

**NEW**

# **Horizons**

*Vol 8 No 3*

*May/June 2004*

*addressing the important issues for today and tomorrow*

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**CGOM**

Churches Of God Outreach Ministries

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will come to understand  
the true meaning of the  
Gospel of Jesus Christ.**

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by Jesus and by his apostles  
in the clearest of terms - and  
recorded for us in the Scrip-  
tures. Over the centuries  
that truth has been buried,  
dug up, buried again. Our  
desire is to restore the sim-  
ple apostolic message. We  
hope you will be excited  
by what the Scriptures re-  
veal about life, and the  
horizons beyond**

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# new **Horizons**

Issue No 45

May/June 2004

**Sport academies abound. Tennis, football, athletics, swimming - all have their special training schools. So, too, does God!**

Top-notch sportsmen and sports-women don't reach the pinnacle of their chosen sport by mere chance. Take football, for example. Teenagers - sometimes younger - are head-hunted by scouts from the big clubs. Maybe a score are in any one year selected for training in the Club's academy. There's intensive training. Physical and mental health are assessed, bodies strengthened, minds oriented to success on the field. Skills are honed by expert professional trainers. There's supervision - and further selection. Indeed it's possible only one trainee may graduate to a team place. The outcome is his exciting rise to prominence and acclaim as a 'star'.

## Selection

It's commonly assumed that becoming a Christian is virtually random. Tom 'gets religion' after attending a revival meeting with sister Jane. Derek, however, seems impervious to all matters spiritual and shies away from anything 'biblical'. Then there's the great mass evangelistic campaign during which, night after night, thousands 'become Christian'. Roughly, out of earth's six billion souls some one in six are Roman Catholic and a similar number sign up to one or other of the Protestant faiths. Two billion Christians. For some their faith is one of total dedication. Perhaps the majority, however, don't allow their beliefs to interfere with the daily grind.

It may come as a surprise that God

has His own Academy - but it's not based on a campus. It is in Anytown, Anystate. The oldest in the world, it has been functioning for some six thousand years. And every true Christian is enrolled.

Perhaps surprisingly, God isn't at this time in the business of saving the world. For God's undergraduates, too, undergo a selection process.

The apostle Peter informs us about Jesus Christ: "... there is salvation through no-one else; for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Ultimately, our eternal life beyond the grave is to be united with the Father of Jesus. Not many earthlings know that! Said Jesus himself: "I am the Way, the Truth and the Life; no-one comes to the Father but through me" (John 14:6).

But it's the Father Himself who makes the initial selection: "No-one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him", said Jesus (John 6:44). That's personal - and it could be you..

## God's Academy

From before the beginning of human life, the Creator knew there was trouble ahead with His creation. Although Adam was 'perfect' yet he was able to choose - for God didn't create zombies. Because of Adam's choice, sin entered the world and a dark night settled over his progeny. Blinded to the true path by their choices and abetted by Satan, they sank into apostasy and rejected God. Demonic forces encouraged a

smorgasbord of false religions which further blinded mankind to the divine plan. The prophet Isaiah wrote of "the veil which is upon all peoples and the shroud that covers all nations" (ch 25:7). It's an obscuring veil that won't be lifted until Jesus' return to Earth.

The New Testament writer Paul enlightens us further: "You too were dead in your trespasses and sins, in which you conducted yourselves in line with the ways of this world system, controlled by the prince of the aerial powers - the spirit of the one now working in the sons of disobedience" (Ephesians 2:1-2). And adds, "If our gospel has been obscured it has been obscured in the case of those perishing, in whom the god of this world has blinded their unbelieving minds to prevent the illumination of the gospel of the glorious Christ, who is the likeness of God, from penetrating" (II Corinthians 4:4).

By his choices and by his intellectual vanity and arrogance, man excluded himself from the divine training programme. He 'de-selected' himself. But God breaks into this universal mental darkness to choose 'students' for His Academy.

