will be blessed. ²⁴I will answer them before they even call to me. While they are still talking to me about their needs, I will go ahead and answer their prayers!

²⁵The wolf and lamb will feed together. The lion will eat straw like the ox. Poisonous

snakes will strike no more. In those days, no one will be hurt or destroyed on my holy mountain. I, the LORD [YHWH], have spoken!" [The Living Translation]

Though ever-living existence on an Edenic earth was the hope of God's ancient peoples, God foresaw "something better" ["a better hope"] for the Christian Church. Paul writes regarding these:

[Christ] is a mediator of a much better covenant, which is also lawfully based on superior promises. ...Though all of these [ancient faithful] received convincing evidence regarding their faith, they did not capture the Promise, our God having foreseen something better for us [in the Church] so that they might not be perfected apart from us." [Hebrews 8:6; Hebrews 11:39, 40 NSR]

Will Christians Live in Heaven with God?

The Nazarene promised his disciples they would share in his "heavenly Kingdom." [2 Timothy 4:18; 1 Corinthians 15:50] At John 14:1-3 Jesus promised his followers a completely new home, one in the Father's celestial Home: ***"Let your hearts not be overly concerned. Believe in The God. Believe also in me. In my Father's House there are many abodes. I am leaving to prepare a place for you. I will Return and will receive you home to me, that where ever I am you also will be."***

In his lengthy Passover prayer Jesus promised his apostles a heavenly place beside him. John 17:5, 24 reads: ***"I have glorified You upon the earth. Now You glorify me, Father, at Your side with the glory I possessed beside You before humankind's social order began. ... Father, concerning what you have granted me, I wish that where ever I am, they also may be with me."***

The "One Hope" of the Church

Ephesians 4:4, *"You were called to one hope in your invitation ... [from the one God]."* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] There is only "one hope" in the Church, the Body of Christ, and this a spiritual, celestial existence.

Philippians 3:20, 21, *"As for us our citizenship exists in [the] heavens, from which also we eagerly await a savior, [our] Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly bodily schematic to be conformed to his glorious body."* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] The Christian's true home is heaven and not the earth. The members of the Bride of Christ will share his body type in order to live in the celestial environment.

2 Tim 4:18 *"The LORD will ... save me into His heavenly Kingdom."* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Paul knew his future lie in the heavenly Kingdom, not an earthly existence.

1 Peter 1:3, 4, *"Blessed The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for in accordance with His enormous mercy He regenerated us unto a living hope by means of the resurrection of Jesus Christ from among the dead, unto an incorruptible, undefiled, and unfading inheritance, preserved [in the] heavens for you."* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] The "living hope" of the Christian Church is a heavenly one. Had it been earthly Peter could have clearly so stated here.

Hebrews 3:1, *"... holy 'brothers' -- partakers of a heavenly calling ..."* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Paul makes clear in his inspired epistle to the Hebrew Christians that their hope was of a heavenly, not earthly kind.

Hebrews 10:19, 22 -- *“Therefore, brothers, possessing a boldness regarding the Way into the [heavenly] Holy Places by the blood of Jesus -- may we continue to approach [The God] with a true heart in complete conviction.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Paul’s parabolic illustration indicates the future of the Church lies within the heavenly “Holy Places” typified by the Tabernacle of Moses.

Hebrews 12:22, 23 – *“However, you have approached Mount Zion and a City of a Living God, to heavenly Jerusalem and myriads of angels in a pangeric and the Church of the Firstborn who have been enrolled in [the] heavens.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] The hope of the “Church of the Firstborn” was to be a member or citizen of “heavenly Jerusalem” where angels also reside.

