

new Horizons

Vol 13 No 3

May/June 2009

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 Newsletter OUTREACH, 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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Churches of God Outreach Ministries
P O Box 54621
Tulsa, OK 74155-0621
USA
e-mail: information@cgom.org
1-800-611-8080
Editor: James McBride
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God, UK
PO Box 2525
LINCOLN LN5 7PF United Kingdom
Regd Charity No 283358
e-mail: coguk@aol.com

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
100 Northcote Street
Aberdare NSW 2325 Australia
e-mail: icg.aust@netcentral.com.au

The Churches of God Outreach Ministries
PO Box 476 Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4 Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

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new Horizons

Issue No 75

May/June 2009

On Sunday May 31 many Christians will celebrate 'Pentecost'. Here's the little-known origin of the celebration

Pentecost - or 'Whitsunday' - is generally celebrated as the time for mass baptisms. Dressed in white - hence 'Whit' Sunday - the year's crop of children will flock to church for baptism. Why this day?

On the first Christian Pentecost some three thousand Jews accepted Jesus as their promised Messiah - and were baptized. But it was the events of fifty days earlier which persuaded them to defy the wrath of their friends and family to commit to follow Jesus Christ.

Divine Power

That awesome event was the resurrection of Jesus. Notes the apostle Paul: '...*This good news is about his Son, our Lord Jesus Christ! As a human, he was from the family of David. But the Holy Spirit proved that Jesus is the powerful Son of God, because he was raised from death*' (Romans 1:3-4 CEV).

Most of those present at Pentecost—Jews and proselytes— had been in Jerusalem for the Passover when the city was alive with the rumour that Jesus had risen

from the dead. They had, perhaps, peered into the empty tomb with its undisturbed grave clothes. They had perhaps asked, *How did Jesus pass through them?* It was the same evidence that had convinced Peter and John (John 20:1-8).

But the resurrection of Jesus was only another step - though the pivotal one - in the cosmic drama of human salvation.

The Wavesheaf

Let's look at a neglected Bible ceremony which clearly typifies the earth-shattering and world-shaking event of the resurrection. It is known as "*the Wavesheaf Offering*".

During the Days of Unleavened Bread [i.e. the Biblical seven-day spring festival known as *Passover*] there was a ceremony which is of vital significance for Christians.

As the weekly Sabbath during the Festival ended, Temple representatives went to a field on the outskirts of Jerusalem and scythed a measure of the first-ripe grain - the '*firstfruits*' of the crop - which had earlier been marked out by delegates from the Jews' ruling body, the Sanhedrim.

The Law stated that it was to be offered in the Temple "*on the morrow after the Sabbath*" (Leviticus 23:11). It was

prepared the evening before. In the prescribed manner, the sheaf was "*lifted up*" (waved) before the LORD on the morning of the first day of the week, with the appropriate accompanying sacrifice of a lamb, fine flour and oil - a sweet-smelling offering to God.

[*The Sabbath* here - Leviticus 23:11 - is the weekly rest-day, the seventh day of the week, our Saturday, largely. The annual 'high day' - the first holy convocation is not in this text called a 'Sabbath']

Firstfruits

The significance of the firstfruits wavesheaf offering wasn't lost on the early Church of God. The Law stated "...*you shall bring the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord*" (Lev 23:10). This ceremony was traditionally (the text doesn't specifically link the two) carried out during the *Days of Unleavened Bread*, and was the starting point for the significant seven weeks leading to the *Feast of Firstfruits* - what we call *Pentecost*.

Contrary to what most Christians believe, Jesus was crucified on Wednesday morning, and killed about the time the Jews were to sacrifice the Passover lamb in the Temple. By the end of the weekly Sabbath he had been in the grave three days and three nights - just as He had predicted (Matt 12:40).

God's
Firstfruits
Harvest

And around the time of the cutting of the wavesheaf on Saturday evening - *Jesus was resurrected!*

Paul's famed 'resurrection chapter' (I Corinthians 15) declares: "*But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*" (v.20). Much of the chapter is devoted to the harvest - resurrection theme.

Here, then, embedded within the *Passover* and *Unleavened Bread* observance, is a pattern for calling to mind the astounding events of the last earthly days of Jesus the Messiah.

As Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple, Jesus was himself sacrificed. As the Wavesheaf was being cut outside Jerusalem at the end of the weekly Sabbath he was resurrected. And as the priests lifted up ("*waved*") the firstfruits offering before the altar on Sunday morning Jesus (perhaps after a night spent in thanksgiving, and intercession for his wayward disciples) ascended to present himself to the Father - '*the firstfruits of them that are asleep*' (I Corinthians 15:20; see also John 20:17 and Matthew 28:9).

Why Pentecost?

So, Jesus fulfilled the typology of the Wavesheaf - the firstfruits of the early grain harvest. Why, then, another seven weeks till Pentecost?

All the offerings and special times that were part of the di-

vinely-revealed religion of ancient Israel had significance for future events - for us. Rooted in that firstfruits offering in spring was another celebration, this time in early summer: *Pentecost*.

God's instruction was that, depending on the beginning of the early harvest, they were to count fifty days - seven complete weeks - from the day following the Sabbath: "*Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath...and you shall proclaim on the same day [ie the first day of the week, Sunday] that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it*" (Leviticus 23:15-21).

But what did this annual holy day signify?

That first cutting of the sheaf of grain in spring was the beginning

of the harvest season. The Feast of Weeks, Pentecost, marked its culmination - a true harvest festival. Bible readers probably pass over some texts related to the Festival without putting them in context.

Firstfruits Harvest

We have noted that Jesus was '*the firstfruits*'. But there are others!

Hear James : "*Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth that we might be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures*" (James 1:18).

Paul tells us that Christians "*have the firstfruits of the Spirit*" (Romans 8:23). And in Revelation (*ch* 14:4), John informs us: "*These were redeemed from among men, being firstfruits to God and to the Lamb*".

In sum, those who 'follow the Lamb' are a firstfruits spiritual harvest. The symbolic fifty days from the first of the firstfruits - the resurrected Jesus - until the 'first resurrection' (Revelation 20:5) represents the entire time since that first Christian Pentecost (Acts 2) until the resurrection of all true Christians at the return of Christ.

There's much more to Pentecost than merely a time for baptism! But baptism - of mature, repentant men and women - is an early and necessary step to being part of the firstfruits harvest of the people of God. **Ω**

PENTECOST

Pentecost is the Greek for *fiftieth*. The Hebrew names for this festival are *Feast of Weeks* (Exodus 34:22) and *Day of the Firstfruits* (Numbers 28:26)

CALLING ALL INTERNET USERS!

The Outreach Ministries website lists over a hundred Bible-based articles which address issues frequently on the minds of Christians. You may download any, or request print copies. There is, too, a section of on-line audio sermons, links to associated groups, back issues of *New Horizons* and an on-line magazine for our younger readers.

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Request the free article:
The Empty Tomb

It's a sad day when a loved one dies. Will you meet again? Is there life after life? What happens when you die?

Most adults have experienced the awful trauma of losing a loved one. An accident, a prolonged disease, or sudden illness blights the lives of the loved one's family and a wider circle of friends and colleagues. Tears well up in private and public grief. An awesome and unfillable gap breaches the orderliness of humdrum life. There's the gnawing pain of loss. Silence shrouds life's business.

Why? is often our first question. Why has this beloved person been taken? Death was so undeserved! Why, when so young? Why, when there was so much good being done? Why, when so beloved by all? The questions—seemingly unanswerable questions—crowd in thick and fast.

Less often asked is: *Where to?* Few like to pose that one!

It's easier when a dear one has led a godly life; easier when you can't find anyone who can in all honesty say a contrary word, when the life has glowed with joy and helpfulness and faithfulness and sound wisdom and encouragement; when life's winter follows a productive harvest of good deeds and love and generosity. Then you can rejoice when the minister says that the loved one is "with the Lord" and is happier than conceivably possible. Then you feel you can say *Amen* when he tells you that the loved one is even now beholding the face of Jesus in heavenly splendour.

When Someone Dies

Infant Reward

But what if it's an infant who has barely drawn his first breath that's being lowered in the cold earth? Where are the good deeds to praise? Where the life of accomplishment? Where the belief?

Or, what if everyone knows the person of mature years has lived a life of selfishness, of greed, or miserliness? What if the individual was untrustworthy or an inveterate liar? Or a callous murderer or unrepentant child molester? Are you comfortable to hear such a person, beloved or not, "preached into heaven"?

