

# *new* **Horizons**

*Vol 21 No 2*

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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**

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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

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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## **The greatest hoax ever? A conspiracy? Or, the certain evidence of a Creator God?**

The resurrection of Jesus is perhaps the most attested fact of history. It has significance for all mankind—for *you*, whether Christian or Muslim or Hindu or Buddhist or even in Judaism. *All* mankind.

Since man was created and 'fell' the knowledge of a coming Deliverer—the '*Desire of all nations*'—was common knowledge. That knowledge—however distorted—passed down the generations, into all nations, all religions. Inevitably false teachers hi-jacked God's plan introducing many of its elements into sometimes suc-

cessful humanly-devised religions. Since creation there have been numerous such deceptions—in Babylon, in Egypt, in ancient Iran, for example.

In Mithraism, 'born' in ancient Persia, the 'god' supposedly died and was resurrected. The hand of the great Deceiver, however, is seen in other aspects of that false faith. In stark contrast to the true church being built (to this day) by Jesus Christ, adherents of Mithraism observed his birth—on December 25. They worshipped on Sunday, believed in an 'immortal soul', believed in false ideas of heaven and hell and eternal torment for the wicked. Just like the modern face of 'Christianity'.

But no-one, ever, has returned

from death in the same manner as did Jesus the Messiah. Certainly no founder of any other faith has done so. Not in all human history. Devotees visit the tombs of Abraham and Mohammed. Buddha died and disappeared into nirvana. Yet Jesus predicted, in detail, his death. He predicted his resurrection and the precise timing of it. He carefully laid the plans for his future activities. He burst the chains of death and came among his contemporaries in a tangible body that defies explanation, able—and visibly to witnesses—to pass through solid matter. He was transported instantly from place to place. He passed through locked doors.

## **The Resurrection of Jesus...was it just a hoax?**

This was no myth. Many contemporary witnesses bore testimony to this unparalleled event. And it's not over, *for he still lives*. The fact of his resurrection was well-known throughout the then known Roman world.

### **What It Means**

The death and resurrection of Jesus sets divine approval on the faith he promoted. In face of philosophers, sceptics, even bishops, unless Jesus of Nazareth arose from the grave Christianity is a fraud. Unless he arose from the grave every professing Christian is still unforgiven, still in their sins, still without salvation. Unless he arose you may as well go away and devise your own rules for behaviour, follow any faith.

And unless Jesus Christ was raised from the dead our world is doomed, each of us - today and from every era of mankind—is doomed to destruction.

### **Divine Proof**

If Jesus conquered death it undeniably proves the existence of an Almighty God. It means that every other faith system is, however successful, fraudulent. It puts every individual who commits to Christianity under awesome obligation. It answers the ultimate question—*is there life beyond the grave?* If the Gospel reports of his resurrection are true can we then question the substance of the rest of the Bible? Or the existence of God?

Jesus time and again predicted his own death. But always he made clear that in a specified time he would rise from the dead.

Talk about going out on a limb! It happened—precisely as he predicted. Since he was right you can be sure his other predictions are certain. Like, '*I will come again*'. Like, '*when the Son of man returns in all his glory he will gather the nations before him*' for judgment.

And believe me, he will not return as the 'meek and mild' Jesus of popular imagination but as the all-conquering King of kings set on exposing and destroying '*those who destroy the earth*'.

### **Irrefutable Evidence**

*Consider the following, each of which can be supported by much evidence:*

- Jesus many times predicted his own untimely death—'*killed*'

- He time and again predicted his resurrection
- He fulfilled a precise timetable, resurrected as the *'first of the firstfruits'*
- He predicted when he would rise again from the dead: in *'three days and three nights'*. This, he said, was the only sign he would give the unbelieving Jewish authorities
- He fulfilled all the many prophecies concerning his death
- He was seen on numerous occasions, after he rose, by numerous contemporaries—on one occasion by around five hundred believers
- The Jewish authorities couldn't produce his body and resorted to bribery and influence
- The empty tomb on the outskirts of Jerusalem, easily accessible to all comers, bore witness to his resurrection. No evidence was produced showing it fake or fantasy. No-one made the tomb a shrine. It was empty.
- Following his crucifixion the disciples were unbelieving, fearful, timid. They were transformed following the resurrection appearances of Jesus

*Was it not necessary for the Christ to suffer these things and to enter into His glory? And beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself* Luke 24:26-27

