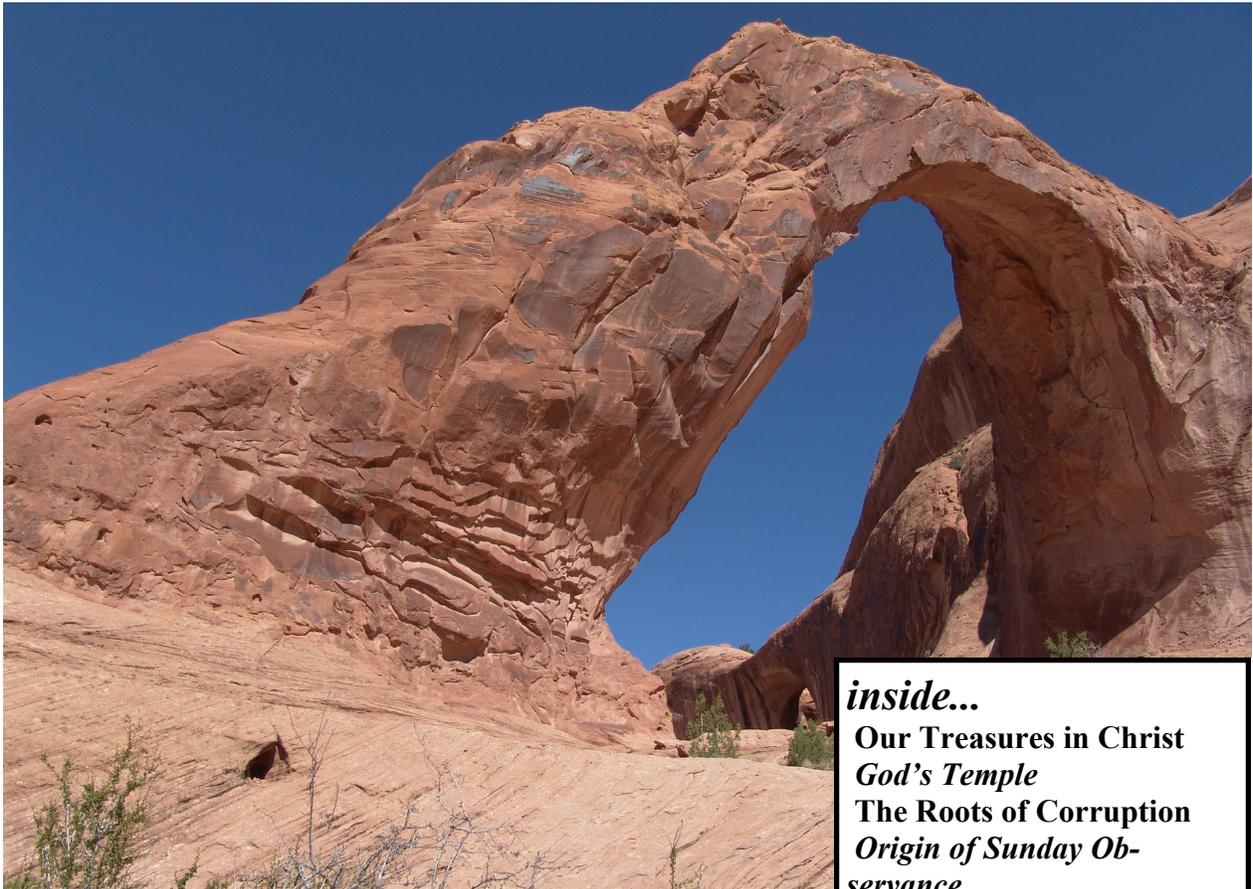


NEW *Horizons*

Vol 24 No 2

March/April 2020

addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow



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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 terms clear to those who have 'ears to hear' - 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

Who We Are

The *Churches of God Outreach Ministries* is an international association of independent local assemblies - Christians who meet together for worship, instruction in the faith and fellowship. Each assembly is self-governing according to Bible principles, but co-operates through our Conference with other like-minded assemblies to work towards agreed evangelistic goals.

These goals are within the framework of the commission set for his church by Jesus: "...going, therefore, disciple all nations, baptising them...and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you"(Matthew 28:19-20). He further commanded that we "...Shepherd...[and] feed my sheep".

To these ends we publish Bible-based literature—eg our bi-monthly Newsletter **OUTREACH, NEW HORIZONS** magazine, the **BIBLE BASICS** on-line home study course, and a 32-lesson **STUDY COURSE**.

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If you would like a copy of our *Statement of Beliefs* or a *Publications List* please request it from any of the addresses listed or go to our website: **www.cgom.org**

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new Horizons

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Christianity isn't all about doctrine

The apostle Paul came to understand that in Christ '*... are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge*' (Colossians 2:3). And the apostle Peter urges us to '*... grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*' (II Peter 3:18). What is that 'knowledge'? Let's examine some aspects of his inestimable character.

