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North Road Chapel (Evangelical)
BIDEFORD

FESTAL DAYS AND THE LAW OF GOD

PART 8

Is the celebration of Festal Days such as Christmas and Easter a violation of God's law?

Having dealt at some length with the festive season of December 25th and all the paraphernalia associated with it, we now turn our attention to the festival of Easter.

It is well that we first analyse the word as to its origin and meaning. "The word Easter is of Saxon origin, Eastra the goddess of Spring, in whose honour sacrifices were offered about Passover time each year. By the eighth century, Anglo-Saxons had adopted the name to designate the celebration of Christ's resurrection" (Unger's Bible Dictionary).

EASTER IS NOT A CHRISTIAN TERM

In its original, Easter is the same as Astarte and Ashtaroth, a heathen goddess, the mother god, or the queen of heaven. "Easter is nothing else than Astarte, one of the titles of Beltis, the queen of heaven,....the worship of Bel and Astarte was very early introduced into Britain, along with the Druids, the priests of the groves" (Hislop, The Two Babylons). Immediately do we see that although this term now appears in the Christian calendar and indeed is common place throughout Christendom, it is of heathen origin and pertains to idolatrous religion. That such words as CHRISTS-MASS and EASTER should ever have become a part of the Christian's vocabulary is most tragic. If we say that we are going to celebrate Easter, it is a most serious thing if we only knew. Do we come into the house of God to celebrate Ashtaroth - the queen of heaven? Such a figure only exists in the vain imagination of the idolater.

A subject of such consequence as is before us now, demands thorough investigation in the light of Holy Scripture and the Spirit of God does give some revelation as to the antiquity of these heathen practices and the idolatrous figures associated with them. In the Old Testament it is stated, "And the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord, and served Baalim: And they

forsook the Lord God of their fathers, which brought them out of the land of Egypt, and followed other gods, of the gods of the people that were round about them, and bowed themselves unto them, and provoked the Lord to anger. And they forsook the Lord, and served Baal and Ashtaroth" (Judges 2:11-13).

This is an historical record of events some fourteen to fifteen hundred years before the birth of Christ.

BAAL AND ASHTAROTH

These are not one and the same, they are two heathen deities. In the religion of Babylon these two are very prominent. Baal is supposedly the male, Ashtaroth the female, and she is the wife of Baal.

In these verses quoted from Judges Ch 2, we learn that the people of God had introduced these two deities into their worship. It was not that Israel had entirely dismissed Jehovah for this was not so; what had happened was that they had INCORPORATED this as an EXTRA. However v 13 of that chapter states "They forsook the Lord." Here is a most solemn lesson; for in the eyes of Almighty God, to incorporate something pagan and of man's invention with the worship of the true God is to FORSAKE THE LORD.

Upon the surface this may appear a drastic statement, but in this examination we are putting Festal Days on trial as was made clear in the earlier sections. These festive occasions are being brought to the touchstone of God's law which is the alone standard. What that law states has been clearly seen, and that which constitutes idolatry has been established. Idolatry is a broad and far reaching principle. That which is evidenced when we introduce something of man's imagination is that WE have made a decision of our OWN will. God has said NO, yet we do it regardless. To be logical in this, we must admit that we have chosen another authority, we have turned away from God's holy law, that is equivalent to forsaking the Lord. Our wills and desires have taken precedence over the will of the supreme eternal God. In this let us not think that He is deceived. No pious talk or well adapted reasoning will impress the Almighty if His law is being spurned by us. Let none be so foolish as to think that

our sentimental devotions count for anything with Him if we are deliberately walking with a foot in two camps, mixing the false with the true. God's word to us is clear. "If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me" (Psalm 66:18).

THE SOLEMN IMPLICATIONS

This matter of festal days is of great moment, it is a subject to be investigated with gravity. These seasonal festivities are remnants of Babylonish worship. However, most would argue this is not so, as Easter to a vast number of Christians is purely a celebration of the death and resurrection of Christ. But is this a correct assumption? Is an annual celebration of this nature Biblical? As with Christmas, so with Easter, the Scriptures can be searched from cover to cover and such a yearly festival is not to be found. What then is the origin, how can it be explained that this spring festival has become woven into the very fabric of professed Christianity?

