

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE?



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By Richard F. Ames

Is death the end of human existence? Will you be reincarnated? Will you “roll around heaven all day” with nothing to do for eternity? The amazing, encouraging truth of the matter is unknown to most people, yet it is found in the pages of your Bible! God has a plan for all of humanity—and a very special reward in store for today’s true Christians!

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Chapter I

Heirs to a Promise

You may have seen polls that ask people about their greatest fears. One famous poll found that people fear public speaking more than they fear death. That may seem humorous to us when we are young and healthy, and indeed public speaking is a challenge for which many are unprepared. Few of us, however, would *really* rather die than speak in public. We probably know what will happen when we finish a speech, but how many people really know what will happen when they die?

Will death bring a permanent end to our brief existence? Many people cannot bear the idea of *not existing*. Instead of living active, vibrant lives, these people waste their time fearing their eventual loss of life. Some, like noted futurist Ray Kurzweil, hope that we are nearing a time when human beings may overcome their biological limitations and “upload” themselves into machines that will “live” forever. A few at the other extreme take measures to preserve their dead bodies through techniques such as cryopreservation—deep-freezing their bodies—in the hope that science may one day be able to restore life to their lifeless flesh and bones.

But is the extension of our present lives really the answer to our problems? How many lives are tormented by pain, regret, sadness, loneliness, and heartache? When we read the Bible’s accounts of the lives of the earliest human beings, we see that they lived for many centuries. Adam lived for 930 years; Seth, his son, lived for 912 years; Enosh lived for 905 years; Cainan for 910 years; Mahalaleel for 895

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years; his son Jered for 962 years; his grandson Methuselah for 969 years. Did their long lives bring them contentment? Did they live in a world filled with peace and prosperity? *No!* “Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart” (Genesis 6:5–6).

No, a longer life doesn’t necessarily mean a fulfilling, purposeful life. And, despite humanity’s best efforts to create eternal life in the flesh, “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27). Death truly is an enemy of mankind (1 Corinthians 15:26) and is truly inevitable: It has come to everyone who has ever lived. Americans may remember the famous quip by founding father Benjamin Franklin: “... in this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes.” A few may have escaped taxes, but death is the one experience common to all.

After Death... What?

So, what will happen to each of us when death inevitably comes? In the Western world, a majority—albeit a shrinking one—still holds “mainstream” or traditional views about heaven and hell. The Pew Research Center reported in 2015 that 72 percent of Americans believed in heaven, defined as a place “where people who have led good lives are eternally rewarded” (“Most Americans believe in heaven and hell,” *Pew FacTank*, November 10, 2015). Interestingly, just 58 percent expressed belief in a hell “where people who have lived bad lives and die without being sorry are eternally punished.”

Or, will death simply mean rebirth in another body? Year after year, pollster George Barna has found that Eastern religious concepts are gaining popularity in America. A few years ago, 18 percent of those surveyed told Barna that they believe in some kind of reincarnation (“Americans Describe Their Views About Life After Death,” *Barna*, October 21, 2003). Some believe that the soul may come back as a human being, or maybe as an animal, depending on our conduct during this life, and that we will only end the cycle of reincarnation when by our own strenuous efforts we achieve perfection. Some describe this perfection as the complete loss of selfhood. Others expect to spend eternity in heaven with one deity or another, or perhaps gazing at a “be-

atific vision” of God, rapt in eternal worship with no particular work to do, forever and ever.

Others say that we live just once, and that if we fail to worship the correct deity, we will spend eternity being tortured by the flames of an ever-burning hellfire. They say that if you happen to be born in a time or place where you never heard of the correct deity, you are predestined for hell. This seems unjust and turns off many who are sincerely seeking to understand.

You Need the Truth!

Is there any way we can know with certainty the truth of what happens when we die? The good news is that we *can* know the truth, and that we can prove it from a source that has proved to be uniquely trustworthy: your Bible! The truth is that those who truly follow Jesus Christ are heirs to a wonderful promise—a promise we shall inherit when we are resurrected from the dead. As the Apostle Paul wrote, “if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise” (Galatians 3:29). The Apostle Peter describes our reward as “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away” (1 Peter 1:4). Notice that this reward is an inheritance that is being kept for today’s Christians. We are heirs, not yet inheritors, of a wonderful promise (Romans 8:14–17). What is that promise that we are destined to inherit? It is something of such wonder that humanity has not yet experienced anything like it, nor can we begin to comprehend that wonder without God’s help. As Paul wrote, “Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things which God has prepared for those who love Him” (1 Corinthians 2:9). Read on to learn more about this astounding promise and what it will mean for you!



Chapter 2

Eternal Life: A Gift

Many Bible students are familiar with this very encouraging verse: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). But how many truly understand what this verse means?

As imperfect human beings, we commit sins and then we repent. We understand that God has not killed us “on the spot” because of our sins. Even those unrepentant sinners living carnal and dissolute lives have not yet received the full wages of their sins. We understand that sinners will earn their full wage **after** this lifetime.

But what exactly *is* that wage? Notice that the above scripture does **not** state, “The wages of sin is immortal life in hellfire.” The wages of sin isn’t any sort of immortal life; it is death—the *absence* of life. Why then do so many picture the “wages of sin” as being *eternal life in torment*? Living forever—available only as “the gift of God” according to this same verse—is the very *opposite* of “death.”

Is the Soul Immortal?

The reason many professing Christians do not believe the plain words of God is the common and inaccurate teaching that everyone has an “immortal soul” that will never die—an immortal soul that will live forever, either in the torment of “hell” or the joys of “heaven.” But think: If we *already have* immortality, we don’t need to receive it as a gift from God!

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Yes, as strange as this may seem to those of us who grew up hearing only the unbiblical assumptions of mainstream “Christianity,” the truth is that until we have “put on” immortality (1 Corinthians 15:52–53) through God’s gift at the resurrection, a soul can *die*! The prophet Ezekiel made this clear when he wrote, “The soul who sins shall die” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). The Hebrew word for “soul” is *nephesh*, which refers to *physical* life; it is the same word used to describe *animal life* in Genesis 1:21.

