

new **Horizons**

Vol 18 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

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God says that Israel will exist in the last days. Where are they?

Thanks to the internet there's widespread interest in tracing our ancestors. Most of us grew up with little interest in 'where I'm from'. Our parents were always there, just part of the furniture, and there was gran but that's as far back we go—never mind a century ago, or a millennium. But *we* were there, though but a 'twinkle in the eye'!

The Bible, however, is hot on 'family trees'. There are endless detailed genealogies, and that should give us pause for thought—*why does God think they are important?*

All of mankind is of course one race, the 'human race', as the apostle Paul asserts:

'...[God] has made all nations of men of one blood to dwell on all the face of the earth, ordaining fore-appointed seasons, and boundaries of their dwelling' (Acts 17:26). Each 'nation' has been assigned its own territory suited to it, occupying it at the era appointed by God. (How they manage or mismanage their territory is in their own hands.) It is a constant theme throughout the Bible that the Creator '...rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He will' (Daniel 4:17, 25).

In past times nations were racially undiluted, with little admixture from other races, the identity of each carefully guarded—reflecting the divisions outlined in the Scriptures: *'...These are the three sons of Noah, and the whole earth was overspread from them' (Genesis 9:19). As the consequences of mismanagement*

come home to roost, poverty has driven many thousands to migrate to more prosperous territories, while power and space-hungry governments have fuelled floods of refugees. The more stable governments are now faced with the challenge of dealing with alien religions and cultures.

Spiritual Lineage

God is certainly concerned and very much involved with the rise and fall of nations. The physical, however, is but the stage on which He is working out His master plan—to *'...bring many sons to glory'*. Having revealed Himself and given life-guidance to our first parents and their descendants the Creator sought out those

with His Plan—a plan that enriches our lives through following His precepts here and now, but stretches into eternity. Some six centuries after Noah one man in the midst of idolatry responded to God's invitation—Abraham (in his early life he could have known Noah). This man *'...obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My Laws' (Genesis 26:5),* and God through his seed, Isaac, selected Abraham's offspring to form a model nation—known as *Israel*. Israel was called to perpetrate the spiritual lineage, to keep alive the true faith in the face of universal apostasy.

All the righteous are preserved in the mind of God: *'...a book of remembrance was written before Him for those who feared Jeho-*

In the Tracks of Israel

who were willing to stay with His plan. After sixteen centuries their exercise of free-will led to the death, because of their wickedness (Genesis 6), of all but one family—that of righteous Noah.

And that's the key: *righteousness*. The Eternal God works with individuals and nations who will stick

Nations start from a single pair (or related pairs) and grow over time. They develop, propagate and become distinguished by their own language, culture and beliefs but at times influenced by circumstance to change. They disperse to new territory—which they then defend against invasion (*cf.* Genesis 11:1-8).

The Biblical nation of Israel is an example, having emigrated to Egypt a mere seventy-five persons (Acts 7:14), growing, within four centuries, to perhaps two million on leaving Egypt (Exodus 12:37).

vah, and for those esteeming His name' (Malachi 3:16)—a sampling of those names is recorded for us in Hebrews 11. God preserves records of the righteous—'...the book of the living' (Psalm 69:28)! Israel alone of the nations preserved the records of the faithful, the knowledge of the true God and His laws in their fullness—though the Israelites themselves sank into idolatry. Above all, God chose Israel, the seed of Isaac, and one tribe in Israel (Judah) to host His Anointed—the Messiah, Jesus.

Israel Dispersed

To Abraham's grandson, Jacob—whom God named Israel—firm promises were given (*eg* Genesis 49) and later prophets predicted that both the House of Israel and the House of Judah would unite at the coming of Jesus as world ruler: *'...In those days the house of Judah shall walk with*

the house of Israel, and they shall come together out of the land of the north to the land that I have given for an inheritance unto your fathers' (Jeremiah 3:18). Adds Ezekiel: '... I will make them one nation in the land upon the mountains of Israel; and one king shall be king to them all' (ch 37:22).