Religious Directories, Encyclopaedias, or that classic work 'The Two Babylons' will give the information that Easter is purely pagan as to its origin and has nothing to do with the death and resurrection of Christ. This festival existed many centuries before Christ was born, and it was a feast connected with spring in ancient Babylon and that part of the world. Spring to us signifies the re-birth of nature, and in it we see the wondrous providence of a SOVEREIGN CREATOR, but to the idolaters of Babylon it was different. They believed that Baal and Ashtaroth were responsible for this and they created a special festival in the spring, it was their Astarte, or in English, Easter. Ashtaroth, the female goddess carries the thought of spring and fertility.

TAMMUZ

At this point another heathen god must be introduced, his name is Taranuz. He is mentioned in Scripture, but nothing is said about him. It has been stated in earlier sections, that the details and fine points of Babylonish worship are not given to us in Holy Writ, neither would we expect it, for it is not the object of the Scriptures

of Truth to educate us in idolatry. So in all probability, when we have read of Tammuz in our Bibles, we have simply passed the name over as being just another Old Testament character which meant nothing to us. However he IS mentioned, which is Biblical proof that these heathen deities were recognized, celebrated and worshipped hundreds of years before Christ was born. It is only when we have a little insight into Babylonish idolatry that these obscure names and figures mentioned in the Bible begin to mean something. The name Tammuz means TRUE SON. Encyclopaedia Britannica 1969 gives a detailed description of him, as it does all these gods and goddesses. Alexander Hislop's work on this is also invaluable. Tammuz was a very prominent idolatrous figure in the whole Babylonish system. His name is often used as the equivalent to Nimrod, Bacchus, Osiris and others. The reason for these variations being, that as Babylonish worship spread ultimately to cover the WHOLE EARTH, so did it vary considerably in its forms, terms, and symbols as it was fitted into the many cultures; but it all started with Nimrod. The BEGINNING of this religious kingdom of false worship was BABEL (cf Genesis 10:10).

That which equates the nearest to Babylonish worship today is Romanism, although relics of it are to be found in every religion under heaven.

To come back to this mystery god Tammuz, which means 'true son'; he was supposedly the son of the mother god Ashtaroth, begotten by Baal, the male or father god. Very significant is his name TRUE SON. We must not forget that which has already been stated - names and terms showed variation in different lands, for example the Osiris of Egypt was but the Nimrod of Babylon.

No record is given us in the Bible as to how Nimrod died, but tradition has it that he died a violent death. However what we do know is that the Osiris of Egypt did come to a most untimely and violent end, and Osiris is but the Egyptian equivalent name for Nimrod. Plato in his writings states that "Osiris and Tammuz are to be regarded as identical, and is the same as Adonis and the mighty hunter." Hislop says "As Egypt wept over Osiris, the

Phoenicians and Assyrians wept over Tammuz, whereas in Greece and Rome they lamented over Bacchus."

What has all this to do with Easter the reader may well be asking? The facts are that this has ALL to do with this spring festival which in its original was Astarte, and into it has been cunningly slotted fundamental aspects of the Christian faith.

This true son of alleged deity - Tammuz, was violently slain supposedly at the age of forty years. In the calendar of Babylonish worship, a period of forty days was set aside prior to the celebration of Astarte or Easter, in which the people would afflict themselves by fasting in sympathy for Ashtaroth the mother, over the death of Tammuz. The reason for forty days was one day for each year of her son's life, also they would join with her in prayers for the re-birth of Tammuz. By doing this they also expected that she in turn would give them a good spring. Forty days fasting to them was a meritorious exercise to gain favour.

Today there are certain sections of Christendom who celebrate a season which they call Lent. This season will be found on most calendars and diaries. There are six Sundays in Lent; forty days are set aside. To imply that this is a time of fasting and affliction today would be gross exaggeration. Nevertheless recognition is still given to a forty day period and some slight restriction may be in evidence on the part of some, but where, we must ask, did this practice of Lent come from? The Book of Common Prayer will be the immediate answer! Yes, there in the Prayer Book it will be discovered. In fact some eighteen to twenty pages will be found which are taken up with rites and lessons for Holy Days. Saints and Bishops listed in large numbers for various days of the year, including Valentine on the fourteenth of February and St Nicholas in December. Benedictine Abbots, Tables and Charts, Sundays in Advent, Epiphany, Lent, Trinity, Ash Wednesday, St John the Baptist, All Saints; Holy Days in profusion as well as Christmas, Easter and Whitsun. True, it is all in the Prayer Book, but where did the Prayer Book get this great list from, and the appropriate days

and dates to so formulate a calendar and bring it in as the official order for worship?