- The teachings of the apostles following the first Christian Pentecost centred on the undisputed fact of the resurrection of Jesus. No-one in Jerusalem contradicted them
- Only in the fantasy realm of fiction did Jesus Christ recover, live for a time in the flesh and then die like everyone else

#### Act Now

The passing of centuries has blurred the impact on the world of the resurrection of Jesus. This most awesome historical event has become too familiar, forgettable by most. The undeniable fact is that he died, horribly mutilated, and then three days and three nights later passed through the undisturbed grave-clothes and a sealed, guarded and solid rock

#### RESURRECTION

The death and the resurrection of Jesus are recalled annually in the *Lord's Supper* and the *Days of Unleavened Bread*. You are invited to request our publications explaining these days

'door' weighing several tons. He walked and talked with his disciples. And then, before many witnesses, ascended to the right hand of God. Historically, some have been restored to life through medical intervention. But they, like all of us, succumb to the grim reaper sooner or later.

Believe he was resurrected and *your life has to change*. The resurrection of Jesus is evidence that death isn't the end, that there is life beyond the grave. That God exists. And, as Jesus said and, as affirmed by his apostles, a time of judgment is coming—for all of us.

Jesus was the first to be resurrected in a spirit-body—'*...the firstfruits of them that slept*' (I Corinthians 15:20). At his coming again all those who truly believe and are baptized will join him, in that same spirit body, to reign with him for a thousand years in a renewed world. Wrote James: '*...we are a kind of firstfruits*'.

There may, now, be time for you to commit to him and to have a stake in his Kingdom—and to reign with him eternally. Ω

*Edited from issue 50 of New Horizons*

#### TRIBULATION...from p.3

Note that this sequence of events occurs just before the resurrection of the saints upon the return of Jesus. They may, literally, 'lose their head' - Revelation 20:4, (*cp* the Islamic practice) but before their physical body decays they will rise in an immortal spirit body: '*...we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in*

*the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And so we shall ever be with the Lord*' (I Thessalonians 4:17).

Tough times loom ahead for our world. We have ignored the Creator, rejected His Word in the Scriptures, refused to change our ways—and are about to experience the inevitable consequence of millennia of disobedience to the divine law, the 'Law of Life'.

But for those who remain 'in Christ' whatever befalls...

***'The eternal God is your refuge, underneath are the everlasting arms'*** Ω

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

## TRIBULATION FACT

The concept of an end-time persecution of Christians—billed as ‘The Great Tribulation’—features high on most prophetic scenarios. There are confusing (and conflicting) interpretations, as disputes often arise about *timing*. Will it last ‘seven years’? Or, is it half that. When does it begin? Or about *location*—where will Christians be: heaven, or in an earth-bound ‘place of safety’ or somewhere in-between? Or, will all Christians have to experience it, or just some—or none?

### What We Know

A microcosm of this terrible yet future period was played out back in 66 to 70AD. Jesus’s warning to return to their God (and their rejection of him as Messiah by the Jewish leadership) went unheeded. Josephus describes the awesome atrocities committed against the Jewish inhabitants of Jerusalem by the Roman military as was detailed by Jesus in Matthew chapter 24.

Gk. *ek* ‘from’: The preposition implies, not a keeping from temptation, but a keeping in the trial, as the result of which they shall be delivered out of its power. Compare John 17:15.” *Vincent Word Studies*.] The concept is illustrated by the Psalmist—Psalm 91.

Clearly, however, there remains a re-enactment of these prophecies of Jesus and on a grander scale—in the years just prior to his return. Note the time-line Jesus laid down: ‘...*In those days, right after that time of suffering [KJV: tribulation, Gk. thlipsis], "The sun will become dark, and the moon will no longer shine. The stars will fall, and the powers in the sky will be shaken." Then the Son of Man will be seen coming in the clouds with great power and glory. He will send his angels*

*to gather his chosen ones from all over the earth* (Mark 13:24-27).

Note the sequence—a time of adversity (*thlipsis*), disruption to the sun and moon and *then* the return of Jesus followed by the resurrection of the ‘chosen ones’, the elect. The suffering will surpass anything yet experienced on earth (*cf* the Aleppo atrocities) and only the timely intervention of Jesus will end it (vv.19-21).