In the book of Hebrews it is explained that there is a foundation of knowledge essential to our relationship with the Father and with Jesus. It is the foundation on which we build our life in Christ, without which we can't claim to be Christian.

They are the 'first principles', the 'milk' of our faith (Hebrews 5:12), which is reflected in the new Christian's status as 'newborn babes' (I Peter 2:2), in need of 'milk' rather than solid food.

These principles are summarized as: '*...repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment*' (ch 6:1,2). He then urges us, having embraced these, to move forward, to '*...go on unto perfection; not laying again the foundation*'.

Hidden Treasure

What, then, does this 'perfection' entail? There are many strands, but surely one of the most essential is Christ himself. Our goal as Christians is that we become

'Christ-like', his 'spiritual *doppelganger*', his 'double'.

Theologians down the century squabble over any and all aspects of the Scriptures—hence the multiplicity of denominations and the disgust that leads many individuals to 'go it alone'. [And my don't they mangle even the basics!]

Christ In Us

But what of Jesus himself? How well do we know him? What can we learn from his bio in the Scriptures? It is, of course, impossible to measure the depths of his perfection; but

Our Treasures in Christ

we can set the goal of personalizing him in our own life, of taking on his characteristics.

Nor do we lack support, for those foundation principles can be our guide as we seek to 'grow in grace'. Take, for example, '*...the laying on of hands*'. It is the outward symbol of our receiving and accepting of the divine Spirit. As we heed the promptings of the indwelling Spirit we are alerted to implement necessary changes to our life-style coupled with the Spirit's power.

Jesus lived by every word of God

The Scriptures were his 'meat and drink'. No action was executed without the express consent of the Father or in accord with the written Word.

He was in constant contact with the Father

Prayer was his life-blood, and

he is recorded as spending all night in prayer, especially before making vital decisions. He frequently went to pray alone.

He expressed compassion for all

Jesus emotionally supported all who called on him for help.

He had respect for all

No 'class' was too far below nor too high for his concern. All were treated according to need.

He 'went about doing good'

Where Jesus encountered need he acted.

He conquered every temptation

All temptations that we face he faced. As 'one of us' he battled them daily—yet without sin. His response?: '*...in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared*'. It's our example.

He endured intense opposition and persecution

His persecutors disfigured him: '*...his visage was so marred more than any man*'. Yet Jesus never wavered from his core faith.

He forgave all who opposed him.

Even on the cross Jesus asked the Father to forgive his persecutors. Nor did he respond in kind to those who vilified him.

Jesus was the personification of the Father whose wish is that we, as His children, reflect His characteristics as demonstrated in the life of

Jesus, our 'brother' Ω

God's Temple

Many Christians are living in expectation of the imminent building of a Temple in Jerusalem. Will they be disappointed?

The Bible shines a light on man's inability to govern, to bring peace, to bring lasting prosperity. It records events as they are, but all recorded events therein are not necessarily orchestrated by Him. I think we can view the 'project of the moment'—a 'third Temple'—in this light.

Such an edifice may indeed become reality, but only because tolerated by God. He notes that the 'man of sin' will enter the Temple enthroned as if he were a god—but God didn't authorize his activities. It is rebellion. He will be destroyed along with whatever Temple has then been built, as in 70AD. Said Jesus '*... [the invaders] will not leave a stone on a stone, because you did not know the time of your visitation.*' (Luke 19:44).

Mankind's passage into the Millennium will be terrifying.

Through 'signs and wonders' the

The vision of Ezekiel (ch 40-48) cannot be literal. In ch 48:35 the dimensions are given of an area for it far larger than Palestine itself. It is symbolic of the true 'Temple', God's church.

man of sin will have deceived all except those in whom dwells God's Spirit. World leaders will submit to his assumed authority—an

authority that derives from the Adversary. By means of totalitarian power he will eliminate all opposition, suppress every religion (especially true Christianity).

The Lord Returns

We have clear guidance on what happens when Jesus returns as

King of kings. He will govern from Jerusalem (Jeremiah 3:17)—but not Jerusalem as we know it. The prophet Zechariah (ch 14) describes the transformation of the area on which the present capital is built. It is destined for destruction in the siege orchestrated by Rome.

Initially there will be a massive earthquake that disrupts the Mount of Olives forming a valley that stretches to the Mediterranean. There will be a vast plain which will be the foundation for the administration area for Jesus and the saints: '*...the LORD shall be king over all the earth: in that day shall there be one LORD, and his name one. All the land shall be turned as a plain from Geba to Rimmon south of Jerusalem: and it [Jerusalem] shall be lifted up, and inhabited in her place*' (vv.9-10).

The area has been estimated to be about fifty square miles. The city will be rebuilt and become the administrative centre for the coming millennium, no more to be destroyed (ch 14:11).

A New Temple

Jesus promised to build a 'third' temple: '*...I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and within three days I will build another made without hands*' (Mark 14:58). Having successfully achieved his mission, Jesus set about the task of building this new temple, his 'church', to replace, through *his own sacrifice*, the now redundant temple sacrificial system. It had served its purpose of shedding a blinding light in symbol on the true lamb of God in all the intricacies of his perfection.

