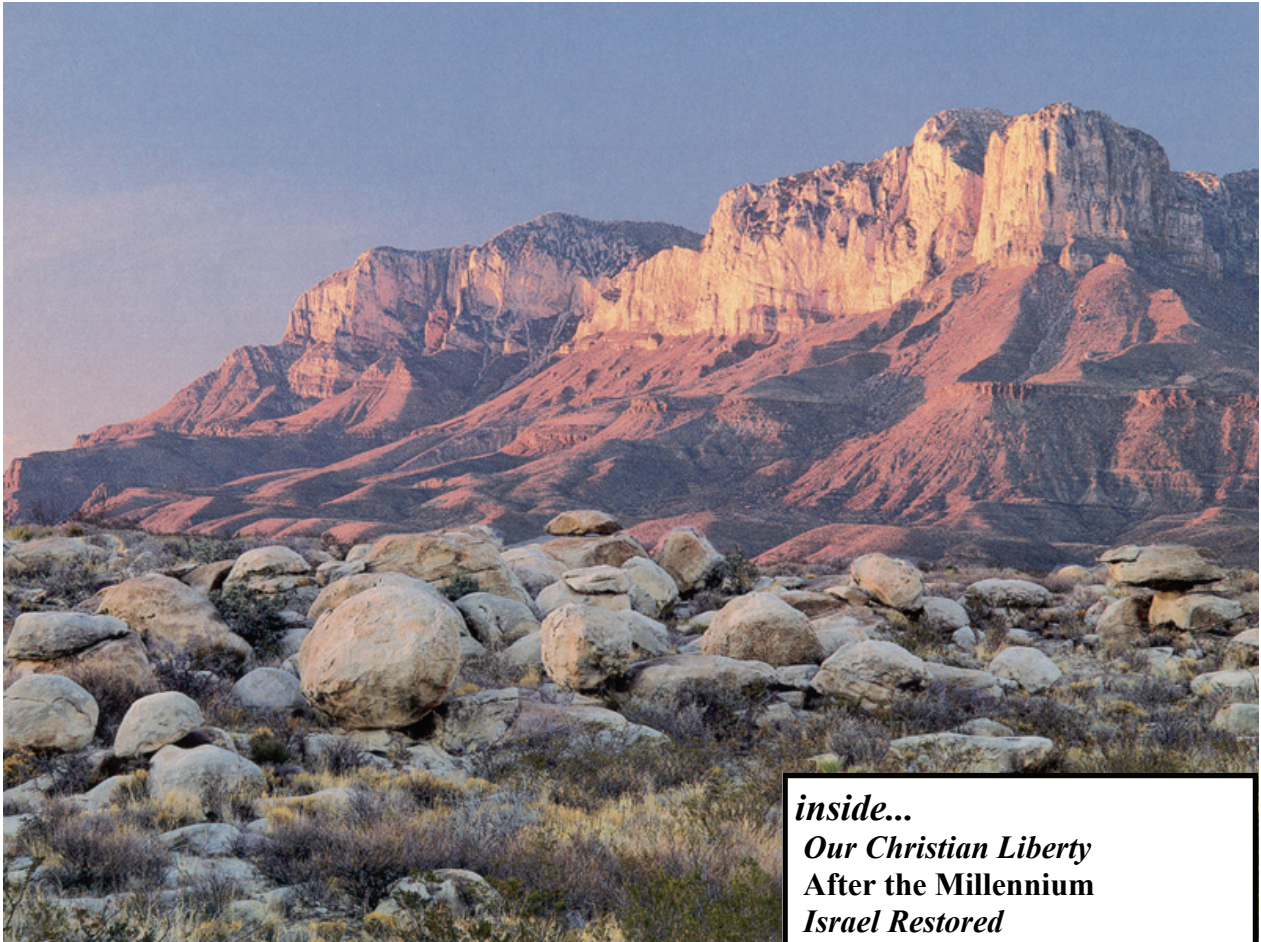


new **Horizons**

Vol 16 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

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

New Horizons is published by the *Churches of God Outreach Ministries*, an association of independent churches, to make known the good news of the soon-coming Kingdom of God

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

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
PO Box 476 Don Mills Station
Don Mills Ontario M3C 2T4 Canada
www.canadianchurchofgod.com

or from:

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The sacred song insists that we are ‘...free from the law, o happy condition’. Is it a happy state? Does it reflect the teaching of Jesus and his apostles?