The Bible will be searched in vain for such warrant. The only Holy Day contained in the Prayer Book which is authorized by the Word of God is the Sabbath, a creation principle of one day in seven to be set aside for God; this the Creator himself instituted to be observed for all time. For us in the New Testament age it is the first day of the week. Nevertheless it is still a Sabbath. This day we are to remember and keep it holy. Not ONE Sabbath in the fifty-two of any year is DIFFERENT to another. Each one is EQUALLY HOLY unto the Lord our God, and any other day set aside as being ESPECIALLY HOLY is an invention of man, and this is totally unacceptable to God because it is adding to His law which He himself has pronounced as perfect (cf Psalm 19:7).

Returning to the forty days again; from whence did it come? The Romanists ADOPTED it in the sixth century A.D. but again where did they get it? It came from BABYLON and it all revolves around the death of Tammuz. We might well ask how did this come to figure in a so-called PROTESTANT Book of Worship? What about the Reformation? What about the so-called evangelical wing of Anglicanism? Yes, and what about Protestant societies who claim to be contending for Biblical Christianity, yet are so often seen to be in defence of a state church which has so much of the relics of Baal in her midst? Why do not Protestants come clean on the whole issue? If they are really striving against error, then they must get at the ROOT of it all which is BABYLON, then Rome would not be their sole target. Such must deal with infant sprinkling, clerical garb, ecclesiastical titles, altars, candles, festal days and many other inventions of man which have invaded the courts of our God; then would such be seen to be witnesses indeed in the land.

There is still more concerning Tammuz which is of very great significance. This 'true son' of heathen deities was supposed to have met his violent death on a Friday, and to have risen two days later at SUNRISE. This is where our term Sunday comes from, the second day after

Friday. Sunday is actually a heathen term. It is far better for Christians to use the term Sabbath or Lords Day than that of Sunday.

Also associated with Babylonish mysticism was the worship of the sun and planets and the word SUN-DAY carries these connotations. Early morning sunrise services also stem from this same source.

EASTER SYMBOLS

HOT CROSS BUNS. Quite harmless we might say. Yes, but what of their origin? They were baked and used in the worship of the queen of heaven by the Chaldeans as early as the days of Cecrops, the founder of Athens - that is 1500 years before the Christian era. Jeremiah, the prophet, refers to such activity. "The children gather wood, and the fathers kindle the fire, and the women knead their dough, to make cakes to the queen of heaven" (Jeremiah 7:18).

EASTER EGGS. That which formed a part of the mysteries of Bacchus as celebrated in ancient Athens, was the consecration of an egg. In China, painted eggs are still used in their sacred festivals. In ancient times both the Egyptians and the Greeks used eggs in their religious rites. One named Augustus, who was reputed to be skilled in all wisdom of his native country, wrote - "An egg of wondrous size is said to have fallen from heaven into the river Euphrates. The fishes rolled it to the bank, where the doves, having settled upon it, hatched it and out came Venus, who afterwards was called the Syrian goddess" - that is Astarte. Hence the egg became one of the symbols of Astarte or Easter (Hyginus Fabulae p.148-149).

RABBITS The pretty little rabbits which are so common on Easter cards also have heathen significance, such as could not be mentioned in these pages, for Ashtaroth and the fertility rites associated with Astarte was a most immoral thing. Is not the bunny the symbol of seduction in much of today's advertising?

As has been before stated, a complete picture of heathen religions and practices is not given in the Bible; there are but scant references, but if we have just a working knowledge of Babylonish worship and customs, then

the Biblical allusions which we have will light up and become significant, whereas if we are in no way historically informed such references will mean nothing to us.

With the background already set in this article we now consult our Bibles again. "He said also unto me, Turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations that they do. Then he brought me to the door of the gate of the Lord's house which was toward the north; and, behold, there sat women weeping for Tammuz" (Ezekiel 8:13-14). This is the only mention of Tammuz in Holy Scripture and in order to know who he was we have had to consult Babylonish history. These women were reported as weeping for the supposed 'true son' of Baal and Ashtaroth - Tammuz. History states that this was a forty day period of affliction. But the Bible would have us note WHERE it was observed; It was in the LORDS HOUSE. This forty day heathen fast had become a part of the worship of God's people.

