

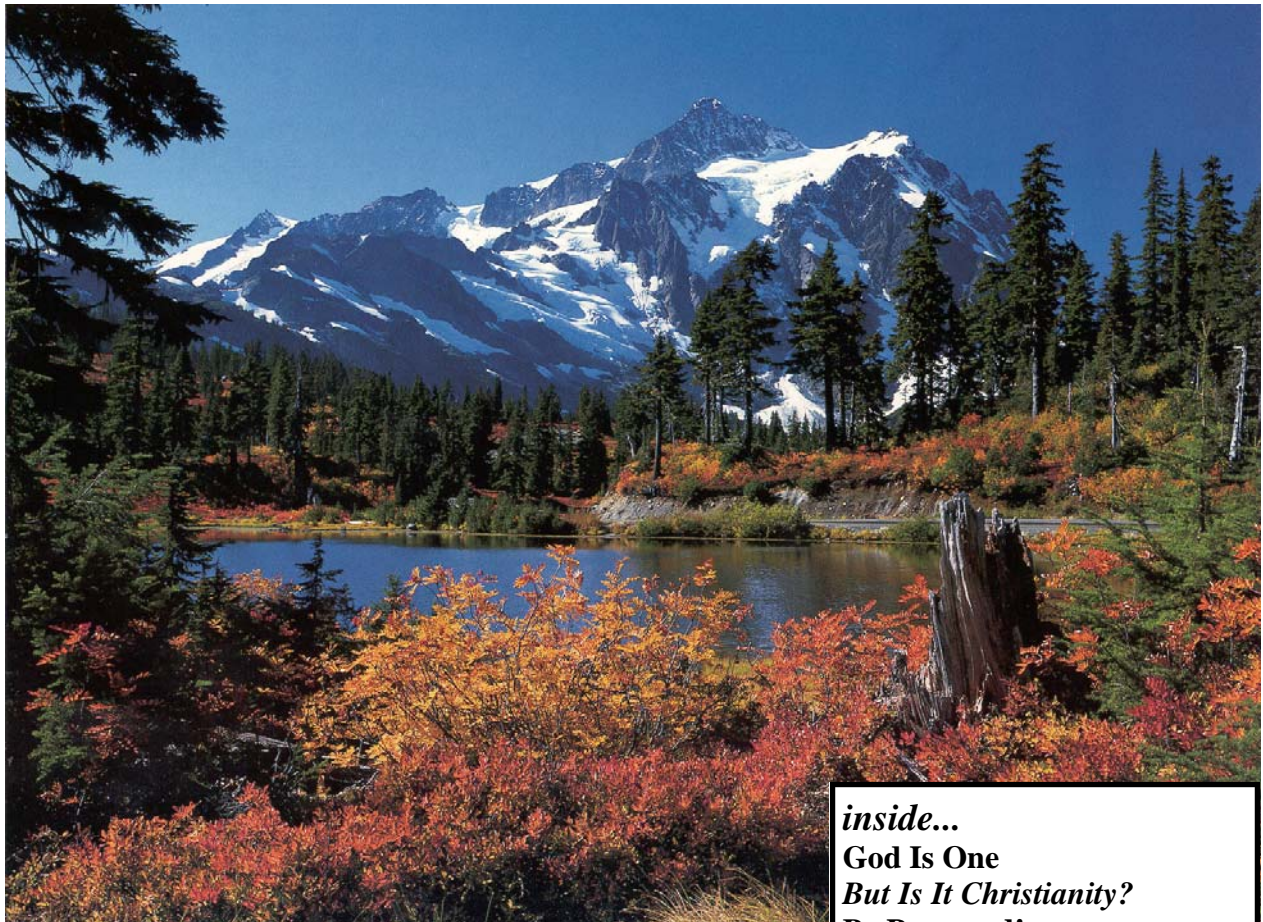
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Horizons

Vol 10 No 2

March/April 2006

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by his apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

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new Horizons

Issue No 56

March/April 2006

Does 'monotheism' mean that God is a solitary being?

Arguments about the 'unity' of God rage even after almost two thousand years of theological jousting. For most the controversy closed in the fourth century with the conclusion that God is a 'Trinity' of immortal beings. But there have also been dissenting Unitarians for whom God can be but a single being.