But this time the affliction will spill far beyond the Middle East. It will be worldwide, affecting all of mankind. Writing to the church in Philadelphia (in Asia Minor)—representative of all true believers—Jesus said: ‘...*Because you didst keep the word of my patience, I also will keep you from the hour of trial [adversity], that hour which is to come upon the whole world, to try [test, examine] them that dwell upon the earth*’ (Revelation 3:10). [see side-panel]

### Time Sequence

Follow the sequence that Jesus outlined (Matthew 24 and Revelation 6) and we see this troubled time follows deception, worldwide war, disease and famine escalating to the inevitable consequence—the described time of affliction. ( The ‘Five Seals’)

Addressing his disciples, Jesus said: ‘...*Then they will deliver you up to affliction [Gk. thlipsis, tribulation], and will kill you, and you will be hated by all nations because of My name*’. This is the *fifth Seal*. (Matthew 24:9, Revelation 6:9). All who refuse to submit to the then extant world-ruling dictatorship will suffer persecution. Those who profess Christ will be a special target.

### Consequences

The ‘tribulation’ is not a divine punishment on sinning and unrepentant mankind *or* on a lethargic church of God but *the inevitable consequence* of perverse and idolatrous human rejection of the Creator God—and affecting everyone on earth. Christians as part of our world do not escape.

Direct intervention by God doesn’t happen, however, until after the *sixth seal*: ‘...*the great day of His wrath has come, and who will be able to stand?*’ (Revelation 6: 12, 17).

A time, then, of universal persecution—especially of those who stubbornly remain faithful to Christ in the midst of all the mayhem—even to martyrdom: ‘...*You will be betrayed by your own parents, brothers, family, and friends. Some of you will even be killed. Because of me, you will be hated by everyone*’ (Luke 21:16-17, Revelation 12:17).

Yet, he continues: ‘... *A hair of your head shall in no way perish*’ (Luke 21:18). *cont’d p.2*

#### ‘tribulation’ def.

- Gk: *thlipsis*—affliction, trouble, tribulation, anguish, burdened
- *Christians can experience it* John 16:33, Acts 14:22
  - *An effect of evil behaviour*
  - *Character building* Romans 5:3: 12:12
  - *Christ is aware of it* Rev 2:9-10
  - *For unrepentant believers* v.22
  - *THE great (ie this climactic time of intense affliction)* Rev 7:14

Each ‘Seal’ event represents the natural consequence of the previous one: spiritual and political deception and incompetence leading to—war—famine—disease—adversity [*thlipsis*]. Jesus noted this same sequence (Matthew 24:4-7). It has been a regular pattern throughout human history!

The complex on-going interplay of world events will merge with this underlying pattern. There is no specified start-date, but it will be cut short!

**Some claim to have seen them, even been helped by them when in trouble. What are they? Do they really exist?**

Aeons ago God created our Universe. Having devised laws in harmony with a particular physical environment, the ever-living God created matter and set in motion the formation of our planet as we now see it. We enter the scene when Earth has developed into a sphere hanging in space (Job 26:7), and perfectly positioned to maintain an environment suitable to sustain life as we know it.

Earth is in darkness and covered with a liquid—water or liquid gases. Then followed the electro-magnetic spectrum (energy, light *etc*) (Genesis 1:1-5). Now God issues the commands for the separation of land and water, and the creation of vegetable, animal—and, the pinnacle of creation, human life.

### Created Beings

But before this God had created another race of beings—'angels' (Gk. *angeloi*)—to carry out His purpose.

Of the patriarch Job God asks: *'...How did I lay the foundation for the earth? Were you there? Doubtless you know who decided its length and width. What supports the foundation? Who placed the cornerstone, while morning stars sang, and angels rejoiced?'* (Job 38:5-7). The creation of angels, that is, preceded the material creation.

### Angelic Nature

The angels were created, as was Adam, 'perfect' but with freedom to choose to do right or to do wrong. They are 'spirits' (Gk *pneuma*, Hebrews 1:7) but also have a body, evidenced by several factors.

Angels frequently appear in the material world, and in Scripture are usually simply called 'men'. They could eat ordinary food, could touch and be touched, get dirty, behave like any human being. Angels might even turn up as 'strangers' on your doorstep (Hebrews 13:2).

They have a body—yes. But it com-

plies with a different set of

laws from the animal or the human body: *'...All flesh is not the same: there is human flesh, and flesh of cattle, of birds, and of fishes. There are bodies which are celestial [ie, in heaven: God, angels] and there are bodies which are earthly, but the glory of the celestial ones is one thing, and that of the earthly ones is another'* (I Corinthians 15:39-40).

