

new **Horizons**

Vol 19 No 3

May/June 2015

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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CGOM

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

With around two thousand Christian denominations vying for your attention, it's easy to miss the important issues of life and religion. It's our hope that through *New Horizons* our readers will come to understand the true meaning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

The Gospel was proclaimed by Jesus and by His apostles in the clearest of terms - and recorded for us in the Scriptures. Over the centuries that truth has been buried, dug up, buried again. Our desire is to restore the simple apostolic message. We hope you will be excited by what the Scriptures reveal about life, and the horizons beyond

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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

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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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new Horizons

Issue No 111

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A reader wonders if the Bible's festivals or holy days are not obsolete because largely fulfilled by events.

Our reader cites, for example, the crucifixion of Christ: He came, he died—so there's no longer a need for a real time memorial (Passover) of the event: '*...Christ our Passover is sacrificed for us*' (1 Corinthians 5:7). Any symbolic meaning, goes the argument, has now therefore been fulfilled. And so for the other festivals.

Our recent 2014 commemoration of the Great War, as do the annual Remembrance Days, demonstrate the need for such memorials—even in the 'modern' world. Christians are no different—equally forgetful!

The Form

It's important, at this point, to note that while the divine festivals may provide the *form* or *appearance* of the Biblical faith—yet, while important, they are *not* its real substance.

In the context of boosting the young Timothy's oversight of the church he pastored, the apostle Paul warns him about teachers who resist the truth and who settle for the externals of the faith. They are men '*...having a form of godliness, but denying the power of it; even turn away from these*' (1 Timothy 3:5). [The apostle also has in mind society in general—v.1]

At the heart of the true faith are the teachings of Jesus on personal character and the transformation from our 'natural man' to the 'new creation' in Christ: '*...if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new!*' (II Corinthians 5:17). And, '*...in Christ Jesus neither circumcision has any strength*

nor uncircumcision, but a new creation' (Galatians 6:15).

This latter theme was taken up by the Jerusalem conference (Acts 15). Some Christians present claimed that circumcision was necessary for salvation—a misunderstanding widely held in Judaism at the time.

It was vital that the principle of personal responsibility—liberty—be established. The dissenters at the conference had not yet grasped this essential ingredient.

Circumcision is a 'yoke' - it is coercive, imposed (by parent on child), a form of bondage or slavery (Galatians 2:4)—for you must be circumcised if you were to be part of the commonwealth of Israel. The uncircumcised were excluded from corporate worship in the Temple. Said Peter: '*...why do you test God by putting a yoke on the neck of the*

Keep My Feasts

disciples which neither our fathers nor we had strength to bear?' (v.10). Clearly this 'yoke' refers to that one aspect of the Law of Moses which is the rite of circumcision.

It was nothing to do with God's festivals, which were joyous occasions to which Jews flocked from around the world—as at Pentecost (Acts 2). Jude warns of false teachers who infiltrate the church festivals as '*...spots in your feasts of charity [Gk. agape], when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear*' (v.12). The first Christians continued in the practices associated with the Bible holy days: '*...Go eat the fat, and drink of the sweet, and send portions to him for whom nothing is prepared. For this day is holy to our Lord. And do not be grieved, for the joy of Jehovah is your fortress*' (Nehemiah 8:10).

They are times of great joy, so why class them as a 'yoke of bondage'!

What of the New Testament church festivals?

Apostolic Christians

Part of the answer to our query is that the New Testament records that the church continued the observance of the holy days. The Corinthian Christians, even as Paul wrote to them, were observing the 'Old Testament' festival of *Unleavened Bread*. He wrote: '*...purge out the old leaven so that you may be a new lump, even as you are unleavened. For also Christ our Passover was sacrificed for us. So let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with leaven of malice and of evil, but with unleavened bread of sincerity and truth*' (1 Corinthians 5:7-8).

Paul (Acts 20:16, 1 Corinthians 16:8) is also recorded as keen to be in Jerusalem for *Pentecost*, another Biblical festival and holy day—widely observed in Christianity to this day. It has ongoing significance for day-to-day Christian living. *Passover* and *Unleavened bread* (Acts 12:4) together with *Atonement* (Acts 27:9) continue to be marked by the early church.

Paul, incidentally, stated (in agreement with Jesus—Matthew 5:17-18—that he '*...believed all things written in the Law and in the prophets*' (Acts 24:14), and that '*...he hadn't offended against the Law of the Jews*' (25:8). He was never abused by the hostile Jews for his submission to the written Law. If he were teaching contrary to the Law he would have been stoned!

In combatting false teachers in the Colossian church Paul encourages the brethren '*...do not let anyone judge you in eating, or in drinking,*

or in part of a feast, or of a new moon, or of Sabbaths' (ch 2:16). The church there was beset by teachers requiring abstention from 'self-imposed worship and humility' (vv.21-23).

