

new **Horizons**

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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

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

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

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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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Just what does the Creator God think of His creation—man? Is He happy with us, or do we even deserve to live?

God, we are told '...created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them' (Genesis 1:27). He then looked at His work and was satisfied that it was '...very good'. (v.31). So what happened? For sixteen centuries later God all but wiped out the human race.

All of us live with death - it is inevitable. But isn't it a puzzle that a loving God *kills* His creation?: '...'*Don't you understand? I am the only God; there are no others. I am the one who takes life and gives it again*' (Deuteronomy 32:39 CEV). How can we reconcile that with Jesus' claim that he came to *save* the world?: '...'*God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life*' (John 3:16)

The Old Testament record makes clear that JHVH did indeed kill - sometimes on a massive scale. All mankind but one family of eight, for example, was destroyed in the Flood. Why? His response: '...*When the LORD saw how wicked everyone on earth was and how evil their thoughts were all the time, he was sorry that he had ever made them and put them on the earth. He was so filled with regret that he said, "I will wipe out these people I have created"*' (Genesis 6:5ff).

Divine Plan

In short, God has a set purpose for the pinnacle of His creation, mankind, and is not disposed to jeopardise that plan. He will remove all obstacles - human or spirit - that knowingly oppose it.

Having created man and instructed him in the way of life, the Creator had initiated His grand design, having made it plain for all. We blew it (Romans 1). Rather than follow the *Manual* we devised our own operating system, and as with any misused device it doesn't work.

Lessons were not learned, and before long the different families were scattered: '...*the LORD said: "Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is what they begin to do; and now nothing will be withheld from them, which they purpose to do. Come, let us go down, and there confound their language, that they may not understand one another's speech."* So the LORD scattered them abroad from

ty of your sister Sodom: pride, fulness of bread, and prosperous ease was in her and in her daughters; neither did she strengthen the hand of the poor and needy. And they were haughty, and committed abomination before me.' (Ezekiel 16:49-50). (Does that have a familiar ring?) Clearly a corrupting influence: '...*therefore I took them away...*'.

God had given ample time for the nations to embrace the one true faith. The Amorites - perhaps the leading Canaanite tribe then in occupation of Palestine - sank deeper and deeper into lawlessness, despite the righteous witness of Shem, of Abraham, of Melchizedek. They continued four generations before being expelled by Israel: '...*in the fourth generation they [Abraham's descendants] shall come here again; for the iniquity of the Amorites is not yet full*' (Genesis 15:16). There may well be parallels in our day!

God's chosen people, Israel, having relapsed into Egyptian idolatry, barely escaped a similar fate, God planning to start again with Moses: '...*I know how stubborn these people are. Now, don't try to stop me. I am angry with them, and I am going to destroy them. Then I will make you and your descendants into a great nation*' (Exodus 32:9-10).

Nothing will stand in the way of the fulfillment of God's loving purpose. Here's what the Psalmist tells us: '...*You [God] warn the nations and destroy evil people; you wipe out their names forever and ever*' (Psalm 9:5 CEV).

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thence upon the face of all the earth' (Genesis 11:6-8) - again to save the plan.

A Deadly Pattern

But corruption once more set in. The 'righteous' became ever sparser, and the LORD again had to work with one family - that of Abraham.

In his days the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah had become degenerate: '...*this was the iniqui-*

And: '*...the LORD preserves all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy*' (145:20).

Solomon places it in context: '*...I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me*' (Proverbs 8:17). But God will when necessary remove individuals, communities, nations who stand in the way. He warns, He is very patient, He is merciful. God is love. But when we persistently 'throw a spanner in the works' - He acts.

Take His warning to ancient Israel: '*...they went and served other gods, and worshipped them, gods whom they knew not, and whom he had not given unto them: And the anger of the LORD was kindled against this land, to bring upon it all the curses that are written in this book: And the LORD rooted them out of their land in anger, and in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day. The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law*'. (Deuteronomy 29:26-29)

Meek and Mild?