Not much imagination is needed—given human nature—to envision the chaos of a world without law. And, of course, Christian proponents of this view would claim that’s not what they mean. In essence, what they have in mind is that we are free from ‘those tiresome laws’ of the Old Testament. We are, in Christ, liberated from them. Is this the whole picture?

None would dispute the need for a law against murder—or indeed against any of the last six of the often reviled Ten Commandments. They are essential for any civilized society, worldwide, and failure to uphold them leads to civil disorder. Any Christian worthy of the name will accept this as ‘gospel’. We are law-abiding citizens and set an example to all, ‘... *the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill [that] cannot be hid*’ (Matthew 5:14).

True Christian love, writes Paul, submits to these laws—and to the authorities who enforce them: ‘...*In the Law there are many commands, such as, "Be faithful in marriage. Do not murder. Do not steal. Do not want what belongs to others."* But all of these

are summed up in the command that says, "Love others as much as you love yourself." No one who loves others will harm them’ (Romans 13:1-10 CEV). Continuing the theme, James, the brother of Jesus, adds: ‘... *But whoso looks into the perfect law of liberty, and continues therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed*’ (ch 1:25). What, then, does the apostle Paul mean when he refers to: ‘...*our liberty which we have in Christ*’ (Galatians 2:4)?

Our Christian Liberty

[Let’s not overlook the role of the *first four* Commandments. Once these—all four—are trampled underfoot the nation enters a downward spiral to destruction (Psalm 11:3). They are the foundation of civilisation. Most Christians agree to them; except, of course, for the fourth, the Sabbath, command—a test of our loyalty to the Creator.]

We could add the various *judgments* based on these foundation laws: a guard rail on a flat roof, a barrier round a hole, returning property you have found, to name a few examples (Exodus 21-23). Transformed into modern terms we would have general agreement that they are not ‘done away’. Indeed they are largely enshrined in our environmental laws.

Other Laws

No, it’s the ‘other laws’ of the Old Testament that rankle. It’s clear from the New Testament teachings that *sacrifices* are no longer required, made obsolete by that one perfect sacrifice by Jesus—his perfect (and law-abiding) life. Nor is *circumcision* a concern. The Pharisees had turned it into a means of salvation because of the blood that is shed in the practice. Paul devotes an entire letter to this—Galatians—demonstrating its irrelevance for Christians. Nor can there be dispute that the laws of *ritual purity*—which are related to the now defunct Temple worship—are no longer applicable.

Where, then, does that leave us? What makes so many Christians ‘hot under the collar’? There is one part of the ‘Law of Moses’ (more properly *God’s* Laws) that raises heckles. It is a matter related to *idolatry*.

Idolatry

God imparted strict warnings against idolatry to His people: ‘...*Take heed to yourself that you be not snared by following [surrounding nations]... and that you enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve [ie, worship] their gods? even so will I do likewise. You shall not do so unto the LORD your God*’ (Deuteronomy 12: 30-31).

We don't have to do much research to identify practices within Christendom contrary to this instruction. Indeed the *New Testament* writers—and Jesus himself—rail against idolatrous intrusion into the faith.

Paul, for example: '... *my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry*' (I Corinthians 10:14). The principle is laid out in the Commandments (Exodus 20): *don't substitute other gods for Me*. Each deity has its own form and times for worship, and unless the practice is prescribed by the one Creator God in His Word it is idolatry. Now would be a good time to check—with the Scriptures—your own religious practices!

A Time to Worship

Christendom is wedded to set times for worship—weekly (Sunday), in spring (Easter), in summer (Pentecost), in winter (Christmas) - and many others. Don't observe them and your Christianity is considered suspect. And, of course, it is the prescribed (by God) times for worship that is the nub of opposition to the Law. Christians who observe them, it is said, are legalist, and 'Jewish'.