Future Observance

Looking ahead, the Bible states that the festivals will also be observed after Jesus returns, during the millennium. The *Festival of Tabernacles* will, the LORD says through His prophet, be observed by everyone: ... '...everyone who is left from all the nations which came up against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, Jehovah of Hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles' (Zechariah 14:16). This proclamation is when '...His feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives' (v.4).

So, too, will the weekly *Sabbath* continue to be kept: '...It shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, says the LORD' (Isaiah 66:23).

The Bible calendar on which the festive dates are placed will then continue to be used (Ezekiel 45). The *Unleavened Bread* festival is continued (v.21).

This prophet also mentions *Tabernacles* (v.25) at that time. *Verse 17* is a useful summary which sounds inclusive: '...it shall be the prince's part to give burnt offerings, and meat offerings, and drink offerings, in the feasts, and in the new moons, and in the sabbaths, in all solemnities of the house of Israel'.

In sum, all seven festival days derived from the Old Testament Scriptures have on-going significance for Christians:

- *Unleavened Bread* focuses on personal spiritual development (two holy days)
- *Pentecost* is about empowerment by God's Spirit
- *Trumpets* heralds the coming return of Jesus
- *Atonement* looks forward to the

Lord's Supper/Unleavened Bread

There is a distinction to be noted between the Passover and the Lord's Supper.

The *Passover* is a joyous celebration in Judaism of the liberation of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt when each family sacrificed a lamb. Its observance ceased when the Temple was destroyed in 70AD, and is superseded in Judaism by the *seder*, popularly known as 'the Passover'.

Unleavened Bread is a seven-day festival (called 'Passover' in Luke 22:1, Ezekiel 45:21) at which, in Israel, the Passover sacrificial lamb was eaten on the first evening of the festival before midnight—having been slain that afternoon, the time coinciding with the death of Jesus on the cross (the 'ninth hour' - from 3pm).

Lord's Supper

Jesus, the 'lamb of God' (John 1:29), anticipating his fulfilment (next day) of the Passover sacrifice (I Corinthians 5:7) and the coming demise of Temple worship, on the evening before he was crucified introduced to the church what is variously named *Lord's Supper*, *Communion* etc (John 13). As with memorials in general it is observed annually '...in the night in which he was betrayed' (I Corinthians 11:23).

The *Lord's Supper* is a simple service of remembrance using the readily available emblems of bread and wine—and a bowl of water and towel

(John 13)! This service is held the evening before the beginning of the days of the Biblical festival of *Unleavened Bread*. (as Nisan 13 ends.) It is, in contrast to the Passover *seder*, a solemn remembrance by which '...you solemnly proclaim the death of the Lord until he shall come' (I Corinthians 11:25-26). That is, it ceases to be observed when Jesus returns.

The *Lord's Supper* is identified with what many Christians call 'the Christian Passover', and coincides in time—the beginning of Nisan 14 on the Hebrew calendar.

Unleavened Bread

Unleavened Bread is a seven day festival beginning the next evening. Ezekiel notes that it will be observed during the millennium (ch 45:21). The first and the last day are days for worship and fellowship - annual sabbaths or holy days. The evening of the first holy day of the festival of *Unleavened Bread* is traditionally a time for fellowship and a festive meal with family and like-minded brethren. It is a 'night to be remembered'. During the seven days no leavened ('raised, yeasted') bread is eaten. Leaven is symbolic of false teaching, hypocrisy etc. The apostle Paul commends the Corinthian church on its observance there of this festival (I Corinthians 5).

[Bible days begin at sundown. The *Lord's Supper* is held at sundown on Nisan 13, *Unleavened Bread* begins at sundown Nisan 14.]

redemption of all mankind

- *Tabernacles* anticipates the 1000-yr reign of Messiah on earth and the general resurrection
- *The Eighth Day* (following *Tabernacles*) looks to eternity

The holy days are joyful occasion (though *Atonement* is a solemn observance). Observing them is a helpful focus, re-enforcing their symbolism. As long

You may find the following titles of further interest:

**God's Holy Days
Tabernacles...mankind
in the flesh
Why Observe Sunday?**

as we are 'in the flesh' we tend to neglect their spiritual message unless we act by observing them. But above all, it is how God has designed His worship calendar for His children to observe! Christianity has burdened itself with a range of festivals—Easter, Christmas, Saints Days, All Hallows etc—which draw on non-Biblical sources and serve to obscure the divine plan and confuse the believer.

