HUMAN LIFE
DEATH AND BEYOND

By
B.L. Cocherell
PREFACE

The Bible is unique. It is the only book that has the answers to the basic questions of life and claims to be written by the true God. This book tells humanity who its Creator is, why it was created, and its ultimate destiny.

Although the Bible reveals the awesome purpose for human existence, it does so in a carefully coded message. The studies that we present reveal much of what is contained in these messages that has not been taught or understood since the demise and disappearance of the early church as a powerful spirit filled entity.

OUR GOALS

Our primary goal is to share our knowledge and understanding of the Sovereign God's plan and purpose for humanity with those who are interested in living their lives according to the law of God, not by the dictates and traditions of men. Our secondary goal is to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God as a warning and a witness to humanity before the Messiah returns to rule the earth.

We hope that you will find this study of God's word intellectually challenging and spiritually enlightening and beneficial.

If you want to know more about us, the work we are doing, or how you can participate in our biblically based educational and research projects, contact us at: www.BibleResearch.org or www.Bible-Prophecy.net

Sincerely,
B. L. Cocherell
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INTRODUCTION
HUMAN LIFE - DEATH AND BEYOND

Billions of humans have lived and died throughout past centuries and many more will be born and die before the eventual disappearance of this physical existence. But, is death the end of a human's existence?

Many philosophies and religions teach that death is not the end of human existence and that, after physical death, some aspect of a human consciousness will live on in one form or another.

Among the various religions, there are individuals who profess to believe what the biblical record says about life after death. However, the vast majority of these individuals have not taken the time or spent the effort to study what the Bible actually reveals will happen after death. Most have just taken the word of someone in whom they have confidence or they just have a feeling about what happens at death. But, is it logical to trust someone else's belief or your own feelings about such an important issue?

The answer to the question about what happens after physical death is clearly answered in the biblical record. But, you must take the time and effort to study what the Bible actually says about the Sovereign God's purpose for creating humans and what he expects of those who want to live forever.

In the Beginning

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen.1:1 KJV).

Although many believe that some unknown physical force brought time and space into existence, there is abundant proof that this present existence and everything in it is the product of careful engineering and intelligent design:

"And God said let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them" (Gen.1:26-27 KJV).

Humans

Humans are not just a cosmic accident or a product of evolution. No other creatures on earth have the unique abilities and potential which humans have. In his letter to the Hebrews, the writer quotes Psalm 8:5-9 and summarizes the Sovereign God's awesome purpose for creating humans and placing them on earth:
"But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that you are mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visit him? You made him a little lower than the angels; thou crowned him with glory and honor, and did set him over the works of your hands. You have put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him" (Heb.2:6-8 KJV).

Although humans were created inferior to angels in many ways, human potential is far greater than that of angels, because humans were created to have a more prominent and prestigious position in God's realm than angels. The following shows the many differences between humans and angels and the reasons human life is extremely unique and precious:

- Humans have limited life spans—Angels are eternal
- Humans only exists in the physical realm—Angels can exist in the physical and spirit realms.
- Humans have limited intelligence and knowledge—Angels have superior intelligence and knowledge
- Humans have the potential to become immortal—Angels can never become immortal
- Humans were created to inherit the Kingdom of God as sons of God—Angels were created to serve God and mankind
- Humans have the potential to become a god-being in the family of God—Angels will always be what they are
- Humans are loved by God—Satan and evil spirits are despised by God for their rebellion
- Humans can have their rebellion against God and violations of his law forgiven—Satan and evil spirits will not be forgiven; they will be punished

Questions

The following and many other important questions about life, death, and the state of the dead are answered from the biblical record in the following chapters:

- What actually happens when you die?
- Why is there more than one resurrection of the dead mentioned in the Bible?
- When sinners die, do they cease to exist, go to a place of eternal punishment, or is there something else that happens to them?
- When the righteous die, do they immediately go to heaven to claim their reward or is there something else that happens before this event?
- When infants and young children die are they immediately granted eternal life?
- What exactly is the state of the dead?
CHAPTER ONE

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

The reality of death is one of the most terrifying thoughts that can come to the human mind; consequently, there are few subjects in the Bible that command more interest than the resurrection of the dead.

Most rational people want to live forever, yet the reality of the human existence dictates that death is inevitable for everyone. There are very few people who have not given some thought to what will happen to them after death. Some wonder whether or not there is life after death. Others firmly believe in some sort of existence beyond the grave and they wonder whether it will be one of happiness or one of sorrow. However, few people have found a satisfactory answer to the question: "Where or how will I spend eternity?"

Is physical death the end of human existence? According to the Bible, the answer is No! This physical life is not the end of human existence. There is an event which will determine the eternal destiny of each individual and this event is a resurrection from the dead.

THE HOPE OF A RESURRECTION

The resurrection from physical death to eternal life is one of the central themes and promises of the Bible. It is this resurrection to eternal life that Jesus Christ, the apostles, and the prophets spoke about throughout the Bible.

Thousands of years ago, a man named Job asked the same questions about life after death which many people ask today. The only difference between Job and most people of today is that Job knew the answers. Job knew there would be a resurrection of the dead and he understood God's plan to give life to those who served him:

"But man dies, and wastes away: yes, man gives up the spirit, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decays and dries up: So man lies down, and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. O that you would hide me in the grave, that you would keep me secret, until your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come [Job knew he would be resurrected.]. You shall call, and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands" (Job 14:10-15 KJV). See also Job 19:25-26.
A Common Belief

In the conversation between Jesus and Martha prior to Lazarus being brought back to life, Jesus says, "Your brother will rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he will rise again in the resurrection in the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life: the one believing in me, though he die, he shall live" (Jn.11:23-25 KJV). See also Rom.5:8-11; 6:5-11,23.

In the account of the resurrection of Martha’s brother Lazarus, two things become apparent. First, during Jesus’ lifetime, some believed there would be a resurrection of the dead at some point in the future. Second, the way to obtain the resurrection to eternal life is through belief in Jesus. See Matt.19:16-21; Jn.5:21-29; 6:40; 10:27-28.

Paul’s Hope

"Yes doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord: for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them as dung, that I may win Christ. And be found in him, not having my own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith: That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable to his death; If by any means I might attain to the resurrection of the dead" (Phil.3:8-11 KJV). See also Heb. 11:17-19; Isa.26:17-21.

Paul Speaks With Felix

"But this I confess to you, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets: And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:14-15 KJV).

Paul Writes to the Corinthians

Notice what the apostle Paul wrote to the Corinthians about the hope of a resurrection.

1.Corinthians 15:12-22 NIV

"But if it is preached that Christ has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even Christ has been raised" (vs.12-13).

"And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about God, for we have testified about God that he raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised" (vs.14-15).
"For if the dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitted more than all men" (vs.16-19).

"But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive" (vs.20-22).

AFTER DEATH THE JUDGMENT

There are two texts which contain the words 'judged' and 'judgment', which are quoted to support the false teaching that today is the only day of salvation. Many people also assume the apostles John and Paul spoke of a single event at the return of Christ, when all of mankind will be judged according to how they have lived in this present life.

"And I saw a great white throne, and the One sitting on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled; and a place was not found for them. And I saw the dead, the small and the great, standing before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the Book of Life: and the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead. And death and Hades gave up the dead in them. And they were each judged according to their works" (Rev. 20:11-13 Para.).

"And as it is reserved to men once to die, and after this the Judgment" (Heb.9:27 Para.).

The English word judged in Revelation 20 is translated from the Greek word krino, which means to judge. It can also mean to sunder, to select, to decide, to assess, to go to law, to seek justice, to expound, to believe, or to resolve. In Hebrews 9, the word judgment is translated from the Greek word krisis, which has the senses of estrangement, conflict, selection, decision, judgment, verdict, and accusation.

The assumption that the words krino and krisis always indicate the delivering of a sentence or punishment for a crime when used in scriptures concerning the salvation of humanity is a much too narrow meaning. Many assign this narrow meaning to all of the scriptures which concern the salvation of humanity so that this meaning will fit these people's own belief about life after death. Both krino and krisis can be used to convey the sense of something yet to be decided or resolved. The use of these words in this sense is the intent in many scriptures which pertain to the overall plan of God for the salvation of mankind.
The Prophet Daniel

Daniel foretells the climactic end of this age, when Christ will return and establish his heavenly Father's government upon the earth. Notice that Daniel only mentions two categories of people who will be resurrected:

Daniel 12:1-4 KJV

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of your people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" (v1).

In verse one, there is a reference to the elect of God who are written in the Book of Life. See Ex.32:23-33; Psa.69:28; Lk.10:19-20; Rev.3:5.

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (v2).

In verse two, Daniel was inspired to use the word many not all when he referred to those who are to be resurrected from the dead. The word many is translated from the common Hebrew word Rab, which can mean much, many, or great. The Hebrew word for all is either kole or micpar, depending on contextual requirements. This is important, because if everyone will not be resurrected to either a reward or a punishment, there must be another category of the dead who will also be dealt with at some time before a final judgment.

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever. But you, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, even to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased" (vs.3-4).

Verse 3 foretells the change of the elect into immortal spirit-beings at the return of Christ and verse 4 tell us that this sealed prophecy can be understood in the context of the final years before the end of human rule on earth.

Jesus Said, "Do not marvel at this: for an hour is coming, in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment" (Jn.5:28-29 Para.).

After reading this verse, many people assume that there is only one specific hour when all of humanity will be resurrected to judgment; however, this is not what Jesus says. He says that there will be an appointed time when all those in the grave will be judged for the way they have lived.
Because Jesus clearly divides these people into two distinct categories—good and evil, many people assume there are only two categories of people who will be resurrected. Although the English word judgment is translated from the Greek word krisis, which does refer to the condemnation of those who habitually practice evil, in this context, we must consider to whom Jesus was speaking.

We must remember that Jesus was speaking to the Jews who were a people who are well versed in the law of God, which clearly defines the difference between good and evil. But what about those who have never known or understood the law of God? God has made an allowance for a special resurrection for those who have never had an opportunity to understand his laws during their lifetime.

TODAY IS NOT THE ONLY DAY OF SALVATION!

Many believe the period of time between Adam and the return of Christ is the only time when salvation is offered to humanity. It is true there are a few scriptures which seem to substantiate this view. However, a review of all the scriptures which speak of the resurrection of the dead will clearly show that past this present age, salvation will be offered to physical humans.

FEW UNDERSTAND THE GOSPEL IN THIS AGE

Although the mystery of salvation has been and is being preached, only a very few are allowed to understand its secrets for very good reasons. God the Father and Jesus Christ love their human creation much more than most can begin to comprehend. And it is this love and concern for each individual that prevents God the Father from offering salvation to all of humanity before the establishment of his kingdom on earth.

God the Father and Jesus Christ do not want anyone to miss or fail in their opportunity to become a part of the God family; they want everyone to obtain salvation:

"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1.Tim.2:4 KJV).

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2.Pet.3:9 KJV).

This earnest desire for the salvation of humanity is the reason God the Father and Jesus Christ have formulated a plan which will afford each individual the optimum opportunity for success. In order for each individual to have the best possible conditions to enhance their possibility for success, they must be allowed to live in a time and environment in which they may succeed, if they want to. This is also why so few in this age are being given the understanding of the mysteries of the Gospel. God knows the potential and character of each individual, and he knows
in which phase of his plan to offer each individual the opportunity for salvation.

A DAY OF SALVATION

The scriptures pertaining to the requirements for salvation cannot be reconciled with the facts of history or the rest of the Bible, if God the Father and Jesus Christ have been trying to save all of humanity from the time of Adam to this present age. However, the understanding that God is not trying to save all of humanity before the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth clarifies the meaning of these scriptures.

If God were trying to save mankind now, he would do it! There is no competition or contest for the lives of humans between God and Satan. God alone is in authority over all that exists in heaven and earth. Satan can do nothing against God's will or without God's permission. God allows Satan to rule the earth within set parameters which do not adversely influence his overall plan for the salvation of humanity. The Sovereign God's plan for humanity is right on schedule, and no human or evil spirit can stop him from fulfilling his purpose for mankind.

Today is not the only day of salvation; it is 'a' day of salvation. Calling all of humanity to salvation at one time has never been a part of God's plan. However, at the proper time and after the proper sequence of events, he will present this opportunity to all of humanity. Surprising as it may be, this is not the only day of salvation for humanity; it is only 'a' day of salvation for those called and chosen for salvation in this age for a special purpose. See chapter 8 for a full explanation of a day of salvation.

GOSPEL PREACHED FOR A WITNESS

Jesus said the Gospel was to be preached only as a witness; he said nothing about trying to convert all of humanity during this present age:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14).

The end which is spoken of in verse 14, is the end of human rule on this earth. A new age will begin after the end of human rule, and the Kingdom of God will reign on earth with Jesus Christ as its king.

During this present age, many people are called and exposed to the opportunity for salvation, yet those who are called are very few in comparison to the earth's population. And among those who are called, few are chosen to participate in the first resurrection: "So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matt.20:16; 22:14 KJV).
THE RESURRECTIONS

Many people believe there is only one general resurrection for all of humanity after Christ's return, and that at this resurrection, all who have ever lived and died will either be given eternal life and go to heaven or be sent to eternal torment in a lake of fire.

However, this popular belief concerning the resurrection of the good and the wicked cannot be verified in the scriptures. The plan of God for the resurrection of the dead is far more complex and fair than commonly believed.

God is fair, loving, merciful, and true to his promises. He is not the cruel and merciless monster that so many preachers depict. Because he is a God of love (1.Jn.4:8), he has designed several different resurrections in order to give the opportunity for eternal life to those who have not known him or had an opportunity to qualify for eternal life.

There is no doubt that each person will have an opportunity to obey God's code of righteous conduct. The only question is when each individual will have this opportunity?:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1.Cor.15:22-23).

After Christ returns and the first resurrection, all the dead will be raised to life to have their first opportunity for salvation or to be punished for their failure to obey God. All will eventually give account to God for what they have done with the opportunity God gives them.

FOUR GENERAL RESURRECTIONS

In the Book of Revelation, we find the statement: "This is the first resurrection." Logic should tell us that if there is a first resurrection, there must be a second. As we will see, there is not only a first, but a second, a third, and a fourth resurrection of the dead.

The Bible reveals that, at this present time in the plan of God for the salvation of humanity, all people fall into one of three categories: the saved, the lost, and those who have not had an opportunity for salvation. And all people represented by these categories will take part in one or more of the four general resurrections mentioned in the Bible.

1. The first resurrection at Christ's return is for the righteous dead of all ages. They are the ones who were given an opportunity for salvation prior to Christ's return, and because they lived a life of obedience to God and his ways, they will receive eternal and immortal life in the Kingdom of God. See Rev.20:4-6;12.

2. The second resurrection is for the dead of national Israel who have never had their first opportunity for salvation. See Ezekiel, chapter 37.
3. The third resurrection is for all those who have lived and died, either being deceived by Satan's religions or never having heard of God's way of life. Therefore, they have never had an opportunity for salvation. They are the rest of the dead mentioned in Revelation 20:5;13.

4. The fourth resurrection is to the second death for the incorrigible wicked who intentionally disobey and reject God and refuse to obey his way of life. See Rev.20:14-15; 21:8; Dan.12:2.

SUMMARY

The Bible reveals the great love and fairness of God toward humanity through each of these four general resurrections of the dead.

In his infinite wisdom, the Eternal God has carefully designed his plan for humanity in order that every person will be given an opportunity to have eternal life (See Ezekiel, chapter 18). The vast majority of people who have lived throughout history have died without ever hearing or understanding God's plan.

The comforting truth is that the majority of humanity, past and present, are neither saved nor lost. They simply have not yet been given an opportunity for salvation.

By B.L. Cocherell
"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their right hands: and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:4-6 KJV).

The individuals mentioned here proclaimed the truth about Jesus and were obedient to God's word. Because of their performance under extremely difficult circumstances, these individuals will receive a great reward.

The Participants of the First Resurrection

Those whom the Father has called to salvation from the time of Adam to the time of the return of Christ are the ones who will be in the first resurrection. They are the righteous of all ages who have qualified during this lifetime to become the leaders of the world:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1.Pet.1:3-4 KJV). See also Job 14:14-15; Acts 23:6; 24:15; Tit.1:2.

Those Written in the Book of Life

The Book of Life is an extremely important book to the elect of God, because the names of the righteous of all ages are recorded in its pages. In beseeching God to spare the Israelites who had rebelled at Sinai, Moses says, "Yet now, if you will forgive their sin. . .; and if not, blot me, pray you, out of your book which you have written. And the Lord said to Moses, Whosoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Ex.32:32-33 KJV). See also Psa.69:28; Rev.21:27; 22:19.
An angel told Daniel the following about the Book of Life:

"And at that time Michael shall stand up, the great ruler stands for the sons of your people. And there shall be a time of distress, such as has not been from the existence of a nation until that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone that shall be found written in the book" (Dan.12:1 Para.).

Jesus said the following to his disciples about the Book of Life:

"Behold, I give to you power to tread on serpents and scorpions and over all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you: but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Lk.10:19-20 KJV). See also Phil.4:3; Heb.12:23; Rev.13:7-8; 17:8.

"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels" (Rev.3:5 KJV). See also Rev.3:4;18; 6:11; 7:9-10; 13-18.

The Righteous Dead of All Ages

In the Book of Hebrews, chapter eleven, there is a long list of righteous individuals who died without receiving God's promises:

"These are the individuals, Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Heb.11:33-35 KJV).

A Better Resurrection

The entire eleventh chapter of Hebrews chronicles these righteous individuals and their deeds of faith as they lived and died in obedience to God. Verse 35 shows that they did all this in order to obtain a better resurrection. Is one resurrection better than another? The answer is Yes! The first resurrection is the best and most desirable because of the rewards that will be given to those who participate in it.

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV). See also v13.

At that point in history, these righteous individuals had not received their reward; moreover, they still have not received it. They are dead, and not alive in heaven or any other place. However, the prophets and the righteous of all ages, including Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, and
David, will receive their reward at the same time as those who died after Jesus and those who remain alive at his return. See 1 Thes. 4:13-15.

THE DAY JESUS RETURNS

One of the most misunderstood topics of the Bible is the return of Christ. Most people do not begin to comprehend the magnitude of the events that surround this climactic event or its importance in the overall plan of God for the future of humanity. The first resurrection will undoubtedly be one of the most awesome and glorious events to ever take place.

A number of cataclysmic, earthshaking events will occur on the day that Jesus returns to the earth. The following are three of these major events which directly concern the elect of God:

- The resurrection of the righteous dead to immortality
- The change of the living righteous to immortality
- The rewarding of the righteous for their diligent effort and self-sacrifice

Jesus Appears In The Sky

One of the first events on this day will be the gathering of the elect of God to meet Jesus in the atmosphere above the earth. As Jesus enters the earth's atmosphere and lights the sky with his glory, the angels will begin to collect the righteous of all ages:

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt. 24:29-31 KJV). See also Isa. 43:5-7; Mk. 13:24-27; 14:62; Rev. 1:7.

The Dead Rise First

In this great day, everyone who has obtained salvation will rise to meet Jesus as he enters the atmosphere, and all of the righteous who have died over the centuries will be resurrected and will join him before those who are alive at his coming:

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep [dead], that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not precede them which are asleep" (1 Thes. 4:13-15 KJV; 1 Cor. 15:51-54).

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"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thes. 4:16-17 KJV). See also 2 Thes. 2:1-8.

Some believe verse 17 means the righteous will not come back to earth but will remain in heaven; however, this is not the case. All of the prophecies which deal with the Kingdom of God in relationship to physical humans after the return of Christ clearly show Jesus ruling on earth. If the righteous are to be with Jesus, they will be on earth with him. See Matt. 5:5; Rev. 5:10.

The Change to Immortality

Those who participate in the first resurrection will have escaped the punishment reserved for the wicked and have been promised that they will live forever as immortal beings:

"Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power. . ." (Rev. 20:6).

"He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches: He that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death" (Rev. 2:11 Para.).

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23 KJV). See also 1 Tim. 6:12 KJV; Lk. 20:34-35.

"And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life" (1 Jn. 2:25 KJV; Tit. 3:7).

The quality of life the righteous are promised is comparable to that which God himself has. God the Father and Jesus Christ are spirit-beings who inherently possesses the highest form of life: immortality on the divine plane of existence. This kind of life springs forth from itself; it never dies or decays and is not dependent on any other source to sustain it: See 1 Tim. 1:17; 6:12-16.

"To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (Rom. 2:7 KJV).

To the Elect at Corinth, Paul explains the resurrection from the dead and the difference between the mortal human who will die and the immortal spirit-being who cannot die.

1 Corinthians 15:35-54 NIV

"But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they be come?' How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies. When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But
God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body' (vs.35-38).

"All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another. There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies: but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor' (vs.39-41).

"So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body' (vs.42-44).

"So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being," the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven' (vs.45-47).

"As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven' (vs.48-49).

"I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable' (v50).

To Be Immortal

The gift that God offers to those he calls to salvation is not just eternal life; it is much more. The angels have eternal life and are sustained by God's life-giving power yet they can be destroyed if they disobey God. The life God offers to the elect is immortal life, which can never be destroyed:

"Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed - in aflash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (vs.51-54). See also 2.Tim.1:9-10; 1.Pet.4:6; Rev.20:6.
It is this quality of life called immortality that God grants to those who participate in the first resurrection. The acquisition of immortality and eternal life allows the elect to pass beyond this physical existence into the Family of God. Immortality represents the highest reward for faithfulness to God, and it is abundantly clear that God intends to share immortality with those he has called to salvation:

"Who will render to every man according to his deeds: To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life" (Rom.2:6-7 KJV). See Lk.18:29-30; 20:34-35; Rom.6:23; 1.Tim.6:12; 1.Jn.2:25; Tit.3:7.

"Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature..." (2.Pet. 1:4 KJV).

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1.Jn.3:2 KJV). See also Rom.6:1-5; Phil.3:21.

With immortality, the righteous will also receive a glorified body, which will radiate with the brightness of the stars:

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan.12:3 KJV).

The First to Become Sons of God

"If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1.Cor.15:19-23 KJV). See also Col.1:13-18.

"For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestine to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom.8:29 KJV). See also 2.Cor.6:17-18; Jn.1:12; 3:1-3; Rom.8:8.

The scriptures clearly show that Jesus was the first of humanity to be resurrected as an immortal being and a son of God, and those who will be resurrected at his coming are also considered to be the first of humanity to receive sonship in the Family of God:

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons to glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren" (Heb.2:10-11 KJV).
"But you have drawn near to Mount Zion, even the city of the living God, to a heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, and to an assembly, a church of the firstborn ones having been enrolled in heaven; and to God the judge of all; and to the spirits of just ones who have been perfected" (Heb.12:22-23 KJV). See also Rev.14:4.

"Do not err, my beloved brethren. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and comes down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures" (Jms.1:16-18 KJV).

The Kingdom of God Established on Earth

After the first resurrection, Jesus will return to the earth with the elect of all ages who will have been changed into immortal beings (1.Cor.15:51-54). One of the primary reasons Jesus will come to rule the inhabitants of earth is to bring peace, so that God's plan for the salvation of humanity can go forward, unimpeded by Satan who is the god of this world. See 2.Cor.4:4; Rev.12:9.

Isaiah prophesied that, after the return of Christ, there will be a time of peace in which the nations will come to Jerusalem to learn the way of God:

Isaiah 2:2-4 KJV

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it" (v2).

The government of God is symbolized by a mountain that will be above all other governments. Notice that people will look to God's government for guidance:

"And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem" (v3).

When all the earth finally comes under the rule of the God family, which includes the elect of God who will have been made immortal, the earth will finally be at peace:

"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (v4). See also Isa.9:6-7.
Revelation

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev.11:15 KJV). See also 1.Cor.6:2-3; 15:24; Rev.12:5; 19:15; 20:4-6.

Daniel

"And in the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever" (Dan.2:44 KJV). See also ch.2:1-44.

Micah

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain [government] of the house of the Lord shall be established in the top of the mountains [governments/nations], and it shall be exalted above the hills [governments/nations]; and people shall flow to it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain [government] of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among many people, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Mic.4:1-3 KJV).

Zechariah

"This is what the Lord says: 'I will return to Zion and dwell in Jerusalem. Then Jerusalem will be called The City of Truth, and the mountain of the Lord Almighty will be called The Holy Mountain" (Zech.8:3 NIV) See also vs.4-7; ch.14:1-21.

"Behold a day of the Lord comes, and your spoil shall be divided among you. For I will gather all the nations to battle against Jerusalem. And the city shall be captured and the houses plundered, and the women ravished. And half the city shall go into captivity, and the rest of the people shall not be cut off from the city. And the Lord shall go out and fight against those nations, like the day he fought in the day of battle. And his feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall divide from its middle, from the east to the west, a very great valley. And half of the mountain shall move toward the north, and half toward the south. . . . And the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you" (Zech.14:1-5 KJV Para.). See also Hag.2:6-7.
A Time of Rewards

The rewards and inheritance for the righteous are reserved in heaven, but when and where will these be given to the saints? The prophetic scriptures clearly show that at the first resurrection, the elect of God will be given rewards for the works they performed during their lives. When speaking of the distribution of these rewards, Jesus said he following:

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matt.16:27 KJV). See also Rev.14:12-13. And, "Behold, I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev.22:12 NIV).

"And the nations were angry, and your wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that you should give reward to your servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear your name, small and great; and should destroy them which destroy the earth" (Rev.11:18 KJV).

The apostle Paul knew that besides being given immortality, which was beyond any human's ability to earn, the righteous would also receive rewards for their performance above and beyond their call to salvation:

"Now he that plants and he that waters are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labor" (1.Corr.3:8 KJV; vs.13-15).

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (2.Tim.4:8 KJV).

CO-RULERSHIP WITH JESUS

King David

Ezekiel was inspired to tell of a time when all of Israel will again be a nation under God’s leadership with David as their king:

"And David my servant shall be king over them; and they shall have one shepherd: they shall also walk in my judgments, and observe my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell in the land that I have given to Jacob my servant, wherein your fathers have dwelt; and they shall dwell therein, even they, and their children, and their children's children, for ever: and my servant David shall be their prince for ever" (Ezk.37:24-25 KJV). See also Zech.12:8-10.

The Apostles

On two different occasions, Jesus promised the twelve disciples that they would rule the earth with him:
"Then answering, Peter said to him, Behold, we have left all things and followed you: what then shall happen to us? And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, You who have followed me; in the regeneration, when the Son of man sits on his throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt.19:27-28 Para.).

"You are those having continued with me in my trials. And I appoint a kingdom to you, as my Father appointed to me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom. And you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk.22:28-30 Para.).

The Overcomers Will Rule With Christ

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev.3:21 KJV).

"And he that overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to pieces: even as I received of my Father" (Rev.2:26-27 KJV). See also 1.Cor. 6:2-3; 2.Tim.2:12.

Kings and Priests

"You also, as living stones, are being built a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. Because indeed it is also contained in the scripture, 'Behold I lay in Zion an elect, precious Stone, a Corner-foundation; and the one believing in him shall never in any way be ashamed. .. But you are an elect race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for possession, so that you may openly speak of the virtues of the One who has called you out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1.Pet.2:5-6;9 Para.).

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. To him that loved us and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And has made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev.1:4-6 KJV). See also Rev.5:10.

Before his death, Jesus told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them where his Father resides:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn.14:2-3 NIV).
Major Responsibilities

Many people wrongly assume the elect will be in heaven forever; however, those in the first resurrection will rule the earth with Jesus for at least a thousand years during which the earth will become a place of peace and prosperity. One of the first major responsibilities for those in the first resurrection is to assist in the conversion of humanity, because God the Father and Jesus Christ want everyone to obtain salvation (1.Tim.2:4; 2.Pet.3:9). For this task, the Father's earthly children are being trained and prepared through trials, tests, continual study into the biblical record, practice of God's truth and law, and prayer in order to grow in grace and knowledge so that each will be able to fulfill an office of a king and a priest who will rule and teach God's truth to those who have never heard or understood the way to salvation.

Those in the first resurrection (i.e., the elect of God) will be the examples, leaders, and teachers for the rest of humanity who have never had an opportunity for salvation. The elect are the ones who will teach the rest of humanity the way of God.

Inherit the Kingdom

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King [Jesus] say to them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father [God the Father], inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt.25:31-34 KJV). See also Jms.2:5.

Those in the first resurrection will inherit the Kingdom of Heaven as a part of their reward:

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:3 KJV, also see v5).

The elect of God will inherit this government and receive many other rewards for their faithfulness and obedience to God.

Inherit All Things

Not only will the righteous inherit the Kingdom but also all things. What a tremendous reward! To inherit the kingdom and to be joint-heirs with Jesus of all that will ever exist:

"He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev.21:7 KJV). See also Heb.1:1-2, 5-8.

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AFTER THE FIRST RESURRECTION

After the first resurrection, there will not be a single person on earth who has the spirit of God. The earth and its people will have been almost totally destroyed by the events at the end of the age, and the people of the earth will be in a state of confusion, terror, and shock. They will be wondering what happened and how they are going to survive. Into such a world, Christ and the elect will return and bring peace, joy, happiness, and harmony.

SUMMARY

The following are the four basic reasons the Sovereign God calls people to participate in the first resurrection:

1. To prepare a people to help Jesus Christ rule the world.
   "And [he has] made us to our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev.5:10 KJV). See also 1.Thes.3:13; Rev.3:21; 20:4-6.

2. To preach the good news of the soon coming Kingdom of God.
   "And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations; and then shall the end come" (Matt. 24:14 KJV).

3. To preach the message of repentance.
   "Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit, Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. . ." (Matt.28:19-20 KJV).

4. To grow in grace and knowledge (2.Pet.3:18) and learn and perfect the ways of God in their lives so that they will be able to fulfill the purpose for which they were called.

The first resurrection is the best resurrection. During this recurred-tions, the elect of all ages will be taken to the heaven of heavens where they will be given their rewards and prepared to return with Jesus Christ to conquer and rule the earth in righteousness:

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein? Know you not, that so many of us as were baptized to Jesus Christ were baptized to his death? Therefore we are buried with him by baptism to death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life [eternal life, immortality]. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:“ (Rom.6:1-5 KJV).

By B.L. Cocherell
Throughout the Bible we see many references to the coming of the Messiah who will bring the Kingdom of God to earth and peace and prosperity to humanity. No student of the Bible will deny that the coming of the Messiah is one of its central themes. However, among student and scholar alike, there is much disagreement as to the timing of this great event. Historically and presently, the Jews are waiting for the Messiah's first arrival. And most Christians wait for his second coming, but some anticipate a second and a third coming.

The Messiah Came Once and Will Return

Historical, civil, religious, and other ancient records confirm the authenticity of the biblical record. Historical writings are full of evidence of the existence of the people and places associated with the Bible and the Messiah.

Writings of Justin Martyr, Tertullian, Eusebius, and other early church leaders mention Pontius Pilate who ruled Judea from A.D. 26 to 36 and they make reference to his official reports to Emperor Tiberus Julius Caesar Augustus.

Tiberius wrote of the trial and crucifixion of a Jew whom many believed to be the Jewish Messiah. Tacitus, a Roman historian, mentions the one named Christ who Pontius Pilate condemned to death (Annals xv:44, written A.D. 115-117). Even Jewish history confirms the life and death of Christ.

Because it can be shown from historical records, which include the biblical record, that the Messiah did come and fulfill the prophecies of his first coming, it makes it possible to believe what the Bible says about his future return.

When Will Christ Return?

Does anyone know when Christ will return to earth? Many in the past thought they knew, and many today think they know. One group of believers thought he would return in 1844, another group thought he would return in 1914, and yet another group predicted it would be in 1975. People continually set dates and are continually disappointed; however, does this mean that no one will know the date and hour of Christ's return until it actually happens? How many times will the Messiah return? Will it be one, two, or three times? Many will find the answers to these questions both exciting and surprising.
After Jesus had told his disciples about the future destruction of the temple, they came to him privately to find out when it would happen and when the end of the age would come.

The disciples already knew of the prophecies about the Kingdom of God and its eventual rule of the earth. And many Jews of Jesus' day were expecting the Messiah to come and establish the Kingdom within their lifetime. See Lk.17:20-24.

Matthew 24:23-51 Paraphrased

"Then if anyone says to you, Behold, here is the Christ; or, There he is! Do not believe. For false christs will rise up, and false prophets. And they will give great signs and wonders, so as to lead astray, if possible, even the elect. Behold, I tell you beforehand. Then if they say to you, Behold, he is in the wilderness; do not go out. Behold, he is in the inner rooms; do not believe" (vs.23-26).

See also Mk.13:21-22.

Throughout the centuries, many false Messiahs and false prophets have come and gone. During the time of trouble at the end of the age, religious deception will be so intense that the only ones who will not be deceived are the elect of God who are diligently following the true God.

Notice the clear statement that Christ makes about one event that will accompany his arrival:

"For as the lightning comes forth from the east and shines as far as the west, so also will be the coming of the Son of man" (v27).

Here, Jesus gave a vivid picture of one of the signs which will accompany his return. Lightning is not a silent or inconspicuous occurrence; it is always accompanied by a loud thunderous noise, which is very noticeable.

"And immediately after the affliction of those days, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give her light, and the stars will fall from the heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken" (vs.28-29).

Cataclysmic celestial events will take place before Christ's return and his gathering of the elect.

"And then the sign of the Son of man will appear in the heavens. And then all the tribes of the land will wail. And they will see the Son of man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and much glory. And he will send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather his elect from the four winds; from the ends of the heavens to their ends" (vs.30-31).
The signs which precede Christ's return are awesome events that will occur in the heavens. The sun will become dark (Mk.13:24-26), the moon will not reflect sunlight to the earth, and the stars (Greek, 'aster') will be moved out of their orbits. When Jesus returns in all his glory and power, his very presence will disrupt the physical universe. See Ex.19:16-18; 24:17; Isa.13:9-13; 24:1-5; Joel 2:10-12, 30; Hag.2:6-7.

Every person alive on earth at the time of Christ's return will be aware of the awesome events that will occur in the heavens. Most people will be terrified and fear for their lives; some will be terrified because they know that Christ is returning to destroy them, and others will be in fear because they think that the world is coming to an end. The magnitude of the events that will accompany Christ's return will be far from secret or silent; they will be awesome and terrifying.

**The End-time Generation**

"But learn the parable of the fig tree: When its branch has already become tender, and it puts out leaves, you know that the summer is near, so also when you see all these things, know that it is near, at the doors. Truly I say to you, In no way will this generation pass away until all these things have occurred. The heavens and the earth will pass away" (vs.32-35).

When Jesus gave this parable, the disciples thought he was speaking of their day and their generation. However, as time passed it became apparent that he was speaking of a people and a generation far in the future. When these heavenly events occur, Jesus' return is imminent, and nothing can delay it.

**The Day and the Hour**

The statement Jesus made in reference to the exact time of his return is in Matthew 24:36 and Mark 13:32. A casual reading of these references seems to indicate that those who believe in a secret return of Jesus are correct. However, as we analyze this subject, we will see that many of the elect will indeed know the exact day and hour when Christ will return:

"But as to that day and that hour, no one knows, neither the angels of heaven but my Father only. But as the days of Noah, so will also be the coming of the Son of man" (vs.36-37).

"The heavens and the earth will pass away, but My word will not at all pass away. But concerning that day and the hour, no one knows, not the angels, those in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father. Be careful; be wakeful, and pray. For you do not know when the time is" (Mk.13:31-33).

The apostles did not give up in their quest to find out when Jesus would return. After his death and resurrection, they questioned him further about his return:
"Then, indeed, these coming together they questioned him, saying, Lord, do You restore the kingdom to Israel at this time? And he said to them, It is not yours to know times or seasons, which the Father placed in his own authority" (Acts 1:6-7 KJV).

It is true that no one including Jesus, the angels, the apostles, or the prophets knew when Christ would return before his death and resurrection. In Acts 1:7, Jesus says it was not for them to know the timing of these events. But why were they not told? The primary reason that no one knew these details prior to and after Jesus' death and resurrection is that it was not necessary for them to know when the end would come. They did not live in the end of the age; therefore, this knowledge would not benefit them.

Those Who Need to Know

Because no one but God the Father knew the timing of the end of the age, does it mean that no one will know when Christ will return? As we will see, those who need to know the timing of Christ's return will know, because this knowledge is important to their lives and their mission.

The Sealed Prophecy

"And he said, Go your way Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed until the end-time. Many shall be purified, and made white, and tested. But the wicked shall do wrong. And not one of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand" (Dan.12:9-10 KJV).

Daniel's prophecy was sealed until the time of the end at which time only the wise would understand. In the Book of Daniel, as well as in the rest of the biblical record, there is much information pointing to the end of the age. When this information is combined, the time of Christ's return can be known with certainty. The key to having this knowledge is to be one of the wise, because it is only the wise who will understand the meaning of specific events at the end of this age.

The Two Witnesses

"And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy a thousand, two hundred and sixty days, dressed in sackcloth" (Rev.11:3 Para.).

These two men will begin to witness about the gospel of Jesus Christ, his return, and the Kingdom of God. They will also foretell many of the earthshaking events at the end of the age. Moreover, they will prophesy for 1,260 days or approximately three and a half years; then, they will be killed.
"And when they complete their witness, the beast coming up out of the abyss will make war with them, and will overcome them, and will kill them. And their bodies will be on the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom, and Egypt—where our Lord was crucified" (Rev.11:7-8 Para.).

Below are some simple questions and answers about the Two Witnesses which pertain to their knowledge of when Christ will return:

Q. How will they know they are the Two Witnesses of God?
A. Christ will tell them.

Q. Will they know when their ministry begins?
A. Yes!

Q. Will these two men know the day when they will be killed?
A. Yes, because it is 1,260 days from the day they begin their ministry.

Q. Will they know the day and the hour of their resurrection?
A. Yes, because they will understand the prophecies that detail their ministry.

Q. Will these two men know the exact time of Christ's return?
A. Yes, because they will understand the prophecies concerning their ministry and his return.

"And after three days and a half, a spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood on their feet. And great fear fell on the ones beholding them. And they heard a great voice out of heaven saying to them, Come up here. And they went up into heaven in the cloud. And their enemies saw them. And in that hour a great earthquake occurred, and the tenth part of the city fell and there were killed in the earthquake seven thousand people. And the rest became terrified, and gave glory to the God of heaven" (Rev.11:11-13 Para.).

The Two Witnesses will be dead for three and a half days; then, they will be brought back to life and taken up into heaven. Christ will return very soon after these things begin to happen. Moreover, with a small amount of addition or subtraction along with the knowledge of other time frames for specific events given in prophecy, any true Christian alive at this time will have little difficulty calculating the time of Christ's return. Yes, the wise will understand:

"For as they were in the days before the flood: eating, and drinking, merry-making, and giving in marriage, until the day when Noah went into the ark, and they did not know until the flood came, and took them all away; so also will be the coming of the Son of man" (Matt.24:38-39 KJV).
It is important to remember that in Noah's generation, people were so evil that God decided to eliminate the human race. Noah was found to be the only righteous individual in all of humanity. Jesus says that this same condition will prevail at the end of the age. Just as the people in Noah's day did not listen to the call to repentance and the warnings of God's wrath, the vast majority of people in the end of the age will not listen to God's ministers. See Gen.6:5-13.

The Righteous Disappear From Earth

"At that time two will be out in the field; the one is taken away, and the one is left; two grinding at the mill, one is taken, and one is left" (Matt.24:40-41 KJV).

Many feel verses 40 and 41 support a secret return of Jesus; however, these events will neither be secret or silent as many scriptures reveal. See Matt:24:30-31; 26:63-64; 1.Thess.4:16-17; 2.Thess.2:1-8.

A Prophecy for the Future

In verses 42 through 51 of Matthew 24, there is a warning prophecy for a very specific group of people who live during the end of the age:

"Watch, then, for you do not know in what hour your Lord comes" (v42).

In verse 42, Jesus gives a very specific command to watch. But what should we be watching for? Jesus is addressing this instruction to a specific group of individuals. But who are they? Verse 43 gives us the answer to these questions:

"But know this, that if the housemaster had known in what watch the thief comes, he would have watched, and not have allowed his house to be dug through. Because of this, you also be ready, for in that hour you think not, the Son of man comes" (vs.43-44). See also Rev.3:3.

It is the housemaster (the one who rules the house) that is responsible for watching. The ones who have the responsibility for the care of the house of God (the church) are the ministers of Christ (1.Tim.3:14-15; Heb.13:7;17). The things to be watched for are world events as they relate to the specific prophecies that will occur at the end of the age:

"Who then is the faithful and wise servant, whom the Lord has set over his household, to give them food in due season? Blessed is the servant whom the Lord shall find so doing when he comes. Truly I say to you, he will set him over all his substance" (vs.45-47).

Who is a wise and faithful minister at the end of the age? He is one who watches and studies current world events as they relate to Bible prophecy and reveals this understanding to those under his care at the proper time.
"But if that evil servant should say in his heart, My Lord delays to come, and should begin to beat his fellow servants, and to eat, and to drink with the drunkards, the lord of that servant will come in a day in which he does not expect, and in an hour which he does not know, and will cut him in two, and will appoint his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (vs. 46-51).

Those who do not watch will not know when Jesus will return. The warning is unmistakable in its meaning: if a minister at the end of the age does not continue to fulfill his responsibility toward Christ and the elect under his care, he will lose his salvation.

Paul Writes to Thessalonica

By the time Paul wrote to the church at Thessalonica, the church understood that Jesus was not going to return in their generation. Paul says that the true elect of God will not be caught unaware by the events that will culminate at the end of the age, because they will understand them:

"But of the times and seasons, brethren, you have no need that I write to you. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction comes upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape. But you, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. You are all the children of light, and the children of this day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober" (1.Thes.5:1-6 KJV).

Christians and the Tribulation

Those who subscribe to the belief in a secret return of Christ, believe Christians will be taken to heaven and spared the horrors and agony of the cataclysmic events just before his return. Others believe that Christians will be protected in some geographical place of safety on earth. But are either of these teachings true? Will there be Christians on earth during this great tribulation? Will Christians be subject to any of the terrifying events at the end of the age?

Christians Will be Hated

Many scriptures describe, with graphic detail, the time known as the great tribulation. There are also many scriptures which show the elect of God will be persecuted, betrayed by their own children and some who profess to follow Christ, brought to trial because of their belief, made to flee for their lives, and made to suffer many other horrible injustices. The following scriptures speak of this time period:
"Then they will deliver you up to affliction, and will kill you; and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake. And then many will be offended, and they will deliver up one another, and will hate one another. And many false prophets will arise, and will mislead many. And because lawlessness shall have been multiplied, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end, that one will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the earth, for a testimony to all the nations; and then shall come the end" (Matt.24:9-14 KJV Para.).

During this time of trouble, Jesus' followers will be persecuted, killed, hated by all peoples, betrayed by their own, make foolish decisions concerning the truth, and forsake God.

"And the gospel must first be proclaimed to all the nations. But whenever they lead you away, delivering you, do not be anxious beforehand about what you should say or think. But whatever is given to you in that hour, speak that. For you are not those speaking, but the holy spirit. And brother will deliver up brother to death, and a father the child. And children will rise up on parents, and will put them to death. And you will be hated by all on account of my name. But the one enduring to the end, that one will be saved. But when you see the abomination of desolation, the one spoken of by Daniel the prophet, standing where it ought not—he who reads, let him understand—then let those in Judea flee into the mountains. And he who is on the housetop, let him not go down into the house, nor go in to take anything out of his house. And the one in the field, let him not return to the things behind, to take his garment. But woe to those that are with child, and to those giving suck in those days! And pray that your flight will not be in winter. For there will be affliction in those days, such as has not been the like from the beginning of creation which God created until now, and never will be" (Mk.13:10-19 KJV Para.).

Jesus tells those in Judea to be alert to the prophetic events surrounding the false worship system of that day and to flee for their lives when they see these events transpire.

Revelation 6:9-11 KJV

"And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And white robes were given to every one of them; and it was said to them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled." See also Rev.12:17.
In all of these references, the elect of God are still on earth, even up to and including the opening of the fifth seal. Notice also that they are to remain for some time after this seal is opened so that others may also be martyred as a witness for Christ.

Revelation 7:1-4, 13-14 Paraphrased

"And after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, Saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel" (vs.1-4 KJV).

"And one of the elders answered, saying to me, These, the ones having been clothed in white robes: who are they, and from where did they come? And I said to him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are those coming out of the great tribulation; and they have washed their robes, and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb" (vs.13-14).

CHRIST TO RETURN TWICE

Throughout the biblical record, there are many references to God coming to earth to reward the saints and establish his government upon the earth in order to bring peace and prosperity to humanity. Most Bible scholars will agree that God says he will indeed come to earth to establish his government. The problem is not with what these references say, it is with the various beliefs of when and how this will happen.

A close review of each reference that details the presentation of rewards given to the elect of God and the establishment of his Kingdom on the earth shows two distinct returns of Christ. Christ's first return involves gathering the elect of God for their rewards and change into immortal spirit-beings. During his second return a short time later, he will conquer the earth and establish the Kingdom of God.

Jesus to Come in Clouds

When the high priest Caiaphas asked Jesus to tell him whether or not he was the Messiah, he did not expect the answer he received:
"The high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You said it. I tell you more. From this time you shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of the heavens. Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, he has blasphemed! Why do we have any more need of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy" (Matt.26:63-65 Para.).

Jesus told the high priest that the next time he sees him, he will be on his throne next to the Father, and when he returns, it will be in the clouds.