Why Jewish? Well, they are 'Old Testament' aren't they? Yes, the Scriptures plainly set them out and tell us when to observe them. They are listed in Leviticus 23 as part of the worship the LORD imparted to Moses to relay to the new-born nation of Israel. (The Jews are only a minor part of 'Israel'.)

The *weekly Sabbath* was instituted before Adam sinned. And,

centuries before Moses '...*Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws* (Genesis 26:5). These laws have their origins with man's creation. They are the bed-rock of the one true faith. Not just 'Jewish'.

Legalism?

But doesn't observance of these days (*any* days, including Sunday, Christmas *etc!*) smack of legalism? Isn't it 'salvation by works'? Not unless you make it so. Indeed the arguments for 'grace' apply equally to God's—they are *His*, not Moses' (Leviticus 23: 4)—festivals and laws and to the heathen substitutes of Christendom.

Sums up one commentator (on Galatians 4:10): '...*To regard the observance of certain days as in itself meritorious as a work, is alien to the free spirit of Christianity. This is not incompatible with observing the Sabbath or the*

In Spirit and in Truth

The phrase *in spirit and in truth* describes the two essential characteristics of true worship: *in spirit*, as distinguished from place or form or other sensual limitations; *in truth*, as distinguished from the false conceptions resulting from imperfect knowledge. True worship includes a spiritual sense of the object worshipped, and a spiritual communion with it; the manifestation of the moral consciousness in feelings, motions of the will, "moods of elevation, excitements," *etc.* It includes also a truthful *conception* of the object. In Jesus the Father is seen and known. Thus the truthful conception is gained. He is *the Truth*. Likewise through Him we come to the Father, and spiritually commune with Him.

Commentary

Christian Lord's day as obligatory, though not as a work (which was the Jewish and Gentile error in the observance of days), but as a holy mean appointed by the Lord for attaining the great end, holiness' (Jameson, Fawcett, Brown).

God's Laws (*torah*=instruction) express how we come before Him in worship, how we live, how we become like Jesus our Saviour. They are the structure, the backbone, of the faith. They are a unique guide to the divine plan.

Bible believers follow them humbly. We follow them willingly and joyously. They are not a burden but an expression of our love for Him.

Each individual, enlightened by the Word and the Spirit, personally applies it to daily life. Too often, however, Christians are cowed by their church into a fear of disobedience and loss of salvation—often by imperfect teachings. The joy of our salvation is suppressed.

Liberty

The Galatian brethren were being seduced by false teachers into the observance of circumcision and law-keeping *as a means of salvation*. They were being taught that the Pharisaic accretions to the written Law (their 'traditions', Jesus called them - Mark 7:8, 13) are an essential for their salvation. The argument is demolished by the apostle.

There's an incident that illustrates our approach to our relationship with the Old *cont'd p.8*

God ‘picks and chooses’ those He invites to join His Family, to become part of the ‘Kingdom of God’. What about everyone else?

‘No-one’ said Jesus, ‘can come to me except the Father who has sent me draw him’ (John 6:44). The Father, apparently, implants a desire that can eventually be satisfied only by a relationship with Him through Jesus. Those invited are free to choose to have that relationship, and to remain in it.

Elsewhere, the apostle Paul records: ‘...Don’t forget what happened to the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Even before they were born or had done anything good or bad, the Lord told Rebekah that her older son would serve the younger one. The Lord said this to show that he makes his own choices and that it wasn’t because of anything either of them had done’ (Romans 9:10-11 CEV).

It’s a divine principle extended to embrace all of mankind. We are all part of an age-long plan instigated by the Creator before man existed to, in a real sense, extend His Family.

Partial Blindness

Initially, a selection is made—based not on individual merit but on God’s sovereign grace.

Throughout history individuals have been invited to take part in the plan—and many did, as recorded in Hebrews 11. And multitudes more since the Messiah, Jesus, came. But the vast majority of mankind were—and are at this time—excluded. Are, then, all these billions ‘lost’?

After the Millennium

Bible students are familiar with Paul’s statement that ‘...I would not, brethren, that you should be ignorant of this mystery, lest you should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fullness of the Gentiles be come in’ (Romans 11:25). The people of Israel, he tells us, are in a (temporary) state of spiritual blindness—excluded for now from the Plan.

