

A scenic view of a river flowing through a rocky landscape. The river is surrounded by dense green vegetation and trees. The water is clear and flows over a series of large, flat rocks, creating a waterfall and rapids. The sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

BOOK 8

LIFE, DEATH  
AND  
BEYOND

*Biblical Research Library*

Roger E. Dickson

# **LIFE, DEATH AND BEYOND**

**The behavior of our lives is based on our system of values. Our values are based on our world view. Therefore, it is essential for Christian conduct to establish one's world view by the revelation of God's truth. Those who are directed in life by the world view that God established in the Bible will direct their lives toward eternal dwelling. They will live in harmony with God who created us for the purpose of our eternal dwelling in His presence. On the other hand, those who do not have a biblically defined world view will always view the Scriptures from a twisted point of view. They will never be able to see the whole picture. Because some have a shallow knowledge of the Bible, it is sometimes difficult to establish a correct whole view of God's work in eternity. Though we cannot understand everything that God is doing in eternity, He has revealed those things that are fundamentally essential to establish a world view that will lead us to a correct understanding of His purpose. It is the responsibility of every believer, therefore, to discover this information, for with this information one establishes a correct foundation upon which to interpret the Bible.**

## INTRODUCTION

In 2 Corinthians 5:16 Paul wrote, “*Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer.*” At least one thing is clear from this statement. **Paul desires that we take our minds off the physical and seek to know both one another and Christ beyond the confines of this physical world.** We must seek to know one another according to our spiritual relationship that we have in Christ. We must seek to know Jesus according to how He is now as King of kings and Lord of lords (1 Tm 6:15). He is seated at the right hand of the Father in the heavens (Ep 1:20-23). He is head over all things (Ep 1:22). We seek to know Jesus as He is now in His majesty in the heavens.

Our thinking, therefore, must be lifted from the limitations of this world to that which is above the material. As creatures who are limited to a physical world of tangible things and historical happenings among those who dwell on earth, we must look beyond this world to that which is not of this world. We must seek to transcend this world to that which is above and eternal. Paul exhorted, “***Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth***” (Cl 3:2). In this book, this is exactly what I seek to do. We must think of those things that are above this material world.

When studying the subject of this book it is very important that we identify and define some basic concepts. The problem with study in this area of biblical revelation is that we are often discussing subjects about which there is little revelation. And when revelation is given, it is often in language that is difficult to understand. This is true simply because we often venture in these studies into areas where we have yet to have experience. In fact, we will never have adequate experience in this world in order to form word definitions that will allow us to fully explain that which is beyond this world.

And when we are discussing areas where man has had no experience, we are often subject to speculation. And speculation is subject to human fallibility. Therefore, I call on your patience as we survey some material that has challenged the thinking of biblical scholars since inspired writers penned the first challenging revelations of life beyond death.

The purpose for a study as this is to establish a clear world view. Everyone has some type of world view. The Christian world view must be established by the Bible, not the culture in which one lives. Since we are all creatures of culture, there will be a continual struggle between what will be the foundation upon which our world view is based. The struggle is between the influences of the culture in which we live and the revelation of God. Unfortunately, we too often succumb to the world in which we live. We create beliefs after our own desires or culture. However, in our study of God's word, it is our purpose as Christians to define reality and those things that stand behind the curtain of the material world, by what is revealed from the Creator of all. Therefore, we must study, meditate, and thus, form our beliefs concerning what is real through a diligent investigation of the revealed word of God.

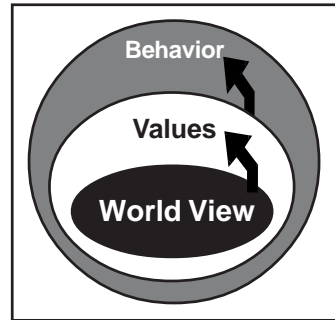
## BIBLICAL WORLD VIEW

World view is made up of the fundamental beliefs that all of us have concerning what is real. **World view has reference to what we consider to be real and true.** Our world view is both conscious and subconscious. Our subconscious views are determined by our past experiences and studies. These views are formed in our thinking as we grow up in the world around us. Therefore, it is important to train or retrain our subconscious world view by both experiences and studies which we conscientiously encounter every day. We can control and determine our world view by both study and obedience to truth. For the Christian, this truth is the revelation

of God, the Bible.

**It is our world view that determines our values. It is our system of values that affects our behavior.**

We behave according to our values that are governed by our world view. Our world view affects our concepts of justice, morality, truth and our everyday conduct of life. It is important, therefore, to establish a biblical world view since we will live according to such.



This book is about our world view as a Christian. It is my purpose in this book to establish a biblical world view concerning that which is beyond this physical world both now and in the future. Since our world view controls the behavior of our lives, it is essential to base our most fundamental beliefs on the word of God. If the Christian can have a clear world view that is based upon the Bible, then this world view will guide his everyday living in a way that will be pleasing to God and in harmony with his fellow man.

God created us to be guided by our beliefs and feelings that are directed by His will. We would assume, therefore, that **the Bible presents a clear understanding of those concepts that are essential to establish a world view that would direct Christian behavior according to the will of God.** This is a logical assumption and one on which we base our search for what God would have us believe.

The Bible gives us direction concerning our origin. It reveals who we are and where we are going. God has revealed the purpose of life, as well as, the destiny of our eternal spirit after death. It is necessary to understand all of these concepts, for they deal with our world view as a Christian. The following are the major areas of study concerning our world view:

- 1. Study of the soul and spirit:** We must study the Scriptures

so as to understand the soul and spirit that exist in us as we live in this physical world. It is not our purpose to study God's existence in eternity before the existence of the world. What revelation is given on God's eternal existence before the creation is limited, and what is given, is beyond the understanding of finite minds as ours. The Bible simply reveals that God is, He exists and is eternal in reference to time and the existence of the world. Therefore, as finite beings, we must pick up with creation and continue our studies into what God reveals concerning what is now and will come in reference to our existence.

When we start with creation, we understand that man was created from the dust of the earth and given a spirit that was created by God. Man is a living soul because of his God-formed spirit that is within him. In order to understand man, we must understand the totality of who man is. And the totality of man is that he is body, soul and spirit.

**2. *Study of the hadean existence:*** We must study that which exists now, but is beyond this world, beyond our empirical perceptions. This is the hadean realm, or unseen existence of the spirit that has departed the body at death and passed into either the loving care of Jesus or the torments of tartarus. One's destination after death depends upon his or her relationship with God in this world. The existence of the spirits of the dead is a present reality, though we do not see or experience the existence of these souls and spirits. We are limited by our five senses to this physical world.

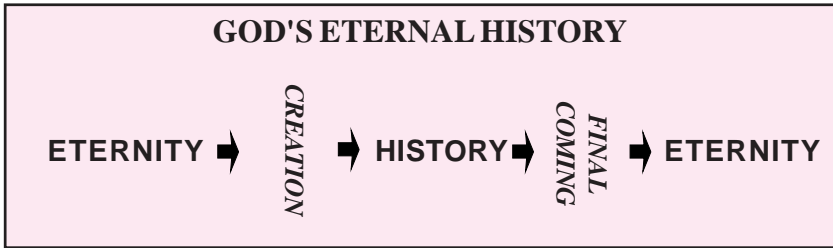
The realities of this present world in which we live and the unseen existence of the dead that is beyond our perception, are existences, or realities, that we must study. These are subjects about which the first century New Testament Christians were concerned. The Thessalonians, in particular, were concerned about their departed brothers and sisters in Christ (1 Th 4:13-18). The Corinthians were arguing over the bodily resurrection (1 Co 15). The same discussions continue today. We desire answers to questions we all have of

that which is beyond the experience of this world.

**3. Study of the final coming and judgment:** We must understand what is to come. The New Testament discusses a “final coming.” It will be a coming again of Jesus to either terminate or transform what we presently see in this physical world. And in some way, He will bring together again our soul/spirit with our resurrected body that was separated at the point of physical death. From the point where time and history terminate – our physical death – eternity will begin. We must, therefore, study the destinies of both the righteous and unrighteous.

**4. Study of heaven and hell:** We must study what the Bible teaches concerning existence after the final coming of Jesus. The Scriptures teach the existence of heaven and hell. Our world view is greatly determined by what we perceive the future to be. Where are we going? To what are we going? Our destiny will determine our values in the present and our values will direct our behavior. Therefore, it is our responsibility as Christians to study what God has revealed concerning the destiny of both the righteous and unrighteous in order to motivate obedience in the present to establish values that are based upon God's word.

One might say that there are three “ages of history” of God's eternity in reference to man's existence. Or, we might say that existence is measured by two major events of existence. One event has already occurred. The other is yet to be. Of course, we cannot measure eternity by time, therefore, we would consider eternity as existence. The two events that have or will interrupt existence are the creation and the final coming of Jesus. Creation has already taken place and been recorded. The last coming of Jesus to terminate that which was created is yet to occur. These two events divide existence into three realms of being. They are (1) The pre-creation age, (2) The present world age, and (3) The eternal age to come. That which is truly timeless must dwell in all three. Thus God is only eternal. Nothing else nor anyone else can be eternal as God.



As stated before, there is little known of existence before the world was created. We have more information in the Bible on the age that now exists. We have some information on the age to come. It is important to study the age to come because the Bible states that the righteous have eternal life (1 Jn 5:11). All civilizations have had some concept of immortality. Even those civilizations that have not been based upon the revelation of the Bible have concepts concerning life beyond death and into eternity. Such manifests the desires of man to know what is beyond this present existence. Such also manifests the innate, or inborn groaning of man that was implanted within him to seek beyond this life for something greater than life. Paul quoted a pagan poet who even affirmed that we were the offspring of God (At 17:28). And being the offspring of God means that we “*should seek the Lord*” and “*grope for Him and find Him*” (At 17:27). There has been within all civilizations those who have sought for that which is above and beyond this world. Man is truly a creature who has sense enough to know that this world is not all there is.

In the course of this book, therefore, it will be my approach to first study present realities. We must establish where we are. We must determine what we are. We must then determine where we go after death. And finally, we must take the journey of any individual who is born into this world from the time of birth to his or her final destiny.

In order to understand that which is beyond this world, we must first recognize a communication problem that we will have in reference to comprehending what is beyond our experience. When study-



ing what is beyond our empirical experiences, there is a communication problem about which we must caution ourselves concerning the study of this subject. There is much that is not revealed in the Bible about the destiny of the soul. Because these things are beyond our empirical experiences, what is revealed is often placed before us in metaphorical language. Through metaphor the Spirit challenges us to wonder. **He uses our earthly defined words to paint a picture of what is beyond this world.** Therefore, throughout our study we must continually remind ourselves not to be too dogmatic. The words of Solomon are appropriate. *“Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few”* (Ec 5:2). We will thus caution ourselves to have few words concerning those things that are beyond revelation and beyond our understanding of the metaphor of revelation.

Through metaphorical words and phrases we are challenged to interpret what is beyond our experience. In interpretation of metaphor, we must caution ourselves not to trip over the source from which the metaphor is taken. Metaphors originate from what is of this world, from what is real to us and experiential in our lives. When the metaphor is used in Scripture, it is often used to explain what is spiritual. Also, something greater than this material world is often under consideration. Therefore, we must look beyond the source of the metaphor – this material world – in order to contemplate what the Spirit is seeking to reveal of that world beyond.

When biblical revelation is centered around realities that are beyond life, such revelation often comes to us in metaphorical language. The Spirit uses words as “hades,” “paradise,” “new earth,” or “judgment seat.” All such words came from either the Hebrew or Greek language, and thus, were used first by the Jews and Greeks to convey concepts that were often linked to their world. Therefore, we must be cautious not to allow the Hebrew or Greek dictionary of earthly definitions to define for us what is beyond the definitions of

man's experience. We can understand what the Jews or Greeks meant when they used such words in their vocabulary in their culture. When the Spirit uses these words to convey to us something that is true, yet beyond our world, then we have some difficulty. Too often in such hermeneutical difficulty the biblical interpreter is prone to revert to the earthly definitions of the words. I feel this is an unfortunate mistake and one that causes much confusion in studies as the one of this book.

I would suggest that we first understand the words the Spirit uses in the historical context in which the words were first used. We should use a first century definition of the Greek dictionary to interpret the letter of Matthew simply because Matthew wrote in the first century. We should understand the words of Isaiah by a dictionary that was written during the time of Isaiah's inspired writing. Once this definition is determined, then we can look beyond the cultural understanding of the word in order to comprehend the biblical or metaphorical meaning of things that are beyond this world. We must then understand words in their biblical context and definition. We must be cautious about allowing our dictionary of present experiences to define those concepts and things that are beyond this world and revealed in the Bible. **We must allow the Bible to give the final definition of those things that are beyond this world.**

Please keep the above in mind as we study through this subject. This is such an important point, I will continually remind you of it as I cover the subjects of this book. Regardless of how a word was first used in the culture of the time when the inspired pen touched paper, we must allow the Holy Spirit to give the final definition of the word. He does such by explanation of concepts that are defined by earthly words that have limitations in defining what is above this world. The limitations are made by our inability to understand beyond our being, beyond our experience. For this reason we simply continue to study those subjects in the Bible where the Holy Spirit has sought to challenge our imaginations of things beyond this world.

Another influence that often hinders our understanding of Scripture in areas as these studies are **traditional interpretations** that are often placed on certain texts. These interpretations have a tendency to greatly affect our private studies of Scripture. However, simply because an interpretation is traditional, does not mean that it is wrong. Therefore, we must be cautious about rejecting traditional interpretations simply because they are traditional. Nevertheless, it is wrong to allow traditional interpretations to dictate our personal investigation of Scripture to the point that we lose our objectivity. We must come to God's revelation unintimidated by what is commonly accepted. In this way we guard ourselves against being led astray by traditional interpretations that are false and have so plagued the denominational world. When we study without the intimidation of the accepted interpretations, we give ourselves a chance to study from different “angles” or approaches. Great study often comes by sitting before an open Bible as if it were the first time we ever saw a Bible.

## Chapter 1

# THE WORLD

In order for us to understand where we are going we must first understand where we are in a world destined for destruction. Though the world is headed for destruction, Christians are headed toward eternity in a heavenly existence. When we die, we shall “fly away” (Ps 90:10). Our spirit will return to God who gave it (Ec 12:7). We are thus with Christ until we are clothed upon by our glorious body that we will receive from God (2 Co 5:1-8). Understanding that we are headed for eternity brings meaning to what we are doing here.

The Bible reveals existence after death and into eternity. Therefore, God through revelation explained the purpose of our existence

in time. In fact, one could say that **it would be impossible to understand this world unless there is an understanding that this world is not all there is.** Life after death does give meaning to life before death. If there is no life after death, then life on earth has no meaning. We should simply eat, drink and get the most out of what brief existence we have (See 1 Co 15:12-19).

If there is no life or existence beyond this world, then we would simply be matter in motion without any direction. If there is no life beyond this world, then there would be no need for God. And if there is no God, then there is no moral standard to direct our lives. We would be left with no moral standard by which to direct our lives simply because there would be no need to direct our earthly lives if there is no life beyond this life. This would be so if there is no eternal purpose to motivate us to direct our lives toward an eternal dwelling.

When societies have no moral direction, they digress to chaos. New societies then emerge and crash, and existence carries on. Without eternal hope, therefore, there is no need for a constant standard to determine what is good or evil, for law would simply be determined by man at any one state of time in history. Thus, what is right for the time would be accepted as correct moral behavior. If there is no eternity after life, then there is no moral standard for all time. And if there is no moral standard for time, then men can determine their own. Men who have no eternity in mind, develop moral codes that are humanistic and self-centered.

It is important, therefore, to understand what is beyond this world in order to bring meaning to this world. God is. And since God is, there are a host of questions that are answered. We are not simply matter in motion without hope or purpose. We are not relegated to a hopeless end in a world that seems to always go wrong. If God is, then I will eventually give an account of my behavior. If I realize that I will have to give account of my behavior in this life, then I will seek to direct my behavior by the rules of the One to whom I will

eventually give account. In this way, my moral behavior is directed and checked by what I believe is beyond this life.

In order to lay a solid foundation for our spiritual and emotional stability, we must understand the nature of God's creation of the world and our existence in it. We must also understand the church which manifests the spiritual righteousness of God within the hearts of men and women of the world. Jesus said, "*If you were of the world, the world would love its own. Yet because **you are not of the world, but I chose you out of the world, therefore the world hates you***" (Jn 15:19).

