

# *new* **Horizons**

*Vol 18 No 3*

*May/June 2014*

*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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### **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 bi-monthly e-mail Newsletter OUTREACH, the NEW HORIZONS magazine, the BIBLE BASICS on-line home study course, and the 32-lesson Study Course. The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* please request it from any of the addresses listed

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# new Horizons

Issue No 105

May/June 2014

**What does it take to become a Christian? Is it simply to say, 'I commit myself to you', and it's a done deal? For others it is a bit more complicated, with 'preparation' taking years of study before rigorous examination leading to baptism.**

That initial commitment is indeed simple—provided you have a basic understanding of what Jesus himself has explained. 'Come to me', he says, and adds '...take my yoke upon you'. Simple? Not quite. For what does it mean to 'take my yoke'? The analogy is with a team of oxen joined together to draw the plough. They have a common purpose. They work together. They are in submission to the ploughman. The Christian is to be in total submission to Jesus. But compared to the demands of other ways of life, his yoke is indeed 'easy'.

## The Invitation

At some stage in life we may feel God's 'tap on the shoulder'. It may come out of the blue. It may follow some traumatic event—illness, bereavement, a near death experience of some kind. It may be something we read—even the Bible! But it turns the mind to the realm of the spiritual, to an understanding that we have sinned—have '...fallen short of the glory of God'. We may simply brush it off. Or we can pursue the thought, dig more deeply, perhaps search

for the Source. It's like entering a building—you open a door into a lobby, then another door, *etc.* It is God the Father inviting you, drawing you, to take part in His mission.

In time you will be led in one direction—to Jesus Christ. Said Jesus: '*...No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me draw him*' (John 6:44) For '*...there is salvation in no other One; for there is no other name [ie Jesus of Nazareth] under Heaven given among men by which we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12). True no matter what your religion, your race, your circumstances. *Only through Jesus.*

## 'Come Unto Me...'

Note the focus of the apostle Paul: '*...I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified*' (I Corinthians 2:2). Crucified—as a sacrifice for our sin, the world's sin. Come under the conviction that we have transgressed God's guidance and there is no other sacrifice for sin than that of Jesus. Accept that—and then follow the guidance of the apostle Peter: '*...Repent [ie forsake sin] and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ to remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*' (Acts 2:39). In Him is forgiveness of sin, and by the gift of His in-

dwelling Spirit we will live forever. You become a new-born child of God, having His Spirit dwelling in you to lead you into developing the very nature, the character, of Jesus. That's why the Father invited you! The alternative is, ultimately, eternal death.

So, is that all there is to becoming a Christian? Not at all!

## Count the Cost

Listen to Jesus again: '*...take my yoke upon you*'. He explains it elsewhere: '*...Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven*'. That will is summed up in the Scriptures. His yoke is to live a life in conformity with the laws of his Kingdom. He adds: '*...whoever does not bear his cross and come after Me, he cannot be My disciple. For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost*' (Luke 14:28).

Like any new-born, life then lies ahead. Much to learn, much to experience. *But you are now a child of God.* With the indwelling Spirit we now are led into a deeper understanding of God's way of life. Ideally this in within the embrace of the assembly of God's 'called-out ones'—those who accept God's invitation, His church—to be nourished to maturity and prepared for mission.

God is jealous for how we relate to Him. From mankind's beginning He has prescribed how He is to be worshipped. It can be something of a shock to the new believer! It can be compared to the new recruit in a long-established business, or the armed forces. He or she has qualified to become part of it (Acts 2:38). Now the new employee or recruit (the new Christian) must learn the business and its procedures and background culture.

### A Narrow Way

As stated above, in committing to Jesus Christ we accept being yoked to him—no matter what that may entail. What that means he has clearly laid before us. He says, for example, that we may lose family and friends. He says it may invite persecution, even martyrdom. Your life will be turned upside down! So not an easy path to tread: *'...because narrow is the gate and restricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it'* (Matthew 7:14).

What Jesus requires comes as a surprise, a shock even, to those few whose eyes have been opened to what the Scriptures teach us about true Christianity. The apostle Paul tells us that *'...if our gospel is hidden, it is hidden to those being lost, in whom the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelieving ones, so that the light of the glorious gospel of Christ (who is the image of God) should not dawn on them'* (II Corinthians 4:4).