But not just Israel, for Isaiah tells us, speaking of a future time: ‘...he will destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail that is spread over all nations’ (Isaiah 25:7). The whole of mankind, then, ‘blinded’ to God and His Plan. *But why?*

Paul, again: ‘...But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost: In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them’ (II Corinthians 4:3-4). Man’s adversary, the ‘god of this world’ ‘...that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceives

the whole world’ (Revelation 12:9). A deception that has ‘blinded’ all nations, all religions, throughout time. Without being aware, we have followed his philosophy since the beginning of humanity.

Isaiah continues, v.8: ‘He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces’. Ultimately everyone will have their eyes opened to the true Way, God’s Way. It’s in the Plan. And the *how* is clearly expressed in the Scriptures.

Life Returns

Most students of the Bible are aware of the ‘millennium’—the predicted thousand year reign of Messiah. It’s a time that follows hard on the heels of the turbulent ‘last days’.

Messiah’s return is marked by an unprecedented event—a mass resurrection, a return from the grave of dead saints, now in spirit form. The apostle John calls this ‘...the first resurrection’.

These saints, gathered from every century, will ‘...reign with [Messiah] a thousand years’ (Revelation 20:6). Satan will be restrained (vv:1-3), and under the benign rule of Jesus and the risen saints sanity will be restored to our world—the perfect universal Government. [Request the free article *A Message of Hope—the World of Tomorrow*].

It is a partial fulfilment of the prediction by Jesus that ‘...The time

Request the free articles ***The Long Sleep*** and ***When Someone Dies***. They explain what happens after death

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

will come when all of the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they will come out of their graves. Everyone who has done good things will rise to life, but everyone who has done evil things will rise and be [judged] (John 5:28-29 CEV).

A 'day of judgment' lies ahead—for everyone who has drawn breath.

In fact, there are *two* mass resurrections. And in his later writings John informs us that there will be a long gap—a thousand years—between the *first* and the *second* resurrection (Revelation 20:5).

"The Rest"

Those in the first resurrection (the faithful from every generation) will no longer be flesh; they will be spirit—part of the very Family of God (I Corinthians 15:53-54), never more to die. But 'the rest'—those 'unsaved' who have lived from every

Woe unto you, Chorazin! woe unto you, Bethsaida! for if the mighty works, which were done in you, had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the day of judgment, than for you. And you, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shall be brought down to hell [the grave]: for if the mighty works, which have been done in you, had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you' (Matthew 11:21-24)

generation, of every faith and of no faith, old and young—will, at the

close of the millennium, be resurrected to renewed *physical* life.

Jesus refers to these people: Even Sodom, once obliterated for its degenerate lifestyle, will be restored to life to face Jesus.

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

Notice. All these folk ('blinded', remember) '*...rise up to judgment'*. Resurrected!

You will recall the words of John: '*...the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished'* (Revelation 20:5). It's their very first opportunity to choose eternal life.

God is fair, and fulfills his promises. Peter tells us: '*...The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance'* (II Peter 3:9).

For our recorded civilisation of some six thousand years the eternal God has been seeking out those few willing to respond to His Word.

Judah Remembered

The people of Judah collectively rejected the opportunity to embrace

unsigned articles are by the Editor

God's Kingdom and the Messiah. God with few exceptions withdrew His invitation to them (*see* John 6:44): '*...No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day'* His invitation has since focused on the Gentile world.

Paul wrote: '*... It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing you put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles'* (Acts 13:46).

But the people of Judah are not forgotten. Jesus said they '*...would rise in judgment'* (Matthew 12:41). Paul again: '*...if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?'* (Romans 11:15)

They, too, will be resurrected from their graves—to *physical* life, and given the opportunity for *eternal* life through the sacrifice of Jesus, their long-desired Messiah.

The Grand Climax

All of mankind, in sum, both Jew and Gentile—by the time the Father comes to dwell among us on Earth (Revelation 21:3)—will have had their opportunity to become part of the Family of God.