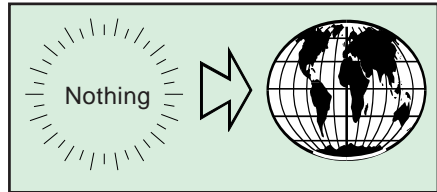
We must understand this present world from two perspectives: (1) There is the physical world that we empirically experience. (2) There is the spiritual world of the church that presently resides in the environment of the physical world but is not of the world. The first exists for the purpose of the second. The physical world now exists in order to sustain the church until eternity begins with the conclusion of this world. Therefore, **the meaning of the physical world is discovered by understanding the purpose and nature of the church.** We understand this present world by understanding the eternal purpose of God through the church. The sole purpose of the existence of all things is to prepare inhabitants for eternal dwelling.

We must never forget that God created the world for the purpose of the redeemed who would by faith, respond to His calling during time from creation to climax. Concerning the church, Paul said that "*He chose us in Him **before the foundation of the world***" (Ep 1:4). Before the world was created, God chose and predestined the redeemed to eternal glory through the church. The creation of the world, therefore, is only a speck of existence in God's eternal purpose to produce inhabitants for heaven. We in the church, therefore, "*have obtained an inheritance, being predestined **according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will***" (Ep 1:11). We will understand this better a billion earth years from now when we look back at the brief existence of

the material world. Right now, it is important to understand that all creation was brought forth in order to prepare the righteous by faith for an eternal dwelling in the new heavens and earth that is yet to come (2 Co 5:2-5; 2 Pt 3:13).

### A. The environment of this physical world:

Genesis 1:1 states the beginning of this physical environment. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* What did God do?



The Hebrew writer explains. *“By faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that the things which are seen were not made of things which are visible”* (Hb 11:3). What is not stated in the creation passages of the Bible, but assumed, is that God also created **natural laws** to govern the physical environment that He created as a dwelling place for man. God also established **moral laws** because man was to multiply and populate the earth (Gn 1:22). Since earth was to be populated with more than one inhabitant, there was the necessity of establishing moral laws that would govern the interaction of men with one another.

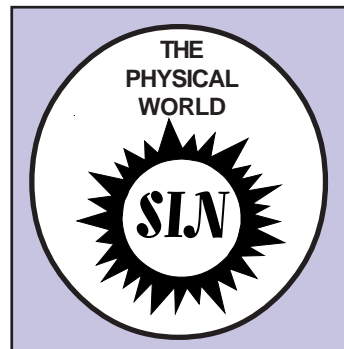
**1. Physical laws:** Physical laws, or natural laws, cause harmony and predictability in the natural world. There could be no natural environment without the controlling natural laws that bring uniformity to this world in which we live.

Where there is law, there is also the possibility and opportunity to violate such. When law is violated, the one who does the violation must suffer the consequences. So it is with natural law. When the law of gravity is violated, often severe consequences result. When one places his hand in a fire, a natural law is violated. The consequences can be quite painful. The purpose of law is to control, but

when those who are supposed to be subject to law are out of control, severe consequences result. We live in a world where there is great suffering because physical law is violated and great consequences have resulted. However, this is the best of all possible environments that could be created for God's purpose to transition souls into eternal dwelling. We must never forget this as we struggle through life by faith.

**2. Moral laws:** God did not intend that men dwell alone, individually separated from one another in a world that was created for human interactivity. If I alone were the only man that existed, then there would be no need for moral law. But since you exist in this environment with me, then there must be divinely established moral laws that will control our relationship with one another. This is necessary because one of us might decide that he was better than the other. Or even worse, one of us might decide that the other should not exist in the environment at all. My selfishness might drive me to eliminate you, or yours might move you to eliminate me. Because man was created a free-moral agent, there was the necessity that God establish moral law in order to control and guide the moral choices of those to whom He gave freedom of choice in a physical environment of character building.

Man's freedom of choice in relation to God's moral laws is what brought sin into the world. Adam introduced sin by committing the first sin, "*therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world*" (Rm 5:12). However, unless we accuse Adam of doing what we would not have done, we must remember the words of Paul. "*There is none righteous, no, not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God ... for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God*" (Rm 3:9,10,23). And the wages of sin



is death (Rm 6:23), for sin separates us from God (Is 59:2). Therefore, we live in a world of sin, a world where men have chosen rebellion against the moral laws of God.

When considering pain and suffering, we must understand that God created the best of all possible environments for the dwelling of a free-moral agent. Man's sinful choices against God's moral laws cause pain and suffering. Man's sinful choices against God's physical laws cause pain and suffering. We must not blame God for the wrong choices of man that bring pain and suffering into our lives.

### **B. Free-moral agency in the best environment:**

We come now to the nature of the environment in which we live. In order to fully understand the environment in which we live, we must understand the biblical teaching concerning the **free-moral agency** of man. In order to understand the free-moral agency of man, we must understand the environment in which we live. This is not reasoning in a circle. It is simply stating the fact that in order to understand creation and man we must understand that both are interrelated because the Author of both created the physical world and man for His own eternal purposes. Keep in mind what Paul said, that we are predestined as a part of the church, "*according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will*" (Ep 1:11).

God did not create independent agencies. That is, man was not created to stand alone, neither was the world so created. The reason for the creation of the world is explained in the existence of man. Man, as a free-moral agent, could not exist without the existence of the world. And there would have been no reason for the creation of the world without the existence of man.

We understand teleology and eschatology by understanding God's purpose in the creation of man. However, in order to comprehend God's purpose in the creation of man, we must understand the free-



moral agency of man as it is defined in the Bible. Eternal destinies depend upon choices. These choices are exercised by man as he lives in the best of all possible environments for the making of choices. Since our choices in this environment have eternal consequences, it is necessary, therefore, to understand the environment for choice making, as well as, the free-moral agent who makes the choices.

Hebrews 9:27 gives reason for the nature of the physical environment of choice-making in which we live. *“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.”* The concept of judgment before an Eternal Being necessitates free-moral agency. This brings us to the realm of law. Moral laws govern the moral behavior of man as he exists in the physical environment. But in order for man to behave as a free-moral agent in relation to moral law, three things must exist.

**a. Man must live in an environment that allows choice.**

In order for man to be truly free, he must live in an environment that allows choices to be made. One must be able to violate physical laws, and also suffer the consequences. One must be able to jump off a high building and suffer the result of this choice when he reaches the ground. A physical environment for choice making cannot exist without physical laws. And free-moral agents cannot exist in such an environment without the choice of violating the laws that govern their environment. We must conclude, therefore, that the environment in which we live is the best of all possible environments for the dwelling of a truly free-moral agent.

**b. Man must have the ability to choose.** God created Adam and Eve and placed them in an environment that allowed choice. They existed in the garden of Eden where both the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil were placed by God (Gn 2:17; 3:22-24). Adam was given the opportunity, therefore, to make a choice. Law was also present, for God said, *“Of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat ...”* (Gn 2:17). If

Adam ate, he would have to suffer the consequences. *“For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die”* (Gn 2:17).

So the environment was set. It was created with natural laws to govern it in an orderly manner. Man was placed in the garden with moral laws to obey. Now, Adam had a choice.

Today, we are all in an environment of choice-making as Adam. All of us have choices to make every day. God gave us the ability to make such choices, and thus, expects us to exercise our privilege of choice. Joshua exhorted Israel to exercise her ability to choose. *“Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve ...”* (Ja 24:15). Isaiah exhorted Israel to *“choose the good”* (Is 7:15). With the ability to choose, comes the responsibility of accepting the results or consequences of our choices. Free-moral ability and responsibility go together. Accepting the responsibility of our choices teaches us to do right. And we must learn what is right in order to be the type of person that can dwell in eternity.

Now here’s the point. **One cannot be a true free-moral agent without being in an environment that allows choices to be made. And one cannot make such choices unless God has given us the ability to so choose.** Since this is now the situation of man, God expects man to make choices. He expects man to make the right choices. The reason God expects choices to be made is because judgment is approaching and we will be held accountable for the choices that we make. The reality that final judgment will come rests upon the fact that man is a free-moral agent with the ability to make choices, and that he must be responsible for his choices. Our eternal destinies will depend upon our present choices concerning moral law. It is important, therefore, that people have a concept of final judgment in their world view. **Final judgment motivates us to make the right choices.**

**c. Man must have the freedom to choose.** Satan erroneously complained to God concerning Job, *“Have You now made a hedge around him, around his household, and around all that*

he has on every side?” (Jb 1:10). Satan was wrong. God had given Job the freedom to make choices. This is the entire foundation of the plot of the book of Job. Job had the opportunity and ability to freely choose concerning God’s moral laws. Job simply chose to obey God’s moral laws as opposed to rebellion.

God has placed all mankind in an environment that demands that choices be made. He did not place a hedge around any man, that is, He has not biased or programmed any mentally sound person not to be able to exercise choice. Because He has not means that individuals are responsible for the choices they make. Now it is each person’s responsibility to exercise his or her freedom to choose right over wrong.



Our study of final judgment and eternal destinies makes sense only if we understand the preceding fundamental points. Here’s how. If God had programmed the mind of man to behave in a certain manner, then choice would have been hindered. There would be no freedom in certain areas. Suppose one is programmed with a flaw. He or she ends up in hell as a result of being programmed to do evil. Could we say that God is just if the one programmed with a flaw is lost? Suppose one is programmed to do only good. Suppose Satan was right, there is a hedge around some and they end up in heaven. Is God just and fair in sending some to heaven while at the same time sending those programmed to do evil to hell?

**There can be no justice of God in judgment if the minds of men are biased to either choose good or evil.** If just one person is lost in hell, how can we interpret God, who supposedly biased the

wicked, to be a just and fair God in judgment? If just one person ends up in heaven, how can we interpret God to be a just and fair God by rewarding one with such without condition? Only because man is not divinely inclined to either good or evil at birth can God remain just in judgment over those who must suffer the consequences of their evil deeds.

Any clear understanding of eschatology depends upon our understanding of the free-moral agency of man. When we discuss judgment, we must consider law by which judgment is made. And when we discuss law, we must discuss free-moral agency, that man has the ability and freedom to make choices concerning the law by which he will eventually be judged. Therefore, we contend that a fundamental teaching concerning the nature of man is that he is a free-moral agent. And as such, he will eventually be held accountable for his personal behavior in relation to God's law. His eternal destiny will depend upon how he responds to the law of God. If he responds in a positive manner, then he will reap an unending life in the new heavens and earth. On the other hand, if he responds in a negative manner, there is nothing to look forward to other than punishment and destruction.

## Chapter 2

# **THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD**

The church is the group of the chosen because it is the assembly of those who have made a positive choice in relation to God's law. Members of the church have chosen to obey the gospel by immersion for the remission of their sins, and thus, as a group, they have been chosen by God to inherit heaven.

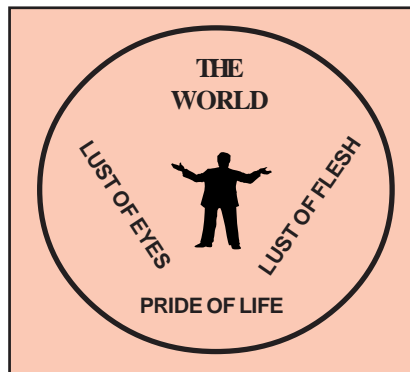
The church exists in a world that has chosen sin and rebellion against God's law. Satan is the **prince** of this world (Ep 2:2), the

**god** of this age (2 Co 4:4). He is the **spirit of evil** that “works in the sons of disobedience” (Ep 2:2). Jesus also pronounced that He is the “**ruler of this world**” (Jn 12:31). However, he is the ruler of this world who has been cast down and judged by the power of the gospel (Jn 12:31; 16:11). Nevertheless, we must remember that Satan goes about “like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour” (1 Pt 5:8; see 2 Tm 4:17). Our struggle as Christians is against Satan and his work. Paul wrote, “For we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, **but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this age, against spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places**” (Ep 6:12).

The fact that the world is full of sin is evidence that men have chosen to be led astray by a desire to live according to the prince of this world. Men have done what John said not to do. “**Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world – the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life – is not of the Father but is of the world**” (1 Jn 2:15,16; see Mt 6:24; Js 4:4).

### A. The nature of the church:

Though the church is in the world, it is not of the world. The church is the assembly of those who have been called out of the world by the members' free-moral choice to obey the gospel. The church began when men and women first submitted to the first public announcement that Jesus was seated as Lord and Christ on David's throne at the right hand of God in heavenly places (See



At 2:33-38,41,47). This occurred in Acts 2 when Peter proclaimed the gospel. The following points explain why the church is not of the world, though the members must live in the world:

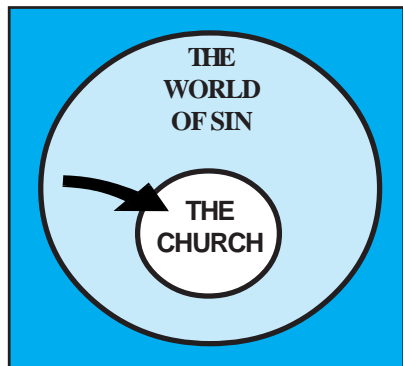
**1. *Jesus reigns in the hearts of church members.*** Jesus said, “*For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you*” (Lk 17:21). The kingdom of God is manifested on earth when the will of the Father is done on earth in the hearts of men as it is done in heaven (Mt 6:10). When men and women submit to the kingdom reign of Jesus, Jesus reigns in their hearts. The kingdom is within them because God’s will is being done on earth in their lives as it is done in heaven. The church is the group of those who have been made kings and priests (Rv 1:6; 1 Pt 2:5,9). Members of the church thus “*reign in life through the One, Jesus Christ*” (Rm 5:17).

Because the kingdom reign of Jesus is within the hearts of the submitted, the submitted will be called out of the kingdom of darkness when Jesus comes again. The believer’s eyes are opened to the sin of the world. The believer has made a decision to be separated from the world of sin (See 1 Pt 2:5,9). Paul spoke of his commission to the lost, that it was a commission “*to open their eyes and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins and an inheritance among those who are sanctified by faith in*” Christ (At 26:18). The submitted have thus been delivered “*from this present evil age*” (Gl 1:4) because they have allowed Jesus to reign in their hearts.

**2. *The church walks in the light, and thus, is the light of the world.*** God has established the church as the assembly of the submitted in the world in order to be the alternative to the kingdom of darkness. Paul wrote, “*He has delivered us from the power of darkness and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of His love*” (Cl 1:13). He continued, “*For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light*” (Ep 5:8). Peter added, “*But you are a chosen generation, a royal*

priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who **called you out of darkness into His marvelous light**" (1 Pt 2:9; 1 Jn 1:7-9). Because the church is walking in the light of the truth, it is not in the darkness. The church thus resides in a world of darkness, but it is not of the darkness. It is the light of God to the world (Mt 5:16), the pillar and ground of the truth (1 Tm 3:15).

**3. The church is not of the world.** The church, therefore, is in the world, but not of the world. Jesus said to the apostles, "**I chose you out of the world**" (Jn 15:19). Because the apostles were obedient to the will of Jesus, they were called out of the world. Jesus prayed to the Father in reference to the apostles, "*I have given them Your word; and the world has hated them because **they are not of the world**, just as I am not of the world. I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. **They are not of the world**, just as I am not of the world*" (Jn 17:14-16). The church is not of the world because its members have made a decision not to "*love the world or the things in the world*" (1 Jn 2:15). Christians have chosen to be separate from the world as is set forth in Paul's instructions to the church in Rome. "**And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God**" (Rm 12:2). In doing this, Christians have set their "*mind on things above, not on things on the earth*" (Cl 3:2; see Mt 6:19-21).



**4. The church is not known by the world.** Because the submitted, or church, have allowed Jesus to reign in their hearts, the

world does not know them as it did not know Jesus. Jesus “*was in the world ... and the world did not know Him*” (Jn 1:10). Jesus even came to His own, the Jews, but they who were “*His own did not receive Him*” (Jn 1:11). Jesus' spiritual body, the church, is still in the world, but the world still does not know the church as it did not know its Founder. In fact, the world hates the body of Christ as it hated its Founder (See Mt 10:22; 24:9). Those who are of the mentality of the world will not accept Jesus. But also, there is a religious world that has deceived itself into believing that they are right, when actually they have created religions after their own desires. This twisted religious zeal of millions throughout the world continues to keep many from discovering Jesus.

In God's foreknowledge of eternity beyond the existence of this present world, He foreordained that the church would go into eternal heaven. God foresaw Himself in final judgment, looking to the world for those He would choose for eternal salvation. In other words, He foresaw the obedient standing before Him in final judgment even before the creation of the world. He therefore did what Paul wrote to the Ephesians, “... *He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world*” (Ep 1:4). Before the creation of the world, God chose the group of those in Christ to be saved. He foresaw those He would save. At the final judgment, God will choose only the obedient for eternal life. The condition for salvation in the end, therefore, is to be a part of those who are in Christ. God will see in the population of the world only those who have been cleansed in their obedience to His will. It is this group He will save.