Further, have you ever heard the preacher announce that someone has reaped the fruit of an evil life and is even now screaming in agony in the flames of hell? In evangelical circles it's the only available alternative—yet, usually unannounced in the "respectable" funeral service!

Then there are the in-betweens—most of us. We've done a bit of good. And there's been a dash of courage, a flash of generosity, a streak of loyalty... But no claim to be a "born again Christian." No profession—in a long lifetime—of faith in Christ as Saviour and Lord. And probably lots of activities we would rather our friends didn't know about! What of these

folk? Where are they after death?

Failed Missionaries

How about the countless billions who have lived, have done good works, and have died—and the missionary didn't reach them in time to tell them salvation comes only through Jesus Christ? Where are *they*? After all, they *never had a chance* to accept or to reject salvation! Yet the Scriptures inform us that God wants all mankind to come to repentance.

And can we really believe that a loved one whom we believe to be in heaven can't see the agonies of those in "hell"? Can't hear the screams of pain? Has *forgotten* that a loving spouse (or an innocent infant son or daughter) never "accepted Jesus"—and, supposedly, went to the other place? Where is the untrammelled joy in that?

And can we believe that our omnipotent and totally loving Father in heaven can ignore their cries? Can permit them to suffer throughout all eternity? (Imagine holding a loved one's hand in a match-flame until it expires—and that's only a few seconds!)

Certainly God is also a just God, a righteous God. But am I more righteous than Him? After all, I give my children more than one chance to "get it right"! Do you give up when your child fails to walk at his first attempt? Perhaps some of us never will get it right in this life, but does that mean we are fit only to burn forever and ever? Surely God has infinitely

*Quotations from the Bible in New Horizons are from translations which clearly express the meaning in modern terms
'CEV' is the Contemporary English version*

more patience, more love!

Source of Belief

These are logical questions and situations. They are questions that most of us don't face—*won't* face! Yet they are questions that are firmly and clearly addressed in that source of Christian belief, the Bible.

The fact is, even for most Christians, much of our belief about death and the hereafter *doesn't come from the Word of God*. They are unproven hand-me-down ideas from childhood. Yet, for Christians, the Bible is supposed to be the sole source of our belief. And what we find there—if we are indeed willing to take an unbiased look at it—is infinitely more satisfying than the concepts outlined earlier in this article.

Bible Facts

So let's take a look at the clear Bible teachings. Recall what Jesus said: *live by every word of God!* As Christians we must be willing to see what God is saying to us. And—dare I say it—not simply accept unquestioningly the powerful assertions of a minister (however well-liked, however charismatic, however caring and sympathetic) at a funeral oration.

There are some clear and simple Bible statements we need to examine and reconcile:

- God *only* has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16)
- There is a spirit in man (Job 32:8)
- The spirit returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7)
- The dead know nothing; the memory of them is lost (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

- All in Christ shall be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:52)
- ... at the "...last trump" (1 Corinthians 15:52)
- The rest of the dead will live again at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20:5)

Each of these statements demands a complete article! Each can be supported by a whole body of Scripture. It can readily be seen, however—since we are looking only to the Scriptures to inform us of God's teachings—that when that beloved one dies, the human spirit is safe with God until resurrected, when consciousness will be revived.

Resting in Peace

What does this mean? Simply that when someone dies—whether they were good or bad, righteous or unrighteous, child or senior citizen, Christian or Hindu or animist, born-again or not—whatever their status, they will, when they die, remain *at rest* until the resurrection.

The Bible leaves no doubt as to when these resurrections (The Bible mentions several) take place. Paul tells us it is "*every man in his own order*" (1 Corinthians 15:23). He tells us that Jesus was the first to be resurrected in this sense. Then there's a "pause" until His return.

It is at this specific point in time (the return of Christ)—represented in Bible prophecy as the "*last [seventh] trumpet*"—that the dead in Christ arise from the grave, their spirit united with a resurrected body. Notice Paul's words: "...*For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be*

raised imperishable, and this mortal nature must [at this point in time] put on immortality" (vv. 52-53).

That's the time gloriously celebrated in the famed Handel's *Messiah!*

The spirit of every righteous person since Adam has—according to Scripture—been preserved in God's care since death, and will remain in His care until the resurrection. *But they have not been conscious of the passage of time!* Nearly six thousand years in some cases!