The Psalmist notes: '...I have hidden Your Word in my heart, that I might not sin against You' (Psalm 119:11). James, the brother of Jesus adds; '... become doers of the Word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves' (ch 1:22). Ω

When you die—will you go to ‘hell’? Should you fear it?

It’s a concept not much brooded on in our secular society. Certainly, if you go to the average Christian funeral service you’re not likely to hear the officiating minister tell us that the loved one is ‘roasting in hell’. But it does form a worrying thought for many—Christian, non-Christian, secular. And it is burned into the theology of most religions. Let’s examine ‘hell’ from the Christian Bible’s view-point.

In the Scriptures we are presented with four words for *hell*: *sheol* (Hebrew), *hades* (Greek), *ge’henna* and *tartaros* (Greek). It is important for understanding that we note the differences.

In brief, *sheol* (Heb) refers simply to the grave, as does *hades* (Gk), while *ge’henna* is what most think of as a ‘burning fiery place where the wicked go’. *Tartaros*, used only once in Scripture, refers to fallen angelic beings. First we will examine what happens to man when we die.

When We Die

We die, then we are buried or cremated—but then what? The vast majority of mankind assumes that life persists beyond death, that abiding in us is an ‘immortal soul’ which passes on to some state of ever-living existence. So we may return in another form (Hindu belief) or, as in Christianity or Islam, go on to ‘heaven’—or, if wicked, to ‘hell’. It is an almost universal belief, but it is a distortion of the Biblical teaching on the nature of man and his destiny beyond the grave.

Mankind, says God’s revelation through the apostle Paul, is ‘...of the earth, earthy’, (I Corinthians 15:47-49)—echoing the revelation given to Adam: ‘...God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul’ (Genesis 2:7). And (obvious to all!), our ‘earthy’ part dies and decays.

Made from earth’s elements, how-

ever, we are also animated by the ‘breath of life’ from God (the ‘spirit in man’)—and made in God’s image (*ch* 1:26-27).

The Grave

The tradition of burial is widespread, the most common means of disposal of human remains throughout time. In the Hebrew texts the word for grave is *sheol* (*hades* in Greek)—often translated (KJV) as *hell*. It is where people go to ‘sleep with the fathers’, a place of silence, of inactivity: ‘... *there is no work, or planning, or knowledge, or wisdom, in Sheol, there where you go*’ (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

It’s a place where ‘...*the dead [in sheol] do not praise Jehovah, nor do any who go down into silence*’ - Psalm 115:17. And ‘...*[man’s] breath [Heb. ruach—spirit] will go out, he returns to the earth; his thoughts perish in that day*’ (146:4).

Matthew records that ‘...*Jesus cried again with a loud voice, and yielded up his spirit*’ (Matthew 27:50). Remarkably, we find that he, too, was then, for three days and three nights, in ‘hell’—*hades*: ‘...*[David] spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul [psuche] was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption*’ (Acts 2:31, Psalm 16:10).

In other words, our human spirit is inert, inactive when in isolation from the physical body. In Bible-speak it is *asleep*. The body without the human spirit is dead and will decay to ‘dust’, but when united with it becomes ‘...*a living soul [Heb. nephesh]*’ (Genesis 2:7).

Made Alive

But they will be re-united, body and spirit, raised from among the dead: ‘...*O God, who is like You, who has*

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

Hell...can you avoid it?

shown me great and evil distresses. You will turn me; You will make me live; and You will bring me up from the depths of the earth’ (Psalm 71:20). And, ‘...*You will not leave My soul in Sheol*’ -16:10).

[‘Soul’ (Gk. *psuche*, Heb *nephesh*) is our life as functioning human beings, animated by the human spirit.

The soul dies (Ezekiel 18:4,20; Matthew 10:28)]

In sum, the human spirit departs the body at death and ‘...*shall re-*

turn to God who gave it’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7). The assumption, then, is that there’s a secure spiritual ‘vault’ (called *sheol*—translated ‘hell’ in many Bibles) where all human spirits are retained in God’s care until their resurrection when Jesus Christ ‘calls’ them to either a spirit or a physical body (John 5:28). Remember, they have no consciousness, so are *not* praising God in Heaven (Psalm 115:17).

All, then, who die are parted from their God-given human spirit and are at rest until resurrected—R.I.P. Both the ‘good’ and the ‘wicked’ share the same fate. They all ‘rest in peace’. So what of the concept of a ‘fiery hell’ where the wicked are tormented forever?

A Fiery Hell

Such a condition will exist! But be ready for a surprise. It has *never*, to date, existed. Yet Jesus speaks quite clearly of ‘...*the fire of hell*’ (Matthew 5:22 *etc*), and gives some dire warnings for transgressors. But it is widely misunderstood.