Jesus is generally perceived as expressing love for all mankind (John 3:16 *etc*). He is not, however, the 'gentle Jesus' of childhood's bed-time stories. In the

days of his flesh, he was fearless when opposed, courageous in face of death. And he 'told it like it is': '*... The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that cause stumbling, and them that do iniquity, and shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth* (Matthew 13:42). The words of Jesus himself! And through the apostle John he adds: '*...hide us from the face of him that sits on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb: For the great day of his wrath is come; and who shall be able to stand?*' (Revelation 6:16-17)

God's purpose is that not one of us should ultimately perish, that we should change, and He patiently gives us time to so do: '*... The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins*'. (II Peter 3:9)

Some flatly refuse, preferring their false faiths and corrupt lifestyle (Revelation 9:20-21, 16:9-11). They will experience the 'wrath of the Lamb'. That's Jesus!

In both Old and New Testament the Godhead is presented as loving, gracious, merciful: '*...the*

LORD your God is gracious and merciful, and will not turn away his face from you, if you return unto him' (II Chronicles 30:9). The Psalmist adds: '*... They [mankind] will tell about all your goodness and sing about your kindness. The LORD is loving and merciful, slow to become angry and full of constant love. He is good to everyone and has compassion on all he made*' (ch 145:7-9). Not the typical portrayal of 'that Old Testament god'!

God and Man

We have thus noted two sides to the character of God. On the one hand compassionate, loving, concerned for His precious creation. On the other a God who exercises all the authority of the Being who is holy, righteous, untouchable—'*...a consuming fire*', the Creator of all.

When the Father and Jesus take life it is to protect and advance their master plan: '*...O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out! For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?*' (Romans 11:36).

Mankind stands at the pinnacle of God's creative acts. But we are 'clay', in the process of being shaped into something beyond our imagination. Ω

KILLER PSALMS

'Love your enemy' said Jesus. Yet about ten percent of the Holy Spirit-inspired Psalms are so-called 'imprecatory', suggesting a degree of displeasure by their writer with certain people.

Psalm 5, for example: '*...Condemn and punish [my enemies] O God; may their own plots cause their ruin. Drive them out of your presence because of their many sins and their rebellion against you*'. Or, '*...May*

they be like snails that dissolve into slime; may they be like a baby born dead that never sees the light' (58:8). Gruesome! Is this compatible with the Christian ethic?

Against the usual Christian background of 'Old Testament bad, New good' it poses a dilemma. Yet when we understand man's proper relationship with God as a deviant subject of the all-powerful Creator who has a timeless plan for His *kosmos* then the fact that God 'kills and makes alive' is clearly part of that

perfect plan: '*...I, and I alone, am God; no other god is real. I kill and I give life, I wound and I heal, and no one can oppose what I do*' (Deuteronomy 32:39).

The sentiment expressed in these Psalms gives vent to the horror with which God—and, surely, His own people—reacts to the terrible evil in our world. We (ought to) feel with the Psalmist, but we leave the 'vengeance' to our loving God to deal with (Romans 12:19-20). Ω

Harvest Time...plan for the ages

The object of all the major faiths is to spread their message. *Islam*, for example, by hook or by crook, wants the entirety of mankind to submit to the tenets of Islam. For *Christians* the mantra is '*here's how you get to Heaven*'. Neither conforms with God's revelation through the Bible, the Christian Scriptures.

Thousands of years before Mohammed and long before Allah was invented, the one and only true God initiated a plan: '*...he [the Creator] has chosen us [ie Christians] in him before the foundation of the world*', wrote the apostle Paul (Ephesians 1:4). Chosen, selected, from all ranks of mankind to become a new holy nation: '*...you are God's chosen and special people. You are a group of royal priests and a holy nation*' (I Peter 2:9).

The Way

Through Jesus the Messiah *alone* can mankind associate with that plan: '*...I am the way, the truth, and the life!*' Jesus answered. '*Without me, no one can go to the Father*' (John 14:6). Or, as he said earlier: '*...No one is able to come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him*' (ch 6:44). Those who choose to enter this association are 'the elect', the chosen, selected by the Father, and from that moment entered on a training program—to prepare them for *eternity*.

