

NEW BEGINNINGS

At the beginning of a brand new year, I thought it might be a good time to have a look at what God says about NEW things.

He sure does have a lot to say about new things. Can you think of any examples? The new man, new Jerusalem, new Covenant, New Testament, new heavens and earth...

Let's have a look at some scriptures. The first thing we notice is that God gets excited about new things!

Isaiah 42:9-10 ⁹“See, the former things have taken place, and new things I declare; before they spring into being I announce them to you.” ¹⁰ Sing to the LORD a new song, His praise from the ends of the earth, you who go down to the sea, and all that is in it, you islands, and all who live in them.”

Isaiah 43:18-19 ¹⁸“Forget the former things; do not dwell on the past. ¹⁹ See, I am doing a new thing! Now it springs up; do you not perceive it? I am making a way in the wilderness and streams in the wasteland.”

Isaiah 62:2 “The nations will see your vindication, and all kings your glory; you will be called by a new name that the mouth of the LORD will bestow.”

God is a great Creator. That means He is creative – has an inventive nature.

When He created the heavens and the earth, He came up with all sorts of new things. Every creation brings about something new, when you think about it. And after the creation, He keeps on coming up with new things. Every year there is a spring season, marked by new growth everywhere – a chance for all of nature to be renewed.

Every month there is a new moon. In God's calendar, the new moon is the beginning of the month, and the people of Israel were asked to mark those in a special way.

Every day is a new beginning, both physically and spiritually, as we see in Lamentations 3:22-23.

²² “Because of the LORD's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail. ²³ They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.”

Every day is an opportunity to forget about the problems and troubles of yesterday and have a fresh new start, a new beginning, with new blessings and mercies from God.

And a New Year is an annual opportunity to be renewed and refreshed, to launch into it with a new determination to do well. Maybe even to make a New Year's resolution on something we want to improve on in the coming year?

Let's look now at an interesting statement Jesus made in the New Testament.

Matthew 13:52 “He said to them, “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

The teachers of the law could only bring forth old things, but once they learnt the gospel Jesus brought, they could bring out new things as well as old. The Kingdom of God involves studying new things and old things. It is divided into New Covenant and Old Covenant, and there are treasures in each. We can learn so much from comparing them.

The Kingdom of God involves the study and understanding of old things and new things. The whole of history and God’s revelation is divided into an Old Covenant and old physical nation of Israel, and a New Covenant and new spiritual Israel.

I often catch myself in sermons comparing physical and spiritual things, because everything in the physical Old Covenant (e.g. the Temple and its furniture, the sacrifices, etc) has a spiritual parallel. But I don’t feel bad about that, because it is exactly what Jesus says in Matthew 13:52 that His disciples will do when they are teaching!

One of the themes repeated over and over in the Bible, is that of leaving the past behind and having a new beginning. Interestingly, it is often associated with the crossing through or over a body of water, moving into a new beginning.

At the very beginning (Genesis 1:1-2) there was water covering the earth and a new beginning came as “the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

Then of course at Noah’s flood the earth was so corrupt it had to have a new beginning – through water.

Joshua 24:14 “Now fear the LORD and serve Him with all faithfulness. Throw away the gods your ancestors worshipped beyond the Euphrates River and in Egypt, and serve the LORD.”

Earlier in the chapter, it says Abraham lived on the other side of the Euphrates, but God called him across the river to a new life. Then He took the people of Israel through the Red Sea to a new life. And then across the River Jordan to a new life in the Promised Land.

The name “eber,” from whom the Hebrews came, means “from the other side”. God wanted His people to put away the past on the other side of the water.

I think we can see the parallel that we also can put away the past and have a new beginning now – after crossing through the water of baptism – and every time we repent is an opportunity for a new beginning! When we forgive others, they have a new beginning.

We read of this new life in John 3:3 and 5

“Jesus replied, “Very truly I tell you, no one can see the kingdom of God unless they are born again.
⁵ Jesus answered, “Very truly I tell you, no one can enter the kingdom of God unless they are born of water and the Spirit.”

We go through a body of water and receive the Holy Spirit, and have a new spiritual beginning – living a new way of life.

2 Corinthians 5:17 sums it up.

“Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!”

We look on life in a new and different way. Everything we do now has a spiritual perspective, a spiritual dimension – everything is done from the viewpoint of God’s presence, God’s way of life.