“But that’s in the Old Testament,” you may be thinking. “What does the New Testament say about the soul?” You may be surprised to learn that Jesus’ teaching was the same: “And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both **soul** [in Greek *psuche*, “life”] and body in hell [*gehenna* fire]” (Matthew 10:28). Do you believe your Bible? Do you believe what Jesus said? God is able to **destroy** both soul and body in “hell”—*gehenna* fire. Instead of describing the soul as “immortal,” Jesus Christ says plainly that the souls of the wicked will be *destroyed* along with their bodies!

The Bible does teach that there is a human *spirit*—the spirit in man (1 Corinthians 2:11; Job 32:8, 18) that works in conjunction with the brain and empowers the remarkable human intellect. Although this spirit is collected by God upon our deaths (Ecclesiastes 3:21), surely containing the record of all we’ve ever known and experienced for God’s future use (as we will see!), Scripture is clear that there is *no consciousness* after death! The dead do not praise God (Psalm 115:17)—they do not thank God, nor even think of Him at all (Psalm 6:5)—in fact, they “know *nothing*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5)! The soul is, indeed, *mortal* and until a future resurrection, the dead are plainly that: dead. The popular teaching of the conscious, immortal soul is simply a fallacy, contradicted by multiple statements in your Bible!

Misunderstanding “Paradise”

Yet, many people mistakenly believe that they will immediately go to heaven when they die in the faith—that there is no need for a future resurrection for them to be with God. Where do they get that idea? Some base their misunderstanding on an incorrect reading of Jesus’ words to the thief crucified alongside Him: “And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise’” (Luke

23:43). Many do not realize that based on the actual Greek text, which has no commas, the word “today” should be with the previous clause of the sentence: “I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise.” Yes, the thief **will** be with Christ in Paradise. But when? What is Paradise? And where is it?

Scripture says that Paul was “caught up into paradise” in a vision (2 Corinthians 12:4) and tells us that the tree of life is in Paradise (Revelation 2:7). It also tells us that the tree of life is in the New Jerusalem, which Christ says will be coming *out* of heaven *to* the earth once its preparation is complete (Revelation 3:12; 21:2; 22:2). Yet, the New Jerusalem will not be ready until *after* the saints have reigned on earth for one thousand years, at the conclusion of God’s plan (Revelation 20–22). Paradise is awaiting a future revelation and arrival on earth! The thief, just as Christ promised, will be with Him in Paradise after he is resurrected—but that time is a *future* time, yet to come.

Furthermore, even Christ *Himself* was not in Paradise—nor did He enter it—on the day when He made that promise! Jesus died, and He then spent three days and three nights unconscious, in the tomb—not in Paradise! Christ was not conscious again until God the Father resurrected Him to life on the third day, in fulfillment of Scripture (Matthew 12:40)!

The gospel of John confirms the truth that souls do not go to heaven when they die. As the Apostle John wrote, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). As the Logos, Christ’s abode had been in heaven before He came to planet Earth as the incarnate Word, Jesus.

Although countless patriarchs had lived and died before the Apostle penned those words, only the one divine Personage now known as Jesus Christ had descended **from** and ascended **to** heaven! When Peter gave his first sermon, weeks after Jesus’ death and resurrection, he could state plainly, “Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.... For David did not ascend into the heavens” (Acts 2:29, 34). David is dead in the grave, unconscious, awaiting the resurrection—as are all the other faithful saints!

Jesus and His Apostles taught what the Old Testament taught about death. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we read, “For the living

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know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). What does it mean that they “have no more reward”? We know from Scripture that human beings will receive eternal reward or punishment. What this scripture is telling us is that death isn’t some different kind of conscious state. When we are dead, we “know nothing”—just as if we were in a deep and dreamless sleep.

The Apostle Paul confirmed this when he wrote to those in Thessalonica:

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13–15).

Paul’s words are clear: The dead are dead, but we have a hope for them—that God will bring them back. That hope is not rooted in unbiblical ideas of conscious existence that continues past death—rather, our hope mirrors that of the Apostle Paul, “that there will be a resurrection of the dead” (Acts 24:15)! Yes, God will, at the resurrection, *give* those who died in the faith eternal life—something we do not have as human beings.

Is God Fair?

The above scriptures should make it exceedingly clear that those who are now dead are actually dead—they are not conscious, immortal souls waiting to be put back into human bodies. But who *will* receive eternal life? The vast majority of people who have lived and died never even heard the name of Jesus Christ. Other billions have heard only a false gospel about a false Christ. Only a relative few have had the opportunity to hear the true Gospel of Jesus Christ and to act on what they have heard. And yet Scripture tells us that we cannot receive salvation without Jesus Christ: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). Does this mean that God is arbitrary or unfair?

Some religious thinkers, like the Protestant reformer John Calvin, have taught that God created billions of souls whom He knowingly predestined to suffer in hell for eternity. Others say that God wants to save all souls, but that it is up to Christians to reach the world with His message—and, if they fail, the souls who have never heard the name of Jesus Christ will spend eternity being tormented in hell.

The Bible, however, assures us that God is just, merciful, and fair. We have seen that the Bible teaches that a dead person remains dead until the resurrection. Both Paul and Jesus referred to death as a “sleep,” and one who is dead has no consciousness—remaining in the grave until the resurrection. Consider Jesus’ words: “Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation” (John 5:28–29). Other translations use the word “judgment” instead of “condemnation.”

Yes, without a resurrection, the soul would be dead forever. Our hope is not on a fictitious eternity in heaven as some disembodied soul, but in a future resurrection to life. Read on to learn what that resurrection—actually, those *resurrections*—will mean to you and your loved ones!



Chapter 3

Three Resurrections

Near the end of His first coming, Jesus Christ told His disciples, “I will no longer talk much with you, for *the ruler of this world* is coming, and he has nothing in Me” (John 14:30). The Apostle John told the Christians of his day, “We know that we are of God, and the *whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one*” (1 John 5:19). And Paul wrote, “But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds *the god of this age* has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them” (2 Corinthians 4:3–4).