The apostle Paul, addressing the Corinthian church stated: '*...Do*

you not know that you are God's temple and the Spirit of God dwells in you?' (1 Corinthians 3:16). Later in this letter (ch 6:19) he adds '*...do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own?'*

In his next letter to this church he tells them '*... we are the temple of the living God, just as God said, I will live in them and will walk about among them, and I will be their God and they will be my people*' (ch 6:16).

To the Ephesian church he elaborates this important theme: '*...you are fellow citizens of the saints and members of the household of God, built*

on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the cornerstone, in whom the whole building, joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are built up together into a dwelling place of God in the Spirit (ch 2:19-22).

It is to *this* 'temple' that the Lord will return. Christians will be 'pillars' in that temple (Revelation 3:12), the vanguard of an ever-increasing spiritual 'temple', enthroned in which is Jesus. A 'temple' that will come to encircle the globe, as the true Gospel is disseminated to the four corners of our planet through the evangelism of the resurrected saints.

The prophet Ezekiel, writing in Babylon, recorded the inspired dimensions of the replacement temple (the original plan may have been lost). The new temple, built under Ezra and Nehemiah, didn't attain the same standard (eg Ezra 3:12).. These chapters (40-48), however, have symbolic value.

Do not be deceived!

Ω

Corruption of the human psyche is a root of all of mankind's varied problems

The church of God in first-century Rome was seated at the heart of an idolatrous religion, practices that have besmirched mankind from near its beginnings. The apostle Paul wrote to the fledgling church there to put the prevailing culture into context—and as a warning to us in the twenty-first century AD.

Contrary to today's philosophical/religious mind-set, mankind is on a downward spiral from our original state of perfection. We were equipped with all the tools necessary to achieve our God-given purpose—to serve our global environment and to attain to the image of our Creator. Surely a 'Golden Age'.

But it didn't last. Before long God's adversary deluded the mother of all living, and the head of the race made the choice to abandon his covenant with his Creator and to go 'my way'. A new mind-set permeated all his descendants.

The distance between man and God widened, and corruption mushroomed—leading to the near extinction of the race. The apostle Paul, addressing the Roman Christians, outlines the course of our descent:

'...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 Godhead, 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 the holy days of Leviticus 23

(Romans 1:19-23)

It didn't, however, stop with the worship of the animate creation. About eight centuries later, the prophet and leader of ancient Israel had to warn his people about the sin of worshipping the inanimate—the heavenly bodies: sun, moon and stars: *'...that you not lift up your eyes towards the heavens and shall see the sun, and the moon and the stars even all the host of heaven, and you be drawn away and worship them, and serve them; which Jehovah your God has allotted to all the peoples under all the heavens'* (Deuteronomy 4:19).

To 'serve' a god is the practicality of how it is worshipped. For example, the prophet Ezekiel describes the apostate Israelites who *'with their backs toward the temple of the LORD, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east'*—a sunrise service. The LORD calls this a wicked abomination' (Ezekiel 8:16)

Early in our history and as Paul notes mankind became *'...vain in their reasonings'*. The light of truth left them and they *'...glorified Him not as God'* but devised their own gods and worship systems. Note, however,

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

The Roots of Corruption

that this wasn't totally random but was built on the foundation of the true faith handed down through the faithful few.

Sun Worship

In nearly all ancient cultures the sun was the prime focus of worship, and was worshipped for its light-giving qualities. It came to permeate the western world through Iran (Mazdaism, Zoroastrianism), and was the dominant belief in Rome in the first century of our era (Mithraism).

The central figure was Ahura Mithra the incarnation of the sun, reportedly 'born' on December 25, and worshipped on the first day of the week. (In the later planetary calendar this was Sunday.)

[December 25 is the birth date assigned to a variety of so-called 'gods': Attis, Horus, Osiris, Buddah, Heracles etc.]

Christianity, however, first worshipped in accord with the annual Biblical festivals (Leviticus ch 23) and the weekly seventh day Sabbath. By the fourth century, Mithraism had such a universal influence that the Emperor Constantine legislated that Christians must worship on Sunday—*Sol Invictus*, the 'venerable day of the sun'.

In the Beginning

To our first parents our Creator had explained how we are to live in order to be in harmony with Him, with our own minds, with our own bodies and to inherit the blessings derived from that harmony. [Through Moses this spiritual law was passed to Israel in codified form as their National Constitution—to us summarized as the 'Ten Commandments'.]

Corruption...from p.3

'... I will put enmity between you [the adversary, Satan] and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel (Genesis 3:15).

This was the promise of a coming Deliverer, the 'seed'. It coloured the idolatrous faiths that developed over the ensuing centuries. Peter speaks of '...cleverly devised fables'

It is a promise passed on through the generations and remembered—however vaguely—by the philosophers of the day: '...to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. (Galatians 3:16). And it became the foundation for an array of distortions.