After Jesus disappeared into the heavens an angel told the disciples essentially the same thing Jesus told Caiaphas about the events surrounding his return:

"As they looked on, he was taken up; and a cloud received him from their eyes. And as they were looking intently into the heaven, he having gone, even behold, two men in white clothing stood by them, who also said, Men, Galileans, Why do you stand looking up to the heaven? This Jesus, the One being taken from you into heaven, will come in the way you saw him going into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11 Para.). See also Matt.24:30.

God and Clouds

Historically and symbolically, when God or a spirit-being came to earth in their glorified form, they appeared in clouds:

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud,. . ." (Ex.13:21 KJV). See also Ex.16:10; 19:9;16; 24:16; 34:5.

"And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spoke to him,. . ." (Num.11:25 KJV).

"And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire" (Ezk.1:4 KJV).

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven,. . ." (Dan.7:13 KJV).

"Who lays the beams of his chambers in the waters: who makes the clouds his chariot: who walks upon the wings of the wind." (Psa.104:3 KJV). See also Psa.18:7-15; Rev.1:7;14:14.

As we review some of the events that surround the end of the age and the return of Jesus Christ, we will notice that a spirit-being has a tremendous impact upon the physical universe when it appears in its glorified form.

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CHRIST RETURNS TO GATHER THE ELECT

When Jesus enters the earth's atmosphere in his glorified form, the elements will begin to disintegrate under the power of his presence. The air will become supercharged with electricity, lightning, and thunder. And fire and smoke will fill the sky as his angels collect the elect:

"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:31 KJV). See also Isa.43:5-7; Mk.13:24-27; 14:62; Rev.1:7.

The Elect Rise to Meet Christ

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1.Thes.4:16-17 KJV). See also 2.Thes.2:1-8.

What happens as the righteous of all ages rise to meet Christ in the clouds above the earth?

"Listen I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we will all be changed— in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1.Cor.15:51-52 NIV).

The change to spirit-beings will be a spectacular event. It will be accompanied by the blast of a trumpet, lighting, thunder, and fire in the sky as the elect rise to meet Christ:

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1.Jn.3:2 KJV). See also Rom.6:1-5; Phil.3:21; Rev.1:13-16.

The righteous will be changed to spirit-beings just like Jesus. At the instant of this change, the elect will become spirit Sons of God and they will shine with the brightness of the stars:

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan.12:3 KJV).
As the saints rise into the sky, they will be instantly changed into glorified spirit-beings, and they will begin to shine with the brightness and power of the stars. At the instant of their change, the very power of their presence will rip apart the atmosphere, dissolving its basic elements. The noise of this awesome event will be almost unbearable to the human ear as sonic booms, explosions, blinding light, thunder, and clouds fill the sky. The sights and sounds of this day will put terror in the hearts of all those who witness it. To many, it will seem as if the world is coming to an end.

**Christ and the Elect Disappear**

Between the time of Christ's first return to gather the elect and his second return to conquer the earth, Jesus promises to keep the elect from the final portion of the tribulation:

"Because you kept the word of My patience, I also will keep you out of the hour of trial which is going to come on all the habitable world in order to try those dwelling on the earth. Behold, I am coming quickly, Hold what you have that no one take your crown" (Rev.3:10-11).

But, how will Jesus protect the elect? After Christ's first return, the righteous of all ages will be spirit-beings who have been taken to heaven. When the righteous are changed into spirit-beings and taken to heaven, there will not be one person alive on earth with the spirit of God. Because the elect will no longer be human, they will be protected from God's wrath which will come upon the earth.

**CHRIST RETURNS TO CONQUER AND RULE**

The Tribulation Cut Short

After all of the righteous have been taken from the earth and only the unrighteous remain, what will stop God from destroying the earth and the rest of humanity?

"For there will be great affliction, such as has not happened from the beginning of the world until now; no, nor ever will be. And except those days had been shortened, no flesh would be saved: but on account of the elect, those days will be shortened" (Matt.24:21-22).

Jesus says it is for the elect's sake that all of humanity will not be destroyed. But why? God will not destroy the entire earth because of his promises to the patriarchs and the elect concerning their inheritance, descendants and rulership, and because of his future plans for the rest of humanity.
**Jesus Comes to Conquer**

After the final plagues are poured out on the earth, Jesus will return with the Elect of God to conquer the beast power and establish the Kingdom of God:

"Now you prophesy against them all these words, and say to them, the Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar over his dwelling place. He answers with a shout, like those who tread out the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A roaring will go to the ends of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with the nations. He will enter into judgment with all flesh; he will give the wicked to the sword, declares the Lord" (Jer.25:30-31 Para.). See also Isa.43:5-7; Mal. 3:2-3; 4:1; Am.9:1-4; Oba. vs.15-16.

"And I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness does judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God" (Rev.19:11-13 KJV).

**The Elect Return With Jesus**

During the time period between Christ's first and second return, his armies will be preparing to invade and conquer the earth. Remember at this time the righteous of all ages will be immortal spirit-beings in the Family of God:

"And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev.19:14-15 KJV). See also Rev.2:26-27; 3:4; 19:8.

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints [the elect]. To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15 KJV).

"These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they [the elect] that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful" (Rev.17:14).
When Christ returns as the conquering king, the elect of God will come with him as a part of his vast spirit army:

"And to you, who are troubled, rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, that will take full vengeance on those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, these will pay the penalty of everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his strength, when he comes to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired by all those who believe in that day, because of our testimony" (2.Thes.1:7-10 Para.).

**Christ's Rule Begins**

"And his feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall divide from its middle, from the east to the west, a very great valley. And half of the mountain shall move toward the North, and half toward the South (v4). ... And the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you" (Zech.14:4-5 Para.). See also Hag.2:6-7.

**His Rule to Last Forever**

"And the seventh angel trumpeted. And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world became our Lord's, even of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev.11:15).

This is the time that was spoken of from the beginning of humanity when salvation will begin to come to all of humanity through the Kingdom of God:

"For a Child is born; to us a Son is given; and the government is on his shoulder; and his name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. There is no end to the increase of his government and of peace on the throne of David, and on his kingdom, to order it, and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness, from now and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this" (Isa.9:6-7 Para.) See Lk.1:32-33.

By B.L. Cocherell
The teaching of a secret coming of Christ is known as the Secret Rapture and it is believed almost universally by professing Christianity as a biblical fact. Although there are many variations of the Secret Rapture teaching, most who believe this teaching believe that Christ will return twice:

**Christ's First Return**
- He will secretly come to gather the saints to protect them from the great tribulation.
- He will return around the middle of the tribulation, or at its end, seven years later.

**Christ's Second Return**
- He will return to destroy the Antichrist and begin his reign on earth.
- He will return to totally destroy the earth and take remaining believers to heaven.

**EMANUAL LACUNA'S BOOK**

The beginnings of the Secret Rapture theory seems to have come from a book by Emanual Lacuna who had become a Chilean Jesuit in 1747. When the Jesuits were expelled from Chile, Lacuna settled north of Italy where he devoted the remainder of his years to writing 'The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty' in which he speculated that Christ will come twice: once for his saints and again with his saints. He completed his book in 1790 and presented it under the pen-name of Ben-Ezra to avoid exposure, which was wise, because his book was placed in the Index of Forbidden Books by Rome in 1824.

Although the teaching of a pre-tribulation secret rapture of the saints is not found in Lacuna's book, he had actually stumbled onto a Biblical truth, and his speculation seems to have been the catalyst for the doctrine of the Secret Rapture.

**THE YEAR 1830**

There does not seem to be any literature referring to a secret coming of Christ until after 1830 when many individuals began to come forth with the concept of a secret coming. Among those who taught this concept were the Anglican Curate J.N. Darby, Newton, George V. Wigram, Andrew Jukes, and J.P. Tregelles.
THE BIBLICAL FACTS OF CHRIST'S RETURN

The biblical facts clearly show the following two returns of Christ:

Christ's First Return

He will openly return to gather the saints three and a half days after the death of the Two Witnesses. See Matt.24:23-51; Rev.11:7-13.

Christ's Second Return

He will openly return with the saints and his heavenly hosts to destroy the governmental and religious system of the Antichrist and False Prophet and establish the Kingdom of God on the earth. See Jude 14-15; Rev.19:11-15; Rev.11:15.

CHRIST TO RETURN OPENLY TWICE

Throughout the Bible, there are many references to God coming to earth to reward the saints and establish his government upon the earth in order to bring peace and prosperity to humanity. Most Bible scholars will agree that God says he will indeed come to earth to establish his government. The problem is not with what these references say, it is with the various beliefs of when and how this will happen.

A close review of each reference that details the presentation of rewards given to the Sovereign Father's elect children and the establishment of his Kingdom on the earth shows two distinct returns of Christ. Christ's first return involves gathering the saints for their rewards and change into immortal spirit-beings. During his second return a short time later, he comes to conquer the earth and establish his heavenly Father's government and worship system which will rule the earth from Jerusalem.

Jesus to Come in Clouds

When the high priest Caiaphas asked Jesus to tell him whether or not he was the Messiah, he did not expect the answer he received:

"The high priest said to him, I adjure you by the living God, that you tell us if you are the Christ, the Son of God. Jesus said to him, You said it. I tell you more. From this time you shall see the Son of man sitting at the right hand of power, and coming on the clouds of the heavens. Then the high priest tore his garments, saying, he has blasphemed! Why do we have any more need of witnesses? Behold, now you have heard his blasphemy" (Matt.26:63-65 Para.).

Jesus told the high priest that the next time he sees him, he will be on his throne next to the Father, and when he returns, it will be in the clouds.

After Jesus' meeting with his disciples and his disappearance into the heavens two angels told them essentially the same thing that Jesus had told Caiaphas about the events surrounding his return:
"While they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11 KJV). See also Matt.24:30.

The Creator God and Clouds

The biblical record tells us that when the Creator God appeared in his glorified form on Mount Sinai that he appeared in a thick cloud and that there was the sound of a trumpet along with lightning, thundering, and smoke rising up from the mountain. The following are a few of the many biblical references which speak of a spirit-being in his glorified form appearing in clouds:

"And the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of a cloud,. . ." (Ex.13:21 KJV). See also Ex.16:10; 19:9;16; 24:16; 34:5.

"And the Lord came down in a cloud, and spoke to him,. . ." (Num.11:25 KJV).

"And I looked, and behold, a whirlwind came out of the north, a great cloud, and a fire enfolding itself, and a brightness was about it, and out of the midst thereof as the color of amber, out of the midst of the fire" (Ezk.1:4 KJV).

"I saw in the night visions, and, behold, one like the Son of man came with the clouds of heaven,. . ." (Dan.7:13 KJV). See also Psa.104:3; Psa.18:7-15; Rev.1:7;14:14.

CHRIST RETURNS TO GATHER THE ELECT

When Jesus enters the earth's atmosphere in his glorified form, the elements will begin to disintegrate under the power of his presence as happened when the Creator God in his glorified presence descended on Mount Sinai. As Christ enters earth's atmosphere, the air will become supercharged with electricity, lightning, thunder, fire, and smoke will fill the sky as his angels collect the elect:

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1.Thes.4:16-17 KJV). See also 2.Thes.2:1-8.
"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:31 KJV). See also Isa.43:5-7; Mk.13:24-27; 14:62; Rev.1:7.

The Elect Rise to Meet Christ

What happens as the righteous of all ages rise to meet Christ in the clouds above the earth?

"Listen I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed" (1.Cor.15:51-52 NIV).

The change of the Sovereign Father's earthly children to immortal spirit-beings will be a spectacular event that will be accompanied by the blast of a trumpet that will be heard around the world. Notice that the elect will not only become immortal, but they will assume an appearance similar to that of Christ.

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1.Jn.3:2 KJV). See also Rom.6: 1-5; Phil.3:21; Rev.1:13-16.

To be like Jesus is to be like him in his glorified form and presence. Notice what the prophet Daniel recorded about the appearance of the righteous who will become immortal spirit-beings in the Kingdom of God:

"And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever" (Dan.12:3 KJV).

As the saints rise into the sky, they will be instantly changed into glorified spirit-beings, and they will begin to shine with the brightness and power of the stars. At the instant of their change, the very power of their presence will rip apart the atmosphere, dissolving its basic elements. The noise of this awesome event will be almost unbearable to the human ear as sonic booms, explosions, blinding light, thunder, smoke, and clouds fill the sky. The sights and sounds of this day will put terror in the hearts of all those who witness it. To many, it will seem as if the world is coming to an end.

CHRIST RETURNS TO CONQUER AND RULE

After many plagues are poured out on the earth, Jesus will return with the Elect of God to conquer the beast power and establish the Kingdom of God:
"Now you prophesy against them all these words, and say to them, the Lord shall roar from on high, and utter his voice from his holy habitation; he shall mightily roar over his dwelling place. He answers with a shout, like those who tread out the grapes, against all the inhabitants of the earth. A roaring will go to the ends of the earth; for the Lord has a controversy with the nations. He will enter into judgment with all flesh; he will give the wicked to the sword, declares the Lord" (Jer.25:30-31 Para.). See also Isa.43:5-7; Mal.3:2-3; 4:1; Am.9:1-4; Oba. vs.15-16.

"And I saw the heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he does judge and make war. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew but he himself. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God" (Rev.19:11-13 KJV).

The Elect Return With Jesus

During the time period between Christ's first and second return, his army of spirit-beings which includes the righteous of all ages then immortal spirit-beings in the Family of God will be preparing to invade and conquer the earth in preparation for the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints [the elect], To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15 KJV).

"And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean. And out of his mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God" (Rev.19:14-15 KJV). See also Rev.2:26-27; 3:4; 17:14; 19:8.

When Christ returns as the conquering king, the elect of God will come with him as a part of his vast spirit army:

"And to you, who are troubled, rest with us, at the revelation of the Lord Jesus from heaven with his mighty angels in flaming fire, that will take full vengeance on those who do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, these will pay the penalty of everlasting destruction from the face of the Lord, and from the glory of his strength, when he comes to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired by all those who believe in that day, because of our testimony" (2.Thes.1:7-10 Para.).
Christ's Rule Begins

"And his feet shall stand in that day on the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives shall divide from its middle, from the east to the west, a very great valley. And half of the mountain shall move toward the North, and half toward the South (v4). ... And the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you" (Zech.14:4-5 Para.). See also Hag.2:6-7.

His Rule to Last Forever

"And the seventh angel trumpeted. And there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world became our Lord's, even of his Christ; and he shall reign forever and ever" (Rev.11:15).

This is the time that was spoken of from the beginning of humanity when salvation will begin to come to all of humanity through the Kingdom of God:

"For a Child is born; to us a Son is given; and the government is on his shoulder; and his name is called Wonderful, Counselor, the mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace. There is no end to the increase of his government and of peace on the throne of David, and on his kingdom, to order it, and to sustain it with justice and with righteousness, from now and forever. The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this" (Isa.9:6-7 Para.) See Lk.1:32-33.

Whether or not Darby, Newton, Wigram, Jukes, Tregelles or for that matter anyone else used Emanuel Lacuna's writings as a basis for their theory of a secret rapture, the Bible shows, beyond a shadow of a doubt, that when Jesus returns to gather the elect of God, the event will neither be secret nor silent. The Secret Rapture theory is just that; it is a theory. It is not biblical fact or truth.

By B.L. Cocherell
CHAPTER FIVE

RESURRECTION OF NATIONAL ISRAEL

The prophet Ezekiel foretold a special resurrection which will only include national Israel. In order to understand why there will be a special resurrection for national Israel, it is important to review some of the promises God made to Abraham and the Israelites.

A Promise to Abraham

"That in blessing I will bless you, and in multiplying I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is on the seashore. And your Seed shall possess the gate of his enemies. And in your Seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed as a reward in that you have obeyed my voice" (Gen.22:17-18 Para.).

The promise to Abraham not only assured him multitudes of descendants but also that all the inhabitants of the world would be blessed through these descendants.

A Promise to National Israel

After God delivered the descendants of Jacob from slavery in Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai, he offered to make a covenant with them:

"And now if you will obey my voice and keep to my covenant, you shall become a special treasure to me above all the nations, for all the earth is mine. And you shall become a kingdom of priests for me, a holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the sons of Israel. And Moses came and called the elders of the people. And he put all these words before them which the Lord commanded him. And all the people answered together and said, All which the Lord has spoken we will do. And Moses brought back the words of the people to the Lord" (Ex.19:5-8 Para.).

In Deuteronomy 28:1-13, God promised wealth, protection, health, happiness, and many other fantastic blessings to the Israelites for their obedience.

If the Israelites had performed their part of this covenant, God would not only have granted them enormous physical blessings but also spiritual salvation.
Immortality and eternal life were also offered to those who lived under the Old Covenant. But in order to obtain it, they had to fulfill the conditions of the covenant. Those who obeyed God deserved life because they kept their covenant agreement with God. A partial list of those who gained salvation under a covenant relationship with God is given in chapter eleven of the Book of Hebrews.

"You shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments, which if a man do, he shall live in [by] them: I am the Lord" (Lev.18:5 KJV). See also Job 14:14-15; 1 Thes.4:13-15; Heb.11:33-40.

We know from history and the scriptures that national Israel failed to keep their part of the covenant, so God canceled the agreement with them by giving them a bill of divorcement through the written word of the prophets. See Isa.50:1; Jer.3:8-9.

Although national Israel failed to fulfill their agreement with God, they still had an opportunity for national greatness and salvation because of God's unconditional promise to Abraham. Because of these prior commitments to the patriarchs (2 Chron.6:14; Psa.89:34; Zech.2:10-12), God will continue to work with Israel until his purpose for mankind is completed:

"For you are a holy people to the Lord your God. The Lord your God has chosen you to be his own treasure out of all the people on the face of the earth. The Lord did not set his love on you or choose you because you were more in number than any people, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But because the Lord loved you, and because he kept the oath which he swore to your fathers, the Lord has caused you to go out with a strong hand, and redeemed you from the house of slaves, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt. Because of this, know that the Lord your God, is God, and who is a faithful God, keeps the covenant and mercy with those who love him, and with those who keep his commands, to a thousand generations" (Deut.7:6-9 Para.).

God Has Not Forsaken Israel

In his letter to the elect at Rome, the apostle Paul clearly explains that God has not forsaken Israel, but he has only set them aside for a short time in order to give the Gentiles an opportunity to have some of the promises given to national Israel.

Romans 11:1-27 Paraphrased

"I say then, Did God thrust away his people? Let it not be! For I am also an Israelite, out of Abraham's seed, of the tribe of Benjamin. God did not thrust away his people whom he foreknew. Or did you not know what the scripture said in Elijah, how he pleaded with God against Israel, Saying, 'Lord, they killed the prophets, and they took down your altars; and only I am left; and
they seek my soul.' But what does the Divine answer say to him, 'I reserved to myself seven thousand men who did not bow the knee to Baal'. So then, also in this present time a remnant according to election of grace has come into being. But if by grace, no longer is it of works; else grace no longer becomes grace. But if of works, it is no longer grace; else work is no longer work" (vs.1-6).

The terms and conditions of salvation through the Covenant with Israel included stipulations for the performance of physical works for justification before God, but this all changed when Jesus became the supreme sacrifice for the sins of mankind. After his sacrifice, works could no longer secure salvation, because salvation had become a gift of grace under the New Covenant.

"What then? What Israel seeks, this he did not obtain, but the election obtained it, and the rest were hardened; even as it has been written, 'God gave to them a spirit of slumber, eyes not seeing and ears not hearing' until this day" (vs.7-8). See 2.Cor.3:13-18; 4:1-4.

Paul says that the majority of Israel obtained neither the blessings promised to Abraham nor salvation. However, those specifically selected by God for salvation did obtain it (see verses 2-5), but the rest had become unresponsive to God. Therefore, they became unable to understand the way to salvation. See Mk.3:5; Rom.2:5; Ezk.3:7.

"I say then, Did not they stumble that they fall? Let it not be! But by their slipping away came salvation to the nations, to provoke them to jealousy. But if their slipping away is the riches of the world, and their default the riches of the nations, how much more their fullness? For I speak to you, the nations [i.e., non-Israelitish nations], since I am the apostle of the nations. . . . I glorify my ministry, if somehow I may provoke to jealousy my flesh, and may save some of them. For if their casting away is the reconciliation of the world, what is their reception, except life from the dead?" (vs.11-15).

Paul further explains that national Israel's opportunity for national greatness and salvation is still a part of God's plan for humanity:

"Now if the first-fruit is holy, so also the lump. And if the root is holy, also the branches. But if some of the branches were broken off, and you being a wild olive tree were grafted in among them, and become a sharer of the root and the fatness of the olive tree, do not boast against the branches. But if you do boast, it is not you that bears the root, but the root bears you. You will then say, the branches were broken off that I might be grafted in" (vs.16-19).
Israel was the nation God chose to begin his redemptive work to the world and to be a righteous example of God's way of life that others could follow. Although Israel failed to be this example, they are still the nation that God will use after the return of Christ to be an example for humanity: See (Deut.30:1-6; Isa.44:21; 51:2-3; 52:1-11; Jer.31:35-38; 32:36-42; 33:1-26).

"Well for unbelief they were broken off, And you stand by faith. Do not be high minded, but fear. For if God did not spare the natural branches, lest he will not spare you either. Behold, then, the kindness and severity. But on you, kindness—if you continue in the kindness. Otherwise you will also be cut off. And those also, if they do not continue in unbelief, will be grafted in. For God is able to graft them in again. For if you were cut out of the natural wild olive tree, and were against nature grafted into a good olive tree, how much more these being according to nature will be grafted into their own olive tree?" (vs.20-24).

The English word unbelief in verse 20 is the Greek word ἄπιστία, which means unfaithfulness. Israel was not temporarily set aside because they did not believe what God said; they were set aside because they were not obedient to his law and the covenant which they had made with him. See Hos.4:6; Joe.2:19-20; Psa.78:10, 36-37; Jer.18:15-17; Rom.1:21-22.

Everyone who has a covenant with God should take heed to honor their agreement and remain faithful to their word, or God will reject them as he did Israel. Verse 23 shows that the consequence of disobedience is the separation from God and the blessings and benefits of this relationship, but obedience brings acceptance:

"For I do not want you to be ignorant of this mystery, brothers—so that you may not be wise within yourselves—that hardness in part has happened to Israel, until the fullness of the nations comes in; and so all Israel will be saved, even as it has been written, 'The deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob. And this is my covenant with them, when I take away their sins'" (vs.25-27).

The Covenant People

When reviewing the new covenant that God has promised Israel, it is important to remember that it is the contract made at Mount Sinai which is spoken of. Moreover, it is this contract with the nation of Israel that will be revised and codified.

"Behold the days come, says the Lord, that I will cut a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah, not according to the covenant that I cut with their fathers in the day I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—which covenant of mine they broke, although I was a husband to them, says the Lord" (Jer.31:31-32 Para.).
Those with whom God made the original contract are all dead along with millions of their descendants who died without a new covenant. Israel of the original covenant is not a nation today; its descendants are scattered throughout the nations of the earth, which was prophesied by the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. However, because the majority of the Israelites who have ever lived are dead, when will God make this new contract with them and their descendants?

"But this shall be the covenant that I will cut with the house of Israel: After those days, declares the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer.31:33 Para.).

Notice that the new contract will be made "after those days." The phrase "after those days" refers to a period of time after Christ returns as a conquering king. Before Christ's return, Israel, as a nation under the direction of God, does not exist, because most of the descendants of ancient Israel are scattered throughout the nations of the world.

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES

Ezekiel 37 contains the prophecy of the valley of dry bones, which pertains to racial Israelites who have died throughout the ages. They will be resurrected to physical life some time after the return of Christ in order to have their opportunity for salvation under the New Covenant:

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, And caused me to pass by them round about: and, behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry."And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O lord God, you know. Again he said to me, prophesy upon these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord" (vs.1-6 KJV).

These people will not be given a spirit body like those who participate in the first resurrection who will be made spirit-beings at Christ's coming (see 1.Cor.15:42-5); these people will be brought back to life as physical human beings (i.e., flesh and blood). See also Ezk.37:11 below.

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophesy to the wind, prophesy son of man, and say to the wind, thus says the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (vs.8-10 KJV).
This pictures millions of humans who will be brought back to physical life in this great valley. God says these people are from the whole house of Israel—the combined houses of Israel and Judah:

"Then he said to me, Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel: behold, they say, Our bones are dried, our hope is lost: we are cut off from our parts" (v11 KJV).

Verse 11 shows that these people who will be resurrected are the whole house of Israel, which also includes the house of Judah. It is apparent that these are the millions of Israelites who have died over the centuries. They all died without hope because they did not have a covenant with God for salvation.

These people will include Israelites who were scattered throughout the nations of the world (most without even knowing they were of Israelite decent) and have lost their national identity as part of national Israel's punishment for disobedience to God:

"And the Lord says, because they have forsaken my law which I set before them, and have not obeyed my voice, and have not walked in it; but have walked after the stubbornness of their own heart, and after Baals, which their fathers taught them; so the Lord of host, the God of Israel, says this: Behold, I will feed them, this people with wormwood, and make them to drink water of poison. I will scatter them among the nations which they have not known, nor their fathers. . ." (Jer.9:13-16 Para.). See also Jer.18:15-17; Ezk.12:1-15; Rev.8:10-11.

"Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel!" (vs.12-13 KJV).

In verses 12 and 13, God speaks to the Israelites as a nation and as specific individuals when he says that he will bring them back to physical life. He calls them my people—a phrase that he only uses for the covenant people.

This scripture describes a people who do not know the God who brought their nation into existence and formed a covenant with them and their ancestors. The only logical reasons that these Israelites who will be resurrected do not know God is that they have either forgotten who he is or have never known who he is.

In order to understand why God said they will know him in verse 13, some of what the Bible records about Israel before, during, and after Christ's first coming must be researched.
BEFORE CHRIST

The following two texts show that national Israel as a whole had forgotten God long before Jesus came as the Messiah:

"With strange gods they moved him to jealousy; and with idols they provoked him to anger. They sacrificed to demons who were not God, to gods whom they did not know, new ones who came lately: your fathers had not dreaded them. You forgot the Rock that brought you into being; and neglected God who formed you. And the Lord looked and despised because of the provocation of his sons and of his daughters. And he said, I will hide my face from them; I will see what their end will be; for they are a perverse generation, sons in whom is no faithfulness" (Deut.32:16-20 KJV Para.).

"O generation, see the word of the Lord. Have I been a wilderness to Israel, or a land of darkness? Why do my people say, We roam; we will come no more to You. Can a virgin forget her finery, or a bride her attire? Yet my people have forgotten me days without number" (Jer.2:31-32 Para.). See also Jer.3:21; 13:25; 18:15-17; 23:23-27; Ezk.22:12.

DURING CHRIST'S LIFETIME

"Then they said to him, Where is your father? Jesus answered, You neither know me nor my Father. If you had known me, then you also would have known my Father. . .. Jesus answered, If I glorify myself, my glory is nothing; it is my Father who glorifies me, whom you say is your God. And you have not known him; but I know him, and if I say that I do not know him, I shall be like you, a liar. But I know him, and keep his word" (Jn.8:19,54-55 Para ).

The Jews who lived in Jesus' time did not know God the Father nor did they recognize Jesus who was the Creator God. Here, we find a people devoid of the knowledge of God the Father and his Son, the Creator and Covenant God of Israel.

The history of Israel from its inception through its division into the ten tribes of the House of Israel and the House of Judah shows a rebellious people who do not have knowledge and faith of the true God. Since the time of Christ to this very day the majority of national Israel who are scattered throughout the nations still do not know their God.

But, there will come a day when the dead of Israel shall rise and know who God is and they will know what great blessings he has in store for them.

After Christ's Return

Both the prophets Hosea and Isaiah spoke of the great resurrection when the dead of Israel will be brought forth from their graves and have their opportunity for salvation:
"O Israel, you are destroyed, but your help is in me. Where is your king? Where is any other who may save you in all your cities? And where are your judges of whom you said, Give to me a king and rulers? I give to you a king in my anger, and take him away in my fury. The iniquity of Ephraim is bound up; his sin is hidden. The pains of a woman in travail shall come to him; he is not a wise son; for he cannot stand still in the time of the breaking forth of sons. I will ransom them from the hand of Sheol; I will redeem them from death. O death where are your plagues? O Sheol, where is your ruin? Repentance is hidden from my eyes" (Hos.13:9-14 Para.).

Hosea was inspired to speak of Israel—past, present, and future—and its destruction for national and personal sins. He spoke of the future when the elect of God will come forth to rule the earth and the dead will be brought out of their graves to an opportunity of redemption through Christ:

"The Lord stands up to plead his cause, and stands up to judge the peoples. The Lord will enter into judgment with the elders of his people, and their kings. For you have eaten up the vineyard, the plunder of the poor is in your houses" (Isa.3:13-14 Para.).

"Thorns and briers shall spring upon the land of my people; even over all the houses of joy in the jubilant city, because the place is forsaken; mound and tower are instead of caves, until forever, a joy of wild asses; pasture for flocks; until the spirit is poured out on us from on high, and the wilderness becomes a fruitful field; and the fruitful field is reckoned as a forest. Then justice shall dwell in the wilderness, and righteousness shall dwell in the fruitful field. And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the service of righteousness shall be quietness and hope forever. And my people shall live in a peaceful home, and in safe dwellings, and in secure resting places" (Isa.32:13-18 Para.).

"Israel is to be saved in the Lord with everlasting salvation. You shall not be ashamed nor disgraced to the forever of eternity" (Isa.45:17 Para.).

These scriptures show that God will resurrect the rebellious of Israel from their graves to give them an opportunity for salvation, not to destroy them.

Alive in the Promised Land

"And I shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then you shall know that I the Lord have spoken it and performed it, says the lord" (Ezk.37:14 Para).
This scripture shows that God will place the spirit of life that belongs to him (See Ecc.12:7; Ezk.18:4; Num.27:16) back into the physical body. The spirit that is placed into these bodies is the spirit of man (Jms.2:26), not the spirit of God, which makes one a spiritual son of God. The spirit of God is only given when a person believes God, repents of sin, and is baptized. These people obviously did not make these kinds of decisions in their first life, because if they had, they would not be included in this resurrection.

Into the Land

"And I shall place you in your own land..." (Ezk.37:14 Para).

This means that these millions of Israelites will be resurrected into the land that God originally gave to ancient Israel.

The land promised to Abraham lies between the Nile and Euphrates rivers. A conservative estimate would allow a minimum of well over a million square miles of territory for this vast multitude to occupy. See Gen.13:14-17; 15:18; Ex.23:31; Deut.11:24; Ezk.chps. 47; 48.

There will be no doubt in any of these Israelite's minds who God is when they are resurrected and placed in the promised land; not just because they have been resurrected but also because Christ and the elect of God will be there to lead and teach them into all truth.

Is all of Israel to be Saved?

A scripture which is often used in an attempt to prove that all of Israel is predestined to be saved is Romans 11:26. Few understand it, yet if all preconceived ideas are put aside the meaning is clear:

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom.11:26 Para.).

Because this scripture says that "all Israel shall be saved", many who believe a doctrine of predestination think that all Israel shall be saved regardless of their behavior. This surely seems to prove their point; however, after further research, it becomes apparent this scripture does not say this at all.

Some Bible scholars say the Greek word pas, which is translated as all in English, could also mean that not all of Israel will be saved, but the majority as a whole will be saved. However, the true meaning of this scripture is found in the original Greek translation.

The following is the correct translation according to the Interlinear Greek-English New Testament by George Rickerberry: "So all Israel shall be saved according as it has been written..."
The key to understanding Romans 11:26 are the words "as it has been written", which refer to how God says we can obtain salvation. The intent of this scripture is not that all will be saved, but that the Israelites must all accept Christ as their savior to be saved.

The overall plan of God for salvation has not changed from the foundation of the world. Part of this plan is that humans must come into conformity with his laws for physical and spiritual behavior. A fundamental teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments is that an individual must stop breaking the laws and precepts of God and obey him before God can bless that individual.

**The Promise to the Apostles**

On two different occasions Jesus promised that the twelve disciples would rule on the earth with him:

"Then answering, Peter said to him, Behold, we have left all things and followed you, what then shall happen to us? And Jesus said to them, Truly I say to you, You who have followed me; in the regeneration, when the Son of man sits on his throne of his glory, you also will sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt.19:27-28 Para.).

"You are those having continued with me in my trails. And I appoint a kingdom to you, as my Father appointed to me, that you may eat and drink at my table in my Kingdom. And you will sit on thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Lk.22:28-30 Para.).

Four hundred years after the death of king David, the prophet Ezekiel also spoke of this same event. See Ezk.37:24-28.

**SUMMARY**

The resurrection of National Israel will occur after the return of Christ and the resurrection of the elect of God (Rev.20:4-6). And after the Israelites who live through the great tribulation are brought to Palestine to reestablish the nation of Israel (Ezk.36:24-28).

In this time of peace and prosperity, all the dead of Israel will be raised out of the dust to meet their God and be taught his laws, which lead to salvation and eternal life in the Family of God:

"And they shall no longer each man teach his neighbor, and each man his brother, saying, Know the Lord. For they shall all know me, from the least of them even to the greatest of them, declares the Lord. For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sins no more" (Jer.31:34 Para.). See also Heb.8:7-10.

When Christ returns, he will fulfill the promise he made to ancient Israel when he was their covenant God, and Israel will again have an opportunity for national greatness, and an opportunity for salvation under the New Covenant.
"Remember these O Jacob, and Israel. For you are my servant, O Israel; you shall not forget me. I have blotted out your transgressions like a thick cloud. Return to me, for I have redeemed you" (Isa.44:21-22 Para.).

"And my Servant David shall be king over them. And there shall be one Shepherd to all of them. And they shall walk in my judgments, and keep my statutes, and do them. And they shall dwell on the land that I have given to my servant, to Jacob, where your fathers dwelt in it. And they shall dwell on it, they and their sons, and the sons of their sons, forever. And my Servant David shall be a ruler to them forever. And I will cut a covenant of peace, and everlasting covenant it shall be with them, and multiply. And I will put my sanctuary in their midst forever. And my Tabernacle shall be with them. And I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And the nations shall know that I, the Lord, sanctify Israel, when my sanctuary shall be in their midst forever" (Ezk.37:24-28).

See also Zech.12:8-10 and the prophecy in Jeremiah 31:15-17 about the children killed by Herod, their return to the land of Israel, and their victory over death after Christ returns (1.Cor.15:24-28).

By B.L. Cocherell
CHAPTER SIX

RESURRECTION OF THE REST OF THE DEAD

After the first resurrection, Jesus will return to the earth as a conquering king with the elect of all ages who have been changed into immortal beings (1.Cor.15:51-54). During the first thousand years of Christ's rule, the earth will be at peace and become a paradise: a world free of war, famine, disease, and Satan and his demons (Rev.20:1-3). It will be a world of peace and abundance:

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years" (Rev.20:4 KJV).

This is the time spoken of by the prophet Isaiah; a time in which the world will be at peace and all nations will come to Jerusalem to learn the way of God:

"And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa.2:2-4 KJV).

See also Mic.4:1-4.

It is during this time of peace and prosperity that the earth will be prepared for the billions of humans who will participate in the next phase of God's plan for the salvation of humanity.

The Rest of the Dead

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection" (Rev.20:5 KJV).

These individuals who will be resurrected a thousand years after Christ begins his reign on earth will not be the elect of God. At this point in time, the elect of God will be immortal beings who rule with Christ. These individuals will not be Israelis either, because national Israel will already have been raised in a special resurrection of their own. The rest of the dead are the billions of non-Israelites who have lived and died without having an opportunity for salvation.
Few Have Known God's Truth

From the time of Adam to the time of the return of Christ, relatively few individuals will have had the opportunity to understand God's truth. Most who hear the Gospel preached hear it only as a witness or as a warning, because spiritual truth and knowledge cannot be conveyed by natural means to a mortal human mind. See Jn.16:13; 1.Cor.2:10-15.

Spiritual truth is conveyed through the Father's holy spirit to those called to a spiritual work. This is why the vast majority of people do not even begin to grasp the awesome truth of God.

Regardless of their quality of life, education, or intelligence, most of humanity has been kept in total ignorance of the true gospel and the way to salvation. God has either purposely not allowed them to understand his truth (Mk.4:10-12; 2.Cor.4:3-4) or they have been deceived by satanic religions (2.Cor.11:10-15; Rev.12:9).

God's Desire for Humanity

God the Father and Jesus Christ want everyone to be converted and have eternal life:

"Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1.Tim.2:4 KJV).

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but, is long suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2.Pet.3:9 KJV).

"For the Son of man is come to save that which was lost" (Matt. 18:11 KJV).

God the Father and Jesus Christ have not forgotten the billions who have never had an opportunity to know them and their goodness. Moreover, they have not forgotten the awesome purpose for which human beings were created. The Father and the Son are still intent on expanding their family by creating sons out of human beings:

"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (Jn.1:12 KJV). See also Jn.3:1-3; 2.Cor.6:18; Heb.2:10; Phil.3:21; 1.Jn.3:2.

The very reason for mankind's existence is so that God can expand his family. The only human beings who will be destroyed in the Lake of Fire are those who refuse to repent of their evil ways. God will not give anyone eternal life until they prove that they will live according to his way of life. This is why God has made provision for a resurrection that will afford each individual the optimum opportunity for success.
SALVATION

The Bible plainly shows that the only way to obtain salvation is through the Messiah and his sacrifice. Under the terms and conditions of the New Covenant, one must be called by God, repent of sin, be baptized, and receive the holy spirit in order to be saved. The simple truth is that the majority of people—past and present—have not had sufficient knowledge and understanding of the Creator God of Israel, his heavenly Father, or the way to salvation. However, how will people who have never even heard of Christ or his sacrifice obtain salvation?

"Let it be known to you all and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised up from the dead—in this name this one stands near before you whole! This One is the Stone counted worthless by you the builders, which has become placed into the head of the corner, and there is salvation in no other One, for neither is there any other name under heaven having been given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12 Para.).

Despite, the tremendous missionary and evangelistic efforts of people throughout history, billions of humans have never heard of Jesus Christ or God's plan for humanity. Even in this age, there are billions who will never hear the name of Jesus Christ or understand his message before he returns. Therefore, God has included a special resurrection for these people in order to give them the opportunity to know him and to chose to be a part of his family if they want.

Steps To Salvation

"No one is able to come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him; and I will raise him up in the last day. It has been written in the Prophets, 'They shall all be taught of God'. So then everyone who hears and learns from the Father comes to me" (Jn.6:44-45 Para.). See also Matt.22:14; 20:16; Jn.6:65; Acts 2:39,47; Rom.8:26-30; Eph.1:5-9; 1.Jn.5:19-21.

Believe in Christ

"He that believes and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believes not shall be damned" (Mk.16:16 KJV). See Jn.3:14-15; Acts 4:12; 8:37; 16:16-33; 22:12-16; 1.Thes.5:9.

Confess Sins

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from unrighteousness" (1.Jn.1:9 Para.). See also 1.Jn.5:13-15.

Repent

"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38 KJV).
Obey God

"And we are his witnesses of these things: and so is also the holy spirit, whom God has given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32 KJV).
See also Acts 3:19.

Is God Fair?

"How then shall they call upon him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have never heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?" (Rom. 10:14 KJV).

Jesus said that we must keep God's commandments in order to live forever (Matt.19:16-17). But, how can people keep his law if they have never had it taught to them? The obvious answer is, they cannot! Logic tells us that a person must know what to do before it can be done. Therefore, because God is fair and just, each person must be given the opportunity to understand his law and way of life and they must be given enough time to act upon this knowledge. The God of love (1.Jn.4:16) will not condemn billions of people to eternal death (Rom.6:23) without first giving them an opportunity to know what they must do in order to gain eternal life.

The Books of Judgment

"And I saw a great white throne, and the One sitting on it, From whose face the earth and the heaven fled; and a place was not found for them. And I saw the dead, the small and the great, standing before God; And books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works" (Rev.20:11-12 Para.).

"I beheld till the thrones were cast down (set in place), and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like the pure wool: his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued and came forth from before him: thousand thousands ministered to him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him: the judgment was set and the books were opened" (Dan.7:9-10 KJV).

People will be judged out of these books which contain the gospel of Christ and the same laws, precepts, and principles by which all the righteous are judged.

One of the books clearly defined in Revelation 20:12 is the Book of Life. This book contains all the names of those who have obtained eternal life; moreover, if a person's name is not written in this book, they will not have eternal life:
"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (Rev.20:13 KJV).

Each individual's final destiny, whether to eternal life or death, depends on whether or not they follow what is written in the books which contain God's code of law and standard of righteous behavior. Those who will be brought back to physical life in the resurrection of the rest of the dead noted in Revelation 20:5 will have the opportunity to live according to what is written in these books and have their names written in the Book of Life.

Judgment and Sentencing

The major difficulty in understanding what the Bible really says about judgment comes from the traditional belief and concept that judgment always means some type of condemnation or sentencing for the commission of a crime. However, in many scriptures, this is not what is referred to at all. Many times judgment refers to a decision process which involves a period of time after which a decision is made as to the final destiny of an individual. And this decision is based on the performance of each individual.

An example of judgment as a life process is given to us by the apostle Peter when he said, "Because the time has come to begin the judgment from the house of God; and if firstly from us, what will be the end of the ones disobeying the gospel of God. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, were will the ungodly and sinner appear?" (1.Pet.4:17-18 Para). Peter speaks of those who are called to salvation under the New Covenant as being under a process of judgment. See also 2.Cor.5:9-10.

Jesus says to the churches, "To him that has an ear, let him hear, what the Spirit says to the churches; To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev.2:7 KJV). See also Matt.24:13; Heb.5:8-9; Rev.2:26;3:21.

Jesus shows that salvation is a process which includes listening, learning, effort, and making correct decisions. Overcoming is a lifelong process which requires effort based on the knowledge and understanding of what is required by God, taking positive action on this knowledge and understanding, and living a righteous life to the best of one's ability.

A Time of Decision

"And I saw the dead, the small and the great, standing before God; And books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books according to their works. And the sea gave up the dead in it. And death and Hades gave up the dead in them. And they were each judged according to their works" (Rev.20:12-13 Para).
"And as it is reserved to men once to die, and after this Judgment"  
(Heb.9:27 Para.).

The English word judged in Revelation 20:12-13 is translated from the Greek word krino (to judge). Krino also means to sunder, to select, to decide, to assess, to go to law, to seek justice, to expound, to believe, and to resolve. In Hebrews 9, the English word judgment is translated from the Greek word krisis, which has the sense of estrangement, conflict, selection, decision, judgment, verdict, and accusation.

The assumption that the words krino and krisis always indicate the delivering of a sentence or punishment for a crime falsely narrows their meaning when used in scriptures concerning the salvation of humanity. Both krino and krisis are used to convey the sense of something yet to be decided or resolved and this is the meaning that is meant in the scriptures which refer to the rest of the dead. See Rev.20:5.

All Must Give Account

"But why do you judge your brother? or why do you also despise your brother? For all shall stand before the judgment seat of Christ. For it has been written, 'I live, says the Lord, that every knee will bow to me, and every tongue confess to God.' So then each one of us will give account concerning himself to God"  (Rom.14:10-12 Para.).

"For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive the things done through the body, according to what he did, whether good or bad"  (2.Cor.5:10 Para.).

At the Proper Time

In order for each individual to have the best possible conditions to enhance their possibility for success, they must be allowed to live in an environment in which they may succeed if they so desire:

"Thus says the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in 'a day of salvation' have I helped you: . . ."  (Isa.49:8 KJV). See also 2.Cor.6:2.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits: afterward they that are Christ's at his coming"  (1.Cor.15:22-23 KJV).

In God's plan for the salvation of humanity, he has set aside a time of peace and prosperity so that the vast majority of humanity can be given his truth and an opportunity to obey him under optimum conditions.
A First Opportunity

There were many who had personally seen Jesus' great acts and still would not repent of their wickedness. Jesus spoke of a time of judgment in which pagans and sexual deviants would be better off than those who saw him and did not believe. Logically, the only way these pagans and sexual deviants could do better in a judgment is if they had repented of their wickedness. We know the people of Sodom were destroyed in their wickedness; therefore, it is obvious that Jesus referred to a time in the future in which these wicked people will be given an opportunity to repent:

"Then he began to reproach the cities in which had occurred most of his powerful acts, for they had not repented. Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the powerful acts which have taken place in you had happened in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, It shall be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon in Judgment Day than for you. And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to the heaven, you will be thrown down to Hades. For if the powerful acts happening in you had taken place in Sodom, it still would be until today. But I say to you, It will be more bearable for the land of Sodom in the day of Judgment than for you" (Matt.11:20-24 Para.).

No Second Chance

Most who believe that this is the only day of salvation feel that to raise a person to physical life again would mean that they are to be given a second chance for salvation. However, this is not the case at all. God only gives one opportunity for salvation. The fact is that the people of Sodom have not yet had theirs. They were never called to salvation nor given the understanding of God's truth. It seems that the people to whom Jesus was speaking in Matthew, chapter 11 have had their first and only opportunity for salvation, if so, they did not repent and their fate is sealed. There is no second chance for salvation—only a first—and the people of Sodom will have their first opportunity in the resurrection of the rest of the dead.

Those Who Hear Will Live

John 5:21-29 Paraphrased

"For even as the Father raises the dead, and gives life, so also the Son gives life to whomever he wills" (v21).

Verse 21 shows that Christ has the authority to give life to whomever he chooses, and verses 22-24 show that Christ has the responsibility to judge all of humanity:
"For the Father judges no one, but has given all judgment to the Son, so that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. The one not honoring the Son does not honor the Father who has sent him. Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears my word, and believes the One who has sent me, has everlasting life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life" (vs.22-24).