“There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies. The glory of the heavenly body is one type and that of the earthly body another type. ... The earthly body is planted in the ground dishonorably, the heavenly body is raised in power. Though planted in the ground as a physical body, it is raised as a spiritual body. Of course, the spiritual body is not the first one, but rather the physical body is, then afterward the spiritual type. The very first human [Adam] was from the earth and composed of dirt. The Second Human is from heaven. Now just as the original human was made of dirt, just so are all those also made of dirt. And, just as the Heavenly One is, just so are all those who are heavenly. And, just as we have borne the image of the person composed of dirt, we shall also in contrast bear the image of the Heavenly Person. However, brothers, I tell you this: flesh and blood can never inherit the Kingdom of God. Nor does the decayable inherit the non-decayable. Behold, I tell you a mystery! We shall not all die! Rather, in an atomic instant, in the blink of an eye, we [who do not die] will be changed. For the trump will blow, and then those asleep in death will be resurrected non-decayable, and we [alive] will be changed. For that which is decayable will be clothed in that which is non-decayable; and, that which is mortal must be clothed in what is immortal. Now, when the mortal is clothed in immortality, the prophecy will be fulfilled: ‘Death is swallowed up forever.’ [Isaiah 25:8]” [1 Corinthians 15:40-54 NSR, Nazarene Commentary©]

2 Corinthians 5:1-5 – *“For we realize that when our earthen home is dissolved we will have another building from God, a dwelling not of human origin, ETERNAL IN THE HEAVENS. For in this present dwelling we groan with great desire to be clothed in the heavenly residence. ... Indeed, we who remain in this present dwelling groan, burdened, because we wish not to put away the present dwelling, but rather to be clothed in the other dwelling. In this way what is mortal may be devoured by the Life. Now, He that produced us for this is God, who has given us the Token, the Pneuma.”* [NSR Nazarene Commentary©] This text seems to make clear that the faithful in the Church will inhabit a body or dwelling of heavenly origin and this will be “eternal in the heavens” and not on earth.

1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, *“[The Lord] will descend from heaven and those dead in Christ will be resurrected first. Afterward, we the living [at his Parousia] will be raptured in clouds at the same time together with them to meet the Lord in the atmospheric heavens. And thus we shall always be together with the Lord.”* The Faithful alive at the moment of Christ’s Return [his Parousia] will be raptured or caught away from the earth to meet the Lord in the heavens. Nothing in this text suggests the Lord will be here on earth.

1 John 2:28; 3:2 -- *Now, little children, continue to abide in (Jesus) so when the time comes for him to be made visible we all might speak openly and freely at his Arrival and not experience embarrassment while standing before him. ... Beloved, at the present time we are “Children of God.” However, what we are to become has not yet been revealed to us. We only know that when the time comes for the Son’s Appearing we will exist after his resemblance. We shall actually behold him as he exists in reality.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Those raised at the Lord’s Parousia will appear in his presence.

Revelation 3:12, *“To the one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the Divine Habitat of my God and he shall never leave [the Divine Habitat. ... To the one who is victorious I shall grant to sit down with me on my throne even as I also conquered and sat down on my Father’s Throne.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Those victorious members of the Church will make their eternal home in God’s residence and remain within His Temple forever.

Revelation 4:2; 7:15 -- *“I saw a throne in heaven. ... The Large Crowd are standing in sight of the Throne, rendering The God worship service day and night in His Divine Habitat.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Those living end-time Saints at the moment of Christ’s Return will be raptured to the heavenly Throne-room to begin their heavenly service before God and the Lamb.

Revelation 11:12, 13 – *“And the 2 Witnesses heard a great voice out of Heaven, calling: ‘Come up here!’ And the 2 Witnesses ascended into Heaven in the cloud and their enemies beheld them.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©]

Revelation 14:1-4, *“I saw the Lamb standing on Mount Zion and the 144,000 with him. They are singing a new song in sight of the Throne. ... The 144,000 have been bought from the earth. These were bought from among humankind as firstfruits to The God and the Lamb.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] The faithful end-time Saints, the 144,000, are seen on “heavenly Zion” ruling in the same location where Jesus began his own rule. [Psalm 2:6, 7; Acts 13:33; Hebrews 12:22, 23] These are bought from the earth to dwell everlastingly in the heavens.