## Who Is Selected?

As the divine Sovereign He picks and chooses (Romans 9:10-18)! Paul, again, tells us more about who God chooses. To the Corinthian brethren he writes: "Simply consider your own call [selection] brothers; not many of you were wise, humanly speaking, nor many mighty, nor many of nobility; but God has chosen the world's unschooled to shame the learned; and God has chosen the weak of the world to shame the strong.. God also

*has chosen the world's lowborn and contemptibles and nobodies in order to annihilate what amounts to something, so that all humanity may be boastless in the presence of God" (I Corinthians 1:26-29).*

From out of all nations (v.24: 'Jews and Greeks'), then, God enrolls individuals with whom He can work to shape into the divine image.

### Academy of Life

As with any sports academy, not everyone graduates' to God's first team. Many are invited to enroll - but turn down the invitation. And of those selected for the course not all remain faithful - '*called, picked and loyal*' (Revelation 17:14). It can be tough! The apostles said: "*We must enter the Kingdom of God by way of many afflictions*" (Acts 14:22). and (Paul) "*If we have hope in Christ for this life only then of all people we [Christians] are most to be pitied*" (I Corinthians 15:19). For God expects more from those whom He is actively shaping for eternity.

Daily, those in God's Academy are being shaped by the master potter: "*We are the clay; you are our Potter; we are all the work of your hands*" (Isaiah 64:8). All true Christians - as Sons and Daughters of the almighty God - are subject to His caring discipline:

And to the Roman disciples: "*I reason that this temporal suffering is of no account in view of the glory that is to be revealed in us*" (Romans 8:18).

*My son, do not think lightly of the Lord's discipline, neither feel faint-hearted under His reproof, for the Lord disciplines the person He loves and punishes every son whom He acknowledges. You must endure for the sake of correction; God is treating you as sons. For what sort of son is it whom the father does not discipline? If you receive no correction, such as all sons share, then you are illegitimates and not sons (Hebrews 12:4-11)*

Whatever life throws at us - and 'graduation' each will be rewarded with a place on God's First Team.

Christians are no less subject than others to life's trials and difficulties - is filtered through God's loving concern for His children. Citing the failings of ancient Israel, Paul told the Corinthians:

You see, God needs you to reveal your heart! As He told ancient Israel: Every individual chosen by God to

*These experiences came to them as a lesson for us and were written as a warning to us to whom the end of the age is imminent. Therefore let him who feels sure of standing firm beware of falling. No temptation beyond human resistance has laid hold on you, and God is reliable who will not permit you to be tempted beyond your ability, but will at the time of temptation provide a way out so that you will be able to stand it (I Corinthians 10:11-14)*

be part of His training for eternity may be in for a rough ride. But on

*Keep in mind the whole way over which the LORD your God has been leading you these forty years in the wilderness - to humble you, to test you so that He might discover your true disposition, and learn whether you will obey His orders or not. He let you suffer...to teach you that man does not live by bread alone; but that man lives on everything that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD (Deuteronomy 8:2-3)*

### Bible Basics

The Churches of God publish an internet study course on our web-site:  
[www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)

The introductory lesson gives some hints about how to study your Bible.

*We are pleased to reply to any questions you may have arising from any of our publications. However at this time we are not in a position to 'grade' your studies in Bible Basics*

### First Team

Some may be shocked when that 'little old lady from down the street' bursts from her grave, resurrected at Christ's return to '*shine as the brightness of the firmament*'. She may be one of those who will become '*as the stars for ever and ever*' (Daniel 12:1-3). She will be among those who are '*royalty and priests for our God and shall reign over the earth*' (Revelation 5:10) alongside Jesus Christ in his millennial reign.

Lifted from obscurity - as men see it, but not in the eyes of God - she and all those who have faithfully persevered through the years in God' Academy will be resurrected to God's First Team. All will be 'stars'. All will receive a winner's crown:

### And the Rest?

And the rest of mankind? Those *not*

*Do you not know that all those racing in the stadium all run, to be sure, but one receives the prize? So run your race that you may win it. But whoever enters the contest practices temperance in every detail; he, indeed to receive a perishable, but we for an imperishable crown" (1 Corinthians 9:24-26)*

now chosen will, resurrected to a physical life, have the veil and the blindness and the hardness of heart removed. If you are not now enrolled, that little old lady may one day be your teacher. □