When the history of this world has transpired, God's purpose for the church will have been completed. The last judgment will complete the “fullness of the times” (See Gl 4:4). Paul continued to the Ephesians, “... *in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth – in Him*” (Ep 1:10). In the end, God will gather out of the world all things, that is, all the church and

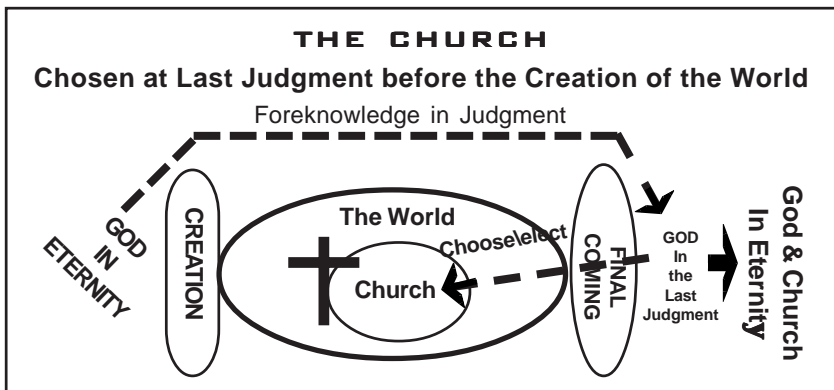


all righteous angels in heaven and departed saints. We will be chosen for heaven out of this world **because we have free-morally chosen to obey the gospel and become members of the predestined group (the church) that is now headed for heaven.**

The church is the group of the chosen because they will be chosen out of the world for eternal inheritance in heaven. All those who will be chosen out of the world when Jesus comes again will be those who now free-morally choose to come into Christ. Paul concluded, “... in whom [Christ] also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestined according to the purpose of Him who works all things according to the counsel of His will” (Ep 1:11).

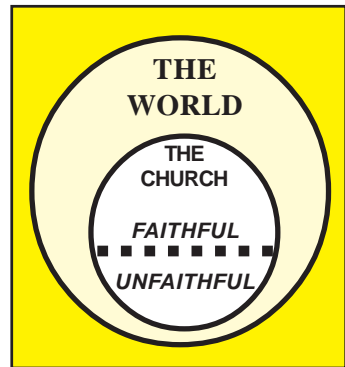
**B. The faithful and unfaithful of the church:**

When we consider the biblical perspective of the church, there are actually two areas of consideration. First, there is the group of **the faithful**, and secondly, there is the group of **the fallen**, the unfaithful. It is not difficult to understand the relationship of the faithful with Jesus, the Son of God. They have submitted themselves to continual obedience to His will (1 Pt 1:22,23). The group of the unfaithful, however, in relation to eternal destinies, is often misunderstood. They have given up allegiance to Jesus, and thus, turned again to the world (2 Pt 2:20-22; Hb 6:4-6; 10:26). However, the



faithful Christians' relationship with the unfaithful is different than their relationship with the world. In order to understand this difference of relationship, we must consider both groups in their relationship with God.

**1. The faithful:** Faithfulness to God is a continual process of life and is based upon the free-will choice of the Christian to walk in the light and God's grace. John places the Christian's salvation in the subjunctive mood in the statement of 1 John 1:7. *"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (See Hb 10:26). The Hebrew writer stated, *"But exhort one another daily, while it is called 'Today,' lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin"* (Hb 3:13). In Christ Jesus, that is, in the church, one has through the grace of God the continual cleansing of sin by the blood of Jesus. However, simply because one is in Christ, does not mean that he or she cannot be overcome again with the corruption of sin and return to the bondage of sin in the world (See 2 Pt 2:19-22). Because this can happen, Christians are exhorted to continually exhort one another (See Gl 6:1,2).



It is the responsibility of the faithful, therefore, to choose to continually serve God. Christians must choose to keep themselves *"unspotted from the world"* (Js 1:27). They must choose not to *"be conformed to this world"* (Rm 12:2). By their faithfulness, the church is the **salt** of the world (Mt 5:13-16; Mk 9:50; Lk 14:33,34). The church is an **example** to those in the world (2 Th 3:9; 1 Tm 4:12; Ti 2:7; 1 Pt 5:5). The church is to be a shining example to the world in order to win the world to Jesus (See 1 Co 7:16; 1 Pt 3:1). It

is important, therefore, that the faithful maintain their moral integrity in a world of sin.

The faithful live in hope of eternal life. The Hebrew writer stated, *“That by two immutable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie,”* the faithful *“might have strong consolation, **who have fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us.** This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil”* (Hb 6:18,19). We live *“in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began”* (Ti 1:2). The faithful, therefore, are motivated and directed by their hope of eternal heaven.

Our transition into the reality of eternal heaven is dependent upon our continuing in the light of the gospel on earth. The faithful must, therefore, make their calling and election sure. Peter warned, *“Therefore, brethren, **be even more diligent to make your calling and election sure,** for if you do these things you will never stumble”* (2 Pt 1:10). However, there are those who do not make their calling sure. They fall away from the grace of God (See Gl 5:1-4). They give up hope. But the faithful must not lose sight of their hope. Their faith in the reality of this hope of heaven must generate strength to maintain faithfulness.

**2. The unfaithful:** The unfaithful of the church have loved this present world (2 Tm 4:10). They have either lost hope or never had hope in the first place. They have again entangled themselves in the pollutions of the world (2 Pt 2:20). *“They have forsaken the right way and gone astray ...”* (2 Pt 2:15). They *“turn their ears away from the truth”* and turn unto fables (2 Tm 4:4). In such a condition or state of mind, they have given up their eternal life because they have *“trampled the Son of God underfoot”* and counted the blood of the covenant by which they were sanctified a common thing (Hb 10:29). For some of the unfaithful, it is impossible to renew them again unto a state of salvation. *“For it is impossible for these who were once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and*

*have become partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, if they fall away, to renew them again to repentance, since they crucify again for themselves the Son of God, and put Him to an open shame”* (Hb 6:4-6).

But what is the relationship of the faithful to the unfaithful? Certainly, it is different than the relationship of the faithful to the world. Those who walk disorderly, that is, those brothers and sisters who do not follow the instructions of God through His inspired word, are to be disciplined according to inspired instructions that Paul gave in 1 Thessalonians 5. In this context there were those Christians who were not working in order to provide for their necessities of life. Of them Paul instructed, *“And if anyone does not obey our word in this epistle, **note that person and do not keep company with him, that he may be ashamed**”* (2 Th 3:14). Concerning an immoral Christian in the church of Corinth, Paul wrote *“not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner - not even to eat with such a person”* (1 Co 5:11). Paul gives these instructions concerning the unfaithful brother with whom the faithful are not to have company or even eat. However, Paul stated to the Thessalonians, *“**Yet do not count him as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother**”* (2 Th 3:15). At least some communicative contact is to be maintained with the apostate brother. The communication, however, is to be for the purpose of admonishing the brother to repent. John admonished the faithful, *“If anyone sees his brother sinning a sin which does not lead to death, he will ask, and He will give him life for those who commit sin not leading to death”* (1 Jn 5:16).

One can therefore become a part of the assembly of the saved and then fall away. One can have eternal life in Christ, but lose it through unfaithfulness. John wrote, *“**And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son**”* (1

In 5:11). When one is baptized into Christ (Rm 6:3; Gl 3:27), he or she comes into eternal life. However, this life is conditioned upon the faithfulness of the believer. One can exercise free-moral choice so as to turn away from the cleansing blood of Jesus. He or she can give up eternal life. Peter warned, "... *beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked*" (2 Pt 3:17). Therefore, each Christian must heed the warning of the Hebrew writer. "*Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God*" (Hb 3:12) The faithful, therefore, must be cautious, "... *looking diligently lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled ...*" (Hb 12:15).

Our eternal destiny depends upon our present faithfulness. Our present eternal life is **conditional** until the final judgment. After the final judgment, we will find out where to go with the conditionality of salvation, for we trust that God will reveal such to us. At this time, however, we know that we must remain faithful to His calling through the gospel. We must maintain good works. "*And let our people also learn to maintain good works, to meet urgent needs, that they may not be unfruitful*" (Ti 3:14).

The church is in the world but not of the world because Christians have chosen to submit to the law of God. Because they have chosen to submit, this often puts them in conflict with those who have not chosen to walk according to God's moral standards. In this way, the church is not of the world. And in this way also the world does not know the church.

As long as one maintains his or her submission to the will of God, he or she remains in fellowship with God, and thus, in fellowship with those who are also maintaining faithfulness to God's principles. The apostle John wrote the word of God "*that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and*

*with His Son Jesus Christ*” (1 Jn 1:3). When we submit to God's word, we are in fellowship with all those who have so submitted. When we turn away from God's word, we turn away from that which brings fellowship between the Father, Son, apostles and all Christians.

### Chapter 3

## **BIRTH: ENTRANCE INTO ETERNITY**

In reference to humanity, eternity begins at the point of physical birth. After one reaches the age at which he or she can make a rational and emotional decision to obey God's word, one is redirected to eternal heaven by being spiritually born again. One is first physically born. However, in order to enter into eternity with God one must be born again of the water and the Spirit (Jn 3:3-5). One must become a new creation (2 Co 5:17). In order to come into eternal life, one must be *“born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”* (1 Pt 1:23). Through the physical seed of man one is brought into this physical world. However, through the incorruptible seed of God (Mt 24:35) one is born again into a spiritual realm which will exist into eternity.

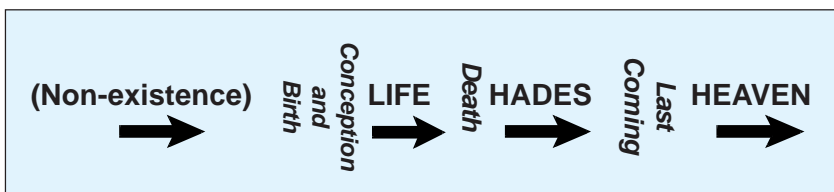
From physical birth to eternal heaven, we might say that one goes through “transitions” and “dwellings” before he or she reaches that eternal existence for which God created the world and man in the first place.

“Non-existence” is a state of nothingness. Before one was conceived, he or she had no existence. One “transitions” into life through physical birth. Life is a state of dwelling, one's dwelling on earth. Death is another transition. It is a transition from life to a disembodied state of existence where one remains before being embodied

again for existence in the state of heaven in eternity (2 Co 5:1-8). The Bible teaches that our transition into eternity will happen when Jesus appears a second time and all are resurrected from the grave and the righteous are embodied for eternal dwelling (Jn 5:28,29). The righteous will then dwell in the eternal “*new heavens and new earth*” (2 Pt 3:13) which will be a habitation for their spiritual body. The unrighteous, however, will be consigned to the destruction of hell (2 Th 1:7-9).

Every person must understand that they are on this journey from physical birth to eternal dwelling. Our source of information to define this journey must come to us only through the word of God. There is much revelation in the Bible concerning the matter of who we are in our earthly dwelling in this present time. However, when we transition from this life through the door of physical death, we are somewhat short of information in the Bible. Nevertheless, this should not disturb us. Paul was caught up to a “third heaven,” but was instructed not to speak concerning what he saw. He wrote concerning his experience, “*And I know such a man – whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows – how he was caught up into Paradise and heard inexpressible words, **which it is not lawful for a man to utter***” (2 Co 12:3,4). Since Paul could not utter those words that explained what he saw, then certainly neither can we. Even if he was allowed to speak concerning what he saw, we could not have understood, for there are no earthly words that can adequately explain that which is beyond this world.

Paul did experience something. He was privileged to experience beyond this world another existence that is not possible to experience in this life. The reason God allowed Paul to have this experi-



ence was to remind us that there is something there. We may not fully understand it, but it is still there.

We must not, therefore, shrink from discussing those passages in the Bible that do give us indications of what is beyond this empirical world in which we live. Simply because we do not have a complete picture of existence beyond this physical world, does not mean that we should neglect our studies of those passages where revelation gives us small glimpses of what is beyond. We will wonder, as Paul, and possibly speculate. I am sure Paul was given much in his vision about which to wonder. We will wonder with him, though we do not have all the information he had concerning the vision. What information we do have will stimulate our faith to trust in God who will take care of things when the time comes.

## PHYSICAL BIRTH

Every man's eternal destination begins at the point of physical birth. Science has unveiled the physical process of genes and DNA and cells in a manner that we can answer many of the questions concerning the physical process of birth. Unfortunately, science, in its empirical world of humanism, must stop short of what cannot be placed in a test tube or under a microscope. We are thus left dangling concerning the mental and emotional birth of the individual. However, it is not science's work to discuss "soul" and "spirit," those things that belong to the world that is not physical. We cannot expect science, that is limited to the seen world, to investigate the unseen world. After all, we cannot subject the soul or spirit of man to the empirical investigations of the scientific method of study. And because we cannot, physical science is at a loss as to how to explain either soul or spirit. Therefore, we must look beyond physical science in order to discover answers concerning what exists beyond death and the destruction of this physical world.

Our only source for material on this subject is the Bible. It is



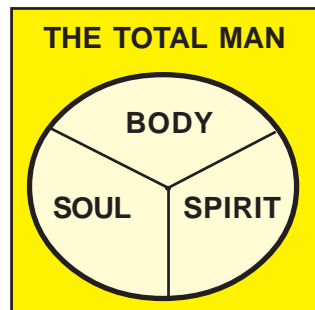
through the word of God that we have revealed to us those things we could never have known except through revelation of God's word (See Ep 3:3-5). Through this revelation, God has given us just enough information to encourage faith. He expects us to trust in Him for the rest of the answers when the right time comes. And that time will be when time on this earth ends.

## THE WHOLE MAN

Under the subject of the physical birth of the individual, there are three topics that must be investigated in the Scriptures. In one verse Paul mentioned all three by stating the totality of the person in 1 Thessalonians 5:23. *"Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole **spirit**, **soul**, and **body** be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* When one is born, he or she is born with a **spirit** that is given from God, the spirit animates the **soul** which is within, the **body** that is after the substance of this world. This is called a **trichotomy**, that is, man is three: body, soul and spirit. In reference to eternity, each of these three "parts" of man have an origin and destiny. Each have specific definitions that determine the whole definition of how God explains the existence of man.

### A. The body of man:

Moses recorded concerning the work of God in creation, *"Then God said, 'Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness .... So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them'"* (Gn 1:26,27; see 5:1). *"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 being” (Gn 2:7). The physical body of man was not made after the image of God. God is spirit and spirit is not of this physical world.

I have found it an interesting naivety of novice interpreters of the Scriptures to insert here man's irresistible urge toward idolatry. These interpreters want to reason backwards, that is, they see only their physical selves, and then, assume that this is the “image” about which Moses was writing in Genesis 1:26,27. God, therefore, ends up being created after the physical image of man. So God looks like a man.

**1. The body is not in the image of God.** The body was not created after some supposed physical image of God. When Moses used the phrase “image of God,” some have wrongly supposed that emphasis was upon the physical nature of man. Such misunderstandings manifest our emphasis upon the carnal, or fleshly side of man. It manifests too much importance of the body, and not enough on the spiritual side of the trichotomy of the individual. This is in the spirit of idolatry, for the idolater seeks to create God after His own image in order that he might in some way better relate to God.

John revealed that God is spirit (Jn 4:24). Spirit does not have flesh and bones. Jesus defined in some way what spirit is in reference to the fleshly part of man when He said after His resurrection, “Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, **for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have**” (Lk 24:39; see Jn 20:20,27; 1 Co 15:50). The definition of spirit is that which is not of flesh and bones. Flesh and bones make it possible for one's location to be identified. I know where you are because of the presence of your flesh and bones. You cannot escape my eyesight unless you hide your flesh and bones. But such is not the case with spirit. A spirit is not of this physical environment. Light cannot be reflected from it so as to make its presence known

to my senses. Spirit is non-material.

God is spirit. We cannot know His presence through the feedback of our empirical senses. In order for us to know His existence, He must make His presence known **indirectly**, that is, through a manifestation, a movement, a miracle of the material world. God said to Moses, “*You cannot see My face; for no man shall see Me, and live*” (Ex 33:20). We too often miss the metaphor of Moses’ statement. A spirit does not have a face. The word “face” is used as a metaphor by God to emphasize His presence. Verse 22 of Exodus 33 explains, “*So it shall be, while My glory passes by ....*” The Lord passed by with His glory (face) in order to reveal a manifestation of His presence. God said, “*You shall see My back; but My face should not be seen*” (Ex 33:23). Moses was thus privileged to see only a glimmer (“back”) of the presence of God and not His total presence (“face”). He did not see a physical being as one would see a man, for God is spirit.