Revelation 15:1, 2, 5 – *“Now I saw another sign in heaven. ... Also I saw sea of glass mingled with fiery flame, and there were those who were victorious over the wild Sea Beast. ... Then I saw next the Divine Habitat of the Testimony Tent was opened in the Heaven.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] The victorious end-time Saints, the 144,000, are

Revelation 22:1-5 -- *“Next the angel showed me a crystal clear river of water of life flowing out from the Throne of The God and the Lamb. ... The Throne of The God and the Lamb will be in her [the Holy City New Jerusalem]. His slaves will offer up worship service and they will behold His face.... They will reign [as kings] into all future periods of time.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©]

The New Jerusalem and the Thousand Years

Though the hope of the Church is eternity in the heavens [2 Corinthians 5:1] this does not mean the Saints will not also spend time on earth during the Thousand Years. Revelation 5:10 states the Saints “will reign upon the earth.” The Glorified Lord in his Christine epistles to the churches in Philadelphia and Laodicea promised the victorious: ***“All who are victorious will become pillars in the [HEAVENLY] Temple of my God, and they will never have to leave it. And I will write my God’s name on them, and they will be citizens in the [HEAVENLY] city of my God—the new Jerusalem that comes down from heaven from my God. ... I will invite everyone who is victorious to sit with me on my throne, just as I was victorious and sat with my Father on his [HEAVENLY] throne.”*** [Revelation 3:12, 21 The Living Translation] Based on Revelation 4:1-3 the Father’s Throne is in heaven and not on earth.

However, when the celestial Holy City New Jerusalem descends, settling its foundations down here on earth during the Thousand Years, the Saints will, indeed, “rule upon earth.” Revelation 20:9 compares this to a temporary military bivouac as a “camp.” From this we may assume the Holy City will not forever remain on earth but may go on to other royal assignments throughout the Universe.

The Bible does not tell us what, if any contact the residences of the Celestial City will have with humans on earth. Some see the possibility of manifestations similar to those of our Lord after his resurrection. [John 20:1; Mark 16:12 KJV]

Endure in the “One Hope”!

The Church of Christ bears “one hope” resulting from God’s invitation or calling. [Ephesians 4:4] Colossians bears testimony to this heavenly hope: *“On account of the hope treasured up for you in Heaven. Of this hope you have already heard in the Message of the truth of the Good News. ... Give thanks to the Father who has made us fit to receive our share of the inheritance of God’s people in Light.* [Colossians 1:5, 12]

This hope is a strong basis for endurance in the race for life. [Romans 5:4] Jesus himself endured a torturous death because of his heavenly hope: *“Observe carefully the Arch-Leader and Perfecter of our faith, Jesus -- who endured execution because of the Joy that lay before him – [he] disdained the humiliation [of the Cross].”* [Hebrews 12:2 NSR, Nazarene Commentary©]

Like Paul, daily we call out, *“Rejoice in The Hope!”* [Romans 12:12]

==== END ====

DID CHRIST HAVE A PRE-EXISTENCE? Or, Did He First Come into Being at his Human Birth?

There are some Christian believers who teach that Jesus Christ the Nazarene had no pre-existence before his birth in Bethlehem. While most in the Christian Church accept the pre-existence of the Messiah before his human birth, what are their reasons based on the Bible?

For nearly two-thousand years some worshippers of God have believed the foretold Messiah would come from heaven and would have existed before his human birth. This is suggested, according to some Biblical scholars as early as the first and second centuries of Christianity, be Proverbs 8:22, *“Yehowah created me as the beginning of his way. He established me before time began, in the beginning, before He made the earth. ... When He prepared the heaven I was present with Him.”* [Septuagint]

That Messiah would have a pre-existence was foretold by the prophet Micah: *“From [Bethlehem] will come out to me the One who is to become ruler in Israel, whose origin is from ancient times, from before the Periods of time began.”* [Micah 5:2 NSR]

Despite these prophecies, there is a small group of Bible students and so-called Christian “scholars” who claim Jesus of Nazareth had no previous existence before his human birth. In considering one popular book and the arguments there presented one discovers: a) the misapplication of Scriptures; b) the omission of important key texts; c) the tyranny of authority [= “leading scholars”]; d) straw-man arguments; e) sweeping generalizations without support [the Magic Wand and Fairy Dust].