There's no reason to assume that angels did not—as, similarly, did the post-resurrection Jesus—have a form of substance, *'...flesh and bones'*, in a very real way (Luke 24:39, John 20:27). It is a 'spirit-body' (Gk *pneumatikos*) but not inherently immortal divine Spirit, as is God (I Timothy 6:16). As created beings they are not immortal but keep their 'spirit-body' only as long as they remain faithful to God.

### Beyond Human

In the book of *Hebrews* in the New Testament we are told that the angels, described throughout the Scriptures in various ways, are in some manner created superior to man (*ch* 2:7).

As God's messengers, they are tasked to execute His will, and as such are equipped with powers beyond the human. Thus we find them (Genesis 19) involved in the destruction, at God's behest, of 'the cities of the plain', Sodom and Gomorrah. Or in God's correction of Israel (II Samuel 24:16). They counteracted forces of evil (*cp* Daniel 9), and will have active involvement in end-time events (*eg* Revelation 19:15).

Angels have continual access to the Father in the heavenly realm (Matthew 18:10), and can move through air and navigate through space (to heaven and back, for example). They can pass through locked doors, can become invisible—as in that incident with the imprisoned Peter (Acts 12). They

## The World of Angels

perfectly process 'angel food'—'manna'. (Psalm 78:25 LXX)

### Action Men

Angelic beings have a vital role in God's interventions in the affairs of men. While He doesn't enforce His sovereign will yet God influences events by arranging circumstances to achieve His purpose—often using the angels whom He has created. They are a means by which God communicates His message to man.

We find an example in Daniel 9. Daniel, aware that the promised return of the Jews from exile in Babylon was near (*ch* 9:2), prayed for God's help. (The request was in accord with God's will.) A powerful angel was immediately despatched to answer, giving to Daniel the outline of God's plan for the return, and time-line leading to the coming of Messiah, Jesus the Christ, some 490 years later—the 'seventy week prophecy'.

### The Dark Side

Another angelic encounter with Daniel (*chs* 10-12) unveils the dark side of the angelic world. In answer to Daniel's prayer, and in detail, a powerful angel lifts the veil that enshrouds events on earth.

The angel explains his delay in responding to Daniel's prayer: *'... the prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me one and twenty days: but, lo, Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me'* (*ch* 10:13). [Michael is an archangel, high in the angelic hierarchy—Jude v.9].

The incident reveals that earthly kingdoms are in thrall to adverse spiritual powers. Indeed, the whole of mankind is deceived by their chief, Satan, who is also called *'...the god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of those who believe not'* (II Corinthians 4:4).

John further describes this being as *'...that old serpent, called the Devil,*

*unsigned articles are by the Editor*

and Satan, which deceives the whole world' (Revelation 12:9). The prophet Isaiah foresaw, however, that God will in His time, '...destroy in this mountain [ie Jerusalem] the face of the covering that is cast over all peoples, and the veil that is spread over all nations' (Isaiah 25:7).

### Battle Stations

The apostle Paul explains: '...We [Christians] are not fighting against humans. We are fighting against forces and authorities and against rulers of darkness and powers in the spiritual world' (Ephesians 6:12 CEV). He {the Devil} is described by Peter as our 'adversary': '...Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walks about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist stedfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world' (1 Peter 5:8-9).

As our adversary, the devil's mind-set is to destroy our faith, to sow doubt, to cause believers to stumble.

### Satanic Origins

These beings were in their beginning created as angels of God, their prince being among those closest to the Father, described as '...the anointed cherub...You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity was found in you' (Ezekiel 28:14). Note that—they were not automatons but created beings endowed with free will, capable of *sin*. And they—including Lucifer (Satan)—did just that, big time.

### Cosmic War

Satan, however had legitimate claims to sovereignty over mankind and earth itself. Jesus recognized his claim, not challenging his adversary: '...the devil takes him up into an exceeding high mountain, and shows him all the kingdoms of the world, and the glory of them; And says to him, All these things will I give you' (Matthew 4:8-9). Satan's by rights, in other words. The '...god of this world', says Paul.

### The Manipulator

Bible prophets record the influence Satan and his angels have over human leaders. They probe behind the human leaders to focus on the being who controlled them. Their discus-

sion about these leaders merges into the spirits who move them.

Isaiah provides insight as to Satan's manipulation of the King of Babylon, and shines a light on Satan's origin. Under the name of *Lucifer* (KJV)—a reference to the Morning Star—he 'pulled the strings' of the King.