At the coming return of Jesus as King of kings and LORD of lords—He wields all political and religious authority—God will '*...destroy in this mountain the face of the covering cast over all people, and the vail [face-covering] that is spread over all nations'* (Isaiah 25:7).

Then comes—*after* the thousand years of Messiah's rule—what has been called the 'general resurrection'. The divine plan on Earth moves to its grand climax when all mankind, all races, all faiths, will have had opportunity to commit to an eternal relationship with the Father through faith in Jesus. Ω

Israel Restored

The Israelis are today in a state of continual siege, protected by high walls and force of arms. But deliverance is coming.

Judaism is a faith that celebrates freedom—also a deep-seated Anglo-Saxon trait. The ancient nation of Israel was famously delivered from Egypt around 1500BC. Five centuries later, in a struggle for freedom, it became divided into two national entities—the Houses of *Israel* and of *Judah*.

In the sixth century, Judah was liberated by King Cyrus from its 70-year Babylonian captivity, which was largely because of Sabbath desecration. To this day the Jews celebrate these freedoms (especially the Egyptian exodus) in the annual Passover celebration—a time of rejoicing.

The northern House of Israel (ten tribes) was scattered by invading armies in the late eighth century, over the millennia losing its Israel identity. The Scriptures, however, assure us both will be reunited '...Therefore, behold, the days come, says the LORD, that it shall no more be said, The LORD lives, that brought up the children of Israel out of the land of Egypt; But, The LORD lives, that brought up the children of Israel from the land of the north, and from all the lands whither he had driven them: and I will bring them again into their land that I gave unto their fathers' (Jeremiah 16:14-15). A second Exodus!

This prophecy had a partial fulfillment when King Cyrus freed the Jews. But envisaged is the final restoration—yet future to us—of *all* Israel. In the end time the people of Israel, scattered around the globe, will be experiencing a time of desolation with millions being killed or dying from famine and disease. God's plan is to rescue the survivors (v.24).

Ezekiel relays God's message using the emblem of 'sticks', representing governments, for Israel: '*...I will take the stick of Joseph, which is in the hand of Ephraim, and the tribes of Israel his fellows, and will put them with him, even with the stick of Judah, and make them one stick, and they shall be one in my hand*' (ch 37:19). The prophet then pinpoints *when* this happens—a time when God's sanctuary is permanently with them in the Land (vv.21-28).

Ezekiel adds (ch 26:24-28):

'... I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries, and will bring you into your own land. Then will I sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean: from all your filthiness, and from all your idols, will I cleanse you. A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh. And I will put my spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them. And you shall dwell in the land that I gave to your fathers; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God.'

Clearly a time of mass conversion to the Gospel.

Kingdom Way

It's the same process as today. We repent from wrong-doing (v.31), we are baptized, we receive into our minds the Holy Spirit - and '*...shall walk in my statutes, and you shall keep my judgments, and do them*' (v.27), abandoning all our idolatrous practices. It is the time we know as the 'Millennium'.

STUDY THE WORD
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free 32-lesson Study
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is for many a
'Book of Mystery'

Isaiah paints a picture of those days, when: '*...he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruninghooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more*' (Isaiah 2:4).

Post Millennium

Ezekiel's prophetic vision extends further, for he looks beyond the Millennium to the 'general resurrection'—the time foretold by Jesus: '*...when all of the dead will hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they will come out of their graves*' (John 5:28-29). The prophet tells us that God will '*...open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel*' (ch 37:12).

A time of resurrection, then, related to the apostle John's vision from Jesus:

And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death
 Revelation 20: 11-14

Paul refers to this same time: '*... For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead* (Romans 11:15).

Israel—both Houses—remains 'the apple of God's eye' (Zechariah 2:8), and *will* be restored. **Ω**

The Shroud of Mystery

The authenticity of the famed ‘Shroud of Turin’ (preserved in the Cathedral of St John the Baptist in Turin, Italy) is often questioned. Is it indeed the very burial cloth of Jesus Christ? Is the image in the cloth his image?

The *Vatican* doesn’t confirm one way or another, while continuing to encourage the image as a place of pilgrimage. *Scientists* either scoff or they produce supposed evidence for a first century origin. We must look elsewhere for confirmation., and the Scripture record is a good starting point.