Paul calls Satan the “god of this age” because of his immense power and influence, and God allows this for His purpose. In Revelation, the Apostle John calls Satan a deceiver who “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9).

A Blinded World

Were the Apostles making this up? Was Christ exaggerating? Of course not! But if the Bible declares unambiguously that Satan is the ruler of this age and that the *whole world* is deceived—yet with nearly one-third of the world’s population professing some form of “Christianity”—what does this mean for Christians? The implications are clear. As shocking as this may seem, the **vast** majority of people who have lived and died in the nearly 6,000 years since Adam have been blinded—unable to understand and live by the true Gospel mes-

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sage that Jesus Christ brought! And that blinded mass of humanity includes the vast majority of those who call themselves “Christian” today!

Is this something we can “fix” by ourselves, apart from God’s help? No! For the faith and understanding that lead to salvation, we need the help of God’s Spirit. Paul explains: “But the natural man does not receive the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; nor can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned” (1 Corinthians 2:14).

The amazing truth is that God is opening the minds of relatively few in this present age. Jesus tells His disciples plainly, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him,” and that “no one can come to Me unless it has been granted to him by My Father” (John 6:44, 65). Peter explains that, in this age, salvation is only extended to “as many as the Lord our God will call” (Acts 2:39), and Paul reveals that only a few are being called by God in this life while others are not, according to God’s overall plan and timing (1 Corinthians 1:26–29; Romans 11:7–8, 32).

Does this surprise you? Think! If the all-good and all-powerful God really wanted to save everyone in this present age, wouldn’t He be able to do so? Even Jesus Christ, at the end of His three-and-a-half-year ministry, had just 120 disciples (Acts 1:15). Jesus spoke to the masses, but as He explained, “Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand” (Matthew 13:13). Jesus did not speak in parables to make His message *clearer* to the crowds. Rather, He used parables so that only His chosen *few* would understand: “And He said to them, ‘To you it has been given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that “Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them”’” (Mark 4:11–12).

This truth of the Bible directly contradicts what most of us were taught by mainstream “Christianity”—that Jesus spoke in parables “so everyone would understand.” In fact, the exact opposite is true! Jesus spoke in parables so the general public would *not* understand! Jesus was not trying to convert the world at that time! He knew that God was calling only a select few believers in this present age, as part

of a far larger plan. One of God's names in Hebrew is *El Shaddai*—God Almighty. Nothing could stop the Almighty God from converting the whole world **right now**, if that were His real intention!

This is not speculation; even secular historians have acknowledged the historical truth of what the earliest Church members believed and taught about the fact that God has planned different resurrections for different times and different portions of humanity. In *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, noted historian Edward Gibbon wrote the following:

The ancient and popular doctrine of the Millennium was intimately connected with the second coming of Christ. As the works of the creation had been finished in six days, their duration in their present state, according to a tradition which was attributed to the prophet Elijah, was fixed to six thousand years. By the same analogy it was inferred, that this long period of labour and contention, which was now almost elapsed, would be succeeded by a joyful sabbath of a thousand years; and that Christ, with the triumphant band of the saints and the elect who had escaped death, or who had been miraculously revived, would reign upon earth till the time appointed for the last and general resurrection (1862, p. 176).

Yes, as Gibbon points out, the first-century Church—the apostolic Church—understood that the saints would first be raised to rule with Christ for a thousand years, preceding a “general resurrection.”

They Are Not Lost Forever!

What does this mean for the billions who lived and died without ever hearing the message of Jesus Christ? Scripture teaches plainly that we cannot receive salvation without Him: “Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12). How can we reconcile Peter's plain words with the truth of a loving and just God? Notice what Jesus Christ said to the people of Capernaum who rejected His message: “And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say

to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you” (Matthew 11:23–24).

God destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah by fire (Genesis 19). Yet Jesus Christ said it will be “more tolerable” for Sodom in the day of judgment than for Capernaum. How can that be? Christ said that if Sodom had seen His works, its people would have repented, and God would have spared that wicked and perverse city. If we believe that God is *fair*, and if we believe Jesus when He says that these people definitely would have repented if they had been given the same opportunity as His audience, then we should believe that they will be given that opportunity. But how can this be?

More Than One Resurrection!

As we will see, God’s word describes *multiple resurrections*, not just one! Notice how your Bible describes the first group of people resurrected—those who are raised to life when Jesus Christ returns:

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over 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 (Revelation 20:4–6).

This *first* resurrection will include “those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God” (v. 4). These saints included in the first resurrection will be raised to immortality and will reign with Jesus Christ for a thousand years—the time we call the *Millennium*, which means “a thousand years” (v. 4).

But notice! If there is a “first” resurrection (v. 5), there must be a *second* resurrection. Indeed, the same verse says that “the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.” (In fact, Scripture also describes a third resurrection, as we shall see.)

Elsewhere, Scripture calls this *first* resurrection a “better resurrection” (Hebrews 11:35) compared to the resurrections that follow it. Why? Faithful Christians of our present age who take part in that first resurrection will be born into the Kingdom of God as immortalized, glorified children of God. We will inherit the earth, and rule with Christ on this earth for a thousand years, as kings and priests (Revelation 5:10). During the Millennium, Satan will be bound and unable to influence humanity (Revelation 20:2). Those whom God is calling *today* must overcome Satan’s influence—something those in the Millennium won’t need to contend against until Satan is again released at the very end. Unlike today, when only a relative few are called, in the Millennium, all will know and be able to live God’s way (Isaiah 11:9). This thousand-year period of peace, prosperity, and spiritual abundance will prepare the earth for the next dramatic step in God’s plan for mankind!