Writes Isaiah: '...How are you fallen from heaven, O day-star, son of the morning! How are you cut down to the ground, that did cast lots over the nations! And you said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, above the stars of God will I exalt my throne, and I will sit upon the mount of meeting, in the uttermost parts of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the Most High.' (ch 14:12-14).

Two centuries later, Ezekiel remarks on this same being: '...You are the anointed cherub that covers; and I have set you so: thou were upon the holy mountain of God; You were perfect in your ways, till iniquity was found in you' (ch 28:14-15).

We also noted, above, the influence of the spirit world on the Persian leader.

### Consequence of Sin

Lucifer—Satan—was consumed with jealousy to the extent of conspiring to be equal with his Creator. So magnificent and so resplendent had God created him (he was one of the Cherubim) that he became driven to his fall by pride, persuading one-third of the angels in heaven to follow him.

Modern scepticism rejects the idea that there are such 'disembodied spirits' (Gk *daimonion*). Yet given the horrendous actions of many world leaders today and in recent centuries, how can we imagine that Satan has not relinquished his influence!

As with humanity—Adam—sin had disastrous consequences. The spirit bodies of the angels became, as did that of Adam, subject to decay, their now disembodied spirits released to roam, ever seeking a body through which to express themselves (Luke 11:24).

### Contemporary Relevance

In our modern world we are comfortable with the concept of invisible

forces—gravity, atomic particles, electricity, dark matter *etc.* Also unseen—usually—is the world of spirit.

But that unseen world is more real than what we discern with the five senses. It is the foundation of everything: '...Through faith we understand that the worlds came into being, and still exist, at the command of God, so that what is seen does not owe its existence to that which is visible' (Hebrews 11:3).

Nehemiah, too, so understood: '...you, even you, are LORD alone; you have made heaven, the heaven of heavens, with all their host [including angels], the earth, and all things that are therein, the seas, and all that is therein, and you preserve them all' (ch 9:6). The active intervention of the Creator is essential to the preservation of our universe!

The apostle Paul ascribes this incredible power to Jesus the Messiah: '...by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist' (Colossians 1:16-17).

### Answered Prayer

To bring angels closer to home—they have a vital role in our prayer life.: '...another angel came and stood close to the altar, carrying a censer of gold; and abundance of incense was given to him that he might place it with the prayers of all God's people upon the golden altar which was in front of the throne. And the smoke of the incense rose into the presence of God from the angel's hand, and mingled with the prayers of His people' (Revelation 8:3-4).

Given the role the angel played in response to the prayers of Daniel, it is clear that they not only convey the prayer requests to the Father—but are commissioned by Him to answer them.

So—invisible, yes, but for good or evil they affect the lives of everyone of us, both personally and on the wider field of international relations.

Visible or invisible—One may be standing beside you, right now! **Ω**

**Christianity is not just a way of life  
but the sole pathway to  
living forever.**

No 'Christian' country exists—nor ever has. That is, no national entity has ever fully embraced the teachings of Jesus Christ. To uncover the reason we need only contrast the pattern for governance that He will inaugurate at His coming return as King of kings, as in Isaiah *ch.2*.

The Kingdom (Family) of God will at that time establish its rule over every nation, the guiding principle being the divine Law as outlined in the Christian Scriptures. It will be written into each nation's Constitution, and become the basis for its peace and prosperity. Nowhere and at no time has that ever happened.

But Christian values *have* spread their benign influence over many nations. The malign influence of mediaeval Christianity abated as the Christian Scriptures were freed from the manacles imposed by the Church.

Slowly—two steps forward, a step back—civilisation has over centuries benefitted from the teachings of Jesus. Ancient foul, destructive and degrading practices have been marginalised—though increasingly festering in dark corners of humanity.

Sadly, subject to weak leadership—in politics *and* religion—society at large is now trending in opposition to those values, while paying lip service to the Christian faith (though millions privately still seek to live by those values).

**Law Not Enough**

Law, however, does not usher in Utopia. The example of ancient Israel suffices as evidence. Having been subject to the perfect all-embracing Law (of divine origin, and for their good—Deuteronomy 10:13) they flouted it—and suffered the pain of foreign invasion and loss of their national territory as they uprooted the protective hedge of law-keeping. What, then, is the remedy?