As we have seen, the ‘soul’ decays to its elements, and following death the human spirit is ‘asleep’, inert. No matter how wicked your life may have been—when you die you will not be facing the ‘devil’s pitchfork’, or being roasted and tormented for ever.

Symbolism

The ‘hell’ referred to (Gk *ge’henna*) draws its symbolism from the Valley of Hinnom—a literal valley just south-east of Jerusalem—a very real place, and Jesus may have been looking into it as he spoke!

This valley was the municipal rubbish dump for the city. Waste was incinerated there, along with the dead bodies of animals and executed criminals. The prophet Isaiah refers to it: ‘...they shall go out and see the dead bodies of the men who have rebelled against Me; for their worm shall not die, nor shall their fire be put out; and they shall be an object of disgust to all flesh’ (ch 66:24).

Those worms, by the way, are the maggots which devoured unburned rotting flesh and vegetation. They didn’t ‘die’ but continually reproduced. The fires were ‘unquenched’ because they burned only as long as there was fuel.

So—a very real place, and symbolic of the future disposal of those who will in the end spurn God’s offer of salvation through Jesus the Christ: ‘...you shall tread under the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day which I am preparing, says Jehovah of Hosts’ (Malachi 4:3).

And doubtless some may end up there!

Divine Plan

It is almost universally believed that God delights in casting into hell, into this ‘Lake of Fire’, those who oppose Him, where they will throughout an eternity be tormented and in agony. That is a gross misunderstanding of the purpose for which He has created mankind.

Whatever His awesome plans for eternity, God’s focus on this planet at this time is to ‘prepare a people for Himself’. He is not concerned to provide a sweet resting place, an eternity of bliss, for those who do what He says. His focus is to select a family of like-minded (*His* mind!)

men and women who have been prepared by Him throughout this physical life—to reign with Him for ever.

By the end of this present earthly phase of God’s plan everyone who has ever lived will have been presented with the opportunity to become part of the Plan. It is a free and open choice, freely entered into. Surely few will reject!

But what if they do?

Fate of the Wicked

At the end of history every human being who has lived will have been confronted with the Gospel, with the opportunity to become a member of the divine Family—to participate in the divine plan for eternity. All who have become children of the Father will have acquired a Spirit body by virtue of God’s indwelling holy Spirit.

Our planet is then about to be consumed in flames: ‘...*But the heavens and the earth now, having been stored up by the same Word, are being kept for fire to a day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men*’ (II Peter 3:7).

‘...the sea gave up the dead in it. And death and hell gave up the dead in

them. And they were each judged according to their works. And death and hell [*Gk hades*] were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death. And if anyone was not found having been written in the Book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire’ (Revelation 20:13-15).

For these it means *death*—not eternal life in hell! Said Jesus: ‘...*God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that everyone believing into Him should not perish [be destroyed], but have everlasting life*’ (John 3:16). *Not death, but life.*

Our Saviour adds: ‘...*fear Him being able to destroy both soul and body in Hell [Gk.ge’henna]*’.

Because the unrepentant are in the end ‘...*cast into the Lake of Fire*’ doesn’t mean they were at that moment still alive! Speaking of those whose growth in Christ is stunted Jesus, comparing them to branches of a vine, says they are *cut off and dried up*—ie, by analogy, killed. No longer fit for purpose they are *then* burned (John 15:6, Malachi 4:3).

A further example is the fate of Ananias and his wife, who ‘...*lied to God*’. They fell down dead and then their bodies were disposed of. (Acts 5:1-11).

The Spirit Kingdom

Hell (Gk *ge’henna*) is the final cleansing of Earth of all that ‘...*comes short of the glory of God*’. Every human being will have by that time been given sufficient opportunity to become part of the immortal Spirit Kingdom of God. A period of physical life during which they will be presented with the same Gospel now open to mankind.

‘I call Heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. Therefore, choose life, that you may live’ (Deuteronomy 30:19). Ω

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**Be sure to take a look at
www.cgom.org**

Governments focus on ‘the economy’ as the measure of national prosperity. Are they right?

Famously, the battle cry for an American election was ‘*It’s the economy, stupid*’. It won the vote. And, of course, the ‘pound in your pocket’ is a high priority for most. Yet in the West, at least, we enjoy greater material prosperity than previous generations. Earth has yielded vast resources that have more than compensated for our burgeoning population growth, while ingenuity has figured how to increase productivity. We all benefit materially.

Much of our ‘prosperity’ derives from reliance on the usurious—and now notorious—banking industry. In Britain, for example, the private debt burden is estimated at well over a *trillion* pounds. That’s £1,000,000,000,000 \$1.8 trillion! The US national debt is officially *four trillion* dollars but the true figure has been estimated at five times that. And wars don’t help.