The record states that the face-covering (Gk *soudarion*) was separate from the main covering. (a ‘winding sheet’) Envisage a head

wrapped in a bandage. The Shroud of Turin, you may know, is a sheet, with the facial imprint squarely in the interior.

Resurrection Evidence

But there is more to this episode. Startled by the report of an empty tomb, Peter and John ran to the site. So shocking was the sight that greeted Peter having entered the sepulchre that ‘...when he saw it, [he] believed’ (v.7). His former doubts passed *Why?* (See John 20:3-8.)

Consider. There lay the grave-clothes *formed in body shape* in the burial niche. (Imagine a mummy.) Separate from them was the face covering ‘...in a place by itself’. Recall that the long binding strips were packed with spices—a hundred pounds (40k or so!—and wrapped between the bindings (John 19: 39-40).

In other words, the grave-clothes had retained the body shape of Jesus (*myrrh* is a form of glue or resin) as Jesus *passed through* them. What more proof did they need of a resurrection. And not a mere physical resurrection as Lazarus who had to be freed from the grave-clothes: ‘...*The man who had been dead came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of burial cloth, and a cloth covered his face*’ (ch 11:44). The body of Jesus, by contrast, had disappeared. He had become spirit.

That Shroud, whether woven in the first century, or a mediaeval forgery, or however imprinted simply draws attention to the most exciting act of history—the resurrection from the dead of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus the Messiah . Ω

Request the free article:
The Empty Tomb

Kingdom of God ...cont’d from p.7 with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first’ (I Thessalonians 4:16). Another stage of the Father’s plan will have been accomplished.

Earthly Rule

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

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

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

earth in the saints—will reign supreme over all mankind.

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

And Beyond...

That earthly Kingdom, of course, is

In Sum...

- The Kingdom of God has always existed. It is the divine Family
- As part of His plan to extend His Kingdom the Father began Project Earth
- Since Creation the Father has called and trained a select few
- The final part of this training is the Millennium and the Second Resurrection
- The extended Kingdom—the Family of God—will continue through Eternity

by no means the end. For beyond lies an eternity of which we know little—yet.

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

We do know that, after the Millennium ‘...*the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God*’ (Revelation 20:3).

This planet will become the centre of all Creation, with God the Himself, our Father, present with us. *Who knows what that future will hold!* Ω

The Kingdom—now and forever ‘...has delivered us from the power of darkness, and has

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

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

Consider the words of the Psalmist: ‘... *Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and Your dominion endures throughout all generations* (Psalm 145:13, Daniel 4:3).

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

Here and Now

‘*Throughout all generations*’ So we need to ask in what manner the Kingdom is ‘here and now’. Jesus made a strange statement: ‘...*if I with the finger of God [ie His power] cast out devils, no*

doubt the kingdom of God is come upon you (Luke 11:20). And ‘... *when he was demanded of the Pharisees, when the kingdom of God should come, he answered them and said, The kingdom of God comes not with observation: Neither shall they say, Lo here! or, lo there! for, behold, the kingdom of God is within you [ie in your midst, here with you, now]* (Luke 17:21). Further: ‘...*if I cast out devils by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God is come unto you [Gk, arrived]*’ (Matthew 12:28). That is, the Kingdom was with them in the form of its King.

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

Soon to Inherit

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

Writes John: ‘...*now are we the sons of God*’ (I John 3:2). And Paul, to the Christians in Rome: ‘...*You are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his*’ (Romans 8:9).

It’s a real transition from *death to life*. It’s our entry into the very Kingdom of God: The Father

translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son’ (Colossians 1:13). That is, there has been a change of kingdoms, from the physical to the spiritual.

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

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

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

New Birth

Jesus and Paul tell us exactly when we will thus inherit. Jesus calls it ‘...*the resurrection to life*’ (John 5:29), while Paul pinpoints the momentous event in time: ‘...*the Lord himself shall descend from heaven cont’d p.6*

Liberty... cont'd from p.2

Testament laws. Jesus encountered a (non-Jewish) Samaritan woman, and discussed true worship with her.