Yet—get this—in their minds they will at the moment of their deaths seem to be instantly with Christ! The intervening millennia will appear to have been obliterated—just like the effects of an anaesthetic!

But what about *unbelievers*?

What of the "Heathen"?

The Bible clearly informs us that *all mankind* is to enjoy this rest. *Their* human spirit, too, is preserved by God. Whether a righteous Abraham or Paul, or an "ignorant savage," or an evil Hitler, or the average unconverted man-in-the-street—all will remain in the grave oblivious of the passage of time *until their resurrection*.

Jesus took time to instruct the Jews in this very matter. He told them: "*The hour is coming when all that are in the tombs will hear His [the Son's] voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the*

resurrection of judgment” (John 5:28-29).

This same author (John), in fact, tells us when these two events will occur. He writes: “...*they [martyrs] came to life again [were resurrected] and reigned with Christ for a thousand years*” (Revelation 20:4). This is in perfect harmony with Paul’s statement that “*the dead in Christ*” (together with Christians then living) will become immortal at Christ’s coming, at the last trumpet sound.

Thus, in one instant the whole universe will burst in joy as the family of God is resurrected to be with Christ! It is at that time—the Second Coming of Christ—that our beloved “*dead in Christ*” will receive their just reward (Revelation 11:18).

And the rest of mankind? John enlightens us: “...*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years [the Millennium] were at an end*” (v.5). Isn’t that clear!

A Second Resurrection!

If we really want to believe what God tells us in His word we can’t escape the conclusion that at least *two* resurrections—separated by one thousand years—lie ahead of us. The *first* for the people of God, the *second* for the rest of mankind. (In his book *The Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*, John Pye Smith mentions ancient authors proving that this concept of a “second resurrection” for “all the rest of mankind” was agreed by the ancient Rabbinical writings.)

In this “second resurrection” all those whom God has never called in this life—the good, the bad, the indifferent—will be restored to physical flesh and blood life. In their former existence, Satan had successfully blinded and deceived them (Revelation 12:9; II Corinthians 4:4). But with this evil rebel safely out of the way for ever (Revelation 20:10), they will (just like Christians now) be judged out of the things written in the Scriptures.

The Book of Life will then be opened—sufficient evidence that God’s grace for salvation will be freely available for them! Note again the word given to the apostle John: “*And I saw the dead, small and great, stand [resurrected] before God, and the books were opened [of the Bible]: and another book was opened which is the Book of Life; and the dead [now resurrected] were*

judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works” (Revelation 20:12). It is ‘...*the day when God shall judge the secrets of men, according to my gospel, by Jesus Christ*’ (Romans 2:16).

In other words, all those men, women and children who have never heard of Jesus Christ or who were not during their lifetime specifically called by God (*read*, for example, John 6:65) will at that time have their very first real opportunity to be converted and to receive the Spirit of God.

An End to Evil

Only after this final grand chance of salvation will “all hell break loose” in the evangelical use of the term! For only those *who fail to then repent* and accept God’s gracious offer of eternal life will suffer “...*the second death*”.

Their bodies will be consumed in a ‘hell-fire’ that is so fervently hot it will completely obliterate the remaining evil on earth (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8), ushering in a “new heavens and a new earth.”

In God’s grand design for mankind, every man, woman, and child ever born in whatever age, in whatever part of the world, and no matter what their religion or their life-style, will be given—in God’s perfect timing—the glorious opportunity to freely choose life for all eternity.

What a beautiful and complete and fair plan! It makes sense of the mystery surrounding the death of our loved ones! Ω

Hell Fire

The deeply held and almost universal notion of ‘hell-fire’ as the eternal destiny of ‘the wicked’ has no resonance in the Christian Bible.

The Biblical view is based on the rubbish dump on the outskirts of Jerusalem—in the Valley of Hinnom (‘*Ge-Henna*’). It was there that all rubbish and the dead bodies of criminals were burned.

The unrighteous dead will be ‘...*ashes under the soles of your feet*’ (Malachi 4: 3), says God.

The Creator is a merciful God whose wisdom and compassion for His creation far eclipses the best of humanity.

unsigned articles are by the Editor

God's law is more than a set of rules. It foreshadows good things to come. Things we cannot even begin to imagine!