However, what of the Christian Bible itself? Did inspired first Nazarene preachers and teachers believe that Messiah would have a pre-existence? Or, did they believe he would only first come in existence at his human birth? Consider 16 proofs that the Bible clearly teaches the pre-existence of Christ.

1. The first one to testify regarding this was the beloved apostle John. He introduces his own Gospel with the words suggesting the pre-existence of the Messiah: *“In [the] beginning the Word existed, and the Word faced toward The God, and the Word was divine. This same one was*

facing toward The God in the beginning. By means of him everything came into existence and without him nothing came into existence. ... The cosmos came into existence by his agency." [John 1:1-3, 10 NSR, Nazarene Commentary©]

Those who believe Jesus had no pre-existence argue that the "Word" [or, Logos] here are the words of God expressed from his own thoughts. However, the Greek word PROS suggests someone facing another to receive something. Compare the phrase PROS TON THEON in the Jewish Greek Septuagint at Exodus 3:15, 16 in the example of Aaron facing Moses to receive God's words.

2. John the Baptist was also inspired to know that Messiah had a pre-existence. He speaks to the Jews in this manner: *"The One arriving after me has gone before me because he existed before me."* [John 1:15, 30] The Baptist repeats this twice. Since John was six months older than Jesus there is no way that Christ could have first come into existence in Mary's womb and still existed before John. Clearly, the Baptist believed Jesus had a pre-existence before his birth.

Jesus himself taught on several occasions that he had a pre-existence. Compare the following statements he made in the hearing of his disciples:

3. John 3:13 – *"No human has ever ascended to heaven but the Son of Humankind who descended from heaven."* If the Son of Humankind "descended from heaven" it strongly infers he had a pre-existence.

4. John 6:62 – *"What if you behold the Son of Man ascending to where he was before?"* The Nazarene makes clear he had existed "before" becoming a human being.

5. John 8:58 – *"I existed before Abraham came to be."* Though translators show their bias – whether trinitarian or unitarian – there are enough of them who agree with this rendering to suggest strongly that Jesus is stating he existed before Abraham.

6. John 17:5 – *"Father, now glorify me with the glory I had at your side with the glory I possessed beside You before the human social order existed."*

Paul also taught the pre-existence of Christ. Note the following:

7. Romans 10:6 – "In contrast, that righteousness resulting from conviction says, "Do not state in your heart [Deuteronomy 9:4], 'Who will ascend into the heavens,' [that is to bring Christ down]." [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Paul's inspired interpretation of Deuteronomy 30:12, 13 has several views. In Deuteronomy the context is the Saying or RHEMA in the LXX and Paul goes on to interpret this as the "Saying of Conviction." Later Jewish Targums viewed the phrase as trying to ascend to Sinai to bring Moses down (called the Christ at Hebrews 11:26) or ascending into the sea to bring up Jonah, both Messiah-types. Beyond accepting Paul's interpretation we leave other views to speculations. It seems to fairly prove that Paul believed in the pre-existence of Christ.