In order for some to establish a “human” relationship with God, there is the tendency to create God after our physical image. We must be careful in this, lest we bring God down to the level of understanding Him as we understand man. The next step in this idolatrous thinking is to carve a physical image of our conception of God in order that we have some understanding of Him. The point is this. When we start making God physical after our bodily presence, we are in the beginnings of the spirit of idolatry.

**2. *The body is of the dust of the earth.*** It is not difficult to understand that the Bible teaches that the body of man originated from the dust of the earth. How God made our flesh from dirt may be difficult to understand. However, when the body dies, it does return to the inactive material particles out of which it is composed. In the curse of Adam, and subsequently humanity, God stated of the body of man, “*In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” (Gn 3:19).

The body is referred to as flesh in the Old Testament. God opened the flesh of Adam in order to remove a rib from from his side for the creation of Eve (Gn 2:21). The body is also subject to the ailments of this world. It can be cut (Lv 17:11), torn (Jg 8:7), consumed by rot in death (Zc 14:12), disease infected (2 Kg 5), become tired (Ec 12:12), and suffer pain (Jb 14:22). The body must be warmed and filled with food in order to survive (Js 2:16). It can be killed by man (Mt 10:28; Lk 12:4). All such things remind us of the frailty of the physical body.

At death the body returns to the elements from which it was originally created. James stated that the “*body without the spirit is death*” (Js 2:26). Job is more graphic concerning death. “*They lie down alike in the dust, and worms cover them*” (Jb 21:26). Thus the body is simply the composition of that which is of this physical world. In the words of Paul it is considered “flesh and blood,” “corruptible,” and “mortal” (1 Co 15:50-54). It is “dishonorable,” “weak,” and “natural” (1 Co 15:40-44). It is a body confined to this physical environment and dependent upon it. It is a body that cannot inherit the eternal kingdom of God (1 Co 15:50).

**3. The body is less important than soul and spirit.** Both Paul and Peter talked of the body as if it were separate to, or less than, the real self that dwells within the person. Paul stated, “*For we who are in **this tent** groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life*” (2 Co 5:4). Peter wrote, “*Yes, I think it is right, as long as I am in this tent, to stir you up by reminding you, knowing that shortly **I must put off my tent**, just as Our Lord Jesus Christ showed me*” (2 Pt 1:13,14). The body is a “tent” (tabernacle) that one puts on at birth, and then takes off at death. The body is important as a dwelling place of the real self, but it is not more important than the real self who dwells within the body..

We must not pollute the body with fornication. Paul taught, “*Flee sexual immorality. Every sin that a man does is outside the body,*

*but he who commits sexual immorality sins against his own body”* (1 Co 6:18). Though the New Testament teaches that the body is separate and subject to the real self (soul and spirit), one must not, as the gnostics of the first and second centuries, develop the idea that it is not important or of any significance concerning the being of the individual. The body is important. It can be used to destroy the inner self. Through sexual immorality, the eternal nature of man can be endangered. Jesus warned, “... *fear Him [God] who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna]”* (Mt 10:28). Those who use their bodies to commit sin will lose themselves (soul, spirit and body) in the destruction of gehenna. Therefore, the body must not be used as an instrument of sin.

## **B. The soul of man:**

A study of the soul and spirit of man is often a very challenging study. It is a study that leaves almost every scholar feeling that he has not completed his research when he has diligently searched the Scriptures from every angle. When all the passages are studied, there is still the sense that one’s studies are not complete. The reason for this arises from two challenges on our part concerning this investigation of Scripture. First, we are investigating that which is beyond our sense perception. We are venturing into the realm of the unseen, the untouched or unencountered. Not only is our vocabulary insufficient for such a study, our perceptions of what is real concerning the soul and spirit must be by faith in what the word of God reveals. We cannot touch our soul or spirit. Therefore, we must rely solely upon God’s Spirit-inspired revelation to define both soul and spirit. And this is not always easy.

Secondly, in revelation the words “soul” and “spirit” are used in many different ways depending on the context in which they are used. It is easier to understand the use of the word “spirit.” However, because the word “soul” is used in many different ways, we

must be careful not to read a wrong understanding into a context that does not demand a certain meaning. The context must be the first dictionary to define any specific use of the word soul. One can sort through a number of passages in order to determine a contextual definition of both words. The following is a brief survey of passages in the Bible that use the word soul:

**1. Definition of soul:** The Hebrew word that is often translated “soul” is *nephesh*. It is used 754 times in the Old Testament. In the context of its use, it is translated “soul” by most translations most of the time. It is also translated “life,” “person,” “heart,” “mind” and “creature.” There are at least twenty-seven other different renderings of the word in various texts throughout the Old Testament. At least one thing is understood from these many uses of the word. *Nephesh* is a generic word that has a wide variety of definitions.

The Greek word *psyche* does not help much in defining a specific meaning of the word soul. *Psyche* is used 105 times in the Greek New Testament and is translated at least seven different ways. In the majority of texts it is either translated “soul” or “life.” It is also translated in many English translations with the words “heart,” “you,” “heartily,” and “us.” Again, depending on the perceptions of the translators of a given translation, the word is rendered into English by use of various English words.

Contexts in which the Hebrew word *nephesh* is used help us understand some of the diverse meanings of the word in the Old Testament context. In Genesis 2:7 God created man “*and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [nephesh].*” Thus the word *nephesh* has reference to the totality of the human being. In Genesis 1:20,24,30 the word is used in the context of the creation of fish, land animals and birds. Thus the word can refer to animals. It is also used to refer to blood (Gn 9:4), a corpse (Nm 6:6), feelings (Ex 23:9; Pv 12:10) and people in general (Nm 31:35).

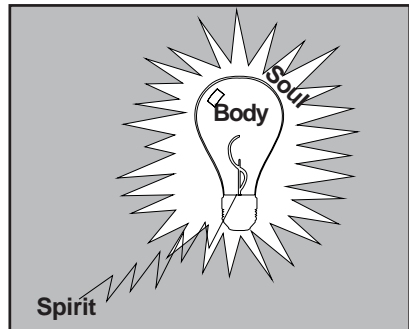
In the New Testament the Greek word *psyche*, which is generally translated “soul,” is used to refer to life (Mt 6:25) and people (At 2:41; Rm 13:1). It is used to refer to the innermost being of man (Ep 6:6). Sometimes it is used in reference to the will or determination of man (Lk 8:55). Jesus promised that those who come to Him would find rest to their souls (Mt 11:29). Jesus also spoke of souls who were sorrowful (Mk 14:34) and troubled (Jn 12:27).

Therefore, the word “soul” can refer to the whole person, including the soul, spirit and body (At 2:41; 1 Pt 3:20). In such cases the word is being used to refer to the totality of the person. However, the word “spirit” is never used to refer to such. The word soul can refer to the higher spiritual nature of man as opposed to the “natural man” (1 Co 2:14). It can refer to the “life nature” which man has in common with all life forms (Ps 78:50). And it can be used to refer to the spirit of man (At 2:27). But the word spirit is more specific. Soul is a generic word which is used in diverse ways, but spirit is specific.

From the many diverse ways the Hebrew and Greek words for soul are used in the Scriptures, a general meaning would be that **the soul has reference to any animate being of life that has sense perception, regardless of whether such sensory perception is exercised when the word is applied to the being.**

Thus the soul would be the life principle of an individual. **In reference to living humanity, soul is the intellectual and emotional consciousness of life.**

In the following discussions of the spirit of man, the spirit is defined as that which generates the life. One becomes a living soul when he or she is given a spirit from God. The spirit is the “electricity” that makes the bulb (body) glow (soul). Without the spirit there



would be no glow. The bulb is simply the mechanism which allows spirits to glow in relation to one another here on earth.

In the context of the nature of man, our reference to the soul of man is the part of man that is immaterial, but is the emotional and moral consciousness of man. It is the part of man in the image of God that has emotion and disposition. It is that part of man that can exist beyond the death of the body. Jesus soul was not left in hades, but was reunited with His body when He was resurrected (At 2:27-31). The souls of martyred saints spoke from under the altar (Rv 6:9; 20:4). It is this use of the word and part of man that is relevant to present reality and eternal destiny. The soul of man does survive physical death. The physical body returns to the dust of the earth. However, the soul remains conscious by the power of the Father of our spirits. Our spirits remain in existence by the power of God.

### **C. The spirit of man:**

The spirit of man was created after the image of God. This is that part of man that is not inseparably linked to the body. This is the part of man that has potential eternity by the power of God. In order to understand as much as possible about the spirit, we must understand its origin. And the origin of the spirit is the God of heaven.

**1. Definition of the word “spirit”:** In the Old Testament, the word “spirit” is translated from the Hebrew word *ruach*, which in its root understanding means “wind.” This is also the word that is used in reference to the Holy Spirit which “*moved upon the face of the earth*” in creation (Gn 1:2). It is also the word used when Job spoke “*in the anguish of my spirit*” (Jb 7:11; see 10:12; 20:3; 32:8). Another Hebrew word, *neshamah*, is also translated “spirit” in Job 26:4 and Proverbs 20:27. It is a word that means “breath.” It is also a word used in the Old Testament to refer to the spirit of man and the Holy Spirit.



*Ruach*, however, is used 374 times in the Old Testament, and thus, is the most common Hebrew word used in reference to the spirit of man. It is translated “spirit” in most contexts in which it is used. It is also translated in many English translations with the word “wind” and also the word “breath” (See Gn 6:17;7:15,22; Ec 3:19; Ps 104:29; 135:17; Jr 10:14; 51:17; Hk 2:19). *Ruach* is used to refer to angels (Ps 104:4), lying spirits (1 Kg 22:21), and the “spirit of wisdom” (Ex 28:3; Dt 34:9). In many contexts of the Old Testament when the word *ruach* is used and translated “spirit,” reference is often to the **disposition** or **attitude** of the individual. In other words, one would be “troubled in the spirit,” or “hardened in the spirit.”

In the New Testament the Greek word for spirit is *pneuma*. This word appears 381 times in the Greek New Testament. It is translated in the New Testament with the word “spirit.” It is used once to refer to the literal breath of man. It is used to refer to unclean spirits (Mt 8:16; 10:1; Mk 9:17; 9:20; Lk 6:18), the Holy Spirit (Mt 3:16; Mk 1:12; Jn 1:32) and the spirit that is within man (2 Tm 4:22; Hb 4:12; 12:23; Js 2:26). Jesus talked of those “*poor in spirit*,” referring to the mourning over one’s sinfulness (Mt 5:3). John the Baptist went forth in the “*spirit and power of Elijah*” (Lk 1:17; see 2 Tm 1:7; 1 Pt 3:4). *Pneuma* sometimes refers to the **intellectual** and **emotional mentality** of the individual in reference to one’s worship of God in spirit and truth (Jn 4:23; see Mt 26:41; Mk 8:12). In some contexts the word also refers to the disposition or attitude of the individual in reference to rejoicing, mourning or being troubled (See Lk 1:47; Jn 11:33; 13:22; At 17:16). It is used over two hundred times with the word “holy” in reference to the Holy Spirit.

From the preceding brief survey of Old and New Testament contexts, it is evident that both *ruach* and *pneuma* are used to refer to several different things. Nevertheless, its use is specific in the sense that reference is to that which is beyond the sensory perceptions of man. Spirit is only indirectly revealed through that which it uses to communicate. Our concern here is with the use of these two words

in reference to the God-given spirit that is created after the likeness of God and will return to God at the point of physical death.

**2. Origin of the spirit of man:** When we are born, God gives us a spirit. Solomon revealed, “*Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it*” (Ec 12:7). God “*forms the spirit of man within him*” (Zc 12:1). Concerning all people of the earth, God “*gives breath to the people on it, and spirit to those who walk on it*” (Is 42:5). Thus God is “*the God of the spirits of all flesh*” (Nm 16:22; see 27:16). The Hebrew writer, therefore, affirmed that God is the “*Father of spirits*” (Hb 12:9). In this sense, therefore, we are as Paul stated, “The offspring of God” (At 17:28,29).

Isaiah 57:16 is one reference where the word “soul” is used in reference to the spirit of man. God stated through Isaiah, “*For the spirit would fail before Me, and the souls which I have made.*” If this passage is understood as a Hebrew parallelism, the words “soul” and “spirit” would in the context refer to the same part of the individual, man's spirit that God has created and placed within every person. However, this understanding is not necessary for God created both the soul and spirit of man. All that man is has originated from God. So truly the words of Paul are correct. “*For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out*” (1 Tm 6:7). God created the spirit of man that is within man. It is the spirit that animates the soul. The spirit gives existence to the soul. Therefore, the soul of man originates from God in the sense that we have soul because of the God-created spirit that dwells within us. Because God made the spirit, He must also be given credit for the origin of the soul of man.

God is spirit (Jn 4:24). A spirit does not have a physical form for it is not of this material world (Lk 24:39). God created man after His image in the sense that there is a spirit within man that is after the image of God (Gn 1:26,27). Every person who is born into this world is given a God-created spirit (Ec 12:7). This spirit resides with one

until physical death (Jn 2:26). The spirit animates the soul of man both in life and after death.

We would be presumptuous to say that the God-created and God-given spirit is inherently eternal, that is, that because the spirit exists, it will eternally exist of its own accord apart from the power of God to sustain its existence. Our spirit does not have eternity simply because the spirit of the righteous will be sustained throughout eternity by the power of God in the presence of God. Jesus said, "*But rather fear Him who is able to **destroy both soul and body in hell***" (Mt 10:28; see Lk 12:5). Since the soul is sustained by the spirit, then God has the authority of terminating (destroying) the soul by termination of the spirit. We must not assume, therefore, that we are eternal in the sense that God is eternal. After all, we had a beginning. God did not. We began when God created our spirit and we became a living soul at birth. God can just as well terminate us in gehenna as He created us at birth. The Bible does not teach that the soul and spirit of man are inherently eternal.

There is a definite relationship between the body, soul and spirit of man. Paul mentioned all three in one verse, thus making a distinction between the three (1 Th 5:23). Man has a physical body. This is the part of man that is terminal and confined to this physical world. It is the part of man that cannot exist separate from the necessities of this world.

The soul of man is that part of the individual that is mental and emotional. Jesus gave His soul as a ransom for our sins (Mt 20:28). He thus gave His being; He gave Himself. His spirit was given to God (Lk 23:46), but His life was given for man (Jn 10:17). The soul, therefore, is the conscious life of the individual that is sparked into being and sustained in life by the spirit that is given to each person at birth.

The spirit of man is created by God and given to one at birth. The spirit is within man (Jb 32:8; 1 Co 2:11). This is that part of man

that is necessary for the existence of the individual. The body is dead when the spirit leaves and returns to God (Js 2:26; Gn 35:18). When we die “we fly away” (Ps 90:10). The spirit returns to God (Ec 12:7; Ec 3:21). Thus the spirit is God’s means of generating life in the body, but also the animation of the soul. The soul’s existence is dependent upon the God-given spirit.

In relation to our existence after death and into eternity, we must determine the journey of the soul and spirit from birth into eternity. This journey begins when one is given a spirit at birth and will continue into one of two destinies after the last judgment.

## Chapter 4

# PHYSICAL DEATH

God warned Adam in reference to the tree of the knowledge of good and evil that he should not eat of it, “*for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Gn 2:17). You know the rest of this story. After Adam and Eve helped themselves to the forbidden delicacy, God pronounced the curse, “*For out of it [the ground] you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return*” (Gn 3:19). Through Adam, therefore, physical death entered into the world because all humanity has been separated from the tree of life (Gn 3:22-24; 1 Co 15:21). As a result, “*in Adam all die*” (1 Co 15:22). Thus, “*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*” (Hb 9:27). So here we are today, staring death in the face because we have been separated from the tree of life.

Until Jesus returns, all men will transition out of this life through the shadow of physical death. Those outside Christ will remain in the fear of death. But those in Christ have overcome this fear and have been delivered from such through obedience to the gospel (Hb 2:14,15). The following are important concepts we must understand

concerning physical death:

### PHYSICAL DEATH

1. Death is a termination (1 Co 15:51,52).
2. Death is a sleep of the body (At 7:60; 13:36).
3. Death is being unclothed by the body (2 Co 5:1-8).
4. Death is a separation of spirit and body (Js 2:26).
5. Death is a departure from this world (Ph 1:23).

#### A. Death is a termination.

When one dies, something is terminated, something stops because there is a separation of the spirit from the body. The physical body as it existed in life is terminated. It will never exist again in the form it was in while alive. It will not be restored to life as it existed while alive. Therefore, we must understand that the word “death” means that something is terminated. Death indicates termination, not transformation.

When Lazarus and others were resurrected, their same physical body came back to life as it was in its original form (Jn 11:43,44). However, in the end of all things there will be no need to restore to life our physical bodies as they now exist. We are headed for a new environment with a new bodily form (2 Pt 3:13).