In fact the entirety of mankind has been deceived as to the true faith. Writes the apostle John: *'...the old serpent called Devil, and Satan, who deceives the whole*

*world'* (Revelation 12:9). Paul adds: *'...the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now works in the children of disobedience: Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others'* (Ephesians 2:1-3).

### The New Christianity

Ancient heathen practices and philosophies have been grafted onto, and distorted, the Biblical faith. The seventh-day Sabbath is replaced, in the new—false—Christianity, by Sunday. The Bible festivals are abandoned in favour of pagan festivals such as Easter and Christmas. The very mortal nature of man is replaced by the false philosophy of an immortal soul—leading to such perverse teachings as Purgatory, heaven as the Christian reward, and everlasting hell-fire for non-Christians.

Also a shock, for what we hear from the pulpit too often fails to reflect the teachings of Jesus and the Scriptures.

Come to Jesus, then, and your life will truly be 'turned upside down', your world view transformed as you learn to see life as God sees it. Yet, as Jesus said, when you come to know these things *'...the truth will set you free'* (John 8:32). Ω

*Our free article explains what God requires of us:*

**What Do You Mean—'Repent'?**

### Gospel ...cont'd from p.3

Jesus—not just on a tunnel vision focus on a brief earthly Kingdom 'coming soon'.

Through the millennia few have embraced it fully. But the Father continues to invite all who will to become part of His Kingdom to *repent*—to live a life transformed—through a new covenant with Him, His laws embedded in our thoughts and actions.

The church is commissioned to proclaim this message *'..in all the world'* as a witness (Matthew 28:19)

Beyond that earthly Kingdom lies an eternity of the expansion of the Kingdom of God beyond our wildest imaginings. Truly follow Jesus Christ and you will be part of it. Ω

### When We Die...cont'd from p.8

the god of fire. Islam forbids cremation as does the Greek Orthodox church. But in the modern Christian world there is no stigma or idolatry attached to cremation—it is the simple disposal of the body, and is a matter of personal choice and not a Biblical requirement.

We can be assured that however our body is disposed of when life ends, as Christians we remain in the care of our loving Father, our spirit preserved until the glorious resurrection at the return of the Saviour. Ω

**Staff at New Horizons are please to respond to any questions you may have arising from our articles. Write or e-mail us at any of our addresses**

## Proclaiming the Gospel of the Kingdom

### The church has a commission— but it is much misunderstood

The message preached by Jesus has sounded around the world. Sadly, it is largely ignored and misunderstood. In the days of the apostles, Paul—echoing Psalm 19:4—could say ‘... *their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world*’ (Romans 10:18). Jesus’ commission had been completed. Mission accomplished?

Of course not. Generation succeeded generation and billions more were ‘evangelised’. For God the Father has set a fixed period—symbolized by the seven day week—during which He selects those whom He wants for His growing Family.

But as Jesus and his apostles predicted, his message became distorted, and few respond to the true Gospel he taught.

Today, relatively few of earth’s six billion plus inhabitants are dedicated believers—often considered by ‘mainstream’ Christians as fanatics, and to be outside the Christian pale. Much missionary effort, however, fails to reflect the fullness of the Christian Scriptures.

### Kingdom Message

That message is unique—though some denominations claim to be ‘more unique’ than the others! Their distinctiveness focuses on the significance of ‘*the gospel of the kingdom*’ (Matthew 24:14). This is assumed to have the nar-

row meaning of a reference to the earthly kingdom that Jesus will return to rule for a thousand years—the ‘Millennium’.

On this presumption vast resources are dedicated to preaching this message, inducing a ‘ghetto-style’ view of the church—‘us and no other’. It’s worthwhile examining this presumption.

The Millennium, it should be noted, is a mere blip on the timeline of eternity. God is King of His creation (Psalm 47:2 *etc*), and has existed ‘...*from everlasting to everlasting*’ (Psalm 90:2). Certainly the coming reign of Jesus Christ must be part of the message proclaimed by the church. But the ‘Kingdom message’ is much more.

Jesus asserted ‘...*I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it*’ (Matthew 16:18). It is alive today—though perhaps not so well!—testimony to his insight and authority.

Only a blind church leader would claim that all who say they are Christian are true believers. It’s a label loosely worn. Yet there are millions of sincere believers who heard the Gospel message. For the most part, however, they have boarded a Christian ‘train’—that is, committed to Christ—but it

*Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms*

has headed along a different track. The message was distorted—not wrong. They began with *alpha* but didn’t move on to *omega*.