That program has been up and running since man's beginnings. Indeed the Scriptures list a sample of those chosen (Hebrews 11): '*...These all died by way of faith, not having received the promises, but seeing them from*

afar, and being persuaded, and having embraced and confessed that they are aliens and tenants on the earth' (v.13). Those chosen up until the death of Jesus laid the foundation on which the church of God has been built over the two millennia since. Jesus said, '*...many will come from east and west, and will recline with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of Heaven*'. (Matthew 8:11)

Early Harvest

God's plan is portrayed in His appointed seasons and the three main harvests of the year—spring, summer, autumn. 'Spring' encompasses all the faithful until the return of Messiah and is pictured by the Biblical *Feast of Firstfruits* (Leviticus 23). John in vision wrote: '*...These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb*' (Revelation 14:4). As James the brother of Jesus wrote: '*...Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*' (ch 1:18).

Mankind having in the beginning rejected Him as our guide, the LORD God gave us free rein as to how we would conduct our affairs. It has been messy—but we needed the experience! And as with any business the Creator carefully selects those—the 'firstfruits'—who will work with Him throughout eternity. When

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

the selected personnel are spiritually toughened by their encounter with Satan's world and the 'crop' ripened, the 'harvest' will be gathered in—by a resurrection from the dead: '*...an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life [immortality]...*' (John 5:28-29)

The coming return of Christ marks incredible change. All human government will be overthrown. Earth itself will be 'at rest'. The Adversary (Satan) will be banished. And the Spirit of God will be freely available to all—as typified by the *Day of Pentecost* (see Acts 2). The 'summer harvest' will have arrived!

Jesus and the resurrected saints—his firstfruits harvest from every era—will begin the restoration of earth and all its institutions. Gone will be corrupt practice at every level of society—from business and commerce, from finances, from entertainment and the media, from the internet. And gone will be every false religion (major and minor), pseudo-faiths that have cast a vail over all mankind. Gone will be every idolatrous practice that demeans and distorts comprehension of our holy and righteous God.

Final Harvest

Without a final harvest, however, the agricultural year would be far from complete. So, too, in the divine plan. For the antitype of the autumnal harvest is the resurrection of the billions of humans until now excluded from the Kingdom. It follows the thousand year reign of Jesus: '*...the rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were over*'. (Revelation 20:5)

Disinterest, preoccupation with the mundane, spiritual blindness imposed by false religions and philosophies, unpreparedness, shallow thinking—all factors that contribute in this life to their ignorance of or rejection of God's freely offered invitation to become a part of the Spirit Kingdom of God.

But our loving God has plans for them: *'...The Lord is not slow to do what he has promised, as some think. Instead, he is patient with you, because he does not want anyone to be destroyed, but wants all to turn away from their sins'* (II Peter 3:9).

These (part of the 'autumn harvest' pictured by the seven day *Feast of Tabernacles*), will also be raised from their graves by a resurrection—but (unlike the firstfruits harvest) by a resurrection to renewed *physical* life: *'...those who have practiced evil [wicked, immoral] things to a resurrection of judgment'* (John 5:29). The apostle Paul notes: *'...as in Adam all die, even so in*

Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order'. (I Corinthians 15:22-23)

Their response to Christ-like principles during that time of judgment will determine their eternal fate—as true immortal children of the Father, or extinction (John 3:16). All that defiles will then be burned up: *'...the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men'* (II Peter 3:7).

A New Beginning

Tabernacles, however, is followed by a separate festival on the *eighth day*—a day representing *eternity*.

A new age dawns—a new beginning, the glorious culmination of God's plan for mankind, a plan formulated before the world began (II Timothy 1:9).

Writes Paul: *'...the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the*

glorious liberty of the children of God' (Romans 8:21).

The *Feast of Tabernacles* marked the time of man's six thousand year sojourn in the flesh—from Adam to the last human to be transformed into spirit from the summer harvest.

Now the awesome God—our Father—comes to the renewed planet Earth: *'...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). His children, now transformed in immortal spirit bodies, will forever be with Him as He continues His Universe-embracing plans. Ω

As it is written, 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. But God has revealed them unto us by his Spirit
I Corinthians 2:9-10

ISRAEL in context

Israel, tucked away on the eastern seaboard of the Mediterranean Sea, is among the smallest of nations—but has huge impact on the global scene.