Revelation 20:5 tells us that, after the Millennium is complete, the “rest of the dead” will be restored to physical life. You can read a description of that time in Ezekiel 37, which makes plain that this *second* resurrection is to lives of flesh and bone—not immortal glory, as in the first resurrection. Who are the “rest of the dead”? They are the masses of humanity who never embraced true Christianity. They include, for example, the peoples of Tyre, Sidon, Sodom, and Gomorrah, whom Christ said will receive favor and tolerance, upon repentance, at their time of judgment—that “day of judgment” we read of earlier, mentioned by Jesus in Matthew 11:24. They include even the peoples of Israel whom God spiritually blinded (Romans 11:25). Indeed, the vast majority of human beings who have ever lived will be resurrected for this period of judgment—not as spirit beings as those in the first resurrection, but as physical beings such as Lazarus was when Christ resurrected him from the dead (John 11:43–44), exactly as described in Ezekiel 37.

The Great White Throne Judgment

In this remarkable time after the thousand-year reign of Jesus Christ and His glorified saints, billions of human beings who were previously spiritually blinded will finally learn from the pain of the past, and God will give them the opportunity to truly repent, believe the Gospel, and eventually inherit the Kingdom of God. As Peter wrote,

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“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance” (2 Peter 3:9).

Notice in Revelation 20:11–12 the description of the time when “the rest of the dead” are raised to physical life:

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who 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, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.

The Greek word for “books” in verse 12 is *biblia*. Yes, after the second resurrection, the “books”—the Bible—will for the very first time be opened to the understanding of the billions of human beings who lived and died before the Millennium without hearing and understanding the true Gospel of Jesus Christ. During this Great White Throne Judgment period, billions will have their *first* real opportunity to learn the truth. And they will have one special benefit we do not have today, as they will be able to remember the results of mankind living its own way in this present age and compare it against the reality of the better world around them, ruled by Jesus Christ. They will look back on today’s modern civilization and see what many today do not: that our system or society is not the one that the Creator God established. Rather, God has given human civilization 6,000 years, under the sway of Satan, to go its *own* way, to try out its *own* ideas, and to learn hard lessons through human suffering.

Does God want His creation to suffer? Is He not a God of mercy as well as justice? Would He not create a plan capable of reaching all those who have ever lived, leaving none without hope and the opportunity to choose? In these two resurrections, we see God’s mercy, justice, and fairness on glorious display. If you would like more information on this remarkable second resurrection, consider requesting our free booklet *Is This the Only Day of Salvation?* You can contact any of our regional offices using the information listed at the end of this booklet to obtain your own free copy.

Not only do many misunderstand God's plan to reveal His truth to the world and to reward the saved, however—many also misunderstand His plan to punish those who reject salvation. Read on for the reassuring, encouraging, and inspiring truth about the true nature of the just punishment awaiting those incorrigibly wicked people who knowingly refuse God's great gift of salvation!



Chapter 4

Punishment or Punishing?

Sadly, throughout history, there are those who have accurately understood God’s grace and salvation, and yet have knowingly, willfully, and utterly rejected it. Even after the Great White Throne Judgment period, there will be those who willfully choose to live in rebellion and who refuse to come under the grace and mercy of God. Although God will give every human being a full and fair opportunity to accept salvation, we understand that there will be some incorrigible people who reject Jesus Christ forever.

He won’t force these rebellious people to obey Him. He will destroy them in the Lake of Fire.

After the Millennium and the period of the Great White Throne Judgment, all those throughout history who lived and died while *both* rightly understanding the truth and knowingly casting it aside and rejecting it will be raised for the *third* resurrection—the resurrection to eternal punishment through death in the Lake of Fire.

Yes, God is just. He reminds us, “Vengeance is Mine, I will repay” (Hebrews 10:30). Standing before the Lake of Fire and agonizing over the fate that awaits them, the wicked will then be cast into the fire and burned up forever (Revelation 21:8). Never again will they live. “For the wages of sin is death [*eternal* death], but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

“How cruel,” some may say, “that a just and merciful God would torment sinners for all of eternity because of decisions they made over a hundred years or so!” Are you one of the many who have never

understood how Christians could possibly enjoy eternal happiness with God, knowing that at the very same time they are supposed to be feeling divine joy, their unsaved loved ones are roasting in hellish torment, experiencing unimaginable pain, forever? If you are, then you need the comfort that comes from knowing the truth!

The Truth About “Hell”

For one thing, the Lake of Fire that we read about in Scripture is not the “hell” that most people think of when they think of God’s punishment of the wicked. Today, the vast majority of people in the Western world get their “picture” of divine punishment not from the Bible, but rather from the writings of a fourteenth-century Italian poet. Dante Alighieri, author of *La Divina Commedia* (or, in English, *The Divine Comedy*) wrote his lengthy poem as an allegory to comment on the social and political problems of his nation. His depiction of hell featured nine descending regions of ever-greater eternal torment for sinners. In one section of Dante’s poem, titled “Inferno,” we find that lustful sinners receive the mildest punishment in the first circle of hell; the lowest realms of hell are reserved for those whom Dante considered history’s most repugnant traitors—not only Judas Iscariot, but also the Roman traitors Brutus and Cassius, who were implicated in the murder of Julius Caesar.

Many are surprised when they discover that Dante’s descriptions bear almost no resemblance to the “hell” described in your Bible.

But first, let us ask: What exactly does the Bible mean by “hell”? In the *King James Version* and *New King James Version*, the Hebrew word often translated as “hell” is *sheol*—which simply means “pit” or “grave.” It does **not** mean a place of ever-burning fire! The word *sheol* occurs 65 times in the Old Testament, yet in the *King James Version* it is only translated as “hell” 31 times! It is translated as “grave” another 31 times, and as “pit” three times. If you read the *New International Version*, you will see that it never translates *sheol* as “hell”—it simply uses the biblically and linguistically accurate term “grave.” As you can see, no one is burning in *sheol*!

Three “Hells” in the Bible

Your New Testament includes three Greek words that are translated as “hell”—*Tartarus*, *hades*, and *Gehenna*—yet each has a different meaning. (See the inset box on p. 21 for a summary of these key words.)

Four Different Words Three Different “Hells”

When you see the word “hell” in an English-language Bible, it has been translated from one of four different words in the original, inspired text.

שְׁחִיל, or *sheol*

A Hebrew word that simply means “pit” or “grave.”