In common with the Jews (and many Christians today) she was tied to ritual in her worship. Jesus disabused her; true worship, he says, is from the heart, of the spirit: '*...God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth*' (John 4:24). It has been described as '*... that where the heart is offered to God, and where we do not depend on external forms for acceptance*'.

As Christians, we don't need, as did Israel, to wear special clothes, or to observe the festivals with branches of trees or necessarily in a single location, or to sacrifice animals. Nor the various rites that were essential to partake in the Temple worship. What identifies a Christian is how we shape our daily life to the image of God as exemplified by Jesus. With the

Psalmist we say from the heart: '*... I deeply love your Law! I think about it all day*' (Psalm 119:97). *and obey, and don't just hear and forget*' (James 1:25).

And Jesus adds a further condition for worship: *truth*. Indeed elsewhere he says: '*...You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free*' (John 8:32). So much of Christian teaching—or the distortions of it—serve to shackle our mind, deprive us of the blessings of our liberty in Christ.

For Christians, the divine Law is not a shackle but a glorious opportunity to voluntarily submit to that Law. Moses describes it: '*...what nation is there so great, that has statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law, which I set before you this day?*' (Deuteronomy 4:8).

And as James, the Lord's brother, writes: '*...you must never stop looking at the perfect law that sets you free. God will bless you in everything you do, if you listen*

Filial Submission

As children of the almighty and loving Father committed Christians seek out His will as recorded in Scripture and joyfully submit to His instructions.

With King David we love His Law and each seeks daily to apply it in daily life. Not from coercion but from loving filial submission.

We grow towards maturity from mere 'babes in Christ'—at our conversion—through the liberty of our daily choices, choices fuelled by our diligent attention to the 'means of grace: to prayer, to study of the Word, to mature instruction by competent pastors and teachers, to frequent interaction with our brethren.

Writes the apostle Paul: '*...the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good*' (Romans 7:12). And, v.14 '*...the law is spiritual*' Ω

A Shift of Time

Time zones can be tricky. Try calling someone in California from London at 7pm. A grumpy, sleepy voice will answer—it is 3am!

North-South, too. In Palestine the sun goes down around six or seven pm the entire year with but a two hour variation over the twenty-four hours, and a very brief twilight. In the UK it can be as much as eighteen hours! '*Are there not twelve hours in the day?*' (John 11:9). It is a localized statement. For Bible students this, unsurprisingly, impacts our understanding of festival observance.

Anciently, all this deeply affected daily life—much more than in our time-piece governed age. Activity for most of the

population began at sunrise, paused at midday for 'breakfast', with the regular evening meal (Gr *deipnon*) about four or five pm. Little but sleep ensued with sundown, when adults and children headed for their bed-roll (eg Luke 11:7).

In this context we must view the life and times of Jesus and the first disciples.

Sabbath, then, began when the sun visibly declined, with an hour or two of daylight remaining.

Consider also the last meal Jesus ate with his disciples, the evening before he died. It was the regular evening meal (*deipnon* - John 13:4), nowhere called Passover (Gk *pascha*), and would likely be begun four-ish. During it Jesus asked his disciples—and us—to remember him and his

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suffering in a simple annual observance using bread (Gk *artos*) and wine, and to wash one another's feet (John 13:14-15, I Corinthians 11:20-24). Ω

MiniStudy

Why Easter Sunday?

Why seek you the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen (Luke 24:5-6)

About two billion professing Christians would class as 'heretic' those believers who do not observe the weekly day of worship, Sunday. One argument for its observance is that Jesus rose from the grave on 'Easter Sunday'. Yet the universal 'Easter' celebration of the resurrection of Jesus is a powerful evidence *against* Sunday observance.