The nation, formed in 1948 with United Nations approval, occupies just 8,000 square miles of territory, that's about one-twelfth that of the United Kingdom—which itself is about the same size as Oregon, USA. It has almost eight million inhabitants—one in five being Arabs, all of whom have equal rights with the Jewish inhabitants and return members to the Knesset (Parliament).

Contrast this with its neighbours mostly Arabs and of the Islamic faith, who cover just over five

million square miles with a population of 330 million—and with little democratic freedom.

Alone in the Middle East, freedom of religion is foundational in Israel, which with Government support hosts large Christian conferences in Jerusalem (eg the *International Christian Embassy Jerusalem* or the growing number of Messianic assemblies). Try openly proclaiming Jesus Christ or building a church in Saudi Arabia or elsewhere in the Islamic nations! Mosques abound in Israel.

Achievements

Skype a distant relative and you use Israeli technology. *Text messaging* is an Israeli innovation, as is the *memory stick*.

The export of desalination technology supports twelve million in this arid terrain. No surprise, as Israel produces the highest number of scientists, produces more scientific theses, has more Phds and publishes more books than any other nation.

Economically Israel hosts the highest number of start-up companies globally and have a higher GDP than a combination of several surrounding Islamic nations having a population of 117m.

Truly they have made 'the *desert blossom as the rose*'—with 450m more trees planted in their Land than a century ago.
with thanks to Maoz Israel

Predicting the future has a sound record of failure. The momentous election of Donald Trump has stirred a hornet's nest of 'prophets'. Are they believable?

Euphoria from half the nation's electors as newly-elected Donald J Trump prepares to take over the most influential political office in the world, President of the United States of America.

The other half? Bitter disappointment, tears—and riots—follow the announcement. Then violence and invective followed (from those who condemned it in the election run-up). Due democratic (of a sort) process was faithfully followed, but that didn't satisfy the 'losers'.

American Dream

President Trump was born to an immigrant mother climbing the success tree to reach this highest office. During the campaign he talked tough and rough, offending many. Not so dignified for an aspiring President, though now that 'it's in the bag' a different 'The Donald' may show!

Every time we have a change of leadership (wherever we live) there's hope of 'better times'. Each time it will be different, we think. A new broom will sweep in policies that will usher in Utopia—or at least put more money in my pocket.

It doesn't happen—or not sustained for long. For history shows mankind simply doesn't know '...the way to peace' (Heb. *shalom*: a Hebrew word meaning peace, harmony, completeness, prosperity—Romans 3:17).

Will the Trump Presidency be any better? Can America - still the world's most powerful nation—truly be 'great again'? That greatness was the result of the diligent use of the vast resources gifted to the nation—coupled with the acknowledgement of their true source, the Creator of all things and the fulfilment of millennium-old promises.

That relationship with the Creator, however tenuous it was, has been

broken. The principles on which the nation was founded (based largely on the Christian Scriptures) have been undermined.

Disappointment, despair, disenchantment, alienation from the nation's leadership—all contributed to the cry from the heart that surfaced as a massive rebellion against the alien and out-of-touch values imposed by successive administrations.

But it's not just the United States, for the same populous sentiment is widespread among the Western democracies, with 'right-wing' parties in the ascendancy—many of which, notably in Europe, have elections looming. Political tremors are shaking the nations!

Divine Appointment

It's tempting for Christians to see such seismic changes as the 'end of the age' as predicted by Jesus Christ. In due time that's a certainty—but His inauguration date is not spelled out! At an unspecified time selected by the Father He will, as promised, facilitate the return of Jesus from Heaven, as political and religious Supremo, to wrest the reins of government from every human ruler.

For now, a variety of 'prophets' are positioning President-elect Trump as a saviour—or, as a destroyer. The only certainty is that whichever role he may assume, he is in office by divine authority—the 'man for the moment'—and he will be called on to answer for how he performs in office.

A sixth century BC Babylonian King

A TRUMPET CALL?

was given such a lesson: '*...to the intent that the living may know that the most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomsoever he will, and sets up over it the basest [lowest] of men*' (Daniel 4:17). That's a concept unexplored by present-day leadership.