Those who hear Christ's words (i.e., his truth) and believe what he says will have eternal life. But, what about those who have never heard his words? It is obvious that those who have never heard cannot believe, because it is impossible to believe what one has never heard and understood:

"Truly, truly, I say to you that an hour is coming, and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and the ones hearing will live" (v25).

Those who never heard God's truth will hear it after they have been resurrected to a physical life, and those who heed what they hear will live. The inference is that those who do not heed what they hear will not live:

"For even as the Father has life in himself, so he gave also the Son to have life in himself. And he also gave authority to him to execute judgment for he is the Son of Man" (vs.26-27).

Again, we are told that Christ is immortal and has the authority to judge humanity:

"Do not marvel at this for an hour is coming in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment" (vs.28-29).

The following are important things to learn from verses 28 and 29:

- All those who are dead will be resurrected and hear Christ's word.
- Those who have done good will receive life.
- Those who have practiced evil will be executed.

It is important to carefully analyze what Jesus said here. He said that all the dead will be resurrected and hear his voice. Included in all the dead are those who have never been given the opportunity to come to the knowledge of God's truth. Jesus did not say that all of humanity will come up in one great resurrection to be judged at that time. He merely showed that all will be resurrected and hear his voice. He also said that those who have had their opportunity for salvation will either hear him when he gives them their rewards or they will hear him pronounce the death sentence upon them because of their unbelief and disobedience.
All Will See Christ

"Behold he comes with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen" (Rev.1:7 KJV).

This prophecy covers the entire time period between the return of Christ at the first resurrection and the final judgment of humanity. Christ coming 'within the clouds' refers to one of the ways he will manifest himself to physical humans after his return. The following shows who will see Christ and when they will see him:

• Christ comes within clouds at the first resurrection and the elect of all ages will see him at that time. See Matt.23:63-65; 24:29-31; Isa.43:5-7; Mk.13:24-27.
• Israelites of the past will see him after their resurrection to physical life. See Ezekiel, chapter 37, which pertains to the resurrection of national Israel.
• The Roman soldiers will see him again because they will be in the resurrection of the rest of the dead at the end of the thousand years. See Rom.14:10-12; Rev.20:5.
• Eventually all will see Christ and come before his judgment seat. See Jn.5:22, 2.Cor.5:10, 1.Pet.4:2-5; Rev.20:12-13.

A Resurrection to Physical Life

The vast majority of humanity are neither saved nor lost; they simply have never heard nor understood God's plan for their salvation. Therefore, they have not yet been given an opportunity for salvation. In his infinite wisdom, the Eternal God has designed his plan for mankind very carefully in order to give every person an equal opportunity to have eternal life.

The resurrection of the rest of the dead is the time in which the billions who died never having had an opportunity for salvation will be resurrected to physical life. During their second life, they will be given the knowledge and understanding of God's truth. Those who demonstrate by their attitude, commitment, and performance that their sincere desire is to love and obey God will qualify for eternal life.

The Bible reveals that the Father is very fair, loving, merciful, compassionate, and forgiving; he is not the cruel and merciless monster which so many preachers depict. The very reason for the resurrection of the rest of the dead is to give everyone who has neither known God nor understood his way of life the opportunity to do so under his peaceful government.

By B.L. Cocherell
A major misconception concerning the fate of wicked humans is that they will live on into eternity and suffer some kind of eternal torture by God. The future punishment of the wicked is a biblical fact; however, ongoing eternal punishment is fiction, which cannot be substantiated by scripture.

Throughout the Bible, it is shown that God has great mercy toward those who repent and reserves a final punishment for those who will not. The prophet Ezekiel was instructed to record how God feels about having to punish wicked individuals:

"Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezk.33:11 KJV). See also 2.Pet.2:1-22; 1.Cor. 6:9-10; Jms.5:19-20.

The First Lie

The first lie recorded in the Bible was told by Satan when he told Eve that she would not die if she ate the forbidden fruit. Since then, Satan has deceived most of humanity into thinking they have an immortal soul. However, humans do not have an immortal soul and will not escape the death penalty for disobedience to God. All sinful humans will be put to death, and this death is final and eternal.

A Resurrection to Judgment

"Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good, into the resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment" (Jn.5:28-29 Para.). See also Dan.12:2; Heb.9:27; 2.Pet.2:9; 2.Thes.1:5-9.

This scripture mentions two separate resurrections: one is to life and the other is to judgment. The resurrection to judgment is for the purpose of punishing wicked individuals who have practiced evil and have been judged unworthy of life; therefore, they will be put to death.

The Wages of Sin Is Death

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).
"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezk.18:4;20 KJV).

What is Sin?

In past centuries, there has been much debate and confusion as to what sin is and what the penalty for committing it is. The answer to both questions can easily be found in the Bible.

"Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1.Jn.3:4 KJV).

"All unrighteousness is sin: . . ." (1.Jn.5:17 KJV).

"Therefore to him that knows to do good, and does it not, to him it is sin" (Jms.4:17 KJV).

"For whatsoever is not of faith is sin" (Rom.14:23 KJV).

Sin is defined as the violation of the physical and spiritual law of God—sin is lawlessness. The scriptures are very clear that the penalty for the violation of God's law is death.

The Baptism of Fire

John the Baptist spoke of a final event at the end of God's present plan for humanity:

"But the people were expecting, and reasoning in their hearts about John, lest perhaps he is the Christ. John answered, saying, I indeed baptize you with water; but he who is stronger than I comes, of whom I am not fit to loosen the latchet of his sandals. He will baptize you in the holy spirit and fire; whose sifting fan is in his hand; and he will fully purge his threshing-floor, and will gather the wheat into his barn—but he will burn the chaff with fire that cannot be put out" (Lk.3:15-17 Para.).

The following are important things to understand about what John was inspired to say:

• The baptism of John was to a physical life of righteousness under the old covenant.
• When Christ came as the perfect sacrifice, a new baptism was instituted whereby a person would be immersed in the holy spirit and become a part of the Family of God.
• The righteous will be separated from the wicked and gathered to God, but the wicked will be consumed by a fire that cannot be extinguished.
A Warning to the Elect

The apostle Peter exhorts the elect of God to continue in righteousness so that they can escape this final death and enter into the new heaven and new earth:

2.Peter 3:3-14 KJV

"Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, And saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water: Whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished:" (vs.3-6).

Here Peter reminds the elect of the first worldwide destruction of the earth and its unrighteous inhabitants by the great flood of Noah's time. Peter also foretells the future destruction of the earth by fire, which will destroy all evil humans:

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved to fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day" (vs.7-8).

God is very merciful and does not want anyone to perish; however, there is a point in time when the next phase of his plan will begin. At this time, the physical creation that housed humanity will vanish in flames:

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; In which the heavens and the earth shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (vs.9-10).

Again, Peter warns of this future destruction and the importance of being found righteous when this day arrives:

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting to the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?" (vs.11-12).

Righteousness is a condition for existence in the new order of things. Nothing evil will exist in the new heavens and earth; all that is evil will be purged away with fire:
"Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwells righteousness. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that you look for such things, be diligent that you may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless" (vs.13-14). See also Matt.3:10-12; 7:19; Rev.21:27.

The Rebellious Elect

In order to more clearly understand what is said about the punishment of the wicked, it is important to examine a few scriptures and parables which give stern warnings to the elect who decide to rebel against God and depart from the faith. Notice that their fate is the same as the incorrigible wicked:

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. . . . But that which bears thorns and briers is rejected and is nigh to cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb.6:4-6;8 KJV). See also Heb.2:1-3; 2.Pet.2:20-21; Ezk.18:24,26.

"For if we are willfully sinful after receiving the full knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice concerning sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment and zealous fire being about to consume the adversaries. Anyone not regarding the law of Moses dies without pity on the word of two or three witnesses: How much worse punishment do you think he will be thought worthy to receive having trampled on the Son of God, and having counted the blood of the covenant in which he was sanctified common, and having insulted the spirit of grace?" (Heb.10:26-29 Para.).

Once a person fully understands what God requires of them but refuses to accept his will in their life, there is no more hope of life:

"It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb.10:31 KJV).

The Sheep and the Goats

Matthew 25:31-46 LBP

"But when I, the Messiah, shall come in my glory, and all the angels with me, then I shall sit upon my throne of glory. And all the nations shall be gathered before me. And I will separate the people as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats, and place the sheep at my right hand, and the goats at my left" (vs.31-33 Para.).
It is important to note that there are three distinct events mentioned here:

- Jesus returns to the earth in his glory
- Jesus begins to rule on earth
- The shepherd separates his flock into two distinct groups

"Then I, the King, shall say to those at my right, 'Come, blessed Of my Father, into the Kingdom prepared for you from the founding of the world. For I was hungry and you fed me; I was thirsty and you gave me water; I was a stranger and you invited me into your homes; naked and you clothed me; sick and in prison, and you visited me," (vs.34-36).

This scripture shows the Father's righteous children being welcomed into his kingdom, which was prepared for them. This great event will happen at the time of the first resurrection and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on the earth.

Those who will be punished with the same punishment that has been prepared for the devil and the demons are mentioned in verse 41. These people will be punished with death by fire at the end of the age of human existence:

"Then I will turn to those on my left and say, 'Away with you, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his demons" (v41).

Verse 42 and 43, shows that the wicked will be punished because they refused to love God and his people:

"For I was hungry and you wouldn't feed me; thirsty, and you wouldn't give me anything to drink; a stranger, and you refused me hospitality; naked and you didn't clothe me; sick, and in prison, and you wouldn't visit me" (vs.42-43).

"Then they will reply, 'Lord, when did we ever see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and not help you? And I will answer, 'When you refused to help the least of these my brothers, you were refusing to help me.' And they shall go away into eternal punishment; but the righteous into everlasting life" (vs.44-46).

The primary reason for the punishment of these people is that they refused to help Christ's family members; therefore, they were refusing to help him. The criteria for being a sheep in the shepherd's flock is having love toward Christ's family members. God will only put to eternal death those people who refuse to repent of evil; therefore, the goats are those who understood his truth and refused to live their lives accordingly.

The Bible is very clear in stating that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God:
"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexuals, nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers, nor swindlers will inherit the Kingdom of God" (1.Cor.6:9-10 NIV). See also Pro.10:30; Gal.5:21.

It is very clear that the wicked will not be tortured with fire forever; the wages of sin is death (Rom.6:23), not eternal life in torment. God is a God of love, understanding, and mercy, and those who willfully disobey and reject him will receive an eternal punishment, not eternal punishing. The wicked will be cast into a fire which will terminate their existence forever (Rev.20:15):

"Again the kingdom of heaven is compared to a drag net thrown into the sea, and gathering together of every kind; which when it was filled, drawing it up on the shore and sitting down, they gathered the good into containers, and they threw out the rotten. So it will be in the end of the age: The angels go out and will separate the wicked from the midst of the righteous; and will throw them into the furnace of fire; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.13:49-50 Para.).

Those Not Found in the Book of Life

While beseeching God to spare the Israelites who had rebelled at Mount Sinai, Moses said, "Yet now, if you will forgive their sin; and if not, blot me, I pray you, out of your book which you have written. And the Lord said to Moses, Whosoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Ex.32:32-33 KJV). See also Psa.69:28; Rev.3:5; 22:19.

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev.20:14-15 KJV).

Under the terms and conditions of both the Old and New Covenants, those who live righteously in obedience to God's laws are granted eternal life in his kingdom (Matt.25:31-34). Moreover, the disobedient and the unrighteous who cannot be written into the Book of Life, must be destroyed because of their wickedness and unwillingness to obey his law (Matt.25:41-46).

Those who refuse to obey God will simply have their existence terminated in the Lake of Fire. There will be no eternal pain and torment, just eternal non-existence. See Psa.72.7; 37:9,11,22,29,34; Ezk.18:4; 20:25.

Only those who are found to be righteous become sons of God. All others will have their life terminated as prophesied by Malachi. See Mal.4:1-3.
The Second Death

In the Book of Revelation, there are the following four references to the second death. By carefully reviewing these references we can understand what the second death is.

1. "He that has an ear, let him hear what the spirit says to the churches; he that overcomes shall not be hurt of the second death:" (Rev.2:11 KJV)

2. "Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:6 KJV).

Those who participate in the first resurrection will be immune to the second death because they will have become immortal beings in the Family of God—only immortal beings cannot be destroyed. See chapter 11, Eternal and Immortal Life, Popular Concepts Verses Biblical Reality.

3. "He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev.21:7-8 KJV).

The following is an alternate translation of verse 8:

"But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death" (Rev.21:8 NIV).

Those who are mentioned as being punished by the second death are those who are disobedient to God's law; therefore, they deserve the death penalty.

4. "And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death" (Rev.20:14 KJV).

The English word death in all four of the above scriptures is translated from the Greek word thanatos, which means death. The concept of a total cessation of existence is difficult for most to believe because of Satan's deception concerning life after death; however, this is exactly what all four of these scriptures document as the final punishment of wicked people.

After the resurrection to the second death, both death and hell (the grave) will be destroyed and cease to exist. A condition of deathlessness will exist for the following reasons:
• All things pertaining to physical life will no longer be relevant to the spirit dimension of existence. Therefore, death and the grave will cease to have a function and will vanish. See Rev.21:4; 1.Cor.15:54.
• Those who die the second death will be the incorrigible wicked of all ages. After these people die the second death, the only beings who continue to live will be composed of spirit. See Rev.20:15; 1.Cor.15:35-50; 2.Thes.1:7-9.

Termination of Existence

The Bible shows beyond a shadow of doubt that God the Father and Jesus Christ have absolute control over life and death, and that they will completely terminate the existence of all wicked humans from their presence:

"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to the heaven, and say, I live for ever" (Deut.32:39-40 KJV).

Samuel said, "The Lord kills, and makes alive: he brings down to the grave, and brings up" (1.Sam.2:6 KJV).

Jesus said, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him [God the Father] which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28 Para.).

The English word body has been translated from the Greek word soma, which means a physical human/animal body or corpse. The Greek word for soul is psyche, which means breath, life, or mind. Here, we see two distinct elements of physical and non-physical human life which can be completely destroyed by God. There is nothing in either of these two words which would indicate anything immortal.

The English word destroy has been translated from the Greek word apollumi, which means to destroy fully, kill, to perish, to completely do away with, to die. Appolumi is used many times to describe the utter destruction of individuals and places (Matt.12:14; 21:41; Lk.17:29). In every scriptural context where appolumi is found in the New Testament, it means to completely destroy and is used to convey utter and complete destruction.

There is no doubt as to the meaning of the words used in Matthew 10:28; it is clear that God has the power to completely destroy all aspects of human life.

"And I say to you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, which after he has killed has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, Fear him" (Lk.12:4-5 Para.).
It is the second death that Jesus speaks of in Matthew 28 and Luke 12. God does indeed have the power to destroy humanity, which he has created. Human beings should fear God who has the power to completely terminate and eliminate the totality of their existence in the second death. The second death is the death from which there is no return. God and his prophets, apostles, and servants continually gave very strong warnings about the finality of this punishment.

Chronology of Events

As noted above, there will come a time in God's plan when all evil will be eliminated. Moreover, nothing evil will be allowed to coexist with God's righteous kingdom. The Book of Revelation gives us a partial chronology of the events which will take place after Christ returns and the government of God rules the earth.

Revelation 20:11-15 Paraphrased

"And I saw a great white throne, and the One sitting on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled; and a place was not found for them. And I saw the dead, the small and the great, standing before God. And books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged out of the things written in the books, according to their works" (vs.11-12).

Verse twelve speaks of the resurrection of the dead of all ages who have not had an opportunity for salvation. And verses 13 through 15 speak of the time at the end of this phase of God's plan for physical humanity. This is the time that all of those not found in the Book of Life will die for their disobedience to God, and all things pertaining to physical life will no longer be relevant to the spirit dimension of existence; death and the grave will cease to have a function and will vanish.

"And the sea gave up the dead in it. And death and hades gave up the dead in them. And they were each judged according to their works. And death and hades (the grave) were thrown into the Lake of Fire. This is the second death. And if anyone was not found having been written in the book of Life, he was thrown into the Lake of Fire" (vs.13-15).

Death by Fire

"The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out; the flame of his fire stops burning. The light in his tent becomes dark; the lamp beside him goes out. . . He is torn from the security of his tent and marched off to the king of terrors. Fire resides in his tent; burning sulfur is scattered over his dwelling, his roots dry up below and his branches wither above. The memory of him perishes from the earth; he has no name in the land. he is driven from light into darkness and is banished from the world" (Job 18:5-6;14-18 NIV). See also Job 15:20-30; Psa.106:16-18.
The NIV translators have powerfully captured the essence and meaning of what is written. They clearly show that the destructive force of fire will be used to terminate the sinner's existence.

There are dozens of scriptures which describe in great detail the future punishment and destruction of evil humans and evil spirits by fire. Fire is the most destructive force known to man, because it can reduce physical things to their lowest form of existence, which is pure energy.

The Day That Burns as an Oven

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch . . . And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.4:1-3 KJV).

See also Ps.37:20; 97:3-5; 112:10; 119:119; 145:20; Pro.2:22; Isa. 47:14; Nah.1:2-6; 2 Thes.1:6-10; Matt.3:10-12; 13:36-46; 49-50.

The prophet Malachi was inspired to show that the fate of the wicked will be complete and utter destruction, without a continuance of life. Malachi does not say whether or not these wicked are humans or spirit-beings. He merely states that the wicked will be destroyed by fire and cease to exist.

SUMMARY

God the Father has provided a way for each individual to be forgiven for their sins through the sacrifice of his son, Jesus the Christ. However, in order to reap the rewards of obedience, a person must avail themselves of this sacrifice by repenting of their evil and beginning to live according to the Law of God. If there is no repentance and sustained effort to live according to God's ways, God will not grant eternal life; instead, he will destroy the wicked person with fire: "For the wages of sin is death" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

"Come now, and let us reason together, says the Lord: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool. If you be willing and obedient, you shall eat the good of the land:" (Isa.1:18-19 KJV).

The Father's call to salvation is very clear. He will reward obedience and forgive sin. He is patient and merciful. He will not cause the irrevocable termination of a human life unless there is no hope of redemption. God the Father will not allow the incorrigibly wicked to have eternal life and become a disruptive force to happiness and joy in the Family of God.
God is righteous and will not cohabit with evil, which is repulsive to him. In order for there to be harmony, unity, and eternal happiness in the Kingdom of God, only righteousness can be allowed to exist. The choices for each individual are clear; either one conforms to that which produces happiness and joy, or one will cease to exist.

God the Father and Jesus Christ want only peace and harmony to exist in their family, and the only way to accomplish this is to eliminate all evil. This is the reason that the second death is necessary.

The scriptures prove that, when wicked humans are punished with the second death, they will cease to exist in all dimensions of God's creation. Death is the absence of life; it is not existence in another form. When God administers the second death to the unrepentant, they will die for eternity and simply cease to exist.

The teaching of eternal punishing of evil humans cannot be substantiated by God's word. Nowhere in the entire Bible is there any proof showing that the final fate of wicked humans is to be tortured by fire for all eternity. The Bible shows just the opposite—the second death is total death, it is an irreversible and total destruction from which there is no return. God will not torment wicked humans forever; he will simply terminate their existence.

By B.L. Cocherell
CHAPTER EIGHT

A DAY OF SALVATION

Many believe that from Adam to the return of Christ is the only time when salvation is offered to humanity and use the following quote from Paul's letter to the Corinthians to support their belief:

"For he says, In an acceptable time I heard you, and in a day of salvation I helped you, Behold now is the acceptable time! Behold now is the day of salvation" (2.Cor.6:2 Para.).

From Paul's statement, it seems that indeed now is the only day of salvation: however, with a small amount of research it can easily be shown Paul did not intend to say that today is the only day of salvation.

SALVATION NOW OR NEVER?

Most of Christianity believes that there are only two categories of people on earth: the saved who are assured heavenly bliss and the lost who are to be tormented forever in an everlasting hell-fire. Is today the only day of salvation? Have God the Father and Jesus Christ been trying to save all of humanity from the time of Adam to this present day?

Many worry that if their loved ones do not accept Christ in this life, they will loose out on salvation. Many grieve over their dead relatives, because they think these loved ones are going to burn in a hell-fire for all of eternity, because they never acknowledged Christ as their Savior.

Billions Have Never Heard

If it were true that this is the only day of salvation, the vast majority of humanity is lost without hope because most of humanity has never heard of Christ or the way to salvation.

Despite the tremendous missionary and evangelistic efforts throughout history, most of humanity has never heard God's true message of salvation. Even in this age just before the return of Christ, many millions and perhaps billions will neither hear nor understand the awesome truth about salvation.

However, this is not 'the' only day of salvation, it is only 'a' day of salvation.
THE ONLY WAY TO OBTAIN SALVATION

"Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12 KJV).

The Bible states that the only way to receive salvation is through the Messiah and his sacrifice. However, how will people—past, present, and future—who have never even heard of Christ or his sacrifice obtain salvation?

Does God have another method of salvation which does not involve a person accepting Christ as their savior, repenting of sin, being baptized, and receiving the holy spirit? Is there another method to obtain salvation besides the one clearly specified in the Bible? See Mk.16:16; Lk.13:3; Acts 2:38; 3:19; 17:30; Rom.8:7-18.

The answer is no! There is no alternate method of obtaining salvation to the one clearly stated in the Bible. There is only one method by which one can obtain salvation, and that way is through Jesus Christ. The simple truth is that billions of people have not yet had their opportunity for salvation.

JESUS CAME TO SAVE HUMANITY

Jesus spoke the truth when he said, "For the Son of man [Christ] is come to save that which was lost" (Matt.8:11 KJV; Lk.19:10). The problem is not with what Jesus said, it is with what most think he said. Most believe Jesus meant he came to save all of humanity at that time; however, he did not say this. He only stated this was his reason for coming.

The Parables and Conversion

Many believe the reason Jesus spoke in parables was to make his meaning clear; however, this was not what he said. He said he spoke in parables to conceal information which would lead people to conversion:

"And when he was alone, those around him, with the Twelve, asked him as to the parable. And he said to them, To you has been given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God. But to these outside, all things are being given in parables, that seeing they may see and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand, least they should be converted, and sins be forgiven to them" (Mk. 4:10-12 Para.). See also Isa.6:8-10; Matt.13:10-15;Lk.8:10; Jn. 12:37-40; Acts 28:25-27.
The word mystery in verse 11 is translated from the Greek word mysterion, which means mystery or secret. Jesus clearly said that those outside of his group were not permitted to understand the secret plan of God which would lead them to salvation.

The apostle Paul spoke to the Colossians about this same mystery and he told them that it was only revealed to the saints:

"Now I rejoice in my sufferings on your behalf, and I fill up in my flesh the things lacking of the afflictions of Christ, on behalf of his body, which is the church; of which I became a minister, according to the administration of God given to me for you to fulfill the word of God, the mystery having been hidden from the ages, and from the generations, but is now revealed to his saints [the elect of God]; to whom God desired to make known what are the riches of the glory of this mystery among the nations which is Christ in you the hope of glory" (Col.1:24-27 Para.). See Rom.16:25-26; Eph.1:8-9.

WHY THE SECRECY?

But why would this information which leads a person to salvation be kept secret and why is it only revealed to God's elect?

Although the mystery of salvation has been preached since the time of Adam, only a very few have been allowed to understand its secrets, and for very good reasons. God the Father and Jesus Christ love their human creation much more than most people can begin to comprehend. It is this love and concern for each individual that prevents God the Father from offering salvation to all of humanity before the establishment of his kingdom on earth.

God the Father and Jesus Christ want everyone to become a part of the God family; they want everyone to obtain salvation:

"Who will have all men to be saved, and come to the knowledge of truth" (1.Tim.2:4 KJV).

"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is long-suffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (2.Pet.3:9 KJV). See also Psa.136:1-26.

This love and concern is the reason that God the Father and Jesus Christ have formulated a plan which will afford each individual the optimum opportunity for success. The Father knows the potential and character of each individual and in which phase of his plan to offer them the opportunity for salvation. In order for each person to have the best possible conditions for success in obtaining salvation, they must be allowed to live in a time and environment in which they can succeed if they so desire.
The Gospel Preached for a Witness

Jesus said the Gospel was to be preached only as a witness; he said nothing about trying to convert all of humanity during this present age:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness to all nations: and then shall the end come" (Matt.24:14 KJV).

The end spoken of in verse 14, is the end of human rule on this earth. With the end of human rule, begins a New Age in which the Kingdom of God will reign supreme.

Today, many people are called and exposed to the opportunity for salvation, yet those who are called are very few in comparison to the earth's population. Moreover, among those who are called, few are chosen to participate in the first resurrection:

"So the last shall be first, and the first last: for many are called, but few chosen" (Matt.20:16; 22:14 KJV).

The overall plan of God for salvation has not changed from the foundation of the world. Part of this plan and a fundamental teaching in the biblical record is that humans must come into conformity with God's law before being granted salvation.

IS GOD FAIR AND JUST?

Jesus said that a person must obey and practice his heavenly Father's commandments in order to live forever. Moreover a person must also obey and practice the things he taught during his ministry (Matt.19:16-17; 28:20). But, how can a person obey and practice what they have never heard? Obviously they cannot unless they are taught (Rom.10:13-15, 17). Therefore, it is logical to ask whether or not God is fair and just in his dealings with humanity?

Many have the impression that God is unfair and that he gets pleasure out of the suffering and death of humans. Nothing could be further from the truth. This misunderstanding comes from a false teaching about God and a lack of knowledge concerning his plan for humanity.

God the Father and his son Jesus Christ are the epitome of love and kindness. They have enormous love for humanity:

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn the world; but that through him it might be saved" (Jn.3:16-17 KJV).
Would God be fair or just if he consigned people to eternal life or death without allowing them the freedom to make this decision for themselves? Of course not! Why would God create beings with the ability to think, reason, and choose, and then not allow them to choose their own destiny? If God wanted automatons, he would have created humans with instinct and predictable responses to stimuli, which is what he did with the rest of his physical creation. But, God does not want automatons in his family. He wants to share eternity with thinking, reasoning beings who have righteous character.

Yes, God Is Fair And Just

"Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. Hear now, O house of Israel. Is my way not fair? Are your ways not unfair? When a righteous one turns from his righteousness and does injustice, and dies in them; he shall die for his injustice which he has done. And when the wicked turns from his wickedness that he has done, and does justice and righteousness, he shall keep his soul alive. Because he considers and turns from all his transgressions that he has done, surely he shall live; he shall not die. Yet the house of Israel says, The way of the Lord is not fair. Are my ways not fair, O house of Israel? Is it not your ways that are not fair?" (Ezk.18:25-29 Para.).

"Say to them, As I live, declares the Lord, I do not have pleasure in the death of the wicked, except in the wicked turning from his way, and so to live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! For why will you die, O house of Israel? And you, son of man, say to the sons of your people, The righteousness of the righteous shall not deliver him in the day of his trespass. And the evil of the evil; in the day he turns from his wickedness, he shall not fall by it. And the righteous shall not be able to live by it, in the day he sins. Though I say to the righteous, he shall surely live; yet he trusts in his own righteousness, and shall not be remembered. But he shall die for his iniquity which he has done. And though I say to the wicked, you shall surely die; if he turns from his sin and does justice and righteousness; if the wicked returns the pledge; he repays the thing stolen; he walks in the statutes of life, not doing iniquity; he shall not die. All his sins which he has sinned shall not be remembered to him; he has done justice and righteousness; he shall surely live. Yet the sons of your people say, The way of the Lord is not fair. But they, even their way is not fair. When the righteous turns from his righteousness, and does iniquity, he shall even die by them. But if the wicked turns from his wickedness, and does justice and righteousness, he shall live by them. Yet you say, The way of the Lord is not fair. I shall judge you, each man by his ways, O house of Israel" (Ezk.33:11-20 Para.).
God says that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, because it is his earnest desire for all human beings to have eternal life:

"Cast away your transgressions from you by which you have transgressed in them; and make for yourselves a new heart and a new spirit; for why will you die, O house of Israel? For I do not have pleasure in the death of him who dies, declares the Lord. So turn and live" (Ezk.18:31-32 Para.).

THE GREAT JUDGMENT

"Do not marvel at this: for an hour is coming, in which all those in the tombs will hear his voice, And they will come out, the ones having done good into a resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment" (Jn.5:28-29 KJV).

Many assume this verse shows that there is only one specific time and one specific resurrection in which all of humanity will be judged by God. And because there is a single final judgment, all must have their opportunity for salvation during this lifetime. However, this is not what Jesus said. He said that there will be an appointed time when all those in the grave will be judged for the way they have lived.

Some also assume that because Jesus clearly divides these people into two distinct categories—good and evil—there are only two categories of people who will be resurrected. In the context of John 5:28-29, the English word judgment is translated from the Greek word krisis, which refers to the condemnation of those who habitually practice evil. However, Jesus was speaking to the Jews who were well versed in God's law, which clearly defines the difference between good and evil.

A DAY OF SALVATION

The prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when each individual will have their opportunity for salvation, and he referred to it as an acceptable time:

"Thus says the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you: . . . " (Isa.49:8 KJV).

The English word acceptable is translated from the Hebrew word rason, which basically means pleasure, delight, or favor. It also has the following nuances in meaning: favor or good will of God, delight or acceptance of an individual in a religious sense, and desire, or pleasure in the specific sense of will, as in the will of God.

Isaiah was inspired to use the word rason because it conveys more than just an appointment of time. It also conveys the tremendous depth of God's concern, desire, and pleasure in granting the opportunity of sonship to humanity.

Today is not the only day of salvation. It is 'a' day of salvation for those the Father is calling during this age. See Isa.49:8; 1.Pet.4:17.
An Acceptable Time

"For he says, 'In an acceptable [Greek: dektos] time I heard you, and in a day of salvation I helped you', Behold now is the acceptable [Greek: euprosdektos] time! "Behold now is the [a] day of salvation" (2.Cor.6:2). See also 1.Pet.4:17.

Note:

The English word acceptable is translated from the Greek word dektos means ten or acceptance, and euprosdektos means approved or favorable.

When the proper article in front of the word 'day' is used in the translation of verse 2, its meaning becomes clear. Paul is saying that it is 'a' day of salvation, not 'the' only day of salvation. If the translators of the King James version of the Bible had used the article 'a' instead of 'the' in verse 2, their translation would have been in conformity with Isaiah's original prophecy.

When Paul quoted Isaiah to the Corinthian Church, he did so in order to remind them that this was their opportunity for salvation. It was the time of salvation for the elect of the church at Corinth and others whom God the Father was calling to salvation at that time. It certainly was not the day of salvation for all people.

THE CALL TO SALVATION

An important point to note is that it is God the Father who determines who he will call to salvation during this age.

The Father only calls those he wants to use for a specific purpose in this age:

"No man can come to me, except the Father who has sent me draw him" (Jn.6:44,65 KJV).

Jesus Christ does not determine who is to be called to salvation during this age; only God the Father makes this determination:

"For the promise is to you, and your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39). See also Rom.8:26-30; 1.Cor.1:9,23-28; Eph.1:5-9;2. Tim.1:8-9; 1.Thes.5:23-24; Heb.9:14-15.

"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47).

The scriptural record of the early church clearly shows a selective calling to the opportunity of salvation. It clearly shows that only those who should be saved are called to salvation. But what about those who were not called in the past, or are not being called at this present time? If this is the only day of salvation as many believe, all of those not called do not have an opportunity for salvation.
THE RESURRECTIONS

In the Book of Revelation, we find the statement, "But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished, this is the first resurrection" (Rev.20:5 KJV). Logic tells us that if there is a first resurrection, there must be a second. A diligent study of the Bible will reveal that there are a number of resurrections of the dead.

In his infinite wisdom, the Eternal God has designed his plan for mankind very carefully in order to give every person an opportunity to have eternal life. The vast majority of people who have lived throughout history have died without hearing or understanding God's plan.

The comforting truth is that the majority of humanity is neither saved nor lost. They simply have not yet been given an opportunity for salvation:

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits: afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming" (1.Cor.15:22-23 KJV).

The popular belief concerning a single resurrection for all humanity has no merit. The plan of God for the salvation of humanity is far more complex and fair than commonly believed.

God is fair, loving, merciful, and true to his promises. He is not the cruel and merciless monster that so many preachers depict. Because he is a God of love (1.Jn.4:8), he has designed a plan which will give all of humanity an opportunity for salvation. There is no doubt that each person will have an opportunity to obey God's code of righteous conduct. The only question is when each person will be given this opportunity?

Conclusions

The scriptures concerning the requirements for salvation cannot be reconciled with the facts of history or the rest of the Bible if God the Father and Jesus Christ have been trying to save all of humanity from the time of Adam to this present age. But, because God is not trying to do this before the establishment of his kingdom on earth, the scriptures can be understood to mean what they say.

If God were trying to save mankind now, he would save them! God's plan for the salvation of humanity is right on schedule; no human or evil spirit can stop God from fulfilling his purpose for humanity.

God has not been calling all of humanity to salvation because he knows the vast majority would not do what is required to repent and live according to his law. However, he will, at the proper time and during the right sequence of events, present this opportunity to all who have not been called to salvation.

"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits: afterwards they that are Christ's at his coming" (1.Cor.15:22-23 KJV).
Everyone will someday have the opportunity to fulfill this scripture, but not all at the same time. Every individual who has ever lived and died will have that opportunity.

Surprising as it seems, this is not the only day of salvation for humanity, it is only the day of salvation for those called to salvation in this age.

By B.L. Cocherell
Has your ultimate destiny been decided for you in advance? Do all humans have a predetermined life? Is there some force or intelligence that has predetermined your very existence and future before you were born? Many people believe that individuals have absolutely no control over their destiny. Many people also feel that whatever happens in their life has been predetermined and there is nothing they can do to alter their destiny.

It is not difficult to understand what the Bible says about the subject of predestination, and why God the Father has predetermined that certain circumstances and events must come to pass in order for his plan for the salvation of humanity to be successfully accomplished. However, this understanding requires more than a casual study of the scriptures pertaining to predestination; it requires some knowledge of the freedom of choice that people have been given concerning their eternal destiny, what God does and does not know about the final decisions that people will make concerning this destiny, and how the Father’s plan has been constructed to make sure every human is treated fairly concerning their opportunity to choose eternal life or eternal death.

DOES GOD KNOW EVERYTHING?

Biblical history shows that God has predicted the outcome of many individual's lives and world events and he has caused these predictions to be fulfilled. There are also many scriptures which speak of God's great knowledge, understanding and wisdom. But, does God know everything in advance? Does God know exactly what each human will do from one moment to the next?

In the Garden

After God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the garden of Eden, a progression of events began to unfold which will eventually culminate in the creation of billions of spirit sons of God.

The first thing Adam and Eve did to set this chain of events into motion was to disobey their Creator's command not to touch the forbidden tree or eat its fruit:

"And the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise; so she took the fruit and ate it, and then gave some to her husband, and he ate it. And their eyes were opened, and they knew they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together, and made themselves some clothing" (Gen.3:6-7 Para.).
"And they heard God calling them as he walked in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from God among the trees of the garden. And God called to Adam, Where are you? And Adam said, I heard your voice, and I was afraid, and I hid myself, because I was naked. And God said, Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree, of which I told you not to eat?" (Gen.3:8-11 Para.).

The Creator God had given clear instructions to both Adam and Eve not to eat the fruit from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God asks, "Who told you that you were naked?" And, "Have you eaten of the forbidden fruit?" Perhaps God already knew the answer to these two questions, and perhaps not. What is clear is that Adam and Eve were free to make a choice, and God had predetermined not to interfere with their freedom of choice.

The Days of Noah

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart were only evil continually. And he regretted making mankind on the earth, and he was very discouraged. And said, I will destroy from the face of the earth the humans that I have created; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for I am sorry that I made them" (Gen.6:5-7 Para.).

This account shows that God learned something about the character of humans which he did not know at the time he created them. Humans were apparently more evil than God thought they would be, and he was so disappointed in his human creation that he was about to destroy them all. It is apparent that there were some things that the Creator did not know about humans until he had an opportunity to observe them for almost a thousand years.

Abraham, the Father of the Faithful

The story of Abraham and his supreme test of obedience and faith is found in Genesis, chapter 22. Because Abraham passed the test that the Creator had given him, God promised to bless Abraham's descendants and all of humanity:

"And he said, do not lay your hand upon the lad, neither do you anything to him: for now I know that you fear God, seeing you have not withheld your only son from me" (Gen.22:12 Para.).

"I will multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand on the sea shore; . . . And in your seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; Because you have obeyed my voice" (Gen. 22:17-18 Para.).

These scriptures clearly show that the Creator did not know if Abraham would obey him until he had been put to the test.
The Agreement at Mount Sinai

"You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bare you on eagles' wings, and brought you to myself. Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then you shall be a peculiar treasure to me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And you shall be to me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel. And Moses came and called for the elders of the people, and laid before their faces all these words which the Lord commanded him" (Ex.19:4-7 KJV).

One of the terms of the agreement at Mount Sinai was that the people would obey the Creator's words. And, if they did obey, they would receive a tremendous blessing. However, if all things were predeter-mined, why would God make an agreement which had terms and conditions attached to it?

"And Moses came and told the people all the words of the Lord, and all the judgments: and all the people answered with one voice, and said, All the words which the Lord has said will we do" (Ex.24:3; 19:8 KJV).

The Israelites had a choice to accept or reject the agreement with the Creator, and they chose to accept the agreement with all its terms and conditions.

These are just a few of the scriptural examples, which show that God does not know in advance everything humans will do or the decisions they will make. This is not to say that God does not know our thoughts if he wants to know them, because the scriptures clearly say that God knows the hearts of men.

Why Must One Overcome?

"And, behold, one came to him and said, Good Master, what good thing shall I do, that I may have eternal life? And he said to him, why do you call me good? there is none good but one, that is, God: but if you will enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matt.19:16-17 Para.).

Why did Jesus tell this young man to keep the Commandments? Why would there be any reason for him to keep these laws if his destiny had already been determined? From what Jesus says to the young man, it is apparent that it was in his power to either obey God and gain eternal life or disobey and pay the penalty for disobedience (Rom.6:23).

Repentance, Baptism, and the Holy Spirit

"Then Peter said to them, repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38 KJV).
A person has a choice of whether or not to be baptized. If the choice is not to repent and be baptized, the holy spirit will not be given.

"And we are his witnesses of these things; and so is also the holy spirit, whom God has given to them that obey him" (Acts 5:32 KJV).

The holy spirit is only given to those who obey. Here is another opportunity for a person to make a choice; one can either obey or disobey. The choice is the individual's to make.

**Freedom of Choice**

It is very clear that God allows mankind to have freedom of choice. Humans have been given free moral agency to make a choice between good or evil and to chose to obey or disobey the ways of God. Moreover, God will not cause a person to chose one way or another.

Does God know the smallest details of everything that will ever happen in a person's life in advance and does he control and manipulate each and every event that comes to pass on earth? The answer is No. He does not know all things in advance nor does he manipulate the outcome of all things. However, this does not mean that he is not in control of all things. The scriptures clearly show that he is in control of the earth and the powers which sustain it.

If the doctrine of predestination were true, no one could have control over their destiny. If this were true, no one could alter what God sets in motion; nothing could be changed. If God knew beforehand what each person would decide and how they would behave in every circumstance, there would be no free moral agency.

The problem with the concept of predestination is that it is not consistent with what the Bible has to say about the plan of God for the salvation of humanity.

**EVERY INDIVIDUAL MUST CHOOSE**

The belief in predestination is very convenient for those who do not want to take responsibility for their own lives. It allows individuals to do as they please without worrying about whether or not they are pleasing God. This belief is a doctrine of no works, no effort, and no personal responsibility for one's life. People who hold this doctrine, believe that the most vile and perverted individuals will have eternal life set aside for them and no vile act or perversion on their part can change their destiny.

This may sound good to those who only want to have a casual relationship with God. However, this teaching is a distortion of God's truth and it is in direct opposition to the plan of God. Regardless of how good or evil they are, all humans will stand before the judgment seat of God and give account for what they have done with the opportunity for salvation that will be presented to them (Matt.25:1-46; Rev.20:11-15 KJV).
NATIONAL ISRAEL AND A CHOICE

After the Creator God gave the Israelites all of the laws, precepts, and principles which were to govern their physical and spiritual conduct, he gave them a warning:

"But it shall come to pass, if you will not pay attention to the voice of the Lord your God, to observe to do all his commandments and his statutes which I command you this day: then all these curses shall come upon you, and overtake you" (Deut.28:15 KJV Para.).

If the Israelites refused to keep their agreement with God, they would not only miss out on the wonderful blessings that would come through this agreement with God; instead, they would receive terrible curses.

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 KJV

The Israelite's Creator and benefactor sums up the choices he had given them:

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the Lord your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it' (vs.15-16).

"But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce to you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, where you pass over Jordan to go to possess it' (vs. 17-18).

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live" (v19).

All Must Give an Account

"For it is written, as I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God" (Rom.14:11-12 KJV Para.). See also Isa.45:22-24; Matt.12:35-36; 1.Pet.4:5.

The Creator wanted the Israelites to choose life over death. But, history shows this did not happen. Although these ancient people were given the knowledge that should have brought them wonderful blessings, the vast majority of the Israelites who participated in the exodus from Egypt made the wrong choices concerning the knowledge and opportunity which they had been given, which would have led them to physical blessings and eternal life:
"For this reason even as the holy spirit says, Today if you will hear his voice, do not harden your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness, where your fathers tempted me, testing me, and saw my works forty years. Because of this I was angry with that generation, and said, They always go astray in their heart; and they did not know my ways; so I swore in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest. Watch, brothers, lest perhaps that there shall be in any one of you a heart of evil unbelief in falling away from the living God" (Heb.3:7-12 Para.).

The vast majority of the Israelites of the exodus from Egypt have had their opportunity for salvation, and because they made the wrong choice concerning obedience to God, they will have their existence terminated in the Lake of Fire instead of living forever in the Family and Kingdom of God. This is why the writer to the Hebrews encourages those called to salvation during the gospel age to pay attention to what the spirit of God says to them about their salvation.

God the Father sets before humanity the choice of life or death and each individual must make a choice. The existence of a choice leaves no room for predestination when it comes to salvation and eternal life. Although the result of a choice can be predetermined, the choice itself cannot be predetermined because it is a choice.

THE SAVED AND THE LOST

The Bible plainly says that Jesus Christ is the only one through whom we can be saved:

"Be it known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him does this man stand here before you whole. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner. Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:10-12 KJV).

Despite the tremendous missionary and evangelistic efforts of the professing Christian community, the vast majority of people have never heard the name of Jesus Christ or the good news message that he brought from his Father in heaven.

What happens to these billions of people who have never or will never come in contact with God's truth before the return of Jesus Christ? Obviously, these people cannot make informed, intelligent decisions based upon God's way of life. Has the God of Love (1.Jn.4:16) predestined these billions of people to eternal death in the Lake of Fire without giving them an opportunity to choose their own destiny? Or is there some method other than through Jesus Christ that those who have never heard of Jesus Christ are allowed to enter the Kingdom of God? If so, it cannot be found in the Bible. A review of the scriptures about
predestination will show that the belief in absolute predestination is based on a misunderstanding of what God does say about this subject.

**TODAY IS NOT THE ONLY DAY OF SALVATION!**

God was not trying to save all of humanity before the advent of Jesus Christ nor is he trying to save all humanity at this time. This is not the only day of salvation. If the Father and Jesus Christ are trying to save all of humanity now, how can we reconcile the following seemingly contradictory statements that Jesus makes about the salvation of humanity:

"For the Son of Man [Christ] is come to that which was lost [humanity]" (Matt.18:11 KJV).

"And the disciples came and said to him, Why speak you to them in parables? He answered and said to them, Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given" (Matt.13:10-11 KJV).

Jesus Christ said he came to save humanity and that he deliberately hid the knowledge of the mysteries of the Kingdom of Heaven from the very people he had come to save.

As surprising as it may seem, the Father is not revealing the understanding of his plan for the salvation of humanity to all people at this time in history. Although the Father's good news message is being preached as a warning and witness to the world, only a very few are permitted to understand its awesome meaning.

The explanation to this seemingly contradictory situation is found in the parable of the sower and the seed (Mk.4:3-20; Matt.13:3-13). The plan of God is for everyone to have an equal opportunity to obtain salvation and become a part of the Family and Kingdom of God. In order to assure that each person will be in the circumstances that will give them the optimum opportunity for success, God will call each person at the best time for them.

God the Father and Jesus Christ love each one of us and they know exactly when to reveal the understanding of the truth about salvation to each person. The Father takes great care in selecting the time and place in which each individual can have the best possible chance to obtain eternal life. This is why so few in this age are being given an understanding of the mysteries of God pertaining to his plan of salvation.

The statements by Jesus in Matthew 18:11 and 13:10-11 cannot be reconciled if God the Father and Jesus Christ are trying to save all humanity during this age. But because they are not, these two statements can easily be understood to mean that today is not the only day of salvation. However, it is a day of salvation for those whom the Father is calling for a special purpose.
The prophet Isaiah and the apostle Paul confirm that today is not the only day of salvation:

"This says the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard you, and in a day of salvation have I helped you. . . " (Isa.49:8 Para.).

"For he says, I have heard you in a time accepted, and in the [a] day of salvation, have I nourished you: behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the [a] day of salvation" (2.Cor.6:2 KJV).

Note:

When the proper article in front of the word 'day' is used in the translation of this scripture, its meaning become clear. Paul is saying that it is 'a' day of salvation, not 'the' only day of salvation.

MANY CALLED, FEW CHOSEN

God the Father personally selects those who will have an opportunity for salvation during this age:

"No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: And I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn.6:44 KJV).

"Therefore I said to you, that no man can come to me, except my Father allows him to come to me" (Jn.6:65 Para.).