The physical body as we know it stops at death; it will never exist again as it existed in life. Paul stated, “*It is sown a **natural body**, it is raised a **spiritual body**. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body*” (1 Co 15:44). Because of our belief in the resurrection of Jesus, we can believe in the bodily resurrection of all saints (1 Th 4:13,14). However, we have a hard time understanding that this same body will be a changed body. It will be the same, but changed. The body as it now exists will terminate. It will be changed in the resurrection, not into what it now is, but into something different. Physical death will terminate our body as we now know it.

Paul told us a mystery. “... *flesh and blood **cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption***” (1 Co

15:50). Our present physical body must die. It must terminate in order to be raised a “spiritual body.” Our natural body will be **changed** to a spiritual body in the resurrection to come. “*We shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*” (1 Co 15:51,52). It has always been difficult for us to understand that the same body that we now possess in this life will be raised, but it will be changed to something that is not of this life.

“*All who are in graves will hear His voice and come forth*” (Jn 5:28,29; see Is 26:19). “*And the dead in Christ will rise first ...*” (1 Th 4:16). It is certain that the present form of our physical body will cease to exist. However, a changed body will be raised and reunited with our soul and spirit as we come with Jesus in the final coming (1 Th 3:13; 4:14). Our body will be changed into a “glorious body” (Ph 3:21). We do not know exactly what its nature will be, but “*we shall be like Him [Jesus], for we shall see Him as He is*” (1 Jn 3:2).

It is important to understand that in physical death, the physical body ceases to exist in the state it was while alive in the flesh. In the resurrection there will be the same body, but changed and glorious for the habitation of our souls and spirits in eternity. Therefore, we look forward to the coming of Jesus (2 Pt 3:12). We groan in the flesh to be clothed with a body from God (2 Co 5:1-8).

Now some have questioned the resurrection of the body (See 1 Co 15:35). It is true that we cannot understand the spiritual body from which the natural body will be the seed. But we must believe in the bodily resurrection for two simple reasons.

**1. Resurrection assumes a previously buried body.** How can there be any discussion concerning resurrection if nothing is going to be resurrected? Certainly, it is not our spirits that will be resurrected for Jesus will bring them with Him when He comes (1 Th 3:13; 4:13,14). When He comes, “*the dead in Christ will rise first*” (1 Th 4:16). Therefore, something is coming with Him and something will be coming out of the grave. That which will come from the grave is

the body, for it has been asleep (1 Th 4:13). It is the body that will be resurrected out of its sleep and reunited with the spirit of man that returned to God at death. Our spirits will be brought by Jesus when He comes again. Therefore, there is no sense talking about resurrection if there is nothing that will come out of the grave.

**2. Change assumes something to be changed.** Paul wrote that we shall be changed “*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*” (1 Co 15:51,52). That which will be changed will then ascend unto Jesus (1 Th 4:17). Change means that something of this world must be changed in order to inherit what is to come. Since “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Co 15:50), then we correctly conclude that our bodies of this world will be changed. The actual physical body we have will return to the dust when we die. However, it will be the seed from which a spiritual body will be resurrected to ascend unto the eternal kingdom of God.

## **B. Death is a sleep.**

The word “sleep” is a gentle term that is used by the Holy Spirit to define physical death. Stephen **fell asleep** when he was stoned (At 7:60). When David died, he **fell asleep** (At 13:36). From God’s perspective, the righteous **fall asleep** when they die (See Mt 27:52; Mk 5:39; Jn 11:11-14; 1 Co 11:30; 2 Pt 3:4). Concerning those who die in the Lord, Paul stated that “*we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep*” (1 Th 4:13-15). Through the eyes of God, physical death is simply falling asleep. However, it is the body that sleeps until the resurrection, not the soul.

The term “sleep” does not refer to the soul, for there is consciousness after death. (More on this later.) It is the body that sleeps. It sleeps in death until the resurrection. We must note that Paul uses the term “sleep” in the context of the bodily resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4. He does such in both contexts

in order to encourage Christians concerning the “awakening” of the body in the resurrection to come as opposed to its sleep until that time.

### C. Death is being unclothed.

Paul wrote, “*For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be **unclothed**, but further **clothed**, that mortality may be swallowed up by life*” (2 Co 5:4). Paul refers to the “earthly tent” or tabernacle in 2 Corinthians 5:1. He mentions that it will be **destroyed**. Thus in death there is the destruction of our physical body. It is destroyed because it has served its purpose. Though this physical body is destroyed, we shall be clothed with “*a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Co 5:1).

Those who are in Christ do not seek to be disembodied. They seek to be clothed with a heavenly body. Certainly, Paul sought to put off the earthly tabernacle as Peter (2 Pt 1:13). But neither Paul nor Peter were seeking permanent disembodiment. They, as we, are “*earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*” (2 Co 5:2). And when we are clothed with this heavenly spiritual body, we shall not be found naked (2 Co 5:3).

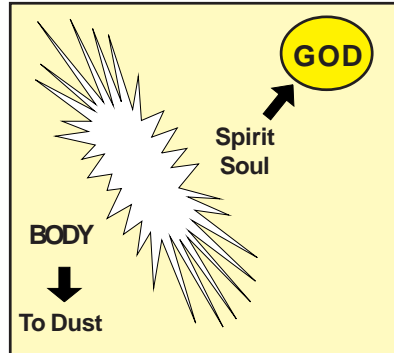
In physical death we are unclothed with our physical body. But we shall not be “naked” in eternity, that is, without a body. We shall be clothed with what the Scriptures refer to as a “building from God” (2 Co 5:1), “a glorious body” (Ph 3:21), “a spiritual body” (1 Co 15:44). Christians earnestly desire this embodiment. They seek to put off the earthly body in order to be clothed with a habitation from God. And in their new habitation from God, they seek to dwell eternally with God.

### D. Death is a separation.

James wrote that the “... **body without the spirit is dead** ...” (Js



2:26). In physical death the life-giving spirit returns to God (Ec 12:7). The spirit goes **upward** to God (Ec 3:20). At the point of death, Stephen cried out, “*Lord Jesus, receive my spirit*” (At 7:59). On the cross, Jesus said, “*Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit*” (Lk 23:46). Though our spirit returns to God at physical death, our body returns to the dust of the earth (Jb 34:15; Ps 104:29). The spirit thus lives on in the loving care of the Father who gave it.



In death, therefore, there is separation. There is separation of the spirit from the body. One sleeps, and the other lives on with Jesus. The body goes to dust and the spirit to the Father and Son.

Paul added, “*We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*” (2 Co 5:8). In death one is absent from his or her physical body. However, this absence is for the purpose of being **with the Lord**. When the Christian dies he is with Jesus (At 7:59; Ph 1:23). He is present with the Lord. We could conclude that as long as we are in this present body, we can never be with the Lord as we would like. In order to have that close relationship with Jesus for which we seek, we must shed this body. In this we groan, that we be clothed with a habitation from God (2 Co 5:1,2).

## E. Death is a departure.

Paul wrote to the Philippians that he had a desire “*to depart and be with the Lord*” (Ph 1:23). The Greek word translated “to depart” means “to return to port.” It is the same word Paul used in 2 Timothy 4:6 when he said, “*The time of my departure is at hand.*” Paul was about to suffer martyrdom at the hands of the Roman executioner.

His time of physical death had arrived. In death he would depart from this present world in order to make his voyage from the port of this world to the dock at the heavenly port of the arms of Jesus.

In physical death one departs from the body. While in the pains of birth, Rachel was dying. “*And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died), that she called his name Ben-Oni ...*” (Gn 35:18). In death we depart the earthly body; we depart this physical world in order to be with Christ.

## WHERE ARE OUR CHILDREN?

In the context of death, the destiny of children who die always arises. The destiny of children who die is based upon our theology concerning sin and the spiritual nature of children. Some believe the concept that children are born with sin, or that they have a sinful nature. But this is not the picture we understand when studying some statements of Jesus concerning the nature of children.

The nature of children was referred to by Jesus in Matthew 18:3 when He stated, “*Assuredly, I say to you, unless you are converted and become as little children, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven.*” The nature of children is not arrogance and pride which was characteristic of those in the context of Matthew 18 who were seeking greatness. The nature of children is humility. In conversion, one must become as this nature in order to enter the kingdom. Why would Jesus refer to this pure nature if children actually have an impure nature, one that is totally depraved or stained with original sin at birth?

The nature of children is again explained by Jesus in Matthew 19:14. “*Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them for of such is the kingdom of heaven*” (See Lk 18:16). Jesus also said, “*Whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it*” (Mk 10:15). Those who have submitted to the kingdom reign of Jesus are walking in the light. And

since they are walking in the light, “*the blood of Jesus Christ*” keeps on cleansing them of all sin (1 Jn 1:7). The kingdom is of a sinless nature because of the cleansing blood of Jesus. Through the cleansing blood of Jesus we are able to be presented perfect before God (Cl 1:28; see Ep 5:27). Such it is with children. They are sinless because they have not reached the age to be able to make a negative moral response to God’s law.

Children are pure. They are safe when they die simply because they have not knowingly or willingly walked in transgression in relation to the law of God. At the time of physical death, therefore, the spirits and souls of children are safe with God. They are not lost to hell, but are in the care of God who will secure them for glory.

I would conclude that in death our physical body as we know it in life will be terminated. However, the physical body is the seed from which our spiritual body will be raised. Though the body “sleeps” at death, there will be a resurrection of this body. It will be changed to a habitation from God that is glorious and after the nature of Jesus’ body. Physical death, therefore, is being unclothed with our present body. It is separation of the spirit from the body, for our spirit returns to God who gave it. In death we thus depart this world in order to be with the Lord. We are then in the presence of the Lord after death, awaiting the resurrection of the body in order that we be embodied for the new heavens and earth. This is the glorious hope of the Christian. Paul exhorted that we must comfort one another with these thoughts (1 Th 4:18).

I would also conclude that though the body is destroyed through corruption (decay), the spirit of the Christian never sleeps. At death we are consciously in the presence of the Lord, and thus in an existence where time exists no more. Though there is a bodily resurrection yet in the future, our spirit is alive and well with Jesus, awaiting to be clothed again with a glorious body from the Lord. In this glorious body we will eternally exist with the Lord in an environment that is not like that in which we now live.

## Chapter 5

# AFTER DEATH

In physical death there is no problem in determining the destiny of the body. It returns to that from which it was created - dust. But we are more challenged in our studies to determine the destiny of the spirit of man.

There have been a host of scholarly studies in this field. Too often, however, there is too much influence from the misguided religious world in which we live. The influence of world views that have been based on speculation has distorted objective Bible study, and thus, misguided religionists have been the basis for a catalog of mystical beliefs and Hollywood films that are based upon the fanciful speculations of life after death.

Mystical beliefs are usually founded upon the speculations of those who have either inherited them from their fathers or they have come from the religious dreams of a theological world that is determined to be led by feelings rather than the word of God. When we are studying this subject we must keep in mind that there is too much confusion in the world concerning life after death to ignore these influences upon the mind. The Christian must constantly keep in mind that the Bible must be our only guide into those realms that are beyond our sense perception. We must struggle against distorted cultural influences, as well as those influences that might come to us from those who have little knowledge of the subject or have been led astray by the influences of their religious environment.

When we come to the Bible, we have glimpses of revelation from God that stimulate our wonder. We are in the area of study concerning this subject where dogmatism has little use because little revelation is given on these matters. As we study, therefore, there is the necessity of guarding ourselves against over-speculation and

over-confidence in our deductions where the light of revelation is only a flicker. We would that God had revealed more. But He did not. We are thus left with what He knew was enough to guard our faith in trusting in Him to take care of everything. He has also given us enough revelation to guard us against the fantasies of those who are guided more by mystical feelings than by revelation.

There are some basic concepts with which we must begin any study as this. These are concepts, or clear statements of Scripture around which we must interpret those passages that are not so clear. These fundamental concepts must always be our interpretive guiding lights that lead us through a host of scriptures that may not be as clear as we might want. Therefore, please understand that the following concepts are most important for our general understanding of life beyond death.

### **A. There is consciousness after death.**

In the light of some clear Bible statements, we do not need to dwell much on theologies that affirm we enter an unconscious state at the time of physical death. We are not “dead all over like the dog Rover.” The Bible clearly teaches that we will have consciousness after death.

A few examples prove the point that we will be in a state of consciousness in the existence that is beyond death. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared with Jesus and were “*talking with Him*” (Mt 17:3). In Luke 16 the Rich Man in torments, “*cried and said, Father Abraham ...*” (Lk 16:23,24). In fact, the Rich Man carried on a conversation with Abraham (Lk 16:24-31). When God allowed Samuel to be seen by the witch of En Dor in order to address Saul, “*Samuel said to Saul, ‘Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?’*” (1 Sm 28:15). Those souls “*under the altar ... who had been slain for the word of God ... cried with a loud voice ...*” for revenge of those who had martyred them (Rv 6:9,10).

All these cases clearly affirm that those who die retain consciousness.

Peter stated, “*The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment*” (2 Pt 2:9). This passage explains the situation of the Rich Man who found himself in torments (Lk 16: 19-31). Therefore, the Lord can “*reserve the unjust under punishment*” in a conscious state. The Rich Man was in a state of torments (Lk 16:23). If the Rich Man and angels were not conscious, they could not be under torments of punishment. God has also reserved disobedient angels in the punishment of darkness for final judgment (2 Pt 2:4; Jd 6). All the disobedient, therefore, are consciously under torments.

According to the case of the Rich Man, we will not only have consciousness, but we will also have memory after death. The Rich Man remembered his five brothers and their sinful life back on earth (Lk 16:24-28). Even at our final judgment when we die, we will have memory because we must give account of all that we did on earth (2 Co 5:10).

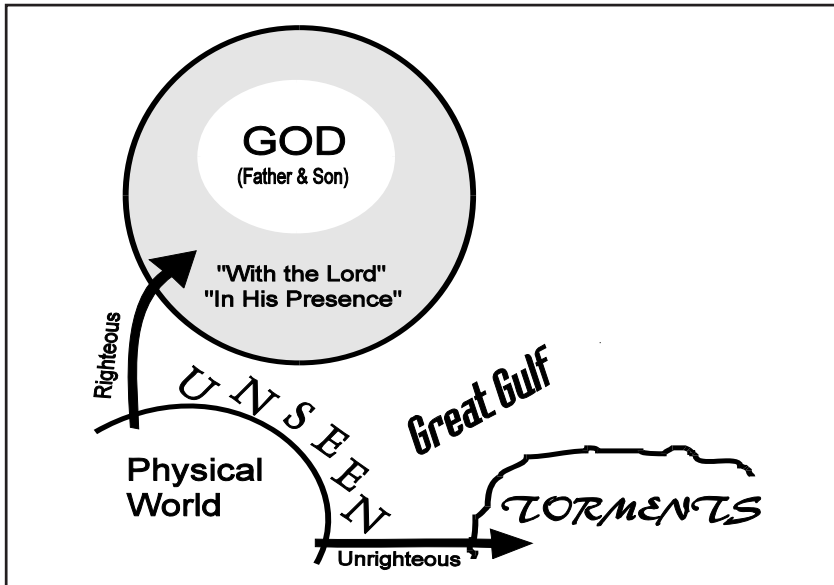
God is the God of the **living** (Mt 22:32; Mk 12:26,27; Lk 20:37,38). Though the “living dead” have physically died, God is still their God, and **they are still living**. Though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had already died when Moses stood before God on Mt. Sinai, God still said to Moses that He was their God (Ex 3:6). When we die, God is still our God. We do not go out of existence. We do not cease worshiping him. On the other hand, the wicked will be tormented by the horror of being separated from God.

Though the body is asleep, therefore, the soul does not sleep in death. One is conscious. Since the following point is a clear teaching of the Bible, and thus, true, then there is no need for an unconsciousness after life on earth. If one is conscious in the eternal heavenly dwelling, then why should there be unconsciousness until the final coming and resurrection? I realize that we are dealing with things beyond this world and in another realm of time. But being with Jesus immediately after death would involve realizing such.

**B. The righteous die and are with the Lord.**

Though there may be some disagreement over the state of existence of the righteous after death, one thing is very clear. The righteous are in the care of the Lord as soon as they die. They are “with the Lord” and “in His presence.” They have not gone out of existence, nor have they gone into a state of unconsciousness. One of the comforting teachings of the New Testament is revelation concerning the continued existence of the righteous with the Lord immediately after death. They will not go into a state of nonexistence. They will be present with the Lord in a state of comfort. This is a comforting doctrine of the New Testament that is clearly taught in the Bible to bring us peace of mind.