SUNRISE SERVICES "Turn again," says the Holy Spirit in this same chapter, for there are even greater abominations, "Then said he unto me, Hast thou seen this, O son of man? turn thee yet again, and thou shalt see greater abominations than these. And he brought me into the inner court of the Lord's house, and, behold, at the door of the temple of the Lord, between the porch and the altar, were about five and twenty men, with their backs toward the temple of the Lord, and their faces toward the east; and they worshipped the sun toward the east" (Ezekiel 8:15-16). WORSHIPPING TOWARD THE EAST where the sun rises; but look closer, their backs are to the Lord! Let the question be asked, Where did these men of Judah who professed the name of the Lord, get all this? Was any of it in harmony with the law of God? "Then he said unto me, löst thou seen this, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they commit the abominations which they commit here? for they have filled the land with violence, and have returned to provoke me to anger: and, lo, they put the branch to their nose" (Ezekiel 8:17). "Hast thou seen this?" said Almighty God, "Is it a light

thing?" What WERE they doing? Nothing less than celebrating Astarte. It was an Easter festival in the house of God; It is an abomination which they commit, said Jehovah.

In view of all the evidence, how can any man or woman justify these festal days?

God HAS commanded a day to commemorate the death and resurrection of Christ. It is not annual, it is weekly. The order is clearly set out in His Word. He has not left it to man's imagination, and in NO WAY does God's pattern resemble that which takes place in so many churches and chapels in the spring of the year.

Easter, like Christmas, is an invention of ancient Babylon, which by the subtlety of Satan and the imaginative craft of man has been incorporated into Christianity. By doing this Christ has been forced into the very framework of heathen religion. "Thou shalt not do so unto the Lord thy God" states His holy law. It is an abomination unto Him. "Therefore will I also deal in fury: mine eye shall not spare, neither will I have pity: and though they cry in mine ears with a loud voice, yet will I not hear them" (Ezekiel 8:18). The New Testament counterpart to that verse in Ezekiel is found in the Apocalypse where the context is still BABYLON. "And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Revelation 18:4).

TO BE CONTINUED.

W.H.MOLLAND

"No one who possesses a copy of the Bible can legitimately plead ignorance of God's will. The Scriptures leave us without excuse, a lamp has been provided for our feet and the pathway of righteousness is clearly marked out.... In His written Word God has revealed His mind, expressed His will, communicated His requirements; and woe to the man or woman who takes not the necessary time to discover what these are."

A. W. PINK

NEVER

"I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee."

Let every believer grasp these words and store them up in his heart. Keep them ready, and have them fresh in your memory; you will want them one day. The Philistines will be upon you, the hand of sickness will lay you low, the king of terrors will draw near, the valley of the ^ shadow of death will open up before your eyes. Then comes the hour when you will find nothing so comforting as a text like this, nothing- so cheering as a realizing sense of God's companionship.

Stick to that word NEVER. It is worth its weight in gold. Cling to it as a drowning man clings to a rope. Grasp it firmly, as a soldier attacked on all sides grasps his sword. God has said, and He will stand to it, "I will NEVER leave thee, nor forsake thee."

NEVER! Though your heart be often faint, and you are sick of self, and your many failures and infirmities - even then the promise will not fail.

NEVER! though the devil whispers, "I shall have you at last; yet a little time and your faith will fail, and you will be mine." Even then the Word of God will stand.

NEVER! When the cold chill of death is creeping over you, and friends can do no more, and you are starting on that journey from which there is no return - even then Christ will not forsake you.

NEVER! When the day of judgment comes, and the books are opened, and the dead are rising from their graves, and eternity is beginning - even then the promise will bear all your weight; Christ will not leave His hold on your soul.

Oh, believing reader, trust in the Lord for ever, for He says, "I will NEVER leave you." Lean back ALL your weight upon Him, do not be afraid. Glory in His promise. Rejoice in the strength of your consolation. You may say boldly, "The Lord is my Helper, I will not fear."

J.C.RYLE

DEATH, MOURNING, BURIAL, CREMATION.

The very title of this article may bring a sudden revulsion into the mind of the reader, for so often are such matters looked upon as morbid and not to be thought of. This attitude is becoming increasingly prevalent in the humanistic, materialistic society in which we live. However, a refusal to face up to these realities which inevitably will come upon us all, is a very foolish stance to adopt, and the Bible which is the final authority on such subjects has much to say concerning each one.

DEATH

In the lower orders of creation such as plants and animals, death denotes extinction and cessation of being, but with humans this is not so.