God is 'one'

There is no doubt that the Scriptures teach the unity of God. It lies at the heart of Jewish belief. Wrote Moses: *'Hear, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah'* (Deuteronomy 6:4). The proclamation by Moses emphasises there can be but one supreme Creator God. And Jesus answered an enquirer: *'The first [commandment] is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God, the Lord is one'* (Mark 12:32). There can be only one God, though the apostle Paul points out that in our world

we all know that an idol is not really a god and that there is only one God. There may be so-called gods both in heaven and on earth, and some people actually worship many gods and many lords. But we know that there is only one God, the Father, who created everything, and we live for him. And there is only one Lord, Jesus Christ, through whom God made everything and through whom we have been given life'

I Corinthians 8:5-6

That is a puzzle: *'...one God, the Father'* and *'...only one Lord, Jesus Christ'*. Does that mean Jesus isn't divine?

Divine Nature

Let's look first at God's nature, His attributes.

Paul tells us that God - the Father - alone has immortality.

'For at just the right time Christ will be revealed from heaven by the blessed and only almighty God, the King of all kings and Lord of all lords. He alone can never die, and he lives in light so brilliant that no human can approach him. No human eye has ever seen him, nor ever will. All honour and power to him forever!' I Timothy 6:15-16

The Father has sovereignty over all

His creation - over all political and religious endeavour.

He is unapproachable by humans. He has never been seen by any of us nor ever will be seen by the human eye. He created everything. He is *'Alpha and Omega, the First and the Last'*. He is revealed to us by His Name *'Jehovah'*. [There are various spellings of this Name.] His supreme authority cannot be questioned.

What, then, of Jesus? He appears to have a subordinate role to the Father.

In a couple of texts Jesus uses the title *'the Alpha and the Omega'*, yet this is the title ascribed (Revelation 1:8) to *'the Lord God...the Almighty'*. Yet Jesus tells John: *"Look, I am coming soon, bringing my reward with me to repay all people according to their deeds. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Beginning and the*

End" (Revelation 22:12-13). Clearly, Jesus shares these august titles with the Father.

As the apostle Paul states: *'...God was in Christ reconciling the world to Himself'* (II Corinthians 5 18-19). God, the self-existing One. was *'in Christ'*. But was that only since his resurrection from the dead? Well, no. The Father was working through Jesus of Nazareth throughout his earthly lifetime to reconcile us to Himself. And before? Paul again, of Jesus:

Paul there says that Jesus was instrumental in creating angels (*the*

"Christ is the visible image of the invisible God. He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation, for through him God created everything in the heavenly realms and on earth. He made the things we can see and the things we can't see—such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world. Everything was created through him and for him. He existed before anything else, and he holds all creation together"

Colossians 1:15-19

heavenly realm'). All creation? That would include all those galaxies observed by the orbiting Hubble telescope - and more. The universe 'works' because of the awesome power He exerted, and continues to exert. And everything on planet Earth - including Earth. He also oversees all human government.

Clearly, the Bible understanding is that Jesus existed from 'the beginning': *"In the beginning the Word already existed. The Word was with God, and the Word was God. He existed in the beginning with God.*

God created everything through him, and nothing was created except through him. The Word gave life to everything that was created, and his life brought light to everyone" (John 1: 1-4).

So, since Jesus 'was God' - and God alone has immortality - then He, too, was 'self-existing' and shared all the divine qualities and nature.

Human Birth

Jesus, of course, also shared our humanity, being born like all of us from a woman. He fought the same battles of human nature but without ever giving in to wrong desires, wrong thoughts: "So then, since we have a great High Priest who has entered heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to what we believe. This High Priest of ours understands our weaknesses, for he faced all of the same testings we do, yet he did not sin" (Hebrews 4:15). Quite a transformation - from God to man.

He had no ordinary birth. Just as the universe was created from nothing by divine power, by the Spirit of God,

"This is how Jesus the Messiah was born. His mother, Mary, was engaged to be married to Joseph. But before the marriage took place, while she was still a virgin, she became pregnant through the power of the Holy Spirit. Joseph, her fiancé, was a good man and did not want to disgrace her publicly, so he decided to break the engagement quietly. As he considered this, an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream. "Joseph, son of David," the angel said, "do not be afraid to take Mary as your wife. For the child within her was conceived by the Holy Spirit. And she will have a son, and you are to name him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins".

Jesus was conceived in Mary's womb by the same Spirit (Matthew 1: 18ff)

The angel adds: "She will give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel which means, God is with

us". As wrote the apostle John: "The Word became flesh". 'The Word' - the Logos - no philosophical concept but the very means by which the Creator communicates with His creation. Endowed from birth with 'the fullness of God' Jesus developed the divine gifts in the service of humanity.