Elements of the divine plan were gradually incorporated in various pre-Christian faiths including Mithraism. So the 'virgin birth', the concept of a dying and risen Saviour, man's resurrection to immortality and the notion of sacrifice—all are implicit in the early chapters of Genesis and were featured in the distorted false faiths which ignored the one and only God the Creator of all.

Mithraism, for example, has roots in themes from the Old Testament which, after the dispersion of Israel, and the Jews exiled in Babylon. (cp the Persian magi), impacted middle eastern countries. The worship of the Egyptian *Osiris* reflected the concept of the resurrection of the god—also an Old Testament theme.

Rather than being humbled by the glory and majesty of God and His creation, mankind has besmirched His image. They despised His power in creation

ascribing it to the inanimate servants of mankind, the sun, moon and stars, and to blind chance (evolution).

This mind-set has funneled mankind into the abandonment of divine guidance for life's pathway—personal, national, global. It has spawned a cesspit of conflicting and competing philosophies that enchain us and obstruct the divine purpose, and gives place to dark forces.

As the apostle Paul wrote: '... 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 4:4).

Jesus Christ is the true '...sun of righteousness' (Malachi 4:2), the '...true light, which lights every man' (John 1:9). By him all of creation exists: '...by him [Jesus] were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or

powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist' (Colossians 1:16-17).

As pointed out by Paul to the Roman Christians this rejection of the Creator has led mankind to stray off the path leading to physical and mental health, to prosperity—and to eternal life.

License has supplanted liberty, immoderation for restraint, disrespect for courtesy: '...know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent [lacking self-control], fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded [conceited], lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof' (II Timothy 3:1-5).

Surely a sad but fair reflection of our own time!

Our World

But haven't we in our modern world abandoned these distortions of the original faith? Well—no. They are alive and well, and not only in distant lands where the religious ritual and art works are a tourist attraction.

The corruption early in the Christian era polluted the crystal clear waters of the true faith as explained in the Scriptures and confirmed by Jesus. The widespread cult of the sun gradually suffocated and corrupted the pure teachings of the primitive church as the leadership compromised and incorporated features of pagan sun worship. **cont'd p.8**

Pagan Mythology

One such myth is that of the Egyptian *Isis and Osiris*. Then there's *Cybele and Attis*.

Another - mentioned by the prophet Ezekiel is that of *Tammuz and Ishtar*. The apparent 'death' of nature in autumn and subsequent 'resurrection' in spring also contributed to the Babylonian myth. Every year Tammuz, the god of the underworld, was mourned by his worshippers. Ezekiel found him - an abomination to God - being worshipped in God's Temple where "...women sat weeping for Tammuz." (ch 8:14). This was for forty days leading to the last week of March when he was 'resurrected'. Tammuz was the husband of his mother - some say sister - Ishtar. (*Ishtar* - also called *Astarte* - has a familiar ring: *Easter!*)

Sun worship characterized many of the early religions

In the Old World it was important in ancient cultures, such as those of Babylon, Egypt, Persia, North India, Greece, Rome. In the New World it was important in the agricultural southeast and southwest of the United States, and in the cultures of Mexico, Central American, and the Andean region.

Connected with sun worship, the observance of the first day of the week, the sun-day, played an important role in the pagan world. The North British Review called Sunday "The wild solar holiday of all times," and Constantine, in his famous Sunday edict, styled it "the venerable day of the sun."

Babylonians

Bel, the sun-god, whose proper name was Marduk, was the patrol god of the Babylonians. To him they dedicated the first day of the week. Their calendar was adjusted in such a way that the first day of every month was also the first day of the week.

"It is clear that the first day of every month was originally a day of rest and fasting."--*Langdon, Babylonian Menologies and Semitic Calendars*, p. 86.

Egyptians

In ancient Egypt the sun-cult originated at Heliopolis. The early sun-god of the ancient Egyptians was Re, and later Osiris, who came to be also the god of the dead and of the resurrection.

"Sunday (day of the sun) as the name of the first day of the week is derived from Egyptian astrology." -*Catholic Encyclopedia*, Art. Sunday.

Medo-Persian

"Each day in the week, the planet to which the day was sacred was invoked in a fixed spot in the crypt; and Sunday, over which the sun presided, was especially holy." --*Cumont, The Mysteries of Mithra*, p. 167.

Indians

Among the Hindus, every Sunday was a holy day. One author writes: "The different days enjoy degrees of veneration according to certain qualities which [the Hindus] attribute to [the days of the week]. They distinguish, for example, the Sunday, because it is the day of the sun and the beginning of the week." --*Albiruni's India*, II, p. 185.

Koreans

"Buddha is reported to have been of solar descent, as were the Incas of Peru and are the present royal house of Japan (whose ancestress is stated to have been the sun-goddess Amaterasu)." --*E. Royston Pike, Encyclopaedia of Religion*, Art. Sun Worship.