1. *Those who are dead in Christ are “with Christ.”* Paul wrote, “For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be **with Christ**, which is far better ...” (Ph 1:23). Where Christ presently is, there the Christian will be after death. Jesus has “ascended on high” (Ep 4:8). He has gone into heaven and “is



seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens" (Hb 8:1; Cl 3:1). In Ephesians 1:20, Paul states that Jesus has been seated in the **heavenly**. Though the passages that discuss Jesus' ascension into heaven are usually in the context of His being enthroned with all authority, they still place Him in an existence that is not of this material world. We shall be present in His care in this existence when we die, for we shall be with Christ.

When one dies, he or she goes to be "with Christ" into a heavenly existence. We do not know where, how or what this existence is simply because such is an existence that is detached from the confines of this physical body. In fact, we should be cautious in saying "where it is." How can earthly words with definitions of confinement and location fully explain that which is beyond this world? How can we "locate" our spirit when it is separated from the physical body that gives it location?

This does not mean that we are detached from location when we die. Lazarus *"was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom"* (Lk 16:22). He went to some place. The Rich Man was **in** torments (Lk 16:23) and he did not want his five living brothers to *"come to this place"* (Lk 16:28). Therefore, as Lazarus, he was in some location. Neither the spirit of Lazarus nor the Rich Man was detached from location simply because their bodies were buried back on earth.

I find it difficult to use words with definitions of this world to define what is beyond this world. The Holy Spirit revealed the world beyond ours with the words of our language in order to give us some concept of that which is beyond. However, I think we are doing an injustice to Deity if we attach our literal definitions of an earthly dwelling to that which is of God. I do not believe the Spirit ever intended that we completely understand the world beyond death through a literal understanding of earthly words He used to reveal such.

The Scriptures simply state that we will be **with Christ** when we die. Is enough said in this simple statement to bring assurance to all who are facing death? Is enough said to maintain faith? I think so.



At least in the statement “with Christ” **presence** is communicated. We shall be in some kind of relationship that assumes presence or fellowship. I believe Paul is trying to convey to us the fulfillment of our present desires. We feel away from Jesus while on this earth and in this body. When we die, we will no longer have that feeling in reference to our relationship with Jesus. When we die the reality of His being or presence will satisfy the yearnings of our desires to feel His existence.

**2. Those who are dead in Christ are “present with the Lord.”**

Paul wrote, “*We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be **present with the Lord***” (2 Co 5:8). When the faithful transition from this physical world through the door of physical death, they are **present with the Lord**. They are not in a “location” that is separate from where Jesus now is. They are in His presence. They are, in earthly words, “close by Jesus.”

This presence with the Lord is emphasized by Paul’s revelation concerning the return of Jesus, for Jesus “*will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Th 4:14). Jesus will come “*with all His saints*” (1 Th 3:13; see Jd 14). Since the saints are now with Him, it would only be natural that they come with Him in order to receive up to heaven the living saints at the time of the end.

I would question the view that the word “presence” in the context it is used by Paul to explain our being with Jesus after death has reference to being with the Lord in a manner of location as we are present with someone on earth. When the word “presence” is used in this world, there is the connotation of **bodily** presence. But in our state of being with the Lord immediately after death, we are in a disembodied state. Therefore, “bodily presence” cannot be the meaning of Paul’s statement in 2 Corinthians 5:8. Though “location” is assumed, I believe emphasis is also upon being in a **relationship** where our King protectively hovers over our spirit. We are in an existence of security with the Lord when we are in His “presence.” We dwell in the unseen world of the eternal Light that maintains

eternal existence to our souls.

Though presence may not signify bodily presence, there would certainly be a spiritual presence with the Lord. In other words, our spirit does not lose its identity when we go to be with the Lord. We do not vanish into nothingness. Disembodiment does not assume disintegration. Our spirit will retain identity and some quality of “location” so as to be present with the Lord.

**3. Our spirit “returns to God.”** When we die, our spirit returns to God who gave it at birth (Ec 12:7). God gave us our spirit, and thus, we return to God in order to wait for the final resurrection that we be clothed with our heavenly habitation, our building that is from God (2 Co 5:1).

(In the material of Chapter 1 concerning the hadean, or unseen existence, it will be important to remember that those dead in Christ are now with the Lord. They are waiting for the new heavens and earth, wherein they will dwell with their resurrected, but changed bodies.)

When one dies, he goes into an existence that is simply called **hades**, which in the Old Testament is referred to as sheol. One goes into an **unseen state of existence**. (More on this later.) I see no contradiction in one being with the Lord and at the same time in a hadean (unseen) existence, for David said, “*If I make my bed in sheol, behold, **You are there***” (Ps 139:8). The hadean existence is not some place in the far off corners of space, away from God. **It is simply an unseen existence of the disembodied dead in the care of the Lord until the resurrection of the body at the end of time.** When we die our spirit returns to the unseen realm of Deity where we remain until the final coming and bodily resurrection. Hades is simply that realm of existence of our spirits that is not perceptible by those who are living. Our spirits pass into an unseen state of existence. There is nothing complicated about this.

### C. The righteous will dwell in eternity in a glorious body.

Paul wrote that Jesus “*will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body ...*” (Ph 3:21). When Jesus comes we shall be as He is (1 Jn 3:2). Therefore, the dead in Christ are waiting for the resurrection of their bodies that are asleep (1 Th 4:14). The body of this world will be changed to a spiritual body (1 Co 15:44), to a body designed for habitation in a new heavens and earth.

**When one dies, he goes to be with the Lord in a heavenly state** (Ph 1:23; 2 Co 5:8). However, we could not say that when we die we are in the new heavens and earth wherein we shall dwell with our resurrected and glorious body after the last judgment. In other words, the bodily resurrection is yet to come. It is future (See Jn 5:28,29). Some Christians had already died when Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 15. And yet, he wrote with the future tense when he spoke of the resurrection and the heaven to come. Therefore, one is not bodily resurrected immediately when he physically dies. When we die, we do not immediately go into the state we will be in the eternal new heavens and earth. In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul explained that the dead in Christ were waiting with the Lord for their future coming with the Lord in order to be united with their resurrected bodies. Between the writing of 1 Corinthians 15, 1 Thessalonians 4, and the bodily resurrection when Jesus comes again, there is an existence of the dead that is different than their existence after the last coming of Jesus at the end of this world. The dead in Christ are with Christ; they are present with God. However, they are disembodied. They will be embodied when Jesus returns in order to dwell in the new heavens and earth.

Since the above is true, then we wonder concerning the state of the dead until the last coming of Jesus. They are now in a heavenly **existence** with the lord, but after the final coming of Jesus, they will be in a final **dwelling**. Their present existence is only temporary. However, dwelling in the new heavens and earth is without end. The

dead who are now with the Lord, therefore, wait with anticipation with the living to be clothed with our habitation that will be from God (2 Co 5:2). All saints, whether living or dead, are waiting for the great event of the resurrection and bodily change that will occur when Jesus is revealed from heaven.

## Chapter 6

# **BETWEEN DEATH AND RESURRECTION**

Jesus is coming again in order to resurrect and embody the righteous. He is coming again in order to render just punishment to the wicked. After His coming and last judgment, the righteous shall go away into the new heavens and earth, that eternal dwelling place in the presence of the Lord and the fellowship of all who have served Him in this life. The wicked, however, will receive their just punishment in a certain destruction that will serve justice for their wickedness.

From the time beginning with physical death and continuing to the final coming of Jesus, the righteous dead are in a disembodied state, a state of existence with the Lord. The righteous are reserved for reward. The wicked are reserved under darkness for punishment. Various words are used in the Bible in order to unveil the concept of the existence of the dead in their disembodied state until the resurrection. Though it is sometimes difficult to understand the meaning of some passages that deal with this subject, there are clear statements in the Bible concerning life beyond death that are not difficult to understand.

The Old Testament does not reveal as complete a picture as the New Testament concerning life after death. Many times, the Old Testament writers referred to the concept of sheol, the abode or existence of the dead. There are also some references to the future

resurrection in the Old Testament. However, information about the state of the dead is not as complete as we find in the New Testament.

The New Testament reveals more because of what Paul said in 2 Timothy 1:10 where he stated that the revelation of God's grace was "*by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.*" Jesus has brought us a more transparent picture of what lies beyond this world. We do not expect to gain a full picture of life beyond death in the Old Testament. We search the completion of written revelation, the New Testament, in order to understand all that God wants us to know concerning that which is beyond. In the New Testament we discover a greater revelation concerning life after death that gives hope of existing in eternity in the presence of the Lord.

## **A. Sheol:**

"Sheol" is the word that is used in the Old Testament in reference to the existence of the soul and spirit after death. It is a difficult word for us today to define by its original use in non-biblical literature. However, regardless of its non-biblical use, when the word is used in the Old Testament, the contextual definition must determine what God wanted the Old Testament faithfuls to understand concerning life beyond death.

**1. *Secular use and definition:*** Many scholars believe that the word sheol originally meant "to ask" or "to inquire." Thus, sheol would be that place which continually asks for more souls (See Pv 30:16). Some believe that the original meaning referred to "that which is hollowed out." In other words, sheol would be that place which is hollowed out for more of the dead.

Translators throughout history have used various English words to translate the Hebrew word sheol. The Jewish translators of the

Septuagint used the Greek word *hades* to translate sheol. Hades refers to the **unseen existence of the dead**. In some way, therefore, the translators associated the meaning of the word *hades* with the concept of sheol in the Old Testament. At least, *hades* was the best Greek word to use in defining the Old Testament concept of sheol. The word *hades* means “the unseen,” and thus, to some extent this is the definition the Septuagint translators understood the word sheol to mean when they used *hades* to translate the word sheol. Hades is the “unseen state” of the dead. It is the unseen existence into which the spirits of the dead go after death.

English translations have used an assortment of words to translate sheol. The *King James Version* often used the word “hell” which is derived from the Anglo-Saxon word *helan*. This word carried with it the meaning “to cover” or “to hide.” This would certainly be the thought expressed by Job in Job 14:13. “*Oh, that You would hide me in the grave [sheol].*”

One could say that generally speaking, **the word sheol refers to the unseen state of existence where the souls and spirits of the dead are hidden from the living**. Of the more than sixty times sheol is used in the Old Testament, the King James translators used the word “hell” to translate sheol in most places. Their interpretation of the word sheol was in reference to the unseen state of the dead. However, they also used the words “grave” and “pit.” Other translations as the *American Standard Version*, have simply used the word “sheol” and left the interpretation to the reader. Some have suggested using a word as “gravedom,” and then allowing the interpreter to determine a definition from the biblical use of the word.

**2. Biblical use and definition:** Through personification Isaiah wrote, “*For Sheol cannot thank You, Death cannot praise You; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for Your truth*” (Is 38:18). Jacob mourned, “*For I shall go down into the grave [sheol] to my son in mourning*” (Gn 37:35). When he died, Jacob expected to go down to sheol (See Gn 42:38; 44:29-31). So also is the case with

Job when Job said, “*Oh, that You would **hide me** in the grave [sheol]”* (Jb 14:13). The *New International Version* translates Deuteronomy 32:22 thus, “*For a fire has been kindled by my wrath, one that burns to **the realm of death [sheol] below ....***” David said of sheol in Psalm 88:12, “*Shall Your wonders be known **in the dark:** and Your righteousness in the **land of forgetfulness?**”* The living seek, but cannot communicate with the dead in sheol (Is 8:19). Sheol is beyond the perception of the living.

The Old Testament righteous did not consider sheol to be a place of separation from the omnipresent God. Job considered making his house in sheol (Jb 17:13). David said, “*If I make my bed in sheol, behold, **You are there***” (Ps 139:8). However, sheol was considered only a temporary state of existence. In prophetic language, David wrote, “*For great is Your mercy toward me, and You have delivered my soul from the depths of sheol*” (Ps 86:13). “***God will redeem my soul from the power of sheol***” (Ps 49:15). “***For You will not leave my soul in sheol***” (Ps 16:10). These statements clearly indicate that sheol was only a temporary dwelling of the righteous.

Probably one of the best biblical descriptions of sheol was given by Job. In Job 10:21,22, Job lamented, “*... I go to the place from which I shall not return, to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land as dark as darkness itself, as the shadow of death, without any order, where even the light is like darkness.*” Though sheol is considered to be a place that is “down,” where one is “hidden” in a “land of forgetfulness” in “the dark,” one is not beyond God’s awareness and control. Job wrote, “*The dead tremble, those under the waters and those inhabiting them. Sheol is naked before Him, and destruction has no covering*” (Jb 26:5,6). One is not outside the presence and control of God in sheol (Am 9:2; Ps 139:8). From the viewpoint of man, sheol is a place of unknown darkness simply because it is an existence that is unknown to the living. However, from the viewpoint of God it is a different story.

Nothing is outside the presence of the omnipresent God.

**3. Inhabitants of sheol:** It is significant to understand two things about the Old Testament concept of sheol in relation to its inhabitants. First, **sheol is not pictured as a place of punishment.** The word is simply used in the Old Testament to describe an existence into which the dead go after physical death. Secondly, **sheol is pictured as an existence into which both the righteous and unrighteous go.** It is the unseen state of existence of the spirits of the dead who have returned to God.

The righteous of the Old Testament expected to go down to sheol. David (Ps 49:15), Job (Jb 14:13), Jacob (Gn 37:35; 42:38; 44:29-31), Hannah (1 Sm 2:6) and other Old Testament faithfuls expected to go to sheol when they died. It was an existence in which they knew that they were not out of touch with God. They knew that God would in some way restore them from this unseen state of existence. Hannah stated, "*He [God] brings down to the grave and brings up*" (1 Sm 2:6). David prophesied, "*For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption*" (Ps 16:10; see At 2:24-32). David rejoiced, "*Our God is the God of salvation; and to God the Lord belong escapes from death*" (Ps 68:20; see Dt 32:39). Isaiah wrote, "*He will swallow up death forever ...*" (Is 25:8). "*Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. Awake and sing, you who dwell in dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead*" (Is 26:19; see 53:8-10; Dn 12:2). Though in sheol, the spirits of the dead will come forth to be reunited with their resurrected bodies that the earth will "cast out."

The wicked of the Old Testament were also pictured as inhabitants of sheol (Is 14:9). Isaiah personifies the inhabitants of sheol as carrying on conversation (Is 14:9-18). These are those who would, if they could, counsel the wicked living who will find their end in sheol, the end of life for all the living on the earth.

The Old Testament concept of sheol is that it is an existence of the



dead. Both righteous and unrighteous are there until the final resurrection. It is not pictured as an existence of torment for the wicked, but simply a realm of existence until God concludes history on this earth and begins eternity. Sheol is viewed as a place of darkness by the Old Testament writers because little revelation was given concerning life after death. Only when we come to the revelation of the New Testament do we find a more complete picture of that which is beyond physical death.

## **B. Hades:**

In Psalm 16:10 David made the prophecy, *“For You will not leave my soul in **Sheol** ....”* This Psalm is quoted by Peter in Acts 2:27 where Peter said of Jesus’ soul, *“Because You will not leave my soul in **hades** ....”* Peter uses the Septuagint translation in making this quotation. The word he quotes from Psalm 16:10 is “hades.” Thus the Jews in the translation of the Septuagint, and Peter’s inspired use of the word “hades,” make the meaning of hades in some way equivalent to the Hebrew word “sheol.” Though the Old Testament does not give us a complete understanding of sheol, at least the New Testament sheds more light on the subject if we parallel the meanings of the words sheol and hades.

We turn to the New Testament in order to discover this state of existence of the dead. Consider the following definitions that give us more information concerning this realm of existence where the souls of the dead are in existence until the final coming of Jesus and resurrection.

**1. *Secular use and definition:*** The Greek word hades simply means “not seen.” It is the word that was used by the Holy Spirit to identify the unseen world, the existence of the dead in relation to the living. In this sense, therefore, hades is the “abode of the dead” in relation to the living. The word does not indicate a place as would be

characteristic with the location of a physical body. Embodiment, or incarnation in flesh and bones is necessary for physical location. And since the dead are disembodied, they are in a **realm of existence** that is not seen by the living. Therefore, we would first understand hades simply as **an unseen state of the spirits of the dead who are reserved by God for the final coming and resurrection of all who are in graves** (Jn 5:28,29). The righteous dead are awaiting embodiment for dwelling in eternity. They are waiting in a realm that is not seen by us, but is “seen” and known by God.

If we maintain this understanding of hades, much of the problem is solved concerning the existence of those who have died. They have not ceased to exist. Their spirits have simply moved into a realm of existence that cannot be seen or experienced by the living.

**2. Biblical use and definition:** The word hades is used ten times in the New Testament (See Mt 11:23; 16:18; Lk 10:15; 16:23; At 2:27,31; Rv 1:18; 6:8; 20:13,14). Unfortunately, the King James translators used the word “hell” to translate the two Greek words “gehenna” and “hades,” and therefore, made it difficult to discover exactly which word is used in a particular text. Later translations have corrected this translation by using a transliteration of the Greek word in the texts where it is used, thus we have the word hades. As will be noted in chapter 11, the word “gehenna” has reference to the final state of punishment of the wicked, not the present abode of disembodied spirits. This word is translated with the word (gehenna) “hell.”