Jesus says he 'came down from heaven'. He was 'sent by the Father'. He would 'ascend where he was before'. In his prayer just prior to his arrest Jesus said: 'Now, Father, bring me into the glory we shared before the world began'.

"Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross. Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honour and gave him the name above all other names, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father"

Philippians 2:6-11

That glory Jesus willingly gave up - for us:

Divine Family

All Christians understand that Jesus is 'the Son of God'. We are 'children of God'. We are 'sons and daughters of the Almighty'. We pray to God as 'Father'. We belong to 'the household of God'. And we are brothers and sisters of Jesus. A family relationship. God, in other words, has a family. That family now consists of Himself and a born Son who is the Father's image. Then there are his as yet unborn children - men and women conceived by that same

Spirit that begat Jesus. We await our resurrection when our flesh will be destroyed and all that remains will be the image of the Father - our character - mirrored in the holy Spirit in us.

Because of that indwelling Spirit we will be *joint heirs* with Jesus: "For his Spirit joins with our spirit to affirm that we are God's children. And since we are his children, we are his heirs. In fact, together

"God, for whom and through whom everything was made, chose to bring many children into glory. And it was only right that he should make Jesus, through his suffering, a perfect leader, fit to bring them into their salvation. So now Jesus and the ones he makes holy have the same Father. That is why Jesus is not ashamed to call them his brothers and sisters. For he said to God, I will proclaim your name to my brothers and sisters. I will praise you among your assembled people." He also said, "I will put my trust in him," that is, "I and the children God has given me." Hebrews 2:10-12

with Christ we are heirs of God's glory" (Romans 8:16-17).

Through His Spirit dwelling in us, Christians have in a sense co-existed with God from eternity past. Should we remain faithful till death we will co-exist with our Father and our 'elder brother' Jesus throughout eternity to come. Jesus, the Word of God, has *consciously* existed co-eternally with the One who became his - and our - Father. We will all, at our resurrection, be 'one'. One divine everlasting Family. That has been God's intention, His plan, from the beginning.

Since no man has seen the Father at any time we must live with the fact that the 'divine appearances' recorded in the Scriptures were a manifestation of the Word - the one who became Jesus. Ω

Take a look at www.cgom.org

There are some two billion Christians and two thousand varieties of Christianity. Is your belief authentic?

Since man was created he has had the ability to express heart-felt joy and gratitude. It is part of our in-born nature, shared with all mankind of all faiths and none.

Christians recognize this in the *Psalms* and in those passages of Scripture in which the Israelites approached JHVH in His Temple. There was expression of true joy, thanksgiving, prayer and worship as they bowed before the great Creator of the Universe.

This may, perhaps, be a puzzle to some. Think about it. For how does this differ from Christianity? We may worship the same Creator. We pray to Him. We use the same Scriptures and claim the same 'fathers'. We draw on the same prophecies of a Messiah, and of future events. And there is like joyful praise and thanksgiving.

There is no reason to assume that believers of other faiths - Islam, Hinduism, Judaism *etc* - are any less sincere in their worship. There are varied styles of worship but each bows before their own understanding of 'God'. Festivals, especially, are times of joyful celebration.

Each 'God' impresses its own form of worship. There are, for example, the 'five pillars of Islam' which includes universal prostration in every mosque, shoes off, a turning towards Mecca at specified times daily and Friday worship. Each faith, too, has its annual round of festivals - for Muslims there is Ramadan, Eid *etc*.

Changed Belief

Perhaps more than any faith other than Hinduism, forms of worship in Christianity vary widely. It appears

that with the Christian God 'anything goes'. Take for example the specified worship days. The foundations of the Christian faith are in the Old Testament Scriptures - the same as for Judaism. Yet for Christians God has apparently permitted radical change.

The seventh-day Sabbath has been, in Christianity, replaced by Sunday. The divinely revealed 'Sabbaths of the LORD' - see Leviticus 23 - have been replaced by Christmas, Easter, All Souls' Day, Advent *etc*. Failure to observe the holy days for Israel brought divine censure. For presumptuous Sabbath-breaking God even prescribed a capital penalty. And yet He tells us '*I don't change*'.

Through the prophet Jeremiah God indicted Israel: '*Has a nation changed its gods, and they were not gods? But My people have changed their Glory without profiting*' (Jeremiah 2:11). The people of Israel had embraced religious practices from the nations around them. Does He, I wonder, also indict modern Christianity? Have we not imported practices foreign to those revealed in Scripture?