Two nations

Notice that the prophets refer to two distinct 'houses'—that is, governments. [see side-bar] The *House of Judah*, following seventy years in exile in Babylon, returned to Palestine and were there until 70AD when again many were slaughtered and the rest exiled by Rome. One hundred and twenty years before Judah's exile the sins of the *House of Israel* caught up with them and they were taken as captives to Assyria, their homeland re-populated by Gentiles from the east.

We know where Judah is—now self-named as Israel, but also widely dispersed in the world. But where are the ten tribes? A few found their way back to Palestine (eg Luke 2:36), but the vast majority dispersed—disappeared. Yet we will find them in existence, as we saw in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, at the time of Christ's return. Clearly, they have been *somewhere* since 720BC!

The contemporary world is evidence that huge populations—through oppression, war, famine, drought, poverty—are on the move. It has been so throughout history. And the historical record tracks the dispersed ten tribes of the House of Israel under various names (they were to lose their original names—Isaiah 65:15)—eg Sacae (derived from Isaac), Massagetae, Khymri. In the time of Jesus the ten tribes, wrote Josephus, '*...are beyond Euphrates and are an immense multitude*'. They trekked north and westwards from the area south of the Caspian Sea and the Zagros mountains of Assyria and Media into Europe and towards the east to India

Abraham's grandson Jacob had twelve sons, each becoming a separate self-governing tribe dwelling in Canaan. Around 1000BC the twelve were one federation—owing allegiance to King David. His son (King Solomon) sinned through idolatry and was succeeded by his son, Rehoboam—who lost support because of his imposition of excessive taxation. He was overthrown by an Ephraimite, Jeroboam, to whom God gave leadership of ten of the tribes—the *House of Israel* (I Kings 14:7). Judah, with Benjamin, formed the *House of Judah*.

and beyond.

Prophesied Prosperity

The prophecies conveyed through the dying Jacob (Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33) are focused on '*...that which will befall you in the last days*' (v.1). That is, the time leading to the end of man's misrule. They imply that Israel will continue to have a place on the world scene into this twenty-first century—for the end is not yet.

Foremost, predicts Jacob, will be the descendants of his son Joseph—Ephraim and Manasseh. These brothers will inherit the material birthright, eventually forming '*...a nation and a company of nations*' (Genesis 48:19), and extracting great wealth from their settled territories (ch 49:22-26).

There can be no doubt that the prophecy is fulfilled by the nations of the United States and the group of nations allied to and descended from the Anglo Saxons—the (now dying) British Commonwealth. Despite the

You are invited to request the following 65-page colour brochure freely provided courtesy of the Global Church of God:
**America and Britain
in Prophecy**

unsigned articles are by the Editor

racial admixture of the past half century these nations project the ethos, the culture of Biblical Israel.

They reached their pinnacle of influence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, but have now gone the way of their forebears, ancient Israel. They inherited the blessings promised to Abraham and passed on through Isaac and Jacob—without earning those blessings.

Prophesied Downfall

For despite their enlightenment they failed to apply the principles that ensure their perpetuity, as said of Abraham: '*...Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws*' (Genesis 26:5). Ancient Israel ignored the principles resulting in their loss of nationhood and their dispersion around the globe.

The predicted end of modern Israel is no less shocking. The modern descendants of the patriarch Jacob have cast aside those laws, abandoned God's weekly Sabbaths, annual holy days and land Sabbaths—and now reap the consequences.

The prophecies predict they will lose the blessings, be plucked up and again dispersed into envious and rapacious enemy nations. [see Leviticus ch 26] Following massive destruction, all the end-time nations descendant of Jacob will be dispersed throughout Europe and various Islamic nations of the Middle East and North Africa. It is the time of '*...Jacob's trouble*' (Jeremiah 30:7).

But, says the prophet '*...he shall be saved out of it*'. For, writes Isaiah: '*...In that day, the Lord shall again set His hand, the second time, to recover the remnant of His people that remains, from Assyria and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Ethiopia, and from Persia, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the coasts of*

cont'd p.4

**Easter Sunday this year is
April 20th. Will you be cele-
brating?**

Easter is perhaps the most pivotal of all the Christian festivals. Fail to observe it and you would not be considered Christian. Wasn't Jesus crucified at that time of year in early Spring? Didn't he hang on the cross for many agonizing hours? Was he not placed in a rock tomb at Easter? And on Easter morning did he not rise from the dead?