God intimately knows each of us and how we may respond to circumstances. The Egyptian Pharaoh of the Exodus (who '*hardened his heart*' against the LORD—Exodus 8:15) was thus selected by Him: '*...in very deed for this cause have I raised you up, for to shew in you my power; and that my name may be declared throughout all the earth*' (ch 9:16). We know the consequences!

The people of Israel in the eighth century BC sank morally to rock bottom. To correct them God raised up the fierce nation of Assyria: '*...I use Assyria like a club to punish those with whom I am angry. I sent Assyria to attack a godless nation*' (Isaiah 10:5-6). The entire nation was deported from their homeland (Palestine) and have not yet to this day returned.

A century and a half before his birth, King Cyrus (of the Medes and Persians) was prophesied by Isaiah to initiate the restoration of the people of Judah, taken captive into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar: '*...You are the one who will rule for me; you will do what I want you to do: you will order that Jerusalem be rebuilt and that the foundations of the Temple be laid*' (Isaiah 44:28). Ezra the priest (Ezra 1) records the fulfillment of the prophecy.

An End to Prophecy

'Trump good' or 'Trump bad'? Is the President-elect a parallel to King Nebuchadnezzar who enslaved the nation of Judah? Or does he parallel King Cyrus who facilitated their restoration? Secular pundits leap on bandwagons heading in both direc-

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

Trumpet Call? *cont'd*

tions. And so, too, do the religious pundits each claiming insight as to our world's trajectory over the next few years—their projected 'end time'.

Each 'prophet', of course, has (in his own eyes) the 'right' interpretation of the Bible prophecies. But the prophecies as given *are* right—and will in time be proven so to the last jot and tittle. And maybe someone *will* inadvertently 'hit the jackpot' and get it right—but evidenced only by the ultimate fulfilment of the prophecies. Truth is, *there's no virtue in speculation*.

Century after century has witnessed the failures of prophetic interpretation—even to our own era: Christ will return in 1000AD, 1844, 1914, 1975, 2000AD, 2012—and 2017, 2019, 2021, 2033. (Well—those last four have not yet stood the test of time.) Wrote Paul: '*...we know in part and we prophesy in part*' adding, '*...now we see through a mirror [indirectly], but then face to face. Now I know in part, but then I will know completely, just as I have also been completely known*'.

(I Corinthians 13:9, 12)

New World Order

The bed-rock of Bible prophecy, the foundation on which all our futures is built, is the coming 'new world order'. It is certain. It is 'in the bag'. It is the imposed direct rule of the Creator, the Kingdom and Family of God, over all mankind.

In coming days '*...in a moment, in a glance of an eye, at the last trumpet; for a trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall all be changed*' (I Corinthians 15: 52). For, '*...the Lord Himself shall come down from Heaven with a commanding shout of an archangel's voice, and with God's trumpet*' (I Thessalonians 4: 16).

That return of Christ as '*...King of kings and Lord of lords*' (Revelation 19:16) will herald an unprecedented thousand years of peace and prosperity for all mankind. Making his return a necessity, however, the institutions that underpin civilization will crumble to dust. Destructive forces, a '*day of darkness and not light*', will engulf us—all of us.

We must each heed the warning signs and become spiritually prepared.

Our Place in the World

As Christians our views on polity are in general at odds with the spirit of the times. Let's heed Paul's admonition: '*...I urge first of all that petitions, prayers, requests, and thanksgiving be made on behalf of all people, on behalf of kings and all those who are in authority [Gk. preeminence], in order that we may live a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable before God our Saviour*' (I Timothy 2:1-3).

In other words, *don't panic*. Our lives are in God's safe hands and it is for us to pray—not that our leaders will bring in Utopia—they don't know how—but for those who control the levers of power that they will so order conditions that we *can*, until Christ does return, live peaceably and godly. We live in peace, we live in conflict. In either state we are sustained by our loving, caring heavenly Father. Ω

Frozen In Time

For some, not even a hundred years of life is enough. They want to live forever, their personality to survive whether in a fleshly body or in a robot. How much more pressing the desire to live on when in our youth.

The dying fourteen-year old who was recently 'frozen' pending a cure for her cancer certainly had this urge, this desire to fully experience a prolonged life, to live again. For this young girl life felt incomplete.