Faith Once Delivered

We must, therefore ask the question, 'Are these fundamental changes driven by the Spirit of God?' Has He recorded them for our instruction in Scripture? To be logical, consistent, we need to assume so. For the apostles 'closed the book': '*...the faith once for all delivered to the saints*', wrote Jude. Yet none of the above changes may be gleaned from the New Testament writings. If God the Father has not authorised these changes - along with many others that feature in modern Christianity - we must surely question its validity.

Yet - do not Christians experience commitment, joy in their faith? Do they not profess to worship the God revealed through the Old Testament?

But Is it Christianity?

Do they not have that essential indwelling holy Spirit?

Jesus quite clearly required of his disciples not only commitment to himself personally but also to his

"Well did Isaiah prophesy concerning you, hypocrites; as it has been written: 'This people honors Me with the lips, but their heart is far away from Me; and in vain they worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.' For forsaking the commandment of God, you hold the tradition of men..." Mark 7:7-8

teachings. He said to the Pharisees: We should apply this to our own faith!

What you believe, he says, is very important and adds:

Not everyone who says to Me, Lord, Lord, will enter into the kingdom of Heaven, but those who do the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in Your name, and in Your name cast out demons, and in Your name do many works of power? And then I will declare to them, I never knew you; 'depart from Me, those working lawlessness!' \ Matthew 7:22-23

Wrote the apostle Paul:

If I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, but I do not have love, I have become as sounding brass or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophecies, and know all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. And if I give out all my goods, and if I deliver my body that I be burned, but I do not have love, I am not profited anything

I Corinthians 13:1-3

Mighty deeds, knowledge, pro-

phetic skill - 'giving your goods' to the needy, or even martyrdom - it is not these which mark out Christianity, but 'love' - total commitment, submission, to the will and Word of God and not some sentimental attachment to a notional concept of what it means to be 'Christian'.

Simply because we mouth Christian-sounding words - 'salvation, love, justified, holy, Lord's Supper, good works etc' - does not mean that we are 'Christian' and converted, that the Spirit dwells in us - no more than that the children of Israel were converted under Moses.

Recall that they - as with Christians - were to '...love the LORD your God with all your heart and soul and strength' (Deuteronomy 6:5). They, too, were urged to 'good works' and to 'Love your neighbour as yourself' (Leviticus 19:18). This is *Old Testament*, remember.

Such behaviour clearly did not require 'conversion'. Just simple obedience to God's revealed Word.

Word of Power

As with the people of God throughout the ages prior to Christianity, association with the revealed word of God in the Scriptures can 'rub off' as worship, as ethical behaviour, as joy, as 'good works', as thanksgiving. But such are common to those of other faiths and of none - not unique to Christianity.

The divine revelation through the Christian Bible has been a powerful influence throughout the world, and has brought enlightenment into the darkness of a world sunk in superstition. Especially in the Anglo-Saxon world it has in the past five centuries overthrown mediaeval religious darkness and shaped the form of religious, economic, social and political

belief. Sadly, it is an influence that is waning sharply in all these spheres of secular and religious human activity.

Misunderstanding of the Bible has given us the Crusades, the Inquisition, book-burning and 'human sacrifice' (remember Cranmer and others), Rwanda. Association with the Bible and its benign culture and teachings is what influences many to a godly life. But that's not all there is to Christianity.

More Than...

To be Christian requires submission to every word of God, to His commandments, to His prescribed form and times of worship. The Spirit may 'dwell with us' - perhaps striving to evoke personal change. But will reside in us only if we:

...repent and be baptized, each of you in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins. And [then] you

will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all those afar off, as many as the Lord our God shall call

Acts 2:38-39

The Indwelling Spirit

The apostle adds that God gives His Spirit to those who submit to His authority (Acts 5:32). Only then will the Spirit of God take up residence in us:

"...the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive because it does not see Him nor know Him. But you know Him, for He abides with you and shall be in you" (John 14:17).

But for Christians, worship and belief is considered to be inspired by God's holy Spirit indwelling the individual. Indeed the Scriptures boldly claim that '*without the Spirit of Christ you are none of*

his' (Romans 8:9).

Yet '*the Spirit was not yet given*' (John 7:39) to the people of Israel. Not until the resurrection of Jesus. Until then the holy Spirit influenced the faithful only externally.

'Christianity', as experienced today, is no more than a hodge-podge of non-Biblical beliefs and practices tacked on to the Name of the Creator. Not only are the divine times for worship changed, despised and replaced by overtly pagan practices (Sunday, Christmas, Easter etc) - but so, too, have fundamental Bible teachings been replaced.