Outside the realm of dictatorships we

generally accept and obey those laws imposed—also, supposedly, for our good—by a civilised government. Yet over two million offenders are incarcerated in American jails and a further almost five million are on parole. In the UK over 85,000 are in prison. Man's law doesn't stop law-breaking—just check the evening news!

God recognizes this, but His master plan requires that many generations be provided with the opportunity to accept His way of life—a life *led by His Spirit*. His agreement (covenant) with Israel evidences the fact that humans need help: '*...if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second. For finding fault with them, he says, Behold, the days come, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah*' (Hebrews 8:7-8).

Following the chaotic times that will herald the end of man's rule, a mere fraction of mankind will survive. The Israel nations will not escape the mayhem, and the LORD will lead them to recover the Land (Palestine) that He had deeded to them because of Abraham's relationship with Him.

That 'new covenant' is—unsurprisingly—law-based. It's not, however, the Law written on scrolls or carved in stone—but '*...this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people*' (Jeremiah 31:33).

It is the indwelling Spirit of God that will motivate Israel—and eventually all people then alive on the planet—to live a law-abiding life in joyful submission to the Creator of the Universe.

**The Narrow Way**

'Christianity' in its current distorted form is viewed by most as little more than another philosophy to live by—

**Christianity...**

**...just a philosophy?**

at least when it doesn't become inconvenient for personal ambition or plans. For others it is just a Sunday habit with little impact on daily life. It is, however, *much more*.

Preachers too often present the Christian faith as the soft option, paving the way to 'Heaven' and cushioning our path through life. Jesus said 'No': '*...the gate to life is very narrow. The road that leads there is so hard to follow that only a few people find it. Watch out for false prophets [teachers]!*' (Matthew 7:14-15). Not, then, for the faint-hearted. The apostle Paul warns: '*...all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution*' (II Timothy 3:12).

The way is indeed 'very narrow' and 'hard to follow', for the invitation (John 6:38, 44) to become a disciple of Jesus Christ leads to 'salvation', to acceptance into the Family of God, to participate in '*...the divine nature*' (II Peter 1:4).

**The Goal: Eternity**

The journey may be long or short—but the goal is to prepare the Christian to become '*...an heir of God*': '*...The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us*' (Romans 8: 16-18).

Should you sense the hand of God on your shoulder—*don't ignore it!* Ω

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**Do you ever wonder if God exists? There's undeniable proof ...*Jesus rose!***

The fact was undisputed - even to the Jewish authorities: *The tomb was empty*. The body of Jesus had disappeared! Since the hour of this discovery, much has been penned to explain - or to explain away - this startling discovery. That Sunday morning at first light the rock tomb in which Jesus of Nazareth had been laid after his crucifixion was bare and empty. Indeed it had lain empty all night.

Within hours of the first report by the women, the guards had roused from their coma and staggered into Jerusalem bearing a weird tale of an earth tremor followed by a blinding light. And, after they recovered, they said Jesus' body was gone. The authorities disputed the story, but it was true - *the tomb was really empty*.

How could it be possible? Was Jesus spirited away by some cunningly contrived human plot? Were the disciples hallucinating? Had Jesus merely swooned? What really did take place?

### **Too Many Questions**

The Jewish authorities admitted the fact that Jesus had gone - and they "knew" the answer: the body had been stolen by the disciples. They had pierced the almost impenetrable defence set to forestall this very act. Thus were doubts smoothed away and conscience eased!

Such explanations were widespread even a century later in the time of Justin Martyr. Later still, Tertullian reported the account extant in his time: The gardener had stolen the body to protect his lettuce!

More seriously, in modern times various ideas have circulated among scholars. For family

reasons, Joseph of Arimathea buried the body elsewhere without telling anyone (Holtzmann). The women, in the darkness, went to the wrong tomb (Lake). It was all a clever invention by the disciples (Reimarus). Jesus had swooned on the cross, recovering later in the coolness of the tomb (Venturini, Schleiermacher). The Gospel story was a myth (Arthur Drew: *The Christ Myth*). Or the resurrection appearances were merely visions: There had been no resurrection (S.V. McCasland).

Of course, all such attempts to explain away the Bible record are designed to eliminate the miraculous. The aim - to negate the intervention of a divine Creator. Yet, aside from this, they fail to account for the facts as recorded by eye-witnesses.

These facts pose too many questions. Who moved the stone? When? How? What about the missing body? And the wraps? And the guards? Why the strange reaction of the disciples in the tomb? What then, is the answer?