### Gospel of the Kingdom

Central to the message of Jesus is Jesus *himself*. Without him—no Christianity. Indeed the message of the Scriptures, Old Testament and New, focuses on Jesus—his life, his death, his resurrection and his continued presence on earth in his church. That was the message of the apostles as recorded in the New Testament.

While on earth Jesus stated to questioning Pharisees who were expectant of an earthly kingdom under Messiah: ‘...*the kingdom of God is within you*’ (Luke 17:21). That is, it is a ‘heart thing’, and represented by him standing in their midst.

The Kingdom with its eternal King, its Laws, its whole ethos is the realm of the transformed mind. As the LORD spoke through Jeremiah: ‘...*I will write my laws on their hearts and they will be my people*’ (ch 31:33).

Applied to all human life and politics that transformation will—at the return of Christ—usher in an earthly Kingdom overseen by the King of ages together with his people gathered from all ages — to prepare a people for eternity.

### And Now?

The church of God must focus on proclaiming the true Gospel of salvation through *cont’d p.2*

## Created With Purpose

**The Christian Scriptures - 'the Holy Bible' - is despised by those proud to call themselves 'atheist'. Yet the arguments against it show the poverty of thought of its detractors**

A professed atheist scorns the Bible as evidence of a divine Being. But it is instructive to look at what it says - about the Earth, about man, about the purpose of creation. That purpose is misunderstood even by many ardent believers.

By divine fiat, according to the Bible, matter came into existence and was organized into 'the Universe' (in the larger sense). The Earth - alone in this Universe - was the centre stage on which God would work out a divine plan. When complete, the physical Earth was tailor-made for His purpose (Isaiah 45:18).

The pinnacle of creation to date - common ground here, with the atheist - is the human race, which for all its present faults is the dominant force on the planet. Mankind was formed from the earth's elements. Every anatomical and physiological system was perfect - the whole a fully integrated, functioning being from the beginning. There was harmony with Earth and with the Creator. Not mere flotsam, a product of random selection born to live and die, the Universe and man were *created with purpose*.

### Divine Plan

By the exercise of his God-given free-will, man chose to ignore the Creator's 'instruction manual' - the guide by which he would live in harmony with his Creator, his fellow-man and the lower creation. By this choice he disrupted the course of nature. It's a decision that reverberates to this day in the chaos and suffering around us.

From the moment of that choice God has largely allowed man to pursue his own destructive path, intervening only to keep His Plan on track. Ever since we have made the same choices - with the same consequences. He has set a finite time to complete it, and when the time is ripe will intervene to restore Earth to its pristine harmony. The Plan will be completed - 'on time and on budget'.

### Step-by-Step Plan

The God of the Christian Scriptures is portrayed as a divine Family, the all-powerful Creator of the Universe, the Supreme Intelligence. Man was created to become a part of that immortal Family.

The Plan is multi-stage, worked out over time through experience and by resurrection. From the beginning God has singled out those who are willing to believe in His existence and who trust Him - even with their life.

It is called *faith*. And '*...without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that comes to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him*' (Hebrews 11:6). With the eye of faith these select few - some are named in Hebrews 11 - could see in the world around them sure evidence that God does indeed exist: '*...the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead*' (Romans 1: 20).

Through a lifetime of experience they trusted God. As said Job:

**Read more on this theme of  
God's purpose for mankind:  
God's Grand Design**

*'Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him'* (Job 13:15). Having remained faithful to death they will experience resurrection to spirit life for eternity at the return of Jesus as King of kings. Through resurrection they become a part of the divine Family.

### Millennial Reign

A further stage finds these 'Firstfruits' (James 1:18) working with Jesus Christ for the thousand years following their resurrection. They will form His Government, reigning over and restoring the entire planet. All false religion, all corrupt government, will be swept away

Their 'subjects' - all of mankind who survive the horrors of the end-time, and their descendants - will have the same opportunity as the Firstfruits to join the divine Family. The presence of God in the person of Jesus on earth in Jerusalem at that time will remove any lingering doubts as to His existence!

### The Rest of the Dead

What, then, of the billions who lived before Jesus brought salvation? What of the further billions who have never heard of Him? Recall that the Christian teaching is that: '*...neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*' (Acts 4:12). What of them?