For example:

- the mortal nature of humanity is turned into the Satanic notion of 'an immortal soul' (Genesis 3:4)
- human destiny is wrongly seen as either *heaven* or *hell* or *purgatory*
- heartfelt 'repentance' has been replaced by external conformity
- tradition replaces the Scriptures
- the notion of a 'trinity' has replaced the Bible view of 'God'
- half of professing Christians are sunk in superstition

If such variation from Scripture were seen in any other faith it would be classed as a different religion!

Test of Faith

The eighth century BC House of Israel were evicted from their homeland for their failure to follow God's revealed way of life. The people who replaced them - non-Israelites - became known as Samaritans and were abhorred by the Jews. The Samaritans '*...feared Jehovah, and served their own gods, after the manner of the nations from among whom they had been carried away*'. (2 Kings 17:34). Their faith was a mixture of truth and error. **cont'd p.8**

Could you cope with a crisis that affects your infrastructure? We should be prepared!

How would you cope without electric power, without fresh drinkable water, without sewerage or social security, no deliveries to shops, no pumped petrol, no transport, no wages, no ATMs, perhaps no job?

For it isn't beyond imagination to envisage such a situation. Terrorism, even nuclear or chemical terrorism, is a present threat. And we are being warned, because of disturbed weather patterns and fuel shortages, about a climatic change with nationwide power disruption.

Wouldn't it be prudent for us to figure ways of surviving "just in case"? Solomon gave good advice (Proverbs 22:3): *"A prudent man foresees danger and hides himself; but the simple go on - and suffer for it"*. Jesus exhorted us to be *"wise as serpents, harmless as doves"*. Because of the then ongoing 'present distress' the apostle Paul urged the brethren to take avoidance measures.

It does not negate trust in God to do what we physically can to preserve our basic life support systems.

By no means do we imply that "the end of the world is nigh"! But it would be sensible to assess our situation and make whatever preparations are within our circumstances to tide us over any situation that may last two or three days, weeks - or even a few months. If disruption extends beyond this we can expect real trouble as folk abandon the thin veneer of civilisation and begin to scavenge for necessities, money, drugs *etc.* Hurricane Katrina shows us it doesn't take long!

Whatever happens, Jesus warned us to always *"be ready"*, with the

emphasis, of course, on our spiritual readiness. Especially in times of stress we must ever look up to our heavenly Father, and not be anxious. But the whole tenor of God's Word is that we do what we can for ourselves. God makes up the shortfall for those who trust Him.

Prepare Now

Before any crisis develops, it would be prudent for us to make some preparations to ensure we can cope for a time without basic services.

Outside the home we need also to consider which services will affect us if they are absent. Water and sewerage, certainly. Shops, petrol stations, financial transactions of all kinds, Social Security, telephone, postal services, street lighting, traffic lights, hospital equipment and health services. All sorts of consequences follow from such breakdown!

It might never happen in our lifetime, of course, and we need not panic! But it's prudent to be prepared! Here are a few suggestions. Clearly, not all are of use to all of us given our varied circumstances. But don't put off your preparations to the last minute! When folk awake to the problem panic may set in! Ever been in a supermarket on Xmas

Eve?

Even if you have a small dwelling it is prudent to have a small store of non-perishables.

To Do List

- make your home as secure as you can
- lay in a supply of non-perishable foods: dried vegetables, dried milk, oats, flour, potatoes *etc.* Remember - your freezer may not be working! Enough to last your needs for perhaps a month or so. After that it will probably be looted!

- if you have a garden put some of it to vegetables
- start saving, now, a small amount of cash. Be frugal until you have a contingency fund - especially if you are on a fixed income. Cash will be king
- try to acquire a heating unit that doesn't depend on piped gas or electric; and be sure you have warm clothing to hand. Get a burner at least sufficient to heat water, preferably a small cooker (kerosene or bottled gas)
- and some batteries for your radio

Be Prepared!

- acquire a light source, preferably other than candles for safety reasons. Camping shops have a range of types
- have available a supply of water-purifying tablets. Dry white wine is also useful for this purpose - about one part in ten of water, left 24 hours. Or a few drops of thin bleach (*eg* hydrogen peroxide, Milton) per pint suffices
- if you use medication be sure to have a supply, along with a basic first-aid kit
- it is recommended that we each have secure copies of important documents - *eg* birth/marriage certificates, house deeds, financial arrangements

Debt

A further important part of our preparation is *debt reduction*.