Let's look at just one convincing proof that Jesus did rise and was not spirited away by the machinations of any group of men, no matter how determined. Here's proof that the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah was *real*.

### **The Impossible Answer**

First reports of the disappearance of the body of Jesus were received with scepticism by the disciples, who discounted them as "*idle tales*." Even though they had heard Jesus tell them time and time again that he would rise from the dead, none

## **The Empty Tomb**

of them were convinced. So how can we account for the dramatic turnaround in attitude evoked by what they saw inside the dimly-lit tomb?

One Bible account reads, "*Then the disciple who had reached the tomb first went in, too, and he saw and believed.*" Seconds before he deemed the idea preposterous! What was the convincing proof? Could a mere empty tomb work such an instantaneous, such a profound, intellectual somersault? An empty tomb proves little. John had witnessed a phenomenon that convinced him of the impossible. *There had been a resurrection!*

This was no physical resurrection such as John (*ch* 11) had witnessed when Lazarus had stumbled from the tomb bound hand and foot in his grave clothes, requiring that someone unwrap him (*v.44*). *This* resurrection was different, unique.

John's first glimpse of the shadowy sepulchre through a narrow slit of a window seemed to confirm that the women bore a wild and nonsensical tale. The body appeared *undisturbed*. John saw the faint whiteness of the wrapped body gleam against the blackness of the rock wall. But, when he went inside and had a close look, *he believed*. Why? What had so disturbed his scepticism? What startling proof of a resurrection did John now have?

The evidence rests in the appearance of the clothes in which Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea had wrapped Jesus' body. The custom of the time was to wrap the body from neck to toe in a

**The Empty Tomb...cont'd**  
long "bandage" and with many pounds of blended spices. The head was separately encased, leaving visible the face: *'...the grave-cloth that was on His head was not lying with the linens, but was wrapped up in one place by itself'* (John 20:7).

[Incidentally, this negates the notion of the one-piece "Turin Shroud" as the burial cloth of Jesus.]

Picture then what John saw as he stood by the body. On the bench hewn from the living rock lay the grave clothes packed with spices - as if Jesus' body were still within. In a depression in the rock lay the head napkin. But...*the body was not there!* The grave clothes were empty.

If, somehow, Jesus had recovered, where were the tangled yards of linen evidence? If somehow, the disciples had stolen past or bribed the guards would they have stopped to unwrap, then rearrange, the wraps? *Could* they indeed?

The bandages were not in disarray. Nor had they been removed. We are left with the rather uncomfortable fact that Jesus' human flesh had been transformed as spirit - and had *passed through* the wraps as easily as he later passed through a solid door.

*He had risen!* This was no human plot. The infinite power of the Almighty Creator had worked a miraculous change and released His Son from the bands of death forever. *Jesus was - and is - alive!*

### Challenge

The proof convinced those men and women of the first century. Jesus was with them on numerous occasions in the six weeks fol-

lowing that memorable morning. When the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians some twenty years later, he cited the living testimony of almost five hundred witnesses of the greatest miracle ever to shake our world: *'...Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures; and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the Twelve. Afterward He was seen by over five hundred brothers at once'* (I Corinthians 15:3-6).

The resurrection was the central teaching of the New Testament church of God, and upon it is based the enduring religion of Christ. It is the 'good news' - the Gospel.

The record of the momentous event remains preserved for 21st century man in the Holy Bible. And the fact of the resurrection remains as much a challenge to us - to all mankind of all faiths - as to those men in the cold sepulchre some nineteen centuries ago.

It's a challenge none of us can

afford to ignore. It irrefutably proves God is alive. It is evidence that He intervenes in human affairs. It affirms His intense and loving concern for every human on this planet. It testifies to the happy knowledge that we are not alone in this universe, that our Creator will never allow His creation to drift to utter destruction.

### A Personal Challenge

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an uncompromising challenge to each of us. It is a challenge to our readers to search out His plan for your own life!

Because the Father raised Jesus Christ from cold death and transformed him from flesh to spirit - then you must face what that means for you! Because Jesus Christ was without doubt raised from the dead, then *God exists*. There is life after life. And that means you must respond to Him - for He holds you accountable!

The Father is, in this age, 'team-building'. He issues a universal invitation to everyone to enter into a relationship with Him through Jesus with the ultimate purpose of working with Him throughout eternity. Those who respond to His call He draws to Jesus: *'...No one can come to Me unless the Father who has sent Me draw him, and I will raise him up at the last day'* (John 6:44).