8. 1 Corinthians 10:4 – *"All the Israelites were immersed into Moses. ... They all drank the same spiritual drink. Because they use to drink from the pneumatic Rock that followed them. And that Rock was the Christ."* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] It is believed by some that Paul refers to the Angel of Yahweh who followed the Israelites in the wilderness and represented the Rock. This "angel of Yehowah" was the pre-existent Christ. [Exodus 3:2; 14:19; 23:20, 23; 32:34; 33:2]

9. Ephesians 4:8, 9 – *"That is why David writes, 'When he ascended on high he led in procession captives as prisoners of war and these he gave as gifts to people.' Now what does, 'he ascended,' mean but that Christ also descended into the lowest places on earth? The person who descended to the earth is the same one who ascended above the entire celestialum. This was so that Christ might fulfill completely everything (purposed)."* [NSR (paraphrase), Nazarene

Commentary©] Paul references Psalm 68 and then gives his inspired application of the implications of the word “ascended.” He argues this leads to the conclusion that Christ had to first descend to the earth, thus indicating a pre-existence.

10. Philippians 2:5-7 –

*‘This be the mind in you
which was also in Christ Jesus
who was existing in a form of a god
(but) thought not equality with the divine
as something to cling to
but he emptied himself
taking a form of a slave
having been born in likeness of men
and having been found in fashion as a man
becoming obedient he humbled himself unto death
(but death of a stake).
And thus, also, The God exalted him
and gave him the name above every name
that in the name of Jesus
every knee should bend ---
those in heaven and on earth and underground ---
and every tongue should confess
that Jesus Christ is Lord
to the glory of God the Father.’*
[NSR, Nazarene Commentary©]

Is it unfair to conclude that here the Christ pre-existed first in the “form of a god” [or, “divine” as Professor Emeritus of Bern, Germany University has it. See notes in Nazarene Commentary© CD-ROM] and then after became a human being?

11. Colossians 1:15-17 – *“Christ is the visible representation of the invisible God, the Firstborn and Lord of all creation. For in Him was created the universe of things in heaven and on earth, things seen and things unseen, thrones, dominions, principedoms, powers--all were created, and exist through and for Him. And HE IS before all things and in and through Him the universe is a harmonious whole. Moreover He is the Head of His Body, the Church. He is the Beginning.”* Several matters point to a pre-existence of Christ: a) He was present at creation; b) he was the agent of creation; c) he is called “the beginning” which would not be the case if he only existed first from conception in the womb.

12. Hebrews 1:1-3 – *“On many occasions, and in a variety of ways in ancient times, The God spoke to our [Hebrew] forefathers by means of the Prophets. In these last days He spoke to us [Hebrews] by means of a Son whom He appointed heir of the Universe. By means of [His Son] [The God] made the Periods of Time. [The Son] is ‘the very reflection of His glory’ [Wisdom 7:22] and the very ‘imprint of His substance’. [Wisdom 7:22] [The Son] upholds the Universe by his powerful word. After [the Son] made a cleansing of the sins, ‘he sat down at the right hand of’ [Psalm 110:1] the Majesty in exalted places. [The Son] became so much better than the angels, becoming very much different compared to them by inheriting a superior name.”* [NSR, Nazarene Commentary©] Paul writes that the Son was the agent of creation [Wisdom personified at the beginning of the Universe]. It is difficult not to read Proverbs 8:22-30 and Wisdom 7:22 into these allusions.

13. Hebrews 1:6 – *“And again, when He brings His Firstborn [Psalm 89:27] again into the inhabited world of humankind, He says, “And let all God’s angels bow before him.”* [Deuteronomy 32:43 LXX] One view held by serious Bible students is that the word “again”

suggests Christ was brought into the earth twice: a) Christ was born into the earth; and, b) upon Christ's resurrection he was brought back into the earth again. Some see the allusion to a pre-existence, particularly based upon the context in the introductory verses.

14. Hebrews 2:9 – *“But, we do behold Jesus -- having been made less than angels -- now crowned with glory and honor because of suffering the death.”* When was Christ made “less than the angels” [or, Hebrew, “god”]? The suggestion is that Christ was once either equal or superior to the angels in general. This infers a pre-existence when the Son was a unique being as “the only-begotten god.” [John 1:18]

15. Jude 9 – *“But (in contrast) Michael the Archangel, when disputing with the Devil, he argued about the body of Moses but did not dare bring a blaspheming condemnation against him. Rather, Michael said, “The LORD rebuke you!”* Some sincere Bible students believe one of the names of the pre-existence Christ was Michael, which means either “WHO IS LIKE GOD” or “WHO IS LIKE GOD?” On the argument that Michael is the pre-existent Christ see the word “Michael” in *De Trinitatis Erroribus* in Nazarene Commentary© CD-ROM.