Germans

"The most ancient Germans being pagans, and having appropriated their first day of the week to the peculiar adoration to the sun, whereof, that day doth yet in our English tongue retain the name of Sunday." --*Verstegan, Antiquities*, p. 10.

Greeks

"At Sparta on the first day of every month the king made a sacrificial offering to Apollon [or Apollo], the sun-god, and the same practice was carried on at Athens." --*Cook, Zeus*, II, p. 237

Romans

"The first day of the week was the Mithraic Sunday before it was the Christian, and December 25 was Mithra's birthday." --*E. Royston Pike, Encyclopedia of Religion*, Art. Mithraism.

Mithraism and Christianity

The popular worship of Mithra [the "Invincible Sun-god"] became so pre-eminent in the Roman Empire in the days of Constantine, that he decreed "The Venerable Day of the Sun" to be the weekly rest day of the Empire.

One authority points out the influence of Mithraism on Christianity,

THE ORIGIN OF SUNDAY OBSERVANCE

saying: "It [Mithraism] had so much acceptance that it was able to impose on the Christian world its own Sunday in place of the Sabbath, its Sun's birthday, 25th December, as the birthday of Jesus." --*G. Murray, Christianity in the Light of Modern Knowledge*, pp. 73, 74.

Still another author says: "The early Christians had at first adopted the Jewish seven-day week, with its numbered week days, but by the close of the third century A.D. this began to give way to the planetary week; and in the fourth and fifth centuries the pagan designations became generally accepted in the western half of Christendom.

During these same centuries the spread of Oriental solar worships, especially that of Mithra, in the Roman world, had already led to the substitution by the pagans of dies Solis (Sun-day) for dies Saturni (Saturday), as the first day of the planetary week...Thus gradually a pagan institution was engrafted on Christianity." --*Hutton Webster, Rest Days*, pp. 220, 221.

Contrary to popular belief, there is not the slightest indication in the Bible that Sunday observance may have originated with Christ or the apostles. Ω

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Festivals 2020

Lord's Supper	April 7 Tues evg
Unleavened Bread	April 9-15
Pentecost	May 31
Trumpets	September 19
Atonement	September 28
Tabernacles	October 3-9
Closing Day	October 10

The Easter Story

**'Remember me', said Jesus.
How? Is there an alternative to
Easter?**

Easter! New hats and frocks. The Easter parade. Rolling coloured eggs. A Sunday sun-rise service. Great fun for the kids. A focus on life renewed: the resurrection of Jesus, triumphant over the grave.

The season, though, began less joyously. Friday - 'Good Friday' - is a day of sadness. By tradition that's when Jesus suffered an ignominious death on a Roman stake. In some Christian societies it's a day for self-flagellation - literally. Some individuals submit themselves to a mock crucifixion. The steps of Jesus along the *Via Dolorosa* in Jerusalem are traced in pageantry.

Death and Resurrection

But such remembrance is far removed from actuality. The spring festival known as Easter - as most Bible students know - did not originate with the death and resurrection of Jesus, pre-dating him by centuries. The 'death and resurrection' of a Saviour is a concept well-known in the Old Testament.

It is implied in the Genesis description, in Eden's garden, of a 'promised seed', a suffering Messiah: *"He will crush your [ie Satan's] head and you will crush his [the Redeemer's] heel"*(ch 3:15). Job, one of the earliest of the Bible writers, also understood it: *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has thus been destroyed then out of my flesh I shall see God"*(Job 19:25).

The Psalmist sings: *"Therefore my heart was glad and my glory [soul, life] rejoiced; my body too will dwell securely. For you will not leave my soul in [the grave] nor allow your holy one to see corruption"*(Psalm 16:8-10).

Jesus, too, recognized this teach-

ing - in the life of the prophet Jonah, drawing from there the analogy of his own death and resurrection (Matthew 12:40). Examples of this could be multiplied!

It isn't surprising, then, to find that early in man's history the concept had crept into the religion of those who had rejected God's revelation - men who *'altered God's truth into falsehood, and revered and served the creature rather than the Creator'*(Romans 1:25).

That a Saviour would die and be resurrected is a concept known widely in the ancient world - even apart from the Bible revelation. It gave rise to the various mythical cycles in which the 'god' dies and is miraculously restored to life.

Any substantial *Encyclopaedia*, of course, will detail how these various rites were absorbed into the Christian church from around the fourth century. They include the forty days of Lenten abstinence, the now popular sun-rise service on Easter morning (*ie* facing east), the rolling of coloured eggs. Ezekiel 8:16-17 is instructive: *'... I was then led into the temple's inner courtyard, where I saw about twenty-five men standing near the entrance, between the porch and the altar. Their backs were to the LORD's temple, and they were bowing down to the rising sun. God said, Ezekiel, it's bad enough that the people of Judah are doing these disgusting things....'*

Such practices replaced the 'death and resurrection' festivals instituted by God and observed by Jesus, the apostles and the first Christians.