We now reach a further stage in the Plan that was begun when man first set foot on Earth. Said Jesus (John 5: 28-29): '*...the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [ie judgment]*'.

When the millennial reign of Jesus is over all those billions, say the Scriptures, will be resurrected and given their chance to believe. The Plan is ready for its final stage - *eternity*.  $\Omega$

## The Kingdom of God—*here and now*

**Just what is the ‘Kingdom of God’? Is it here, now? Or, is it a future event?**

Many Christians consider the Kingdom of God to be ‘the Church’. Parables are adduced to indicate it will begin small (1st century) and gradually grow over the centuries, culminating at the return of Jesus. For others the ‘Kingdom of God’ is a limited earth-bound kingdom, ruled over by Jesus and the saints—the ‘Millennium’. Would it surprise to learn that both views have merit?

Consider the words of the Psalmist: ‘... *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations* (Psalm 145:13, Daniel 4:3). Here we have a definition of God’s Kingdom. It exists eternally. It has total authority over time and eternity. It is a spirit kingdom (otherwise it wouldn’t last for ever!). And, v.1, God is the King of the Kingdom (Jeremiah 10:10)—the everlasting Spirit (John 4:24). He is ‘...*from everlasting to everlasting*’ (Psalm 41:13). His ‘... *throne is established of old: you are from everlasting*’. (Psalm 93:2).

### Here and Now

‘*Throughout all generations*’. So we need to ask in what manner the Kingdom is ‘here and now’. Jesus made a strange statement: ‘...*if I with the finger of God [ie His power] cast out devils, no doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you* (Luke 11:20). And ‘... *when he was demanded of the*

*Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God comes not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [ie in your midst, here with you, now]* (Luke 17:21). Further: ‘...*if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you [Gk, arrived]*’ (Matthew 12:28). That is, the Kingdom was with them in the form of its King.

Is that any different from today, in this twenty-first century? Recall that Jesus told his disciples: ‘...*I am with you always, even to the end of the world*’ (Matthew 28:20). How? By his Spirit.

### Soon to Inherit

Jesus is living in each Christian by his indwelling Spirit (*cp* II Corinthians 3:17). Not some ephemeral notion, but *reality*. Selected by the Father, each Christian is spiritually begotten by Him, enabling us to become His children, His sons and daughters.

Writes John: ‘...*now are we the sons of God*’ (I John 3:2). And

Paul, to the Christians in Rome: ‘...*You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*’ (Romans 8:9).

It’s a real transition from *death to life*. It’s our entry into the very Kingdom of God. The Father ‘...*has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has translated [ie, transferred] us into the kingdom of his dear Son*’ Colossians 1:13). That is, there has been a change of kingdoms, from the physical to the spiritual.

More: ‘...*if children, also heirs, heirs, indeed, of God, and heirs together of Christ*’ (Romans 8:17). Christians are *heirs* of the Kingdom. As children of the King, as in any royal family, it is now ours (if we continue in the faith) to be fully realized at the resurrection. We are, now, ‘...*a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people [a people for God’s possession]*’ (I Peter 2:9).

The Kingdom of God is wherever the indwelling Spirit of God dwells. It is the task of the Church of God to proclaim this message worldwide to all nations: ‘...*this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come*’ (Matthew 24:14).

The Gospel is the good news that God has a plan that delivers mankind into the Family of God. By turning from sin and embracing the divine way we embrace that destiny and—like children in the womb—are ‘begotten’ children.

### **STUDY THE WORD**

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*unsigned articles are by the Editor*

### New Birth

Jesus and Paul tell us exactly when we will thus inherit. Jesus calls it ‘...*the resurrection to life*’ (John 5:29), while Paul pinpoints the momentous event in time: ‘...*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first*’ (I Thessalonians 4:16). Another stage of the Father’s plan will have been accomplished.

### Earthly Rule

And next? Together with the resurrected saints, Jesus will begin to establish the rule of the Kingdom over the despondent remnant of mankind, emerging from the worst time of trouble ever.

These refugees from all earth’s nations will begin to experience the joy of the divine rule of the Kingdom of God, the Family of God.

The prayer of Jesus will at last be fulfilled: ‘...*Your Kingdom come [and] Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven*’. The everlasting Kingdom of God, the divine Royal Family—at present reigning in heaven over the angelic hosts, and on earth in the saints—

will reign supreme over all mankind.