National debt can be absorbed—for a time. But it will in the end catch up with us, and financial experts are already screaming warnings. Personal debt bites more quickly. Overspend and the bankruptcy court with all its painful consequences looms. Your home may be re-possessed and you are out on the street. Your family and business ruined. Friendships severed.

Who’s To Blame?

To seek improved quality of life is praiseworthy and to be considered by all. And indeed given human ingenuity and the products of nature’s bounty it is disgraceful if such improvement stalls. Government—ignoring personal responsibility—seeks to re-distribute national income, to grab from the productive to help, often, the feckless and thus provoking tax-dodging, the black economy and other illegality.

We can pin blame for excessive national debt, at least in part—and es-

pecially but not exclusively in ‘third world’ nations—on corruption and profligacy at the top of government and business. Failed technology drains the national coffers—for example Government computer systems. The arms industry absorbs vast sums. Unnecessary bureaucracy, too, with multiple thousands of useless jobs financed from the public (taxpayers) purse. And then there’s the huge ‘welfare’ drain. No wonder national debt soars!

What of personal debt? The Christmas season gives a clue, for that’s when most debt accumulates around the neck of unbelievers and believers alike. It’s the time for perhaps a third of retail sales—also a clue.

There’s a malaise in the human heart that wants to spend, spend, spend. Possessions—we want them. A more luxurious home, more exotic holidays, nicer designer clothes, better furnishings, well-turned-out children, treasured *objets d’art*. And if the factor that underpins these—a sufficient income—can’t be achieved by legal pursuits then there’s always the illegal, the ‘black economy’.

National Prosperity

We may, in general, be more prosperous than before, have more ‘goods’, more leisure, live longer. Is a strong economy, though, *real* prosperity?

The downside, what we all live with, is neglect of the sick and the elderly, widespread violence, broken dysfunctional families and gross immorality in high places, fraudulent practices and corruption, a lack of integrity and the grasping for possessions.

Government—they bear much responsibility for all this—has failed to curb such excesses. Indeed, “*The whole head is sick and the whole heart faint. From the sole of the foot to the head there is no soundness in*

it”. There are clear reasons.

Divine Utopia

Imagine a society in which there is the mirror image of this ‘downside’: the elderly and the disadvantaged are respected and cherished, intolerance of every form of violence, minimal divorce, adultery and ‘co-habitation’ marginalized, sound transparent practice in government and business, justice upheld, honesty everywhere, and contentment.

Burdensome pressures and finances would be minimized as exorbitant taxation is rolled away. But, did you notice anything? Such good practice is age-old.

Such practices are the public face of *God’s* pattern for a prosperous society. Paint in one more brush stroke and the picture is clear, for there is still a missing ingredient.

Through Moses and confirmed by Jesus and his apostles God tells us: “*Take heed lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping His commandments and His ordinances and His statutes, lest when you have eaten and are full, and have built goodly houses and live in them, and your herds and flocks multiply, and your silver and gold is multiplied, and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up and you forget the LORD your God*” (Deuteronomy 8:11-14).

This solemn warning was delivered to ancient Israel upon their inheritance of the Land of Canaan. But doesn’t it ring true to our twenty-first century Western nations?

What prosperity is ours! Haven’t we ‘*eaten and are full*’? Don’t we have ‘*goodly houses*’? Isn’t there abundance of agricultural products? Only at the margins of society are these benefits scarce. And haven’t we ‘*forgotten the LORD our God*’?

cont’d p.8

‘It’s the Economy’...really?

Alive Again!

Jesus Christ asserts that every man, every woman, born will live again to face judgment

Speaking to those Jews who wished to kill him Jesus said: ‘...*Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have practiced evil to the resurrection of condemnation*’ (John 5:28-29).

The apostles Paul and John tell us that there will be a series of future resurrections—beginning with the saints at the return of Jesus.

Everyone who comes to the Father through Jesus, having repented of our sin and rebellion against God, will be ‘begotten’ by God’s Spirit. That is, miraculously the divine Spirit will bond with the human spirit thus making us ‘children of God’ in a very real sense.

Remain faithful until death and we will—by means of a resurrection from the dead—become truly a part of the divine family—immortal, alive evermore. But immortal not of ourselves but because of that bonding with God’s Spirit.

We carry into the resurrection life our human spirit as moulded by our individual response, during our lifetime, to the influence of God’s Spirit. That determines our role in God’s earthly Kingdom. Others, however, will be raised to a physical life.

After Death

A return to life may, in our technological age, seem common-place—visit an A & E unit! But it’s not new, for the Bible records several instances of the dead being raised—but miraculously, by divine power and authority. [see side-bar].