However likely or unlikely future problems may be, it is prudent to dispose as far as possible of any indebtedness we may have - credit/debit cards, loans *etc* (though mortgages would be an exception).

Paul's principle *"Owe no one anything"* is valid as a general rule of life! But especially in uncertain times. It's all too easy to be trapped into the consumer mentality, in which we *"must have"*. It would be wise to build rather than deplete our personal reserves, no matter how small. Ω

Three Days and Three Nights In The Grave, *Why?*

Steven J. Kieler

Why was Jesus in the grave three days and three nights? Why did he make such an issue out of it, saying to the Scribes and Pharisees: "... *An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas*" Matthew 12:40?

Jesus made very specific statements that lend understanding to this situation. First, let's consider the "*Three days and three nights*" factor as it relates to Jonah.

Jonah

Jonah 1:17, "*Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow up Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.*" That is very time-specific and Jesus used it to illustrate a certain point.

Matthew 12:40, "*For as Jonas [Jonah] was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.*"

Scripture is exacting again about time in I Samuel 30:12-13 and Esther 4:16. Phrases like "three days" are used when it is less important. But why was Jesus entombed for that length of time?

The Corruption Connection

It is clear that after three days the body begins to decay. "*Jesus said, 'Take ye away the stone.' Martha, the sister of him that was dead, saith unto Him, 'Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days,'*" John 11:39.

Quoting David from Proverbs 16:10, who had prophesied that The Saviour would not see corruption.

Paul said in Acts 2:31, "*He [David] seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell [sheol, the grave], neither His flesh did see corruption.*" (Read verses 26-31 for the complete context.)

Even the two witnesses of Revelation will, being human, see corruption as their dead bodies will lie in the streets for three and one half days. (Revelation 11:9,11) Note the words "*and one half.*"

The number three in scripture denotes complete or entire. It is clear that Jesus was in the grave not more than three days. But we also know that He was three days *and* three nights in the grave. It does not say "a part of the day or night." Look at your calendar and see if you can get three days *and* nights from Friday afternoon till Sunday morning.

Perhaps a more important lesson here is that Jesus was uncorrupted, without sin; He saw no physical corruption but neither was he like sinful corruptible man.

But how could Jesus be buried on "Good Friday" and resurrected on Sunday morning?

From Burial to Resurrection

The fact is, He was not.

John 20:1, "*The first day of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, when it was yet dark, unto the sepulchre, and seeth the stone taken away from the sepulchre.*" It is not disputed that the first day is Sunday. But notice Mary, while it was yet dark, came to the tomb, and Jesus had already risen (past tense) sometime earlier. But when? Let us return to the crucifixion day.

John 19:42. "*There laid they Jesus*

therefore because of the Jews' preparation day; for the sepulchre was nigh at hand."

John 19:31, "*The Jews therefore, because it was the preparation, that the bodies should not remain upon the cross on the Sabbath day, (for that Sabbath day was an high day,) besought Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away.*"

There seemed to be some urgency to get Jesus into the tomb and it had to do with the "preparation day." That is the day before a weekly or annual Sabbath. John notes that this was not a seventh day Sabbath; it was a High (Holy) day. Indeed it was; it was the first day of Unleavened Bread (Leviticus 23:6-8). And that could fall on any day of the week.

We now know:

- that the crucifixion was on the day before a "High Day"
- He was in the tomb three days and nights
- He was resurrected sometime before Sunday morning
- He was in the grave just before sunset on the "preparation day"

We can deduce that, if He was three days and nights in the grave, He was resurrected the same time of day He was entombed. Therefore, the latest He could have left the tomb was Sabbath (Saturday) evening as Mary was there at dawn on Sunday and it could not have been earlier or the guards would have reported it on Saturday. (Matthew 27:62-64)

Counting back three full days from Saturday eve brings us to Wednesday, the preparation day when Christ was killed. The following day would be Thursday, the "High Day," then Friday, day two. And, finally, there is Sabbath, day three.

Interestingly, this Passover week correlates to the same days of the

week as the Passover during the Exodus. You could calculate this by counting back from the incident of the gathering of the manna on the Sabbath and the chronology in the book of Numbers.

There's another point yet to consider.

Signs and Wisdom.

Jesus, speaking to the Pharisees and the Scribes, gave them a sign. Matthew 12:39, "*But He answered and said unto them, An evil and adulterous generation seeketh after a sign; and there shall no sign be given to it, but the sign of the prophet Jonas.*" That sign was the three days and three nights. It was exact so they wouldn't miss or misinterpret it.