The Father must call a person to salvation. This special selection does not mean that these individuals are better than the rest of humanity; it just means they have been called for a special task and responsibility during this age. The Father will not deny anyone an opportunity of salvation (1.Tim.2:4); however, today is not the time when he is calling everyone to salvation. There is no injustice with God. Everyone will have an opportunity for salvation and eternal life.

Many people have heard the gospel preached as a witness since the advent of Jesus Christ, but few have been given an understanding of what the Father's good news message truly means. Moreover, they cannot understand it because the Father's truth is spiritual knowledge, which cannot be transmitted through natural means to a mortal human mind; spiritual truth is revealed through the spirit of God. See Matt.16:17; 1.Cor.2:12-16.

If the Father and Jesus Christ were trying to save all of humanity before the Kingdom of God is established on earth, they would do it! There is no contest between the Father, Jesus Christ, and Satan for the lives of humans. The Father alone rules all that exists on earth and in heaven and he will offer salvation to each and every individual when he feels it is appropriate to do so.
"To them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ is the power, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise, mighty, or noble men are called" (1.Cor.1:24-26 KJV Para.).

Only some are called to salvation during the gospel age. Paul addresses only those whom God the Father has called as 'brethren', and he says that not many who are wise in this world's ways are called. Paul explains that God calls very few people of prominence to understand his truth during this age of salvation.

GOSPEL PREACHED FOR A WITNESS

Jesus says his Father's good news message would be preached only as a witness; he says nothing about saving all of humanity during this age:

"And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world, for a witness to all nations, and then shall the end come" (Matt.24:14 KJV).

The end that is spoken of is the end of human rule on this earth. With the end of human rule, a new age will begin in which the Kingdom of God will reign supreme.

Today, many people are called and exposed to the opportunity for salvation (Matt.20:16), yet the number of people who are called are very few in comparison to the earth's population. And those who are called are called to a special calling.

THE PURPOSE OF THE FATHER'S CALLING

God the Father is not trying to save the whole world today. If the vast majority of people are not yet given an opportunity for salvation, why does the Father call anyone during this age? What is the purpose for some people being given this opportunity today?

The following are the basic reasons God the Father calls people to salvation during this age:

• To proclaim a message of repentance and obedience:

"Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt.28:19-20 KJV).

• To prepare a people to help Jesus Christ rule this world after his return:

"And has made us [the elect] kings and priest to our God; and we shall reign on the earth" (Rev.5:10 Para.). See also 1.Thes.3:13; Rev.3:21; 20:4-6.
• To proclaim the Father's good news message and the soon-coming Government of God:

"The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev. 11:15 KJV). See also Matt. 24:14; Rev. 19:11-17.

ALL ISRAEL SHALL BE SAVED

A scripture that is often used in an attempt to prove that all of Israel is predestined to be saved is Romans 11:26:

"And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Zion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob" (Rom. 11:26 Para.).

Because this scripture says that "all Israel shall be saved", many who believe a doctrine of predestination believe that all of Israel will be saved regardless of their wishes. This scripture surely seems to prove this; however, after further research it becomes apparent that this scripture does not say this at all.

The true meaning of this scripture is found in the original Greek language. According to the Interlinear Greek-English New Testament by George Rickerberry, this scripture should be translated; "So all Israel shall be saved according as it has been written."

The key to understanding this scripture are the words "as it has been written", which refer to how God says we can obtain salvation. This overall plan of God for salvation has not changed from the foundation of the world. Part of this plan is that humans must come into conformity with his laws for physical and spiritual behavior. A fundamental teaching of both the Old and the New Testaments is that an individual must stop breaking the laws and precepts of God and obey him before God will bless that individual.

Moreover, it is understood from what is written in Hebrews 3:7-12 that all Israel will not be saved, because the vast majority of those who were led out of Egypt by Moses made the wrong choice concerning their opportunity for salvation.

WHAT PREDESTINATION IS NOT

A person can search the scriptures from beginning to end and not find one text where God makes a decision for a person as to their final destiny. Nowhere can one find a scripture which says that one's final destiny has been predetermined. Nowhere can one find that a person's right to choose whether or not to follow God is taken from them. Moreover, one cannot find a scripture anywhere in the Bible which says any human is predestined to be destroyed in the Lake of Fire.
Although the Bible does address the subject of predestination, it does not say what many people assume it says. Many people assume that the scriptures say that one's destiny is sealed and that one is either predestined to be saved or predestined to be lost. The main problem with this belief is that it cannot be found within the Bible.

THE WORD PREDESTINATED

In the New Testament, the Greek word proorizo is translated into the English word predestinated. Proorizo means beforehand, to mark out beforehand, to determine before, foreordain, and determine before. The word proorizo only occurs in the following scriptures which discuss the Father's authority and control pertaining to his truth and his calling of people to salvation:

Although it is true that humans have the ability to plan and predetermine the outcome of many things and events, no human has ever had the ability to plan and predetermine things and events before their existence. However, God the Father has this ability. Because he existed before humanity and is the Sovereign of all that exists, he has the authority and power to predetermine and to bring to pass anything he desires.

When the apostle Paul spoke of the promises the Creator God gave to Abraham, he understood that God had the authority and power to bring to pass what he predetermined to be done:

"As it is written, I have made you a father of many nations, before God, whom he believed, the one who could make the dead alive, and calling the things that are not as if they were" (Rom.4:17 Para.).

Predestination Concerning Jesus

After Peter and John were questioned by the high priest and other spiritual leaders of the Jews concerning why Peter had healed a crippled man and why he and John taught salvation through Jesus Christ, they returned to their own people and reported what had happened to them. Upon hearing what they had to say, the people praised the Father:

"The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were assembled on the same day against the Lord [God the Father]; yes, against his Christ. For truly both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the nation of Israel were assembled against your holy child Jesus, whom you anointed, to do whatsoever your hand and counsel determined [proorizo] before to be done" (Acts 4:26-28 KJV).

Here, there is a reference which shows that the Father had predetermined the existence of Jesus and his mission concerning the salvation of humanity. See also Lk.22:22; Acts.2:23-24; Jn.1:1-17.
Hidden Mysteries

1. Corinthians 2:1-8 Paraphrased

"And when I came to you, brothers, I did not come with excellency of word and wisdom, declaring to you the testimony of God. For I decided not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and him having been crucified. And I was with you in weakness, and fear, and in much trembling. And my word and my preaching was not in moving words of human wisdom, but in proof of the spirit and in power, that your faith might not be in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God. But we speak the wisdom among the perfect: but not the wisdom of this age, nor of the rulers of this age, those who are being brought to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, having been hidden, which God predetermined [proorizo] before the ages of our glory" (vs.1-7).

What Paul reveals to the elect in Corinth, is not the wisdom of the human mind; it is the wisdom that comes from God the Father, which is only revealed to those who are perfect before him through the sacrificial blood of Jesus Christ. Notice that the mysterious hidden wisdom concerning Christ was predetermined before the world came into existence.

"Which none of the rulers of this age has known. For if they had known, they would not have crucified the Lord of Glory" (v8).

Paul clearly shows that the Father's plan for the salvation of humanity was formulated before the world and humanity were created (see Lk.11:50; Heb.4:3; 9:26; Rev.13:8). And if the people who were in authority during Jesus' lifetime had truly understood who he was and why he had come to earth, they would not have killed him, because they would have understood that he was the Creator God incarnate who had come to remove their sin and give them eternal life.

Predestined to Become Sons of God

In both Romans 8:29-30 and Ephesians 1:5,11; Paul speaks of the Father's plan to create and select certain individuals long before the existence of the world. These individuals were to be created and selected for an opportunity to become the first humans to be transformed into sons of the Father's new creation.

Romans 8:28-30 Paraphrased

"But we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, and for those who are called according to a purpose" (v28).
There are many scriptures that define the reasons why some people are called to salvation before Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. The point in verse 28 is that individuals whom the Father calls to salvation during this age are called because of some specific purpose that he had in mind for them before the world was created.

"For whom he foreknew, he predestinated [proorizo] to be con- formed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (v29).

Paul reveals that, even before humanity was created, God the Father had predetermined that the Creator God would become the firstborn of his new creation of spirit sons.

"Moreover those he predestinated, he also called: and those he called, he also justified: and those he justified, he also glorified" (v30).

If you are one who is now called to salvation, God the Father knew you before the foundation of the earth; he knew you would exist, because he had predetermined your existence and had predetermined the time you would be born and given an opportunity for salvation. Moreover, he did this so that you would have an opportunity to become one of his firstborn sons of his new creation.

All whom the Father foreordained to be created and given an opportunity for salvation before his son returns to establish his government on earth have either been called in ages past or will be called before his son returns. If one who is called accepts the Father's offer of salvation and performs the Father's will in their life (the purpose for their calling), they will be justified before him through the sacrificial blood of his firstborn son and glorified as his son in his divine family and kingdom.

"According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated [proorizo] us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will. . . in whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predesti- nated [proorizo] according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will, for us to be the praise of his glory, the ones who first trusted in Christ" (Eph.1:4-5, 11-12 Para.).

Before the foundation of the world, the Father determined that those whom he would create and call during this phase of his plan for humanity would become holy and blameless through the sacrifice of his firstborn Son, Jesus Christ, so that they could be adopted into his family as sons.

Verses 11 and 12 show that the Father predetermined that certain individuals would come into existence in order to perform certain responsibilities for him.
The predestination that the apostle Paul speaks of has nothing to do with a person's decision to repent or not. Moreover, it has nothing to do with one's final destiny? It has to do with the Father's predetermined plan for the salvation of specific individuals and humanity as a whole.

The Holy Calling

"Do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord [Jesus Christ], nor of me [Paul], his prisoner. But suffer hardship with the gospel, according to the power of God [the Father] who has saved us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace [favor] given to us in Christ Jesus before eternal times, that is now revealed by the appearance of our Savior, Jesus Christ, making death of no effect and bringing life and incorruption to light through the gospel" (2.Tim.1:8-10 Para.).

Paul encourages Timothy and reminds him that the Father had purposed, before the existence of time, to favor some people above others with the offer of salvation through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, and that the Father did this for his own purpose.

The major point here is that the Father formulated a plan to create humans and offer them salvation long before this dimension of time and space came into existence. Included in this plan was a provision for the Creator God to come to earth and sacrifice his life for the salvation of humanity. Also included in this plan was the creation and calling to salvation for a certain number of humans whom the Father had already selected for a predetermined purpose.

What the Father Predestined to Occur

None of the texts where the word 'predestination' occurs say anything about a person being irrevocably predestined to suffer the second death or to inherit eternal life. Predestination has to do with the Father's preplanning for the salvation of humanity and the creation of certain individuals and their subsequent opportunity for salvation and service to him and his Son, Jesus Christ, before the establishment of his government on earth.

The Father did not decide in advance who would be saved or lost. But he did determine before the foundation of the earth who would be the first humans to be given an opportunity to become his sons and participate in the first resurrection at the return of his firstborn Son, Jesus Christ.

THE FIRST RESURRECTION

The first resurrection at Christ's return is for the elect of God who are called to repentance in this life and have qualified to become the leaders in his world-ruling government.
"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them; and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:4-6 KJV).

The first resurrection is for the Christians who have overcome the trials and temptations of this life:

"But that which you already have, hold fast till I come. And he that overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him I will give power over the nations" (Rev.2:25-26 Para.).

The first resurrection is for the ones who have a special relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ during this lifetime:

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev.3:21 KJV).

The first resurrection will undoubtedly be one of the most earth-shaking and glorious events ever to take place. But what will happen to those who do not take part in this first resurrection? What is the meaning of Revelation 20:5:

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished."

THE RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD

In his infinite wisdom, God the Father has designed his plan for mankind so that every person will be given an equal opportunity to have eternal life (Ezekiel, chapter 18). The vast majority of people who have lived throughout history have died never hearing or understanding God's plan. These people will be raised up to physical life after God's government has been ruling the earth for a thousand years:

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished" (Rev.20:5 KJV).

During this one thousand year period of time before the resurrection of the rest of the dead, the earth will be made ready to accommodate the billions upon billions of people who have lived and died. These people will be resurrected to a physical life in order to have an opportunity for eternal life. The resurrection of the rest of the dead is also the time spoken of in Revelation 1:7 in which every eye shall see Jesus. The prophet Ezekiel also foretold a special resurrection for all the dead
Israelites as being one of the major events to occur after Christ returns. These Israelites will be raised to physical life, and King David who died over four hundred years before Ezekiel's lifetime will reign over them (Ezk.37:1-28).

The scriptures clearly show that in order to live forever, a person must understand and obey the Father's way of life (Matt.19:16-17;28:20). But how can people understand or obey if they have never heard the Word of God? The obvious answer is that they cannot unless they are taught what his ways are (Rom.10:13-15).

**IS GOD FAIR?**

Somehow, many have the impression that God is unfair and that he gets pleasure from the suffering and death of humans. Nothing could be further from the truth (Ezk.18:23-32; 33:11). This misunderstanding comes from a lack of knowledge of God's overall plan for mankind.

God the Father and his son Jesus Christ are the personification of love and kindness. John 3:16-17 shows the enormous love that both the Father and Christ have for humanity. In Ezekiel 18:1-25, the Creator God emphatically states that he deals with humanity in a fair and equitable way. In Ezekiel 18:32, he says that he has no pleasure in the death of humans. It is clearly the Father's and Christ's earnest wish for all of humanity to have eternal life:

"For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior; Who will have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the truth" (1.Tim.2:3-4 KJV). See also 2.Pet.3:9; Psa.136:1-16.

Would the Father be fair or just if he predetermined people to eternal life or death without them first having an opportunity to decide what they want to do with their lives? Of course not! Why would he create beings with the ability to think and reason, but not allow them to choose their own destiny? If the Father wanted automatons, he would have created humans with instinct and predictable responses to stimuli as he did with the rest of the physical creation.

But the Father does not want automatons in his family. He wants to share eternity with beings who have the capacity to think and reason and have righteous character and pleasing personalities. The Father is so concerned for mankind that he sent his only Son to this earth centuries ago to give his life for the salvation of humanity. He truly wants each and every human to have eternal life (1.Tim.2:4; 2.Pet.3:9). This is the reason for the resurrection of the rest of the dead after Christ's one thousand year reign. Everyone who has not known the Father and his Son nor had an opportunity to qualify for eternal life will have this opportunity through another physical life under the peaceful and just government of God.
NO SECOND CHANCE

Even after a person is called to salvation and given an understanding into spiritual things, a person can lose out on eternal life if they make the wrong choices. According to Matthew 25:31-46, Jesus says that the unprofitable servant would be cast out, if not found to be righteous. This and many other statements of Jesus Christ clearly show that, after a person is called to salvation, their eternal destiny is in their own hands.

The writer to the Hebrews warns of the danger of forsaking God's way of life. Once a person has been enlightened to the truth of God concerning salvation and has been given the holy spirit, there can be no return to one's former life without dire consequences:

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the holy spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again to repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame. For the earth which drinks in the rain that comes oft upon it, and brings forth herbs fit for them by whom it is dressed, receives blessing from God: But that which bears thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh to cursing; whose end is to be burned" (Heb.6:4-8 KJV).

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remains no more sacrifice for sins, But a certain fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy by the testimony of two or three witnesses: How much greater punishment, do you suppose that he shall be thought worthy of who has stomped on the son of God, and has counted the blood of the covenant, through which he was sanctified, as an unholy thing, and has despised the spirit of grace? For we know him that has said, Vengeance belongs to me, I will recompense, says the Lord. And again, the Lord shall judge his people. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb.10:26-31 Para.).

If one has truly been called by the Father to salvation, has had their mind opened to spiritual knowledge, and then sins willfully, deliberately, intentionally, and will not seek God's forgiveness, the opportunity for salvation has been lost. It has not been lost because the Father took it away, but because the one called to salvation will not be obedient to the Father's way of life. The Father will not give eternal life to individuals who refuse to live in obedience to his way of life. There is no second chance to obtain salvation.
THE RESURRECTION TO DEATH

Only after every person who has ever lived has had an opportunity to understand the Father's plan for their salvation and made a choice of whether or not to become obedient to his way of life will there be a resurrection to the second death in the Lake of Fire.

The Incorrigibly Wicked

Those who are incorrigibly wicked and will not repent and follow the laws and ways of God will not receive eternal life. They will participate in a resurrection for the spiritually dead (Jn.5:25-29), which is the second death spoken of in Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8. These people will have their life-force terminated in the Lake of Fire and cease to exist. They will be burned up and become ashes under the feet of the saints (Mal.4:1-3). This is the event Jesus speaks of in Matthew 10:28 and Luke 16:20-31. These people will be denied eternal life and will cease to exist in any form.

Some might think that God the Father is harsh and unfair in his dealings with the incorrigibly wicked, but he is not (Ezk.18:1-32). The Father will give people every opportunity to repent and learn his perfect way, which leads to eternal happiness and joy. However, he will not allow the incorrigibly wicked to have eternal life and become a disruptive force to the joy, peace, and happiness of other spirit-beings in his Family and Kingdom. And he will not give them eternal life apart from his Family and Kingdom.

SUMMARY

Predestination in the biblical sense has to do with the Father's preplanning for his great work of creating sons to be a part of his spiritual Family and Kingdom. At some point in eternity, God the Father decided to increase his family, and create immortal and eternal beings just like himself to share in his spiritual existence. This great undertaking required planning and organization on a scale that is beyond the comprehension of mortal humans. Much of the Father's plan to create his sons depended on exact timing, which involved the Creator God becoming human and sacrificing himself for humanity. Additionally, this plan involved creating certain humans who would participate in fulfilling his plan throughout history until his great work was successfully accomplished.

The scriptures clearly show that God the Father personally calls each and every individual who is given the opportunity to serve him and his Son and participate in the first resurrection. The scriptures also show that, if you are one whom the Father has called to salvation during this gospel age, your calling is not a chance occurrence; it was predetermined before the foundation of the earth.
Because certain individuals were foreordained for creation and a call to salvation, God the Father and the Creator God who became Jesus Christ and their heavenly host of angelic beings have guided and manipulated peoples lives and historical events in order for these individuals to be born into this world at a specific time in history under specific circumstances. All of this planning was done so that those to whom God predestinated to offer salvation would have the opportunity to fulfill the purpose for their creation and calling.

A Choice to Make

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil; In that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the Lord your God shall bless you in the land whither you go to possess it" (Deut.30:15-16 KJV).

The choices are no different for God the Father's earthly children today than they were for the ancient Israelites who were called out of Egypt to an opportunity for salvation. One must obey God in order to obtain eternal life.

"Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, of a truth I perceive that God is no respecter of persons: But in every nation he that fears him, and works righteousness, is accepted with him" (Acts 10:34-35 KJV).

"And behold I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city" (Rev.22:12-14 KJV).

Individuals who seize the opportunity during this age and correctly perform the purpose for their predetermined creation and calling will be granted immortality and eternal life as the Father's firstborn sons in his Family and Kingdom:

"But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor.2:9 KJV).

Although the opportunity and method by which a person may obtain immortality and eternal life was predetermined before the foundation of the world, whether one decides to choose eternal life or eternal destruction is entirely up to each individual. Neither the Father nor Jesus Christ will interfere with an individual's freedom of choice. The choices are yours to make. Choose death or choose life.

By B.L. Cocherell
The basic teaching of the reincarnation of humans is that, after the body dies, the individual is reincarnated as an animal or human and this reincarnation cycle continues until the individual obtains perfection and can escape from this endless cycle into nirvana, heaven, or some higher life form.

There are many people who claim to believe in and follow the teachings of the Bible who believe the biblical record supports the teaching of the reincarnation of an individual into another human body after death. Additionally, some of these individuals believe humans are the incarnation of angels who are being given an opportunity to make amends for past mistakes and obtain immortality as a son of God through rebirth as a human.

When challenged, people who believe in reincarnation will ask for proof that their belief is not true, which is impossible to do outside of the biblical record. If a person does not believe in the validity of the Bible, no explanation or philosophical reasoning will convince them that their belief in reincarnation is false. Therefore, this study will only examine the theory of reincarnation from the biblical perspective of life, death, and a resurrection from death. Before we examine the biblical texts which some individuals believe prove that reincarnation is a biblical teaching, we need to document what is recorded in the Bible about the origin of humans and their cycle of life and death.

**HUMAN ORIGIN**

According to the biblical record the first humans were created out of the elements of the earth, and their bodies were to return to these elements at death:

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul" (Gen.2:7 KJV).

"In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and to dust shall you return" (Gen.3:19 KJV).

These two scriptures show the life and death cycle of human existence. Clearly, the first two humans were created beings with a unique life: they were not the reincarnation of a former human or an angel. The following scriptures show the consistency of the biblical record about the human cycle of life and death.
Job and the prophets Isaiah and Zechariah all record that the Creator forms a person in the womb:

"If I did despise the cause of my manservant or of my maidservant, when they contented with me; What then shall I do when God rises up? and when he visits, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:13-15 KJV).

"This says the Lord, your Redeemer, who formed you in the womb: I am the Lord, that makes all things, that stretches out the heavens; I alone spread out the earth by myself" (Isa.44:24 KJV Para.). See also Isa.49:1-5.

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, says the Lord, which stretches forth the heavens, and lay the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zech.12:1 KJV). See also Heb. 12:9.

The English word spirit, in Zechariah.12:1 is translated from the Hebrew word ruwach, which means wind, or mind. It does not denote a physical being at all; it denotes an essence that is non-physical.

**Physical and Spiritual Elements**

The human body is formed out of the elements of the earth though a physical birth process, but the unique spirit of a human is formed by God and placed into the physical body at birth. See Zech.12:1.

Job writes, "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8 KJV).

There is a non-physical element of a person which is an integral part of the human creation. The human spirit (i.e., the human mind) is this non-physical element which resides within the human body. This spirit is actually the person and it gives an individual the ability to be on a higher thought-plane than all other physical creatures on earth.

**The Cycle of Life and Death**

"Man that is born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He comes forth like a flower, and is cut down: he flees also as a shadow, and continues not" (Job 14:1-2 KJV).

Job begins his thoughts about a person's finite physical life by stating the fact that a person's days are few on earth and there is no continuation of life after death. In verses 10-15, he then explains the progression of a person's life which ends in death, after which an indeterminate amount of time passes before the next phase of God's purpose and plan for mankind is completed.
"But man dies, and wastes away: yes, man gives up the spirit, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decays and dries up: so man lies down, and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. O that you would hide me in the grave, that you would keep me secret, until your wrath is past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come; ]Job knew he would be resurrected.] You shall call, and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands" (Job 14:10-15 KJV). See also Job 19:25-26.

Job understood that, when he died, he would not live again until God brought him back to life and competed the purpose for his existence as a human.

King Solomon had the following to say about what happens after death:

"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun" (Eccl.9: 5-6 KJV).

"Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go" (Eccl.9:10 KJV).

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Eccl.12:7 KJV).

After death, humans are not reincarnated into another body to live an endless cycle of death and rebirth.

When a person dies, their thought process stops and their spirit returns to God, where it awaits a resurrection in which each individual is given either immortal life, their first opportunity for salvation, or death in the Lake of Fire.

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH

Many quote the following text in which the Creator God tells Jeremiah he knew him before he was born as a proof that Jeremiah existed as a living being in a prior life and was reincarnated as the prophet Jeremiah:

"Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jer.1:4-5 KJV Para.). See also Isa.49:1-5.
In verse 5, the English phrase *I formed you* is translated from the Hebrew word *yatsar*, which means to *mold into a form*; especially as a potter; figuratively, to *determine* (i.e. *form a resolution*). The English phrase *I knew you* is translated from the Hebrew word *yada*, which means to *know* (properly, to ascertain by seeing), which is used in a great variety of senses, figuratively and literally, and euphemistically and Inferentially.

Although the Creator God predetermined that Jeremiah would be born and become a prophet before his physical conception, to say this proves Jeremiah was considered a living entity before his birth is to apply a meaning which is not there. By saying that he knew Jeremiah before he was formed and before he was born, only proves that the Creator had the ability to predetermine events and cause them to happen; it does not prove an individual who lived and died was then placed into the fetus which would become Jeremiah.

What Jeremiah 1:4-5 and other scriptures with the same tone prove is that some individuals are predetermined to come into existence to fulfill a specific function and responsibility for God as he guides the affairs of mankind in order to work out his plan and purpose for mankind.

**YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN**

Jesus’ comment to Nicodemus about being born again is thought by some to support the idea of reincarnation. However, what Jesus explained to Nicodemus is one of the great mysteries surrounding the Kingdom of God and the New Creation. Jesus revealed to Nicodemus the method by which a person can enter into a special relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ.

**John 3:1-10 Paraphrased**

"But there was a man from the Pharisees, Nicodemus his name, a ruler of the Jews. This one came to Jesus by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you have come as a teacher from God. For no one is able to do these miracles which you do, except God be with him" (vs.1-2).

As most Jews of his day, Nicodemus was looking for the Messiah to come for the purpose of delivering the Jews from captivity, establishing the Kingdom of God, and restoring Israel as a nation.

However, he did not expect to hear what Jesus told him in reference to being a participant in the Kingdom of God:

"Jesus said to him, Truly, truly I say to you, if one does not receive birth from above, he is not able to see the Kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, How is a man able to be born, being old? He is not able to enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born?" (vs.3-4).
Nicodemus had no doubt that Jesus was talking about a literal birth; however, in his mind he could only picture a physical birth. Nevertheless, Jesus was not speaking of a physical rebirth; he was speaking of a completely different kind of birth process:

"Jesus answered, Truly, truly I say to you, If one does not receive birth out of water and spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. That receiving birth from the flesh is flesh; and that receiving birth from the spirit is spirit" (vs.5-6).

Jesus clearly explains to Nicodemus that he is speaking of a birth into the spirit-dimension of existence, not a rebirth into the physical world:

"Do not wonder because I told you, You must receive birth from above. The spirit breathes where he desires, and you hear his voice; but you do not know from where he comes, and where he goes, so is everyone having received birth from the spirit. Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things come about? Jesus answered and said to him, You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things" (vs.7-10).

Jesus explains that, through the power of God's spirit, a person is born into the spirit-world. Although Nicodemus was a teacher of the law, he did not understand the writings and prophecies which foretold being born into the Family of God:

"If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. You shall call, and I will answer you: you will have a desire to the work of your hands" (Job 14:14-15).

Job said he waited for his change to come; he waited for the climactic finish of God's work in his life and his transformation into a spirit-being. This information about the spirit in man and the change into a spirit-being is what Nicodemus should have understood, but he did not. See Ezek.34:22-24; 37:21-26; Gal.4:23-29; Phil.3:20-21; 1.Pet.1:22-23; 1.Jn.4:7.

John The Baptist

Some people believe the angel's announcement to Zacharias that his son would possess the holy spirit from the womb, proves John the Baptist was alive in the womb. However, the Greek language of this text does not support this belief:

"But the angel said to him, Fear not, Zacharias: for your prayer is heard: and your wife Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the holy spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Lk.1:13-15 KJV Para.).
The English word *from* in verse 15 is translated from the Greek word *ek*; a primary preposition denoting a point of origin (i.e., the point from where action or motion proceeds), from or out of a place, a time, or a cause. If the writer had intended to mean that John possessed the holy spirit in the womb he would have used the Greek word *en*; a primary preposition denoting a fixed position in a place, a time or a state of existence.

The Greek language clearly reveals that John did not have the holy spirit in the womb, but he received it at birth. Moreover, the apostle James tells us, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jms.2:26 KJV).

The English word *spirit* in verse 26 is translated from the Greek word *pneuma*, which means a current of air, a breath or a breeze; by analogy or figuratively, a spirit. Regardless of whether James was referring to the breath of life or the spirit of man, a human body without both is not alive.

The biblical fact is that human life as God created it does exist apart from the breath of life and the spirit of man within the human body. It is also clear that the holy spirit does not dwell in a body devoid of the breath of life. Therefore, a logical assumption is that the holy spirit entered John after his birth as a breathing, living person.

**The Babe in Elizabeth's Womb**

Many quote the following text as proof that the fetus in Elisabeth's womb was a sentient cognitive individual and the product of reincarnation:

"And Mary arose in those days, and went to the hill country with haste, to a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the holy spirit. And she spoke out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Lk.1:39-44 KJV).

In an attempt to show that this text proves the fetus in Elisabeth's womb was a sentient being, some translations insert the words *for joy* after the word *leaped* in verse 44 to show that the fetus was able to perceive and understand what was taking place outside the womb and leaped for joy in response to Mary's salutation.

The English word *leaped* in this text is translated from the Greek word *skirtao*, which basically means *to jump*, i.e. to sympathetically move.
This scripture simply records the reaction of the fetus being stimulated by Elisabeth's emotional response to hearing Mary's greeting and Elisabeth being filled with the holy spirit. There is nothing in this event which indicates a fetus is a sentient being with cognitive ability.

A literal translation of verse 44 is: "Lo, for, as soon as sounded the voice salutation of yours in ears mine, for joy leaped that babe in womb my."

In this text, the English word joy is translated from the Greek word agalliasis, which basically means exultation and specially, welcome. However, agalliasis is a constructed word which is found only in the Bible and the early church writings with one other exception as noted in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume 1, page 19.

Although the Greek meaning of agalliasis can mean joy, the meaning of agalliasis is more metaphorical and idiomatic than literal and does not in any way ascribe cognitive thought to the fetus in Elisabeth's womb. Moreover, the Greek language in verse 44 can be interpreted to mean the joy (agalliasis) was possessed by either Elizabeth or the fetus. The context of Luke 1:39-44 seems to show that the joy being expressed was Elizabeth's, not the fetus'.

The question of whether or not the fetus in Elizabeth's womb, which was predetermined by the Creator God to become John the Baptist, was a living human with cognitive thought and with the spirit of man can be answered from the biblical texts which explain what human life is and is not.

The Coming of Elijah

Jesus' conformation that John the Baptist was the prophetic Elijah is thought by some to be concrete proof that reincarnation is a biblical fact. However, it is clear from the biblical record that the two prophetic Elijahs who were to come after the prophet Elijah of ancient Israel are not his reincarnation in the flesh:

"And his disciples asked him, saying, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? And answering Jesus said to them. Elijah indeed comes first, and shall restore all things. But I say to you, Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they desired. So also the Son of man is about to suffer by them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them about John the Baptist" (Matt.17:10-13 Para.).

Jesus clearly says that John the Baptist was the prophetic Elijah who was to come before the Messiah. However, when Jesus said, "Elijah truly will come first and restore all things," Jesus reveals that another Elijah is yet to come after John the Baptist. John the Baptist did not come to restore anything; however, when the third Elijah comes, he will be involved in the restoration of things pertaining to the worship of God.
In Jesus' day, there was a belief that the prophet Elijah would actually be resurrected or reincarnated in another individual just before the first advent of the Messiah. But, was John the Baptist the reincarnation of the Prophet Elijah?

Before the conception of John the Baptist, an angel old his father, Zacharias, "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah. . ." (Lk.1:16-17 Para.).

John was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was not to be the prophet Elijah reincarnated. John would be directed and empowered by the same spirit as the Prophet Elijah, just as Elisha was empowered by this same spirit (2.Kgs.2:1-15).

Notice what John told the Jews who asked him if he was Christ or Elijah:

"Now this was John's testimony when the Jews of Jerusalem sent priests and Levites to ask him who he was. He did not fail to confess, but confessed freely, "I am not the Christ." They asked him, "Then who are you? Are you Elijah?" He said, "I am not." "Are you the Prophet?" He answered, "No." Finally they said, "Who are you? Give us an answer to take back to those who sent us. What do you say about yourself?" John replied in the words of Isaiah the prophet, "I am the voice of one calling in the desert, 'Make straight the way for the Lord'" (Jn.1:19-23 NIV).

Just as John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah and preceded the first ministry of Jesus, the prophet Malachi foretold that an Elijah will precede the return of Jesus to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. This prophetic Elijah will not be the prophet Elijah incarnate; instead, like John the Baptist, this person will come in the spirit and power of Elijah.

"Behold I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with utter destruction" (Mal.4:5-6 Para.).

BEFORE HUMANS - ANGELS

Before humans were created, the biblical record shows there were millions, perhaps billions, of spirit-beings who served the Sovereign God and the Creator God in the heavenly realm. After mankind's creation, many of these spirit-beings (i.e., angels) interacted with mankind and, according to the Bible and the Book of Enoch, some of them violated God's law and were sentenced to be punished. Some individuals believe that some rebellious angels are given an opportunity to make amends for past mistakes and obtain immortality as a son of God through rebirth as a human.
Within the scriptures which deal with individuals being predestined to have an opportunity for salvation during the gospel age are a number of scriptures taken out of context to prove that some individuals were angels in a past life who have been reincarnated.

When the apostle Paul wrote of some individuals being known by the Sovereign God before their physical birth and before the existence of the earth, he was referring to a specific purpose God had in mind for individuals he would cause to come into existence during the existence of mankind.

If you are one of the individuals to whom Paul refers who is now being called to salvation, God the Father knew you before the foundation of the earth; he knew you would exist, because he had predetermined your existence and the time that you would be born and given an opportunity for salvation. This foreknowledge of God has nothing to do with reincarnation, but has everything to do with specific individuals and their opportunity to become one of the firstborn sons of his new creation.

"According as he has chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love: having predestinated us to the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will... In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who works all things after the counsel of his own will, for us to be the praise of his glory, the ones who first trusted in Christ" (Eph. 1:4-5, 11-12 Para.).

Before the foundation of the world, the Sovereign God determined that those whom he would create and call during this phase of his plan for humanity would become holy and blameless through the sacrifice of his firstborn Son, Jesus Christ, so they could be adopted into his family as immortal sons. See Jn.1:12; Rev.21:6-7.

Verses 11 and 12 show the Father predetermined that certain individuals would come into existence in order to perform specific responsibilities for him.

The predestination which the apostle Paul speaks of has nothing to do with a person's decision whether or not to repent. It also has nothing to do with anyone being alive as an angel before or after the creation of the earth. Moreover, it has nothing to do with one's final destiny? It has to do with the Father's predetermined plan for the salvation of specific individuals and humanity as a whole.

In Paul's letter to the elect at Rome, he reveals that, even before humanity was created, the Sovereign God had predetermined the Creator God would become the first son of his new creation of spirit sons whom he had predetermined to be given this awesome opportunity:
"For whom he foreknew, he predestinated to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. Moreover, those he predestinated, he also called: and those he called, he also justified: and those he justified, he also glorified" (Rom.8:29-30 KJV Para.).

None of the texts where the word predestinated occurs say anything about a person being irrevocably predestined to suffer the second death or to inherit eternal life. Predestination has to do with the Father's pre-planning for the salvation of humanity and the creation of certain individuals and their subsequent opportunity for salvation and service to him and his Son, Jesus Christ, before the establishment of his government on earth.

The Sovereign God did not decide in advance who would be saved or lost. But, before the foundation of the earth, he determined who would be the first humans to be given an opportunity to become his sons and participate in the first resurrection at the return of his firstborn Son, Jesus Christ.

There are many scriptures which define the reasons why some individuals are called to salvation before Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth. However, none of these scripture refer to reincarnation of angels as humans.

PAST LIVES

Many people feel they are the reincarnation of specific individuals or angels.

These individuals will say, they can remember being this person and can sometimes provide details about this deceased person, which can be substantiated by the historical record. But, do these memories and historical facts prove these memories are those of that specific person or is there another more plausible explanation which can be found in the biblical record?

The following are two plausible sources for a person's memories of a past life:

1. Information collected and stored in person's memory through their life experience.
2. The implantation of information into a person's mind by evil spirits whose lives and experiences encompass eternity and mankind's past and present existence. Some evil spirits may even have possessed the people whose memories they use to deceive people into believing they have been reincarnated.
THE RESURRECTIONS

According to the teaching of reincarnation, individuals go through many life, death, and rebirth cycles until they obtain perfection and escape from this endless cycle into nirvana, heaven, or some higher life-form. However, the Bible only speaks of a resurrection of individuals in which one is either given immortal life, their first opportunity for salvation, or death in the Lake of Fire. None of these resurrections are the reincarnation of an individual into a fetus to be born again through a physical birth process.

"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:4-6 KJV).

The individuals who are to participate in the first resurrection are those who have lived a life in service an obedience to their heavenly Father and his firstborn, the Savior of humanity.

"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works" (Rev.20:11-12 KJV).

The biblical record reveals that, when individuals die, they stay dead until they are resurrected to a judgement predicated on the things written in the book of life and other books. According to other scriptures, these books contain God's law which is to govern a person's attitude and behavior toward God and their fellow humans.

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev.20:13-15 KJV).
SUMMARY

The biblical record does not support the theory of reincarnation. The biblical record clearly shows that the theory of reincarnation is in direct opposition to the Sovereign God's awesome plan and purpose for the creation of this dimension of time-space and its human inhabitants.

Christ God Incarnate

The only scriptures which show a spirit-being incarnated into a fleshly human are those showing the incarnation of the Creator God as Christ, the only begotten of the Sovereign God. The Creator became human for the purpose of living a perfect life in accordance to his heavenly Father's law, which sets forth the attitude and behavior a person should have toward other people and God. Moreover, he became human to sacrifice his perfect life as a payment for the sins of mankind (See Hebrews, chapters 9 and 10, which explain the necessity for Christ's sacrifice). All humans, other than Christ, are shown to be a unique creation for the purpose of having an opportunity to become an immortal son of the Sovereign God through the process of repentance, baptism, the receiving of the holy spirit, and living a righteous lifestyle to the best of one's ability.

Things to Avoid

In Paul's letter to Titus, he cautions Titus to maintain good works and avoid heretics and foolish questions and discussions which have no merit, because these are a waste of one's time and of no benefit to one's goal of salvation:

"This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that you affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable to men. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and striving about the law; for they are unprofitable and vain. A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sins, being condemned of himself" (Titus 3:8-11 KJV).

Although the theory of reincarnation is the teaching and belief of many religions, the teaching of the reincarnation of individuals who have died or angels from the heavenly realm into an animal or a human to live another life cannot be found in the biblical narrative. The biblical record reveals that, when a person is dead their spirit goes back to God and is held there until a resurrection of the dead.

The theory of reincarnation clearly fits into the category of being without merit and of no importance to the Sovereign Father's earthly family of king-priest who are to discern between good and evil and hold on to that which is good and profitable to their goal of salvation.

By B.L. Cocherell

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Many people believe there is life after physical death. It seems that no one wants to believe that when a person dies, they are truly dead. During many funerals, people refer to the deceased as having passed away or passed on. Not many people want to believe that a person ceases to exist as a conscious living being at death.

Almost all religions of the world teach that humans and spirit-beings have eternal life and an immortal consciousness in one form or another. But is this true? Do humans or spirit-beings have an eternal and immortal existence?

Because the subject of eternal life and immortality and how to obtain them is the most important topic in the Bible, it is vital for everyone who seeks these qualities of life to understand what God's word has to say on the subject. It is obvious by the fact of physical death that humans are not immortal, but mortal in the flesh and subject to death and decay.

This study examines the scriptures to determine what eternal life and immortality are, who has them, and how they can be obtained.

THE SOVEREIGN GOD

Before one can begin to understand the subject of eternal life and immortality, one must understand who controls eternity and immortality and what constitutes being eternal and immortal.

"Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen" (1 Tim.1:17 KJV).

In Paul's acknowledgment of the majesty of God, he reveals that the God he refers to is the king. Here, the English word king is translated from the Greek word baslou, which conveys the sense of one who is the foundation of power (i.e., the sovereign authority).

Paul also said this sovereign God is eternal, immortal, invisible, and must be given honor and glory forever. In this verse, the English word eternal is a translation of the Greek word aion, which means ages (i.e., perpetuity or eternal). And the English word immortal is a translation of the Greek word aphthartos, which means will not decay, continuance of life, or ever-living.

The God Paul refers to in this verse is God the Father, the Sovereign God, who has authority and control over all that exists and over all that is eternal or immortal.
As Paul continues to instruct Timothy he writes:

"I charge you before God [God the Father] who makes all things alive, and before Christ Jesus, who gave a good witness for God to Pontius Pilate, that, you keep the commandment, spotless and blameless, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ; Who in his own time will reveal the blessed and only potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords; the only One who has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach to; whom no man has seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting. Amen" (1.Tim.6:13-16 Para.).

Verses 13 through 16 show that God the Father is sovereign over all things including Jesus Christ and the qualities of life defined as eternal and immortal.

Verse 13 reveals that there is a God who has the power to give life to all things and that this God is someone other than Jesus Christ.

Verses 14 and 15 show that it is Jesus Christ who reveals the Sovereign God who is "the only potentate, King of kings and Lord of lords." Although Jesus Christ is also called the King of kings and Lord of lords, he is never called the only potentate. In these verses, the English word, potentate is translated from the Greek word dunastes and means one of great authority.

Jesus was to reveal the one with great authority. And the only being who is greater than Jesus is God the Father. Jesus refers to God the Father as the sovereign over all things in heaven and earth:

"You have heard how I said to you, I go away, and come again to you. If you loved me, you would rejoice, because I said I go to the Father: for my Father is greater than I" (Jn.14:28 KJV).

In verse 16 Paul also reveals that the Sovereign God (God the Father) who is the only potentate, and King of kings and Lord of lords, has all authority and control over immortality. The English word, has in verse 16 is translated from the Greek word eho, which means to hold, to posses or to own. Moreover, the English word immortality in verse 16 is translated from the Greek word athanasia; which means deathlessness, never dying, a continuance of life.

It is clear from what Paul says in 1.Timothy 1:17 and 6:13-16 that God the Father is not only eternal and immortal, but also he has sovereign authority and control over the conditions of existence defined as eternal life and immortality. The following are qualities of the Sovereign God to whom Paul refers:
He is eternal.
He is immortal.
He is invisible.
He is the only wise God.
He is able to give life.
He is the only potentate.
He is superior to all other kings and lords in heaven and earth.
He is revealed by Jesus Christ.
He has absolute authority and control over eternal and immortal life.
He lives in unapproachable light.
No man has seen or can see him.

No Man Has Seen Or Heard The Sovereign God

In his introductory comments to his gospel account, the apostle John wrote, "No man has seen God at any time, the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he has declared him" (Jn.1:18 KJV). When John wrote this, he could not have been referring to the Creator God, because men did see, hear, and speak to him face-to-face. Clearly, John was speaking about the Sovereign God—God the Father.

After Jesus' baptism and during his ministry, he said the following to a group of Jews at the temple in Jerusalem, "And the Father himself, which has sent me, has borne witness of me. You have neither heard his voice at any time, nor seen his shape" (Jn.5:37 KJV).

What the apostle John says in his introductory comments and what he says that Jesus said about no one ever seeing God the Father's shape or hearing his voice are both fact, because the scriptures do not contradict themselves.

Although John's record should be accepted as fact, some will argue that, when Jesus was baptized, the Father's voice was heard saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt.3:17). See also Mk.1:9-11; Lk.3:21-22.

In each of these accounts of Jesus' baptism, the English word voice is translated from the Greek word phaino, which means a show (transitive or intransitive, literal or figurative). The Greek word phone does not necessarily mean a voice, it can mean a disclosure; proclamation; a tone (articulate, bestial or artificial); by implication, an address (for any purpose), saying, or language.

Because the Greek word phone has meanings other than the English word a voice, there is room for conjecture about who actually made the declaration from heaven. Additionally, it is important to note that these three accounts of Jesus' baptism do not specifically say it was God the Father who spoke from heaven.
Some also assume that the following statement by the apostle Peter proves that it was God the Father who spoke from heaven and acknowledged Jesus as his son:

"For he received from God the Father honor and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount" (2 Pet.1:17-18 KJV).

Here again the English word voice is translated from the Greek word phone, which conveys the concept of a disclosure; a tone, an address, saying, or language.

The following is Matthew's account of what happened:

"And after six days, Jesus took Peter and James, and his brother John, and brought them up into a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun, and his clothing became white as the light. And, behold! Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. And answering Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you will, let us make three tabernacles here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. And, behold, a voice out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found delight; hear him. And hearing the disciples fell on their face and were greatly terrified. And coming near, Jesus touched them and said, Rise up, and do not be terrified. And lifting up their eyes they did not see anyone except Jesus alone" (Matt.17:1-8 Para.).

Continuing in verse 9, Jesus explains what the disciples actually saw and heard:

"And as they were going down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of man is raised from the dead" (v9 Para.). See also Mk.9:2-10; Lk.9:28-36.

Jesus said what they saw and heard was a vision of the resurrection, which had not actually occurred; this was a prophetic vision of the future—not the reality of the moment. See Jn.3:13; Acts 2:29;34; Heb.11:33-35;39-40; 1.Thes.4:16-17; 2.Thes.2:1-8.

The Sovereign God's Voice

The accounts surrounding Jesus' baptism and the vision seen by Jesus, Peter, James, and John are the only accounts in the biblical record of a voice being heard that could have possibly been the Sovereign God's voice. Moreover, there are no accounts of the Sovereign God ever being seen other than in a vision. Additionally, no biblical record shows the Sovereign God personally speaking to individuals or making announcements.
What is recorded before the advent of Christ are the Sovereign God's thoughts being conveyed by the Creator God, one of the heavenly hosts, or a prophet.

The record of the New Testament clearly shows that God the Father only speaks to his earthly children and answers their requests through Christ who is the mediator between them and their heavenly Father (1.Tim.2:5; Heb.4:13-16; Jn.16:23-24). The scriptural record also shows that the Sovereign God will only interact face-to-face with those of his new creation after they are immortal spirit-beings in his heavenly family (Rev.21:1-6). Any spirit-being or human who represents themselves as the Creator God or the Sovereign God during this gospel age of salvation is a liar and should be avoided.