So let’s address the question: *what becomes of the human spirit after death?* It’s a matter addressed by

King Solomon: ‘...*the spirit shall return to God who gave it*’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7). But *return where?*

[The state of the dead is addressed in our article *When Someone Dies*]

Out of the Grave

As we have seen above, the human spirit can return to the body following death. The parable of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16) indicates a widespread belief that the dead can indeed return.

A further example may be that of King Saul’s encounter with the departed prophet Samuel (I Samuel 28) - a direct intervention by God. It is clear that the witch was genuinely disturbed and surprised by Samuel’s appearance (v.12). We may perhaps also apply this to the appearance to the disciples of Moses and Elijah with Jesus (Matthew 17).

Also, following the resurrection of Jesus ‘...*the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised. And coming forth out of the tombs after His resurrection, they entered into the holy city and were revealed to many*’ Matthew 27:52f.

In sum, the human spirit departs the body at death and ‘...*shall return to God who gave it*’ (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Remember, while there they have no consciousness, so are *not* praising God in Heaven (Psalm 115:17)! Nor are they experiencing the tender ministrations of devils in hell!

The assumption, then, is that there’s a secure spiritual ‘vault’ where all human spirits (non-corporeal) from all eras are retained under God’s care until their resurrection when Jesus Christ ‘calls’ them to either a spirit or a physical body (John 5:28). The sole indication of location is the notional concept of ‘hell’ (Gk. *hades*).

Judgment for All

Some few have been restored to life in this age. But: ‘... *it is reserved to men once to die, and after this, Judgment*’ (Hebrews 9:27). All of us face a period of existence during which

Physical resurrections

There are several instances recorded in the Scriptures:

- Elijah restored the life of a widow’s son (I Kings 17)
- Elisha restored the life of a young lad (II King 4)
- A man restored to life on contacting the body of Elisha (II Kings 13:21)
- Lazarus restored to life by Jesus (John 11)
- A widow’s son restored to life by Jesus in Nain (Luke 7); also Jairus’ daughter (Matthew 9:25)
- The dead (plural) raised under the ministry of Jesus (Matthew 11:5)
- Many believers restored to life at Christ’s resurrection (Matthew 27:52)
- Peter raises Tabitha (Acts 9:40)

we are assessed. For Christians it is during this lifetime (I Peter 4:17). And for those who remain faithful to Christ until death the return of Jesus signals their resurrection. Writes the apostle John: ‘...*this is the first resurrection*’ (Revelation 20:5)

The General Resurrection

All others, as said Jesus (John 5:28-29), will be raised from the grave, their physical body restored according to the pattern recorded in their human spirit.

As the reign of Jesus draws to a close Satan’s influence will be removed for ever (v.10), and what is widely known as ‘the general resurrection’ takes place: ‘...*the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were ended*’ (Revelation 20:5).

But why?

God is fair, unprejudiced, even-handed. Salvation—eternal life—is for all who surely desire it, and this resurrection is to provide that chance to those of all faiths and none who were in this life blinded by Satan and who will at that time truly change their life around. **Ω**

What are you worth?

A recent ‘costing’ of the adult human body—all its elements, minerals *etc*—calculated that it would be worth around £95 or \$160. (Though half a century ago it was considered to be a few pence!)

But what is our true value? We are, of course, worth much more than the sum of our parts. Think of each individual’s ‘intellectual property’. How do we value an Einstein or a Fleming or a Churchill or any of the vast array who have contributed to man’s well-being.

Yet each of us is indeed extraordinary—right from that moment when two living cells (an *ovum* and a *sperm*) united to form a unique human being. We each contribute our skills and our talents to the general economy and well-being of mankind.

Note that those two cells were not inanimate objects. *They were alive, they were living cells!* Otherwise there would be no procreation. So when does life begin?

Life Begins Here

Clearly not at that moment of our parents’ union. Nor was it when our grandparents contributed their DNA to our being. Or *their* grandparents. Indeed we can go back generations—right back to that awesome moment when ‘...*Jehovah God formed the man out of dust from the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath [spirit] of life; and man became a living soul*’ - Genesis 2:7. *That’s* when your life began!

And what a pedigree Adam had: ‘...*Adam the son of God*’ (Luke 3:38)! For ‘...*God created the man in His own image; in the image of God He created him. He created them male and female*’ (Genesis 1:27).

From that moment of conception there is the potential for the birth of a man or a woman who could radically change our world for the better. Some genius, some sage, a great leader, an inventor.