Worship - God's Way

Having initiated human life, the Creator gave us guidance on how to live and how to worship Him. One aspect was a series of annual reminders of His plan - seven recurring annual festivals each of which highlights an aspect of that plan, and each pointing to Jesus Christ. The Spring festival consisted of the sacrifice of the *Passover*, followed by the seven *Days of*

Unleavened Bread, the whole being loosely termed 'Passover' (Ezekiel 45:21, Luke 22:1).

In harmony with God's perfect timing (*eg* Galatians 4:4), Jesus died late in the afternoon of Nisan 14*. At this time, between 3pm and 4pm ('evening'), the Passover lamb was ceremonially sacrificed in the Temple. Paul refers to Jesus as *'Christ our Passover'* (I Corinthians 5:7).

Many Christians today observe it as the 'Night to be remembered', investing it with Christian significance. It begins a week of rejoicing known in the Scriptures as *Unleavened Bread*. To the Corinthian brethren - largely Gentile - Paul in that same passage acknowledges that the brethren were observing these days (vv.6-8).

Jesus, however, introduced a further observance which is to continue until he returns.

Lord's Supper

This remembrance is a solemn memorial of his night of betrayal, anguished suffering and subsequent crucifixion on a Roman stake. Called by Paul the *Lord's Supper*, it is held annually *'on the night in which he was betrayed'* - the beginning of Nisan 14*.

At the evening meal on that pre-Passover night he introduced the simple everyday symbols of bread and wine as representative of his broken body and shed blood.

A Lesson in Humility

Further, Jesus enjoined the practice of 'foot washing', having himself set the example to the disciples at that last meal before he suffered: *"...if I, your Lord and Teacher, wash your feet you surely ought to wash one another's feet; for I have set you an example so that you might do just as I did to you.... If you grasp these truths, blessed are you if you practice them"*(John 13:12-17).

A Pure Heart

The *Unleavened Bread* festival, also observed by the early church (I Corinthians 5), was a period *cont'd p.8*

Be Content!

Christians are to improve their well-being but are urged to avoid greed

The 'tenth commandment' which the LORD handed down to Israel in His summary of the divine spiritual law may be summarized in the words of our title—'Be Content'. In the words of the King James Bible, '*...you shall not covet*'.

It's an instruction that underlies the other commandments: neglect of the elderly, violence, theft, aberrant sexual desire—all can have an element of personal gain. Then there's the link made by the apostle Paul with idolatry: '*... covetousness, which is idolatry*' (Colossians 3:5).

It's not unusual to hear of the elderly being 'fleeced' by their own family for personal gain, to 'speed' an inheritance. And all too common for violence against the person to acquire another's property. Why steal or burgle a home if not to take something desirable—but not yours. And isn't adultery simply the taking of another's 'property'.

Covetousness isn't just an afterthought tagged on to make up the round number, ten. It is a fundamental aspect of much of human behaviour.

Idolatry

So why 'idolatry'?

The Commandments have two main elements, service to God (the first four) and service to neighbor (the final six): '*...And Jesus said to him, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the first and great commandment. And the second is*

like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments all the Law and the Prophets hang' (Matthew 22:36-40).

The Israelites abandoned the God who delivered them from 'hard bondage' in Egypt. They desired the wanton lifestyle of the gods of the nations around them. Seduced by their hedonism, Aaron '*...built an altar before [the golden calf image]. And Aaron called and said, A feast to Jehovah tomorrow. And they rose early on the morrow, and they offered burnt offerings and brought near peace offerings. And the people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play. And Jehovah spoke to Moses, Come, go down, for your people whom you caused to go up from Egypt are corrupted*' (Exodus 32:5-7).

[*'Play'* is not innocent but means 'fornicating and adulterous intercourse' (Clarke). *cf Numbers 25*]

Such idolatry is condemned by God, and Paul records His reaction to similar idolatry by Israel. Plague broke out and 23,000 died '*...in one day*' (I Corinthians 10:8).

The coveting of another god with its debauched rituals has echoes in the present society's preoccupation with Christmas and Halloween festivities.

Century Twenty-one

Humanity doesn't change. Covetousness is a dominant driving force in every generation, not least our own.

There are, of course, valid reasons for someone to have a temporary financial shortfall. But the level of debt is astonishing, both nationally and individually. The

UK national debt is £1.78 trillion, costing the taxpayer an annual £48 billion in interest payments. In the USA the national debt is \$23.16 trillion (and rising). History predicts it will end in a collapsed economy.

In Britain there are an estimated five million of us with personal debt of over £10,000 (excluding mortgage debt). 20% used borrowing to finance holidays while 18% 'blamed Christmas' and the same number had loans for vehicles and luxury items. Many borrow while spending on TV packages, gambling, alcohol or tobacco. Or to 'keep up with the Jones's'.

Sage Advice

The apostle Paul injects some wise pertinent words: '*...godliness with contentment is great gain*' (I Timothy 6:6). 'Godliness' means giving heed to how God says we should order our lives. Paul, for example says '*...The one stealing, let him steal no more, but rather let him labor, working what is good with the hands, that he may have something to give to the one that has need*' (Ephesians 4:28). Jesus said, '*...Do not treasure up for you treasures on the earth, where moth and rust cause to perish, and where thieves dig through and steal*' (Matthew 6:19). He then directs us to the true treasures that reflect heavenly values.