16. Revelation 3:14 – *“... the beginning of the creation of The God.”* The glorified Jesus Christ calls himself “the beginning of the creation of The God.” If this is the correct rendering [Trinitarians disagreeing] then the Christ had to have a pre-existence in order to be the “beginning of God's creation.”

There seems considerable Biblical evidence that Christ DID have a pre-existence.

==== END ====

EVERY CHRISTIAN AN EVANGELIST! ***The Miracle of Early Christian Growth***

History's greatest missionary stated a spiritual truth to all the Christians in Rome: *“How lovely are the feet of those bearing good news!”* [Romans 10:15] To the Ephesians Paul warned that part of the equipment in the battle against Satan was *“having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel.”* [Ephesians 6:15 RSV] Thus, here and elsewhere, Paul taught that every Christian should be an evangelist, or bringer of good news.

Paul's methods in evangelizing were copied from the Nazarene himself. Can there be any question Jesus was the greatest of all evangelists? Did he not send out all of his apostles to evangelize others? Did he not appoint 70 disciples to go “preaching the good news of the Kingdom”? The early Church followed this example. It was the secret of the marvelous growth: every disciple shared the Gospel with others.

In modern times this evangelism might be called “networking.” Note how the process began with Jesus in the Gospel of John:

The next day John was standing with two of his disciples, and as he watched Jesus approaching he declared: “Behold, the **Lamb** of The God!” And THE TWO DISCIPLES LISTENED TO HIM, and so they followed Jesus. But, turning Jesus saw them following and said: **“What are you seeking?”** They answered “Rabbi, (which is translated, Teacher,) where are you staying?” He said to them: **“Come, and see.”** Therefore they went and saw where he stayed, and they remained with him that day; it was about the tenth hour. One of the two was Andrew the brother of Simon Peter who had heard what

John said and followed [Jesus]. [ANDREW] FIRST FOUND HIS OWN BROTHER, SIMON, and said to him: "We have found the *Messiah*" (which translated means, Christ). ANDREW LED SIMON TOWARD JESUS. Looking at Simon, Jesus said: "**You are Simon the son of John. You will be called Cephas**" --which is translated Peter).

The next day Jesus wished to leave for Galilee. SO HE FOUND PHILIP and said to him: "**Follow me.**" But Philip was from Bethsaida, from the city of Andrew and Peter. PHILIP FOUND NATHANAEL, telling him: "We have found the one of whom Moses wrote -- in the Law and the Prophets -- Jesus, the son of Joseph, from Nazareth." [John 1:29-45 NSR]

Now that is networking: one friend finds another and one relative finds another --and so on, and so on, and so on. But, what motivates one person to become a Christian evangelist?

Paul stated the principle at 2 Corinthians 4:12, 13: "*I believe, therefore, I spoke.*" Anyone convinced of something, enthused about its value, cannot help but spread the news [evangelize]. Gossips and slanderers are experts at spreading news though damaging to others. If some even professed Christians used the same energy used in gossiping in spreading the good news they would become renowned missionaries!

Of course, it is difficult for some who are not natural talkers to introduce a strange subject to someone else. Others are gifted at such things. How can one learn to become a true Christian evangelist?

First, learn from others. Paul writes that one of the purposes of Christian elders is to teach others to spread the good news. Consider what he counseled Timothy: "*What you have heard from me before many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also.*" [2 Timothy 2:2] To the Ephesians he wrote of gifts from the Glorified King, "*These 'gifts' given to humans include apostolic representatives, prophetic spokesman, missionaries of the good news, pastoral shepherds of congregations, and teachers within the Church. The purpose of these 'gifts' is to rearrange and perfectly equip all the Saints for the work of service to others.*" [Ephesians 4:11, 12 NSR] Yes, Christ has provided gifted elders within the Church – men who have experience in evangelism – to teach new Christians how to share the good news with others.