*[see the Mini-Study on p.9]*

*You are invited to request the free related articles:*

**What Do You Expect From God?  
What Do You Mean - 'Repent'?  
Coming to Baptism**

**On Sunday May 30 many Christians will celebrate 'Pentecost'. Here's the little-known origin of the celebration**

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

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

That awesome event was the resurrection of Jesus. Most of them had been in Jerusalem for the Passover when the city was alive with the rumour that Jesus had risen from the dead. They had, perhaps, peered into the empty tomb with its undisturbed grave clothes. They had perhaps asked, *How did Jesus pass through them?* It was the same evidence that had convinced Peter and John. [Request the free article *The Empty Tomb*]

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

### The Wavesheaf

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

During the Days of Unleavened Bread [*ie* the Biblical seven-day spring festival that began with Passover] there was a ceremony which is of vital significance for Christians.

As the weekly Sabbath during the Festival ended, Temple representa-

tives went to a field on the outskirts of Jerusalem and scythed a measure of the first-ripe grain - the '*firstfruits*' of the crop - which had earlier been marked out by delegates from the Jews' ruling body, the Sanhedrim. The Law stated that it was to be offered in the Temple "*on the morrow after the Sabbath*" (Leviticus 23:11). It was prepared the evening before. In the prescribed manner, the sheaf was "*lifted up*" (waved) before the LORD on the morning of the first day of the week, with the appropriate accompanying sacrifice of a lamb, fine flour and oil - a sweet-smelling offering to God.

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

### Firstfruits

The significance of the firstfruits wavesheaf offering wasn't lost on the early Church of God. The Law stated "...*you shall bring the firstfruits of your harvest to the priest, and he shall wave the sheaf before the Lord*" (Lev 23: 10).

This ceremony was traditionally (the text doesn't specifically link the two) carried out during the *Days of Unleavened Bread*, and was the starting point for the significant seven weeks leading to the Feast of Firstfruits - what we call *Pentecost*.

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

And around the time of the cutting

of the wavesheaf on Saturday evening - Jesus was resurrected!

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

Here, then, embedded within the *Passover* and *Unleavened Bread* observance, is a pattern for calling to mind the astounding events of the last earthly days of Jesus the Messiah. As Passover lambs were being slain in the Temple, Jesus was himself sacrificed. As the Wavesheaf was being cut outside Jerusalem at the end of the weekly Sabbath he was resurrected. And as the priests lifted up ("*waved*") the firstfruits offering before the altar on Sunday morning Jesus (perhaps after a night spent in thanksgiving, and intercession for his wayward disciples) ascended to present himself to the Father - the Firstfruits of the dead (*see* John 20:17 and Matthew 28:9).

### Why Pentecost?

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

All the offerings and special times that were part of the divinely-revealed religion of ancient Israel had significance for future events - for us. Rooted in that firstfruits offering in spring was another celebration, this time in early summer

God's instruction was that, depending on the beginning of the early harvest, they were to count fifty days - seven complete weeks - from the day following the Sabbath: "*Count fifty days to the day after the seventh Sabbath...and you shall* [cont'd p.8

# THE CHRISTIAN AND THE SPIRIT Some History

## How does God's Spirit interact with the human mind? Let's unravel a puzzling mystery

The nature of the Spirit of God and the interaction between God's Spirit and the human spirit has given rise to a multitude of explanations - of what he or it is, how it works, who has it. Much of the confusion rises from a wrong perspective. The difficulties are removed when we step back to look at the plan and purpose of God.

God's focus at the creation of human kind was to make a being "*in the image and likeness of God*". It's not wrong, therefore, to draw some 'anthropomorphic' conclusions. Thus, according to the Bible man looks physically as God appears in His spirit form. And man has intellectual capacities comparable to the divine - though clearly far inferior in power and scope.

When man was created his total being pleased his Creator - he was "very good" (Genesis 1:31). All his physical and intellectual and emotional faculties fitted him for stewardship over the remainder of creation. He was, though, on a par with the rest of creation in regard to his make-up - indeed sharing the bulk of his genetic form with every other creature. Like them, Adam - man was "*of the earth, made from dust*" (I Corinthians 15:47, Genesis 2:7). He was, with them, not immortal - a quality of life possessed only by God (I Timothy 6:16).

But there are obviously significant differences between man and beast. One of these lies in what the Bible terms "the spirit". It is a faculty shared with other living creatures. As Solomon pointed out: "*Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes*

*down to the earth?*" (Ecclesiastes 3:21).