Isn't that sentiment widely shared, don't we for the most part wish to cling on to our physical existence, to imagine what might have been, to have unlimited time? Then we encounter the reality check—we all die, we have our '*...three score years and ten*' or perhaps a few more. But the end is inevitable.

Health, wealth, medication adds a few years. Then full stop. Cryonics won't change that.

Distorted Vision

Religion has certainly distorted the concept of life beyond the grave. Nirvana, heaven, hell—even nothingness. Almost universally the major faiths imagine a conscious existence when we cast off our mortal coil. The 'soul' lives on.

Turn to the Christian Scriptures, however, and we are presented with a different scenario. Hear wise King Solomon: '*...the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing*' (Ecclesiastes 9:5). Or hear the Psalmist: '*...The dead are silent and cannot praise the LORD*' (Psalm 115:17).

There is a 'spirit in man' that sur-

vives death (Job 32:8), but without a body (spirit or material) it is inert, unconscious—'*...asleep*', as Paul asserts (*eg* I Thessalonians 4:13)

Life 'Unfrozen'

The young teenager didn't understand that the Creator's plan for us—all of us—assures us of life beyond the grave. Life *will* return, whether we were frozen or drowned or buried or turned to ashes.

Each human spirit with all its physical properties, all its thoughts and memories and attitudes is preserved safely in the care of God. Jesus Christ makes it clear: '*...an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear His voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment*'.

(John 5:28-29). *cont'd p.8*

DEATH

We can't escape it. All who have gone before or who now exist or will be born—all experience it. But what is it?

Death is universal across every species—insects or birds or animals or sea creatures. And, of course, mankind. But is there a difference? Is the death of humans the same as that of the lower creatures?

From the anthropologist and humanist (including King Solomon!) point of view we are all the same—as dies one so does the other. We are born, we grow to maturity (usually), and then the body decays in death. All ‘turn to dust’. And that’s all.

Deathless—or Immortal?

What about Adam? The Word of the Creator tells us that he came ‘*very good*’ from His hands. He was ‘*...in the image of God*’ (Genesis 1:26-27) but made from earth’s elements. He was complete, rational, perfectly-functioning, thinking, replete with speech and capable of managing his environment. His abilities far excelled the rest of creation. More, he had, uniquely, the option of staying alive forever—or dying just like all the lower creatures around him.

But, as demonstrated by the outcome, he was *not immortal*. Before him lay the opportunity to live forever in his perfect physical body. When he breached the divine ‘operating instructions’, however, the LORD changed his body constitution and the death process immediately set in.

Given his in-born stamina he and his immediate descendants continued in their physical state for almost a thousand years. Over the centuries the race weakened physically, our lifespan depending on a wide range of environmental factors.

Adam’s physical constitution, his mortality, passed to his off-spring: ‘*...even as sin entered the world through one man [Adam], and death through sin, so also death passed to all men, inasmuch as all sinned*

(Romans 5:12). He adds: ‘*...by the trespass of the one, the many died*’ (v.15).

Present Death

All mankind has inherited mortality. All are ‘*dead in trespasses and sins*’—unless and until we are begotten by God’s Spirit: ‘*...In the past you [Christians] were dead because you sinned and fought against God. You followed the ways of this world and obeyed the devil. He rules the world, and his spirit has power over everyone who doesn't obey God. Once we were also ruled by the selfish desires of our bodies and minds*’ (Ephesians 2:1-3).

Those ‘selfish desires’ are in-born, the ‘natural man’, the downward pressures in our flesh to rebel against God’s pattern of holy living. Jesus took on our human flesh (Romans 1:3) and he alone has perfectly resisted those pressures (Hebrews 4:15)—but ‘*...all [others] have sinned and come short of the glory of God*’.

Without the indwelling Spirit—and barring a future restoration to physical life (which God plans!)—all of us are doomed to eternal extinction: ‘*...the living know that they shall die; but the dead do not know anything*’ (Ecclesiastes 9:5).

Choices

The LORD set a choice before our first parents, carefully spelling out the inevitable consequence of choosing wrongly—the loss of his conditional immortality. Resist the wiles of the Tempter and in time he would become truly immortal, gifted with the Spirit of holiness.