Man is not just body - flesh and blood, he also has a soul and spirit (cf I Thessalonians 5:23). Here in this Scripture BODY, SOUL and SPIRIT are mentioned. Hebrews 4:12 also clearly identifies both soul and spirit. Man is a tripartite being. At creation God said "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness" (Genesis 1:26). The eternal God is a Trinity in Unity and in a 'three in one' form did He make man. Man's body was formed out of the dust of the ground, but into that body God breathed the breath of life; - this was God's breath, breathed into a human body and "man became a living SOUL" (Genesis 2:7). This was much more than a living body such as animals possessed. This was spiritual life - life which henceforth could never cease to exist. True it is that through the fall of Adam the federal head of the race, "death has passed upon all men" (Romans 5:12). This death also has triple aspects, spiritual death, physical death, and the second death. These three together, give the full meaning of the Creator's words "Thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:17). But this is not annihilation. Because of the spirit element with which man was created he can never cease to exist.

When Adam disobeyed the command of God in Eden, spiritual death was immediate; he was cut off from God (cf Genesis 3:24). Physical death followed in the wake of his

spiritual death, and at the age of nine hundred and thirty years he died (cf Genesis 5:5). As to whether or not Adam experiences the third aspect of death which is eternal, or whether through the grace of God he knows salvation unto everlasting life, the Scriptures do not tell us. But this we do know, Adam's physical death did not end his existence. He is consciously alive in one of two places, and in one of two conditions, and this is the truth concerning every member of Adam's race right through to the end of human history. All are born in a state of spiritual death; in consequence all will experience physical death prior to the second advent, and apart from the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, all will be assigned at the last to the second death. Because of this solemn fact it is imperative that before physical death overtakes us, we repent and believe the gospel, calling upon the name of the Lord for salvation.

Having given a very brief outline as to what death is in its totality, and what it is not, also its origin, we are now to come to that aspect of death which is the main concern of this article, namely physical death. What exactly happens when a human body breathes it's last? From this point we shall be treating of THE BELIEVER - the true Christian who has been born of God's Holy Spirit. The moment the heart of a regenerate man or woman, boy or girl ceases to beat, the spirit of that person at once returns to God who gave it (cf Ecclesiastes 12:7). Immediately that element of human personality which CANNOT DIE is consciously "with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23). That person has left earth and in an instant of time has been translated into heaven. This is an amazing happening. Physical death should never be looked upon as a natural thing, it is something which is fundamentally spiritual; it is awesome. To be in the presence of death is no light matter to be confronted with; it should hush our souls into holy contemplation as to just what has taken place. Another redeemed soul has been brought by the Saviour into the "Father's House" to "dwell in the house of the Lord forever" (Psalm 23:6). "Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His

saints" (Psalm 116:15).

In this the bereaved child of God finds great comfort and they sorrow not as those who have no hope (cf I Thessalonians 4:13). But then looking upon the cold lifeless body, the pangs of grief surge up. The loved one with whom so many happy years have been spent, is gone. That king of terrors has invaded the home and taken one from us who was so dear. This is something which we all have to face up to, and it is because of sin. Death is appointed unto all men. This is where the sadness and the sting comes in. Death is an enemy which is not destroyed as yet; if so, then there would never be a funeral of a believer. Death is the LAST enemy to be destroyed (cf I Corinthians 15:26). Those who teach that there is no sting in death for the Christian do not teach the truth. The FEAR of death has been removed, but the STING remains until the last great day. It is "WHEN this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, THEN shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" (1 Corinthians 15:54-55). That great enemy with it's sting is still very much with us. The Scripture also states that the body is sown in corruption and dishonour (cf 1 Corinthians 15:42-43). Death is a very REAL THING.

MOURNING

The Word of God abounds with instances of human grief and mourning. One of the early records is that of Abraham grieving for his beloved Sarah. "And Abraham came to mourn for Sarah, and to weep for her" (Genesis 23:2). But his dear one was in glory, why weep for her? Surely he should rejoice! What is more she had reached the age of one hundred and twenty seven years, a good life span by any standard. Great man of faith as Abraham was, should he not have been above displaying such sorrow? A steel-like stoicism is an approach to death which alas is all too common today, but it is not of God. As stated earlier, man was created body, soul, and spirit; he is not an expressionless vegetable, neither is he animal; although even a ewe, if she loses her lamb will not go off

as if nothing has happened. If her dead lamb is not collected and buried she will lie by it for days.