Numerous Bible texts confirm there is "*a spirit in man*" - and in the lower creation.

### Spirit in Man

Whatever this spirit may be it is not immortal. There is no possible way of proving from Scripture that any aspect of man survives death - apart from a resurrection. But that is a different matter.

Some anatomy is useful here. The most obvious difference between man and beast is our brain function. Our capabilities - between kind and kind - are directly related to the brain structure. The brain is made up of nerve cells - neurons - each with a varying number of branches which inter-connect with other nerve cells. A worm has about nine neurons. A bee has several thousand. A cat about one hundred million. But a human being has some ten billion - and the inter-connections run in to astronomical figures. The human brain has been described as "the most complex machine in the universe".

It's this quantum leap in capacity that enables man to fulfill his stewardship function. It enables us to appreciate beauty, to craft complex machines, to create civilisations. The intricacy of the human spirit gives us a capacity to dream - to envisage, to plan, to execute marvels. And to grasp the notion of the divine. God has "*put eternity into man's mind*", wrote Solomon (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

All this is achieved through the activity of the human spirit. Wrote the apostle Paul, "*...for what person knows a man's thoughts except the spirit of man which is in him?*" (I Corinthians 2: 11).

Fresh from the hand of God, the first man Adam had a mind that reflected that of his Creator. He had, if you like, 'God's neurons' just as he had other more overtly physical characteristics of God. (God, of course, is "spirit" - John 4: 24.)

Tradition has it that Adam perfectly expressed the will of God for all of seven years - though Scripture does not specify a time. He carried out his God-given functions faultlessly, having dominion over all of the material creation around him. Adam and Eve also functioned perfectly in that they never during this time transgressed the "operating manual" for which they were designed. In Bible terms, Adam did not sin. Their human spirit, until this point, was in fact the mind-set of God.

### Choice

One key point in Adam's creation - while in perfect harmony with God yet he had the faculty of choice. Likely, time and again he and his wife were tempted to go contrary to the way of holiness - but resisted.

To use an analogy from the world of personal computers, Adam's operating system (the spirit in man) was perfectly tailored to run on only the "programme" designed for it. That programme was the divine Law. When a "bug" entered the system - when he transgressed that Law - the system crashed! Since then the human spirit has been distorted - and of a mind-set that the Bible describes as "*enmity with God*" (Romans 8:7).

The result is the chaos, the misery, the pain that swamps our world today.

### Four Ages of Man

Before we go to how God's Spirit "*bears witness with our spirit*" (Romans 8:16), let's summa-

size what could be called “the four ages of man”.

*First* is man newly formed by the Creator. In Eden he lives in perfect harmony with God. He carries out the will of God, enjoying all the fruits of that harmony (Galatians 5: 22, 23).

*Next* is man having broken that perfect relationship and as a result being ejected from his Paradise. His spirit is now at war with God. It is “re-wired” and has become hostile to God’s Operating Manual, with all the ensuing devastating consequences we see around us.

*Third* - we come to the implementation of God’s safety-net - redemption.

The loving God provides mankind a way to eventually be restored to his pristine state. We will return to this in a moment.

And *finally* there is the stage, yet future, when man will put off entirely “the old man” and be restored to the divine image by means of a resurrection to unending life. [You are invited to request the article *After The Resurrection*]

### Recovery Mode

Let’s look more closely at that third stage. It is the time - extending from the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ - in which we now live - until the end of this present era.

Thanks to the sin of Adam and Eve we are saddled at birth with our crashed operating system. Through our parents we have inherited a flawed spirit that is hostile to God, that has been blinded by the devil to the perfect ways of the Creator (II Corinthians 4:4). Our natural mind or spirit rejects the way of life revealed by Jesus Christ in the Old and New Testaments. It’s a spirit that will be with us till the day we die.

For the vast majority of mankind this is all that we know. We are born. We live a life of time and chance that can be pleasant or can be hell - usually a mixture. Then we die.

But God has a plan. He has by no means abandoned His intention of making us “*in his image*” (Genesis 1: 26, 27). We were created for the very purpose, as the apostle Peter tells us, of being “*partakers of the divine nature*” (II Peter 1: 3-4). God’s plan for man is to share with us the magnificence of His Universe. We are destined as God’s children to be “heirs of God and fellow-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8: 17).