**What are Eternal Life and Immortal Life?**

Eternal life is a continuance of life that is sustained by God the Father and is conditional based on obedience to God and his law. Immortal life is life that springs forth from itself; it is not dependent on any other source to sustain it because it is self-sustaining.

**Who Controls Life and Death?**

This study will show that God the Father has reserved to himself the power to destroy spirit-beings, as well as humans who violate his principles, precepts, and laws. The following scriptures show beyond a doubt that God the Father has absolute control over life and death:

"See now that I, even I, am he, and there is no god with me: I kill, and I make alive; I wound, and I heal: neither is there any that can deliver out of my hand. For I lift up my hand to heaven, and say, I live for ever" (Deut.32:39-40 KJV).

"The Lord kills, and makes alive: he brings down to the grave, and brings up" (1.Sam.2:6 KJV).

"And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he tore his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and make alive, that this man does send to me to recover a man of his leprosy?" (2.Kg.5:7 KJV).

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28 KJV).

Although the Creator God who became Jesus Christ had authority and control over all life, God the Father has absolute control over all life:

"For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it" (Jn.5:21 NIV).
The God Who Cast Off Immortality

The apostle John reveals that Jesus as the Creator God cast off his immortality in order to become human and experience life and death as a human:

"In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. The same was in the beginning with God. All things were made by him; and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life; and the life was the light of men. And the light shined in the darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. . .He was in the world, and the world was made by him, and the world knew him not. . .And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld his glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father) full of grace and truth" (Jn.1:1-14 KJV). See also Matt. chps.1-4.

Despite the many scriptures which speak of Jesus being a member of the God family, many people still feel that he was only a human being who did not pre-exist. John records Jesus telling the Jews of his pre-existence:

"Jesus said to them, (amen amen lego humon prim abraham gino-mai ego eimi [I am]) Truly, truly, I say to you, Before Abraham was, I AM" (Jn.8:58 KJV).

Jesus told these Jews that he had pre-dated and existed before Abraham, which meant that he was the Creator God of Abraham. This angered the Jews so much that they immediately tried to kill him for speaking what they considered to be blasphemy.

"I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father" (Jn.16:28; 3:13 KJV).

Here, Jesus says that he came from the Father into the world 'again'. What did Jesus mean by 'again'? If we understand that Jesus was the Creator God (Jn.1:1-12; Heb.1:1-3), this statement will not be a mystery.

The English word again is translated from the Greek word palin, which means once more, repetition, or again. As the Creator and the God of ancient Israel, he came to earth many times. Remember, Abraham, Jacob, Moses, and many others talked, ate, and fellow-shipped face-to-face with the Creator.

"And now, O Father, glorify you me with your own self with the glory which I had with you before the world was" (Jn.17:5 KJV). See Jn.8:38-59; 17:24.

Clearly as the Creator God, Jesus had existed before his creation of humanity. Moreover, he set aside his position as second in authority in the God family to become a human.
Jesus, The God Who Died

In the first chapter of Revelation, the apostle John records his encounter with Jesus Christ who says he is the God Alpha and Omega (Rev.1:8).

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying to me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev.1:17-18 KJV). See also Rom.6:8-10, Acts 2:24-32; 3:15,26.

The Greek interlinear Bible translates the phrase was dead, in verse 18, as I became dead. The Greek word used for dead here is corpse. The 'Alpha and Omega' says he was a dead body, but is now alive forever. Despite the fact that this statement says that Jesus was totally dead, some still believe the totality of Jesus did not really die.

"And to the angel of the church in Smyrna write: These things says the first and the last: who became dead [was a corpse], and lived" (Rev.2:8 Par.). Notice again that the Alpha and Omega (the Savior) says that he was totally dead at one time.

"But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man" (Heb.2:9 KJV).

"Your attitude should be the kind that was shown to us by Jesus Christ, who, though he was God, did not think it was wrong to be as the Sovereign God. Jesus did not cling to his rights as God, but laid aside his power and glory, taking on the form of a man: And humbled himself even further, by allowing himself to unjustly be put to death as a criminal on the cross" (Phil.2:5-8 Par.).

Jesus Christ, the Creator of all things (Jn.1:1-3), was an immortal spirit-being that inherently possessed the highest form of existence: life that springs forth from itself, never dying or decaying. A being who was not subject to death emptied himself of his glory, power, and immortality to become a mortal man. Then, he, allowed his creation to murder him. Not only did this immortal being voluntarily give up his life but also he died an agonizing physical death and completely ceased to exist as a living entity for a short time. See Lk.24:1-7.

"Paul an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead" (Gal.1:1 KJV). See also Acts 4:10; 5:30; 10:40; 13:30.

Jesus was completely dead; he ceased to exist. All that remained of him was the spirit and physical records of his existence. Even these could have been completely destroyed and erased, if the Father had willed it (Matt.10:28; Lk.12:4-5). It is important to understand that Jesus would have remained dead forever—never to live again—if his Father had not resurrected him from the dead.
It is also important to understand the enormity of what had taken place during Jesus' life and at his death. During this time, God the Father was the only immortal being in existence.

CAN SPIRIT-BEINGS DIE?

The Bible says that God the Father and Jesus Christ are immortal and the Father controls who is given eternal life and immortality. Presently the only immortal spirit-beings are God the Father and Jesus Christ. Although many people believe that all spirit-beings are immortal because they are composed of spirit, this is not true. As Jesus explained the rewards of a righteous life to his disciples, he also explained the punishment that will be given those who refuse to live righteously after they are called to salvation:

"Then shall he say also to them on the left hand, Depart from me, you cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt.25:41 KJV).

Why is a fire prepared for Satan and the evil spirits under his control? It makes no sense to prepare a fire to cast evil spirits into unless they can be harmed by this fire.

Angelic Beings are Eternal, not Immortal

Many assume angels have immortal life and cannot die because of the following statement Jesus made about those accounted worthy of eternal life not being subject to death and being equal to the angels:

"And Jesus answering them said, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, do not marry, nor are given in marriage: Nor can they die any more: for they are equal to the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Lk.20:34-36 Para.).

In verses 34 and 35, Jesus is only answering the Sadducees' question of marital status in the Kingdom of God; he is not addressing the question of eternal life or immortality. He explains that marriage is only for humans and is not necessary in the spirit world. Angels are created beings, which do not procreate as humans do. Likewise, when the children of God are transformed into spirit-beings, they will neither marry nor procreate.

Verse 36 does not say angelic beings are immortal. It just says that the resurrected saints will be in a condition similar to the angels. However, unlike the angels who have eternal life which can be destroyed, people who participate in the first resurrection are given immortal life as sons of God. Because these children of God are immortal they have life that springs forth from itself, which never dies or decays and is not dependent on any other source to sustain it; therefore, they cannot die (1.Tim.1:17, 6:12-16, Heb.2:9:10; 1.Cor.15:50-56).
Angels are not immortal spirit-beings, they are eternal beings, which have their life sustained by the power of God. Eternal life can be terminated, which is documented by the many scriptures which show the destruction of evil spirits.

Mark's record of Jesus' answer about marriage in heaven includes the following information about the angels mentioned in Luke's account:

"For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mk.12:25 KJV).

The angels Jesus refers to in answering the Sadducees, are the righteous angels in heaven. These spirit-beings do not die because they have not committed anything worthy of death. However, the rebellious angels have disobeyed God and will be punished for their disobedience.

**Spirit-beings Can Die**

Can spirit-beings die? Yes, spirit-beings are subject to death under certain conditions. God the Father has ultimate power and authority over all that he has caused to be created, including evil spirits. However, evil spirits want us to believe that they are immortal beings which will live forever. Nevertheless, they are not immortal; they are only eternal.

While explaining the necessity for a child of God to have faith with works, the apostle James makes an interesting statement about evil spirits and their fear of God:

"What does it profit, my brethren, though a man says he has faith, and has not works? Can faith save him? [Obviously not!] If a brother or sister is naked and destitute not having daily food, and one of you says to them, depart in peace, be warmed and filled, and does not give them the things which are needful to the body. What does it profit? Therefore, faith, without works, is dead, being alone. Yes, man may say, You have faith, and I have works: show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. You believe that there is one God; you do well: the devils also believe, and tremble" (Jms.2:14-19 KJV Para.).

What is it that evil spirits know about God that would make them tremble in fear? This question is answered in Mark's account of Jesus meeting a man in a synagogue who was possessed with a demon:

"And there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with you, you Jesus of Nazareth? are you come to destroy us? I know you, you are the Holy One of God" (Mk.1:23-24 KJV; Lk.4:33-35).
In verse 24, the English word *destroy* is translated from the Greek word *apollumi*, which means *to destroy fully, complete destruction, to perish, or to die*. This same word is used many times to describe the utter destruction of individuals and places (Matt.10:28, 12:14, 21:41; Lk.17:29). All of these examples of the word *apollumi* are used to convey utter or complete destruction. Both the Hebrew and the Greek words for *destroy* mean *the destruction and cessation of existence*.

The question the demon asks is important because it tells us three essential facts about evil spirits:

• Evil spirits know they can be destroyed
• Some evil spirits know they are going to die for their rebellion
• Jesus has the power to destroy evil spirits

**SATAN'S PUNISHMENT**

"And I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season" (Rev.20:1-3 KJV). See also Isa.24:21-22.

At the beginning of the millennium, this powerful evil being will be bound and held in a prison for a thousand years, after which he will be released for a short time. But what will happen to him after his release? Will he be allowed to continue his existence or will he be destroyed?

"When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from prison and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore. They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever" (Rev.20:7-10 NIV).

If this translation of verse 10 is taken at face value, it seems to say that Satan will be cast into a lake of fire to be tortured for eternity. But, does the phrase *for ever and ever* mean an eternity in the original Greek language?

**For Ever and Ever**

The English phrase *for ever and ever* in verse 10 is a gross mistranslation of the original Greek phrase *eis tous aeonas ton aionon*, which means *to the ages of the ages.*
A more correct translation of verse 10 is as follows:

"And the devil who deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and false prophet were. And they shall be tormented day and night until the age of ages."

Satan will not endure everlasting punishing; he will have his existence terminated; he will cease to exist forever. The age spoken of in verse 10 is the termination of an age. It is the time when the existence of physical humans on earth will end. Moreover, it is a time when a new age will begin and the mystery of what God is doing here on earth will be revealed.

**Satan Will Die**

After Adam and Eve had eaten the forbidden fruit, the Creator God gave a prophecy about the termination of Satan's existence:

"And I will put enmity [separation] between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; it shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gen.3:15 KJV). Note, the woman's seed is a reference to Christ.

The English word *bruise* in verse 15 is translated from the Hebrew *shoof*, which means to crush or strike at. Because Satan is referred to as a serpent, it makes sense that Satan is the serpent who would try to destroy the Savior.

Almost all Bible scholars agree this verse is speaking about the Savior who would come and triumph over Satan. Satan would strike at the heel and damage it a little bit. But, Christ will crush the head of Satan; thereby, he will destroy him.

"And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen" (Rom.16:20 KJV).

The English word *bruise* in verse 20 is translated from the Greek word *suntribo*, which means to crush or to completely shatter (i.e., to destroy).

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;" (Heb.2:14 KJV). See also 2.Thes.2:8.

In verse 14, the English word *destroy* is a translation of the Greek word *katargeo*, which comes from the root *argeo*, which means to render entirely useless. It can also mean to abolish, to cease, to vanish away, or to utterly destroy. Christ will utterly destroy Satan.
There is nothing in the Greek word *katargeo* that indicates anything other than destruction; it does not show that Satan will continue to live. Indeed, it indicates he will be utterly destroyed. Verse 14 also shows that Jesus has the power to destroy Satan.

**Satan the Lawbreaker**

"You are of your father the devil, and the lusts of your father you will do. He was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaks a lie, he speaks of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it" (Jn.8:44 KJV).

Satan and other evil spirits were cast out of the Kingdom of God because of their rebellion (Rev.12:1-9). They are against the law of God and will not conform to it willingly. Moreover, they willfully break the laws of God and obey only what God imposes upon them by force.

**A Covering Cherub Will Die**

Ezekiel, chapter 28 contains the prophecy about the physical king of Tyrus and the destruction of the evil cherub who possessed the king.

"Son of man, take up a lamentation upon the king of Tyrus, and say to him, Thus says the Lord God; You seal up the sum, full of wisdom, and perfect in beauty. You have been in Eden the garden of God; every precious stone was your covering, the sardius, topaz, and the diamond, the beryl, the onyx, and the jasper, the sapphire, the emerald, and the carbuncle, and gold: the workmanship of your tabrets and of your pipes was prepared in you in the day that you were created. You are the anointed cherub that covers; . . ." (Ezk. 28:12-14 KJV).

Verses 13-14 do not describe the physical King of Tyrus; they describe someone completely different. The only kind of being that could fit this description has to be from the spirit realm of existence. These verses show the magnificence and beauty of a powerful spirit-being who was created to hold a powerful position within the Kingdom of God.

"And I have set you so: you were upon the holy mountain of God; you have walked up and down in the midst of the stones of fire. You were perfect in your ways from the day that you were created, till iniquity [lawlessness] was found in you. By the multitude of your merchandise they have filled the midst of you with violence, and you have sinned: therefore I will cast you as profane out of the mountain of God: and I will destroy you, O covering cherub, from the midst of the stones of fire" (Ezk.28:14-16 KJV).
The English word *destroy* in verse 16 is a translation from the Greek word *abad*, which is translated 57 times in the Old Testament as *destroyed*, 79 times as *perished*, and 36 times as to *destroy* or *to perish*. The word *abad*, as used in Ezekiel 28, cannot mean anything other than total destruction. These scriptures prove beyond doubt that this powerful spirit-being will have his life terminated and will cease to exist.

"Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty; you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I will cast you to the ground, I will lay you before kings, that they may behold you. You have defiled your sanctuaries by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your traffic; therefore will I bring forth a fire from the midst of you, it shall devour you, and I will bring you to ashes upon the earth in the sight of all them that behold you. All they that know you among the people shall be astonished at you: you shall be a terror, and never shall you be any more" (Ezk.28:17-19 KJV). (A more correct translation is, "You shall never be a terror anymore").

The fire that will come from within this powerful spirit-being will consume him; he will be destroyed and turned to ashes. The judgment and punishment for this spirit-being has already been made—his fate is sealed. He will be destroyed by fire for his rebellion. Remember, the penalty for committing willful sin is death (Rom.6:23).

It is important to understand that the Lake of Fire in which evil spirits and humans will be cast is a physical place that burns with physical fire. Because both evil spirits and people will be destroyed by the same physical fire (Matt.25:40-41; Rev.20:7-10) and turned to physical ashes that will be trodden under the feet of the righteous (Mal.4:1-3), it seems likely that God will change both evil spirits and people into fleshly beings before they are destroyed by this fire.

**IS THERE A FATE WORSE THAN DEATH?**

We have learned that evil spirits can be destroyed; however, is there a fate worse than death reserved for some evil spirits?

Notice what some evil spirits ask Jesus:

"When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. "What do you want with us, Son of God?" they shouted. "Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?" Some distance from them a large herd of pigs were feeding. The demons begged Jesus, "If you drive us out, send us into the herd of pigs" (Matt.8:28-31 NIV). See also Lk.8:26-33."
What did these demons fear? Did they fear death, or something worse than death? Notice, they asked if Jesus had come to torture them before their appointed time. What torture and what time were they referring too? Actually some of these evil beings will suffer a fate far worse than death.

**Raging Waves and Wandering Stars**

Jude’s letter is mainly a warning to the elect about the false brethren who were among them. While giving this warning message, Jude also records two types of punishment for evil spirits.

"I will therefore put you in remembrance, though you once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not. And the angels that kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness to the judgment of the great day. Even as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire" (Jude 5-7 KJV). See also 2.Pet.2:4.

Jude reminds them of what was common knowledge at that time. Verse 6 shows that some of these rebellious angels are chained in a prison of darkness until the day they will be punished by fire. However, in verse 13, Jude makes a statement about a second group of rebellious angles. His statement explains what torture the demons who met Jesus at the tombs were concerned about:

"Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 13 KJV).

The following are translations of words from the original Greek text which show the severity of the punishment noted in Jude, verse 13:

- **Wandering**: [Greek *planetes*: From a root word which means a rover or a planet].
- **Blackness**: [Greek *zephos*: blackness, darkness as shrouding like a cloud].
- **Darkness**: [Greek *skotos*: obscurity, or darkness].

Because there is no reference to the death of these evil spirits, the indication is that this prison of blackness and darkness is a place they will never leave. Moreover, it is probably where they shall be confined to wander alone forever.

For a sentient being, there could be no greater or torturous punishment than to be totally cut off from all other beings and left alone with one's thoughts in total darkness forever. This is the torment that demons fear more than death. Some demons are already experiencing this torture, which is indicated in Jude 6 and 2.Pet.2:4.
Another Dimension

There are scriptures that say no evil will be allowed in the new heavens, the new earth, or the Holy City (See 2.Pet.3:10-13; Rev.21:1-27). This seems to contradict the scriptures which say some of the demons will be punished by being left alive in total darkness. However, not allowing any evil presence in the new heavens and earth does not preclude the existence of another dimension of time and space outside of where the God family exists (See 1.Pet.3:18-20; 2.Pet.2:3-5). The current physical and spirit realms are an example of two separate dimensions of time and space which exist concurrently; therefore, there is no reason to believe that God cannot design and create as many separate dimensions of time and space as he deems necessary for whatever purpose he desires.

It is obvious from the scriptures, that all spirit-beings do not have immortal life. If they did, they could not be destroyed. All spirit-beings, besides the Father and those of the New Creation can only possess eternal life as long as they are obedient to the Father. And although the majority of evil spirits will be destroyed in a Lake of Fire (Matt.25:41), some will suffer a fate worse than death for their rebellion against God.

ARE HUMANS IMMORTAL?

The reality of death is one of the most terrifying thoughts that can come to the human mind. It is so frightening and distasteful that most people try to avoid talking or thinking about it. Life is our most precious possession, but no matter what we do or how hard we try to preserve it, the inevitable will happen—we will eventually die.

At the Beginning

At the very beginning of human history, God warned the first man that if he disobeyed his instructions he would die:

"And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you shall not eat of it, for in the day that you eat thereof you shall surely die" (Gen.2:15-17 KJV).

Satan Enters the Garden

"And the serpent [Satan] was cunning above every animal of the field which the Lord God had made. And he said to the woman, Is it true that God has said, You shall not eat from any tree of the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the trees of the garden, but the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, God has said, You shall not eat of it nor touch it, lest you die" (Gen.3:2-3 Para.).
Satan who is a master of deception questioned Eve to see if she understood what God had said regarding the trees of the garden and he discovered that she did understand that disobedience would cause her death.

The Big Lie

"And the serpent said to the woman, You shall not really die" (Gen.3:4 Para.).

The first humans believed this lie; they believed they were immortal and could not die. However, they were not immortal; they did die. Throughout human history the vast majority of their descendants have believed this same lie, and many will face the final death because they preferred to believe a lie instead of the truth.

The scriptures show beyond a shadow of a doubt that, when wicked individuals are punished with death, they cease to exist from all dimensions of God's creation. Death is the absence of life; it is not existence in another form.

The Spirit Returns to God

"Then shall the dust [the human body] return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecc.12:7 KJV).

"For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yes, they have all one breath; so that a man has no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and will turn to dust again. Who knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth?" (Ecc.3:29-21 Para.).

Many have concluded from these scriptures that the human spirit is immortal because it returns to God. However, just because the human spirit returns to God does not mean that humans are immortal. The scriptures clearly show that only the righteous will possess immortality in the Kingdom of God (Matt.25:31-34, Jn.3:16,36; 1.Jn.5:11-12) and the unrighteous will be destroyed because of their wickedness (Matt. 25:41-46; Mal.4:1-3).

God Can Destroy the Spirit in Man

The apostle Paul was inspired to speak of the temporary condition of the flesh and the hope of the continuance of life as a spirit-being:

"Therefore we do not faint, but if indeed our outward man is being decayed, yet our inward man is being renewed day by day—for the lightness of our present affliction works out for us a far more excellent eternal weight of glory; we are not considering the things seen, but the things not being seen; for the things seen are not lasting, but the things not seen are everlasting" (2.Cor.4:16-18 Para.).
Although there is hope of eternal and immortal life in the spirit realm, the reality is that the spirit can be destroyed if a person is incorrigibly wicked and does not repent of their sin.

Jesus says, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28 KJV). See Gen.6:1-7; Lk.12:4-5.

The English word body is translated from the Greek word soma, which means a physical human/animal, body, or corpse.

The English word soul is translated from the Greek word psuche, which means breath, life, or mind. Here, there are two distinct elements of physical and non-physical human life and both elements can be completely destroyed by God. There is nothing in either of these two words that indicates anything immortal.

The English word destroy is translated from the Greek word appollumi, which means destroy fully, to kill, to perish, to completely do away with, or to die. The word appollumi is used many times to describe the utter destruction of individuals and places (see Matt.12:14, 21:41; Lk.17:29). In every context where appollumi is found in the New Testament, it means to completely destroy and it is used to convey utter and complete destruction.

There is no doubt as to the meaning of the words used in Matthew 10:28. The point is clear that men only have the power to kill the body, but God has the power to completely destroy all aspects of his human creation.

Unrepentant Sinners Die

"Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die" (Ezk.18:4 KJV) See also verse 20.

The English word, soul in verse 4 is a translation from the Hebrew word nephesh, which means a breathing creature or animal, vitality, beast, body, or breath. There is absolutely nothing in the word nephesh which indicates anything other than physical life, whether human or animal. And there is nothing throughout the entire Bible that indicates humans are immortal. Nephesh means a state of being alive.

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

"Brothers, if anyone among you goes astray from the truth, and anyone turns him back, know that the one turning a sinner from the error of his way will save the soul from death" (Jms.5:19-20 Para.).

"Whosoever hates his brother is a murderer: and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him" (1.Jn.3:15 KJV).
Sin is defined as the violation of the physical and spiritual law of God; sin is lawlessness (Rom.14:23; 1.Jn.3:4; 5:17; Jms.4:17). The violation of God's law requires the death penalty (Rom.6:23) for the incorrigible, unrepentant lawbreaker.

**The Finality of Death**

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch." . . . "And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.4:1;3 KJV).

Malachi does not say whether these wicked individuals are evil spirits or humans. What is clear from many other scriptures is that there is a time in the future when both evil spirits and humans who oppose God will be destroyed in a lake of fire, and that those who are destroyed by fire will never live again. See chapter 7, The Resurrection to Death.

"But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Rev.21:8 KJV). See also Rev.20:12-15.

The destruction of wicked humans will be accomplished in the same manner as the destruction of evil spirits; they will be consumed by fire.

**Humans are Mortal**

Regardless of what people believe or want to believe about the spirit in man, the evidence from the Bible shows that humans are mortal; they do not possess immortality in any way, shape, or form. Paul wrote the following about the endeavor to obtain eternal life and immortality:

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereto you were also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1.Tim.6:12 KJV). See also verse 19.

"To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life:" (Rom.2:7 KJV). See also Matt.19:16-17; Lk.10:25-27;18:18-20.

"Behold I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So 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" (1.Cor. 15:51-54 KJV). See also 1.Cor.15:26, 2.Tim.1:9-10, 2.Pet.1:4; Rev.20:6; 21:1-4.
If humans already possess immortality, these scriptures would make no sense. Why must a person continue to strive for eternal life and immortality if they already have it? It is apparent from what Paul says that eternal life and immortality is only guaranteed if a person lives a righteous lifestyle. It is also obvious from what Paul says that those who are called to the first resurrection must be changed into immortal beings in order to continue life in the spirit realm:

"And if the spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his spirit, who [i.e., which] lives in you"

(Rom.8:11 NIV). See also Job 4:17; Rom.6:12.

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible that shows humans have an eternal or immortal spirit. In fact, the scriptures show just the opposite; they clearly show human life as a temporary condition. See 2.Cor.4:17-18.

**SUMMARY**

Although many would like to believe they will gain immortality by virtue of being human or by belonging to one religious organization or another, this is not what the word of God says. God says that he has no pleasure in the death of the wicked:

"Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?"

(Ezk.33:11 KJV).

Please read Ezekiel, chapter 33, which shows the concern God has for Israel, and the finality of the of the punishment for being wicked. See also Ezk.18:20-32; 18:27; 2.Pet.2:1-22; 1.Cor.6:9.

All wicked individuals, whether humans or evil spirits, will be punished for their wickedness and will eventually be eliminated from the Father's realm of existence. The scriptures clearly show that when a human or an evil spirit is punished with death in the Lake of Fire, their life will be terminated, and all traces of their existence will be erased; they will totally cease to exist (Mal.4:1).

Eternal and immortal life represent the highest form of existence. This is the kind of life that God the Father offers to those he calls to participate in the first resurrection. He is offering people eternal life and immortality as sons of his in his kingdom and family.

Jesus said, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn.10:10 KJV).
No form of existence can be more abundant and filled with joy than eternal and immortal life on the divine spirit plane of existence in the Family and Kingdom of God (see 1.Cor.2:9). What gift could be greater than to have immortal life, which springs forth from itself and does not depend on any other source to sustain it because it is self sustaining?

"Who has saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began. But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (2.Tim.1:9-10 KJV). See also 1.Jn.2:25.

Concerning eternal and immortal life, the choices for anyone called to salvation today are the same as those called before and during the Old Covenant with ancient Israel. Anyone who is called to salvation today and chooses to live a righteous life will be rewarded with eternal and immortal life. However, those who refuse to keep their agreement with God will be punished with a death from which there is no return. The Creator God who became Jesus Christ had these choices summarized and recorded so that there would be no doubt as to what he was offering for righteousness:

Deuteronomy 30:15-19 KJV

"See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil: In that I command you this day to love the Lord your God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that you may live and multiply: and the Lord your God shall bless you in the land where you go to possess it' (vs.15-16).

"But if your heart turn away, so that you will not hear, but shall be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce to you this day, that you shall surely perish, and that you shall not prolong your days upon the land, where you pass over Jordan to go to possess it' (vs.17-18).

"I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live:" (v19).

It is God the Father's and Jesus Christ's earnest desire for people choose life instead of death.

The biblical record clearly shows individuals who choose to live in disobedience to the Sovereign God's righteous laws, precepts, and principles will have their existence terminated in the Lake of Fire and cease as a living being, but those who live in obedience to his righteous laws, precepts, and principles will live forever in his Kingdom of spirit-beings. The choice is yours to make.

By B.L. Cocherell

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One of the most misunderstood subjects in the Bible is the state of the dead. The main barrier to gaining a clear understanding of this subject is the teaching that assumes humans have an immortal soul which goes to heaven, hell, paradise, or someplace in-between after death.

Because this belief in the immortality of the soul is extremely comforting, most people avoid thinking about the validity of these teachings about heaven and hell. Instead, they avoid the clear scriptures which show that the dead are not alive in some form and in some other place, because these scriptures threaten the very foundation of the teaching of an immortal soul.

Although the beliefs of Catholics and Protestants differ radically in many respects, both believe in the immortality of the soul. They also believe that humans only die physically, but the spirit (i.e., the soul—the sentient being) remains alive in heaven, hell, or some transitory state in-between.

However, the Protestant theology of going to heaven or hell immediately upon death cannot be proven from the Bible. Moreover, the Catholic concept of purgatory as a place or condition of spiritual cleansing is also a non-biblical teaching. Neither of these teachings are valid biblical concepts. They are simply figments of theological imagination, which were conceived to explain the state of the dead in the context of humans having an immortal soul.

What really happens to humans at death? Are they alive in another dimension, or do they cease to exist? If you study the Bible and believe what it actually says, these questions can be answered truthfully.

TWO DIMENSIONS OF HUMAN EXISTENCE

In order to understand the state of the dead, it is important to understand what a human being is. Many theologians and others believe humans have a soul which is non-physical. The Bible does say that humans have a spirit, but is this spirit a physical creation or is it from another dimension of existence?

The scriptures show two distinct dimensions of existence, and that humans are composed of elements from both dimensions. There is both a physical and a spirit dimension of existence and each is separate from the other in function and creation. However, both work together to enable humans to exist on a higher plane of consciousness than the rest of the physical creation:
"And I say to you, my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I [Jesus] will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him [God the Father], who after he as killed has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, Fear him" (Lk.12:4-5 KJV).

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him [God the Father] which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28 KJV).

The English word body in these two verses is a translation of the Greek word soma, which means a human/animal body or a corpse. The Greek word used in these two scriptures for soul is psyche, which can be translated as life or mind. These two scriptures mention two distinct elements of human life: physical and non-physical, both of which can be completely destroyed by God.

The English word destroy in the above verses is a translation of the Greek word apollumi, which means to destroy fully, to kill, to perish, to completely do away with. There is no doubt that the words used in Matthew 10:28 mean that God has the power to completely destroy all aspects of human life.

Jesus says there are two elements of human existence and we must fear God who can terminate both the physical and non-physical elements.

Paul also refers to the two elements of human existence in his letter to the Thessalonians:

"And may the God of peace Himself fully sanctify you, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1.Thes.5:23 Para.).

In verse 23, the English words spirit, soul, and body are translated from the Greek words pneuma, psyche, and soma, which respectively mean physical breath or the soul, the spirit or the mind, and the physical body.

THE PHYSICAL ELEMENT OF HUMANS

In order to determine what the physical element of human life is, the creation of mankind should be reviewed:

"And the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen.2:7 Para.). See also vs.8; Deut.32:18.

"In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it you were taken: for dust you are, and to dust shall you return" (Gen.3:19 KJV).
"You hide your face and they are troubled; you gather your breath, and they expire and return to their dust" (Psa. 104:29 Para.; Job 34:13-15).

In Genesis 2:7, the English word soul is translated from the Hebrew word nephesh, which means a breathing creature or animal, vitality, beast, body, or breath. There is absolutely nothing in the word nephesh which indicates anything other than physical life—human or animal. The Hebrew word nephesh means a state of being alive. God created a lifeless body in the form of man and made it a living soul (nephesh) by blowing air into its lungs; thus, he gave it life.

"The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life" (Job 33:4 KJV).

**PHYSICAL LIFE IS IN THE BLOOD**

"And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eats any manner of blood; I will even set my face against that soul [nephesh] that eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people," (Lev. 17:10 KJV).

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; . . . Therefore I said to the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood. . . . For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof: . . ." (Lev. 17:11-14 KJV).

In this modern age, we can understand the biological implications of this scripture. The heart circulates the blood throughout the body, which in turn performs its life sustaining functions.

If God had not activated Adam's life functions by inserting air into his lungs, Adam would not have lived. But is human life no more than a chemical-electric reaction of a well designed structure of gas, fluid, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli? Is this the sum of what God created as physical man? If so, humans would be no different from any other animal.

But humans are different from animals and the rest of creation in many obvious ways. Humans are on a higher plane of existence than the rest of creation. But, what is it that makes humans different? The unseen physical and spirit elements of the human creation makes it different from the rest of creation.

**THE SPIRITUAL ELEMENT OF HUMANS**

There is another element to human life besides the physical. This element is the spirit in man that separates mankind from the rest of creation:

"But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8 KJV).
Here, the English word *spirit* is a translation of the Hebrew word *ruwach*, which means *wind or mind*. It does not mean a physical being or even a being at all. Rather, it denotes something which is not physical.

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, says the Lord, which stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zech.12:1 KJV). See also Ecc.12:5-7.

The human spirit is a non-physical element of the human body that truly separates humans from the rest of the physical creation. God calls this non-physical element the spirit in man and he has designed it to be a part of the human body. It is this spirit that gives mankind the ability to be on a higher thought-plane than all other physical creatures on earth.

The spirit in man is only one of the two elements of human life that the scientific community neither understands nor ascribes to the human life function. Nevertheless, the spirit in man is of major importance to human life after death.

**THE GOD OF SPIRITS**

The scriptures show that God formed the spirit which lives within the human body:

"And they fell on their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh [i.e., humans], shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?" (Num.16:22 Para.).

"Let the Lord God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation" (Num.27:16 Para.).

The spirit in man is neither an undefinable essence nor mysteriously apart from man. The spirit of man is man. The physical body is the habitation of the spirit, which is the sentient and conscious element of the human creation.

**THE HUMAN LIFE-FORM**

Human life is unique in all of creation. A human being is the only life-form on earth which is both physical and spiritual and has the opportunity to be elevated to the highest of all life-forms—a spirit-being in the Family of God.

Animals do not have the potential for immortality and they do not relate to God in the same way as humans. Furthermore, they do not have the ability to worship or interact with God like humans do. See Rom. 8:14-16. For a detailed explanation of the destiny of humanity obtain a copy of the book, The Gift of Immortality, ISBN 978-0-9844608-4-7.
WHAT HAPPENS WHEN HUMANS DIE?

The Bible describes two major events which take place at the death of a human being. These events are of extreme importance to the final destiny of each individual, because each event decides whether or not each individual will have a future existence.

What the Bible says about the physical and spirit record and the events which happen to humans after death is very different from what is taught by the religions of this world. According to the Bible, after a human dies, there are two records of their existence: one which is kept in heaven and one which is kept on earth.

NO MENTAL ACTIVITY AFTER DEATH

At death, the cerebral functions cease; there is no more thought process, no reward, no memory, no knowledge, and no access to this world. Death terminates an individual's interaction with this physical dimension of existence.

The Psalmist

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa.146:3-4 KJV).

Solomon Wrote

"For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (Ecc.9:5-6 NIV).

"Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go" (Ecc.9:10 KJV).

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psa.115:17 KJV).

The reason the dead cannot praise God is because they are no longer alive; their life has been silenced. In death, there is no thought process.

"Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Psa.6:4-5 KJV).

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for you have cast all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot celebrate you: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth. The living, he shall praise you, as I do this day: . . ." (Isa.38:17-19 KJV).
It is obvious by the abundant scriptural proof that all conscious thought and life-functions cease at death. The scriptures which speak of human speech, desires, and admonitions after death are either poetic metaphors or analogies, and in some cases, they are describing demonic impersonations of dead people.

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible which indicates the human life function continues in one state or another after death. The Bible says just the opposite; it clearly shows that the physical life of a human is a temporary condition, which can be terminated forever.

THE SLEEP OF DEATH

Many scriptures speak of the state of the dead as analogous to sleep. Because the dead do not have a conscious thought process (Psa.146:4; Ecc.9:5-6), sleep is an excellent description of the condition of death. Below are a few references which show how God views the condition of death:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan.12:2 KJV).

"He said these things. And after this He said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going that I may awaken him. Then his disciples said, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. But Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that he spoke of the sleep of slumber. Then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (Jn.11:11-14 Para.).

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this, he fell asleep" (Acts 7:59-60 NIV).

"But man dies and is cut off; and man expires; and where is he? As the waters go from the sea, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Who will grant that You would hide me in Sheol; You would hide me until Your anger turns back; that You would set a limit for me and remember me? If a man dies, will he revive? All the days of my warfare I will wait, until my change comes" (Job 14:10-14 Para.). See also 1.Kg.2:10; 1.Thes.4:13-17.

The billions of humans who have lived and died over the centuries are completely unaware of the passage of time. The interim period between the moment of death, when their conscious thoughts ceased, and the instant they awake to life again at the resurrection does not exist for them. It will be as if they had gone to sleep and awakened without dreaming; the passage of time is meaningless to them.
The Righteous Dead

In his first major evangelistic sermon after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostle Peter says, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day. . . . For David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:29, 34 KJV).

Peter made these statements about the dead fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected. At this point in history, King David was still dead and buried; he had not been resurrected to life.

The Writer to the Hebrews

In Hebrews, chapter 11, there is a long list of righteous individuals who died without receiving God's promises:

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:" (Heb. 11:33-35 KJV).

If any are worthy to receive the promises of God, it would surely be these champions of faith: Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and Moses whom God called his friends, Rahab who had faith that God would protect her for her kindness to the Israelite spies, and King David who loved God with great zeal. All of these are among the great men and women of faith. However, about thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection when the letter to the Hebrews was written, these righteous individuals were still dead.

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40 KJV) See also verse 13.

Twice in this eleventh chapter these righteous individuals are mentioned as having died without receiving the promises that God made to them.

The simple truth is that the righteous of all ages, are not alive; they are dead awaiting the return of Jesus to resurrect them and give them their reward. See Matt.24:29-31; 1.Cor.15:50-54; 1.Thes.4:16-17; 2.Thes.2:1-8.
WHERE DOES THE BODY GO AT DEATH?

Science defines death as the cessation of the life function (i.e., all systems cease to operate—the heart stops circulating blood, the brain stops sending orders to the organs, all thought process cease, the body becomes immobile, all regeneration processes stop, and the body starts to decay). The Bible defines physical death in the same way:

"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. For you have been taken out of it; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen.3:19 Para.).

God says our bodies were made from the elements of the earth and they will return to these same elements after death.

"All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust" (Job 34:15 KJV).

Solomon Wrote:

"For that which happens to the sons of men, and that which happens to beasts; even one event is to them. As this one dies, so that one dies; yea, one breath is to all; so that there is to the man no advantage over the beast; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and return to the dust" (Ecc.3:19-20 Para.).

Solomon says that both man and beast have the same death process; they both die and return to the elements from which they were made. There is no quarrel with the scientific definition here. At death the physical body in which God placed the spirit of man ceases to function. However, there is more to the physical body than the visible elements from which it is made.

WHERE DOES THE SPIRIT GO AT DEATH?

"Who knows the spirit of the sons of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goes downward to the earth?" (Ecc.3:21 Para.).

Solomon asked the same question many have asked over the centuries about the destination of the spirit in man. However, the great difference between Solomon and most others who ask this question is that Solomon knew the answer:

"Then the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecc.12:7 Para.).

The spirit of man returns to God who gave it. King David and Jesus also understood that God was the custodian of the human spirit.

"Into your hands I commit my spirit: you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" (Psa.31:5 KJV).
"And crying with a loud voice, he said, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. And saying this, He breathed out the spirit" (Lk. 23:46 Para.).

At death, this spirit, which is composed of material from the spirit-realm, returns to God the Father who inhabits the spirit-realm.

**The Spirits Cry Out**

The Book of Revelation has an allegorical reference to the spirits of the righteous dead crying out for God to avenge their death:

"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those having been slain for the word of God, and the witness which they had. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Rev.6:9-10 KJV). See also Gen.4:10; Heb.11:4.

Although the spirits under the altar are unconscious and unaware of anything happening on earth or anywhere else, they symbolically cry out for justice. This scripture confirms that these human spirits have been returned to the Father from their earthly habitation.

**IS THE BODY MORE THAN FLESH AND BLOOD?**

The scriptures show that the human body is just a chemical-electric reaction of a well designed structure of gas, fluids, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli with the spirit of man inhabiting it. And at death, the body becomes lifeless and useless:

"Then shall the dust [physical body] return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecc.12:7 KJV). See also Gen.2:7, Deut.32:18.

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jms.2:26 KJV).

**THE INVISIBLE ELEMENT OF THE BODY**

The scriptures clearly show that two separate elements are combined to form the creation called a human being. It is also extremely clear that, at death, the body returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God. However, how do we answer the clear scriptures which indicate a dead person is both in heaven and on the earth?

A brief study into physical and spiritual law shows that an object cannot occupy two different dimensions of time and space simultaneously. This knowledge helps solve the mystery surrounding the scriptures which seem to indicate that the dead are in two places at the same time. See Ecc.12:7; Psa.31:5; 49:14-15; Lk.23:46; Acts 2: 27-29, 34; Heb. chp.11.
There is an invisible physical element to the body which is preserved on earth after the body dies. This invisible element of the human creation is extremely important to the destiny of each individual. Without an understanding of what this essential element is, much of the Bible does not seem to make sense when it comes to the state of the dead and the various resurrections.

THE MYSTERIOUS REPHAIM

Who or what are the Rephaim? Bible Scholars have had great difficulty discovering the intended meaning of this Hebrew word, because its usage indicates that all dead humans remain on earth, instead of going to heaven or hell, which is a common belief.

The Hebrew word rephaim is often used as an allegory which describes the dead and gives vital insight into an extremely important unseen element of the human body.

The Hebrew word rephaim has three basic meanings: giant men, ghost of the dead, or shades (i.e., shadows). There are many references which refer to the dead as rephaim. These references also indicate that the rephaim occupy sheol, which is located within the confines of earth's environment. The following scriptures reveal the allegorical use of the word rephaim to describe dead humans:

"Sheol below is excited for you, to greet your coming, waiting for you rephaim, all the rulers of the earth. Rising them from their thrones, all the kings of the earth" (Isa.14:9 Literal Translation).

"The dead will not live, rephaim will not rise, therefore you have punished and eliminated them, and caused their memory to perish" (Isa.26:14 Literal Translation).

"The dead will live, their corpses will rise. Awake and shout for joy, dwellers in the dust! For dew of lights (morning) is your dew, and earth will give birth to rephaim" (Isa.26:19 Literal Translation).

In verse 14, Isaiah laments the state of the dead. But, in verse 19, he speaks of the hope of the resurrection. He says he rephaim (the dead) which are dead in the dust of the earth will be resurrected:

Psalm 88 speaks of those who are dead in the depths of the earth being devoid of life or conscious thought.

"For the dead will you do a wonder? Will the rephaim rise and praise you? Selah! (Psa.88:10 Literal Translation).

The following verses in Proverbs show that the foolish will occupy sheol where the rephaim are:

"The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who..."
lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" But little do they know that the dead [the Rephaim] are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave" (Pro.9:13-18 NIV).

"And he does not know that the rephaim are there. In the depths of sheol are her invited guests" (Prov.9:18 Literal Translation).

There is no doubt that the rephaim are a part of the human creation. The question is what part? The scriptures show that the rephaim are in sheol, have no conscious thought, are lifeless, and will be resurrected. See also Psa.6:5; 31:17; Pro.9:18, 21:16; Isa.26:14-19.

The rephaim cannot be any part of the spirit of man, because the spirit of man returns to God at death, but the rephaim are in a state of preservation on earth. A rephaim is the invisible yet permanent part of a physical human body, which continues to exist on earth after the human body decomposes and returns to the elements from which it came. The rephaim is the record of the human body which will be used when the body is resurrected to a physical existence.

SPIRIT AND PHYSICAL DIMENSIONS OF EXISTENCE

The scriptures show that spirit-beings and spirit-substance can exist in this physical dimension (See Gen. chps.18,19; Numb. chap.22; Job 1:6-12; Lk. chap.24; Rev.12:7-9). However, the scriptures also show that physical beings cannot exist in the spirit realm (See Jn.3:3-5; 8:13-23; 13:33-36; 1.Cor.15:50). Therefore, it makes sense that the spirit element of the human creation returns to God at death (Psa.31:5; Ecc.12:7; Lk.23:46), but the physical element of the human creation remains on earth (Gen.3:19; Job 34:15; Ecc.3:19-20).

Because God designed the human life-form with both spirit and physical elements, both of these elements will be used to reconstruct individuals at the time of their resurrection.

THE DEAD SHALL RISE FIRST

In Paul's writings to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians, he speaks of the first general resurrection of the dead at which time the elect of God will be given immortality at Christ's coming:

"Behold, I show you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1.Cor.15:51-52 KJV).

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which sleep [are dead], that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep [are dead] in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not
prevent [precede] them which are asleep [are dead]. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead shall rise first" (1.Thes.4:13-16 KJV).

These scriptures are very important, because Paul says the dead shall be raised and it is obvious that Paul understood the dead remained on earth awaiting their resurrection. See 1.Sam.2:6; Psa.49:14-15; Jn.3:13; Acts 2:29-34; Heb.11.

Because the spirit record of the elect returns to the Father, when Paul speaks of the dead rising from the earth, he must be referring to a physical record, that will rise from the earth where it resides in sheol awaiting the resurrection.

THE RESURRECTION OF ISRAEL

Another key to understanding the rephaim is found in Ezekiel, chapter 37. This chapter speaks of the resurrection of the Israelites to physical life sometime after the return of Christ.

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry" (Ezk.37:1-2 KJV).

This event transpires on earth, and these bones represent people who will be brought back to life.

"And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know. Again he said to me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones; Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezk.37:3-6 KJV).

Here, God promises to resurrect these dead Israelites to physical life (Ezk.37:11). The word for bone in Hebrew can also be used allegorically to mean a dead person.

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophesy to the wind, prophesy son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (Ezk.37:8-10 KJV).
There are similarities between this resurrection and the creation of Adam and Eve. God made Adam's body from the elements of the earth; then, he took a bone from Adam's body and made Eve. In this resurrection, God takes the bones (an allegory of the dead Israelites) to use as the foundational substance with which to reconstruct each individual Israelite. Adam, Eve, and these resurrected Israelites are constructed from the elements of the earth. And like Adam, these Israelites have no life force until air is placed into their lungs and they begin to breath.

"Therefore prophesy and say to them. Thus says the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves. O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And shall put my spirit in you and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the Lord have spoken and performed it says the Lord" (Ezk.37:12-14 KJV).

In order for these reconstructed bodies to function as sentient beings, the spirit of man must be put back into the body: "The body without the spirit is dead . . ." (Jms.2:26). At death, the body dies and becomes useless to the spirit which inhabited it.

THE RECORDS OF THE DEAD

The Father has promised to resurrect not only all of the Israelites who have ever lived and died without an opportunity for salvation but also the rest of humanity who have not had this opportunity. In order to accomplish this task, he has a record of each person's intellect (mind), which is stored in heaven.

The Sovereign God made provisions for a record to be kept of each individual who has ever existed. Humanly, we can understand that everything in the physical universe operates under a system of immutable laws, which control and sustain the physical creation. The physical record of man does not exist in some mysterious magical non-physical dimension of time and space; it exists as a physical thing, which was created as a part of the human being and exists under the specific laws which regulate its physical existence.