That in a nutshell is the "Easter story". On Easter Sunday Christians everywhere don their best attire ("put on their Easter bonnet") and go to places of worship - to mighty cathedrals, to lowly chapels, to churches made of mud, to open spaces. Millions rise before dawn for a sunrise service in honour of the Saviour of mankind. Surely Easter is a festival central to the faith of all Christians.

Yet many Christians do not observe it. *Why?*

These same Christians are as convinced as the others that Jesus died and rose again. That by these acts they have been freely redeemed and given eternal life. That through Jesus they are placed as sons and daughters of the Almighty. *But they do not observe Easter.*

First Observation

You may be surprised to learn that neither did the apostles. Nor any of the first Christians!

In fact it was not for over a century after the resurrection of Jesus

that its observance began to enter the Christian Church. Indeed the very word "Easter" is found nowhere in Scripture except in one gross mistranslation in the King James Bible (Acts 12:4) - corrected in later versions.

Anyway, what on earth do you mean - "Easter"?

Says the *Oxford Companion to the Bible*: "Easter: From *Eostre*, a Saxon goddess, celebrated at the spring equinox". The goddess was also known as *Astarte* and *Ishtar* - the name used in ancient Babylon. Her son was *Tammuz* (called Nimrod in the Scriptures) who died violently. Her "weeping" was deemed to bring about his resurrection in the spring.

This same idolatrous practice crept into the worship of ancient Israel - see Ezekiel 8:14. It later gave rise to the practice of "Lent" - the forty days of partial fasting prior to Easter - by apostate Christianity.

Strange Customs

As the Christian Church abandoned God's revealed precepts it thus began to wear the religious garb of the idolatrous religions that surrounded it.

Ishtar was also worshipped idolatrously as *Venus* and *Isis*, and one of her symbols was the egg. Hence the modern - and ancient - custom of coloured

Why Celebrate Easter?

eggs at Easter. The egg symbolized her fertility. This strange notion also accounts for the "Easter bunny" - rabbits and hares, too, being seen as fertility symbols in ancient idolatry.

Strange, isn't it, how "modern" man can lapse into silly and idolatrous worship, ascribing it to the one and only pure and righteous God, Creator of all things!

Ancient Festival

How then did the first Christians mark this pivotal historical event of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ?

The truth is they continued to observe one of the most ancient of religious festivals the origins of which go back to just after man's creation. From it derives all the sacrificial rituals used by mankind in whatever religious guise.

When our first parents sinned God showed them that they must sacrifice an innocent victim to cover that sin. In ancient Israel it was known as "*Passover and Unleavened Bread*". You can read about it in Exodus 12 and Leviticus 23. This spring festival marks the sacrificial death of the Lamb of God - and his resurrection as the firstfruits of mankind into the Family of God. That mistranslation in Acts 12 served to hide this observance. It should read *pascha* - Passover.

Spring Festivals 2014

Lord's Supper: April 13 Sun evg
Unleavened Bread: April 15-21
Pentecost: June 8

That the first Christians continued this form of worship is verified by both the Scripture record and by secular history. The *Oxford Companion*, for example, admits the late arrival of Easter as a festival on the Christian calendar, mid second century.

After the death of the apostles the Church caved in to the pressures of the surrounding pagan society. To avoid persecution and to achieve political clout - and more converts - the religious practices of the day were grafted on to Christianity.

Does It Matter?

God reveals Himself as “Jealous”. So jealous for how He wishes to be worshipped that the “people of God” - the nation of Israel - were evicted by God from the land of promise for embracing strange worship. Read, for example, the fierce condemnation of Israel for “Easter sun-rise services”! (Ezekiel 8:16).

A further example is Israel’s failure to worship God on the *Sabbath* -the seventh day of the week (Ezekiel 20). Another is the abandonment of the annual *Festival of Tabernacles* - the notorious and oft-mentioned sin of King Jeroboam (I Kings 12:32-33). Read, too, the account in Jeremiah 10:1-5 of God’s condemnation of what looks suspiciously similar to a Christmas tree! Here God warns Israel: “...Learn not the way of the heathen [ie idolatrous worship]...for the customs of the people are vain”. Israel “forsook the Lord and served Baal and Ashtaroth [ie the goddess Easter]” (Judges 2:11-13).