Instead, Adam (unless he later joined the roll of the faithful) died and his inert human spirit lingers in God’s keeping until the culmination of God’s plans—a future resurrection to experience a time of testing and judgment in a restored physical (mortal) body (Revelation 20:5). At that time he may qualify to be written in the *Book of Life* (Revelation 20:11-15).

True Immortality

Adam’s ‘immortality’ vanished like a

DEATH in the Law

Death—it casts a shadow over all our lives. Indeed it features prominently in those instructions God gave to Israel though Moses.

In all its aspects, death was at the core of the sacrificial system—whether as in animal sacrifice or, in the varied rituals, as types of things to come, each reflected in the life and death of Jesus Christ.

Contact with death—the dead, dead animals, bones even, homes where death entered *etc*—all such contacts made the individual ‘unclean’ and as such unfit to worship (Numbers 19:11-22). Cleansing through sacrifice was required. It served to emphasize that death is indeed ‘*...the last enemy*’ (I Corinthians 15:26).

Why? Because death is the direct consequence of *sin*, of our disregard for the fundamental God-ordained principles of life: ‘*...the wages of sin is death*’ (Romans 6:23).

Death is the evidence that sin corrupts, that sin defiles and destroys—that ‘*...your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear*’ (Isaiah 59:2). We are barred by our sin from all access to the holy and righteous Father who created all things through Jesus Christ.

When, by repentance and baptism, we enter into a covenant relationship with him the power of death is neutered. *Our* part of the covenant is to ‘*...put on Christ*’, to be righteous, become holy ‘*...holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord*’ (Hebrews 12:14).

‘...put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that you put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness’.

puff of smoke after he sinned. Jesus the Messiah came to make it possible for mortal man to conquer

death. God, the awesome Creator of all that exists material and immaterial is the epitome of perfection. He is *'...the only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the only One having immortality, living in light that cannot be approached, whom no one of men saw, nor can see; to whom be honor and everlasting might'*. Yet He desires mankind to become Family members!

Jesus came to make a way for us to be reconciled to this almighty Being without compromising His holiness.: *'...God*

sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous demand of the Law might be fulfilled in us, those not walking according to flesh, but according to Spirit' (Romans 8:3-4).

A Body Transformed

Jesus is *'...the last Adam, a life-giving spirit'* (I Corinthians 15:45). And *'...as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive'* (v.22).

Those who in this life respond to God's universal invitation are selected by the Father to enter a relationship with Him through Jesus (John 6:44). In due time they die, as do all

mankind. But ahead for them lies a resurrection—not, as with Adam had he not sinned, to unending life in the flesh, but to *spirit* life.

The apostle Paul provides insight to this momentous transformation of our mortal body: *'...we will not all fall asleep [ie die], but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the blink of an eye, at the last trumpet.*

For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For it is necessary for this perishable body to

put on incorruptibility, and this mortal body to put on immortality' (I Corinthians 15:51-53).

[The remnant of Christians alive at the return of Jesus will not die but will be transformed instantly to a spirit body (I Thessalonians 4:14-17)]

The apostle Paul again: *'...So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power: 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 15:42ff). **Ω**

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In Our Likeness

Born from Mary and as a son of the royal Davidic line Jesus inherited—as do all infants—the same morally downward pressures of the flesh which we all experience. *But he never sinned.*

Writing to the Hebrew Christians the apostle explained: *'...we do not have a high priest [ie Jesus] not being able to sympathize with our weaknesses but One having been tried in all respects according to our likeness, apart from sin'* (Hebrews 4:15). Jesus was *'...made of the seed of David according to the flesh'* (Romans 1:3).

The apostle Paul wrote of Jesus to the brethren at Philippi: *'...who subsisting in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, having become in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient until death, even the death of a cross.'* (Philippians 2:6-8)

And in the words of the aged apostle John: *'...many deceivers went out into the world, those not confessing Jesus Christ to have come in flesh'*. (II John 7)

Frozen...cont'd from p.6

Their human spirit, 'frozen' since death (no matter how long ago), will be united with a new physical body to live a physical existence in a world transformed by a thousand years of divine intervention.