The rephaim or the record of a dead human body which occupies sheol is neither spirit nor human, does not have conscious thought, and is not animated or alive. However, it is real and made of physical substance which occupies this physical existence.

Because of the abundance of allegorical and factual references about sheol and the rephaim (record of dead bodies) which occupy it, the rephaim must be the physical record and pattern of each human body.
Logic tells us that, because this record or pattern is invisible yet physical, it must be composed of pure energy in one form or another. This invisible yet physical element is the physical record/pattern that God will use to reconstruct each individual's unique physical body at the proper time in his plan for the salvation of humanity.

The physical body decays and returns to its basic elements, while the rephaim, which is the record/pattern of the physical human form, remains on earth because it is a part of this physical existence and cannot enter the spirit-realm.

The Resurrection Process

The spirit record of a human is kept in heaven, the physical record is stored on earth, and each is being held ready for the resurrection process. The scriptures show that there will be two kinds of resurrections: one is to spirit life as a spirit-being, and the other is to physical life as a human being. Therefore, it is important to know the process involved in each.

Resurrection to Immortality at Christ's Return

"The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thes.4:16-17 KJV).

During the resurrection of the righteous dead, the following will occur:

• Each person's unique physical body will be reconstructed using the pattern that is stored on earth.
• Each person's unique spirit will be returned to earth from wherever it was stored in heaven and placed into the reconstructed body.
• Each person will then be changed to an immortal spirit-being.

Resurrection to Physical Life

The dead will be resurrected to physical life for the purpose of giving them an opportunity for salvation or for destroying them because of incorrigible wickedness. During the resurrection the following will occur:

• Each person's unique physical body will be reconstructed using the pattern that is stored on earth.
• Each person will then have the breath of life placed into their lungs to start the physical life processes.
• Each person's unique spirit will be returned to earth from wherever it was stored in heaven, and then it will be placed into the reconstructed body.
SPIRITS OF THE DEAD

Many people believe in what are commonly called ghosts, which are believed to be the spirits of dead people interacting with this physical existence for various reasons. The interaction with people by some of these supposedly dead individuals may seem to be harmless, but in reality such interactions are far from harmless.

It is well documented that supernatural events do occur. Hazy apparitions of people do appear in houses and other places. Banging, thumping, doors opening and closing seemingly on their own, objects moving about in a room, places which become extremely cold for no apparent reason, and many other types of seemingly unexplainable events occur regularly throughout the world.

These occurrences are not actually the manifestations of dead people, but are caused by evil spirits masquerading as people and causing these events to happen in order to terrorize people or to deceive people into interacting with them.

If one believes the biblical narrative, the answer to this question is simple. The Bible clearly shows that when a person is dead they are dead and have no thoughts or ability to interact with mankind or this physical existence (Psa.146:3-4; Ecc.9:5-6). The only exception noted in the Bible is the account of Saul, Samuel, and the Witch of Endor in which Samuel was awakened by God to pronounce a curse of death on Saul for his violation of the law concerning witches and necromancy.

Events attributed to ghosts of the dead interacting with the living and other such occurrences can easily be explained as natural phenomena or the manifestations of evil spirits.

SUMMARY

The dead are simply dead; they have no life function; they are not alive in heaven or any other place; they are dead without conscious thought awaiting a resurrection. Some of the dead will be resurrected to eternal life and immortality, some will be resurrected to physical life and be given their opportunity for salvation, and some will be resurrected to the punishment of a second death from which there is no return.

By B.L. Cocherell
What is the spiritual condition of infants, young children and the unborn? Some believe that infants and very young children who die are granted salvation, because they could not possibly understand what sin is. Others suggest that before a certain age, children are not held accountable for sin and because the unborn have never sinned they will be granted salvation. The major problem with these beliefs and assumptions is there is no scriptural conformation to support them.

In an attempt to support their position on the salvation of infants, young children, and the unborn, some point to Matthew 18:3-6 and Mark 10:13-16, which say that one must become as a little child to enter the Kingdom of God. So, to these people, infants and young children must be granted salvation by virtue of their youth. Notice what Jesus really said: "And he said, Truly I say to you, Unless you convert, and become as the little children, in no way can you enter into the Kingdom of God. Therefore, whosoever will humble himself as this little child, this one is the greater in the Kingdom of Heaven" (Matt.18:3-4 Para.).

Jesus neither said that little children will enter the Kingdom of God nor implied they are granted salvation. In this example, Jesus noted two things which are necessary in order to enter the Kingdom of God: first, a person must be converted; second, a person must become child-like in humility. It is very clear that Jesus was merely using young children as an example of the attitudes and attributes people must have if they expect to enter the Kingdom of God.

The Age of Accountability

The age a person must be before being spiritually accountable is impossible for humans to establish with certainty, because this is God the Father’s decision and it is predicated on belief, understanding, and repentance. All three of these are mental conditions, which are prerequisites to conversion and baptism, and all three are dependent on each other. For a person to have belief, there must be some understanding of what is believed.

Jesus says to repent and believe the Gospel: "Now that after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God. And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel" (Mark 1:14-15 Para.).
In order to repent, a person must have an understanding of what to repent of (re-think) and what the gospel (good news) of the Kingdom is. In both Acts 16:31-33 and Acts 8:27-38, the people spoken of understood the circumstances surrounding Jesus and what he preached. Therefore, they were able to make their decisions based on the facts presented.

A major prerequisite for baptism is repentance: "Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38 KJV). But, repent of what? Be sorry for what? Desire to change what? In order to repent, a person must first understand something about the plan of God.

It is quite evident that a person cannot have the kind of belief, understanding, and repentance necessary for baptism unless he or she is old enough to have developed the mental capacity to make intelligent decisions based on the information presented. It is also evident that infants and young children have not developed the life experience and emotional stability to make and stand behind decisions of the magnitude that must be made before and after baptism. All of the scriptural examples show only adults (including young adults) being baptized, but no examples of infants or young children being converted.

The setting of a minimum age requirement for conversion is an impossibility because of the differences in the speed with which each individual grows into mental and emotional maturity. The ability to make decisions concerning conversion depends entirely on a person's maturity level, understanding of the gospel, and desire to follow God's way of life (See Luke 3:8).

Common sense dictates that infants and young children have not had the time or the life experience necessary to understand the requirements of salvation. They are certainly not able to understand the awesome implications or responsibilities of making a covenant with God. Therefore, the spiritual condition of infants and young children is the same as any unconverted person who has never had the opportunity for salvation.

God will only grant immortality and eternal life after a person goes through the process of conversion. Infants and young children who die before Christ's return will be brought back to life during the resurrection of "The Rest of the Dead" (Rev.20:4-6). Those who remain alive on earth at Christ's coming will live into the first thousand years of Christ's reign and have their opportunity for salvation at that time.
The Unborn

For those who profess to believe in the God of the Bible and follow biblical concepts, precepts, and principles the question of whether or not a woman's fetus is a living person cannot be answered by science alone, because the question of human life concerns more than the physical body, it also concerns the human spirit. Therefore, the answer to the question of when human life begins is both scientific and theological, which makes it impossible to give a simple and concise answer without reviewing both the scientific and biblical definitions of what human life is and reviewing what the Bible and Judaism have to say about a woman's fetus.

There is no doubt that, according the Bible, human life is sacred. The God of the Bible shows through many different concepts, principles, instructions, and laws that human life is sacred and that all life must be shown respect.

There is also no doubt that a woman's egg fertilized by a man's sperm, will result in a new and unique individual being born if this process is allowed to proceed uninterrupted. The question is not if the physical process which results in human life begins at the moment of conception, because it clearly does. The question is when does human life begin according to the Bible; at conception, at some point during gestation, or at the moment of birth when the breath of life enters the lungs?

Clearly, the point at which the life of a human begins defines whether or not a fetus is a person with the spirit of man (i.e., a human spirit). Therefore, the following three questions which must be answered by those who profess to follow the God of the Hebrew Bible are:

1. What does the God of the Bible consider human life?
2. When does human life begin according to the Bible?
3. What is the scientific definition of physical life?

Once these three questions are answered, whether or not a fetus is a person according to the Bible can be determined.

GodKnowsUsintheWomb

The biblical record is replete with the names of individuals, such as Samson, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah, kings David and Cyrus, John the Baptist, and Christ who were predestined to come into existence before their birth and to perform tasks to further the Sovereign God's plan for the salvation of humanity. Because these individuals were predestined to exist and because of the language used in describing them or their prophetic missions prior to their birth, some people believe this is proof that a fetus is a living individual with the spirit of man. The following are two such examples:

"Did not he that made me in the womb make him? and did not one fashion us in the womb?" (Job 31:15 KJV).
"For you have possessed my reins: you have covered me in my mother's womb. I will praise you; for I am fearfully and wonderfully made: marvelous are your works; and that my soul knows right well. My substance was not hid from you, when I was made in secret, and curiously wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes did see my substance, yet being imperfect; and in your book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them" (Psa.139:13-16 KJV).

There are many other scriptures which set forth this same tone and show a personal identity of the fetus. On the surface these scriptures seem to indicate a fetus is a living individual within its mother's womb. Although the Bible clearly shows that God is involved in the creation of humans, this involvement and the ascribing of a personal identity to a fetus does not prove that a fetus is a living individual with the spirit of man as a part of its composition. Rather, these scriptures just show God's creative process, his control over it, and his ability to intervene in human affairs in order to produce a desired outcome.

Many quote the following text where the Creator God tells Jeremiah that he was predestined to become a prophet as a proof that life begins in the womb:

"Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Before I formed you in the belly I knew you; and before you came forth out of the womb I sanctified you, and I ordained you a prophet to the nations" (Jer.1:4-5). See also Isa.49:1-5.

Although the Creator God predetermined that Jeremiah would be born and become a prophet before his physical conception, to say that this proves Jeremiah was considered a living entity before his birth is to apply a meaning that is not there. In saying that he knew Jeremiah before he was formed and before he was born only proves that the Creator had the ability to predetermine events and cause them to happen; it does not prove a fetus is a living individual with the spirit of man in the womb.

What this and other scriptures with the same tone prove is that some individuals are predetermined to come into existence to fulfill a specific function and responsibility for God as he guides the affairs of mankind in order to work out his plan and purpose for us.

**John The Baptist**

Some people believe that the angel's announcement to Zacharias telling him his son would possess the holy spirit from the womb, proves John the Baptist was alive with the spirit of man and the holy spirit in the womb. However, the Greek language of this text does not support this belief:

"But the angel said to him, Fear not, Zacharias: for your prayer is heard; and your wife Elisabeth shall bear you a son, and you shall call his name John. And you shall have joy and gladness; and many shall rejoice at his birth. For he shall be great in the sight of the
Lord, and shall drink neither wine nor strong drink; and he shall be filled with the holy spirit, even from his mother's womb" (Lk.1:13-15 KJV Para.).

The English word from in verse 15 is translated from the Greek word ek; a primary preposition denoting a point of origin (i.e., the point from where action or motion proceeds), from or out of a place, a time, or a cause. If the writer had intended to mean that John possessed the holy spirit in the womb he would have used the Greek word en; a primary preposition denoting a fixed position in a place, a time or a state of existence.

The Greek language clearly reveals that John did not have the holy spirit in the womb, but received it at birth. Moreover, the apostle James tells us, "For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also" (Jms.2:26 KJV).

The English word spirit in verse 26 is translated from the Greek word pneuma, which means a current of air, a breath or a breeze; by analogy or figuratively, a spirit. Regardless of whether James was referring to the breath of life or the spirit of man, a human body without both is not alive.

The biblical fact is that human life as God created it does not exist without the breath of life and the spirit of man within the human body. It is also clear that the holy spirit does not dwell in a body devoid of the breath of life; therefore, a logical assumption is that the holy spirit entered John after his birth as a breathing, living person.

The Babe in Elizabeth's Womb

Many quote the following text as proof that a fetus is a sentient, cognitive individual in the womb:

"And Mary arose in those days, and went to the hill country with haste, to a city of Juda; And entered into the house of Zacharias, and saluted Elisabeth. And it came to pass, that, when Elisabeth heard the salutation of Mary, the babe leaped in her womb; and Elisabeth was filled with the holy spirit. And she spoke out with a loud voice, and said, Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the fruit of your womb. And whence is this to me, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? For, lo, as soon as the voice of your salutation sounded in my ears, the babe leaped in my womb for joy" (Lk.1:39-44 KJV).

In an attempt to show that this text proves the fetus in Elisabeth's womb was a sentient being with the spirit of man, some translations insert the words for joy after the word leaped in verse 44 to show that the fetus was able to perceive and understand what was taking place outside the womb and leaped for joy in response to Mary's salutation.

The English word leaped in this text is translated from the Greek word skirto, which basically means to jump, i.e. to sympathetically move.
This scripture simply records the reaction of the fetus being stimulated by Elisabeth's emotional response to hearing Mary's greeting and Elisabeth being filled with the holy spirit. There is nothing in this event which indicates a fetus is a sentient being with cognitive ability.

A literal translation of verse 44 is: "Lo, for, as soon as sounded the voice salutation of yours in ears mine, for joy leaped the babe in womb my."

In this verse, the English word joy is translated from the Greek word agalliasis, which basically means exultation and specially, welcome. However, agalliasis is a constructed word which is found only in the Bible and the early church writings with one other exception as noted in the Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Volume 1, page 19.

Although the Greek meaning of agalliasis can mean joy, the meaning of agalliasis is more metaphorical and idiomatic than literal and does not in any way ascribe cognitive thought to the fetus in Elisabeth's womb. Moreover, the Greek language in verse 44 can be interpreted to mean the joy (agalliasis) was possessed by either Elizabeth or the fetus. The context of Luke 1:39-44 seems to show that the joy being expressed was Elizabeth's, not the fetus'.

The question of whether or not the fetus in Elizabeth's womb, which was predetermined by the Creator God to become John the Baptist, was a living human with cognitive thought and the spirit of man can be answered from the biblical texts which explain what human life is and is not.

A Quality of Life Issue

Solomon who was given the gift of wisdom by the Creator God says the following:

"If a man fathers a hundred children, and live many years, so that the days of his years are many, and his soul is not filled with good, and also that he is not buried; I say, that an untimely birth is better than he. For he came in with vanity, and departs in darkness, and his name shall be covered with darkness. Moreover he that has not seen the sun, nor known any thing: has more rest than the other" (Eccl.6:3-5 KJV Para.). See also Eccl.4:1-3.

The English phrase untimely birth in verse 3 is translated from the Hebrew word nephel, which means something fallen, i.e., a miscarriage of a fetus in this text.

Solomon is not advocating abortion nor is he attributing sentient or cognitive ability to the unborn; he is just addressing a quality of life issue and a logical alternative by stating that it is better for some not to be born than to live an exceedingly miserable life.
While lamenting his current situation, Job voiced similar logic to that of Solomon about quality of life issues and life's difficulties. Notice what Job said at the end of a litany of curses he pronounced against the day of his birth:

"Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost when I came out of the belly?" (Job 3:11 KJV).

Although poetic the King James translation of the Hebrew text does not accurately convey what Job said. A more accurate translation based on the Hebrew language of this text would be, "Why was I not dead in the womb or died at birth."

"Why then did you let me be born? Why did not you let me die at birth? It would have been as if I had not existed, I should have gone directly from the womb to the grave" (Job 10:18-19 Para). See also Job.3:2-4,11,19.

Rather than affirming that a fetus is a viable human life, Job indicates that human life begins at birth.

Although both Solomon and Job advance a strong argument for quality being more important than being alive under certain circumstances, neither advocated abortion, both just state a fact. Clearly, it seems better for some to never be born than to endure a life of misery.

**HUMAN LIFE**

Jesus said that there are two elements of the human existence and that we must fear God who can terminate both the physical and non-physical elements:

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell" (Matt.10:28 KJV). See Gen.6:1-7; Lk.12:4-5.

The English word *body* in this text is translated from the Greek word *soma*, which means a physical human/animal body, or corps. The Greek word *soul* is *psuche*, which means *breath*, *life*, or *mind*. Here, there are two distinct elements of physical and non-physical human life spoken of in the Bible and both elements can be completely destroyed by God.

Understanding that a human body is only a physical housing through which we can experience this physical dimension of time and space helps us to understand what human life is and the importance of knowing when life begins and our responsibility to respect life as God's creation.

**The Physical Element**

In order to determine what God considers human life and its life-force, we need to review what the Bible says about the creation of mankind and where this life-force resides within the physical body.
The Breath of Life

"And the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen.2:7 Para.). See also verse 8; Deut.32:18.

The English word breath in this text is a translation of the Hebrew word neshamah, which can mean wind, vital breath, divine inspiration, or intellect.

In verse 7, the English word soul is a translation of the Hebrew word nephesh, which means a breathing creature or animal, vitality, beast, body, or breath. The Hebrew word nephesh means a state of being alive.

The Creator formed the lifeless body of the first human out of the elements of the earth and brought it to life by blowing air into its lungs.

The Genesis account of the beginning of Adam's life clearly documents that, for a person to be alive, he or she must be breathing. This is clearly the case, because when a person stops breathing all bodily functions begin to shut down: the brain ceases to function and the body becomes immobile and begins to decay.

The Creator God said the following about the breath of life as he was about to destroy the earth in a flood:

"And, behold, I, even I, do bring a flood of waters upon the earth, to destroy all flesh, wherein is the breath of life, from under heaven; and every thing that is in the earth shall die" (Gen.6:17 KJV). See also Gen.7:15, 21-22.

The English words breath and life are translated from the Hebrew words ruwach and chay, which respectively mean wind, life, and a living thing.

The Psalmist said the following concerning the breath of life and the death of a human:

"His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa.146:4 KJV).

"You hid your face, they are troubled: you take away their breath, they die, and return to their dust" (Psa.104:29 KJV).

The book of Jeremiah contains God's condemnation of men who make, worship, and trust in lifeless man-made idols:

"Every man is brutish in his knowledge: every founder is confounded by the carved image: for his molten image is falsehood, and there is no breath in them. They are vanity, and the work of errors: in the time of their visitation they shall perish" (Jer.10:14-15). See also Hab.2:18-19; Jer.51:17-18.
Notice that these idols are lifeless because they do not have the breath of life in them.

Clearly, it is a biblical and a scientific fact that the breath (i.e., oxygen in the lungs) begins and sustains the physical life function of an individual after birth. It is also a fact that a lack of oxygen terminates the human life function.

**Life Is in the Blood**

In the Book of Leviticus, chapter 17, we are told that life is in the blood:

"And whatsoever man there be of the house of Israel, or of the strangers that sojourn among you, that eats any manner of blood: I will even set my face against that soul [nephesh] that eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. "For the life of the flesh is in the blood: . . ..Therefore I said to the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood…. For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof:…." (Lev.17:10-14 KJV).

In this age, we can understand the biological implications of this prohibition. The heart circulates the blood throughout the body, which in turn performs its life sustaining functions. However, circulating blood is of no value unless it is saturated with oxygen in a specific ratio with the blood—no oxygen, no life—no breath of life, no life.

What is it that activates life and that is the most essential sustaining force of life from a biblical perspective? It is the breath of life—the oxygen, which is in the blood. Without oxygen to saturate the blood, physical human life cannot exist.

Since life is in the blood, it follows that the sperm and egg are not a human life as there is no blood within them. It also follows that, until the fertilized egg matures to the point to where it has its own independent blood and oxygen supply it has no independent life as defined by the Bible. Moreover, the blood and oxygen within a fetus originates from the mother and it is sustained by her life-force.

A fetus apart for its mother's sustaining blood and oxygen cannot survive, unless it begins to breathe on its own after leaving its mother's womb. Therefore, logic tells us that, until a fetus is separated from its mother's womb and is functioning with oxygenated blood separate from its mother's womb, it is not physically a viable individual life.

If God had not activated Adam's life functions by blowing air into his lungs, Adam would not have lived. But, is human life no more than a chemical-electric reaction of a well designed structure of gas, fluid, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli? Is this the sum of what God created as physical mankind? If so, humans would be no different from any other animal. But humans are different from animals.
and the rest of creation in many obvious ways. Humans are on a higher plane of life existence than the rest of creation. But, what is it that makes mankind different? According to the Bible, it is the unseen physical and spirit elements of the human creation which makes us different from the rest of creation.

The Spiritual Element of the Human Creation

There is another element to human life besides the physical body. This element is the spirit in man which separates us from the rest of creation:

Job said, "But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8 KJV).

The English word spirit is a translation of the Hebrew word ruwach, which can mean wind or mind. Ruwach does not mean a physical being or a being at all. Rather, it denotes something that is not physical, which in the context of this text, has to do with God's ability to impart understanding to the human mind.

The prophet Zechariah said this about the creation of the spirit in man:

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, says the Lord, which stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zech.12:1 KJV). See also Ecc.12:5-7.

The human spirit is a non-physical element of the human body which truly separates humans from the rest of the physical creation. God calls this non-physical element the spirit in man and he has designed it to be a part of the human body. It is this spirit that gives mankind the ability to be on a higher thought-plane than all other physical creatures on earth.

The spirit in man is only one of the two elements of human life which the scientific community does not understand or ascribe to the human life function. Nevertheless, the spirit in man is of major importance to human life before and after death.

At the moment the fetus is removed from its mother's womb and inhales the breath of life it becomes a living spirit housed in a physical body:

"And the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground, and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul" (Gen.2:7 Para.). See also Gen.1:26-27.

THE GOD OF SPIRITS

The scriptures show that God formed the spirit which lives within the human body. Animals do not have the potential for immortality and they do not relate to God in the same way as humans. Furthermore, they do
not have the ability to worship or interface with God like humans do (Rom.8:14-16).

As Moses and Aaron were beseeching God for the lives of the Israelites: "They fell on their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?" (Num.16:22 Para.). See also Num.27:16.

The spirit in man is not an undefinable essence nor is it mysteriously apart from man. The spirit of man is man. The physical body is the habitation of the spirit, which is the sentient and conscious element of the human creation.

Where Does the Body Go at Death?

Science defines death as the cessation of the life function (i.e., all systems cease to operate—the heart stops circulating blood, the brain stops sending orders to the organs, all thought processes cease, the body becomes immobile, all regeneration processes stop, and the body starts to decay).

The Bible defines physical death in the same way as science:

"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground. For you have been taken out of it; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Gen.3:19 Para.).

God says that our bodies were made from the elements of the earth and they will return to these same elements after death.

King Solomon wrote the following about what happens to the physical body after death:

"For that which happens to the sons of men, and that which happens to beasts; even one event is to them. As this one dies, so that one dies; yes, one breath is to all; so that there is to the man no advantage over the beast; for all is vanity. All go to one place; all are of the dust, and return to the dust" (Ecc.3:19-20 Para.).

Solomon says that both man and beast have the same death process; they both die and return to the elements from which they were made. There is no quarrel between what Solomon said and the scientific definition of death. At death, the physical body in which God placed the spirit of man ceases to function. However, there is more to the physical body than the visible elements from which it is made.

Where Does the Spirit Go at Death?

Solomon asked the same question many have asked over the centuries about the destination of the spirit in man:

"Who knows the spirit of the sons of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the beast whether it goes downward to the earth?" (Ecc.3:21 Para.).
The great difference between Solomon and most people who ask this question is he knew the answer:

"Then the dust shall return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecc.12:7 Para.).

The spirit of man returns to God who is the one who gives the human spirit to each individual who survives the birth process and takes their first breath. Jesus also understood this when he said just before he died: "Father into your hands I commit my spirit. And saying this, his breath left him" (Lk.23:46 Para.).

Jesus' exhaled is last breath and died. His spirit, which was composed of material from the spirit dimension of existence, returned to God the Father who inhabits the spirit-realm.

THE RESURRECTION OF ISRAEL

Another key to understanding when human life begins is found in Ezekiel, chapter 37. This chapter contains the prophecy of the valley of dry bones, which are Israelites who have died throughout the ages.

This prophecy clearly shows these Israelites will not be given a spirit body like those who participate in the first resurrection, but they will be brought back to a physical life as human beings after Christ returns, in order to receive an opportunity for salvation under the New Covenant with national Israel.

Ezekiel says the following about the bones of these Israelites:

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them.

Then said he to me, Prophesy to the wind, prophesy son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (Ezk.37:8-10 KJV).

There are similarities between this resurrection and the creation of Adam and Eve. God made Adam's body from the elements of the earth, and then he took a bone from Adam's body and made Eve. In this resurrection, God takes the bones (an allegory of the dead Israelites) to use as the foundational substance with which to reconstruct each individual Israelite. Adam, Eve, and these resurrected Israelites are constructed from the elements of the earth. And like Adam, these Israelites have no life-force until air is placed into their lungs and they begin to breathe.

In order for these reconstructed bodies to function as sentient beings, the spirit of man must be put back into them, because the body without the spirit of man is lifeless (See James 2:26). At death, the body dies and becomes useless to the spirit of man which inhabited it.
The Records of the Dead

The Father has promised to not only resurrect all of the Israelites who have ever lived and died without an opportunity for salvation but also the rest of humanity who have not had this opportunity. In order to accomplish this task, in addition to the spirit of each deceased individual, he has a record of each person's intellect (mind) stored in heaven.

Humanly, we can understand that everything in the physical universe operates under a system of immutable laws, which control and sustain the physical creation. The physical record of man does not exist in some mysterious magical non-physical dimension of time and space; it exists as a physical thing, which was created as a part of the human being and exists under the specific laws which regulate its physical existence.

The scriptures tell us that the rephaim or the record of a dead human body, which occupies a place noted in the Bible as sheol, is not spirit or human, does not have conscious thought, and is not animated or alive. However, it is real and made of physical substance which occupies physical time and space within this dimension of existence.

Because of the abundance of allegorical and factual references about sheol and the rephaim which occupy it, the rephaim must be the physical record and pattern of each human body. For details about the rephaim, see chapter 12, The State of the Dead.

Although this record or pattern is invisible, it is still physical; therefore, it must be composed of pure energy in one form or another. This invisible, physical element is the physical record/pattern which God will use to reconstruct each individual's unique physical body at the proper time in his plan for the salvation of humanity.

The physical body decays and returns to its basic elements, but the physical record/pattern of the individual remains intact and is stored on earth.

The rephaim, which is the record/pattern of the physical human form, remains on earth because it is a part of this physical dimension of time and space and cannot enter the spirit realm.

The Resurrection Process

The spirit record of a human is kept in heaven, the physical record is stored on earth, and each is being held ready for the resurrection process. The scriptures show that there will be two kinds of resurrections: one is to spirit life as a spirit-being, and the other is to physical life as a human being.

The resurrection to a physical life, like the one shown in the prophecy of dry bones, first requires the construction of a physical body, then oxygen being placed in the lungs to bring the body to life, and finally the placing of the spirit of man back into the body in order for it to function
as a sentient human. Again, it is the breath of life which allows human life to begin.

**YOU MUST BE BORN AGAIN**

While explaining the change which must take place in order for a human to become a spirit-being, Jesus used the analogy of the human birth process. Within this analogy, we can determine when human life begins and when the spirit of man enters into an individual.

Notice what Jesus says to the Pharisee Nicodemus about being born of the spirit:

**John 3:1-10 Paraphrased**

"But there was a man from the Pharisees, Nicodemus his name, a ruler of the Jews. This one came to Jesus by night, and said to him, Rabbi, we know that you have come as a teacher from God. For no one is able to do these miracles which you do, except God be with him" (vs.1-2).

As most Jews of his day, Nicodemus was looking for the Messiah to come for the purpose of delivering the Jews from captivity, establishing the Kingdom of God, and restoring Israel as a nation. However, he did not expect to hear what Jesus told him in reference to being a participant in the Kingdom of God:

"Jesus said to him, Truly, truly I say to you, if one does not receive birth from above, he is not able to see the kingdom of God. Nicodemus said to him, How is a man able to be born, being old? He is not able to enter into his mother's womb a second time and be born?" (vs.3-4).

From the language Christ used, Nicodemus understood Jesus was talking about a literal birth, in which the fetus comes out of the womb and becomes a living, breathing individual. However, in his mind, he could only picture a physical birth. But, Jesus was not speaking of a physical rebirth; he was speaking of a completely different kind of birth process:

"Jesus answered, Truly, truly I say to you, If one does not receive birth out of water and spirit, he is not able to enter into the kingdom of God. That receiving birth from the flesh is flesh; and that receiving birth from the spirit is spirit" (vs.5-6).

Jesus clearly explains to Nicodemus that he is speaking of a birth into the spirit-realm and not a rebirth into the physical world:

"Do not wonder because I told you. You must receive birth from above. The spirit breathes where he desires, and you hear his voice; but you do not know from where he comes, and where he goes—so is everyone having received birth from the spirit. Nicodemus answered and said to him, How can these things come about? Jesus
answered and said to him, You are a teacher of Israel, and you do not know these things" (vs.7-10).

According to what is written in the New Testament, a person receives birth from above when the spirit of adoption enters into them after they have come out of the baptismal water, which is symbolic of the death of the old person.

In a physical birth, life apart from the womb begins at the moment the breath of life enters the newborn's lungs. If this never happens, there is no live human body which the spirit of man can inhabit. It is exactly the same in being born as a spiritual son in the Sovereign Father's family and Kingdom. If the Father's spirit of adoption never enters into a person, that person is not born of the spirit as a new creation in the Father's earthly family of king-priests. See Rom.8:14-16; Eph.4-24; Rev.1:5, 5:10.

**Miscarriage or Manslaughter**

Exodus 21:22-25 is often quoted as proof that a human life begins in the womb:

"If men strive, and hurt a woman with child, so that her fruit depart [from her], and yet no mischief follow: he shall be surely punished, according as the woman's husband will lay upon him; and he shall pay as the judges [determine]. And if [any] mischief follow, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, Burning for burning, wound for wound, stripe for stripe." (Ex.21:22-25 KJV).

Verse 22 of this instruction shows the miscarriage of the fetus is due to injury inflicted on the woman during a fight between men. However, the injury does not rise to the level of a capital offence for which the penalty would be death. Instead, the injury is determined to be a civil matter for which the penalty is compensation for the miscarriage to be determined by the husband and the court.

The fact that the husband must be compensated for the miscarriage of the fetus tells us the husband suffers a loss of one of his possessions (i.e., a live child). Because a potential child has been lost, restitution for this loss must follow the guidelines for a loss of property or livestock noted in Exodus 22:1-15.

What seems clear from verse 22 is that the miscarriage results in a fetus which does not become a live infant, otherwise, no monetary payment would be due to the woman's husband.

Although nothing in the language of verses 23-25 clearly tells us it is the woman who sustains a lingering physical disability or dies due to her injuries, this instruction does speak to the laws delineating punishment where no compensation can be made for a physical injury or a loss of life.
Under the laws of restitution and retribution which the Creator God gave to govern ancient Israel, a person who wronged another person was to make restitution and just compensation for the damage caused. However, in certain situations, such as murder, no restitution could be made, because a human life cannot be restored or compensated for by the perpetrator nor could an eye or a hand lost due to the initial actions of another person be restored. Therefore, a punishment fitting the severity of the loss was required—a life for a life, an eye for an eye. See Lev.24:19-20; Deut.19:16-21.

We are many centuries removed from the fountain of knowledge which flowed within ancient Israel and there is no consensus of opinion among Hebrew scholars (past or present) as to whom is referred to in verse 23. Additionally, verse 23 does not say someone dies as a result of the injury. The only thing we can know for sure is that, as a result of either a death or a disability, a severe punishment was to be administered.

Exodus 21:22-25 cannot honestly be used to prove or disprove whether or not human life begins within the womb.

**Innocent Blood**

The most common argument that human life begins in the womb and that abortion is murder comes from the belief that abortion is the termination of an innocent human life. The following scriptures clearly say that the shedding of innocent blood is a capital crime in God's eyes:

"Cursed is he that takes a reward to kill an innocent person" (Deut.27:25 Para.).

"Yes, they sacrificed their sons and their daughters to devils, And shed innocent blood, even the blood of their sons and of their daughters, whom they sacrificed to the idols of Canaan: and the land was polluted with blood" (Psa.106:37-38 KJV).

"These six things does the Lord hate: yes, seven are an abomination to him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood..." (Prov.6:16-17 KJV). See also Jer.7:6; Psa.106:37-38; Prov.6:16-17.

These is no doubt that a fetus has the potential to become a living individual; however, the assumption that abortion is shedding innocent blood begs the question of whether or not a fetus in the womb is a living individual according to the biblical definition of a living individual who has the spirit of man.

**JUDAISM AND ABORTION**

In Judaism, the biblical perspective concerning abortion is reasonably unambiguous in that biblical concepts and principles and rabbin-
ical writings show a consensus of opinion concerning the status of a fetus. It is generally agreed that, although the fetus has the potential of human life, it is not an individual, but is considered a part of the woman's body. Virtually all Jewish authorities would agree that abortion is not defined as murder under biblical law.

There are many deferring opinions expressed in rabbinical writings, such as the Mishnah and the Talmud, as to the circumstances when a woman has a legitimate reason to have a therapeutic or a non-therapeutic abortion. However, the consensus of opinion is that, just as one is constrained by biblical law from mutilating one's own body, so too a woman is not permitted to capriciously abort her fetus as a matter of convenience or as a means of birth control in order to avoid the responsibility of bearing and caring for a child.

Orthodox Judaism's view of the abortion issue is not easy for most people to understand, because it is rooted in both tradition and biblical law and there is no consensus among Jewish scholars and rabbis to establish a single principle by which to determine the morality of abortion. However, much of what is taught by Orthodox Judaism concerning abortion is based in biblical concepts and logic.

Jewish tradition divides the issue of abortion into four basic categories:

- The legal status of the fetus
- The exact moment when the spirit of man is imparted
- The criteria for a therapeutic abortion
- The criteria for a non-therapeutic abortion

**The Legal Status of the Fetus**

While recognizing that a fetus in its mother's womb has the potential of human life, Jewish opinion does not consider a fetus to be alive with the spirit of man; therefore, the fetus does not have legal standing of its own.

Rashi, a well known 12th century commentator on the Bible and Talmud, says regarding the fetus: "lay nefesh hu-it is not a person." (Responsa Koah Schorr, no. 20). The Talmud contains the expression "ubar yerech imo-the fetus is as the thigh of its mother", which shows that a fetus is deemed to be part and parcel of the pregnant woman's body. This assessment is correct because the mother's body sustains the fetus.

**The Exact Moment When the Spirit of Man Is Imparted**

Because of the many opinions, speculation, and disagreement among the various rabbis and Jewish scholars throughout history, the exact moment in time when the spirit of man is imparted and a human body becomes a sentient being cannot be determined from Jewish literature. The only part of this issue that there seems to be some agreement on, is that it is a secret of God which will be revealed when the Messiah comes.
Therefore, this issue has little or no bearing in Jewish decisions concerning abortion.

**The Criteria for a Therapeutic Abortion**

There are two principles which determine if abortion is justified. The first is that a fetus is only a potential life until it leaves the woman's body. Therefore, it is justified to sacrifice a potential life in order to save an existing life. The second is that of self-defense. In Jewish law, one is permitted to defend oneself, even to the extent of taking the attacker's life should one's own life be in jeopardy. Therefore, if the woman's life is in danger from the pregnancy, it is permissible to remove the fetus to save the woman's life.

**The Criteria a Non-therapeutic Abortion**

There are many opinions and much relevant information to be considered which lead to different conclusions concerning non-therapeutic abortions in the Jewish community. Some of these are as follows:

- A pregnancy which impairs the mother's ability to provide milk to nurse an existing infant who could not survive without this milk for various reasons. This situation becomes an issue of saving an existing child.
- Long-term effects of pregnancy to the woman, such as her mental health, or a permanent physical disability.
- Adultery, Rape, and Incest.

The majority of Jewish legal opinion is that abortion is permissible at any stage of the pregnancy if the well-being of the woman is jeopardized. However, the well-being of the unborn child's future after birth is not grounds for abortion. The determining factor to prohibit or permit a non-therapeutic abortion is for the health of the mother, not the fate or condition of the fetus.

Although biblical law is silent concerning abortion, Judaism, seems to have a reasonably clear and balanced biblical perspective concerning the subject of abortion.

**The Pursuer and the Perused**

R. Huna said, "A minor in pursuit may be slain to save the pursued. Thus he maintains that a pursuer, whether an adult or a minor, need not be formally warned. R. Hisda asked R. Huna: we learnt [learned]: Once his head has come forth, he may not be harmed, because one life may not be taken to save another. But why so? Is he not a pursuer? — There it is different, for she is pursued by heaven." See Talmud - Mas. Sanhedrin 72b.

"This refers to a woman giving birth, whose life is endangered. Now, if the fetus put forth any limb but the head, it may be cut off, so as to facilitate delivery, and save the mother. But if his head issued, it is regarded as alive, and the mother may not be saved at his expense. I.e., in
seeking to be born, he is as a pursuer endangering his mother's life. There it is different [a difference], for she is pursued by heaven." See Talmud - Mas. Sanhedrin 72b.

There is no doubt that murder of another human violates God's law (Ex.20:13) and there is no doubt that God considers the malicious premeditated taking of a human life to be murder and a capital crime worthy of the death of the perpetrator (Gen.9:6; Ex.20:5). However, the scriptures clearly indicate that human life begins at birth when the breath of life animates the body and the spirit of man is placed into the body.

One simply cannot prove from the Bible that therapeutic or non-therapeutic abortion is a violation of God's law. What one can prove is that human life is precious and that God does not look favorably on those who treat human life with callous indifference.

Because no direct or indirect law can be cited from the Bible concerning therapeutic or non-therapeutic abortion, the decision to abort or not to abort should be weighed carefully considering all of the biblical concepts and principles dealing with the sacredness of life and the long term well-being of the woman clearly in mind.

Although abortion is an extremely complex issue, the decision to abort or not to abort for an adult woman who has the indwelling of the holy spirit and the ability to make the decision, it is within her authority to decide and is a matter of conscience.

Both biblical and scientific evidence clearly show that, in order for a person to be considered alive, that person must be breathing. Moreover, the Bible clearly shows that the spirit of man cannot inhabit a body which is not enlivened with the breath of life. Therefore, a logical conclusion is that a woman's fetus is not a living person with the spirit of man until it breathes the breath of life.

SUMMARY

Infants And Young Children

The question of whether or not infants and very young children who die are granted salvation is answered by the apostle Peter when he explained the prerequisites for receiving the holy spirit, which transforms a person into a child of God:

"Then Peter said to them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the holy spirit" (Acts 2:38 KJV).

Infants and very young children who die are in the same spiritual condition as any unconverted person who has never had the opportunity for salvation.

Infants and young children who die before the return of Christ will be resurrected in the resurrection of the rest of the dead. Those who
remain alive at his coming will live into the first thousand years of Christ's reign and have their opportunity for salvation at that time.

**The Unborn**

Although a human fetus has the potential for human life outside the womb, human life as defined by the biblical record does not exist without the breath of life and the spirit of man within the human body. Additionally, the holy spirit does not dwell in a body devoid of the breath of life, therefore, the logical conclusion is that the unborn fetus it does not qualify for participation in God's plan of salvation became it never became fully human with the breath of life and the spirit of man.

By B.L. Cocherell
Many hold the popular belief that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved. The teaching of going to heaven immediately after death to receive one’s reward for a righteous life is almost universally believed among most who profess to follow Christ. To even question this teaching would seem like blasphemy to many who believe heaven is their ultimate reward. However, among those who believe that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved, there are many different ideas as to when, and how one gets to heaven.

What does the Bible actually teach about the rewards of the saved? If the dead in Christ go to heaven immediately after death and this is their reward for a righteous life, we should be able to find abundant proof within the Bible showing when, and how people obtain this reward. Can this type of documentation be found in the Bible? You may be surprised to find that it cannot, but what is found in the Bible about the rewards of the saved is far more exciting than the nebulous idea of going off to heaven without a clue as to what one would do there for eternity.

THE WORD HEAVEN

There are three heavens referred to in the Bible:

- Earth’s atmosphere (Gen.1:20; 27:28; Deut.33:28)
- Outer space where the planets and stars are (Gen.1:14-15; Psa.8:3)
- God’s dwelling place 2.Cor.12:2-4; Heb.8:1-5; Rev.2:7;22:1-2)

Of these three heavens, most believe that their reward is to inhabit the third heaven where God dwells. But, is this actually the ultimate reward of the saved?

WAS HEAVEN EVER PROMISED AS A REWARD?

Is there any solid proof in the Bible that anyone was ever promised residence in heaven as their ultimate reward for a righteous life? This question is vitally important in order to gain an understanding of what the Bible teaches about the awesome rewards of the righteous.

In order to expose the false teaching of heaven as the ultimate reward of the righteous, each scripture used to support this teaching will be analyzed and explained. Moreover, it will be shown that no solid scriptural foundation can be found for this teaching and that those who teach it must rely on mistranslations, obscure scriptures, and traditions to support their belief.
NO MAN HAS EVER GONE TO HEAVEN

For centuries churches have tried to get their converts to set their sights on going to heaven when they die. However, do the saved go to heaven when they die? Does anyone go to heaven when they die or at any other time? Will anybody go to heaven? Has anyone gone to heaven, and if so, who and when?

Jesus himself said that "No man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man . . ." (Jn.3:13 KJV).

Even the Jews of Jesus' time knew that no man was in heaven. Notice what they said while condemning Jesus:

"Then said the Jews to him, Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keep my sayings, he shall never taste of death. Are you greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? . . ." (Jn.8:52-53 KJV).

Peter said the following about King David fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected. At this point in history David had not been resurrected, he was still dead and buried:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day. . . . For David is not ascended into the heavens:. . ." (Acts 2:29; 34 KJV).

The Writer to the Hebrews

In the Book of Hebrews, chapter 11, there is a long list of righteous individuals who died without yet receiving their rewards:

"These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth" (Heb.11:13 KJV).

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:" (Heb.11:33-35 KJV).

If any are worthy to receive the promises that God has for the righteous, it would have surely been these champions of faith. However, about thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection (when the letter to the Hebrews was written), these righteous people were still dead in their graves; they did not receive their reward then and they still have not received it:
"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV). See also v13.

The simple truth is that Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David, the prophets, and the righteous of all ages are dead, not alive in heaven or some other place. However, upon the return of Jesus Christ, they will be resurrected and receive their reward.

WHAT ARE THE REWARDS OF THE RIGHTEOUS?

Believe it or not, the ultimate reward for being righteous is not to float aimlessly around heaven playing harp music for eternity. There is something far more spectacular in store for those who are accounted worthy of salvation:

"But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1.Cor.2:9 KJV).

The following are just some of the rewards for righteousness:

- To have one's name in the Book of Life (Phil.4:3)
- To become an immortal being (Rom.2:7)
- To have eternal life (Lk.18:29-30)
- To become a son of God (Jn.1:12; Rom.8:14)
- To be a joint-heir with Christ (Rom.8:16-18)
- To inherit all things (Rev.21:7)
- To inherit the earth (Psa.37:9)
- To inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt.25:31-34)
- To have access to New Jerusalem (Rev.22:14)
- To be in the first resurrection (Rev.20:6)
- To be a co-ruler with Christ (Rev.2:26-27)
- To become a king and a priest (Rev.1:4-6)

This list contains only a few of the enormous rewards which God has promised to the saints. The magnitude of the rewards for those who obtain salvation is so far beyond our imagination and dreams that it defies human comprehension.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

For the righteous, the Book of Life is the most important book ever written, because their names are recorded within its pages. However, some believe that because the saint's names are recorded in heaven, they will immediately go to heaven after death. Therefore, it is important to know what the Bible actually says about the Book of Life and how it pertains to the righteous.
In beseeching God to spare the Israelites who had rebelled at Sinai, Moses says the following:

"Yet now, if you will forgive their sin"; and if not, blot me, I pray you, out of your book which you have written. And the Lord said to Moses, Whosoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Ex.32:32-33 KJV). See also Psa.69:28; Rev.21:27; 22:19.

The following are three major things to notice about this book:

1. It is God's property.
2. God controls whose name can be placed into or taken out of it.
3. If a person's name is taken out of it, they will not have eternal life.

It is evident the righteous have their names recorded in the Book of Life, which is in heaven. However, there is absolutely nothing anywhere in the scriptures that remotely indicates that the saved immediately go to heaven after they die because their names are written in the Book of Life. It is obvious from the many references throughout the biblical record which refer to the Book of Life, that this book is a record, not a permit to reside in heaven:

"Behold, I give to you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over, the power of the enemy: and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Lk.10:19-20 KJV). See also Phil.4:3, Heb.12:23; Rev.13:7-8;17:8.

"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev.3:5 KJV).

IMMORTALITY

The quality of life which the righteous are promised is comparable to God's quality of life. God is a spirit-being who inherently possesses the highest form of life: immortality on the divine plane of existence. This kind of life springs forth from itself; it is not dependent on any other source to sustain it; it is self sustaining:

"Behold I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So 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" (1.Cor.15:51-54 KJV). See also 2.Tim.1:9-10; Rev.20:6.
"To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life:" (Rom.2:7 KJV).

It is abundantly clear that God intends to share immortality with those he has called to salvation. Immortality represents the ultimate reward for faithfulness to God.

"Whereby are given to us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these you might be partakers of the divine nature..." (2.Pet.1:4 KJV).

**ETERNAL LIFE**

Immortality and eternal life are rewards that allow a person to pass beyond this physical existence:

"I tell you the truth... no one who has left home or wife or brothers or parents or children for the sake of the Kingdom of God will fail to receive many times as much in this age and, in the age to come, eternal life" (Lk.18:29-30 NIV).

"Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereto you are also called, and have professed a good profession before many witnesses" (1.Tim.6:12 KJV; Lk.20:34-35).