Eternity

But that possibility pales into insignificance before the awesome potential to become a part of the divine family. Hear Paul:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery again to fear, but you received a Spirit of adoption by which we cry, Abba! Father! The Spirit Himself witnesses with our spirit that we are children of God. And if children, also heirs; truly heirs of God, and joint-heirs of Christ, if indeed we suffer together, that we may also be glorified together. For I calculate that the sufferings of the present time are not worthy to compare to the coming glory to be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly awaits the revelation of the sons of God. For the creation was not willingly subjected to vanity, but through Him subjecting it, on hope; that also the creation will be freed from the slavery of corruption to the freedom of the glory of the children of God.

The Dark Side

That is our almost unimaginable potential. Wrote the apostle Paul: ‘...*Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard, nor has it risen up into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him. But God revealed them to us by His Spirit*’ (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

But according to the World Health Organization, every year worldwide there are an estimated 40-50 million abortions—*excluding* natural miscarriages (which form 15-20% of all pregnancies, though possibly much higher). This corresponds to approximately 125,000 abortions *per day*.

Recent estimates are: 1.4m aborted annually in North America, 4.2m in Europe, 27.3m in Asia. 6.4m in Africa, 4.4m in Latin America. And over a billion since 1973. A quarter of all pregnancies in the UK, for example, are deliberately terminated before birth, some 190,000 abortions in 2013—fifteen times the level in the 1950’s.

Our Human Potential

Life Begins

Life in any form does *not* begin at conception! *Consider:* the *ovum* is not dead, nor is the *sperm* cell—otherwise no life results, even with the latest scientific wizardry.

Those two living cells at once begin to multiply, producing the unique creature dictated by its joint DNA—a horse, a monkey, a human.

So, when does life begin?

Whatever the rights a woman may claim over her personal choices—what a pathetic and monumental waste. And what shameless total disrespect for the most precious resource on the planet—that continuous stream of life reaching across the millennia to our first parents.

In the Beginning

To our first parents God said ‘...*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it*’ (Genesis 1:28). And in the book of Hebrews he adds: ‘...*You made him [mankind] a little less than the angels; You crowned him with glory and honor; and "You set him over the works of Your hands. You subjected all things under his feet." For in order to subject all things under him, He left nothing not subjected to him*’ (Hebrews 2:6-8).

The writer adds: ‘...*But now we do not yet see all things being subject to him*’ (v.8). That potential is delayed. *Why?* Because, in Eden, we failed our life and death test. The result was calamitous.

Faced with the choice of submission to his Creator or submitting to the whisperings of a rebellious spirit, mankind rejected divine wisdom and guidance, and substituted his own choices divorced from the perfect will of his Creator: Writing of mankind’s beginnings the apostle Paul reminds us *cont’d p.8*

Human Potential ...cont'd

the thing known of God is clearly known within them, for God revealed it to them. For the unseen things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things made, both His eternal power and God-head, for them to be without excuse.

Because knowing God, they did not glorify Him as God, nor were thankful. But they became vain in their reasonings, and their undiscerning heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became foolish and changed the glory of the incorruptible God into a likeness of an image of corruptible man, and of birds, and four-footed animals, and creeping things. Because of this, God gave them up to impurity in the lusts of their hearts, their bodies to be dishonored among themselves, who changed the truth of God into the lie, and worshiped and served the created thing more than the Creator, who is blessed forever
Romans 1:19-25

Not what the prestigious history and sociology tomes would have you believe! Animal to human and not human to divine. Born only to die without trace and not to live forever, co-operating with Jesus Christ in the furtherance of God's grand design for His Universe.

God's invitation is open to all of mankind. But you have to respond, to commit to His service through His Son, Jesus Christ. For '... there is salvation in no other One, [Jesus] for neither is there any other name under Heaven having been given among men by which we must be saved' (Acts 4:12) **Ω**

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Economy...cont'd from p.5

The Pay-off

But are not such benefits the product of our ingenuity our relentless effort, our industry? Hear the Creator: "Beware lest you say in your heart, 'My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth'. You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is He who gives you power to get wealth" (v. 18). We don't remember Him. We have forgotten. We neglect the Spirit.

That's why the economy merely bumps along. Why nationally and as families and individuals our resources are 'a bag with holes'. Why hard cash is poured by the billion into public services only to dissipate without noticeable effect. Half the year, near enough, we work to pay our burden of taxation.

Individually, we waste resources on unnecessary possessions, time-wasting entertainment. Billions

poured away into often useless public service 'non-jobs', into the deep trough of self indulgence, into a perverted justice system, into the destruction of national sovereignty.

We are afloat—but on a candy-floss foundation.

First Cause

At the mere mention of 'God', of course, the scoffers swarm in droves. We have long ago, in government and in our personal lives, forsaken Him, abandoned His laws and statutes.

The clear logic and wisdom of a super-intelligent First Cause is ignored along with the knowledge that He remains sovereign—and intimately interested in His *kosmos*, His creation.