John Morton

Man's physical existence is only the first stage of accomplishing something far greater than most imagine. When God said *"Let us make man in our image, after our likeness:"* (Genesis 1:26), He meant more than a physical likeness. Man is to be perfected in His image, *"Be you therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect."* (Matthew 5:48). He envisaged like-minded, spirit beings with whom He can share His power and glory. The divine nature, or mind of God, is to be reproduced in those with whom He will share His Kingdom for all eternity.

Man's ability is currently limited to things physical, but God whose understanding is *'infinite'* (Psalm 147:5) and whose greatness is *'unsearchable'* (Psalm 145:3) has no such limitations, *"For who has known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him?"* (I Corinthians 2:16).

In order to share in God's power and glory man must have the understanding and ability that can only come from God. He enhances man with his own divine nature through the gift of His Spirit, *"For what man knows the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knows no man, but the Spirit of God."* (I Corinthians 2:11).

God's Spirit transforms the hu-

man mind to a spiritual plane in preparation for final resurrection to a spiritual existence in God's kingdom.

The law foreshadows this event, *"For the law having a shadow of good things to come,"* (Hebrews 10:1). And, *"... 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."* (I Corinthians 2:9). There is a lot more to the law than most imagine!

How Will It Be Accomplished?

In the Bible there are two basic types of law. There is the 'moral law' that is an expression of God's mind foreshadowing the attributes of God that are to come to fruition in man. Then there is the 'ceremonial law' that governed the Tabernacle with its associated priesthood and sacrifices that foreshadowed Christ under whose administration the creation of man in God's image man is to be fulfilled. Man is to become the embodiment of the law he has been instructed to keep.

Christ was represented by the High Priest who presided over the Tabernacle. He now presides over a spiritual temple comprising

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those currently under his administration whom he is preparing for eternal life, *"Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God,"* (Hebrews 4:14). And, *"Know you not that you are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?"* (I Corinthians 3:16).

The sacrifice Christ made on behalf of all mankind was a key event that was also foreshadowed in the ceremonial law by the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. He opened up the way for individuals to be reconciled to God the Father and receive God's Spirit.

The Holy Spirit is like a seed containing all the attributes of its parent replicating God's divine nature in man. That divine nature then becomes part of the psyche of man as God promised, *"I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them; And their sins and iniquities will I remember no more."* (Hebrews 10:16-17 and Jeremiah 31:33). This is what the law foreshadows.

The process by which man is ultimately created in God's image was pioneered by Christ's own resurrection, *"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept."* (I Corinthians 15:20). He was the first to be resurrected to spirit life. His resurrection, witnessed by many at the time, provides hope for believers today (I Peter 1:3).

Believers also receive the Holy Spirit as God's personal guaran-

Why Does God Kill? *Manual* we devised our own operating system, and as with any misused device it didn't work. Over the centuries man deviated further and further from the Way - to such a degree that eventually '...God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually' (Genesis 6:5). The result? All of mankind but for one righteous family was 'purged' in a worldwide flood - to save the plan.

We all live with death - it is inevitable. But isn't it a puzzle that a loving God claims to kill His creation? Can we reconcile that with Jesus' claim that he loves, and came to save, the world?

The Creator God reveals Himself in the Scriptures as loving, merciful, compassionate: '*...But you, O Lord, are a God full of compassion and gracious, slow to anger, and plentiful in mercy and truth* (Psalm 86:15).

Yet the Old Testament record makes clear that the Creator, JHVH, did indeed kill - sometimes on a massive scale. All mankind but one family of eight, for example, was destroyed in the Flood (Genesis 6).

Why? Can we reconcile this with such statements as '*...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)?

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 initiated His plan, having made it plain. Writes the apostle Paul: '*...that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God manifested it unto them. For the invisible things of him since the creation of the world are clearly seen, being perceived through the things that are made, even his everlasting power and divinity; that they may be without excuse* (Romans 1:19-20).

We blew it. Rather than follow the

things' (v.23). 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). And: '*...the LORD preserves all them that love him: but all the wicked will he destroy*' (145:20). But Solomon adds: '*...I love them that love me; and those that seek me early shall find me*' (Proverbs 8:17). God will when necessary remove individuals, communities, even whole 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.

Lessons were not learned, and before long the different families were scattered (*ch* 11) - again to save the plan. 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 iniquity 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). Clearly a corrupting influence: '*...therefore I took them away as I saw good*'.