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

"And this is the promise that he has promised us, even eternal life" (1.Jn.2:25 KJV; Tit.3:7).

**BECOME A SON OF GOD**

Many believe that even if they do gain eternal life, they will be doomed to some meaningless existence. However, this assumption could not be farther from the truth:

"Wherefore come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty," (2.Cor.6:17-18 KJV).

Part of the reward of righteousness is becoming a spiritual son of God the Father and a brother of Jesus Christ:

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren," (Heb.2:10-11 KJV).

Jesus who was the Creator God is the one who suffered death so that you and I can become children of God the Father.
"But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name:" (Jn.1:12 KJV).
See also Jn.3:1-3; Rom.8:18.

"For whom he did foreknow he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Rom.8:29 KJV).

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is" (1.Jn.3:2 KJV). See also Phil.3:21.

What the apostle Paul reveals in these scriptures is truly astounding; to become a son of God and a brother of Jesus is a tremendous reward with truly awesome implications.

JOINT-HEIR WITH CHRIST

Through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we can become heirs of the Kingdom of God.

"The spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us" (Rom.8:16-18 KJV).

"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal.4:4-7 KJV).

INHERIT ALL THINGS

"In many times and in many ways of old, God spoke to the fathers by the prophets: in these last days he spoke to us in the Son, by whom He appointed heir of all; through whom he indeed made the ages" (Heb.1:1-2 Para.). See also verses 5-8.

"He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev.21:7 KJV).

What an amazing reward! Not only are the righteous heirs but also joint-heirs with Jesus. Moreover, they will share in the inheritance of all that exists now and forever.
INHERIT THE EARTH

Part of the promise that God gave to Abraham was that he and his descendants would inherit the earth and be a blessing to all nations forever. See Gen.12:2-3; 13:15-16; 15:7, 18:18; 26:1-5; Rom.4:13.

"And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:29 KJV).

"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt.5:5 KJV).

"For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth" (Psa.37:9 KJV). See also Psa.37:11, 22, 29, 34;72:8.

The scriptures clearly show that, when the righteous become spirit-beings, they will inherit the earth. But, what possible use could they have for a physical earth? It seems that the earth would be of no use to them unless God is not finished with his plan for the salvation of humanity after Christ returns. Therein lies one of the purposes for the earth as an inheritance; it is to be inhabited by both spirit and physical beings as God's plan for the salvation of humanity continues after Christ returns.

INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

"Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:3 KJV).

Here, Jesus speaks of those who will obtain the ultimate joy of sharing the rewards of the Kingdom of God with him because of their humility of spirit. The undeniable fact is that there is a Kingdom (a government) of Heaven, which is owned by God the Father, and the righteous are to inherit it.

When Jesus told the parable of the shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats, he clearly reveals that the Kingdom of God was prepared as an inheritance for the righteous before mankind was created:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King [Jesus] say to them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father [God the Father], inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" (Matt.25:31-34 KJV). See also Jms.2:5.
HAVE ACCESS TO NEW JERUSALEM

Not only do the righteous inherit the Kingdom of God but also they have access to New Jerusalem from where the Father rules all of his creation.

"And there in no wise enter into it any thing that defiles, neither whatsoever works abomination, or makes a lie: but they which are written in the lamb's book of life" (Rev.21:27 KJV).

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev.22:14 KJV). See also Rev.21:1 through 22:13.

CO-RULERSHIP WITH CHRIST

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev.3:21 KJV).

"And he that overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of Iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Rev.2:26-27 KJV).

TO BECOME A KING AND A PRIEST

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And has made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen" (Rev.1:4-6 KJV). See also Rev.5:10.

Here, John speaks of the future when he says that the elect are kings and priests. This indicates that as far as the Father is concerned, this reward and responsibility has already been given to his elect children.

CITIZENSHIP IS IN HEAVEN

"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ," (Phil.3:20 NIV).

Some believe this verse confirms that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved, because it calls the elect citizens of heaven. It is true that the righteous are not of this world, although they must live in it and be subject to many of it's laws until the return of Christ.

Jesus and the apostle Paul said the following about the elect and their citizenship:
"If you were of the world, the world would love his own: but because you are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hates you" (Jn.15:19 KJV).

"Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ's stead, be you reconciled to God" (2.Cor.5:20 KJV).

Because one's citizenship is in a certain place does not mean one must continually reside there?

**IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE**

Jesus tells his disciples:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn.14:2-3 NIV).

Because this is one of the primary scriptures many quote to support their belief in going to heaven immediately after death, it is important to discover what Jesus actually said.

The English word rooms is translated from the Greek word mone, which can mean staying, tarrying, abiding, or place to stay (e.g., an inn or watch house). In the New Testament, it only occurs twice and denotes a dwelling place or an abode. Moreover, there are many Rabbinic parallels that denote the phrase "my father's house" as a place of rest.

In this scripture, Jesus makes a statement of fact. He will go to prepare a place for the righteous where his Father dwells. The Greek word for place is topos, which can mean a geographical location, but it can also be used in its abstract form to mean a position or office of endeavor. Other scriptures show that what Jesus is preparing is not only a space to inhabit but also positions and offices of authority within which the elect will function.

Because Jesus says he will come back and take the elect to the place he has prepared for them, many believe this means that they are going to reside continually heaven with Christ. However, the scriptures clearly show that ecclesiastical and governmental positions will be given to the righteous through which they will govern the physical earth with Christ for at least a thousand years.

Jesus said nothing about heaven being a reward or a continual residence for the saints from which they will never leave; he merely states that he was going to prepare a place for them and take them there so they can be where he is. Many scriptures show that after his return, he will administer the government of God over the earth from Jerusalem. See Isa.11:5-9; 27:13; 65:17-25; Mic.4:1-7; Zech.8:3-4.
In John 14, Jesus merely explains that he would go to heaven to prepare positions and offices of authority and responsibility in which the elect will function in the Kingdom of God. Just because the elect have access to heavenly Jerusalem (Rev.20:6, 21:27; 22:14) does not prevent them from reigning on earth with Jesus.

There is no doubt that Jesus went to heaven to prepare a place for the elect and there is no doubt that the elect will be wherever Jesus is going to be. In fact, one place where Jesus is going to be is right here on earth with the righteous who have obtained salvation.

OUR HOPE IS IN HEAVEN

Some believe that because there are scriptures which state the hope of the righteous is laid up in heaven, the ultimate reward of the saved will be to go to heaven. But just what is this hope that is laid up in heaven for the righteous? Is it to reside in heaven forever without ever leaving or is it something very different?

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;" (Col.1:3-5 KJV).

The English word hope in this text is translated from the Greek word elpis, which connotes faith, trust, assurance, an expectation of the future, and comfort in distress.

Paul says the hope of the righteous is reserved in heaven. But, what is this hope that is reserved there?

Paul does not say that our hope is to go to heaven to reside forever or that our hope is to be with Christ in heaven. He just says that our hope (faith, trust, assurance, expectation) is laid up in heaven.

Paul had faith that God was going to provide many things as a reward for righteousness and they were reserved in heaven awaiting distribution to the elect of God:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (2.Tim.4:8 KJV).

"Paul, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness; In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Tit.1:1-2 KJV). See also Tit.3:7; 1.Thes.5:8.
Many of the things which are laid up in heaven as rewards will be given according to the effort of each individual. Jesus said, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt.6:20 KJV).

How does one lay up treasures in heaven? Many scriptures document that it takes special effort to gain rewards outside of the gift of eternal and immortal life:

"Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev.22:12 NIV).

"Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2.Jn.8 NIV).

The hope that is laid up in heaven is the faith that God the Father and Jesus Christ who are in heaven will fulfill their promises to give us our rewards in that great day when Jesus returns to rule the earth.

**REWARDS ARE RESERVED IN HEAVEN**

There are many scriptures showing that the rewards for the saints are reserved in heaven. However, do any of these references state that the saint's reward is exclusively heaven, or that they must reside in heaven forever to receive their reward?

"Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: . . ." (Matt.5:12 KJV; Lk.6:23).

"Take heed that you do not your alms [i.e., acts of goodness] before men, to be seen of them: otherwise you have no reward of your Father which is in heaven" (Matt.6:1 KJV).

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1.Pet.1:3-4 KJV). See also Acts 23:6; 24:15, Tit.1:2.

There is no denying that the above scriptures show that the reward of the righteous is reserved for them in heaven. However, are there any clear scriptures which say heaven is the only reward of the saved or that the inheritance of the saints is to live in heaven forever? No, there are not! In fact, nowhere in the entire Bible does it say that going to heaven is the only and final reward of the saved.
SUMMARY

If the righteous were to go directly to heaven at death to receive their reward, why would they need to be resurrected (1 Cor. 15:52-53)? It does not make any sense to resurrect (restore to life) people who are already alive. Moreover, all of the scriptures which speak in great detail about the resurrection of God's elect would be meaningless, and there would be no reason for Christ to return and bring the elect's reward with him if they have already received it.

Remember that Paul said he and the other elect children of God will receive their reward in the day that Jesus returns to earth:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8 KJV). See also Matt. 16:21; Rev. 11:18; 14:12-13; 22:12.

Why do those who teach that going to heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved rely on mistranslations, obscure scriptures, and tradition for their support of this teaching? The simple truth is that the Bible does not teach that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved nor does it teach that the saved go immediately to heaven after death. These teachings are another example of the many contradictions between what people believe and what the Bible actually says.

The rewards God has prepared for the righteous are far more exciting than the nebulous idea of going off to heaven. The Bible teaches that the rewards of the righteous are immortality, becoming a son of God the Father, a joint inheritance and rulership with Jesus Christ in the God family, and much more. The Bible also teaches a life full of peace, happiness, joy, and pleasures forever for those who obtain salvation:

"You will make me to know the way of life. In your presence are fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forever" (Psa. 16:11 Para.).

The teaching that humans go directly to heaven after death is a false teaching and the scriptures clearly show the error of this belief. As you can see by the clear scriptures that have been presented here, there is a great contradiction between what people believe and what the Bible actually says about this topic. Moreover, personal research and study into this topic will help bring a deeper understanding of the tremendous opportunity God is offering humanity.

By B.L. Cocherell
Many believe that humans have an immortal soul, and that they go immediately to either heaven or hell at death. A fundamental principle of this teaching is that all a person has to do in order to go to heaven is ask forgiveness for their sins any time before death. In an attempt to substantiate this belief, people often refer to the conversation between Jesus and the two thieves who were crucified with him:

"And one of the hanged criminals blasphemed him, saying, If you are the Christ, save yourself and us. But answering, the other rebuked him, saying, Do you not fear God, for you are in the same judgment? And we indeed justly, for we receive things worthy of what we did. But this One did nothing wrong. And he said to Jesus, Lord, remember me when you come in your kingdom. And Jesus said to him, Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in paradise" (Lk.23:39-43 Para.).

Indeed, this conversation does seem to indicate that Jesus did promise the thief that he would go to paradise with him that very day; however, is this what Jesus actually meant? Did Jesus grant one of these thieves salvation just before his death, and did he go to heaven with Christ that day?

This study will show that there is a serious mistranslation of the original Greek words of this text in the King James version of the Bible, and that this mistranslation has led many to believe in the false teaching of going to heaven or hell immediately after death.

This study will also show that the thief who asked Jesus to remember him is not in heaven, the process of salvation requires more than just asking to be remembered by Jesus, and Jesus' promise to the thief did not mean that the thief would receive eternal life and immortality at the time of his death.

Did Jesus Die?

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand on me, saying to me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that lives, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death" (Rev.1:17-18 KJV).

The apostle John records that Jesus himself said he died.

The Greek Interlinear Bible translates the phrase "was dead" in verse 18 as "I became dead". The Greek word for dead is corpse, which means a lifeless body. Jesus said he became a dead body. This phrase is very
important because some believe Jesus did not totally die; they believe that only his flesh died, but his spirit remained alive and went to heaven.

The original Greek language of verse 18 leaves no doubt that Jesus was totally dead. He ceased to exist as a living, thinking being. All that remained of him was the record of his existence. It is important to understand that, if God the Father had not resurrected Jesus, he would have remained dead forever, never to live again. See Matt.10:28; Lk.12:4-5.

Jesus Was Buried

King David was inspired to foretell the death and resurrection of the Messiah:

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in hell [sheol]; neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption" (Psa.16:9-10 KJV). See Mk.16:6.

Both Peter and Paul speak of this prophecy in reference to Christ's resurrection. Around fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected, Peter says that King David was still dead and had not gone to heaven:

"Because you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One to see corruption . . . . He [David] seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption" (Acts 2:27, 31 Para.). See also Paul's comments in Acts 13:35-37.

The statements of King David, Peter and Paul, prove that Jesus did not go to heaven at death, but he was in the grave until God the Father resurrected him to life. However, when did he rise from the dead and when did he go to heaven?

Jesus Rose the Third Day

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:" (1.Cor.15:3-4 KJV).

The apostle Paul says that Jesus died, was buried, and rose the third day. There are 17 other references in the New Testament that indicate Jesus would be dead until he was resurrected the third day. If this is so, how could the thief be in paradise with Jesus the same day he died, when Jesus himself was dead for three days?

About 30 Years Later

About 30 years after the death and resurrection of Jesus, the writer to the Hebrews gave a long list of righteous individuals who were still dead and in their graves:
"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV). See also v13.

Both the living and dead elect of God will be made perfect at the same time. The perfection spoken of is the transformation from a temporary existence to immortality. If the thief was granted salvation just before his death and went immediately to heaven that same day, most of the scriptures which deal with a future resurrection make no sense.

The Dead Rise First

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep [dead], that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not precede [precede] them which are asleep" (1.Thes.4:13-15 KJV). See also 1.Cor.15:51-54.

In this great day, all of the dead who have obtained salvation will rise first to meet Jesus as he enters the atmosphere and will be joined by the living who have also obtained salvation. Here, Paul clearly says that all of the righteous who have died over the centuries will be resurrected in a single event.

Was the Thief Saved?

The only way a person could obtain salvation under the terms and conditions of God’s first covenant with national Israel was to fulfill its requirements. Under the New Covenant a person must be called by God the Father, repent of sin, be baptized and receive the holy spirit. From what God’s word sets forth as necessary procedures and requirements before a person is given salvation, it seems impossible that the thief could have gained salvation under either covenant before his death.

"To him that overcomes will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God" (Rev.2:7 KJV).

Overcoming is a process which takes effort, which is based on the knowledge and understanding of what is required by God. There was no time for the thief to go through the overcoming process, which involves listening, learning, effort, and making correct decisions. Therefore, he could not have been saved and entered into the paradise of God which is reserved for the overcomers. See Matt.24:13, 2.Cor.5:9-10, Heb.5:8-9, Rev.2:26;3:21.

Furthermore, even if the thief were converted and had obtained salvation before his death, he still would have had to await the resurrection of the elect of God, which has not yet occurred. See Matt.24:30; 1.Cor.15:23; 51-54; 1.Thes.4:13-15; Rev.20:4-6.
I Have Not Yet Ascended

"And she saw two angels in white, sitting one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. And they said to her, Woman, why do you weep? She said to them, Because they took away my Lord, and I do not know where they put him. And saying these things, she turned backward, and saw Jesus standing, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, Woman, why do you weep? Whom do you seek? Thinking that it was the gardener, she said to him, Sir, if you carried him away, tell me where you put him, and I will take him away. Jesus said to her, Mary! Turning around, she said to him, Rabboni! that is to say, Teacher. Jesus said to her, Do not touch me, for I have not yet ascended to my Father, but go to my brothers and say to them, I am ascending to my Father and your Father, and my God and your God" (Jn.20:12-17 Para.).

In this conversation between Mary and Jesus, he says he had not yet ascended to heaven. It is important to note that this conversation took place early Sunday morning, but Jesus had died around 3 p.m. on the previous Friday.

Therefore, if Jesus had promised the thief that he was going to be with him that day in paradise, it would have been a broken promise because on Sunday morning Jesus still had not gone to heaven. Either Jesus lied to the thief or there is some other explanation as to what he meant when he said, "Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk.23:43 Para.).

What Did Christ Promise?

The problem is not with what Jesus said; it is with what some think he said. There is no doubt that Jesus told the thief that he would be with him in paradise. But when would the thief be in paradise with Jesus? And to what paradise was Jesus referring?

Jesus did not lie to the thief, because he had the authority and power to fulfill his promise. The conversation that Jesus had with Mary after his resurrection shows that he did not go to heaven immediately after his death; therefore, the thief did not go there either. Moreover, the thief could not have fulfilled the requirements under the Old or New Covenants to obtain salvation. And the thief could not have preceded Christ to heaven, because Jesus was the firstborn from the dead to receive eternal and immortal life (1.Cor.15:20; Col.1:13-18).

Furthermore, Jesus has not established his kingdom upon earth, a kingdom in which the elect are to rule with him (Matt.25:31-34; 2.Tim.2:12; Rev.2:26-27; 3:9-10). So, what did Jesus really say?

What Jesus Really meant

First we must understand that the King James Version of the New Testament was translated from the Greek language; therefore, they had no reason to clarify what Jesus meant.
The Word Today

"Truly I say to you, Today you will be with me in Paradise."

The English word today is translated from the Greek word *semeron*, can mean many things depending on the context in which it is used. It can mean a whole day, a point in present time, a period of time, or an immediate future in contrast to the present situation.

The misconception concerning what Jesus said is partly a matter of semantics, based on the punctuation used in the King James version of the Bible that did not exist in the original text. The comma that is placed before the word 'today' completely changes the meaning of the sentence: "I say to you, today you will be with me in paradise." This is taken to mean that the thief would go with Jesus to heaven the very same day. However, if the comma is placed after the word today, the sentence can be assumed to mean that on that day Jesus was telling the thief that he would eventually be with him in Paradise: "I say to you today, you will be with me in paradise" (Lk.23:43 Para.).

Clearly, what Jesus said and meant was: I am telling you today, (meaning right now) that you will be with me in paradise. Any other meaning would conflict with all other references to the resurrection of the elect at Christ's return.

The Word Paradise

The English word *paradise* in verse 43, is translated from the Greek word *paradeisos*, which means a garden, park, or paradisal state.

The paradise the thief will find himself in when he is brought back to life will not be the paradise of God nor the paradise of the new heaven and earth, but it will be the Kingdom of God right here on earth. In this earthly paradise the thief will have his opportunity to repent, be baptized, receive the holy spirit, and qualify to enter God's eternal paradise.

SUMMARY

The simple fact is that there is no scriptural precedent, permission, or condition whereby the thief could possibly have gone to heaven immediately after his death.

By B.L. Cocherell
CHAPTER

SIXTEEN

ARE ENOCH AND ELIJAH IN HEAVEN?

The mysterious disappearance of Enoch and Elijah has led to the popular belief that at death righteous individuals go to God in heaven. However, this is contrary to what the Bible teaches.

The references to Enoch being translated so that he would not see death and Elijah being carried into the heavens by a great wind and a chariot of fire are often used in an attempt to prove that righteous people go to heaven at death. However, do either of these references prove that any of the righteous have gone or will go to heaven before the return of Christ and resurrection the saints?

Who is in Heaven Now?

Before explaining where Enoch and Elijah actually went, it is important to review what the Bible says about who is in heaven. It is without question that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the heavenly host of angels are the inhabitants of heaven. But what about humans? Has anyone besides Jesus ever gone to heaven?

Jesus refers to heaven where God the Father dwells when he says that no human had gone to heaven at that time. Jesus knew this because he came from heaven:

"And no man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man . . ." (Jn.3:13 KJV).

The Jews of Jesus' time understood that no human had ever gone to heaven; they believed that, when a person died, they were dead, awaiting the judgment:

"Then said the Jews to him [Jesus], Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man keep my saying, he shall never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? . . ." (Jn.8:52-53 KJV).

In his first major evangelistic sermon after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostle Peter says, "Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day. . . . For David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:29, 34 KJV).

Peter made these statements about the dead fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected. At this point in history, King David was still dead and buried; he had not been resurrected to life.
The Writer to the Hebrews

In Hebrews, chapter 11, there is a long list of righteous individuals who died without receiving God's promises:

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again; and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:" (Heb.11:33-35 KJV).

If any are worthy to receive the promises of God, it would surely be these champions of faith: Abel, Enoch, Abraham, and Moses whom God called his friends, Rahab who had faith that God would protect her for her kindness to the Israelite spies, and King David who loved God with great zeal. All of these are among the great men and women of faith. However, about thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection when the letter to the Hebrews was written, these righteous individuals were still dead in their graves.

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV) See also verse 13.

Twice in this eleventh chapter these righteous individuals are mentioned as having died without receiving the promises that God made to them.

The simple truth is that Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David, the righteous of all ages, and the prophets, including Enoch and Elijah, are not alive in heaven; they are dead awaiting the return of Jesus to resurrect them and give them their reward. See Matt.24:29-31; 1.Cor. 15:50-54; 1.Thes.4:16-17; 2.Thes.2:1-8.

WHO WAS ENOCH?

There are two Enochs mentioned in Genesis; however, it is the second Enoch (the son of Jared and the father of Methuselah) who many people think escaped death and went to heaven. Jude calls him the seventh from Adam, which does not mean that he was the seventh person from Adam. It means that he was the seventh preacher of righteousness from Adam—Noah was the eighth. See 1.Chr.1:1-2; Jude 14-15; Lk.3: 37-38; 2.Pet. 2:5.
Enoch the Prophet

Enoch foretold the destruction of the world in which he lived (Gen.5:21-27) through the name of his son Methuselah, which can be interpreted as 'man of the spear/weapon' or 'at his death it shall be'. If we assume Methuselah's name means 'at his death it will be', it is easy to see that Methuselah's name pictured the end of that era of humanity.

Methuselah was 187 years old when Lemech, Noah's father, was born; Lemech was 182 years old when Noah was born, and Noah was 600 years old when the Great Flood came upon the earth (Gen.7:6). From Methuselah's birth to his death and the beginning of the flood is 969 years: "And all the days of Methuselah were 969 years: and he died" (Gen.5:27 KJV).

Enoch also predicted the end of the next era of humanity, when he foretold the return of Christ with the elect of God to establish the Kingdom of God on earth:

"And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these things, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 14-15 KJV). See Isa.9:6-7; 1.Thes. 3:13; Rev.17:14.

What happened to Enoch?

"By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him: for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God" (Heb.11:5 KJV).

The translators of the King James Bible translated the two Greek words metathesis and metatithemi, which means change of place and put in another place into the English word translated. This is probably because the theology of their day taught that when righteous people died they were taken to heaven. However, by no stretch of the imagination can the two Greek words metathesis and metatithemi, which are used in Hebrews11:5, convey the concept of Enoch being transported to heaven.

Even a casual reading of Hebrews, chapter eleven reveals that none of the men and women mentioned, including Enoch, had yet received the promises given to the patriarchs and other righteous individuals (Heb.11:13, 39-40).

Enoch Walked With God

One thing that is evident about Enoch is that he had a very close and special relationship with the Creator God. This relationship was so special to God that he spared Enoch the agony of seeing the catastrophic events of the flood by mercifully ending his life:
"And Enoch walked with God after he begat Methuselah three hundred years, and begat sons and daughters: And all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty and five years: And Enoch walked with God; then he was not, for God took him" (Gen.5:22-24 Para.).

The English phrase was not is translated from the Hebrew word ayin, which has no single meaning, but it is a negative substantive. Therefore, its meaning must always be determined by context. The word ayin can never indicate that something continues to exist in one state or another; moreover, it cannot mean that something is transported to another place in time and space. In the context of Genesis 5:24, it can only mean that Enoch was not (i.e., he ceased to exist as a living breathing human; he was not alive from that point on).

**Enoch is Dead**

Moses does not say that Enoch did not die, nor does he say that Enoch went to heaven. He merely says that "He was not . . . for God took him" (Gen.5:24). The writer to the Hebrews only says that Enoch had a change of place (Greek: metathesis) so that he would not see death, and that he was not found because he was put in another place (Greek: metatithemi) by God.

Did Enoch escape physical death and go to heaven or is he dead waiting for the first resurrection? The scriptures clearly show that Enoch did not escape death; he is waiting for the first resurrection of the dead at Christ's coming just like all the righteous who have died through the ages.

It is obvious from the scriptures that Enoch is dead, but where did he go when he died? Jesus, Peter, and the writer of Hebrews say that none of those who died before Jesus became the perfect sacrifice have received the promises of God; therefore, the only place Enoch could have gone when he died was to his grave where all the righteous dead await the first resurrection. See 1.Cor.15:50-52; 1.Thes.4:13-17.

**God Took Moses**

In Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:4-7, the Creator God took Moses from among the living, and buried him so that he could not be found. This means that Moses died and was buried somewhere where no one could find his body.

Moses and Enoch were both taken by God. Moses was a healthy vibrant individual when God took him from among the living, and Enoch was only 365 years old when God took him (he was barely a middle aged man according to the longevity standards of his time). Both of these men could have lived many more years if God had not intervened and cut their lives short.
The Second death:

"Truly, truly I say to you, if anyone keeps My word, he will never see death" (Jn.8:51 Para.). See also Jn.11:25-27.

It is evident that, since righteous individuals have died a physical death before and after Jesus spoke these words, Jesus was speaking of the second death which will come upon all the incorrigible wicked (Rev.20:14; 21:7-8). The scriptures clearly say that no man, other than Jesus, has ever gone to or is in heaven (Jn.3:13; Acts 2:29;34; Heb. chp.1).

The death that God did not want Enoch to see was the death of humanity in the Great Flood at the end of the age in which he lived (Gen.5:23; Heb.11:15).

DID ELIJAH GO TO HEAVEN?

The Prophet Elijah first appears in scripture in 1.Kings 17:1 to pronounce a drought upon the House of Israel. Elijah was a prophet to the House of Israel during the reigns of King Ahab (874-854 B.C.) and his son Ahaziah who reigned for one year (853-852 B.C.). At the end of Ahaziah's reign and the beginning of Joram's reign in 852 B.C., the events surrounding the end of Elijah's ministry to the House of Israel occurred. These two events are recorded in 2.Kings.

"And it happened, when the Lord God was to take up Elijah to heaven in a tempest, Elijah and Elisha went from Gilgal. And Elijah said to Elisha, Please stay here, for the Lord God has sent me to Bethel. And Elisha said, As the Lord God lives, and your soul lives, I will not leave you. And they went down to Bethel. And the sons of the prophets came out to Elisha, and said to him, Do you know that today the Lord God will take away your lord from your head? and he said, Yes, I know. Keep silent" (2.Kgs.2:1-3 Para.).

It did not come as a surprise to Elisha or the sons of the prophets that Elijah would be taken by God.

"And Elijah said to him, Elisha, please stay here, for the Lord God has sent me to Jericho. and he said, As the Lord God lives, and your soul lives, I will not leave you. And they came into Jericho. And the sons of the prophets in Jericho came near to Elisha, and said to him, Do you know that today the Lord God will take away your lord from your head? And he said, Yes, I know. Keep silent" (2.Kgs.2:4-5 Para.).

The sons of the prophets who lived in Jericho also knew that Elijah would depart from them.
"And Elijah said to him, Please stay here, for the Lord God has sent me to the Jordan. And he said, As the Lord God lives, and your soul lives, I will not leave you. And they went on, both of them. And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went on and stood afar off, across from them and they both stood by the Jordan" (2.Kgs.2:6-7 Para.).

Why did Elisha and these fifty men want to follow Elijah around the country? The reason is that they knew Elijah would be taken from them by God and this was a major event in all of their lives, because he was their teacher and leader. However, the scriptures do not say how all these people knew of this event; the scriptures only show that they knew about it and that they wanted to be with Elijah when it happened.

"And Elijah took his mantle, and rolled it up, and struck the waters. And they were divided here and there, so that they both went over on dry ground. And it happened, when they were crossing, Elijah said to Elisha, Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you. And Elisha said, Then let there now be a double mouth of your spirit on me. And he said, You have asked a hard thing. If you shall see me taken from you, it shall be so to you. And if not, it shall not be" (2.Kgs.2:8-10 Para.).

Elijah took off his mantle (i.e., his cloak, which was the symbol of his authority) and used it to part the Jordan. Elisha asked for the spirit, which Elijah had to be upon him also. Most translators feel that Elisha asked for a double portion of the spirit-power Elijah had. However, the phrase 'double mouth' can also mean 'two-thirds' as in Zechariah 13:8. Two-thirds is the correct translation, which is evidenced by the events depicted in the following scripture:

"And it happened, as they were going on and speaking, behold, a chariot of fire and horses of fire came. And they separated between them both, and Elijah went up in a tempest to heaven. And Elisha was watching, and he was crying, my father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen! And he did not see him again: and he took hold of his garments and tore them into two pieces" (2.Kgs.2:11-12 Para.).

Elijah was taken into the sky and he disappeared. This was an emotional moment for those who stood by because they were losing fellowship with Elijah who had been their teacher and prophet for many years:

"And he lifted up the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him, and turned back and stood on the lip of Jordan. And he took Elijah's mantle that had fallen from him, and struck the waters, and said, where is the Lord God, the God of Elijah, even he? And he struck the waters; and they were split in two here and there, and Elisha crossed over" (2.Kgs.2:13-14 Para.).
By picking up Elijah's cloak and using it in a powerful way, Elisha demonstrated to those standing by that the office of the prophet to Israel had been transferred to him.

"And when they saw him, the sons of the prophets across in Jericho, then they said, The spirit of Elijah has rested on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed to the earth to him" (2.Kgs.2:15 Para.).

After acknowledging that Elisha had replaced Elijah as the prophet to Israel, these men asked permission to search for the body of Elijah. Elisha reluctantly gave his permission, because he knew Elijah was still alive. After a three day search, they did not find him and returned to Jordan (see 2.Kgs.2:16-18).

Two Nations

In order to understand what happened to Elijah, it is important to understand that, at the time of Elijah's ministry, the nation of Israel was separated into two distinct nations: the House of Israel and the House of Judah. Each of these had their own central governments. The House of Israel's king governed from Samaria, and the House of Judah's king governed from Jerusalem.

Where Did Elijah Go?

The answer to the question of where Elijah went after he was taken up into the sky in the chariot of fire is not as difficult as some think. Many believe that he was taken to heaven to be with God; however, this was not the case. Elijah was still alive and performing the duty of a prophet long after he was taken into the sky.

A Letter From Elijah

2.Chronicles 21 contains a letter to King Jehoram from Elijah warning him about the punishment that God would give him and the nation:

"Also, he had made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the people of Jerusalem to commit fornication, and led astray Judah. And a writing came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, So says Jehovah, the God of your father David, Because you have not walked in the ways of your father Jehoshaphat, and in the ways of Asa the king of Judah, and you walk in the way of the kings of Israel, and caused Judah and the people of Jerusalem to commit fornication like the fornications of the house of Ahab; and also you have killed your brothers, the house of your father, who were better than yourself; behold the Lord God shall strike with a great destruction among your people, and among your sons, and among all your goods; and you, with many sicknesses, with disease in your bowels, until your bowels come out because of the sickness, day by day" (2.Chron.21:11-15 Para.).
Notice that Elijah wrote this letter to King Jehoram who began his reign in 848 B.C. This is a very important date because Elijah departed Israel by the chariot of fire at the end of Ahaziah's reign and the beginning of Joram's reign in 852 B.C. This means that, even if Elijah wrote this letter at the beginning of Jehoram's reign, he could not have written it any earlier than four years after he had left Israel.

Remember that Elisha only asked for two thirds of the spirit that Elijah had. The reason he did not ask for more was that he knew Elijah would continue to live, and to ask for more power and authority than Elijah would be the same as asking to replace him as the chief prophet. This was an unthinkable thing for Elisha, because he knew that his master Elijah would continue to live.

The four year gap between the reigns of King Joram of Israel and King Jehoram of Judah proves beyond a doubt that Elijah was still alive long after his departure from his office as prophet to the House of Israel:

"And after this, the Lord God plagued him in his bowels by disease for which there was no healing; and it happened, from days to days, and as the time went out, the end of two years of days, his bowels fell out because of his sickness; so he died of painful diseases. And his people made no burning for him, like the burning of his fathers. He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem; and he left without being desired, and they buried him in the city of David, but not in the graves of the kings" (2.Chron. 21:18-20 Para.).

Jehoram's sickness lasted two years and he reigned eight years. If his sickness started shortly after Elijah pronounced the curse, Elijah's letter would have been written about ten years after he departed.

The scriptural evidence seems to show that Elijah lived at least 10 years after his departure from Israel. It is not evident how much longer he lived than that. However, he did not go to the heaven where God is.

THE TRANSFIGURATION

Some would say that the appearance of Moses and Elijah with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17:1-13 proves that Enoch and Elijah are alive in heaven:

"And after six days, Jesus took Peter and James, and his brother John, and brought them up into a high mountain apart. And he was transfigured before them and his face shone like the sun, and his clothing became white as the light. And, behold! Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with him. And answering Peter said to Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here. If you will, let us make three tabernacles here, one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah. While he was yet speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them. And, behold, a voice out of the cloud saying, This is my beloved Son, in whom I have found delight; hear him. And hearing the disciples fell on their face and were greatly terrified. And
coming near, Jesus touched them and said, *Rise up, and do not be terrified. And lifting up their eyes they did not see anyone except Jesus alone*" (Matt.17:1-8 Para.).

A few days before this event Jesus told his disciples, "Truly I say to you, there are some standing here who shall in no way taste of death until they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom" (Matt.16:28 Para.).

A few days after Jesus spoke these words to the apostles, Peter, James, and John did see a vision of Jesus as he would be in his kingdom. This was a vision of Jesus, Moses and Elijah in the glory of the resurrection, which has not actually occurred yet: it was a prophetic vision. See Jn.3:13; Acts 2:29;34; Heb.11:33-35,39-40; 1.Thes.4:16-17; 2.Thes.2:1-8.

"And as they were going down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no one until the Son of man is raised from the dead" (Matt.17:9 Para.). See also Mk.9:2-10; Lk.9:28-36.

A vision is not a material thing, it is a graphic representation of the real thing. Peter, James, and John knew that Moses and Elijah were dead, which is why they asked Jesus about the coming of Elijah.

**The Coming of Elijah**

"And His disciples asked him, saying, Why then do the scribes say that Elijah must come first? And answering Jesus said to them, Elijah indeed comes first, and shall restore all things. But I say to you, Elijah has already come, and they did not know him, but did to him whatever they desired. So also the Son of man is about to suffer by them. Then the disciples understood that he spoke to them about John the Baptist" (Matt.17:10-13 Para.).

In Jesus’ day, there was a belief that the prophet Elijah would actually be resurrected or reincarnated in another individual just before the first advent of the Messiah.

Before the conception of John the Baptist, an angel told his father, Zacharias, "And he will turn many of the sons of Israel to the Lord their God. And he will go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah . . ." (Lk.1:16-17 Para.). John was to come in the spirit and power of Elijah. He was not going to actually be Elijah. He would be directed and empowered by the same spirit as Elijah.

Just as John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of the office of Elijah and preceded the first ministry of Jesus, the prophet foretold by Malachi will precede the return of Jesus to establish the Kingdom of God. This prophet will not be Elijah incarnate; instead, like John the Baptist, he will come in the spirit and power of Elijah.
Only a few who lived during the time of Jesus understood that John was the Elijah of Jesus' day. They only understood this because they had been told by Jesus. The prophet who will come in the end of this age to proclaim the return of Christ will be recognized by all of those who truly follow God. See Dan.12:9-10.

"Behold I am sending you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of Jehovah. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the sons, and the heart of the sons to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with utter destruction" (Mal.4:5-6 Para.).

Conclusions

It is evident from the scriptures that Moses, Elijah, Enoch, the prophets, and the righteous dead of all ages are not alive in heaven. The only human that has ever gone to heaven is the Creator God who came from heaven to become a man and returned after his death and resurrection (see Jn.3:13; 14:2-3; Acts 1:10-11). All people, including the righteous who have died over the centuries, are still dead and await their resurrection at Christ's return.

By B.L. Cocherell
Many people quote the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus the Beggar to support the traditional teaching that the righteous go to heaven at death and the wicked go to a place of eternal torment. One must admit, the story does show a judgment in graphic detail. It is no wonder that after hearing a 'hell-fire' sermon based on this parable, vast numbers of people are scared into a religious life. But, does this story support such a belief?

In the Abramic covenants, God promised great, irrevocable blessings to Abraham and his descendants. The Jewish civil and religious leaders of Jesus' day understood the magnitude of these promises. They also understood that when the Messiah came, he would establish a kingdom that would rule the earth and give Abraham and his descendants their inheritance. An analysis of the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus shows that this story is just one of the many warnings Jesus gave to the Jewish leaders of his day. These men who were supposed to lead the people into righteousness were themselves examples of unrighteousness. Jesus warned them many times that they would lose their inheritance, as well as their lives if they did not repent of their evil ways.

"And there was a certain rich man, and he was accustomed to wearing a purple robe and fine linen, making merry in luxury day by day" (Lk.16:19 Para.).

A Dual Meaning

The meaning of this story can easily be viewed from two perspectives: It can be viewed as a reprimand for the failure of national Israel to perform their national covenant with God or as a reprimand for the failure of the religious and civil leaders to perform their duties before God.

The nation of Israel and their descendants were chosen by God to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation to God (Ex.19:6) through which he would bless the entire world (Gen.18:18; 22:18). And as a reward for performing this task, they would receive great physical blessings (Deut. 28:1-14; 30:16).

The Rich Man

The Rich Man is depicted as a son of Abraham (Luke 16:24;25). Such sonship made him a legal heir to Abraham's inheritance. Moreover, he had the great material blessings which were promised to Abraham's descendants.
The Rich Man wore purple, which is symbolic of kingship and a sign that the Davidic or Messianic Kingdom was his. Therefore, he represented both national Israel and Judah who should have been spiritually dressed in kingly robes. The Rich Man also wore linen, which is symbolic of the priesthood and righteousness. Moreover, he enjoyed the riches of the earth (Rev.19:8; Deut.28:1-14; Gal.3:8-9; Acts 3:25-26).

The Rich Man also represents the religious and civil leadership of the Jews who, by virtue of their offices (i.e., temple service, religious duties, and civil functions), lived in luxury compared to the common person.

The Beggar

"And there was a certain poor one named Lazarus, who had been laid at the porch, being plagued by sores, and longing to be filled from the crumbs that were falling from the table of the rich one. But even the dogs coming licked his sores" (Lk.16:20-21 Para.).

Lazarus is the English translation of the Hebrew word Eliezer, which means God has helped. Of the eleven different Eliezer's in the Old Testament, the only one who fits the lesson of the story is the Gentile, Eliezer of Damascus, who was the chief steward of Abraham. Once this simple connection is made it is possible to interpret the real meaning of the story.

The Lazarus of the story represents Abraham's faithful steward Eliezer. Although he had been the legal heir of Abraham's possessions (Gen.15:1-3), he was disinherited at the birth of Isaac. He no longer had a claim to any of Abraham's inheritance: "To him [Isaac] has he [Abraham] given all that he has" (Gen.24:36). Likewise, Lazarus the beggar possessed nothing of earthly value. The desire to be fed with the crumbs that fell from the Rich Man's table was also a typical image of Gentiles during Christ's time. To the Jews of Jesus' time, the Gentiles were 'dogs' who were unworthy of any special consideration. See Matt. 15:21-29; Mk.7:27-29.

Jesus could have chosen a laborer, a tax collector, or any other class of individual to compare with the Rich Man, but he chose a common beggar with diseased flesh, which was one of the lowest and most repugnant of Jewish society in the eyes of these sanctimonious leaders.

In the beginning of the story, Jesus mentions the Rich Man first because of his position and wealth, but eventually he reverses the order and begins to give honor to the beggar by mentioning him first.

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried" (Lk.16.22 KJV).
The beggar Lazarus is the one carried to the bosom of Abraham, but the Rich Man is left behind and buried in the grave. In the story, Lazarus lives alongside the Rich Man. He is sick, hungry, and destitute, but something must have changed before his death, because it is he who gains the prize of eternal life, but the Rich Man loses everything, including eternal life.

This is not what the Jewish leaders would have expected. Moreover, it would not have met with their sanctimonious view of righteous standards. Here, Jesus begins to show these leaders their true spiritual condition and the consequences of their behavior if they would not repent:

"Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (that done in the body by the hands of men)—remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of promise, without hope and without God in the world. But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near through the blood of Christ" (Eph.2:11-13 NIV). See also Rom.10:19,11:11.

In The Bosom of Abraham

Many people believe that the phrase Bosom of Abraham is analogous to heaven, but is it? The word 'bosom' is a reference to a close, intimate relationship, as noted in Numbers 11:11-12, Isaiah 40:11, and John 1:18. The Jews knew that a close relationship with Abraham assured them of God's love, protection, and a share in the blessings and inheritance which were promised to Abraham.

This principle applies to the elect of God, whether or not they are Israelites or Gentiles. The apostle Paul said, "And if you be Christ's, then are you Abraham's seed [children], and heirs according to the promise" (Gal.3:29 KJV) See also v.7; Gen.12:5-7, 13:15, 15:18, Acts 7:1-5, Rom.4:13; Heb.9:15)

Did Lazarus go to Heaven?

The ancient Israelites believed that everyone who died—the righteous as well as sinners—went to sheol and were there together. However, over time the word sheol (the realm of the dead) had undergone a considerable modification in meaning. The belief that sheol was separated into two divisions became popular. These two divisions were Abraham's Bosom, where the righteous were and the lower part of sheol, which was separated from Abraham's Bosom by a great ravine. The lower part of sheol was believed to be a prison for all of the wicked.

The Jewish belief was that the Bosom of Abraham was the place in sheol where the true children of Abraham would be taken by angels after their death. This may be the belief that Jesus referred to in his story.
In this story, Jesus never says that Lazarus went to heaven. However, he does say that Lazarus was carried away to the Bosom of Abraham by angels. This is important, because the only references to the righteous being collected by angels is in an end time context at the return of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

The Righteous Gathered

"Immediately after the tribulation of those days shall the sun be darkened, and the moon shall not give her light, and the stars shall fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens shall be shaken: And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:29-31 KJV). See also Isa.43:5-7, Mk.13:24-27, 14:62; Rev.1:7.

At the return of Christ, the angels will gather the resurrected saints who will receive many of their rewards and inheritance at that time. This must be the logical time setting of Lazarus being gathered to Abraham's Bosom, because the scriptures support the timing of such an event. However, this is not the time setting in which the Rich Man will open his eyes and see Lazarus enjoying his reward and inheritance. The Rich Man will awake from death at a different time for a different purpose.

Is Abraham in Heaven?

Abraham is not in heaven. According to Jesus, Peter, and the writer to the Hebrews, he is still dead in his grave.

Jesus:

"And no man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man . . ." (Jn.3:13 KJV).

Here, John is quoting what Jesus told Nicodemus. Did Jesus make a mistake? Remember that Abraham had been dead for a long time when Jesus was on earth (Jn.8:51-53).

Peter:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day. . . . For David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:29;34 KJV).

Here, Peter merely confirms what Jesus and the writers of the Old Testament taught about the state of the dead.

The writer to the Hebrews notes a long list of righteous individuals who died without receiving God's promises.
"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance: that they might obtain a better resurrection" (Heb.11:33-35 KJV).

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (Heb.11:39-40 KJV). See also v13.

The simple truth is that these champions of the faith—Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets and the righteous of all ages—are dead, not alive in heaven or any other place.

It is clear that Jesus did not portray Lazarus going directly to heaven at death to be with Abraham, because Abraham is still dead (Psa.6:4-5; 146:3-4; Ecc.9:5-6;10; Jn.8:52-53). Moreover; Lazarus could not have inherited the promises before Abraham did (1.The 4:13-17; 1.Cor.15:51-54). Jesus is clearly speaking of future events in which there will be a judgment of the righteous and the unrighteous.

The Rich Man Was Buried

"The rich man also died, and was buried; And in hell [Greek: hades, the grave] he lifted up his eyes, being in torments, and sees Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom" (Lk.16:22-23 KJV).

Those who teach that the righteous go to heaven at death and that the wicked go to eternal punishment often point to Luke 16: 22-23 as proof of their teaching. However, this is not the meaning Jesus intended, nor is it the point that Jesus was making to these religious leaders.

It is important to note that Luke did not use the word gehenna (the place where garbage is destroyed by fire) when quoting what Jesus said in this story. Jesus often used the word gehenna when referring to the fiery destruction of the wicked. The word hades refers to the same place as the Hebrew word sheol (i.e., the realm of the dead, a hole in the ground, a pit or grave). Neither the Greek word 'hades' nor the Hebrew word 'sheol' indicate a place of fire or torment. Hades (i.e., the grave) is the same place where Jesus was buried, the same place where his body lay after his death, and the same place from which he was raised to life. See Acts 2:27,31; Psa.16:9-10.

In this story, the Rich Man died and was buried in the grave where he will stay until he is brought back to life to be sentenced for his sinful life.
Father Abraham

Most of the Jews of Jesus' time believed that, by virtue of being Abraham's descendants, they were assured the blessings and inheritance which God had promised Abraham. They were under the false assumption that Abraham's righteousness was ascribed to them by birthright. However, this is definitely not what the God of Israel taught through his servants.

The Jewish concept of a hierarchical relationship of man with God would have placed Abraham at the very top. Jesus uses this relationship to warn these leaders of their error in looking to Abraham for their salvation and that they should obey the teachings of the servants of God:

"They answered him, We are Abraham's seed, and we have been in slavery to no one, never! How do you say you will become free? Jesus answered them, Truly, truly I say to you, Everyone practicing sin is a slave of sin. . . . I know that you are Abraham's seed, but you seek to kill me because my word has no place in you. . . . They answered and said to him, Abraham is our father. Jesus said to them, if you were Abraham's children, you would do the works of Abraham" (Jn.8:33-39 Para.). See also Rom.4:1-3.