It's 'the fool' who has said in his heart 'there is no God'. The lesson of history is that nations rise—and catastrophically fall. That lasting prosperity follows when nations acknowledge the Creator and are guided by His Laws and statutes. That calamity follows on the heels of that nation which rejects the foundation of those Laws and statutes.

God's blessings—and curses—are certain. *Which* we experience reflects our response to His Word. (Read Leviticus 26.) The voice of Scripture is a clarion call to repentance from the sovereign God.

Is it already too late? Can government, can individuals, acknowledge the real source of prosperity? That it is the sovereign Creator who gives us wealth-giving power? That if He is to install His programme He requires obedience—obedience to His revealed plan for all mankind? That any other 'programme' we run will cause our system to crash?

It's *not* the economy. *It's us.* **Ω**

(edited from *New Horizons*
May 2009)

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MiniStudy**Church—Who Needs It?**

‘...let us consider one another, to incitement of love and of good works, not forsaking the assembling together of ourselves, as is the custom of some, but exhorting, and by so much more as you see the Day drawing near’ (Hebrews 10:25-26)

Setting off to church on a Sunday is fast becoming a rare event. Even many professing Christians don’t bother. Indeed the example of other religions—Islam, for example—should shame those professing to follow Christ. ‘Boring, dull, repetitive’ is a not uncommon response. It has been said: *‘Every day, people are straying away from church—and going back to God’*. So what’s wrong with ‘church’?

- Clearly, the writer of the book of Hebrews (above) values Christians assembling together. He sees it as a precious opportunity to fellowship with like-minded brethren to help and encourage one another, and to receive instruction from qualified Bible teachers. And, of course, the New Testament letters bear testimony to that. They are written to individual local assemblies addressing their varied strengths and weaknesses, and laying doctrinal foundations
- ‘Church’ (Gk. *ecclesia*) derives from the word signifying to ‘call out, invite’. It is used over a hundred times in the Scriptures and refers to any assembly of people—religious (church, synagogue) or secular (public assemblies). In the Old Testament Septuagint (Greek) version it translates the word ‘congregation’ (of Israel)
- In Christianity ‘church’ is a gathering of those whom the Father has called out to partner with Him: *‘...You [Father] gave them to Me; and they [the apostles] have kept Your Word’*, said Jesus (John 17:6). Only much later was the term applied to the building in which the church met. In the beginning the brethren met in homes—eg the home of Priscilla and Aquila (Romans 16:5). ‘Church’ is also used of a geographical location—eg *‘...the churches in Judaea’*. The Christian assemblies were modeled on the Jewish synagogue format
- Each assembly once established was guided and overseen by qualified leaders—in the apostolic church there were appointed only *elders* (known as overseers—Gk. *episcopos*) and *deacons* (Gk. *diakonos*) (Philippians 1:1, Titus 1:5, 7). In later centuries church offices multiplied into the mish-mash of Popes, Archbishops, Bishops, *etc* that afflicts the modern churches. The apostle Paul specified to Timothy (I Timothy 1:1-13) and to Titus (Titus 1:6-9) the qualifications for these offices. They were selected with oversight by known leaders with the approval of the assembly (Acts 6:1-5, 14:23)
- Each established assembly was independent but in co-operation with other like-minded assemblies. While it maintained amicable relationships with others it was not under their authority. ‘Denominations’ developed over time (Church of Rome, Eastern Orthodox, Church of England, Methodist *etc*) as leaders asserted their personal prejudices, a desire to exercise authority or to pursue a pet doctrine
- *Why church?* Recently baptized Christians (and, even, all too often, long-term members—Hebrews 5:12) are viewed as *‘...babes in Christ’* and in need of nourishment with the ‘milk’ of teachings about the faith, and not able to digest ‘strong meat’ (I Corinthians 3:1ff). As the apostle notes here, even the baptized member can be ‘carnal’: *‘...For where among you is jealousy, and strife, and divisions, are you not fleshly and walk according to man?’ (v.3)*. The example (hopefully!) of mature brethren as we interact with one another promotes spiritual growth. As such it is important that we remain in association with other Christians and with sound Bible teaching—trained up in the fundamentals of the faith within ‘mother church’
- So we all need church! Apart from it we can lurch off the beaten track, stray into bye-ways that stultify our growth in Christ—the very purpose of our divine call. If you are aware of ‘God’s tap on the shoulder’ you should carefully select a church home. There’s a vast supermarket of choice—but not all are careful to reflect the teachings of the Christian Scriptures. There is no ‘true church’ apart from the spiritual Body of Christ—the sum of all those in whom is the Spirit of God. Seek it. Seek an assembly that is welcoming, that holds firmly to clear Bible teachings, that is growing in *‘...grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ’* **Ω**

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