God had given ample time for the nations to embrace the one true faith. The Amorites - perhaps the leading Canaanite tribe 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: '*...Four generations later, your descendants will return here and take this land, because only then will the people who live here be so sinful that they deserve to be punished*' (Genesis 15:16 CEV). Their depravity is described in Leviticus 20: '*...they committed all these*

things' (v.23).

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Gentle Jesus

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.

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)**

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 weeping 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: **cont'd p.7**

MiniStudy

The Reality of Hope

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to his great mercy begat us again unto a living hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead (I Peter 1:3)

In modern speech the term *hope* usually has a negative edge. *'I hope so'* you exclaim, thereby signifying some doubt about the outcome. Not so in the Christian Scriptures. *Hope* in the Scriptures is one of the most positive of virtues.

- It's often said that we are *'a world without hope'*, that mankind is doomed to destruction—by his own hand or by the anger of nature. Individuals, too, often fail to cope with what life throws at them: *'it's hopeless'* they say when the black cloud of depression settles around them
- Hope (Gk *elpis*) in the Bible, however, has a positive ring - assurance, confidence. It is one of the three great and enduring and uplifting virtues named by the apostle Paul: *'...and now abides faith, hope, charity, these three'* (I Corinthians 13:13). And like the other two, hope can be nourished, strengthened. It's not a vague aspiration but a reality, a matter of substance. It's a *'living hope'* (I Peter 1:3)
- It is closely linked with the symbolism of the *Feast of Weeks* - the Biblical seven week period of the spring harvest, which culminates in the *Day of Pentecost*. These seven weeks were initiated by the harvesting—by the priests—of a sheaf of barley on the Sabbath evening associated with the *Feast of Unleavened Bread* in Israel. This was prepared and 'waved' before the LORD in the Temple the following morning (Sunday). It signified the nation's gratitude for the fruits of the earth, their hope of an abundant harvest. None of the new grain harvest was to be eaten before this annual ceremony
- There is, however, a deeper meaning. For that wavesheaf offering was but a type of the resurrection of Jesus Christ on that Sabbath evening after three days and three nights in the grave, and His presentation to the Father on Sunday morning - the first of the firstfruits spiritual harvest: *'...now has Christ been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of them that are asleep'* (I Corinthians 15:20). Jesus is the first one ever to have been raised from the dead in a spirit body [Request the articles: *The Empty Tomb* and *Three Days and Three Nights—Why?*]
- Man is a material being energized by the human spirit. When we die we are 'dead as a door-nail'. No life after death—*except by means of a resurrection*. This is the great and uniquely Christian hope of those who *'...follow the Lamb whithersoever he goes. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb'* (Revelation 14:4). They are themselves *'...a kind of firstfruits'* (James 1:18). But *everyone who has lived* will in God's time come out of their grave. Jesus tells us that *'...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 [judgment]'* (John 5:28-29)
- For Christians especially, hope lies in resurrection. It is a certainty. No matter how long dead, no matter how they died—all in whom is the holy Spirit will, at Christ's coming, burst from the chains of death to unending life in a perfect spirit body. Paul informs: *'... [I] have hope toward God... that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust'* (Acts 24:15). Indeed if this were not so Christianity itself is no more than a lie (I Corinthians 15:12-22)
- In Christ we become *'sons, heirs of God'* (Galatians 4:7). As we are *'... children, then [we are] heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together'* (Romans 8:17). That's the *'glory of God'* for which we live in certain hope (Romans 5:2). We may suffer for the faith—but: *'...the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us'* (8:18). The people of God throughout the ages have often suffered extreme privation, but they remained faithful and are assured *'...a better resurrection'* (Hebrews 11:35)
- Hope, however, is not limited to Christians for, as Jesus said, *all* will be called from the grave. That means hope for every man, woman and child who has lived, however dire their circumstances. After the millennial reign of Jesus and the resurrected saints they will be raised from the grave for a term of being 'weighed in the balance', and being faced—with utmost clarity—with the opportunity to embrace the Gospel of Christ. They, too, may then experience the *'hope of the glory of God'*—to be part of the divine Family. Those who then reject God's gracious offer of eternal life will die. their bodies consumed by fire in *'Gehenna'* Ω

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