Through the sufferings, the death, and the resurrection of His own Son - the very Word of God (John 1: 1-3, 14) - God has provided a way for mankind to be restored to the original model. But this time the end result ensures we forever after will always make the right choices.

### A New Spirit

The apostle Peter made clear how God will achieve this. Addressing those gathered in Jerusalem for the Festival of Pentecost he said, “*Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit*” (Acts 2:38). This was a promise long foretold in the Scriptures (Joel 2:28-29). In modern language what Peter says is, “Turn yourself

away from breaking my laws and be baptized. I will freely forgive all that has been wrong with you - and I will restore to you My mind-set, My operating system”.

Note that this new Spirit does not replace our human spirit, but works along side of it. It is God’s way of directly communicating with us (I Corinthians 2: 9-13).

Indeed, as Paul’s own experience highlights - there will as long as a Christian lives be an unending *battle between our spirit “in the flesh” and the Spirit of God “in our mind”* (Romans 7:21-24). They oppose one another.

Those who have received the Spirit of God have, like Adam, the power of choice. Christians can indeed choose to grieve (distress, cause pain) to the Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30). We may even quench or put out the Spirit (I Thessalonians 5:19). This frightening thought is further explained in Hebrews: (6: 4): “*For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened...if they shall fall away, to renew them to repentance*”.

Alternatively, we may choose, with the help of God’s indwelling Spirit, to suppress those human desires that emerge from our faulty human spirit - a spirit that obeys the flesh with all its seeking after satisfaction. Do this, and the influence of God’s Spirit - nourished by the written Word of God - gains ascendancy. We increasingly become like our Father in heaven, as we strive towards Christ-like maturity (Matthew 5:48). We become truly ‘*sons and daughters of the Almighty*’ - His children shaped in His likeness (II Corinthians 6:18).

The divine Spirit acting with our human spirit will ultimately restore to us the lost divine image. □

### Internet Access

Many readers of *New Horizons* now have access to the ‘world wide web’. You are invited to visit the **CGOM** website at

**www.cgom.org**

Dozens of past articles from this magazine, and many of our other publications and services may be viewed there - or downloaded to your printer

## The Drugs Menace

**At four recent church functions which I attended, alcohol was served. Although alcohol is widely consumed it is the cause of Britain's biggest drug problem. While the anti-social effects of drinking have increased in the last thirty years, Christian witness on this important issue has declined**

**John D Beasley**

Alcohol needs to be seen in the wider context of the total drugs scene. The tragic death of Leah Betts who died on her eighteenth birthday after taking ecstasy hit the headlines. Yet the media fails to tell countless terrible stories about the consequences of using heroin, cocaine, LSD, solvents, tobacco *etc.* Smoking, for example, annually causes about 120,000 deaths in Britain.

How can Christians respond to Britain's drug problem? Here are some steps we could take.

- **Examine our lifestyle.** Jesus said: "I have come in order that you may have life - life in all its fullness". As Christians we do not need non-medicinal drugs to enable us to enjoy life.

Jesus spent much of his ministry healing sick people, so he obviously wanted people to have healthy bodies. As his followers we should try to keep as fit and healthy for as long as possible. Clearly some illnesses and disabilities occur through no fault of the person who suffers from them, but Christians should try to avoid damaging their God-given faculties through unhealthy lifestyles.

- **Set a positive example.** Jesus said that his disciples were to be light to the world, salt to the earth and leaven in society. He also heavily criticized those who lead children

astray. "It would be better" he said, "for that person to have a large millstone tied around his neck and be drowned in the deep sea".

Christians never know when their example is being followed. There is a tragic true story about a lad who killed someone while under the influence of alcohol. In a cell he told his minister that he took his first drink at a wedding reception because he saw the minister take one first.

- **Become aware of drug problems.** Christians may be tempted to be like ostriches and keep their heads in the sand to avoid seeing the problems. But Jesus told a story about one lost sheep. As all human beings are precious to God, we need to learn about the ways in which a wide range of drugs are harming a colossal number of people.