- Everybody 'knows' that Jesus rose from the grave early Sunday morning. It has been passed down the centuries as incontrovertible 'fact'. And on this supposition is based the idea that the Biblical Sabbath observance - the *seventh* day of the week - has been transferred to Sunday [Read our articles *The Day To Remember, Why Do You Observe Sunday?*]
- Apart from a few abortive attempts to lengthen the week, for example, in France to ten days) a seven day week is universally observed, with Saturday as day seven. The Christian Scriptures record this as do secular historical records. Sunday, of course, owes its position as the 'first day' to the fact that Saturday is the last, the seventh, day of the week (Genesis 2:2-3, Exodus 20:10). (In recent years there has been a tendency for printed calendars to place *Sunday* as the 7th day.) .
- However, in first-century Judaea and areas beyond - in the era Jesus lived - Sunday was the first *working* day of the week. Paul intimates this in writing to the Corinthians (*ch* 16:1). Sunday, however, was observed by those religions which deified the sun but was anathema to the Jews for whom it had no religious significance. [*Sabbath*, in the Scriptures, is the only named day of the week - the others had numbers: *first, second etc*]
- Many Bible scholars now question the idea that Jesus died on a Friday and was resurrected on Sunday. The evidence indicates he fulfilled his own prediction that '*...even as Jonah was in the belly of the huge fish three days and three nights, so shall the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights*' (Matthew 12:40). The research conclusion is that he died late afternoon Wednesday and was resurrected late on the Sabbath (*ie* just before sundown) - three days and three nights [Request the article *Three Days and Three Nights* for the evidence]
- Jesus' death coincided with the *Passover* sacrifice, on the Preparation Day for the annual seven-day *Feast of the Passover*. Because the Feast was at a fixed (Hebrew) calendar date (Nisan 15-21) it began on different days of the week. But the weekly Sabbath during the seven days of the Feast had special significance: '*...when you come in to the land which I am giving to you, and have reaped its harvest, and have brought in the sheaf, or the beginning of your harvest, to the priest, then he shall wave the sheaf before Jehovah for your acceptance; on the morrow of the sabbath the priest shall wave it*' (Leviticus 23:10-11). It was the day of the *Wave-Sheaf offering* - always the day following that particular weekly Sabbath and the day Jesus rose from among the dead. *And always the first day of the week*
- The only 'Sundays' in the year associated with Biblical Christianity are this *Wave-Sheaf* Sunday and the linked *Pentecost* Sunday - both of which depend for their place on the calendar on the perpetual continuance of the weekly seventh-day Sabbath (Leviticus 23:v.11 & v.16). They are observed annually, not weekly. Their observance confirms that the seventh-day Sabbath continues as the true Christian observance (*Pentecost* is still a major festival: Acts 2:1, 20:16, I Corinthians 16:8) The *Wave-Sheaf* is the '*firstfruits of the harvest*' (Leviticus 23:10). It was the beginning of the spiritual harvest typified by the seven weeks culminating on the *Feast of Pentecost* on a Sunday fifty days later (Leviticus 23: 15-16). Jesus is the firstfruits: '*...now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept*' (I Corinthians 15:20, 23). . Christians are '*...a kind of firstfruits*' (James 1:18, Revelation 14:4)
- Jesus fulfilled all the Old Testament types. *He* is the *Wave-Sheaf* offering. Having risen from 'the heart of the earth' in the end of that Sabbath, he presented himself before the Father in Heaven the next day, that first-day (Sunday) morning. For that reason he refused to be touched prior to this presentation: '*...Jesus says to [Mary], Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend to my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God*' (John 20:17) Later that day Jesus *invited* the disciples to touch him, having fulfilled this type (Luke 24:39)
- Christians today, to accurately reflect the Bible teachings, continue to observe the weekly seventh-day *Sabbath*, the *Wave-Sheaf* Sunday (linked to the Sabbath and to the *Days of Unleavened Bread*) and the *Pentecost* Sunday - the timing of which is counted from the *Wave-Sheaf* (Leviticus 23:15). The death of Jesus is remembered annually in the *Lord's Supper* - observed '*in the night in which he was betrayed*'. The Saviour's resurrection is commemorated weekly in the observance of the seventh-day Sabbath (when he rose from the tomb), and moment-by-moment as we live out his teachings. The Biblical festivals - outlined in Leviticus 23 - are the only 'holy convocations' and festival days sanctioned by the LORD. All other forms of celebration are mere shadows and human tradition, and reflect a falling away from the Scriptural pattern Ω

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