Examples: 2 Samuel 22:6; Job 11:8; Psalm 55:15; Ezekiel 31:17

ᾗδης or *hades*

A Greek word that is the equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol*.

Examples: Matthew 16:18; Acts 2:27; 1 Corinthians 15:55; Revelation 1:18

γέεννα or *Gehenna*

A Greek word describing the fire that will destroy the souls of the wicked, derived from a burning garbage dump near Jerusalem.

Examples: Matthew 5:22; Matthew 10:28; Luke 12:5; James 3:6

ταρταρώ or (*cast down to*) *Tartarus*

A Greek word that is only used once in the New Testament, in 2 Peter 2:4, referring to a condition of restraint that applies to fallen angels.

So, when someone mentions “hell,” you should ask, “Which ‘hell’ are you talking about?”

The Greek word *Tartarus* denotes a condition of restraint, and your Bible shows that it applies to fallen angels, not to sinful human beings. Notice: “God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [*Tartarus*] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment” (2 Peter 2:4). As one scholarly source explains, “The verb *tartaroo*, translated ‘cast down to hell’ in 2 Pet. 2:4, signifies to consign to Tartarus, which is neither Sheol nor hades nor hell, but the place where those angels whose special sin is referred to in that passage are confined ‘to be reserved unto judgment’; the region is described as ‘pits of darkness’” (*Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1996, p. 300).

The Greek word *hades*, like the Hebrew *sheol*, simply means “pit” or “grave.” If you read the *New King James Version*, you will notice that Hades is often left untranslated. Farmers long ago, speaking Old English, would talk of “helling” their potatoes, which did not mean to burn them—it meant to store them underground.

More relevant to our discussion of the Lake of Fire is the Greek word *Gehenna*, describing the fire that will destroy the souls of the wicked (Matthew 10:28). *Gehenna* is derived from the Hebrew expression *Ge Hinnom*—referring to the Valley of Hinnom, south of Jerusalem. Anciently, the Valley of Hinnom was used as a place to dump Jerusalem’s trash. Fires burned continuously, fed by the city’s garbage, which included the dead bodies of condemned criminals. As a result, *Gehenna* became a symbol of judgment associated with fire.

This same word, *Gehenna*, was also used in Matthew 5:22, when Jesus said, “But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, ‘Raca!’ shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, ‘You fool!’ shall be in danger of hell fire”—*Gehenna* fire. Yes, unrepentant sinners will be cast into a lake of fire. *Gehenna* fire is a reference to this final fate of the wicked: to be burned into ashes, into non-existence—not to burn forever and without end. Remember the decree of Ezekiel 18, verses 4 and 20: “The soul who sins shall die.” This is the “second death” described in Revelation 20:6, from which the firstfruits—Christians raised to immortality in the first resurrection—are exempt.

The second death—extinction in the Lake of Fire—is final; it is a death from which there is no resurrection. This is the real “hellfire”

of your Bible. After the Great White Throne Judgment, all human beings who have ever lived will have come to one of two ends: they will be glorified children of God, born anew to live forever in the immortalized Family of God, or else they will have been utterly destroyed in the Lake of Fire, never to live again. Each of us will either live forever or die forever. There is no third option. Then Satan himself will be cast into the Lake of Fire and be tormented forever (Revelation 20:10). We read, “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14–15).

Peter writes that the earth will be totally purged by fire: “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up” (2 Peter 3:10).

So, with all of this planned for the future of humanity, why has God arranged to have a group of Christians saved in our present age, ahead of all the others? Are you one of those God is now calling? Read on to learn about the reward God has prepared for today’s faithful Christians, and about what they will be doing during the Millennium—and on into eternity!



Chapter 5

The Reward of the Saved

Most people who call themselves “Christian” have only a vague idea of what their Christian reward will be after death. Perhaps you are one of the many who believe that they will have a “mansion” in heaven, or at least a wonderful room in a mansion. People often get that mistaken idea from a misunderstanding of John 14:2, in which Jesus tells us, “In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.”

The Greek word *monai*, translated above as “mansions,” is better translated into modern English as “rooms” or “chambers.” Jesus’ Father’s house has many rooms. But what *is* the Father’s house? Notice in Jeremiah 35 that the “house of the LORD”—the temple of God—has a variety of chambers, which correspond to the particular job held by the resident of each chamber (v. 4). The earthly house of God was a type of the Father’s house in heaven (Hebrews 8:5). Notice that the Bible nowhere calls heaven itself the Father’s house—the Father’s house is *in* heaven. When Christ departed from His disciples to prepare them a place, He did not tell them that the place would be in heaven. Rather, He told them that He would go to heaven to prepare their place in the Father’s house! When a cook prepares dinner in the oven, we do not say that the dinner is the oven—and the dinner is certainly not served in the oven! Amazingly, then, we go on to read that when the New Jerusalem comes to planet Earth after the Great White Throne Judgment, *it* will be the

Father's house. Christ is preparing for today's faithful Christians their places in the New Jerusalem, which will come to planet Earth! "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Revelation 21:3).

A Brief Appearance Before the Father!

Perhaps you have the idea that we will spend eternity sitting on clouds, playing harps, gazing at the face of God forever? This is not true at all, though Scripture *does* portray a brief, future period in which faithful resurrected Christians stand with harps before God's throne: "And I saw something like a sea of glass mingled with fire, and those who have the victory over the beast, over his image and over his mark and over the number of his name, standing on the sea of glass, having harps of God" (Revelation 15:2). When we read of ancient King David praising his Lord with music, we can appreciate how music can express our deepening love for our Savior.

However, this brief moment is often misunderstood and misinterpreted, and our reward is *so much more* than that—as revealed in that passage and elsewhere in Revelation! First, notice that these harp players are not floating around on clouds. These musicians—resurrected Christians who have overcome the prophesied "beast" of Revelation—are standing on "the sea of glass." Saying that it is "the" sea of glass implies it is the very same sea of glass seen by John earlier in his vision. Indeed, earlier in Revelation, after a description of God's throne, we read, "Before the throne there was a sea of glass, like crystal" (Revelation 4:6). So, the sea of glass is before God's throne, but where is God's throne? We know that after the Millennium, God's throne will come to planet Earth, when the New Jerusalem descends, "coming down out of heaven" (Revelation 21:2).