Man has a soul, he has an inbuilt quality called emotion. It is a means whereby he can and SHOULD express the inner surgings of his unique personality. Abraham came to mourn and to weep. Such words recorded by the Holy Spirit are not words of rebuke, rather do they set a precedent. This is a course to follow, not a path to forsake. There are many traditions and principles which are rejected today, being described as Victorian, yet those very traditions have their roots in Holy Scripture. How often does one hear it said, "Oh, people do not do that today!" Let us all be very careful before we discard a thing, that we know exactly what we are discarding, and before we abandon a tradition, make certain from whence that tradition sprung. The full meaning of Abraham's mourning is defined in three ways.

1. In a SPIRITUAL sense Abraham took his bereavement very seriously.
2. Abraham allotted definite time to mourn.
3. Abraham went about the indulgence of grief as a work of faith.

This man remained in the home, present all the time making all the necessary funeral arrangements, meticulously seeing to every detail. Any friends visiting Abraham would immediately be confronted with an atmosphere of awe and reverence. A great spiritual happening had taken place, death had entered his family circle. It was no trivial thing. It was not something to pass over as quickly as possible and then get back to normal and try and forget it, which sadly seems to be the spirit of our age. Were not our forefathers right in their reverence of death and due regard for mourning? Mourning for the dead should be evidenced and never stifled. Death is a spiritual thing, so also is mourning; it is of God.

When the tie of natural affection is severed by the ruthless hand of our last great enemy - death, it is a heart hardened by the adversary that can feel no pangs; and for the relief of those inner sorrows God has made provision - TEARS. Abraham wept for his wife Sarah; our

blessed Lord wept at the grave of His friend Lazarus. Are we to view weeping as a form of weakness? Something merely to be tolerated in the circumstances, but actually an infirmity which some are not of sufficiently strong character to suppress! Would any dare to infer such a thing in the light of the Saviour's tears over the brother of Martha and Mary, or over the city of Jerusalem? Here was PERFECT, SINLESS humanity weeping. Robert Candlish, that great Scottish minister of the last century said, - "It is not that a believer is ALLOWED to weep, but at the appropriate season it is his PROPER BUSINESS, an exercise to which he is CALLED."

The man or woman who can bury a loved one and show no emotion, but continue as if nothing has happened, is surely lacking of an essential element of human personality. Sincere sorrow is utterly Biblical; not extravagant displays of inordinate sentiment, rather that true and irrepressible mourning which is an inbuilt quality of our tripartite personality as created by God, and which should never be stifled at the appropriate seasons.

BURIAL

When death takes place in our families, and the spirit has departed and is consciously at home with the Lord, arrangements have to be made for the lifeless body, for it will rapidly commence to corrupt. The question arises what are we to do with the corpse? As in all matters, the Word of God supplies the answer and gives direction. Many are the examples given, but having already cited Abraham, we will continue to examine the procedure of this great man of faith. "And Abraham stood up from before his dead, and spake unto the sons of Heth, saying, I am a stranger and a sojourner with you: give me a possession of a burying-place with you, that I may bury my dead out of my sight" (Genesis 23:3-4). "That I may BURY." Burial for the dead is a Scriptural principle. Abraham was now concerned, for he had made no previous arrangements for this. Where are we going to be buried? This was the question which was uppermost in his mind. But did this really matter? Need it be of such concern?

Was not Sarah now in heaven? After all it was only the body. Is not this the reasoning which we so often hear today even from those who profess the name of Christ? But such thinking is extremely shallow, and shows a great lack of understanding of the whole process of death. Death in all its aspects is SPIRITUAL, it is a most awesome and sacred thing. The body is as vital and as precious to God as the soul and the spirit. No Christian must ever say "It is ONLY the body." The body of a believer is redeemed equally as much as the soul and the spirit. That body has been the temple of the third person of the Godhead right up until death. It must be treated with reverence and handled in a way which God has appointed for His chosen people, which is burial, ever remembering that the body, though it goes to corruption, will one day be raised in power and glory.

It is not until the great resurrection of the last day that the work of Christ in redemption will be seen in its totality. The SPIRITS of just men are already made perfect (cf Hebrews 12:23) but they are at present "UNCLOTHED" (cf 2 Corinthians 5:4). That is, in a state of being "absent from the body" (2 Corinthians 5:8); nevertheless waiting for the redemption of the body (cf Romans 8:23). This resurrection of the body and the reuniting with soul and spirit unto eternal glory is the final act in our salvation which will take place at the last day. Then will human personality which has been in a temporary state of dissolution at physical death, be fully and eternally restored as we are fashioned like unto Christ's glorious body (cf Philippians 3:21).