And, of course, the so-called 'negative' Ten Commandments, viewed positively, are a treasure house of good advice for combating our covetous impulses.

We live in uncertain times and it is vital that all of us listen to the apostle Paul: '*...Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loves another has fulfilled the law*'. Ω

Easter ...cont'd from p.6

of seven days starting with Pass-over during which no 'leavened bread' - ie yeasted, raised, fermented bread - was eaten. In Christian use it is symbolic of a pure life, energized by the risen Christ through his Spirit.

Physically, leaven is corruption, but spiritually it signifies *hypocrisy* (Luke 12:1), and *false teaching* (Matthew 16:12). This festival thus encapsulates the concept of *resurrection*, a *pure heart* and *pure truth*. The Scriptures therefore give no specific day - eg 'Easter Sunday' - to commemorate this momentous event. Rather it is an entire seven days of celebration during which Christians live without this symbolic corruption (leaven) in our bodies or our homes. By our eating daily of *unleavened* - 'sweet' - bread we are reminded that throughout life we must 'feed on *that bread which came down from heaven*' (John 6:51).

The Bible festivals (the 'appointed feasts of the LORD' - Leviticus 23:2 - not of Moses) are free from the leaven - hypocrisy and false teaching - that permeates most of Christianity by the observance of days which are plainly from idolatrous sources.

This year, why not commit yourself to the observance of those days God has set aside for His people! **Ω**

**This on the calendar widely used throughout the then known world. On the current, Gregorian, calendar it falls sometime in March/April. A calendar linking the old calendar and the new is available from any of our addresses.*

The church became entangled in a hierarchical structure, gradually assuming temporal authority over nations and enforcing its faith by 'the

Boundaries

Mankind has from earliest years sought to overturn God's plans. We find, for example, that He '*... set up the bounds of the peoples, according to the number of the sons of Israel*' (Deuteronomy 32:8). Yet leaders have repeatedly sought to join the nations in a global empire. (The project is again far advanced.)

There is one border, however, that is often top of the news—modern Israel, as conflict flares between Jew and so-called Palestinians. The new 'Peace Plan' proposed by the United States seems set to stir the pot of seething discontent among the Palestinians.

So—back to boundaries. Where in this land, once gifted perpetually by the Creator to the people of Israel—all *twelve* tribes—should they be drawn? The title deeds are clear and not a hidden secret. If implemented it may well ease tensions and bring peace to this troubled area.

The relevant deed is recorded in the *Book of Joshua*, chapter fifteen, verses one to twelve. There a detailed delineation is given of where the House of Judah was assigned to inhabit. The remainder of the Land was apportioned to the other tribes. (*They* became known as the House of Israel.)

As predicted, because they overthrew their Covenant with the LORD both Judah and Israel were temporarily evicted from their assigned territories, with the promise of a future restoration on their reconciliation with the LORD.

But when we compare this (inspired) map with that now drawn up by the US administration there are obvious

discrepancies. For example, all the land north of Jerusalem up to the Lebanese border and now occupied by the Israelis was not assigned by God to Judah but to the House of Israel. In a sense they (and Palestinians) are 'squatters'.

The southern border of Judah, represented by the Israelis, extended—as today to what is now the Sinai Peninsula (Egypt). But The present US plan includes deeding a portion of the southern border to the Palestinians.

The Palestinians (not a historical tribe—they were named as such in the 1980s) occupy the land by God's sufferance as temporary, if insufferable, tenants. Like those of the Jewish faith, by continuing to reject Jesus as their Redeemer they are in rebellion against God and await full restoration.

Restoration

The Christian Scriptures predict tumultuous times ahead for both Houses of Israel. Jerusalem, as forecast, has become a bone of universal contention for political authorities and will remain so until Messiah returns.

That event heralds a humanitarian new world order with far-reaching geographical, economic and religious transformation. It heralds a millennium of peace and harmony among nations. **Ω**

Our readers should understand that the people of Israel, in the tenth century BC, separated into two houses (governments). The *House of Israel* was a federation of ten tribes, the *House of Judah* also including Benjamin and Levi. *Judah* is now represented by those of the Jewish faith. *Israel* is represented in the modern world mainly by those of Anglo-Saxon descent.

sword'. Even in our secular age world leaders submit to its spurious moral authority. All who embrace true Christianity must remain faithful to the written Word of God **Ω**

You are invited to read...

Get Ready for Sunday

available in print and on-line

MiniStudy**Spring Harvest**

'...unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days' (Leviticus 23:16)

'Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures' (James 1:18)

The Biblical 'types' can be based on historical events (*Passover*, for example). Or, as in this case, in a natural event - the early grain harvest. Our physical life depends on the produce of the ground, and it is surely right that we recognize the source of this abundance with thanksgiving to the Creator. But the types also have a spiritual fulfillment, and the seven weeks of the grain harvest in ancient Palestine are of momentous significance.