In the following contexts, the Greek word hades is used in the New Testament.

## HADES

- a. *"And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades ..."* (Mt 11:23; see Lk 10:15).
- b. *"... the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it"* (Mt 16:18).
- c. *"Because You will not leave my soul in Hades"* (At 2:27).
- d. *"He [David], foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see*

corruption” (At 2:31).

- e. “I am he who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of **Hades** and of Death” (Rv 1:18).
- f. “... and the name of him who sat on it was Death, and **Hades** followed with him” (Rv 6:8).
- g. “Death and **Hades** delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and **Hades** were cast into the lake of fire” (Rv 20:13,14).

It would be good here to focus on some of the above statements in order to better understand exactly what is being said. I believe that if we simply define hades in the sense of being the unseen existence of the dead, instead of a particular place, our interpretation and perception of Bible statements of this existence will be easier. I believe that the use of the word hades has reference to the existence of the dead in relation to the living instead of the relationship of the dead with God. The dead are unseen by the living but in the care of God. Consider the following thoughts:

**a. Matthew 11:23:** Jesus affirmed that though Capernaum had exalted herself to be seen of men, she would be brought where men will see her no more. Jesus used hades as the state of existence of those who had sought to be seen in this world, but at death they will go into a state of not being seen or noticed by the living.

**b. Matthew 16:18:** The word “gates” is used by Jesus in this context to refer to the **power** of hades. This meaning in reference to hades is also in Psalm 49:15. “*But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave [sheol].*” The unseen which claims all men will not prevail against those who submit to the Bread of Life. Jesus’ commentary would be, “*And I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; neither shall anyone snatch them out of My hand*” (Jn 10:28). “*I am the living bread which came down ...*” from heaven (Jn 10:28; see 6:51-58). Those in this life who eat of the Bread that came from heaven, will not perish at death, nor in the world to come. Death and hades will not exist where there is immortality.

**c. Acts 2:27:** Peter quoted Psalm 16:10 in Acts 2:27, and thus, defined the Hebrew word sheol in Psalm 16:10 to refer to the unseen existence of the dead. Jesus' soul was not left in the unseen realm of the dead, nor was His body allowed to decay away. His soul returned to the body, and thus, He was resurrected to be seen again by men (At 2:31).

**d. Revelation 1:18:** John revealed that Jesus had the authority ("keys") over those who are unseen. His **all authority** of Matthew 28:18 extends beyond the realm of this physical world. The Father "*put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church*" (Ep 1:22). God has "*highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth*" (Ph 2:9,10). All who are in the hadean realm of existence are presently under the authority of Jesus. Though they are unseen by the living, they are not out of sight of Jesus' authority.

**e. Revelation 6:8:** In Revelation 1:18 and 20:13,14, death and hades are mentioned together. The reason for this is obvious. When one dies, his soul goes into a state where it cannot be seen by those on earth. One dies and goes into the hadean state of existence. Hades always follows physical death. However, as is stated in the following verse, both death and hades will cease to exist in eternity. In the heavenly existence of the new heavens and earth we shall never go out of sight from one another.

**f. Revelation 20:13,14:** In John's vision of the finality of all things, physical death is terminated by Jesus' final coming and the resurrection of all (See Jn 5:28,29). In the end, all the dead shall be raised. Those of the populations of the world (sea) who are spiritually dead, but living when Jesus comes, shall be delivered to judgment. Those in the unseen state (hades) shall also be judged. In Revelation 20:13-15, John's emphasis is upon the unrighteous who are either living or dead when Jesus comes again. They will be judged according

to their works. This judgment, however, always ends in second death, for *“by the deeds of the law no flesh shall be justified in His sight”* (Rm 3:20). Christians know that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ (Gl 2:16). This fact should motivate every Christian to take the gospel of Jesus to all the world. It should motivate all who have heard, not to trust in their own works, but in the grace of God, *“for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (At 4:12).

It is also necessary to note that John pictures the termination of the hadean existence after the final coming. When death is taken away by the final resurrection and institution of incorruptible and immortal bodies of eternal dwelling, there will be no need for an unseen state. The righteous will dwell in existence with no more termination of bodies or separation by physical death. No longer will there be a death that will move one into a separation from loved ones. Thus death, with her twin sister, hades, will go into destruction. Their function will no longer exist in an eternal realm of existence. When mortality no longer exists, there will be no need for death and the hadean existence.

**3. *Inhabitants of hades:*** Since hades is associated with the definition of sheol in the Old Testament (compare Ps 16:10 with At 2:27), then we would correctly assume that all the dead, both righteous and unrighteous, are in this unseen existence. There are numerous statements in the New Testament that explain the dwelling of the dead before the final resurrection. Since both the righteous and wicked are in a disembodied state before the final resurrection, then we wonder what their relationship is with one another after death and what their relationship is with the Father of spirits and Jesus.

If we stay with the definition that hades is simply the “unseen state of the dead,” then we would have to say that all the dead are unseen by the living. Though the righteous dead are in the presence of the Lord (2 Co 5:8), they are still in hades; they are not seen by the living. In Revelation 1:18 Jesus is pictured as having authority (“the keys”)

of hades. He has control over this realm; He has power over all the souls of those who have died. Simply because the dead are out of our sight does not mean that they are out of control of Jesus.

The following points are set forth in order to define a difference between the state of existence between the righteous and unrighteous dead. Though all the souls of the dead are kept under the control of Jesus, we would not assume that they are kept in the same realm of preservation until the final resurrection and embodiment. It is evident from the Scriptures that the righteous dead and unrighteous dead are reserved in two different states of existence until the resurrection.

**a. Paradise:** When Mary encountered Jesus in the garden immediately after His resurrection, He said to her, “*Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father*” (Jn 20:17). However, by the time of this encounter with Mary, Jesus had already in the spirit descended into the hadean existence (At 2:27,31). In the context of His statement to Mary in John 20:17, Jesus is making reference to **His body**, not His soul. He had not yet ascended to the Father in bodily form as is later explained in Acts 1:9,10.

Peter made two interesting statements in 1 Peter 3:19 and 1 Peter 4:6. He said, “... *by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison .*” “*For this reason the gospel was preached also to those who are dead ....*” If we would understand 1 Peter 3:19 and 1 Peter 4:6 in reference to Jesus’ presence in hadean existence after His death, then He “*went and preached to the spirits in prison*” (1 Pt 3:19), and by this “*the gospel was preached also to those who are dead*” (1 Pt 4:6). Jesus did this **in the spirit**, not in the body. How this was done without embodiment, or was even necessary, is left to our speculation. One thing is clear, He had not yet bodily ascended to heaven after His death and before His ascension in Acts 1. Jesus did not go immediately to heaven in bodily form when He died on the cross, **but did go to the hadean realm of heaven in the spirit. He went to paradise.**

We do know that Jesus went into hadean existence between His death and resurrection. Did He just go among the righteous? I would think not. I would challenge you with the thought that He went and announced to all the dead that the gospel plan had been accomplished. God had *“preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying 'In you all the nations shall be blessed'”* (Gl 3:8; see Gn 12:3). However, neither Abraham nor all his descendants understood all the implications of this mystery that would be revealed in later times (Ep 3:3-5). *“Of this salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently ... searching what, or what manner of time, the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating **when He testified beforehand of the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow ...**”* (1 Pt 1:10,11). These Old Testament prophets all died in faith, not having experienced the promises (Hb 11:13). It would only be reasonable to believe, therefore, that when Jesus died He would go to the spirits of Abraham, Moses and all the righteous by faith and announce to them that the redemption which God had planned before the foundation of the world had finally been accomplished by the outpouring of sacrificial blood on the cross. The righteous by faith would rejoice because their faith paid off. The torment of the unrighteous would be increased because they would realize what they had missed because they refused to trust in God.

Jesus did go to paradise. He said to the thief on the cross, *“Assuredly, I say to you, **today you will be with Me in Paradise**”* (Lk 23:43). The Moffat version translated this verse, *“‘I tell you truly,’ said Jesus, ‘you will be in paradise with me **this very day**’.*” When Jesus died, His soul went into hadean existence (At 2:31). We assume, therefore, that paradise is of the hadean existence, that it is the realm of existence of the righteous that is unseen by those on earth. If we link Jesus’ statement to the repentant thief with Peter’s statement in Acts 2:31, where it is stated that Jesus was in hades, then we conclude that immediately after His death and before His ascension, Jesus went to paradise in the unseen world of the existence

of the dead. Because Jesus did not make the statement of Luke 23:43 to the other thief, indicates that the other thief was destined to another realm of the unseen world. It was a realm different from paradise.

The word “paradise” means garden. The use of this word in the Bible in reference to the dwelling of the righteous after death certainly has its metaphorical foundation in the garden of Eden in Genesis 2. The association between paradise and the tree of life is brought out in Revelation 2:7. “*To Him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise [garden] of God.*” The first time we read of the tree of life in the Bible is in Genesis 2:9 where God placed it in the midst of the garden of Eden. It had the “power” to allow one to live forever (Gn 3:22). However, Adam was separated from the tree of life when He was driven from the garden (paradise) of God because of his sin. He could not eat of it, and thus, introduced physical death into the world (See 1 Co 15:20-22). Metaphorically speaking, therefore, this tree of life is restored after death for the righteous. It is in the garden (paradise) of God for the righteous in order that they live forever.

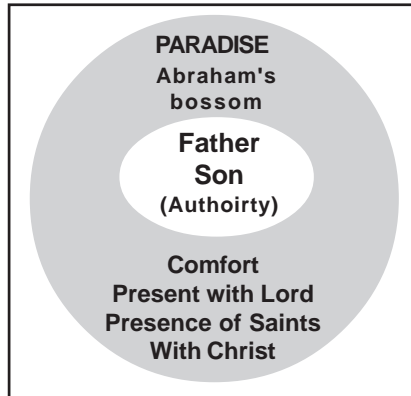
There is a qualifying phrase in Revelation 2:7 concerning paradise. It is the paradise “of God.” In this sense, therefore, paradise originates from God. It is a realm from God that is prepared for the spirits of the righteous who have returned to God their Father (See Ec 12:7; Hb 12:9). It is a realm hidden from the living, but one in which the righteous are “with Christ” (Ph 1:23) in the “presence of the Lord” (2 Co 5:8).

**b. Abraham’s bosom:** In Luke 16, after the death of Lazarus, he was “*carried by the angels to Abraham’s bosom*” (Lk 16:22). The word “to” indicates that his spirit went somewhere. He was not left to wander around in space, detached from some location. Lazarus left his body (Js 2:26), left this material world and went back to God to “Abraham’s bosom.” When he died, his spirit was “*carried by angels to Abraham’s bosom*” (Lk 16:22). “Bosom” here would be metaphorical with the definition of comfort and care. Thus in



death, Lazarus was in the protective care of God in an existence that was away from the confinement of this material world but in the loving preservation of the Lord.

We must not miss the point here that Lazarus was “carried away.” He was not left in spirit to float around in space to seek out dwelling in either rocks, trees



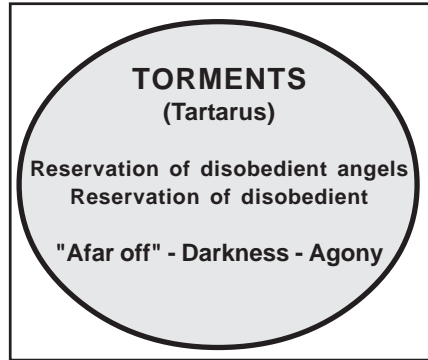
or some other person. His person (soul) was taken to some place where it had returned to God (Ec 12:7). The Bible does not teach that there are wandering spirits seeking some thing or someone in which or whom to dwell. It is only a figment of the wild imagination of religious dreamers who contend that there are spirits wandering at will looking for some innocent prospect in whom to dwell.

Since the forgiven thief on the cross went with Jesus to paradise immediately after death, and Lazarus was carried away to “Abraham’s bosom,” we would not be wrong to assume that the words “paradise” and “Abraham’s bosom” are figures that refer to the same existence. It is an existence of being with Jesus (Ph 1:23) and in the presence of the Lord (2 Co 5:8). It is an existence where the disembodied spirits of the righteous are in the protection of the Lord until they are clothed with a spiritual body from God at the final coming of Jesus (2 Co 5:1-8).

We must keep in mind that this dwelling is not the final goal of the righteous. Paul said that we "*groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from God*" (2 Co 5:2). We are “naked” in paradise; we are without a body. This is not our final destiny or desire. We do not want to be “unclothed,” that is disembodied (2 Co 5:4). We seek embodiment at the resurrection in order that we dwell in the new heavens and earth that are yet to come

(2 Pt 3:13).

**c. Tartarus and torments:** The Rich Man in Luke 16, and the unrepentant thief, went to a different state of existence than Lazarus. “*And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom*” (Lk 16:23). “Afar off” does not mean that the Rich Man was “distant” from God in some far off corner of the universe. I would again caution us here about using literal definitions of this world in explaining those things that are beyond this world. This makes it challenging for us to understand exactly what is going on, or exists, in existence beyond the physical world. However, we cannot make the unseen abode of the dead something physical in relation to a world of spirits.



“Afar off” simply means that the Rich Man was not approachable by the righteous in paradise, or Abraham’s bosom. Neither could he approach the righteous. Jesus used the term “great gulf” to indicate the impossibility of transferring from one state of existence to another (Lk 16:26). The gulf was **fixed** between Lazarus and the Rich Man. No one could cross over in order to fulfill the desire of the Rich Man that someone come and quench his agony. What seems to be the meaning of this great gulf is that after death, there is no possibility of passing between the realm of the wicked dead and the righteous dead. The destinies of both are sealed and there is no use trying to change the fact. Of course, it would be the wicked who would try to change their predicament if they could. For this reason, we see the Rich Man, not Lazarus, making the request for relief. He is seeking some kind of relief from his situation in torments. If only Lazarus could touch his tongue with a drop of water from his fingertips. The metaphorical

statement surely means that the Rich Man is seeking relief from the tormenting condition in which he is. But there is no relief. His destiny is sealed. His judgment has been pronounced (Hb 9:27). In his “far off” realm he must wait for the final pronouncement and assignment of destruction at the end of time.

The Rich Man is not trying to change his destiny. He accepted such but asked if Lazarus could be sent back to earth to warn his five brothers “*lest they also come to this place of torments*” (Lk 16:28). This request is also denied. Thus the dead cannot communicate with the living.

We do not know how far “afar off” is in relation to God. We simply know that the spirits of all the dead have “returned to God” (Ec 12:7). We do know that Lazarus goes “to” Abraham’s bosom. We know that the Rich Man was in a “place.” One thing is certain. The dead have not lost their identity. And in some sense, they have not lost their presence. Their spirits have not evaporated into nothingness, but are confined and continued by the power of God. Neither are they floating around in space, detached from place. Though they are unseen by us, they are in the care of God.

When studying Luke 16, we must remember that this text is loaded with metaphors. Both the body of the Rich Man and Lazarus were buried back on earth, yet in the language Jesus uses, He says that the Rich Man “*lifted up his eyes*” (Lk 16:23). The Rich Man asked that Lazarus be allowed to “*dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue*” (Lk 16:24). The eyes, finger, water and tongue of Lazarus and the Rich Man were all in the grave on earth. Our task, therefore, is not to think literally, but metaphorically when approaching this passage. What is meant by these statements? What does “torment” mean when there is no flesh to suffer pain? At least what we can conclude from this existence which is beyond our experience is that the Rich Man was in an emotionally agonizing situation. Lazarus, on the other hand, was in an emotionally pleasant environment in comfort. The situation of the Rich Man was

emotionally tormenting. It is a realm to which none of us would want to go.

Peter uses another interesting word that defines the existence of the Rich Man. He uses the word “tartarus” in 2 Peter 2:4 in reference to angels who have been reserved for final judgment. “... *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 ....*” This is the only time this word is used in the Bible. In secular literature the word refers to “a dark place, a prison.” Thus, tartarus has reference to imprisonment of the wicked before the last judgment is carried out. Reference is not to what will transpire **after** the judgment. These angels who are presently confined to tartarus will after the last judgment be cast into gehenna, the final punishment of Satan and his angels (Mt 25:41). Jude says of these disobedient angels, that God has reserved them “*in everlasting chains **under darkness** for the judgment of the great day*” (Jd 6). At this time of the history of the world, they are still reserved in the darkness of tartarus for judgment to come. They were there at the time Peter and Jude wrote these words. They are still there today.