A disturbing survey of church-affiliated young people showed that they were no less likely to take drugs than non-churchgoing teenagers. Results of the survey, based on the drugs involvement of 7,666 church-affiliated young people aged between twelve and thirty, were "broadly similar" to secular surveys. It also revealed a direct link between cigarette smoking and drug-taking - young people who smoke are over fifty times more likely to use drugs regularly.

Overall, cannabis was the most popular illegal drug among young people from church-linked backgrounds. Solvents were the next most commonly used by children between the ages of twelve and sixteen, followed by stimulants and hallucinogens such as LSD.

Figures show that in the twelve to sixteen age group, 23% had been offered drugs and 9% had tried them.

In the seventeen-plus age-group the figures were 46% and 23% respectively. The figures were "slightly less" than those obtained in secular surveys, states the report, adding that "there was no room for complacency concerning drug misuse by young people in the church".

Carried out in 1995 at Spring Harvest, an annual festival attended by 70,000 Christians, the survey was commissioned by the Evangelical Coalition on Drugs (ECOD) to discover the depth of the drug problem within the church.

- **Educate children and young people about drugs.** Education on alcohol, smoking and illegal drugs should be part of every church's work among children and young people.

### Resources

Attractive high quality drug education manuals and other literature are published by *Hope UK*, a national Christian drug education charity which specialises in this important field. Three new manuals were recently launched at a packed seminar in Central London. *How to do Drugs* was specially written for youth workers and *Getting it Sorted* for pre-teens leaders. *Doing Drugs* is designed for Christian groups and contains practical advice. *Hope UK* also organizes a "Now You Know..." project which involves providing an attractive information booklet and colourful wall-chart for youngsters aged eleven to fourteen.

Britain has serious drug problems and every church can play a part in helping to reduce them. The problems demand an urgent response. Premature deaths and other tragedies will be prevented if we can encourage more young people to adopt healthy and safe drug-free lifestyles. □

John D Beasley, a Methodist Local Preacher for over thirty years, works with *Hope UK*. A free resources catalogue can be obtained from:  
Hope UK (Dept NH)  
Freepost SW1439  
London SE1 0YT

**Controversy rages about the relative merits and demerits of Mel Gibson's film *Passion of Christ*. What is the real message?**

Lauded by many Roman and Protestant Christians worldwide the film is viewed by others as an affront to Jewish sensitivities - and indeed perceived by some viewers as rather tasteless in its lurid depiction of gratuitous violence.

**The 'How'**

Jesus did indeed suffer. He was maliciously opposed throughout his years of ministry by the religious hierarchy. In one night he was betrayed by a close friend, abandoned by his disciples, tried by a prejudiced Court and handed over to the occupying power in the 'hope' they would execute him. He was exposed to the taunts of an inflamed baying rabble.

Jesus was humiliated and mocked by Rome's foot-soldiers, and scourged by its torturers. He was impaled on a wooden stake and left to die - again taunted by the few who were close enough to see his suffering. His pain was, finally, ended by a Roman spear thrust to his side.

All this is fact - and depicted in varying degree of accuracy and omission in the film.

**More Fact**

However, it is also fact that much of his torment was in private, witnessed by relatively few. A crowd, later, witnessed his procession through the quiet early morning streets of Jerusalem. Most, however, were preoccupied with preparations for the Passover that coming evening. It was the Sanhedrin who, summoned to Pilate, screeched for his death. Few gathered within close sight of the 'cross' to witness his agony first-hand.

And in the centuries since not a one witnessed his final hours in person. Yet the suffering and death of Jesus - and his glorious resurrection - has

impacted millions. The world became a better place. Many - despite never having witnessed the crucifixion - have been brought to faith and to eternal life. The message of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth reverberates down the centuries.

**The Right Question**

Clearly the 'how' of the suffering of Jesus is off the scale in its significance. His horrendous ordeal - foreseen in detail by prophets and psalmists - wrings the hearts of even unbelievers. More significant, however, is its meaning. *Why* did Jesus die?

The world of the first century wallowed in darkness and depravity. In pursuance of His divine plan God stepped into our world - in the person of His Son.

**Unnatural Death**

God is perfect. He is 'pure light'. Man (Adam) was created complete at a specific time on a specific day. He was the perfect image and likeness in human form of his Creator and, reflecting that light, had the potential to live for ever.

