



PAL Project Number 8 - January 2009

Efé bé dzogbenyui nami.... Bonne année... Nav varsh ki subhkanma... Mwaka mzuri / heri ya mwaka mpya... Feliz año nuevo... or Happy New Year! That is how some of our friends around the world say it (in Ewé, French, Hindi, Swahili and Spanish!).

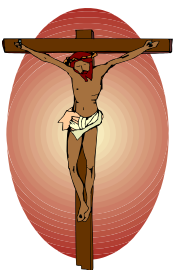
New Year is said to be the oldest of all holidays, being first observed in ancient Babylon about 4,000 years ago! It was celebrated at the appearance of the first new moon after the Vernal Equinox (the first day of Spring) and so usually occurred in March or April. Early calendars were set according to the moon, until in Roman times a new calendar (the Julian calendar) was adopted to synchronize with the sun, and it was decided to declare January 1st as New Year. But not every country around the world celebrates it on this date. **Israel** still uses a lunar calendar, and its New Year is called Rosh Hashanah and is celebrated with the new moon in September or October. **China** also uses a lunar calendar and this year will celebrate New Year with the new moon on January 26th - when the Year of the Ox will begin.



Of course there are many different New Year customs and traditions around the world, but in the West, it is very common for people to make **NEW YEAR RESOLUTIONS**. These are like promises that they make to themselves to try to start new or better habits - such as to lose weight, exercise more, study harder or to stop losing their temper. They feel the New Year is a good time to start over afresh - but sadly the truth is that often even after just a few days, they have forgotten or given up trying, and so don't bother to try again until the next year!

But as we read the Bible we learn that God loves us so much that He wants to help us start over and develop better habits. When we realize we have done wrong or we have a bad habit, we can repent and ask God to forgive us and help us turn away from that way of living. We don't have to wait until the New Year to start over; we can do so **ANY DAY!** There are many passages in the Bible that tell us that the Holy Spirit will help us as we try to overcome bad habits or develop good new ones. As we follow the Bible's teachings we learn more self-control, patience and wisdom that help us have better lives.

1 John 1:9 says if we confess our sins, God is faithful and just and will forgive us and purify us from all unrighteousness



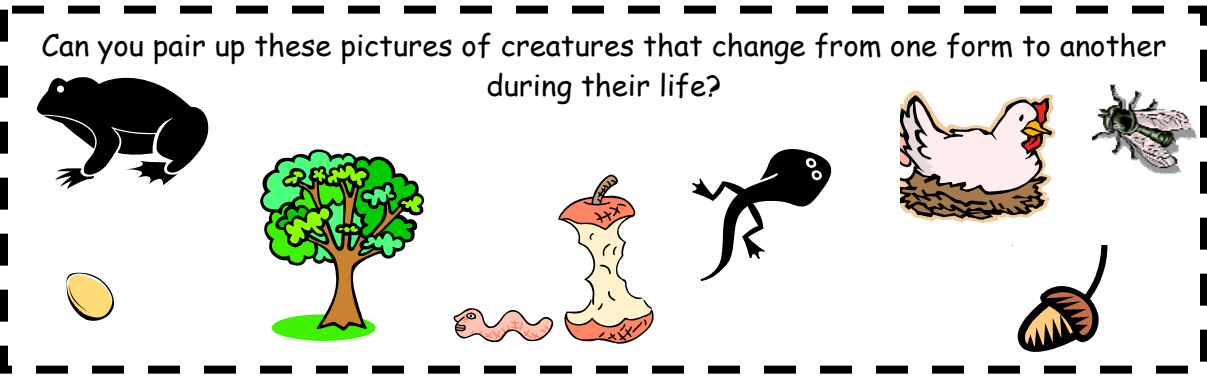
Jesus made all this possible when he came and gave his life for us on the Cross. If we admit to God that we have done wrong and deserve to be punished, and truly believe that Jesus took our punishment on the Cross, then we are very grateful to him and want to please him every day of our lives after that. That is what Salvation is all about - and in **2 Corinthians 5:17** we read that "If anyone is in Christ he is a new creation, old things are passed away and all things have become new." THAT is so much better than starting just a New Year! We can put the old things of the past behind us forever because the Bible says when God forgives us it is as though it never happened. (**Colossians 2:14; Psalm 103:12**)



We can think of our old life as like a caterpillar - when it's been changed into a butterfly its old life on the ground is forgotten! It's still the same creature but has been totally changed and now has a new and better life!



Can you pair up these pictures of creatures that change from one form to another during their life?



One of our friends, named Yolanda, lives in Santa Ana in El Salvador in Central America. She teaches Sunday School class at her church and wrote to tell us this true story. In July 2007, her church started a special outreach for children into a very poor part of town. They called the club "Little Seeds" and they used one of our teaching series for children called "Bible Heroes". Several children received Jesus during the outreach and one of the boys was called Juan Anthonio. He was 12 years old and the oldest of 7 brothers and sisters. This is his story:

"My life has changed since that day (when I received Jesus). I no longer use bad words and I don't fight with my neighbors. I was always a loud-mouth and always wanted to be better than others. I used to help my mother with the chores and taking care of the others, but it always made me angry. Jesus changed me and because of that I'm going to take classes every Saturday to learn more (about the Bible). I love everything they do in that class. Sometimes I can't attend church on Sundays because I am learning to make bread and I have to go out and sell it. But the lady that teaches me says God has something special prepared for me and so I want to learn a lot of the Bible and then I am going to teach other children."



The few Sundays that he can come to church, Juan Antonio brings other children from his area to visit the Sunday School. He leaves home very early to get them from their homes and when he has a good group of boys, he brings them to church with him. He says "I want to be a friend to everyone so that I can bring them to church!" This is a photo of Juan Antonio helping out at church.

Juan Antonio heard the Gospel and realized that fighting, using bad words and complaining are not pleasing to God. They are sins just as much as lying and stealing are. He had always lived his life that way but he wanted to change in order to please Jesus. After he got saved and made Jesus Lord of his life, he found that God helped him change his ways. Now he is excited and happy as he finds new ways to serve God and please Jesus. If YOU would like to be like Juan Antonio and make good changes in your life, talk to your pastor or children's minister about it. You can start to learn more about the Bible and how to accept Jesus as Lord of YOUR life. Why don't you write and tell us about it too?

Hoping this new year will bring you lots of happiness as you learn more about Jesus,
'Til next time,
Your friend, Shirley