When that thousand years of peace and perfect benign Government has come to a conclusion, all of mankind will return to physical life to their (first) opportunity for access to membership of the Family, the Kingdom, of God.

### And Beyond...

That earthly Kingdom, of course, is by no means the end. For beyond lies an eternity of which we know little—yet.

Through the centuries of human existence God has gradually unveiled His magnificent plans for His beloved creation. Wrote the apostle Paul: ‘...*Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him*’ (I Corinthians 2: 9). He continues: ‘...*For us, however, God has drawn aside the veil through the teaching of the Spirit*’ (v. 10 *Weymouth NT*).

We do know that, after the Millennium ‘...*the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his*

*people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*’ (Revelation 20:3). This planet will become the centre of all Creation, with God Himself, our Father, present with us. *Who knows what that future will hold!* **Ω**

### Moving On...

We all hold deeply-entrenched beliefs sown in us from our earliest years. What our parents said—and did. The influence of teachers. The books we have read. What we heard in church.

For the most part we simply accept them, though we throw in the occasional (odd) self-generated musings. In matters of faith, however, we tend to ‘leave it to the experts’. Few of us will challenge what we hear from the pulpit, whatever our faith. Too complicated!

Charismatic gurus arrive in our lives and all too readily we succumb to their teachings—often to our detriment, and leaving us confused should we find them in error. (That’s why they don’t like you questioning their authority, or consorting with ‘outsiders’.)

In my case I identified a score of erroneous concepts inherited from a trusted Bible teacher! So it’s vital that we examine our own beliefs in the light of Scripture—while focusing our lives on the example of our Saviour, Jesus. *Truth frees!*

### Request: Church—or Cult?

### Time... cont’d from p.7

10th Nisan (Exodus 12:3) no longer applied, the Jewish authorities having so decided. Nor did they smear blood around their doors as in the first Passover (v.7).

### Confusion

However, there remains some confusion within the Church of

God family as to which calendar is appropriate. Various—conflicting—calendars have been proposed causing unnecessary division among the brethren, and resulting in the holy days being observed on different dates. Most Christians, however, accept what has been termed ‘the Hebrew calendar’ to predict when to observe the holy days. It is widely avail-

able in print (and on-line) as the *Comprehensive Hebrew Calendar*, and is used by most Sabatarian Churches of God. **Ω**

*A calendar card covering several years is available from us on request*



## Marking Time—*then and now*

***How do we relate the calendar, now used to date the Biblical holy days, to the modern everyday 'Gregorian' calendar?***

As Christians we do indeed live in 'two worlds', for we are described as '*...strangers and pilgrims*'—temporary inhabitants of a world that rejects the Creator and His values.

How we relate to God's worship plan is no exception. In our day-to-day walk, in our business activity, in our personal financial transactions we are guided by the calendar that starts the year on 'January 1st'. So it can be confusing when confronted by the calendar on which God has set His annual holy days, in which there are strange names given to the months, when the number of months in a year varies over a nineteen-year cycle, when there are variable length (29 or 30 days) months. How can we possibly relate?

For example—when do we observe the Lord's Supper/Passover? Biblically it falls on the 14th/15th of the first month of the Bible year, 'Nisan/Abib', which this year equates to Sunday evening, April 13th. [*Abib* means 'tender green ears'.] To arrive at that date requires complex calculations! But fear not, the work has been done!

The calendar we use to date the holy days has a long pedigree, and was used by many ancient peoples of the Middle East. At the time of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt, the LORD identified to

Moses when the religious year should begin—in spring at the time of the barley harvest: '*...this shall be the first month of the year*' (Exodus 12:2).

### Administration

The calendar was under the authority of the priests, and was determined annually by them, the priests taking note of the state of the harvest, arranging at times an extra month to harmonize with the seasons *etc.* Israelites living outside Canaan were informed by courier as to when each year began. With greater dispersion—eventually worldwide, global—this was of necessity replaced by a calculated calendar, still in use today by Jews and by most Christians who observe the Biblical

### Autumn Festivals 2014

Trumpets	September 25
Atonement	October 4
Tabernacles	October 9—15
Eighth Day	October 16

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Be sure to take a look at [www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)

holy days (Leviticus 23). The Jews had been delegated the authority, by the LORD, to determine the calendar. The apostle Paul explained that one advantage to being a Jew was that '*...unto them were committed the oracles of God*' (Romans 3:2), adding, '*...If some did not believe, will not their unbelief nullify the faith of God? Let it not be!*' (v.3).