Exercising his freedom of choice, Adam 'switched off the light'. In Bible terms, *he sinned* and became subject to death. Contrary to common belief, death is *not* 'natural' for man. Certainly we all die - but that is the consequence of sin. God's plan was that we live for ever. As long as Adam functioned in accordance with God's 'Instruction Manual' - His eternal spiritual Law - he would remain alive in his flesh. He ate the forbidden fruit - and the death process began. *"Whoever obeys the whole Law, but slips in one point, becomes guilty in every respect"* (James 2:10). It doesn't matter which part of a shattered vase hits the ground first!

# 'The Passion of Christ' ...not *How*, but *Why*

**Why Jesus Died**

As the head - and representative - of the human race, Adam passed on death to all of us: *'...in Adam all die'* (I Corinthians 15:22). His sin was a barrier that separated him - and us - from the God of all holiness.

So precious to the Creator is each human life that He said: *"Whoever sheds a person's blood by man shall his blood be shed, because God made man in His likeness"* (Genesis 9:6). And *"...the blood through the life in it serves for expiation"* (Leviticus 17:11). Adam's life was sustained by his circulating blood: *"The life is in the blood"*. This vital renewable organ was his life. The shedding of blood - in sacrifices, in judicial execution - is symbolic of death.

And we are all - all mankind - subject to that penalty and deserving of death *'for that all have sinned'*. God, as Creator, so loved His creation that He had to define a means whereby man's depravity could be reconciled to His - God's - perfect and awesome holiness, and to satisfy justice.

Only the death of a man, a new Adam - born of sinful woman, subject to God's Law and who throughout his life successfully resisted every sinful thought - only such a death could break the pattern and reconcile God and man. God decreed Jesus was that man.

The ire of the religious hierarchy - the Sanhedrim - having been stirred they sought his death knowing full well the vile implications of a Roman crucifixion. In the end Jesus, the Lamb of God, was sacrificed and his blood poured out when he was pierced by a Roman lance - at the time designated for the annual Passover sacrifices in

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unsigned articles are by the Editor

### 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 cooperates 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 quarterly *Newsletter*, *Fountain of Life*, a bi-monthly outreach magazine *New Horizons*, the *Bible Basics* home study course). The *Outreach Ministries* also supports a network of independent fellowships and scattered brethren.

We cordially invite all independent fellowships of whatever size - or individuals - to associate with us in this worldwide ministry. Our *Statement of Beliefs* and a *Publications Catalogue* is available from any of our addresses. We are pleased to offer you, without charge, any of our publications.

### Why Marry?

**June is the time for weddings. Thousands will - despite the decline in its popularity - 'tie the knot' in church or office. Why bother?**

On the face of it marriage seems unnecessary. Mankind can *'be fruitful and multiply'* without the benefit of a marriage certificate. And so, too, sexual pleasure. And millions of cohabitantes indeed 'don't bother'.

But these factors are not what marriage is about! Somehow the notion of a man and a woman getting together, formalized by that certificate, has gripped all nations throughout history.

### FIRSTFRUITS...cont'd

*proclaim on the same day [ie the first day of the week, Sunday] that it is a holy convocation to you. You shall do no customary work on it" (Leviticus 23:15-21).*

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

But what did this annual holy day signify?

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

### Firstfruits Harvest

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

Hear James : *"Of his own will he brought us forth by the word of truth*

*that we might be a kind of firstfruits of his creatures" (James 1:18).*

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

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

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

*you are invited to request, free:*

***Should You Be Baptized?***

### Divine Plan

Only the intellectually blind and willingly ignorant can conjure up the weird notion that man 'evolved' from an inert rock or drifted to Earth as a speck of plasma from an alien planet. No. We don't derive from blind chance but we are the product of direct divine creation.

*And we are created with purpose.* At the time of His choosing God created the physical universe as the foundation on which to work out the plan for which He had long prepared. He created mankind - the 'clay model' from which to develop Spirit beings in every way like Himself.

Rather than creating a hermaphrodite - a combination of both sexes - to procreate, God made us *'male and female'*. For, He said: *"It is not good for man to be alone - I will make him a suitable helper, completing him"* (Genesis 2:18). Thus He made woman -

equal but different.