It is because of the tripartite nature of man that such care and attention should be taken at death. It is not just a matter of disposing of the body. That body is the redeemed property of God and of Christ, and although it may for a while go to corruption, the eye of an omnipotent God will guard those basic elements of the human frame, and on that appointed day bring them together, a glorious body.

Pending that great event the Biblical pattern for the believers body is that it should lie in the soil from

whence it was taken at creation (cf Genesis 3:19). The last journey a Christian body should make on earth is to a BURIAL GROUND, there to await the last trump. Such occasions should be marked by great reverence, Godly fear and a spirit of awe, for Christian burial is nothing other than the SOWING of a natural body, which in due time will be raised and come forth a spiritual body - like unto Christ's body of glory. True it is, the body lowered into the earth is sown in weakness, but it will be raised in power; it is sown in dishonour, but it will be raised in GLORY (cf 1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Again let it be stated, death in its every aspect is SPIRITUAL. Therefore the Christian dare not move away from Divine instruction and precedent laid down in Holy Scripture, pertaining as to how we are to act and handle the situation when it comes into our families. Many are the accounts given to us of the passing of great men of faith in the Bible, but in every instance they were BURIED. Our blessed Lord and Saviour was BURIED (1 Corinthians 15:4). "Devout men carried Stephen to his BURIAL, and made great lamentation over him" (Acts 8:2). This was Christian burial, accompanied by mourning. "Great lamentation;" it was not a private affair, it was a big funeral. The believers were there in great numbers to publicly show their grief and to identify and pay respect to an honoured servant of Christ and His Church. This is Biblical CUSTOM and it is to be the ONGOING PRACTICE of the Church. The funeral service of a believer followed by Christian burial is a most grave occasion, to be carried out, not with pageantry and show, but with dignity and awe because of the great spiritual significance of DEATH and BURIAL.

CREMATION

Present day society to a large degree would contend that there is a more convenient and hygienic means of disposing of the body, and that is by cremation. At the outset of this section of the article, it must be said that a Christian should not speak of DISPOSING of the body. We are to LAY the body in a grave (cf John 11:34), to SOW it in the soil (cf 1 Corinthians 15:42-44). Sad to

say however, many Christians have accepted the practice of cremation. In all probability this is because of ignorance which is largely due to the fact that in the main, ministers and pastors have failed to deal with the matter and to instruct their congregations. They will argue that it makes no difference at the resurrection at the last day, which of course is perfectly true. The God of heaven will raise ashes as well as dust; likewise also those who have decomposed in the ocean depths, or have been thrown to wild beasts; none of these situations pose a problem to the Almighty. "There shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15). That is sure, certain, and inescapable, regardless as to how the body was treated at death. This being the case, then surely cremation or burial are options! The writer would not wish to wound any one's feelings in such a sensitive area, for no doubt all of us have had relatives and friends who have been cremated; nevertheless one has to be faithful to that which is written and it must be stated that for a child of God, cremation is foreign to the Scriptures. Indeed it cuts right across every example, precedent, type, and analogy in the Word of God. The Bible sets out Christian burial, not Christian cremation, for cremation is NOT Christian, its origin is pagan. It was a widespread practice throughout much of the heathen world millenniums ago. The Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans in the great majority of cases had the bodies of their dead burnt, according to the historians Sir William Smith and William Ramsey. Indeed the burning of human bodies can be traced back to early civilization and just as heathen religions find their origins in Babel, so do these rites and customs. At Babel, God scattered the people and to the four corners of the earth they went. Wherever they settled, they multiplied, and there they developed their languages, customs and religions.

Buddhists and Hindus have their pyre or funeral pile which is a heap of combustible material upon which they can burn a body. These religions with their practices stem from Babel.

The children of Abraham, that is Israel - the Jews, were God's earthly people, but they were also typical or symbolic of His New Testament spiritual people, and we are told that the manner of the Jews (God's people) was to BURY; - not bum (cf John 19:40). This is the procedure for the Christian.

Christ himself who is the Head of the body - the spiritual people, was BURIED. Each writer in his gospel lays great emphasis upon this, going into considerable detail concerning His burial. The early Church continued in the Jewish practice although the Romans were in power and burning the dead was prevalent, yet the Christians objected. They knew that the Head having been BURIED "after the manner of the Jews" (John 19:40) a precedent had been set for all the members.