- The Biblical festivals are rooted in the physical laws that govern our planet: *'...and God said, Let there be lights in the firmament of heaven to divide the day from the night; and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days and years'* (Genesis 1:14). Note that word 'seasons'. In Hebrew it is *mo'ed*, denoting a 'fixed time'. The word is used of the divinely-appointed feasts: *'...These are the feasts [mo'ed] of the LORD, even holy convocations, which you shall proclaim in their seasons [mo'ed]'* (Leviticus 23:4). They are appointed times for the people of God to assemble before Him in worship, and their place on the religious calendar is governed by those 'lights'
- Earth's produce, too, is dependent on these 'lights' - our sun and moon. The Creator uses these harvests as an object lesson for His creation. They depict His plan for mankind, and the spring grain harvest is at its heart. In Israel, the new corn could be consumed only after special offerings were presented before the LORD. It was called the *Firstfruits* or the *Wave-Sheaf*. Jesus fulfilled this ancient type on the Sunday morning after his resurrection. Because of the Christian's place as the *'brethren of Christ'* (Hebrews 2:11), we are called *'a kind of firstfruits'* (James 1:18).
- It is these latter - faithful Christians - who represent the 'fifty days' of the spring harvest grain: *'... you shall count unto you from the morrow after the sabbath, from the day that you brought the sheaf of the wave offering; seven sabbaths shall be complete: Even unto the morrow after the seventh sabbath shall you number fifty days'* (Leviticus 23:15-16). The fifty days of the early harvest represent the present era, when the Father is inviting the willing to be the firstfruits of His spiritual harvest. The symbolic fifty days of harvest represent the need for the people of God - throughout the year - constantly to be spiritually nourished, to grow to Christ-like maturity: *'... but grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ'* (II Peter 3:18). And to *'be fruitful and multiply'* - ie to evangelize (Matthew 13:8)
- The apostle Paul explains the significance of the *Firstfruits* offering: *'...now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept'* (I Corinthians 15:20, 23). It represents the resurrection from among the dead. He continues: *'...for as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end'* (vv.22-24). Jesus was the first to be resurrected in spirit form. Then, at his return, all those in whom is the Spirit of God will be resurrected - in their new spirit body - to reign alongside the returned Christ (I Thessalonians 4:14-17, Revelation 20:6)
- The fiftieth day, Sunday, is the *Feast of Pentecost*, familiar to most Christians as the day the holy Spirit came with power upon the disciples (Acts 2:1). The word means *fiftieth*. (This 'seven plus one' theme is common in Scripture. 7 days of *Unleavened Bread* plus 1 (Pentecost); 7 day of *Tabernacles* plus 1; 7 x 7 years plus 1 to the *Jubile* year.) The *Day of Pentecost* - also called the *Feast of Weeks* (eg II Chronicles 8:13) - represents the culmination of the divine plan for this age. It is also the forerunner of the time of Christ's return, when the entire remnant of mankind will have the veil of deception removed (Acts 2:17, Isaiah 25:7, II Corinthians 4:4) - the late harvest, the ingathering of the nations
- *Pentecost* is the only Bible festival for which no calendar date is given in Scripture. It has to be calculated, counted. Contrary to this, in Judaism the date is fixed at the sixth day of the third month - based on fifty days from the first annual High Day of the *Feast of the Passover* (Nisan 15). Note that the *Day of Pentecost* is a 'holy convocation', a High Day, but is not here (Leviticus 23) termed an annual Sabbath - thus making clear that the Sabbath referred to is the weekly one. Jesus, however, fulfilled the typology as the first of the *Firstfruits* harvest. On the day following that High Day (that year it was a Friday) he was still in the grave having been crucified on Wednesday. He could not therefore have fulfilled the type. God always acts 'on time'; He does nothing prematurely. For example: *'...when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son'* (Galatians 4:2, 4; also Ephesians 1:10; Acts 2:1; Exodus 12:17, 41; Daniel 12:7)
- In sum, Jesus as the firstfruits to God by his resurrection was accepted by the Father next day - on the 'morrow of the Sabbath', Sunday morning. From that day we are to count fifty days, and that (Sun)day is *Pentecost*. He is *'...declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead'* (Romans 1:4). As ever Jesus Christ is the focus of the festival. The seven weeks represent Christians of this era - *'a kind of firstfruits'*.
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- *This year (2020) Pentecost is on Sunday May 31st*

Ω

Are you unable to attend Sabbath services in your area?

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www.tulsachurchofgod.net — www.tulsachurchofgod.org*

*Church of God, New Mexico, — 1:30 p.m. MST
www.cognm.org*

*The above also offer online access to past sermon presentations.
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These are not CGOM Associates, but are of like mind and faith.*

*Church of God International, Tyler, TX — 11:00 a.m. CST
www.cgi.churchonline.org*

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