### Companions

Man - and woman - are of themselves incomplete. Only the union of the two as *'one flesh'* (v. 24) and over a lifetime enables the companionship that properly reflects the Creator's purpose. It is a *covenant* - an agreement with mutual obligations and privileges. Any other form of 'living together' pro-tem is *sinful*, and heaps up trouble upon trouble - as is clear from the many mixed-up relationships all around us.

As marriage - the uniting of a man and a woman for life - is a divine institution (and the very first institution) its rejection is a rejection of God Himself. Few understand its importance both for personal fulfilment and also for national stability. Fewer still understand it is a prototype for the forthcoming unbreakable marriage between Jesus and the church.

*request the free article:*

***Spend a Lifetime - Together***

Will *you* this year be a 'June bride and groom'? Understand that you embark on a lifetime commitment with implications for your own future - from here to eternity. □

**Mini Study...****What happens to those who die 'unsaved'?**

*The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were completed* (Revelation 20:5)

Christianity claims that only through a relationship with Jesus Christ can anyone have eternal life. Excluded, therefore, would be those who lived before Jesus suffered, died and resurrected; those through the centuries since - the majority - who never came in contact with Christianity; and the couple of billion now living who haven't so much as heard of him. Yet we read that God *'is not willing that any should perish'*. In fact the eternal welfare of all these billions throughout the ages is a key part of the divine plan. All mankind of all ages will have, by the end, opportunity to *'choose life'*

- God's loving concern is for all mankind. We are created with purpose. At the heart of the divine plan is His desire to increase His Family - to transform men and women into the divine image. [See E-study No...]
- we are created with the seeds of divine character - not least being our *freedom to choose*. A devastating effect is that in general man has rejected the 'instruction manual' by which we are designed to optimally function. The consequence is poverty, squalor, disease, personal and intra-national violence, confusion in religion

and in education, economics, politics. And the inevitable rejection of the true Creator God

- locked into a culture of atheism (eg China) or religion (eg Hinduism, Islam, voodoo) whole nations have excluded themselves from the divine plan. 'Christianity' is not exempt, for it has wandered far from the pathway of its Founder. Overseen by Satan, *'the god of this world'*, the world's systems have served to blind mankind to the way of the Creator (Isaiah 25:7, II Corinthians 4:4)
- scattered within the nations are individuals to whom God reveals Himself. They may be genetically disposed to listen to His invitation. They may simply be battered by life. They will not, usually, be the 'strong or noble or wise': *'...but God has chosen the world's unschooled to shame the learned, and the weak to shame the strong. God has also chosen the world's low-born and contemptibles and nobodies...'* (I Corinthians 1:26-29)
- God prepares these folk - those who respond to the invite - for leadership in His Kingdom . (Just as personnel are carefully selected for management of a multi-national.) He first draws them to Jesus Christ - and then as the Master Potter He shapes them to spiritual maturity to reign with Jesus
- but God hasn't forgotten the vast majority of mankind - the 'unsaved'. The time is coming when the prime mover of man's

troubled existence - Satan - will be removed from his position of influence. For the ensuing one thousand years (the 'Millennium') the survivors of the coming holocaust and their descendants will learn to follow that Instruction Manual (Micah 4:1-7)

- but that still leaves those unsaved billions from the past. Again - not forgotten. In the divine plan they will all - after the Millennium - be returned to physical life by a resurrection from the dead. Jesus told the Jews who accosted him: *'...the time comes when all who are in the graves shall hear his voice and shall come out; those who have done good to the resurrection of life [ie, at Jesus' second coming] and those who have practiced evil for the resurrection of judgment' [ie, after the Millennium]*. At that time they will be judged by the same standards that God is applying to those He calls now . They will be able to exercise choice without the malign influences of Satan and *this* world

*further reading:*  
**When Someone Dies**

**'The Passion'... cont'd**

the Temple. Only by means of his pain and his blood poured out on that hillside is it possible for us to be reconciled to the all-holy God. Not to satisfy some mythical bloodthirsty tyrannical God but as the first step towards becoming part of a loving Father's ever-living Family.

That's why Jesus died - for each of us. □

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study the Bible

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tions. However, we are not yet in a  
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