They had a peculiar habit described in I Corinthians 1:22, "*For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom*".

Returning to Matthew, the theme continues: "*The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation,*

Antichrist - Who is he?

It is often assumed that 'the Antichrist' is a single entity, focused by many Protestants on the Church of Rome - specifically the Pope and his church. The apostle John, however, cites 'many antichrists' in his day. It may be worth considering that the end-time may produce more than one such anti-Christian person.

Take a look at some of the 'marks' of Antichrist, gleaned from the Scriptures:

- denies the Father and the Son
- denies the incarnation
- exalts himself above the one true God revealed in the Christian Bible
- claims personal divinity
- a man of sin, lawless - inherently worthy of destruction
- a false prophet producing lying wonders and false miracles
- author of a great apostasy from the 'faith once for all delivered to the saints'
- defiles the Temple holy place
- desolates the land of Palestine
- sets up a kingdom, small to begin but spreading widely - ultimately worldwide
- uses force to propagate his belief system
- hates Christianity and Judaism by any name
- arises after demise of Roman Empire

CGOM...Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you" (Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature (eg our quarterly *Newsletter*, *Fountain of Life*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - or individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.

Unsigned articles are by the Editor

and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here. {42} The queen of the south shall rise up in the judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it: for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and, behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (Matthew 12:41-42).

See how Corinthians and Matthew are complementary. They both speak of 'signs and wisdom'.

The sign is there for *all* to see and neither the sign to the Jews nor the wisdom of the Greeks would suffice to deliver them. But then the sign was only to show them they were an evil and adulterous generation.

Paul sums it up nicely: "*But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness;*" (I Corinthians 1: 23). Ω

- still powerful at Christ's return
- and only destroyed by the returning Christ

History shows us that some who occupied the Papal throne fulfilled some of these criteria. But certainly not all - witness the late John Paul II. Such, however, will in contrast be the marks of the end-time 'man of sin', the Antichrist.

Man of Sin

In other words, the 'man of sin' (the *lawless one* - II Thessalonians 2:8) heads an assembly of nations which is opposed to the Father God and denies that Jesus is God's Son and His Messiah - the Anointed One. His dominion arises to prominence sometime after the restraining influence of the Roman Empire is taken away (in the mid-sixth century AD), when the Empire shattered into ten divisions - and continues until destroyed by the returning King of kings.

Antichrist...cont'd

The seeds of his belief system were sown in the first century. The apostle John points to him as the Antichrist, 'against [and instead of] Christ'. The Antichrist, a false Messiah, claims superiority over Jesus, as do his followers - he 'blasphemes the God of Heaven'. He is, personally, a debauched 'man of sin' and fit only for destruction. He acts through the energy, false miracles and deceptive methods of Satan - who now has a stranglehold on our world.

The Antichrist considers himself superior to all other faiths - even his own - and takes to himself divine authority.

The 'man of sin' and his system is not peaceful but violent. He is a warrior and gains followers by the sword or the threat of the sword. The especial objects of his

wrath are Christianity by any name and Judaism - though his religion is based on a perversion of both, on spurious revelations' and on false miracles. Down the centuries his successors have had the same violent tendency. In the end-time he acts '... according to the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders'.

This evil end-time despot - who echoes Antiochus the Illustrious of ancient Syria - arises from the same eastern portion of the old Grecian Empire - which included greater Syria and Iran (Daniel 8:21-25), and later was also part of the Roman Empire

In the end-time he will be supported by an alliance of Middle Eastern nations: Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Turkey, Lebanon and the Palestinians

(Psalm 83), aided by Iran. (There may be ten allied nations sharing his aims.)

Second 'Beast'

However, a power wielding universal religious authority - also arising from Roman territory - is predicted to influence the world to support this 'Beast', the 'King of the North'. It will, briefly, gain support from believers of many religions, including Christianity.

The 'Man of Sin' and the 'False Prophet' are the two leaders of the great apostasy - from eastern and from the western areas of the old Roman Empire. They will in the end join forces to conquer the world. Both claim roots in the Bible but 'blaspheme' - distorting the clear words of Scripture and adding contrary teachings snatched from human reasoning. **Ω**

Christianity...? cont'd from p.5

In the time of Jesus the Samaritans were deceived by Simon the Magician. He later 'believed and was baptized' but utterly misunderstood the true faith and was powerfully condemned by the apostle Peter (Acts 8). Later reports place him in Rome where he is reported to have introduced 'Samaritan' - ie Babylonian - practices to the church of God at Rome. These have gripped mainstream Christianity ever since.