The Marriage of the Lamb

Putting these scriptures together, we can see that the resurrected saints will gather on the sea of glass, in front of God's throne in heaven, for a brief time after their resurrection. But what will the saints be doing there? Will they just be playing music to honor God, or is there something more?

The answer can be found in a promise Jesus Christ made to His disciples. During His time on earth, Jesus likened Himself to a bridegroom (Matthew 9:15). And truly, that is what He will be!

“Let us be glad and rejoice and give Him glory, for the marriage of the Lamb has come, and His wife has made herself ready.” And to her it was granted to be arrayed in fine linen, clean and bright, for the fine linen is the righteous acts of the saints. Then he said to me, “Write: ‘Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!’” And he said to me, “These are the true sayings of God” (Revelation 19:7–9).

How can mere human beings marry the Son of God? Even the simplest look at the world around us will reveal a fundamental fact: Every species reproduces after its own kind. The mating of two dogs doesn’t produce a cat. The mating of two birds doesn’t produce a fish. If God is reproducing Himself, then His offspring will be like Him, and will be full members of His divine Family! Indeed, God is the Father “from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named” (Ephesians 3:14–15). And God wants each human being to voluntarily choose to become His son or His daughter! God wants us to come out of the carnal, sinful ways of the world. As the Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians, quoting the Old Testament, “Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you,” and “I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:17–18).

But we do not do this on our own. After we experience genuine repentance, exercise faith, and receive proper baptism in the manner God commands, He gives us the gift of the Holy Spirit. Once we receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, we become *begotten* children of God! We become the very heirs of God—co-heirs, or “joint-heirs” with Christ. Read it for yourself:

For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption [or “sonship”], whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself

bearth 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 (Romans 8:14–17, *KJV*).

A Transcendent Purpose

Please think carefully about the real meaning of Jesus' final prayer to His Father in John 17. In the most awesome prayer ever recorded in the pages of the Bible, the Son of God asked His Father, "And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was" (John 17:5). Jesus was with God from the beginning of creation, and we're told, "All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made" (John 1:3). Here, Christ asked the Father to restore the full glory that had been His when—acting for the Father—He, as the Old Testament "Logos," created the entire universe!

After praying for His disciples on that final Passover evening before His crucifixion, Jesus prayed for those who would believe in Him after them:

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, *that they may be one just as We are one*: I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me (John 17:20–23).

Can we fully grasp the awesome request the Son of God made in this prayer? He was asking that we who "believe in Me through their word" share with Him—in the resurrection—the glory He now shares with the Father. Yes, Jesus really meant what He said in this inspired prayer. He was asking that His true followers eventually become *full* sons of God and enter into the *oneness of the God Family!* Your Creator and Savior did not die so He could have a "barnyard" of lesser creatures to enjoy. When God the Father raised Jesus Christ from the dead, He

became the **firstborn** of many **brethren**—actual “younger siblings” of the “God kind” in the Family of God, able to share a love and fellowship far more intimate than even the happiest human families share today.

As members of the God Family, we will indeed bear a family resemblance to our Father and to the resurrected Jesus Christ. Have you ever wondered what Jesus Christ looks like, right now? The Bible reveals His appearance:

One like the Son of Man, clothed with a garment down to the feet and girded about the chest with a golden band. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and His eyes like a flame of fire; His feet were like fine brass, as if refined in a furnace, and His voice as the sound of many waters; He had in His right hand seven stars, out of His mouth went a sharp two-edged sword, and His countenance was like the sun shining in its strength (Revelation 1:13–16).

Glory Beyond Compare!

Can you picture that? His face shines like the sun! And those of us who are willing to truly surrender our hearts, minds, and wills to our Father in heaven, and come to Him through Jesus Christ in genuine repentance, can look forward to this kind of magnificent glory! For the God of the Bible wants all of us to become real sons—not just lesser beings God merely calls His sons! Remember that after genuine conversion, God puts His very divine nature within true Christians. The Apostle John wrote, “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (1 John 3:2). Yes, we will literally “look like” Jesus Christ! We will be “glorified” in the resurrection as full sons of God—full brothers of Jesus Christ! For the Bible clearly explains that Christ will be “the firstborn among many brethren” (Romans 8:29).

After Christ’s resurrection, He appeared to the Apostles and to others several times. They did not always recognize Him at first—He looked a little different from how He had appeared during His human life. Yet the resurrected Christ nearly always appeared to others as a human being, interacting with people in that manner so they would understand what He was saying and would not be afraid. He even

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demonstrated the ability to manifest the wounds of His crucifixion on His body, which He used to help the doubting Apostle Thomas to believe (John 20:14–17).

With all of this in mind, we can understand why Peter was inspired to reveal that, by God's divine power, there "have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature" (2 Peter 1:3–4). Born again into the Family of God, we will have God's very own divine nature! But what will we be doing with that nature? Many mistakenly assume that there will be nothing in particular for the resurrected saints to accomplish. But your Bible reveals that the saints, having become literal members of God's Family, will have a job to do—a joyous and fulfilling job that will not take place in heaven! Read on to learn more about that job!

Chapter 6

The Kingdom of God

As we have seen, Christians who die in the faith during this present age will, at the first resurrection, become full children of God, able to interact with Christ and the Father and share fully in Their thoughts, plans, and projects. We will be able to join in various future creative projects and activities throughout the vast universe. The prophet Isaiah was inspired to tell us, “Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end” (Isaiah 9:7).

But first, we will have one very important job to do—for a thousand years! When Jesus Christ returns, He will return as King and will establish the Kingdom of God, which will reign right here on planet Earth! And it will be today’s faithful Christians who, as the resurrected saints and members of His Family, will rule under Him during that Millennium, which will precede the period of time known as the Great White Throne Judgment.