It's a life-time commitment along a narrow and difficult pathway, and *'...narrow is the gate and constricted is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it. Beware of false prophets who come to you in sheep's clothing'*.

Along this pathway we are assured of the guidance and support of the only person raised from the dead to spirit life. **Ω**

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## MiniStudy

### **GOD IN US**

*‘...if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwells in you’ (Romans 8:11)*

*‘...he who is in union with the Master is one with Him in spirit’ (I Corinthians 6:17)*

We all die. But what happens beyond the grave is much misunderstood by all religions—not least in the Christian faith. There’s widespread belief in the concept that upon death each of us is destined for either ‘heaven’ or ‘hell’. (Both terms are themselves much misunderstood.) But who goes where?

- At the heart is the matter of ‘judgment’. Theologians of all faiths look to a time of reckoning after death, a time for each of us to give account to their ‘god’ of how we have lived. Divine judgment is founded on the bedrock of perfect justice—God works according to law. There are the laws of *physics* which are inexorable—gravity, for example. There are *social* laws—neglect a business or a marriage and it will fail. There are *moral* laws—the Decalogue, with its sub-laws. (Exodus 20ff). These are the ‘scales of justice’ against which our behaviour is weighed
- What, then, determines your eternal destiny? For many within the Islamic faith, for example, martyrdom is a passport to heavenly bliss—hence ‘suicide’ bombers. In the Christian community Roman Catholics emphasize ‘good works’ while for many Protestants it is a matter of ‘faith’. But just how ‘good’ must you be to merit the reward of heaven? Where does God draw the line? *Is there a ‘line’?*
- Uncle Harry may have had his ‘bad’ moments, but overall he lived a decent life. Maverick cousin Bill, however, had only the occasional flash of a ‘good work’. Who wins heaven, and who goes ‘down’? Are there degrees of ‘badness’? In the Scriptures there are records of killers and adulterers (*eg* King David) who will reign with Christ in his Kingdom: *‘...David my servant shall be king over them’* (Ezekiel 37:24). The apostle Paul recounts: *‘...I [God] have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will’* (Acts 13:22). A further example is the thief crucified with Jesus (Luke 23:39-43). Just *where* is that ‘line’?
- Then there are the ‘good’ who turn bad: *‘...when the righteous turns away from his righteousness, and commits iniquity, and does according to all the abominations that the wicked man does, shall he live? All his righteousness that he has done shall not be mentioned: in his trespass that he has trespassed, and in his sin that he has sinned, in them shall he die’* (Ezekiel 18:24). At what degree of ‘wickedness’ is the line drawn, the sentence of death executed?
- On the first Christian Pentecost the apostle Peter addressed the assembled Jews, confronting them with their heinous act of crucifying the Messiah. Stricken by conscience they demanded of the apostle *‘...what shall we do?’* (Acts 2:37). His inspired response: *‘...Repent 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’* (v.38). This precious ‘gift’ is the key to our puzzle
- The apostle Paul highlights this key: *‘...he who is in union with the Master is one with Him in spirit’* (I Corinthians 6:17). And, *‘...the Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are the children of God’* (Romans 8:16). This gift transforms our relationship with God. Said Jesus to the disciples: *‘...I am the Vine, you are the branches’*; (John 15:5) - those in whom dwells the Spirit are inextricably bound to Jesus Christ: *‘...if anyone has not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of His’* (Romans 8:9). If, then, you are so bound your destiny is to be with Christ, your destiny is to be with him where he is: *‘...you died, and your life has been hidden with Christ in God’* - Colossians 3:3). Only those who are united in Christ—who dwells in them—will reap the gift of life eternal: *‘...Christ in you, the hope of glory’* (Colossians 1:27). The union is *real and personal*—not a mere metaphor: *‘...that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You, that they also may be one in Us’* (John 17:21). The living Jesus Christ—through his indwelling Spirit—*lives in us!*
- In contrast to our Saviour all of us lead imperfect lives. We may strive for ‘perfection’ but we too often fall far short—and we try again, with Christ’s support, to conquer our ‘besetting sin(s)’ (Hebrews 12:1). And certainly we don’t always get our ‘doctrine’ right. Depending on our effort—or lack of effort—we may end up as *‘...the least in the Kingdom’* (Matthew 5:19). But we will be there! Let’s continue to nourish that Spirit in us Ω

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