Twenty-first century Christianity closely parallels the Samaritans in their acceptance of practices God has utterly condemned.

Difference

The first Christians were in their general practice indistinguishable from the Jews. They worshipped on the seventh-day Sabbath and on the

Biblical holy days. They observed the Bible dietary instructions. They carefully applied the revealed moral teachings as summed up in the Ten Commandments and sought to resist the pulls of the superstitions that surrounded them.

But they were different, too.

Some Jews - and later the non-Jews - responded to the divine call to follow Jesus Christ - to death, if that were necessary to remain faithful to him and his

ways.

God's Law was no longer an external imposition but 'written in the heart'. Animal sacrifice was replaced by the once-for-all sacrifice of Jesus for our sin. The Spirit of God resided in each Christian and did not, as with the Israelites, merely influence them from without. The indwelling Spirit motivated and empowered the Christian to obey the revealed will of God.

In sum, Christianity as seen today

is far removed from the 'faith once delivered to the saints'. Indeed the faith of Jesus survived, except for a few faithful, barely fifty years beyond the resurrection of Jesus. The history and characters in the Bible are unchanged. The terminology of the Bible is unchanged - though meanings are distorted. Jesus is exalted - though his message is garbled. The Kingdom of God is preached - but largely misunderstood. There is 'a different Gospel'.

What passes as Christianity is certainly a powerful influence in the world because of its widespread propagation of the Scriptures, the very Word of God. But it must take its place alongside Hinduism, Islam, Buddhism as just another faith to be superseded by the true Word of God in His due time.

Perhaps you should ask yourself: are you a Christian - or a mere 'Christianist'? It's vital that we each 'test our faith'. **Ω**

The article
6000 Years of Christianity
develops this theme.
Ask for a free copy

Request:
**What Do You Mean - 'Repent'?
Should You Be Baptized?**

MiniStudy**Does God Have Special Days?**

And the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them: The appointed seasons of the LORD, which you shall proclaim to be holy convocations, even these are My appointed seasons (Leviticus 23:1-2)

take heed to yourself that you not be snared to follow [other nations] after they have been destroyed before you; and that you not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? And I shall do so, even I'. You shall not do so to Jehovah your God (Deuteronomy 12:30-31)

Every major faith encourages its adherents to assemble for worship at specific seasons. Hindus, Moslems, Christians, Jews - all have their special days, both weekly and annually. Christians for example will this year (2006) celebrate 'Easter' in mid-April. Around the world, it commemorates the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, the Messiah. These annual days are special for Christians, as are the days of *Ramadan* for Muslims, *Passover* for Jews, *Divali* for Hindus. And each faith ascribes the festival's origin and significance to their God.

We ought to ask, though: If all these faiths represent the same divinity - how come such variation? Does God himself not care? Is it human responsibility to devise our own forms of worship? According to the Christian Scriptures (see above), clearly *not!*

- recall that God says '*I change not*'. He is '*the same yesterday, today and forever*'.
- the convocations listed in Leviticus 23 are *His* convocations - holy, *ie* separate, special - and do not, as often stated, derive from Moses. They are not 'just Jewish'
- the weekly seventh-day Sabbath - also a convocation, an assembly - was so precious to Him that He protected it by a capital penalty
- indeed the nation of Judah was evicted from the land of promise because of their disregard for the Sabbath and 'days of Baal'
- Jeroboam - king of the ten northern Israelite tribes - changed the divinely-appointed festivals and was thereafter castigated as an example of rebellion against God. They 'rejected *his statutes*' (II Kings 17:13-16)
- these divine festivals or assemblies (Hebrew: *mo'ed* - 'seasons') were inbuilt by the Creator in the physical creation (Genesis 1:14)
- neglect of God's 'holy convocations' - the annual festivals - blinds us to the divine plan of the ages. Each represents a significant aspect of how and when God is working, and what His plans are for us
- the apostolic church of God continued to observe these same divinely-appointed days - the weekly seventh-day Sabbath and the Festivals. There is no indication in the New Testament that the days were exchanged by God for the observances and festivals of their pagan neighbours. Paul urged Timothy to pass on to others the teachings he had been taught. And Jude wrote that in his day - the first century of the Christian era - there was a '*faith once for all delivered to the saints*'. Christians have the same God as did Moses and the prophets

For more information request:

***God's Holy Days, God's Grand Design
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