For a survey of the true worship revealed in the Scriptures you are invited to request the titles

God's Holy Days
The Faith Once Delivered

Nowhere in the writings of the Old or the New Testament Scriptures did Jesus Christ authorize a change to the worship prescribed for mankind. Clearly, the religious worship surrounding Easter is in direct conflict with that prescribed by God

For God, it *does* matter how we worship. He remains “jealous”, protective. In no way does this compromise His deep and enduring love for mankind. But to add practices from the depraved religions concocted by the perverted imaginations of devil-inspired humans is an affront to the Creator. Such practices cloud God’s beautiful plan for mankind revealed in His holy days.

Too many Christians ask: “How did the heathen worship their gods? Even so will I do likewise”. And what is God’s response? “...You shall not do so to the Lord your God...What things soever I command you, observe to do it: you shall not add thereto, nor diminish from it” (Deuteronomy 12:29-32).

Judgment

What will you do when, facing Jesus Christ, you plead for admission to the Kingdom? You may say, Didn’t I religiously attend worship every Easter - and Christmas and Sunday - from childhood? Didn’t I dress up and roll eggs and for years diligently worship you at our annual Easter sunrise service? Didn’t I give up smoking for Lent? And didn’t I

teach my children that the Saviour was honoured through the Easter bunny and by rolling eggs?

His reply may well be, “...In vain [uselessly] did you worship me, teaching for doctrines the traditions of men” (Matthew 15:9).

Simply because you call Jesus “Lord” is not enough. You must “...do the will of my Father which is in heaven”. Otherwise Jesus Christ may say to you in that day: “...Not everyone who says to Me, Lord! Lord! shall enter the kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in Heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, Lord! Lord! Did we not prophesy in Your name, and through Your name throw out demons, and through Your name do many wonderful works? And then I will say to them I never knew you! Depart from Me, those working lawlessness” (Matthew 7:21-27).

To go through life thinking you were diligently serving God and then to at last find out He hadn’t noticed you is an awesome thought!

Is that what you want? Ω

Tracks of Israel...cont’d
the sea’ (ch 11:11).

Exit Route

This predicted downfall of the modern nations of Israel is not, however, fixed in stone. There is an exit: ‘...if the wicked will turn from all his sins that he has committed, and keep all my statutes, and do that which is lawful and right, he shall surely live, he shall not die’ (Ezekiel 18:21).

It applies to you as an individual, and it applies to nations. *We can change.* Ω

We are all influenced by the world we daily inhabit. Does it matter what company we keep?

Steven J. Kieler

A flood of events is and has been rocking the world for many years. All the major national and international problems, scandals, and even the ravaging fires and floods and earthquakes are certainly sobering. And it is frightening to consider the multitude of local news reports of local crime and violence that seem to be hitting closer and closer to home..

Those statistics alone are horrifying enough, but an all too often common thread in the stories is what really caught my eye.

This phenomenon appears on the scene when a person is accused of wrongdoing and many leap to proclaim his or her defense as character witnesses. Noticeable in most of the reports and interviews were friends, relatives, neighbors, or companions who were there to relate how the accused was a nice, quiet person as they began to defend the reputation or honor of the accused. Sometimes the interviewees seemed to be just groupie idol worshipers but most appeared to be acquainted with the accused to some degree.

“Why, he was such a nice boy, quiet, friendly, helpful, never got into any trouble; he would never do such a thing”, they might say. Let us presume that the character witnesses are correct, that he was a “good” young man. This leaves us with the other alternative that he was a product of his environment, a ‘good boy gone bad’. He had, as they like to say today: “made a poor choice”. Syndicated columnist Charlie Reese said it well: *“Those kids... are products of the American culture”*.

A Lesson from Nature

How much does our environment influence our lives? The Psalmist said: *“...your children (shall be) like olive plants round about your ta-*

ble” (Psalm 128:3) Plants thrive (or wilt) depending on the conditions of the soil, the weather, the nutrients; the things a plant is fed determines the health and what a plant produces. Some even claim that if you talk to your plants or play certain music to them they will thrive.