Some are particularly nervous about talking to others and this is understandable. Though some very shy persons have turned into very talkative disciples after some years of experience. How can all spread the good news and thus share in the grand work of evangelism?

One method of many is to let some kind of written material do your talking for you. The *Friends of the Nazarene* have prepared a number of brief four-page tracts to share with others. These can be copied and mailed to those who might benefit from them. Some of those currently available are:

WHO WILL FOLLOW THE LAMB INTO THE THIRD MILLENIUM?
NAZARENE PRINCIPLES
THE PROPHETIC HORIZON
SEAL NOT THE BOOK!

Like godly seeds these can also be left in areas where people read: hospital waiting rooms, doctors' and dentists' offices, airports, Laundromats, bus terminals. They can be shared with fellow travelers on the bus, subways, airlines.

Some *Friends* like particular articles found in the monthly online magazine on the web page. These can be copied and reformatted into 2 to 4 page tracts or booklets and then shared with others.

If one is zealous to form a local *Friends* group then an address may be added inviting others to meet for weekly Bible reading and discussion. These Devotional Discussion groups can use materials prepared by the *Friends of the Nazarene* or Bible reading with open discussion. We get posts and mail from people all over the world wondering what to do. In all cases they are directed to imitate Jesus and Paul and become local evangelists. Often there is enough interest right in one's family and among friends and fellow workers. The only limitation in the evangelizing work is one's imagination and prayers.

I BELIEVE, THEREFORE, I SPOKE! Yes, how truly beautiful to God our those so moved by the spirit of Jesus to want to share the Evangel with others.

==== END ====

WHAT IS "ARMAGEDDON"?

"Armageddon" is one of those words which has become embedded in a large measure of humanity's vocabulary. Most understand it as "the end of the world" or "the last great battle between good and evil." It is often applied to some kind of atomic World War Three. Those familiar with the Bible know it appears only one in Revelation 16:16? It is often associated with the large phrase "the battle of Armageddon." What does this strange word mean?

Revelation 6:14-16 reads in the *Nazarene Saints Rendering*:

Revelation 16:14 *These (frogs) are demonic spirits and they perform signs to lead together the kings of the whole inhabited earth to the War of the great Day of The Almighty God. Revelation 16:15* [Look! I am coming like a thief! Happy are those who stay awake and keep on their outer garments so they do not walk about naked and people look upon their shamefulness.] **Revelation 16:16** *And (the demonic spirits) led them together into the place that is called in Hebrew HAR-MAGEDON.*

According to this "Har-Mageddon" is a "place." [The Greek is TOPON = English "topology, topography."] But, what kind of "place"? Some understand "Har-Mageddon" to mean a "city" and others a "mountain" [New Jerusalem Bible]. Others, both a mountain and a city. [Consider Bauer, Arndt, and Gingrich page 106, "Megiddo and Jerusalem."] One interpretation is that the whole word literally means "The Mountain [or, City] of the Assembly of Troops." Clearly earth's rulers and their armies [or, troops] are being gathering by demonic influence to a battle with God as represented by the Lamb and his Bride. [Revelation 17:14; 19:11-19]

It is our belief that the New Jerusalem descends before the Day of Wrath. [Revelation 14:20] Thus, Satan musters earth's kings and their armies to a battle against the Holy City. Of course, the Holy City New Jerusalem is also called Mount Zion. [Hebrews 12:22, 23; Revelation 14:1; Psalm 2:6, 7] So, whether one understands Armageddon to mean a place, as in a city or a mountain, it matters not, as both are covered by an understanding of the Apocalypse.