"But when he [John the Baptist] saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism, he said to them, O generation of vipers, who has warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bring forth therefore fruits meet for repentance: And think not to say within yourselves, We have Abraham to our father: for I say to you, that God is able of these stones to raise up children to Abraham" (Matt.3:7-9 KJV).

The Resurrection to Death

The Bible speaks of several different resurrections of the dead. And each has its own unique time and purpose in God's plan for humanity. The first general resurrection of the dead is clearly the one in which the beggar would participate (Rev.20:4-6). The resurrection in which the Rich Man would participate is the resurrection to death (Rev.20:11-15; 21:7-8):

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which stands for the children of your people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan.12:1-2 KJV).

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth: they that have done good, to the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, to the resurrection of damnation" (Jn.5:28-29 KJV).
The tragic situation we find here is that the Rich Man who is a descendant of Abraham has failed in his responsibilities before God; therefore, he will not obtain the blessings and inheritance promised to Abraham and his descendants. Instead, he will suffer the punishment of death for his failure to obey the laws of God. See Mal.4:1-3; Lk.13:25-29.

Eternal Suffering?

"And calling he said, Father Abraham, have pity on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am suffering in this flame" (Lk.16:24 Para.).

There is no doubt that this pictures the Rich Man being tormented by fire; however, is his suffering going to continue for eternity? There is no proof or indication of eternal punishment for the unrighteous.

The Flame

In this story, the Rich Man awakes from death to find himself immersed in fire and he cries out for help because he is in excruciating pain, because his flesh is being consumed by fire. At this point, he remembers the teachings of God's way of life, which he did not heed. He knows that he is about to die forever just as the prophets foretold (Dan.12:2; Mal.4:1-3).

Jesus said the following about the fate of the wicked:

"The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity: And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.13:41-42 KJV). See also Lk.13:28.

The fire that the wicked will find themselves cast into when God purifies his kingdom is not a fire of eternal torture, but a fire of destruction. This fire will destroy all impurity and wickedness from God's kingdom. See 2.Pet.3:10-13.

A Sin of Omission

"But Abraham said, Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and you are tormented" (Lk.16:25 KJV).

Verse 25 is a stinging rebuke and indictment upon the wealthy religious leadership of Jesus' time. The Creator God gave Israel many instructions about their responsibilities to be a righteous example in caring for the poor and teaching his truth. However, as history documents, Israel as a whole did not follow God's instructions. It was and still is the leadership's responsibility to promote God's way of life to his people. The following scriptures show what the proper treatment and attitude toward the poor should be:
"He that has pity upon the poor lends to the lord; and that which he has given will he [God] pay him again." (Pro.19:17 KJV).

Speaking of the qualities of a righteous man, the Psalmist said:

"He is ever merciful, and lends; and his seed is blessed" (Psa.37:26 KJV).

"A good man shows favor, and lends: he will guide his affairs with discretion" (Psa.112:5 KJV).

Another Condemnation

Luke cites another condemnation of the religious leaders for not having compassion on the poor, sick, and needy:

"And taking it up, Jesus said, A certain man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among robbers, who both stripped him and laid on wounds, going away, they left him, being half-dead. But by a coincidence, a certain priest went down on that road; and seeing him, he passed on the opposite side. And in the same way a Levite, also being at the place, coming and seeing him, he passed on the opposite side. But a certain Samaritan came upon him, he was filled with pity. And coming near, he bound up his wounds, pouring on oil and wine. And putting him on his own animal, he brought him to an inn, and cared for him. And going forth on the next day, taking out two denarii, he gave them to the innkeeper, and said to him, Care for him, and whatever more you spend, I on my return will repay to you. Who then, of these three seems to you to have become a neighbor to the one having fallen among the robbers? and he said, The one having done the deed of mercy with him. Then Jesus said to him Go, and you do likewise" (Lk.10:30-37 Para.). See also Lk.14:12-14.

The beggar, Lazarus, lay sick and hungry outside the gates of the Rich Man's house and he needed to be helped out of his sickness and poverty, but the Rich Man ignored this need against the express instructions of God.

The purpose of this story was not lost on these unrighteous leaders; they knew the laws of God and that Jesus depicted them as insensitive and derelict in their duty to serve his people.

The Great Gulf of Separation

"And beside all these things, a great chasm has been fixed between us, and you, so that those desiring to pass from here to you are not able, nor can they pass from there to us" (Lk.16:26 Para.).

There will be a chasm or separation made between the righteous and the unrighteous in the day of judgment.
"Do not marvel at this, for the hour is coming in which all that are in the tombs will hear his voice. And they will come out, the ones having done good, into the resurrection of life; and the ones having practiced evil into a resurrection of judgment" (Jn.5:28-29 Para.). See also Dan.12:2; Heb.9:27; 2.Pet.2:9; 2.Thes.1:5-9.

"Again the kingdom of heaven is compared to a drag net thrown into the sea, and gathering together of every kind; which when it was filled, drawing it up on the shore and sitting down, they gathered the good into containers, and they threw out the rotten. So it will be in the end of the age: The angels go out and will separate the wicked from the midst of the righteous; and will throw them into the furnace of fire; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth" (Matt.13:49-50 KJV).

"And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire" (Rev.20:14-15 KJV).

Under the terms and conditions of both the Old and New Covenants, those who live righteously in obedience to God's laws are granted eternal life in the Kingdom of God (Matt.25:31-34). Moreover, the disobedient and the unrighteous who cannot be written into the Book of Life must be destroyed because of their wickedness and unwillingness to obey God's law (Matt.25:41-46).

Only the righteous will be granted eternal life (1.Cor.15:50-55) and only the righteous will inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt.25:31-34). But, the unrighteous will be punished with eternal death for their wickedness. See Matt.25:41-46; Mal.4:1-3; Rev.20:14-15; 21:8.

The great gulf separates life from death and once a person has chosen death, they cannot have eternal life.

Throughout the Bible, there are many examples of God's great mercy toward those who repent and the finality of judgment for those who will not:

"Say to them, As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his ways and live: turn you, turn you from your evil ways; for why will you die, O house of Israel?" (Ezk..33:11 KJV).

Ezekiel, chapter 33, shows the concern God has for Israel and the finality of the punishment of the wicked. See also 2.Pet.2:1-22; 1.Cor. 6:9.

"Then he said, I pray you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify to them, lest they also come into this place of torment" (Lk:16:27-28 KJV).
Knowing his fate is sealed, the Rich Man shows concern for his loved ones. He does not want them to make the same mistake that he has. However, they are also in the same spiritual condition as the Rich Man.

Note:

There were six religious sects of the Jews at the time of Christ: the Essenes, Nazarites, Pharisees, Sadducees, Scribes, and Zealots. The Pharisees were the ones to whom Jesus was addressing this admonition. It does not take much imagination to see that the Rich Man's five brothers are analogous to the other five religious sects of the house of Judah.

"Abraham said to him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, No, father Abraham: but if one went to them from the dead, they will repent" (Lk.16:29-30 KJV).

Always Seeking a Sign

The leaders and the people of Jesus' day were always seeking a sign from Jesus to prove his authority (Matt.12:38-42, Mk.8:11-12; Lk.11:16,30-31). They were also well versed in the history of Israel, which documented resurrections of the dead at the hands of the Prophets. And many of these leaders had heard that Jesus had resurrected the dead. But as great as it was, the witness of one raised from the dead was small in comparison to the witness, miracles, and teaching of the servants whom God had sent to Israel.

Many Warnings

"And he said to him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" (Lk.16:31 KJV).

Apparently, none of the prophet's teachings, warnings, or the awesome events of Israel's history made much of an impression on the arrogant religious intellectuals and their followers; they were not persuaded to repent of their rebellion against God.

It seems also that, in this story, Jesus foretells his resurrection, which these people would also reject as a witness. However, the story may have been referring to the resurrection of Lazarus, which angered those religious leaders. Moreover, they rejected Jesus' miracles and the resurrection of Martha and Mary's brother, Lazarus.

"Then the chief priest and the Pharisees assembled a Sanhedrin, and said, What are we going to do, for this man does many miracles. If we let him alone, all will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away from us both the place and the nation. . . . Then from that day they took counsel how that they might kill him" (Jn.11:47-48, 53 Para.).
"Then a great crowd of the Jews learned that he was there. And they did not come because of Jesus alone, but that they also might see Lazarus whom he raised from the dead. But the chief priest took council that they also might put Lazarus to death because through him many of the Jews went away and believed in Jesus" (Jn.12:9-11 Para.).

Did these religious leaders forsake their false teachings and repent of their sin after Jesus rose from the dead? The Bible records that many of the priests (Acts 6:7) became obedient to the faith. However, not many of the other religious leaders were persuaded to repent by Christ's teachings, miracles, or the dramatic events surrounding his resurrection.

Throughout the history of Israel, God has sent his righteous leaders, prophets, and servants to teach, admonish, and warn Israel. But, to no avail. They importuned Israel to repent and obey God and they warned of the punishment that would follow if obedience was not forthcoming. However, the civil and religious leaders of Israel killed and slandered most who were sent to them by God instead of heeding their warnings.

Jesus laments,

"Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the one killing the prophets and stoning those who have been sent to her. How often would I have gathered your children together, in the way a bird gathers her chicks from under her wings! And you would not desire it" (Matt.23:37 Para.).

Nothing in the story of the Rich Man and the Beggar suggest, that the righteous go directly to heaven at death, nor does it prove the existence of an ever burning place of punishment for the wicked. It was a reprimand and a warning for religious leaders of Jesus' time to repent. Prophetically it is a warning for the religious leaders of both the House of Israel and the House of Judah of today to repent.

What is very evident is that Jesus constantly taught repentance and a return to the teachings of the Patriarchs, servants, and prophets of God. This story is an analogy of the vast difference between the rewards of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked.

"From the time the master of the house shall have risen up, and he shuts the door, and you begin to stand outside and to knock at the door, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us, even answering he will say to you, I do not Know you. From where are you? Then you will begin to say, we ate and drank in your presence, and you taught in the streets. And he will say, I tell you, I do not know you, from where are you. Stand back from me, all workers of unrighteousness. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, but yourselves being thrust out. And they will come from the east and west, and from north and south, and will recline in the kingdom of God" (Lk.13:25-29 Para.).
SUMMARY

Luke who was the companion of Paul the apostle to the Gentiles is the only one of the Gospel writers to record the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. This fact indicates that the story concerns Gentiles and their ability to participate in the inheritance of the promises to Abraham.

The following are explanations of the symbols, figures, and events in the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus:

- The Rich Man is the House of Judah and the religious leadership of the day.
- Lazarus is Eliezer, Abraham's steward of Genesis, chapter 15, and Eliezer the Gentile of Damascus—a proselyte of the gate.
- Lazarus, the disinherit ed steward, became a beggar "who ate the crumbs of the table", but remained faithful to Abraham and God.
- When Lazarus' earthly life was over, he received Abraham's inheritance because of his faithfulness.
- The Rich Man represented the descendants of Abraham (Judah and the religious leaders, which Lazarus (Eliezer) was not).
- The Rich Man (Judah) had a purple robe, which is symbolic of royalty, and he wore fine linen, which is symbolic of the priesthood.
- The Rich Man (the religious leaders) is not a righteous steward of the Abramic blessings.
- Although the Rich Man and his brothers (Judah and the religious leaders) are given the oracles of God, they do not accept the witness of Christ resurrected from the dead.
- The great chasm separates eternal life from final and permanent death.

All the symbolism of the story fits perfectly to reveal profound teachings. The story of the Rich Man and the Beggar is just a story—an analogy of faithful and unfaithful stewardship.

Although Judah was a legal heir of Abraham's blessings (both spiritual and physical), its religious leaders had been unfaithful in their responsibilities. Therefore, they would find themselves completely disinherit ed. The story also shows that the Gentiles are now legal heirs of the promises of the Abramic covenant and salvation.

The great lesson of this story is that the physical inheritance through Abraham is nothing without the spiritual redemption which Jews and Gentiles can have through Christ.

By B.L. Cocherell

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For centuries, in order to motivate converts and prospective converts to strive to 'go to heaven' when they die, religious leaders have tried to frighten them with the threat of eternal punishment in a place called hell. As fearful as many are of going to hell, most people do not have the slightest understanding of what the Bible really teaches about this subject. This study investigates the myth of hell as a place were people are tormented with fire for eternity and what the Bible actually says about hell.

In most Christian theologies, Hell is a place of punishment after death. Although there are many different and confusing explanations as to exactly what and where hell is, there are three widely accepted beliefs surrounding punishment in hell:

- Hell is generally believed to be under the earth.
- Hell's fire burns forever.
- Hell is where the wicked are tormented forever.

Although Catholic and Protestant theology differ radically in many respects, the foundation for the Protestant belief in 'hell-fire' is firmly fixed in early Catholic theology. The main difference between the two is that Catholics believe in an interim conditional stay in Hell, which they call 'purgatory', but Protestants believe that the wicked go straight to Hell and stay there for eternity.

The translators of the Authorized King James Version of the Bible lived at a time when the doctrine of 'hell-fire' and damnation was generally accepted. When it came to translating the original Hebrew meaning of the word 'sheol' (i.e., grave or pit) they used the English word 'hell' (i.e., to conceal, cover; hide); thereby, they effectively concealed the true meaning of scriptures while confirming their preconceived belief in a place where unrighteous people would be punished forever.

However, the translators found it impossible to use the word 'hell' in every instance as a translation of the Hebrew 'sheol', because to do so would place some of the most righteous individuals in the Bible in a place of torment with the wicked. Therefore, whenever necessary, they used other words in place of 'sheol' that would not conflict with their belief system. Had these translators simply left the word 'sheol' untranslated, the concept and meaning of each verse where it is used would have been readily understood by any serious reader.
In order to expose the false teaching of hell as a place of eternal torture and fiery torment, it is important to review many of the scriptures in which the Hebrew word 'sheol' and the Greek word 'hades' are translated into the English word 'hell.'

The Word Sheol

The Hebrew word 'sheol' appears 65 times in the Old Testament and is translated many times as 'hell,' which confuse the meaning of the text in which it is used. The word 'sheol' simply refers to a hole in the ground, a pit, or a grave. Many times 'sheol' is also translated as 'grave' which makes its meaning clear. See Gen.37:35; 42:38; 44:29-31; 1.Sam.2:6; 1.Kg.2:6; Psa.49:14-15.

The Biblical Sheol

Both Job and the Psalmist indicate that 'sheol' is a place where the body resides to rot and decay in the dirt of the earth. Job also says that God has the power to bring one out of sheol and back to life:

"Are not my days few? Then cease, and set me alone, that I may take little comfort before I go; and I shall not return; to the land of darkness, and the shadow of death; a land of obscurity, the darkness of the shadow of death, and not any order; even the shining is as darkness" (Job 10:20-21 Para.).

"But man dies and is cut off, and expires; and where is he? As waters go from the sea, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Who will grant that you would hide me in sheol; You would hide me until your anger turns back; that you would set a limit for me and remember me? If a man dies, will he revive? All the days of my warfare will I wait, until my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer you; you shall complete the work of your hands" (Job 14:10-15 Para.).

"If I wait for sheol as my house; I have spread out my bed in the darkness; I have said to corruption, you are my father, to the worm my mother and my sister. And where is my hope? they shall go down to the bars of sheol, when our descent together is in the dust" (Job 17:13-15 Para.).

"Like sheep, they are appointed to sheol [the grave]; death shall reign for them; and the upright ones shall rule over them in the morning; and their form is for rotting; Sheol is home for them. But God will redeem my soul from the hand of sheol; for he will take me. Selah" (Psa.49:14-15 Para.). See also Psa.6:5; 30:3; 89:48.

When Korah and his sons rebelled against Moses and Aaron, God opened the earth and they descended into sheol (Num.16:20-30):
"For my soul is full with evils; and my life touches sheol. I am counted with those who go down to the pit; I have been like a feeble man, free among the dead, as pierced ones lying in the grave, whom you remember no more; yea by your hand they are cut off. You have laid me in the lowest pit in the dark places; in the deeps" (Psa.88:3-6 Para.).

The Condition of Death

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible that indicates humans have an immortal soul or that any human life function continues after death. The Bible indicates just the opposite; it clearly shows that the physical life of a human is a temporary condition which can be terminated forever.

At death, the cerebral functions cease, the brain dies and there are no more thought processes, no reward, no memory, no knowledge, no access to this world; the dead are simply dead, not alive:

"For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in any thing that happens under the sun" (Ecc.9:5-6 NIV).

"All that your hand finds to do, do it with your strength. For there is no work, or planning, or knowledge or wisdom, in sheol, where you go" (Ecc.9:10 Para.).

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down in silence" (Psa.115:17 KJV).

The reason they cannot praise God is that they are no longer alive; their life has been silenced. In death there is no thought process:

"Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Psa.6:4-5 KJV).

"Put your trust not in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psa.146:3-4 KJV). See also Isa.38:17-19.

Where is Sheol?

Although the Bible does not indicate a specific geographical location on earth for sheol, there are many descriptions of the location of sheol. It is said to be under the mountains, the earth, the waters, and it is a place to where people descend. See Num.16:30; Psa.104:29; Job 26:5; 34:14-15; Pro.1:12; Isa.14:14-19; Ezek.32:23; Jon.2:6.
Sheol is a place of darkness, silence, and rest; moreover, it is a condition of unconsciousness. It is a place where there is no communication between God and man (Psa.6:5; 31:17-18; 94:17; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5-6;10; Job 10:21-22).

Sheol is also a place where only the physical element of man resides, but not the spirit of man (Ecc.12:70). It is a place where both the righteous and the wicked go to await a resurrection to immortality, an opportunity for salvation, or the second death.

From the context of the many scriptures that speak of sheol, it is evident that sheol is not limited to one specific geographical location on earth. Instead, it is often used to describe a physical resting place for a dead body. It is also used to described a condition of rest. In the broadest sense, sheol simply means 'where dead bodies are.'

In most English translations, 'sheol' has been translated 'hell' with the conceptual meaning of a place of torture and suffering. However, 'sheol' does not even remotely denote a place of fiery torment.

There is no contradiction in the usage of the word sheol in the Bible; the contradiction is between what people believe and what the Bible actually teaches.

HADES

The Greek word 'hades' refers to the same place as the Hebrew word 'sheol' (i.e., the realm of the dead, a hole in the ground, a pit or grave).

Jesus Went to Hell

If hell is a place of eternal torment for the wicked as is commonly taught, we have a problem of monumental proportions, because the Bible clearly shows that Jesus went to hell after he was crucified and before he was resurrected:

"Therefore my heart is glad, and my glory rejoices: my flesh also shall rest in hope. For you will not leave my soul in hell; neither will you suffer your Holy One [Jesus Christ] to see corruption" (Psa.16:9-10 KJV).

Both Peter and Paul spoke of this prophecy in reference to Christ's resurrection:

"Because you will not leave my soul in hell, neither will you suffer your Holy One [Jesus Christ] to see corruption."He [David] seeing this before spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption" (Acts 2:27; 31 KJV). See also Acts 13:35-37.

In Psalm 16:9-10, the King James translators used the word 'hell' instead of the Hebrew word 'sheol', which can mean grave or pit. In Acts, they used 'hell' for the Greek word 'hades', which means grave.
In these statements by King David, Peter, and Paul, there is irrefutable proof that hell (sheol), or hades (grave) is not a place of eternal fiery torture. Was Christ sent to a place of torture before his resurrection? Of course not! Christ was buried in a tomb, which is the equivalent of the Hebrew word 'sheol' and the Greek word 'hades'. He did not go to a place of torture; his body lay in a tomb and his spirit went back to God the Father until his body was resurrected and his spirit was placed back into it.

When translating the prophecy of Christ’s death and resurrection, the translators found themselves in a doctrinal dilemma. A correct translation of the words 'sheol' and 'hades' as 'grave' would not harmonize with current theology concerning the immortality of the soul. It would have shown that Jesus did not have an immortal soul, but that he was dead in a grave on earth until God the Father resurrected him. In order to solve their problem they used the word 'hell' to obscure the true intent of the scriptures.

"Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong: because he has poured out his soul to death: and he was numbered with transgressors. . ." (Isa. 53:12 KJV).

Jesus went to hell. Moreover, Jacob said that he too would go to sheol (hell) where he thought his son Joseph was (Gen.37:31-35). Even righteous Job requested to go to sheol (Job 14:13-15).

If hell is a place of fire and torment for the wicked, why would Jesus and other righteous individuals be found there? The simple fact revealed in scripture is that all humans who die go to the same place at death.

**Resurrection From Hell**

God will resurrect those in the grave. If the King James translators had been consistent with their usage of the word 'hell' in place of 'sheol', it would have caused a problem with their doctrine of hell being a place of eternal torment.

The prophetess Hannah says,

"The Lord kills, and makes alive: he brings down to the grave [sheol], and brings up" (1.Sam.2:6 KJV). See also Job 21:23-32; 30:23; Psa.30:3; 49:15; 86:13; Hos.13:14; Nah.1:14; Rev.1:18.

"And when I saw him, I fell at his feet, as dead. And he put his right hand on me, saying to me, do not fear. I am the first and the last, and the Living One; and I became dead: and behold, I am living forever and ever. Amen. And I have the keys to Hades, and of death" (Rev.1:17-18 Para.).

Jesus has the authority and power to unlock the grave and resurrect those who reside there. See Acts 10:42; Rom.14:9.
In 1 Corinthians 15:55 KJV 'hades' is translated as 'grave', "O death, where is your sting? O grave [hades], where is your victory?"

"And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works" (Rev.20:13 KJV).

This is an important scripture because it contradicts the traditional teaching of the immortality of the soul and that hades is a place of eternal torment from which there is no escape.

A short study into the references where the word 'hades' is used will easily show that it means the 'grave' and not an 'ever-burning place of eternal torture'.

**GEHENNA/GEHINOM**

The Greek word 'gehenna' and the Hebrew word 'gehinom' are translated as 'hell' in the New Testament and come from the Hebrew phrase 'Gay Ben Hinnom', which means 'The Valley of the Son of Hinnom'. This small valley was located south of Jerusalem on one of the borders between the territories of Judah and Benjamin (see Josh.15:8). Periodically, during the times of the Kings of Israel, the sacrificial burning of children was practiced there:

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned sixteen years in Jerusalem: but he did not that which was right in the sight of the Lord, like David his father: For he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and made also molten images for Baalim. Moreover he burnt incense in the valley of the son of Hinnom, and burnt his children in the fire, after the abominations of the heathen whom the Lord had cast out before the children of Israel" (2.Chron.28:1-3 KJV). See also 2.Kg.23:7-10; 2.Chron.33:1-6; Jer.7:31;32:35.

These sacrifices were a part of the worship of Molech. Jeremiah and many other prophets condemned this practice and prophesied that the valley would be called 'The Valley of Slaughter' because of the events that would transpire there (see Jer.19:5-6). The location in the Valley of Hinnom where the children were burnt in sacrifice to pagan gods was called 'topet', which means 'a burning place'.

The Gehenna of Christ's day was the name of a deep ravine about a thousand yards south of the temple area just outside of the city of Jerusalem. This ravine was used as the city's garbage dump. It is said that all sorts of things were disposed of there, such as bones and the bodies of animals and criminals. Fires were kept continually burning in the Valley of Gehenna in order to consume whatever was thrown there.

Because of the circumstances associated with Gehenna, the Hebrew word 'gehinom' became an idiomatic expression for 'a place of fiery destruction.' When Jesus spoke of Gehenna it was for the purpose of describing destruction, not torture.
"Fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna]" (Matt.10:28 KJV). See also Gen.6:1-7; Lk.12:4-5 KJV.

The English word destroy in verse 28 is translated from the Greek word apollumi, which means to destroy fully, to kill, to perish, to completely do away with. The usage of the word apollumi in the New Testament always indicates complete destruction. Both the Hebrew and Greek words for destroy mean the destruction and cessation of existence.

There is no doubt that Christ's audience knew exactly what he was referring to when he spoke of gehenna. His symbolic usage of gehenna in portraying destruction was a very graphic illustration and an unmistakable reference to total destruction.

"Woe to you scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitened graves which outwardly indeed appear beautiful, but within are full of bones of the dead, and of all uncleanness. So you also indeed outwardly appear righteous to men, but within are full of hypocrisy and lawlessness. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you build the tombs of the prophets, and adorn the tombs of the righteous. And you say, If we had been in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets. So you witness to yourselves, that you are the sons of those who murdered the prophets. And you fill up the measure of your fathers. Serpents, offspring of vipers! How shall you escape the judgment of gehenna?" (Matt.23:27-33 Para.).

Here, Jesus gives a powerful rebuke and warning to these wicked religious leaders. Notice that, if they do not repent, there is no escape from the punishment for sin, which is utter, final destruction by fire.

The destructive power of fire was used many times to destroy those who opposed God or his people. There are many warnings in the Bible, which show that those who oppose God, his prophets, and his people will be destroyed with fire. See Gen.19:24; Deut.4:23-24; 9:3; Isa.9:18-19; 30:26-23; Matt.3:10; 5:21-22; 2.Thes.1:7-8.

The Gehenna fire that Jesus warned of is not a place of eternal torture; it is a place where the death penalty will be administered. It is a place of the final destruction of wicked humans and spirits.

Every time Jesus referred to gehenna, those listening knew exactly what he was saying. They did not imagine a place of fiery torture under the earth or anywhere else. They visualized a foul, stinking garbage dump where refuse and unwanted waste of all kinds was thrown to be destroyed by fire.
The Worm of Gehenna

In another reference to Gehenna, Jesus makes the picture of destruction more graphic by referring to the ever-present worms that infested the garbage and dead bodies that were thrown there:

"And if your hand offend you, cut it off. For it is profitable for you to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go away into the fire of gehenna that cannot be put out: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out. And if your foot causes you to offend cut it off, for it is well for you to enter into life lame, than having two feet to be thrown into gehenna, into the fire that cannot be put out: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out. And if your eye offends you, cast it out. For it is profitable for you to enter into the kingdom of God one-eyed, than having two eyes to be thrown into the fire of gehenna: Where their worm does not die, and the fire is not put out" (Mk.9:43-48 Para.). See also Matt.5:29-30; 18:8-9.

Many think these scriptures say wicked people will be tortured forever. However, Jesus uses the city dump where garbage was burned as an example of the destruction of the wicked.

But what about the worm that does not die? Some feel that because Jesus says *their worm does not die*, there must be eternal punishing for sinners? However, Jesus is using the city dump and its fires as a symbolic representation of final punishment.

The English word translated as *worm* is translated from the Greek word *skolex*, which refers to a grub, maggot, or earth worm, which fits perfectly into the symbolism of the Gehenna-fire garbage dump. When a carcass was thrown into Gehenna, but it was not totally consumed by the fires or did not reach the fires to be burned, it would be consumed by animals, birds, insects, maggots, and/or worms.

When dead flesh is infested with worms/maggots, their endless reproductive life cycle (e.g., egg, pupa, larva, insect) will eventually totally consume the flesh. This is what Jesus meant when he said *their worm does not die*. He did not mean that the worm was eternal, he was using the city dump and its destructive nature as an allegory for the finality of the punishment for sinfulness.

The prophet Isaiah also used the symbolism of a worm and fire when he foretold the total destruction of the wicked during the millennial reign of Christ:

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain. And it shall come to pass, that from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, says the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against me:
for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh" (Isa.66:22-24 KJV).

When Jesus spoke of Gehenna and worms that did not die, he was giving a graphic description of the finality of the destruction of the wicked to his audience. They knew he was speaking of a most foul and miserable destruction in a Gehenna type garbage dump where worthless things were disposed of.

TARTAROO

The Greek word tartaroo appears only once in the Bible: "For God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down into hell [tartaroo], and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved to judgment" (2.Pet.2:4 KJV). See also 1.Pet.3:19-20; Jude 6.

The beings who will be sent to hell (tartaroo) are not people; they are wicked angels. Tartaroo is neither gehenna nor hades; it is a place of darkness and restraint and its literal meaning is incarceration or restraint. It does not necessarily mean a place at all. Moreover, in no way whatsoever can this word be applied to a place of punishment for humans.

SUMMARY

The Bible is very clear in stating that the wicked will not inherit the Kingdom of God:

"Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor male prostitutes nor homosexual offenders nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God" (1.Cor.6:9-10 NIV). See also Gal.5:19-21.

The Incorrigibly Wicked

What will happen to the incorrigible sinners? Are they all to be tortured with fire forever? No, they will not be tortured forever. The wages of sin is death (Rom.6:23)—not eternal life in torment.

Those who willfully disobey and reject God will receive eternal punishment, not eternal punishing. They will be cast into a fire that will terminate their existence forever (Matt.13:38-42; Rev.20:15), and they will be ashes under the feet of the righteous (Mal.4:3):

"But for the cowardly and unbelieving, and those having become foul, and murderers, and fornicators, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all the lying ones, their part will be in the Lake burning with fire and brimstone, which is the second death" (Rev.21:8 Para.).
Hell Fire

It is evident that the popular concept of hell as an ever-burning place of torture for the wicked cannot be substantiated by honestly translating the Bible. Because it cannot be proven from scripture, it is obviously a false teaching and a deception of Satan who is the God of this world's religions. The traditional teaching of an eternal 'hell-fire' torture reserved for the wicked is false. Such a place simply does not exist as a teaching of the Bible. Although Jesus and the prophets did not teach ever-burning torture, they did teach a final punishment for the wicked.

The wicked will be punished by fire. However, this fire is far hotter and more permanent than most believe. The fire that will be used to punish the wicked will consume both body and spirit; therefore, it will terminate the totality of their existence forever:

"For, behold, the day comes, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yes, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that comes shall burn them up, says the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. . . . And you shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, says the Lord of hosts" (Mal.4:1;3 KJV).

By B.L. Cocherell
At some point in eternity, a plan was carefully designed to create humans for the purpose of increasing the Sovereign God's family of immortal spirit-beings. Details of this plan are found scattered throughout the biblical record and involve every person who has lived, is now living, and is yet to be born. However, this plan has been intentionally kept secret from most of humanity until humans could learn the lessons which only time and experience can teach.

Matthew 13:10-17 KJV

"And the disciples came, and said to him, Why speak you to them in parables? He answered and said to them, Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. . . Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. . . " (vs.10-13).

"And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which says, By hearing you shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing you shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them" (vs.14-15). See also Isa.6: 9-10.

"But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. For verily I say to you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which you see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which you hear, and have not heard them" (vs.16-17). See also Mk.4:11-12; Lk.8:10.

The Mystery Revealed

It is now the end of this age and the Sovereign God is revealing, through the biblical record and his servants, the good news of his soon-coming Kingdom and the awesome purpose for human existence, which is to become a spirit-being and live forever in the Sovereign God's family and kingdom.

Shortly after his death and resurrection, Jesus gave the following instructions to his disciples and those who would believe in him and what he taught:
"Go you therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the holy spirit: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the world. Amen" (Matt.28:19-20 KJV).

"And he said to them, You go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. One who believes and is baptized shall be saved; but the one who does not believe shall be damned" (Mk.16:15-16 KJV Para).

During this age, before Christ returns to earth, those who understand the Sovereign God's plan to increase his family are to teach this plan to others and accept those who believe it into his earthly family of king-priests. See Acts 2:38-39; 1.Pet.2:9.

God the Father has embarked upon the greatest and grandest of all his creations; he is creating beings just like himself (Phil.3:21; 1.Jn.3:2), and his intent is to share with them all he has created or will create throughout eternity.

To the saints at Corinth and Rome the apostle Paul wrote the following about a life much better than this present existence:

"But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1.Cor.2:9 KJV).

"For whatever things were written before, were written for our instruction, that through patience and encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope" (Rom.15:4 Para.).

The Bible is not mythology or just quaint stories fabricated by the ancient nation of Israel; it is a book of hope which promises eternal and immortal life after physical death through participation in the Sovereign God's plan to bring new members into his heavenly family.

THE PLAN

The following is a summary of seven phases of the Sovereign God's plan to increase his heavenly family:

PHASE 1

ORIGINAL CREATION AND RECONSTRUCTION

"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth" (Gen.1:1).

The Bible does not say exactly how long ago the earth was created; however, Biblical and historical evidence indicate that between six and seven thousand years ago humans with the spirit of man began to populate the earth:
"And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" (Gen.1:26 KJV).

The word God in the above verse is a uniplural Hebrew word that means more than one being is involved. Please read John 1:1-18.

From the time of Adam to the days of Noah, humans were allowed to live and do their own thing, but during the days of Noah, humans had become so wicked and rebellious, that God was sorry he had created mankind:

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And it repented the Lord that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. And the Lord said, I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth; both man, and beast, and the creeping thing, and the fowls of the air; for it repents me that I have made them" (Gen.6:5-7 KJV).

Not wanting his human creation to continue to suffer under the oppression of evil, God destroyed all of humanity in a worldwide flood, except Noah and his family.

PHASE 2

A NEW START AFTER THE FLOOD

Only eight people survived the flood. This small remnant was all that was left of a race that had existed for almost two thousand years, and had populated the earth with millions of people.

The Creator told Noah and this small remnant to repopulate the earth, and promised that he would never again destroy the earth and humanity with a flood. As a token of this promise, God said he would cause a change in the atmospheric conditions so that rainbows could be seen from time to time as a reminder of this promise (Gen.9:7-17).

Approximately 130 years after the flood, the earth's population had grown to hundreds of thousands and perhaps millions. Because of the knowledge brought from the former civilization by Noah and his family, and because of a common language, man's knowledge and scientific achievements were advancing at a rapid pace, so much so that God stepped in and suppressed man's ability to communicate among themselves (Gen.11:5-9). This slowed scientific progress and forestalled the inevitable result of the misuse of scientific knowledge—genocide through war and the destruction of the environment.

The next 1900 or so years of man's history was business as usual. People were doing the things they had been doing from the creation of Adam; being born and dying, loving and hating, marrying and divorcing, and warring and seeking peace.
But most importantly, history was being recorded so that humanity could eventually see and understand the utter hopelessness of human existence apart from God's influence and guidance.

PHASE 3
THE PLAN REVEALED

About 2,000 years ago, the Roman Empire ruled most of the world, and there was a rare period of partial peace in human history. During this time of peace, God the Father sent the One we call Jesus Christ to be born of a virgin and become a human being.

There were many reasons for this bold venture, some of which are the following:

- To gain a firsthand knowledge of what it was like to be human.
  
  "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil; And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham. Wherefore in all things it behooved him to be made like to his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people. For in that he himself had suffered being tempted, he is able to succor them that are tempted" (Heb.2:14-18 KJV). See also Heb.5:7-8.

- To reveal God's plan to humanity.
  
  "Now after that John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God" (Mk.1:14 KJV; Lk.8:10).

- To show the God Family's concern and love for their human creation by giving a gift worth more than all in existence. That gift was the life of one of the members of the God Family. This life was to be given as payment for the sins of all humanity, because it is only through the death of Jesus Christ, that humanity is able to obtain forgiveness of their sins.

While Jesus Christ was on earth (approximately thirty-three and a half years) he lived his life much as any other Jew of his day, with one great exception, he knew that he was the Creator God in the flesh and if he failed in any part of his mission, he would cease to exist and humanity would lose its opportunity for salvation and eternal life (Jn.3:15-17; 12:47; 1.Tim.2:4-6; 1.Cor.15:17).
At about thirty years of age, Jesus chose twelve men (Matt.10:1-11; Lk.6:12-16; 8:10; Mk.3:13-19) who were to learn God's Plan and then teach others. Throughout the ensuing centuries (Rom.16:24-26; Eph.6: 19; Col.1:25-27), others would also be specially selected by God the Father to proclaim his plan to the world:

"No man can come to me, except the Father which has sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day" (Jn.6:44 KJV).

"For as many as are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom.8:14 KJV). See also Acts 2:47; Matt.20:16; 28:19-20.

PHASE 4

AMBASSADORS FOR JESUS CHRIST

Since the days of Jesus Christ and his disciples, God's Plan has been presented to humanity in a publication known simply as The Book. However, God's plan was understood by only a very few prior to the advent of Jesus. But since Jesus Christ came and revealed it to his disciples, this understanding has been passed on by his followers from generation to generation.

Individuals who receive this knowledge, accept Jesus Christ as their personal Savior, and live their lives in accordance to the rules for human behavior as set forth in the Bible become ambassadors for Christ. Their duties as ambassadors include:

1. Showing that God's way of life is the best way to live, in order to have real peace and happiness:

"The thief comes not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (Jn.10:10 KJV).

2. Proclaiming the good news of the soon-coming world-ruling government of God:

"And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent you, and believe the gospel" (Mk.1:15 KJV). See also Matt.28:19-20.

3. Explaining that the result of ignoring God's laws, precepts, and principles will bring eternal death:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom.6:23 KJV).

4. Preparing to assume the role of priests and kings to rule the earth with Christ at the institution of God's government over humanity:
"And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given to them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshiped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:4-6 KJV).

PHASE 5

THE END OF HUMAN GOVERNMENT

Jesus was asked a question by his disciples—a question that all who serve God and desire real peace on earth have asked throughout the centuries: When will the government of God come to the earth? The answer is found in Matthew, the 24th chapter. Read it very carefully and think about the condition of the world today.

When we take careful note of world conditions, it appears that we are indeed living in the times spoken of by Christ, and that these events could very well end in the complete annihilation of all life from the face of the earth.

If this is the time spoken of by Jesus, the end of human government is very near, and will be accomplished by the direct intervention into world affairs by Jesus Christ who will save humanity from total destruction.

PHASE 6

THE GOVERNMENT OF GOD COMES TO EARTH

This earth will be invaded by Jesus Christ, his angels, and the elect resulting in the most horrible and terrifying war that humans will have ever experienced (Jude v15; 1.Thes.3:13; Rev.19:14-15). This invasion will be met with tremendous resistance by the warring nations of the earth (Rev.17:12-14; Matt.24:21-22), but physical humans will be no match for the Creator and his army of spirit-beings (Rev.6:15-17). All resistance will be put down quickly, and God's government will rule the earth from Jerusalem forever:

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. And many people shall go and say, Come you, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And he shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many
people: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more" (Isa.2:2-4 KJV).

"And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever" (Rev.11:15 KJV).

PHASE 7
THE FAMILY OF GOD

The entire history of mankind, from God's creation of the universe to the earth-shaking events to come, has been carefully guided through the centuries in preparation for the grand climax of God's plan for humanity. This phase in the plan is the changing of physical humans into immortal spirit-beings in the family of God:

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality" (1.Cor.15:50-53 KJV).

"So 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 your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, which gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1.Cor.15:54-57 KJV).

That's right! Humans were created to become eternal beings just like God the Father and Jesus Christ (1.Jn.3:2; Phil.3:21; Rom.8:14-19). This is God's primary purpose for the physical creation, and this is what is in store for those who obey God (Jn.1:12; Heb.1:12). They will become spirit Sons of God, and live forever with their heavenly Father and brother Jesus Christ (Rom.8:29; 1.Cor.2:9).

YOUR PART IN THE PLAN

If you are willing to accept the challenge, your part in this drama of human existence, is to be among the very first humans to become Sons, Kings, and Priests of God:

"And he that overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron;" (Rev.2:26-27 KJV).
"Blessed and holy is he that has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (Rev.20:6 KJV).

Do you want to become a part of the God Family and live an exciting and joyful life for eternity? The process by which this very special relationship with God the Father and Jesus Christ can be obtained is called Salvation and it is offered to those whom God the Father calls:

"For the promise is to you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call" (Acts 2:39).

B.L. Cocherell b7w18
MISSION STATEMENT

We sincerely hope that you have found these topical studies into the Bible intellectually challenging, spiritually enlightening, and beneficial.

For those wondering who authored this study, what the study's purpose is, or how to participate in this educational program, the following brief summary will give some insight into who we are and what we are trying to accomplish.

This Work

This work is a non-profit volunteer effort, there are no salaried writers, employees, or staff. The volunteers are engaged in an ongoing effort to discover, research, understand, and publish foundational truths that have been hidden in the Bible for centuries. We believe that, when these foundational truths are correctly understood and practiced, they will bring people happy, abundant, and productive lives with the promise of eternal life after physical death.

Our Goals

Our primary goal is to share our knowledge and understanding of the Sovereign God's plan and purpose for humanity with those who are interested in living according to his law, and not by the dictates and traditions of men. Our secondary goal is to proclaim the coming Kingdom of God as a warning and a witness to humanity before the Messiah returns to rule the earth.

If You Want To Know More

If you want to know more about us, the work we are doing, or how you can participate in our biblically based educational and research projects, contact us at: www.BibleResearch.org or www.Bible-Prophecy.net
WHO IS GOD?
WHAT IS THE BIBLE AND ITS MESSAGE?

The identity of God is one of the greatest mysteries of the entire Bible. Without understanding who God is, it is impossible to understand the biblical record, the reason humans exist on earth, and the message that Jesus brought about how to enter the Kingdom of God as an immortal spirit-being.

People all over the world are searching for a way to live longer, healthier, and happier lives. The biblical record reveals that the purpose for your existence is to give you an opportunity to live forever in a place where no evil exists and where you will have a wonderful life filled with all that is good and enjoyable. This is the good news message that Jesus Christ brought from the Sovereign God.

This book reveals the true identity of the Sovereign God, the Creator God, and Jesus Christ. Additionally, this book unlocks many of the Bible's mysteries and secrets which explain God's awesome and wonderful plan for humanity.

BIBLICAL PROPHECIES PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

The Bible is full of prophecies which speak of unimaginable pain and suffering which Jesus Christ says he is going to pour out on humanity and many of the Father's elect children before he returns to establish the government of God on earth. But, why would the loving God who gave his life for humanity as the Messiah want to inflict the kind of pain, agony, and terror spoken of throughout the Bible as 'The Wrath of God'?

If the wrath of God is inevitable, when will it come and what does God hope to accomplish through it? These and many other questions are answered in this in-depth study about the major events which will precede and be a part of the return of Christ and the establishment of the Kingdom of God on earth.

This book also identifies several political alliances, people, and spirit-beings and their involvement before and during the fulfillment of the prophetic events at the end of this age.
THE GIFT OF IMMORTALITY

The magnitude of the opportunities and rewards that the Sovereign God offers to those he calls to salvation through repentance, baptism, and conversion is almost beyond comprehension; nevertheless, what is offered can be obtained by those who are willing to become obedient to his way of life.

This book answers many questions about how to enter the Sovereign God's family and kingdom as an immortal spirit-being and what he expects of his children while they live in human form.

THE COMMANDED OBSERVANCES AND HOLY CONVOCATIONS
PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Throughout human history, anyone who wanted to worship the true God had to do so within the boundaries of strict rules that were set forth by God. The foundational elements of this worship system are shown through the sacrificial system and the commanded observances and holy convocations.

This two volume study answers many questions about the Sovereign God's plan for humanity, explains many of the literal and prophetic meanings of the various observances and convocations, and reveals a new dimension of understanding into God's plan for the salvation of humanity—past, present, and future—that has been hidden for many centuries.

SURVIVE AND THRIVE AS A FOLLOWER OF CHRIST

During the centuries that followed the demise of the early church, those who clung to the basic truths of God also accepted much error and made many departures from the truth once delivered. Along with this departure from truth, much knowledge and understanding about spiritual leadership, congregational organization and government, and problem solving within the body of believers was lost.

This book contains studies that should give any serious student of the Bible enough knowledge to understand who the spiritual leaders of the church are and are not, the organizational and governmental structure of the early church, and what one's attitude, behavior, and responsibility should be pertaining to the organizational and governmental structure of the church and those who govern and serve the elect of God through it.
BIBLICAL LAW PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

Throughout much of Christian history there has been much confusion and misunderstanding as to what constitutes God's law and whether or not any or all of it applies to Christians today. This study gives some unique insights into the Sovereign God's purpose for humanity and shows how the first humans came under the authority of God's law, how the law applies to Christians today, how it will apply to humans after Christ returns, and how to have a harmonious relationship with the Sovereign God and Jesus Christ through the practice of God's law.

This book gives logical, concise, and meaningful answers to many questions concerning God's law and its application today.

OUR PLACE IN THE SPIRIT REALM
GODS • ANGELS • DEMONS

The spirit realm and the beings who inhabit it and interact with this physical realm are a reality which should not be casually dismissed as being unimportant to one's daily life.

The Bible contains much information that true Christians need to know about the Sovereign God, the Creator God, Jesus Christ, and other spirit-beings.

This book is a serious discussion about the reality of spirit-beings, the tremendous positive impact on mankind that some of these beings have had, are having, and will have in the future and the serious danger posed by some spirit-beings as they interact with humans and this physical dimension of time and space.

SYNAGOGUE OF SATAN AND DOCTRINES OF DEMONS

In the Book of Revelation, there is a cryptic reference to individuals Christ identifies as being of the synagogue of Satan. Additionally the apostle Paul warned the evangelist Timothy to beware of those who would depart from the faith and pay attention to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons. Is it possible that much of what is taught as biblical truth today is not truth, but a clever deception?

This book identifies the Synagogue of Satan and its members and documents a number of popular beliefs held by many professing Christians that are in reality teachings of evil spirits meant to prevent an understanding of true biblical precepts, principles, and laws that lead to everlasting life when practiced.
BOOK ORDERS AND DONATION INFORMATION

5½" x 8½" soft cover copies of each book noted in the above list may be ordered from www.BibleResearch.org or www.Bible-Prophecy.net. Copies of each book and the topical studies contained in each book may be downloaded free of charge from the websites noted. This book or the ones noted in the above list can be ordered from the printer for mass distribution at cost plus shipping and handling.

Donations are gladly accepted to help defray the cost of our publishing, shipping, and the maintenance of our websites.