Hope for the Dead

God forgets no-one. Recalled by divine fiat from the dead all will be given the opportunity to become part of God's Family—'salvation'. Reject it and *'...all the wicked will he destroy'* (Psalm 145: 20).

As this present era of man's incompetent stewardship crashes to destruction, the Father—in His perfect time—will send Jesus Christ to our planet to establish the rule of the

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God Family or Kingdom, to restore order to a disordered world. Change is coming. The dead will be awakened from their 'long sleep'.

God is *now* offering the chance to rule with Jesus in that new world. Those who respond are being trained in the ways of the Kingdom. At the return of Jesus they will be raised from the dead in an immortal spirit body, prepared to teach the world to live godly and at peace. **Ω**

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In Our Likeness

‘...who subsisting in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave, having become in the likeness of men and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself, having become obedient until death, even the death of a cross (Philippians 2:6-8)

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The end of the first century of our era witnessed the flowering of a fundamental heresy—that Jesus wasn’t really fully human, that he didn’t die on the cross, that the divinity in him departed before his crucifixion. For how could God die? The apostle John addresses the heresy in his second letter, branding the perpetrators as ‘deceivers’.

- A key to understanding this conundrum (*how can a spirit God die?*) is to first recognize, with the apostle Paul (Philippians 2:6-8, *above*, that Jesus pre-existed His human birth, that He co-existed with the Father. He was ‘sent’ from heaven: ‘...*God did not send [Gk apostello] His Son into the world that He might judge the world, but that the world might be saved through Him*’ (John 3:17)
- Jesus before his human birth shared divinity: ‘... *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through Him, and without Him not even one thing came into being that has come into being*’ (ch 1:1-3)
- As God, Jesus (JHVH, the Family name shared with the Father) had created the spirit and material world from what is to us invisible: ‘...*Because of our faith, we know that the world was made at God's command. We also know that what can be seen was made out of what cannot be seen*’ (Hebrews 11:3). Cosmology theorizes that two-thirds of the matter in the Universe is so-called ‘dark energy’—supposedly sub-atomic particles (but who knows!). That awesome power also transformed divine Spirit into the human flesh that became the infant Jesus
- The angel announced to Mary, ‘...*The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God's power will rest upon you. For this reason the holy child will be called the Son of God*’ (Luke 1:35). Mary conceived, adding her human DNA to that supplied by the Father: ‘...*God was manifested in the flesh*’ (I Timothy 3:16). Jesus took on our nature: ‘...*as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same*’ (Hebrews 2:14). From conception he shared divine and human characteristics—our human nature and the divine Spirit nature indwelling him
- The false notion that the mother of Jesus was by divine grace free of the downward pull of human nature (the ‘Immaculate Conception’) obscures the very reality of Jesus’s struggle to ‘walk in the Spirit’ throughout his short life: ‘...*in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared*’ (Hebrews 5:7). Until Jesus completed his work there was no salvation. If he were to fail—if he were to have sinned—Jesus would face a natural death, his purpose unfulfilled: ‘... *when the fullness of the time came, God sent forth His Son, having come into being out of a woman, having come under Law*’ (Galatians 4:4). What a sacrifice the Father was prepared to make! But Jesus conquered sin: ‘... *we do not have a high priest not being able to sympathize with our weaknesses but One having been tried in all respects according to our likeness, apart from sin*’ (Hebrews 4:15)
- And by his triumph we, too, may conquer: ‘...*when we lived according to our human nature, the sinful desires stirred up by the Law were at work in our bodies, and all we did ended in death*’ (Romans 7:5). But, ‘...*God sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and concerning sin, condemned sin in the flesh, so that the righteous demand of the Law might be fulfilled in us, those not walking according to flesh, but according to Spirit*’ (Romans 8:3). What the Law demanded we now do, because that’s where the Spirit leads
- Jesus, as a fully human being, overcame sin day in, day out. He defeated, by the power of the indwelling Spirit, every downward pull of the flesh, every confrontation with malign spirit forces. The apostle Paul has encouraging words: ‘...*touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty; having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilements of flesh and of spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God*’ (II Corinthians 7:1) **Ω**

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