



Ron & Cheryl Myers

GOD'S WORD FOR ISAN NEWSLETTER

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A Faith-based Ministry Sustained Through the Prayers and Partnership of God's People

When Does the New Year Actually Begin; And, Which Year Is It?

By Ron Myers

New Year's Greetings in Jesus' Name,

For the Jewish community, *Rosh Hashanah*, literally "head of the year," is a two-day celebration. It *begins* this year at nightfall of September 6, and is one of two Jewish *highest holy days*. The other is *Yom Kippur* or "Day of Atonement," ten days later. According to tradition, the Hebrew calendar started at the time of Creation, making 5781 the current Hebrew year.

The traditional Chinese New Year (based on the lunar calendar) will begin on February 12 this year, as does neighboring Vietnam's. Twenty-twenty-one is the year of the ox according to the ancient Chinese 12-year animal numbering cycle. This year will be 4719. According to legend, the Chinese calendar can be traced back to the 14th century B.C. when Emperor Huangdi invented it in 2637 B.C. It is associated with many myths, customs, and traditional festivities where deities and ancestors are honored. It's also an occasion for families to gather for annual reunion dinners—not unlike our Thanksgiving, Christmas, or Easter. In short, New Year's celebrations in Asian cultures are very important occasions, that of transitioning from the old and welcoming the new.

One notable Asian tradition is for every family to thoroughly clean their house to sweep away any of the out-going year's ill-fortune and make way for incoming good luck. I have a Thai-Chinese friend whose family takes all their furniture from their home, dusts everything off from stem to stern, and even hoses down the cement floors. Surprised, I asked him what was happening. He explained that it is done to get rid of the bad and welcome the good of the upcoming year. Also, Cambodia, Laos, Burma (Myanmar), Sri Lanka, as well as parts of China, Vietnam and India have similar *out-with-the-old—in-with-the-new* cleansing traditions.

Thailand's New Year celebration (April 13-15) is called *Songkran*, to usher in the Buddhist new year of 2564, purportedly the year the Lord Buddha attained Nirvana. *Songkran* initially began with giving each Buddhist idol its annual sacred washing with a change of fresh robes. It's also when fun-loving Thai go into the streets to douse each other with water to bless and promote good fortune. Aromatic baby powder is mixed in with the water, which, when dry, marks the recipient with a light-gray cast as have been blessed, which also fills the air with a pleasant fragrance. If you're there, you'll get a blessed soaking. All done in good fun, of course. The Thai also have a full-moon fall festival called *loi-kratong*, where all make small floats which are set adrift down-stream—believed to be a symbol of letting go of past transgressions and negative thoughts.

I have drawn some analogies here from the above paragraphs. As *born-again* Christians, we have been washed and blessed, not for a year, but for all eternity (Heb 7:27), and are now clothed in the righteousness of Christ (1 Cor 6:11). We have the gift of eternal life, which doesn't need to be repeated yearly. God's indwelling Spirit now emits the sweet aroma of Christ to a lost and dying world around us (2 Cor 2:15), the mark of our having been washed and blessed. As new persons in Christ, old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Cor 5:17). Also, we have been redeemed, purchased by the Blood of Christ, having had all our sins paid in full (Eph 1:7; Col 1:14). We are now being kept by the Power of God unto the Day of Redemption (Eph 1:14; 1 Pet 1:5). We don't have to keep or save ourselves by practicing religious rites (Gal 2:16). We don't rely on any earthly ceremonial traditions, like christening, baptism, communion (Eucharist), which are mere symbols. Nor can church affiliation help. We have been sanctified and washed by the cleansing power of the Word of God and the Blood of Christ (Rev 1:5).

That said, not to get political, what has transpired surrounding the election and the aftermath has been unbelievably disheartening. I don't know about others, but I am sad over the stolen election and the spiraling future of our country. The only thing that gives any hope or consolation at all is to remind myself that my true citizenship is in heaven and I am but a pilgrim here, passing through. The only solace I have is prayer, and to go to the Word of God and allow God's Spirit to give peace and comfort during these trying, uncertain times. One thing I do know, we need to keep looking up, because the return of our redeemer is drawing nearer with each passing day (Luke 21:28).

"How ought we then live" during this coming New Year (2 Pet 3:11)? We expectantly await God's promise of a new Heavens and a new Earth wherein righteousness dwells (2 Pet 3:13). When Christ said, "Behold, I come quickly" (Rev 22:12), He meant that when He comes His appearance will be instant. In Christ's parable of the nobleman who went into a far country to receive a kingdom and to return, the nobleman (Christ) warned his servants to "occupy" or "do business" until His return (Luke 19:11-13). I am reminded that's what Christ told his disciples—to occupy or to be obedient.

By God's Grace and for His Glory,

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For us, that means having a part in getting the Gospel to lost souls still waiting in spiritual darkness at the ends of the Earth. **GOD IS GREAT—SERVE HIM! MAY GOD BLESS ALL OF YOU WHO ARE DOING JUST THAT,** obeying Christ's implicit commands. **Pray** this New year will see less Covid-19 sicknesses and hardships, and that the vaccines will prove highly successful. **Pray too** for my being able to return to Thailand soon. Covid-19 restrictions now impede that. My co-worker Bao-Ter keeps asking, saying he misses my help.

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