If one day the believer is to experience the "likeness of His resurrection," is it not correct that we should be like Him in His burial? (cf Romans 6:5)

Fire in the Word of God is always associated with sin and judgment. The sacrificial victims of the sin and trespass offerings, having been charged with the sins of the people, were then slain and the carcasses burnt with fire. They were consumed because of the sins which had been laid upon them. There is a great link in Holy Scripture of SIN, FIRE and JUDGMENT. At Sinai, the Golden Calf was burnt with fire and ground to powder (cf Exodus 32:20). Altars, graven images and groves were to be destroyed and burnt with fire (cf Deuteronomy 7:5). Tamar, the harlot, was to be burnt (cf Genesis 38:24). Daughters who played the whore were to be burnt with fire (cf Leviticus 21:9). In the New Testament the same link of fire with sin and judgment is carried on. "So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, and shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:49-50). "Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:41). "And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may

dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:24). The evidence in Holy Writ is overwhelming that fire is associated with wrath and judgment.

Can any Christian who thinks seriously, ever contemplate cremation; for their body to be consumed by flames - a body which has been redeemed, a body which is CHRIST'S? Is not fire, which is a symbol of judgment, a most terrible means to select for the last rites of a body which has been pardoned and justified? For the imputed righteousness of Christ is not just on the spirit, it is upon the whole person which includes the BODY. How ill-informed are so many of God's people today! What an account so many elders and ministers will have to render, for in this as in so many areas of teaching, there is a guilty silence in the pulpits.

There is not a single instance in either the Old Testament or in the New Testament of any of the Lord's people being cremated, although it was a common practice in the world around them. Then why do so many today say? - "It makes no difference." The Word of God says - "Thus saith the Lord, Learn not the way of the heathen" (Jeremiah 10:2).

W. H. MOLLAND

A HOUSE NOT MADE WITH HANDS

When we are about to pull down a house, intending to rebuild it, we remove the inhabitants out of it, lest they should be injured by the fall, and we provide for them some temporary residence; but when we have rebuilt the house, then we bring them back to a much better habitation. Thus God, when He pulls down the body, calls out the soul for a little time, and lodges it with Himself in some other place while He is repairing our bodies against the resurrection; and then, having made them beautiful and glorious, He replaces our souls again in their former habitations (2 Corinthians 5:1).

JOHN CHRYSOSTOM

EDITORIAL

Traditions and customs are said to die hard; in some instances this is true, in others not. It is quite common to hear people say "I am a traditionalist," meaning that they are adhering to certain customs. This can be a good thing, it can be otherwise. As Christians we should be diligent to ascertain the origin of the tradition which we are discarding or perpetuating. "FESTAL DAYS" is a case in point, the origin of which has been clearly set out in this magazine of late.

Customs pertaining to "DEATH," "MOURNING," "BURIAL," "CREMATION," demand the same investigation. There is an ever increasing indifference and apathy to death being evidenced in society, and alas many Christians are setting poor examples in this. In past generations there was an awe, and a deep spirit of reverence shown in the presence of death. As a mark of respect neighbours would draw their blinds when a cortege left a nearby house. Men would halt, remove their hats, and bow their heads at the approach of a funeral procession. Funeral services were marked by a solemn hush which surely the occasion demands. All the people would be soberly dressed, women in dark attire, not a man with anything other than a black tie. Today however all this is deemed to be outdated by the majority, and the casual attire of everyday is considered quite suitable, even for a funeral. General deportment also has likewise deteriorated, as trivial chatter both before and after the service all contribute to detract from the reality of death. So has gone from society a most important tradition; a tradition which Christians should have maintained, because even by our dress and conduct we can convey something of the gravity of the occasion.

Solemnity in the presence of death find its origin in the Holy Scriptures and it should be the ongoing practice of the people of God to ever preserve that spirit of solemn reverence which death requires, and not to follow the trend of those who would discount such customs as being but Puritanical.

Our hearts were sad as we gathered on Saturday 19 October last for the funeral of our beloved sister Mrs. Vera Gee. She had been in failing health for some months and after a short time in Hospital the Lord called her home.

Mrs. Gee was a woman of indomitable spirit and great character. A most loyal and faithful supporter of the work at North Road Chapel. Even over her last months during which she was often very poorly she would never miss the services if she could possibly get there. Her present is now greatly missed. However we rejoice in the knowledge that she is now at home with the Lord in the 'Father's House' where her beloved husband entered just over two years previously.

We look back over the years in which they served the Lord so faithfully in our midst with great affection and thankfulness to God.

“The memory of the just is Blessed”
Proverbs 10:7