Ruling and Teaching on Earth

The people of the physical nations of the world will need instruction and guidance. Just as the resurrected Christ appeared to His disciples after His crucifixion, the resurrected saints will be able to manifest themselves to human beings during the Millennium. As kings and priests, we will be governing and teaching. In fact, the priests in ancient Israel were also Israel’s teachers. During the Millennium, we will be teaching God’s way of life—the way of truth, the way of the

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Bible, the way of living that Christ exemplified and taught. As kings and priests, we will teach the world the way to peace:

And though the Lord gives you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your teachers will not be moved into a corner anymore, but your eyes shall see your teachers. Your ears shall hear a word behind you, saying, “This is the way, walk in it,” whenever you turn to the right hand or whenever you turn to the left (Isaiah 30:20–21).

Does this surprise you? It shouldn’t! Scripture tells us that resurrected Christians follow the Lamb—Jesus Christ—wherever He goes (Revelation 14:4)! They will follow Him for the marriage of the Lamb in heaven immediately after their resurrection and transformation, as we saw earlier. Then, they will follow Him to planet Earth, where He—and they—will rule in the Kingdom of God. For a thousand years, the work of the resurrected saints will be on earth, **not** in heaven!

Although the fact of the saints’ earthly rule is plainly taught in Scripture, many have been confused on this matter. But the misunderstandings are easily cleared up for those willing to put all of the scriptures together.

For example, when Jesus told His disciples, “Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven” (Matthew 5:12), He was not telling them that their reward would be permanent residence in heaven. Rather, He was emphasizing the greatness of that reward, which—until the resurrection—is being *reserved* in heaven for Christians. Christ told us He was going to heaven to *prepare* it (John 14:3). The Apostle Peter describes this reward as “an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, *reserved* in heaven for you” (1 Peter 1:4). Again, we see that the inheritance is being held in store for today’s Christians, to be brought *from* heaven by Christ when He returns to earth to reign (Isaiah 40:9–10). We are only heirs for now, not yet inheritors (Romans 8:14–17). Rather, Jesus tells us, “I am coming quickly and my *reward is with me*” (Revelation 22:12).

Interestingly, the Greek word *topos*, often translated as “place” in John 14:3, also has the sense of “opportunity”—and indeed, Christ **has** prepared a wonderful opportunity for the resurrected saints.

That opportunity is to rule on the earth under Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God.

Notice, too, what we learn about that reward in the Beatitudes, where Jesus describes the rewards for His followers whose qualities please Him: “Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matthew 5:5). How plain that is! Many are familiar with this verse, but few believe it! We shall inherit *the earth*. God’s word says clearly to all who will read it and believe it that “we shall reign on the earth” (Revelation 5:10)!

Four Elements of a Kingdom

To fully understand the reward of the saints, we must comprehend what it means to rule under Jesus Christ in the Kingdom of God. First, let us understand what a kingdom actually is. Every kingdom has four basic elements: a **ruler**, a **territory**, **laws**, and **subjects**. How does this apply to the Kingdom of God?

First, the Kingdom of God has a **ruler**, as the Bible explains in many places. Notice what John wrote: “Now I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse. And He who sat on him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and makes war. His eyes were like a flame of fire, and on His head were many crowns. He had a name written that no one knew except Himself” (Revelation 19:11–12). Jesus Christ, wearing many crowns, will return to earth as a conquering King (Zechariah 14:3–4).

Here is another description of Jesus’ appearance at His Second Coming:

He was clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God. And the armies in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. Now out of His mouth goes a sharp sword, that with it He should strike the nations. And He Himself will rule them with a rod of iron. He Himself treads the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And He has on His robe and on His thigh a name written: KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS (Revelation 19:13–16).

Yes, the Ruler of the soon-coming Kingdom of God will be Jesus Christ Himself! Are you praying, “Your Kingdom come”? Are you

eagerly anticipating Jesus' return to planet Earth? The Apostle John certainly was. John concluded the next-to-last verse in your Bible with his prayer and fervent hope: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Revelation 22:20).

What will be the King's **territory**? When Jesus Christ comes, His territory will be the whole earth, and His subjects within that territory will be the whole of humanity. Scripture describes the whole world learning the way to peace. Every year, people will come to worship their King in Jerusalem. The whole earth will learn to observe the same biblical Holy Days that Jesus and the Apostles observed. "And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the LORD of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles" (Zechariah 14:16).

Every nation on earth will worship the King—and will keep the Feast of Tabernacles. Many do not realize that the Holy Days are still filled with meaning for Christians today. The New Testament Church was founded on the day of the Feast of Pentecost, though many today have forgotten that Pentecost is one of the biblical Holy Days that God gave to His people. In the book of Acts, we read that throngs of people were gathered together to observe the Feast of Pentecost when the Apostles preached to them and thousands were converted. The people were gathered to observe the day because it was commanded in Scripture! As the *Zondervan NIV Study Bible* tells us, "Pentecost is also called the Feast of Weeks (Dt 16:10), the Feast of Harvest (Ex 23:16) and the day of firstfruits (Nu 28:26)" (ed. Kenneth Barker et al., 2005, p. 1685).

True Christians today understand that the Feast of Pentecost commemorates the stage in God's plan of salvation when He calls the "firstfruits" to salvation in this present age, preparing them to rule under Christ in the Millennium. To learn more about this wonderful truth, request our free booklet *The Holy Days: God's Master Plan*.

What will be the **law** of the Kingdom? During the Millennium, the resurrected saints will administer God's law. The prophet Isaiah gives us an inspiring foretaste of what will come:

Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all na-

tions shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2–3).

In Scripture, a mountain is often a symbol of government, including God’s. The government of God will rule on earth, and Jerusalem will be the capital of the world. “Thus says the LORD: ‘I will return to Zion, and *dwell in the midst of Jerusalem*. Jerusalem shall be called the City of Truth, the Mountain of the LORD of hosts, the Holy Mountain’” (Zechariah 8:3).