Nevertheless, it is as though we as parents or as a society have planted our children and then, by analogy, either over or under-fed, over or under-watered or ‘fertilized’. Any one of those excesses can affect their moral “DNA”.

When they leave home, however, they may trip on a stumbling block and fall into infertile or toxic ground or another bad environment. Jeremiah explains it this way. *“O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walks to direct his steps”* (Jeremiah 10:23).

Hopefully, we have been given a good instruction code in our moral “DNA” that will direct us to reach up for a limb when we are in the mire, or gasp for a breath of good air before we sink beneath the waves. But we can never be fully or perfectly prepared to walk safely on our own.

Solomon shared his insight into this matter with us in Ecclesiastes 9:11, *“I returned, and saw under the sun, that the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, neither yet bread to the wise, nor yet riches to men of understanding, nor yet favor to men of skill; but time and chance happens to them all”*.

I think Solomon is saying that no matter how well trained or strong

Environmental Influences

you are, eventually you will be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Be Hopeful

Mud holes get slipperier and deeper the more you stir them up, and man has had 6,000 years of getting stuck in the same old rut; so life is really a challenge today, especially for the young. Don't lose hope because, as the hymn says, “He is able to deliver you.” And in Proverbs 16:9 we see that *“A man's heart devises his way: but the LORD directs his steps”*.

Do you suppose that presumes we must be listening to His directions for that to be effectual? A good navigator keeps his eye and ear upon and open to his charts, the radio, the lookout, and the radar. Just as a ship must have lifeboats we must also rely on a lifeline to God for those occasions when situations become out of control, become too great for us.

Still, we must use our own common sense for our own protection. There are many admonitions to watch out that we are not fooled. Jesus Himself said: *“...Take heed that ye be not deceived: ...”* (Luke 21:8).

Be aware of what is going on around us at all times. Unfortunately we must have a little ‘street smarts’ sometimes, just don't get caught up in the ways of this world. Keep your eyes open but know this, that even with your eyes open you can't see without light. A miner does not go into the mine without a light and a minor, or anyone else for that matter, should not go into the world without one either. And here is the light you need. *“Your word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path.”* (Psalm 119:105).

Don't let it be said of you: *‘what a nice person, I guess he just made a bad choice hanging around with that crowd’*. Ω

*Request the articles:
Reap a Destiny
What Do You Mean—’Repent’?*

THE EMPTY TOMB

Jesus Christ rose from the dead. Here's undeniable proof!

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 defences set to forestall this very act. Thus were doubts smoothed away and guilty

consciences 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 of them were convinced. So how can we account for the dramatic turnaround in attitude evoked by what they saw inside the dim 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 had witnessed when Lazarus had stumbled from the tomb bound hand and foot in his grave clothes (John 11). 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

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

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 fabric 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 long "bandage" and with many pounds of blended spices. The head was separately encased, leaving visible the face. (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' hu-

man flesh had been transformed as spirit - and had *passed through* the wraps as easily as he later passed through the huge stone at the entrance of the tomb, and 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 remains - alive!*

Challenge

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

The resurrection was the central teaching of the New Testament church of God, and upon it is based the enduring religion of Christ.

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 -

STUDY THE WORD
Be sure to enroll for our free 32-lesson Study Course. It's a key to what is for many a 'Book of Mystery'

as to those men in the cold sepulchre some twenty 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.

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

Since God raised Jesus Christ from cold death and transformed him from flesh to spirit - then you must face what that means for you! Since 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—and everyone else—*accountable!* **Ω**

'...as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the huge fish, so the Son of Man shall be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth'

A confusing saying of Jesus, given that Friday to Sunday fails to fulfill this 'sign'! All is explained in the article

Three Days and Three Nights
Available free on request, or to read on our web-site

Request the free article:
Tabernacles: *humanity in the flesh*
Passover—a Double Celebration

Common or Unclean? Kosher, halal, common. Does it matter?

Over two billion of us—one in three—do not eat pork in any form—an animal called, in the Christian Scriptures, ‘unclean’ [Gk *akathartos*]. Those of the *Islamic* faith are forbidden pork, blood and carrion, and have strict rules as to what is lawful (*halal*), including how animals are killed for food.