There seems a strong likelihood that the Har-Mageddon of Revelation 16:16 is drawn from Zechariah 12:11 – *"There will be great lamentation in grief on that Day in Jerusalem, just as the lamentation ... in the valley of MEGHID-DOHN."* This later spelling is very similar to that form in Revelation 16:16 – har-MAGEDON. The Latin version of this is MAGEDDON. In several Hebrew versions of Revelation 16:16 the word used is HAR [mountain] MEGHID-DOHN' [of Megiddo]

Anciently many battles were fought near Mount Carmel on the ocean plain of Megiddo. Thus, it was a "place" [a mount, or valley plain] of great lamentation. There are some interesting

possibilities to an understanding of Zechariah 12 and 14. Zechariah 12:9, 10 -- *“And it must occur in that day [that] I shall seek to annihilate all the nations that are coming against [New] Jerusalem. And I will pour out upon the house of David and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem the spirit of favor and entreaties, and THEY WILL SEE THE ONE WHOM THEY PIERCED., and they will certainly wail over Him as in the wailing over an only [son]; and there will be a bitter lamentation over him as when there is bitter lamentation over the firstborn [son].”* A portion of this – THEY WILL SEE THE ONE WHOM THEY PIERCED – is also referenced at Revelation 1:7. If this verse in Revelation were applied to the parousia of Christ and his subsequent judgment against the nations, then it would not be unfair to move the prophetic context into that of Har-Magedon. There is a noticeable parallel between Zechariah 12:9 and Zechariah 14:16

The “kings of the earth and their armies” gather against the Holy City New Jerusalem [Mount Zion] which has settled down on its foundations here on earth. [For details see the book *Nazarene Apocalypse* on the Friends of the Nazarene web page, or in the Nazarene Commentary CD-ROM Biblical library.] The holy City has been under attack already for over 42 months. [Revelation 11:2, 3] Now the Satan-inspired governments of earth attack this “heavenly Jerusalem.” Note how Zechariah 14:2, 3, 12-16 describes this war and its aftermath:

“And I [Yehowah] will gather all the nations against [the New] Jerusalem for the battle [of Har-megeddon]. ... And Yehowah will surely go out and battle with those nations just as in the day of combat, the day of battle. And his feet will actually stand in that day upon the Mount Olives ... It will take place on that Day that confusion sent by Yehowah will spread among them and they will revolt against their own in complete anarchy. ... Then, it will surely take place that every survivor from among the nations that fought against the [New] Jerusalem must make an annual pilgrimage to prostrate themselves in worship before the King, Yehowah..”

Yes, there will be “survivors” of the Great Day of Wrath. Even from among those who had actually fought against New Jerusalem will survive the Battle of Armageddon. These will be among the two-thirds of humanity who will be the first generation to live on into the Thousand Years, there to live under the judgment of the King and his Bride, the New Jerusalem.

Many sincere Bible students have noted that Revelation 16:14-16 occurs in the context of the Sixth Plague. Such careful readers of the Bible have learned from Revelation 15:1, 2 that the Saints are in heaven when the plagues begin. They have been called out of Babylon by the Rapture before the plagues befall the “great city.” [Revelation 18:4; compare Revelation 11:12, 13; 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17]

However, some are confused by Revelation 16:15 which seems a caution to the Saints. Since it seems clear the Saints are all in heaven before the Sixth Plague breaks forth [Revelation 15:1, 2] this fifteenth verse is view as a parenthetical warning from the Lord Jesus. The language echoes Luke 21:36 and the exhortation to remain awake unto the Coming of the Christ. Thus some translations put verse 15 in parenthesis. [NEB, NWT]

The Sixth Seal describes only the preparations for the ensuing battle when our Lord returns with his Bride to fight the Battle of Armageddon. [Revelation 17:14; 19:11-19] The “gathering” occurs and then the battle takes place as two armies with their troops come together for this war. The kings come with their troops and the Lamb leads his troops to the “City [Mountain] of Assembly of Troops.”

==== END ====

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