Under the reign of the Kingdom of God, humanity’s often-contradictory and unjust laws will be no more. God’s laws will be taught and administered from Jerusalem, and the Ten Commandments are the foundation of those laws. Remember, Jesus said, “But if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments,” and then went on to list several of the Ten Commandments (Matthew 19:17–19). Moreover, in His “Sermon on the Mount” Jesus actually magnified the Ten Commandments. He made them more comprehensive and more binding, because Christians need to observe the Ten Commandments in the spirit, not just in the letter!

The **subjects** of the Kingdom will be the human beings who survive into the Millennium—living and learning in a world transformed!

For those subjects, what will be the impact of having God’s law in effect? The Kingdom of God will be established following several years of terrible devastation and death around the world. Billions of people will have died due to war, famine, and disease. Survivors will be physically and emotionally shattered by the world-shaking events of the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord. Yet, though humanity will have grown used to widespread injustice, corruption, and violence, Christ the King will bring justice and peace: “He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; 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 anymore” (Isaiah 2:4). Young men and women will not be taught to fight in wars anymore. Yes, in the Kingdom of God, Christ the King will reeducate the whole world in the way of peace:

The cow and the bear shall graze; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. The nursing child shall play by the cobra's hole, and the weaned child shall put his hand in the viper's den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isaiah 11:7–9).

Destined for Rulership

Remember that Christ will not do this alone—He will enlist today's faithful Christians, the resurrected saints in the Millennium to assist Him! In Luke 19, Jesus gave the parable of the minas (or “pounds,” *KJV*), revealing that faithful Christians will rule over cities—some managing five, some overseeing ten. Jesus also taught that those who overcome would rule over nations (Revelation 2:26). Today's true Christians, born at their resurrection and transformation into God's glorious, immortalized Family, will be a vital part of the solution to this world's problems!

In God's Kingdom, King David will be resurrected to rule over both the house of Israel and the house of Judah, as the two nations become one (Ezekiel 37:17–19, 24). Also, Jesus told the Twelve Apostles that they would be ruling over the twelve tribes of Israel:

Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life (Matthew 19:28–29).

Those called to be in the first resurrection truly possess a remarkable opportunity!

Into Eternity!

For a thousand years, humanity will experience the benefits of life under the benevolent rulership of Jesus Christ, with the rulership of the saints under Him. Then, for a period afterward—perhaps a 100-year period, as may be implied by Isaiah 65:17–20—the Great White Throne

Judgment will follow. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is during this period when the *second* resurrection occurs and the minds of those who died without understanding the truth of God are finally opened so that they, too, may choose to become children of God.

Finally, when both the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment have passed, those in God's Family will receive an even greater inheritance. Notice that God not only gives Christians the earth (Matthew 5:5)—He also gives us the entire universe: "He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son" (Revelation 21:7; Romans 8:32). Consider this amazing promise: "For in that He [God] put all in subjection under him [humanity], He left nothing that is not put under him" (Hebrews 2:8).

"Nothing" not put under him? "All" in subjection? Yes, this is the promise! The Greek phrase translated as "all" in Hebrews 2:8 is *ta panta*—which literally means "the all." As Greek lexicons explain, *ta panta* in the absolute sense means "the universe." God wants to give you, along with billions of others, dominion not just over the earth, but over the universe! Yet we can only receive that after we have inherited eternal life—only once we've become God's immortal children to reign with Christ in His Kingdom for all eternity! Our job during the Millennium, vital as it will be, is but a foretaste of what will come afterward. God's purpose is to prepare us to govern the universe. We will be able to travel instantly to far-off galaxies. We will not be limited by time and space. God wants us to liberate the creation from its decay and corruption. As Paul wrote, "the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God" (Romans 8:21).

Truly, God has an amazing destiny in store for His faithful children. We will be active, fulfilled, and gloriously happy for all eternity. Foretelling the coming of the Messiah and His eternal Kingdom, the prophet Isaiah wrote, "For unto us a Child is born, unto us a Son is given; and the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace there will be no end" (Isaiah 9:6-7).

Do you want to be a part of the glorious future God holds out to you? Do you look forward to the day when God's throne of grace will come to the earth? Only then, finally, will there be no more pain, suf-

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fering, and death. John writes of our inspiring ultimate destiny: “And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:4).

This is the eternity God has prepared for you. May God help you understand His great love and purpose for you, and may He help you prepare for your awesome eternal destiny!

Chapter 7

Is God Calling You?

As we have seen earlier in this booklet, God is not calling most of mankind to repentance and baptism during this present 6,000-year period in human history. Well-meaning “altar calls” by popular evangelists may stir up human emotions, but unless God Himself stirs people’s spirits and opens their minds to His truth, they will remain fundamentally unconvinced, uncalled, and unconverted. The truth is that most human beings will have their day of salvation at the time of the “second resurrection”—the Great White Throne Judgment. For such individuals, their lives in this present age will one day serve as a powerful “witness” demonstrating the depths of human weakness and depravity in lives cut off from God. The *Work of Tomorrow’s World* and the Living Church of God is to provide a strong warning to such individuals of the terrible end-time suffering just ahead of us. When that time comes, and planet Earth is in the grip of the Great Tribulation, millions who have heard this message will know where God has been working, and will be all the more ready to embrace His ways joyously in the Great White Throne Judgment.

Respond to God’s Call!

However, the very fact that you are reading this means that God may well be calling you, now, to be one of His firstfruits! You may be eligible for what Scripture calls the “better resurrection.” If so, you do not want to reject this call! For most of humanity, salvation will come

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in the Millennium or the Great White Throne Judgment—when God “will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.’ For out of Zion the law shall go forth, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem” (Micah 4:2). Those whom God calls today can, with His help and by His power, resist and overcome the deceptions of Satan, and can live Spirit-filled lives full of peace and joy and deep meaning.

If you feel that God may be calling you to repentance and baptism, and you would like to know more about God’s ways, please contact the Regional Office nearest you, listed at *TomorrowsWorld.org* and at the back of our printed booklets. One of our representatives will be happy to talk to you, at a time and in a place convenient for you.

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