In *Judaism* there is an extended list of prohibited land and sea foods, including pork. [They are listed in Leviticus *ch* 11, Deuteronomy *ch* 14.]

Most of the over a billion of the *Hindu* faith do not eat meat of any kind, nor do most *Buddhists*.

Bible Believers

Christians, for the most part and perhaps surprisingly—given their focus on the Bible—will eat almost anything. Should we? Are the laws of ‘uncleanness’ obsolete?

Recall the admonition of Jude that we should ‘...earnestly contend for the faith once for all delivered to the saints’ (v.3). That is (in an echo of God’s instruction to Israel: ‘...All the things I command you, be careful to do it. You shall not add to it, nor take away from it’ - Deuteronomy 12:32) the practicalities of the faith are underpinned by God’s Word and not by human traditions.

Ancient Practice

The distinction between clean and unclean long pre-dated Moses and was known to Noah (Genesis 7:2, 6:21). Only the clean animals were acceptable for sacrifice to God, and this was known from the beginning of human existence: ‘...Abel also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat of it. And Jehovah had respect to Abel and to his offering, (Genesis 4:4).

Until the sin of our first parents their metabolism was suited to a vegetarian diet (Genesis 1:29). In their first—sinless—state they were in an intimate unhindered relationship with God. Then death entered, affecting metabolism—of man and animal (Romans 5:12).

Following their sin access to God was through the sacrifice of clean beasts (Genesis 4:4). This involved the participation of the offerer by eating the flesh. It was *revealed* which creatures were suitable—‘clean’.

The pig was considered unclean by various ancient peoples, notably among the Egyptians and Israel.

New Testament Guidance

The apostle Paul upheld the food laws, explaining that certain foods are ‘...sanctified [set apart] by the word of God and prayer’ (I Timothy 4:3-5). That Word details which animals are ‘clean’ in Leviticus 11. (God, note—v.3—created poisonous plants—but they are not for the purpose of ‘food’! It is well-known that there can be health dangers in ingesting swine or sea food.)

The divine laws were enacted ‘...for our good always’ (Deuteronomy 6:24), and although *why* may sometimes be obscure yet we gladly follow them—for Christians are a holy nation: ‘...you are a chosen race, a priesthood of kingly lineage, a holy nation, a people belonging specially

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Be sure to take a look at

to God’ (I Peter 2:9) - as was ancient Israel: ‘...you shall make a difference between clean animals and unclean.... And you shall be holy to Me. For I, Jehovah, am holy, and have severed you from the nations, so that you should be Mine’. (Leviticus 20:25-26).

Grace versus Works

When we respond to the Father’s call we wholeheartedly turn to His Word as our guide to this holy living—and not least His guidance on the ‘unclean’, an aspect of holiness. But our salvation, of course, does not depend on our refusing to eat pork or crab or camel!

Paul again: ‘...All things are lawful to me, but not all things profit. All things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any. Meats for the belly and the belly for meats, but God shall destroy both it and them’ (I Corinthians 6:12-13). And adds: ‘...though our outward man [the body] perishes, yet the inward man [the spirit] is being renewed day by day’.

He encourages Christians not to be focused on foods at the expense of the more important principles of the faith: ‘...it is good for the heart to be established with grace [Gk *charis*], not with foods [Gk *broma*]’ Hebrews 13:9). An example is the Christian who pores over the menu searching for particles of ‘unclean’ products in his otherwise ‘clean’ order—or ‘leaven’, during the festival.

Our salvation does not depend on our works (Ephesians 2:8-9) but are indeed ‘...For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to good works, which God has before ordained [prepared] that we should walk in them’ (v.10). Such ‘works’ are detailed in the Scriptures, and define holiness. Ω

This topic is explored in our article:
Are Some Foods Unfit to Eat?

MiniStudy**The 'Lord's Supper'/Passover**

'...this do in remembrance of Me (I Corinthians 11:24)

Christians are united in the desire, in some manner, to remember the death of Jesus. Indeed he himself asked us to remember his death, and together with his resurrection such a remembrance is at the heart of the Christian faith. Yet there is much confusion surrounding this memorial.