This new beginning – new creation – is all that really matters now, the only thing that counts! Strong words?

That’s what we see in Galatians 6:15:

“Neither circumcision nor uncircumcision means anything; what counts is the new creation.”

Other versions include the word “only”, i.e. “the only thing that matters...”

Ephesians 4:22-24 explains what is new in our lives now.

²² “You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness. ²⁵ Therefore each of you must put off falsehood and speak truthfully to your neighbour, for we are all members of one body.”

We come through the waters of baptism into the new beginning of a new life. Interestingly, when a baby is born, the “waters break”. Water precedes the birth of the baby – it is born through water – just as we are spiritually.

Titus 3:5 “He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit”

Romans 12:2 “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God’s will is—His good, pleasing and perfect will.”

Now, having been born anew, we are to grow.

Ephesians 4:11-15 ¹¹ “So Christ Himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, ¹² to equip His people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ¹⁴ Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. ¹⁵ Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of Him who is the head, that is, Christ.”

It is a process: step by step growth. When you come to think of it, there can’t be any growth without something being new. For a plant to grow, something new has to be added to it – otherwise it hasn’t grown!

How can we “grow in grace and knowledge”? You grow in knowledge by adding something new to the knowledge you already have. You grow in grace by doing something gracious – adding to your grace. You grow in the fruit of love by doing something loving, something new, by being more kind or considerate, or friendly or courteous than you ever have been before.

We grow in patience by surviving a trial of health, or unemployment, or whatever, for one more day with a good attitude. That's something new – an extra increment of character is grown. The dictionary definition of "grow" is "to increase in size," "to become by degrees". It involves something new, something added to our character.

2 Corinthians 4:16 "Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day."

Every day is a new beginning physically, so it should be spiritually too. Our physical body's strength is renewed by taking physical food – so we need to do the same spiritually. We won't be renewed automatically, but it will happen if we pray and study daily. It's not easy to be a Christian. There can be roadblocks and challenges in our new life. We can fall down at times.

Revelation 2:3-5 ³"You have persevered and have endured hardships for my name, and have not grown weary.⁴ Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken the love you had at first. ⁵ Consider how far you have fallen! Repent and do the things you did at first. If you do not repent, I will come to you and remove your lampstand from its place."

"Do the first things (works)": - i.e. the key is to have a new beginning. Are you as enthusiastic about and committed to God's Work as you used to be? We ought to be, according to verse 5, and it shows us how to do so. God wants us to keep our first love, not to become weary in well doing (Galatians 6:9). We are to be constantly being renewed in God's Way! But how can things always be new? Isn't there a lot of sameness after a few years in the Church? After hearing the sermons for 40 years, can we be as excited about them as we used to be?

Would you be excited if you could have some chocolates, or a glass of wine, beer, or delicious fruit juice right now? Would that be refreshing? But you've drunk hundreds of them in the past! It's funny that we can eat food over and over again – the same food – but still really yearn for it when we haven't had it for a while.

And so spiritual food can be continually new, refreshing and exciting too! We need to hunger and thirst for God's righteousness. Remember the way we used to be, and ask God to renew our love for Him every day, through the Holy Spirit, and we can be renewed day by day. Every day is a new beginning physically, and it can be spiritually too. Look what God promises us:

Revelation 2:17 "Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who is victorious, I will give some of the hidden manna. I will also give that person a white stone with a new name written on it, known only to the one who receives it."

Revelation 3:12 "The one who is victorious I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will they leave it. I will write on them the name of my God and the name of the city of my God, the new Jerusalem, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on them my new name."

Even as far down as Revelation, God keeps coming up with new things! He is thrilled by new things. He never faints nor is weary or gets old, even though He has been around for zillions of years! He is always new. That's His nature and character – even though He is the "Ancient of Days", He is always refreshed and renewed!

This keeps going right until the last chapter of the Bible.

Revelation 21:1-2 “Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. ² I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.”
A new beginning for the entire Universe!

Verse 5 “He who was seated on the throne said, “I am making everything new!” Then He said, “Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.”

That’s what should be happening in our lives now!

2 Corinthians 5:17 “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here!” *All things are become new!*

Let’s continue to put away the old man and become a new creation, asking God for His Holy Spirit to keep renewing us day by day.

HAPPY NEW YEAR - LET’S HAVE A GREAT ONE!