To drive this home he later tells the Roman brethren: '*...Israelites, whose are the adoption and the glory, and the covenants, and the Lawgiving, and the service [ie worship; Gk latreia], and the promises*' (ch 9:4). The administration of divine worship [*latreia*] was assigned to them, and backed by God. God, in other words, upholds their decision on such matters, even should they fall into unbelief, or become secular. (It is ironic that it was in Rome that the holy days were first abandoned and pagan celebrations substituted.)

It may help if we set this word of the apostle Paul in the context of these chapters (9-11) of Romans. As he here and elsewhere gives us to understand—*God is sovereign*. He has a plan. He is selective. He does as it pleases Him. All for our benefit. And here he tells us that God has given the Jewish people the authority to regulate His worship—however disobedient they may become. And even should they in the future revert to 'observation'.

Jesus himself appears to have accepted this authority. For example, in the first century the original instruction to Moses to set aside a lamb on the *cont'd p.6*

## When We Die

*The end of life is a sad time for all those left behind. But—what should be done with our body?*

All faiths have their rituals for disposing of the physical body, often reflecting deep-held beliefs as to what happens ‘beyond the grave’. For the Christian there is the hope of resurrection—the restoration of the individual to share in the reward for a life well-lived. But there is a dilemma: burial, or cremation?

For some it’s a matter of practicality. Cost may be a factor. Or maintenance of a distant burial plot. Even a fear of being buried alive. There may, too, have been the wishes of the deceased, or a necessary delay in the funeral service. But for many Christians the decision may be influenced by their understanding of ‘theology’.

The disposal of the dead in ancient times was almost universally by burial, reflecting the general understanding that ‘...dust you are, to dust you shall return’ (Genesis 3:19). In later times various culturally driven methods and rituals developed - embalming, for example, among the Egyptians.

An extension of burial in the ground was the use of some form of family tomb—as with Abraham and his descendants (Genesis 25:9). (Joseph had his father Jacob embalmed and then interred in a cave.) Burial is also seen as a mark of respect (II Kings 9:34). It was the norm, and not only among Israelites. An exception to burial is from necessity as in a plague when the victims are, wisely, burned (Amos 6:10). King Saul and his sons dead bodies were beheaded by the Philistines who made an exhibition of them. Loyal Israelites burned the remains and buried the bones to protect them from marauders (I Samuel 31:8-12).

### Cremation

There were occasions among the Israelites when burning (cremation) took place. Burning was the legal response to heinous criminal behaviour: ‘... a man takes a wife and her mother, it is wickedness. They shall be burned with fire’ (Leviticus 20:14, also 21:9). The cremation, of course, followed judicial execution by stoning etc (Joshua 7:25). It was a sign, during those times, of disgrace. In the New Testament cremation isn’t noted. Paul’s analogy is that the body is ‘sown’, as in the ground: ‘... it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body’ (I Corinthians 15:44). An example of Christian disposal of the dead is of Ananias and Sapphira—both buried (Acts 5:6, 9).

It is a not uncommon belief by Christians, however, that cremation is a reflection of the mythical ‘hell fire’ and is therefore avoided. But consider. Since the flesh and even bones disintegrate over time—turn to ‘dust’—how the body is disposed of is irrelevant (but very personal).

### After the Millennium

Those who die not having the indwelling Spirit of God will be resurrected after the end of the thousand-year reign of Christ (Revelation 20:5). Upon death their spirit is preserved until then—to be re-formed in flesh according to the ‘template’ of their human spirit. They will live in the flesh and be presented with the same Gospel message as mankind today—the opportunity to become a part of the divine Family of God.

Any who reject the offer of salvation will die a second death, their dead body and spirit consumed by fire, both destroyed—only God’s Spirit is immortal—in the final conflagration that cleanses planet Earth (Revelation 20:14-15).

*Request the related articles:  
When Someone Dies  
After the Resurrection*

Christians have died in fires—their resurrection is no less secure!

### When We Die

Death may overtake in bed at home or in a hospital or care home. Or result from a violent act, or an accident. On the other hand the body may be consumed in fire or devoured at sea—even destroyed in space—with no remains to dispose of. In the latter cases—how can the individual be resurrected?