- The remembrance is known by a variety of names: Lord's Supper, Communion, Passover, the Mass, Eucharist, Memorial. It is, too, varied in its timing. Some observe it 'anytime', others daily or weekly or quarterly
- The apostle Paul places his authoritative stamp on an *annual* observance. He states the time of the observance: *'...the Lord Jesus in the night in which He was betrayed took bread'* (I Corinthians 11:23). It is a perpetual observance for all Christians until he returns in person in glory
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- For Christians, the Memorial is a solemn remembrance of the suffering and death of Jesus as the only sacrifice for our sin, and our example of holy living. *'This do in remembrance of Me'*, Jesus said when introducing the observance to his apostles. Paul adds: *'...as often as you may eat this bread, and drink this cup, you solemnly proclaim [announce publicly] the death of the Lord, until he shall come'* (v.26)
- The observance is an annual renewal and confirmation of the agreement (covenant, compact) we made at our baptism. As such it is observed only by those who have been 'born anew' through repentance and baptism, those in whom dwells the Spirit of God (*cp* Hebrews 10:29)
- As for any memorial service, the Lord's Supper is a solemn observance. The Corinthian brethren had turned it into a raucous drunken 'party', and Paul had to correct their behaviour (vv.20-22). It was not a meal - for they ought to satisfy their appetite at home. This should be a solemn occasion, he tells them (vv.27-29): *'whoever should eat this bread, or drink the cup of the Lord, unworthily, that one will be guilty of the body and of the blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of the bread, and let him drink of the cup; for he eating and drinking unworthily eats and drinks judgment to himself, not discerning the body of the Lord'*
- We may indeed be 'unworthy' to eat at the same table as Jesus. But this - 'unworthily' - refers to the manner in which we approach the service. With reverence, in other words, with due regard to its meaning. It's a personal responsibility to *'examine ourselves'*, to discern our attitude to the awesome sacrifice of our Saviour. A careless observance of this solemnity is reflected in our bodily health, for the Lord will chasten us in this life (Hebrews 12:6). In Corinth, the brethren were guilty of 'respect of persons', the affluent ignoring those who had little. They *'despised the assembly of God'* (v.22) - the Body of the Lord
- There are, then, the elements of bread (Gk *artos*) and 'the cup' (the content is not specified). As we partake of the material, by faith we absorb the endless spiritual benefits of his sacrifice (*see* John 6:33-40). To this Jesus himself had added a further element. He *'...put water into the basin and began to wash the feet of the disciples'* (John 13:5). It was an expression of the respect and duty of care all of us have to one another (Galatians 6:2, 10). Jesus added: *'...you also ought to wash the feet of one another. For I gave you an example, that as I did to you, you also should do'* (vv.14-15). It is still, today, an integral symbolic part of this annual service
- This 'last supper' of Jesus and the disciples took place on *'the night in which he was betrayed'* by Judas Iscariot, the evening prior to his death on the stake. John tells us it was *'...before the feast of the Passover'* (John 13:1), the *'...preparation of the Passover'* (*ch* 19:14). 'Passover' refers to the seven-day *Feast of Unleavened Bread* (Ezekiel 45:21), which began the next evening - a festival observed by even the Gentile Christians in the early church (I Corinthians 5:1-8), and by brethren of the church of God to this day
- Jesus is *'...the Lamb of God, taking away the sin of the world'* (John 1:29). He is *'...our Passover, sacrificed for us'* (I Corinthians 5:7). The night and day following the supper he was cruelly mistreated by the religious (Sanhedrin) and secular (Roman) authorities (Acts 2:23). They impaled Jesus on a wooden stake and he died - sacrificed by a Roman spear (John 19:34)- at the time of the evening sacrifice, which, on that day (Nisan 14 on their calendar) was the sacrifice of the Passover lamb. In Jesus was fulfilled all the sacrificial types of the Old Covenant
- The *Unleavened Bread* festival is the annual remembrance of our essential need to be spiritually nourished by the 'flesh' of Jesus. That is, the absorption into our daily life of all those principles of Godly behaviour as exemplified by his life in the flesh. This is symbolized—and reinforced in us—as we daily, for these seven days, eat unleavened bread . Ω

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