Man is more than the billions of sophisticated cells that make us, for every creature, including, mankind, is driven by an indwelling ‘spirit’. It is what makes a fly or an elephant do what it does. In human-kind it is what the Scriptures term the ‘spirit in man’ (Job 32:8). To be basic, the spirit is a ‘recording device’ on which is encoded our DNA, even our thoughts and our character. Upon death the spirit ‘...returns to God who gave it’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7). In His care the human spirit is reserved until re-united with the spirit body at the return of Jesus: ‘...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body’ (I Corinthians 15:44).

At our resurrection all our characteristics, encoded on our preserved human spirit—and accrued during our physical lifespan—are enabled in our new spirit body. Notice how Jesus, appearing in his spirit body on the Mount of Transfiguration, the disciples recognized and communicated with him (Matthew 17:2-4).

In sum, the last ‘resting place’ of the body is a cultural matter, the mode of disposal subject to change in different societies. The norm in Israel was for burial, and still is for most societies. Burning was an expression of revulsion. Other faiths attach great religious significance to cremation—in Hinduism it is (except for ‘holy men’) mandatory, the dead body being an offering to Agni, *cont’d p.2*

MiniStudy

## Will You Go To Heaven?

*Blessed are the gentle for they shall inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5)  
Unless your righteousness exceeds that of the Scribes and Pharisees, you shall not at all  
enter into the Kingdom of Heaven (v.20)*

Some Bible students find difficulty in reconciling these two sayings of Jesus. What is it to be: heaven—or earth? The average Christian's expectation is that upon death he or she 'goes to heaven'. After that it's a bit fuzzy. Endless adoration of God. Listening to angelic choirs. Playing a harp for eternity. Talk to non-Christians and the reply is even fuzzier, ranging from a vacuum to a vague hope of 'something nice' - but again certainly not 'that *other* place'. What, then, is the 'reward' of those who are 'saved'?

- For most in the Christian tradition - whether or not a committed Christian - death is the divider. When that inevitable event overtakes us, they believe, it's either *Heaven* or *Hell*, or for some, an intermediate state - *Purgatory*
- The Scriptures have a different take. When anyone dies (Christian, atheist, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, animist), they teach, *we are dead*. No conscious thought. No communication with the world left behind. No pain. Just 'at rest in peace'. Writes the Psalmist: '*...the dead praise not the LORD*' (Psalms 115:17). And King Solomon: '*...the living know that they shall die; but the dead do not know anything*' (Ecclesiastes 9:5). So, beloved believers are *not* in Heaven, nor the wicked in hell fire
- But there's more. For, said Jesus, *everyone* in their graves will be restored to life - resurrected: '*...the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have practiced evil to the resurrection of condemnation [judgment]*' (John 5:28-29). Each man, woman and child who does not, at death, have in them God's holy Spirit—*ie*, who is converted—will come to life again *in the flesh*, some having been dead for thousands of years: '*...the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished*' (Revelation 20:5)
- Those in whom is God's Spirit - and that is available only through Jesus (Acts 4:12) - will be raised from the dead when Jesus, as promised, returns to earth as King of all kings and rulers. They will be raised in a new spirit body - immortal, spiritual, glorious, powerful - to work with Christ in the Father's ongoing plan for mankind (*see* I Corinthians 15:42-44)
- When Jesus returns—will he then take you back to Heaven? Or is there some other plan up his sleeve? In fact, his work on our planet is far from finished. In the decade before his return earth will experience unprecedented turmoil. The disaster movies haven't told the half! Millions - perhaps billions - will die from war, famine, disease, natural disasters. Few will survive (Isaiah 24:6). But beginning with this few Jesus and the resurrected saints will establish - *here on earth*, and for a thousand years - a new world order of peace, justice and prosperity for all the surviving remnant of mankind. God hasn't given up on His creation. But the millennial reign of Jesus is merely a staging post to eternity, as millions are, under the direction of Jesus and the risen saints, prepared for eternity!
- God's Kingdom is now in Heaven, but will in God's time be based right here on planet Earth, the Father Himself coming from Heaven to dwell here with His Spirit-born Family: '*... the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*' (Revelation 21:3). All will then be spirit, and ahead is an endless future of activity throughout the vastness of the Universe—far beyond our wildest imaginings, and of which we are now afforded the merest glimpse (I Corinthians 2:9)

Ω

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