The wicked are reserved for the final resurrection of the last great day (Jn 5:28,29). The disobedient angels are reserved under darkness for the judgment (2 Pt 2:4; Jd 6). Whether together or separated, both are not in the realm of existence of the righteous dead who are in Abraham’s bosom, the paradise of God. All the dead, as the living, are awaiting the climax of time. They are waiting until the living have finished their course of life and the conclusion of the history of man on earth.

We often wonder if those who have gone on to be with the Lord experience time as we do on earth. I would suggest that they do not, since time for the living is measured by planetary movements of the earth and moon in relation to the sun and our interactivity with current events. The dead are in another existence that is not influenced by our measurements of time. They do not grow old as we do in the physical

body. However, consider the following which would suggest that they in some way are considerate of time:

(1) **Revelation 6:9-11:** The souls under the altar cried out, “**How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth**” (vs 10). It seems that the souls of these martyred saints were “waiting” in reference to time on earth until their deaths were avenged by the Lord. The words “how long,” “until,” and “dwell” all have reference to time on earth, not to time in their realm of existence. The Lord responded to their requests by saying that they “**rest a little longer**” (vs 11). This statement must suggest that the dead do recall time, and are possibly subject to it, though they are in paradise. At least, they are conscious of time as long as this earth is in existence. When this earth is terminated, then time will cease to exist.

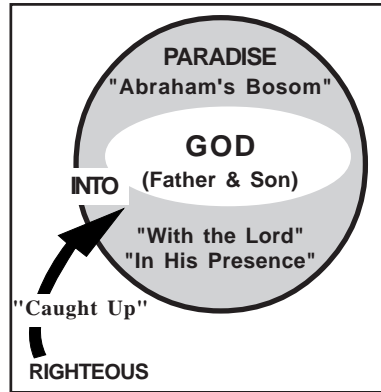
(2) **Luke 16:19-31:** The Rich Man found himself “*being in torments*” (vs 23). Abraham said to him, “*You are tormented*” (vs 25). The Rich Man was thus going through torment. The torment was not an instant occurrence. It was an ongoing happening. As the Rich Man was experiencing torments, Lazarus was in an ongoing existence of comforts.

**d. Paradise and heaven:** Are the righteous in a heavenly state of existence? Certainly. They are with Jesus (Ph 1:23) in the presence of the Lord (2 Co 5:8). Are they embodied in their spiritual body from the Lord that we shall receive at the resurrection (See 1 Co 15:44; 2 Co 5:1-8)? Certainly not. The final coming of Jesus has not yet taken place, for it will be at the final coming when the righteous will be raised incorruptible and reunited with their resurrected spiritual bodies (1 Th 4:13-17; 1 Jn 3:2). At that time, they will be rewarded with their heavenly dwelling in eternity (2 Pt 3:13).

This may sound confusing. If it does, then maybe we are on the right track. I do not suppose to completely understand all that is beyond the limits of our world. Therefore, I am cautious about being too dogmatic in this area. We have only the Scriptures to paint a

picture for us, and sometimes, that picture is not painted as clearly as we would like it to be. Those who want to argue over this matter too often move from the realm of what is exactly revealed, to an interpretation of forming conclusions that are based upon human reason. And we know how fallible human reason is.

So when one dies, does He go to heaven? We could answer this question from Paul's experience in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. In verse 2 Paul said he "*was caught up to the third heaven.*" The Jews maintained the concept that the birds flew in the first heaven. The sun, moon and stars were in the second heaven. Deity dwelt in the third heaven. If we assume that Paul's



use of the phrase "third heaven" has reference to the Jews' concept of heaven, then we could assume that in this unique experience Paul was caught up, but not into the dwelling of God. He was caught up to heaven. But in verse 4 he states that "*he was caught up into Paradise.*" The conclusion is that paradise and heaven have a close "relationship" or "proximity" to one another. Some might suggest that they are the same place. But I think not.

Actually, there is no argument here concerning affirmations that when one dies he goes to heaven. The point is, one does go "into" an existence in a heavenly realm which is paradise. You might look at it this way. **All paradise is heaven, but not all heaven is paradise.** Paul was caught up into paradise which is of heaven. One need not parallel paradise and heaven as the same by comparing verse 2 and verse 4 of 2 Corinthians 12. Paradise is simply the existence in the heavenly wherein is reserved the spirits and souls of the dead who have returned to God who is in heaven.

In fact, the language Paul uses in the context of 2 Corinthians 12:1-

4 does not necessitate interpreting the third heaven and paradise to be the same. He was caught up **to** the third heaven. The Greek word is *heos*. The meaning is “even to.” The Greek word does not mean “into.” Paul was caught up **to as far as** the third heaven. But when he refers to paradise, he says that he was “*caught up into Paradise.*” This is a different Greek word and one that is here translated correctly. Paul was caught up even unto heaven but into paradise.

Jesus’ statement concerning heaven is still true when understood in its context. “*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven*” (Jn 3:13). At least at the time Jesus made this statement, **no one had ascended to heaven**. We could also say that at the time John wrote the statement, no one had been caught up into heaven wherein is the Father and Son. However, I would say that in the context of John 3:13 Jesus is not discussing realm, but authority to reveal “heavenly things” (Jn 3:12). He is the only one who has the authority to reveal “heavenly things,” for He is the only one who has descended directly from the Father’s authority in heaven (Hb 8:1).

If one understands Jesus’ statement in John 3:13 to include the concept of the realm of heaven, then we would understand that the Old Testament faithfuls were not, at the time Jesus made the statement, “in heaven.” At the time John wrote the statement, only Jesus was in heaven with the Father. Abraham, Elijah and the others were in sheol (hades) in the heavenly presence of God. They would be before the throne, the authority of God as pictured in Revelation (See Rv 7:9-17).

How close to God does one have to be before he is considered to be in heaven? Does one have to actually sit at the right hand of God before being considered to be in heaven? Certainly not. Here is my point. Being “in heaven” does not have reference to location. And being in the presence of God does not refer to “how close.” These are all terms and concepts of this world that refer to our location in

reference to people and things in this world. But I would caution us about using such concepts in reference to the realm of the heavenly and applying them to God and our being “in heaven.”

The Hebrew writer stated, “*For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, but ... into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hb 9:24; 1 Pt 3:22). Jesus went to the right hand of the Father “*in the heavens*” (Hb 8:1). We will not be in this position of authority at the right hand of the Father, but we will be in the presence of the Lord when we die (2 Co 5:8). The “right hand” of the Father has reference to authority, not physical location. Our presence in the heavenly will not be in a place of authority as Jesus, but in an existence of comfort and rest (Rv 14:13).

We would not confuse the present heavenly **existence** into which Paul was introduced by being caught up to the third heaven, with the heavenly **dwelling** that is yet to come. Only after the final resurrection, when spirits are embodied, will there exist the new heavens and earth wherein **dwells** righteousness (2 Pt 3:13). This new heavens and earth are yet to come. This “realm” or “existence” does not yet exist because the resurrection has not yet occurred.

When the righteous die, they go to the unseen world of the dead in order to be with the Lord. They are disembodied, for their bodies have returned to the dust of the earth. They are naked because they have been unclothed with their physical bodies. When the wicked die, their spirits also return to God. Their bodies also return to the dust of the earth.

The righteous are reserved in comforts with the Lord. They are in the conscious fellowship of all the righteous who have passed through physical death into the unseen existence of the dead. The wicked, however, are reserved in torments.

Both the righteous and wicked are in a disembodied state after death. They await the final coming of Jesus and resurrection. All the dead are awaiting that final hour “*in which all who are in graves will hear His voice and come forth ...*” (Jn 5:28,29).



## Chapter 7

# THE LAST COMING

With great expectation Christians look toward the future. When Jesus was with the disciples on earth, He always pointed their minds toward the future. *“And if I go ...I will come again ... that where I am, there you may be also”* (Jn 14:3). *“I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, **he shall live”*** (Jn 11:25; see Jn 3:16,36). Jesus always gave hope for the future. This hope, therefore, is a very important part of the Christian’s world view. It is that substance of belief that sustains one through the trials and rigors of this present life. Christians have *“fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before”* them (Hb 6:18; see Rm 8:24,25).

Jesus is coming again. Technically speaking, it is His **second** coming in a visible manner, and His **final** coming for the purpose of judgment. The Hebrew writer said that Jesus would visibly appear a second time (Hb 9:28). However, Jesus has already **come in judgment in time** upon Jerusalem (Mt 23). He has come in judgment in time upon the church of Ephesus (See Rv 2:5) and Pergamum (See Rv 2:16). His coming in the last day, therefore, will be a **final** coming in judgment. It will be the last personal appearance to the inhabitants of the world, but a final coming in judgment of things that pertain to the world. He appeared in the flesh in the first coming, and He will appear a second time so as to be seen.

We live in a world of religious speculators who never cease to captivate the public’s attention by their prognostications as to when Jesus will come. I never cease to be amazed at the emptiness of those religions that place specific dates on Jesus’ coming in order to generate a fearful following to those religious sepulchers that are full of dead men’s benign predictions. It is interesting that no matter how many unfulfilled predictions of the end that fall by the historical

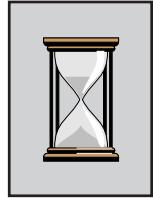
wayside, adherents will still push on in allegiance to false prophets who simply update their calendars. We live in a crazy world of religious charlatans who have long since forgotten the essence of discipleship, that it is by love, not fear. Because of love, we follow Jesus and perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18). So here we are. Surrounded by the false and vain predictions of a religious world that is constantly stirring about with predictions of the end.

Naturally, we are excited about the future. Knowledgeable and faithful Christians are “*looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God*” (2 Pt 3:12). They are “*eagerly waiting for the revelation of our Lord Jesus Christ*” (1 Co 1:7). They “*eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ*” (Ph 3:20). They “*groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*” (2 Co 5:2). For this reason, Christians pray, “*O Lord, come!*” (1 Co 16:22). They cry out, “*Even so, come, Lord Jesus!*” (Rv 22:20). Those who are not of such a disposition concerning the coming of Jesus should reconsider their hope; they should be warned concerning their love of this present world which shall pass away (See Mt 6:24; Js 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15,16).

So what will happen when Jesus comes? How shall He come? What will be the nature of His appearance? What will take place? These and a host of other questions are commonly asked and can be answered only from God’s word. Seeking for answers in non-biblical sources will only lead us to nonsense concerning those things about which the Bible speaks. Therefore, let us be cautioned about inventing our own imaginations about what the Bible teaches concerning future events in reference to the end of time. Here are a few important things the Bible reveals about the final coming of Jesus in order to answer some of the questions we have about this coming event. Understanding these characteristics concerning the coming of Jesus will help guard ourselves against speculations of those who do not know the Bible nor have any concern about the return of the Son of God.

## A. Jesus is coming in the last day.

The events of Jesus' coming will occur in the last day of measured time on earth. Jesus said that those who believe in Him will be raised up at the **last day** (Jn 6:40,44). Jesus said that the word He has spoken will judge the rebellious on the **last day** (Jn 12:48). Therefore, this last day of earth history will be a tremendous event in eternity. It will be the beginning of eternity for the righteous who have been confined to time.



Days are measured by the uniform occurrence of celestial bodies in relation to one another. The earth rotates on its axis to produce 24-hour days. It rotates around the sun to produce years. Since there will be a last day of these physical heavenly bodies (2 Pt 3:10,11), then we can correctly assume that the means by which days are accounted will be terminated when Jesus comes again. This is what Peter wanted us to understand when he revealed, "*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 Pt 3:10). The day is coming, therefore, when the time measuring elements of this present universe will be dissolved away into eternity.

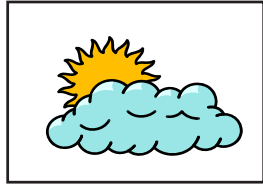
Many things will occur on the last day. The following is a list of events that will finalize the existence of all things as we now know them:

### EVENTS OF THE LAST DAY

1. Jesus will come (Jn 6:40,44).
2. The dead will be raised (Jn 5:28,29).
3. The righteous living will be bodily changed (1 Co 15:52).
4. The righteous dead will be reunited with their resurrected bodies (1 Th 4:14-16).
5. Judgment of the living will occur (Jn 12:48).
6. All the righteous will ascend to heaven (1 Th 4:16,17).
7. The present earth and heavens will pass away (2 Pt 3:10,11).
8. Satan, his angels and the wicked will be cast into hell (Mt 25:41).

## B. Jesus is coming in the clouds.

Two angels said to the disciples who had just witnessed Jesus' ascension in the clouds, "*This same Jesus who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*"



(At 1:9-11). Jesus' return, therefore, will be **in like manner**, not the same manner, as His ascension. We must not miss the simile here. His coming will be **like** it was when He ascended, but it will not be in the exact same manner as the ascension.

"Coming in the clouds" is also judgment language that is taken from the Old Testament. Jesus ascended unto the throne of David in the clouds (Dn 7:13). Must we assume there are literal clouds in heaven wherein originates the authority of David's throne? Certainly not! Jesus also came in judgment on Jerusalem in the clouds (Mt 24:30; 26:64; Lk 21:27). "Coming in the clouds" has reference to heavenly glory that is manifested from heavenly authority. We would assume, therefore, that Jesus' coming in like manner as His ascension at the end of time will be in the clouds, that is, in heavenly glory with all authority. In other words, it will be a glorious coming in a heavenly manner.

Jesus ascended from a specific location on earth. He ascended somewhere outside Jerusalem. However, when He comes again, it will be a universal coming, one that will be simultaneous throughout the whole world.

We should not assume that He will come at a particular location, and then another. The New Testament does not talk about Jesus coming **here or there**. His omnipresence would allow His appearance throughout the world at the same time. However, it would be superfluous to speculate on how He will come. We simply leave the **how** of His coming to Him. Our inability to understand how He will come does not argue against His coming. If we conclude that

there is a God, then certainly He will conduct His coming according to His will and not according to the limitations of our imagination. It will happen with events beyond our understanding. There is nothing that has happened in history that will compare to that which is to happen with the final coming of Jesus.

### C. Jesus is coming in a visible manner.

*“He is coming with the clouds, and every eye shall see Him”* (Rv 1:7). Jesus shall **appear** (1 Tm 6:14; 2 Tm 4:1,8). It will be a glorious **appearing** (Ti 2:13). The Hebrew writer stated that *“He will appear a second time”* (Hb 9:28). The word “second” associates Jesus’ final coming with His first personal coming. Therefore, we could



assume that His appearing would in some way be bodily as it was bodily when He first came. At least, He will come in a visible manner. However, He is presently in a bodily form that is different from His first coming in the flesh. Paul says He now has a glorious body (Ph 3:21). John, who experienced His resurrected body, affirmed our transformation into the same bodily form as Jesus. John wrote, *“... 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 Jn 3:2). Therefore, **every eye** shall see Jesus when He comes. We shall see His glorious body (Ph 3:21). There will be no secret comings for He shall appear before the entire world.

### D. Jesus is coming with a great noise.

Paul revealed that *“the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God ...”* (1 Th 4:16). His coming will be *“at the last trumpet. For*

*the trumpet will sound*” (1 Co 15:52). The Old Testament trumpets were sounded in order to draw attention and gather Israel’s army together. At the last trumpet call, God’s people will be called out of the populations of the world for their victory march home (Compare Mt 24:31). The final coming will not be a quiet matter in some far corner of the earth. Every inhabitant of the earth at the time of His revelation from heaven will hear the sound of this final event. No one will be left out. No one will be able to hide from the trauma of the event. Disciples of Jesus look forward to the sound. Unbelievers will be terrified at the prospects that they failed to heed the warning of His coming.



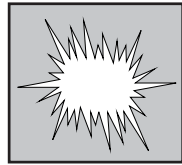
### **E. Jesus is coming in flaming fire.**

Fire is metaphorical of destruction. Jesus is coming “*in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction ...*” (2 Th 1:8,9). Paul stated that the last day of revealed fire from heaven will be the final determining factor of the faithfulness of one’s evangelistic work (1 Co 3:13). Those who willfully sin have “*a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation will devour the adversaries*” (Hb 10:27). The fire to come is a consuming fire of judgment upon the wicked (See Zp 1:18). It is a consuming fire of destruction of the material world (2 Pt 3:10,11). Thus, when the New Testament talks about fire to come, there is destruction coming.

### **F. Jesus is coming with His angels.**

Jesus shall be “*revealed from heaven with His mighty angels*” (2 Th 1:7). This seems to be the normal prophetic picture of God’s coming in judgment. Before God’s judgment by the flood of Noah’s

day, Enoch prophesied that the Lord “*comes with ten thousands of His saints, to execute judgment on all ...*” (Jd 14,15). In His coming in judgment upon Jerusalem **in time**, the Son of Man came in the glory of His Father **with His angels** (Mt 16:27; see Mt 13:41; 25:31). His coming at the end of time will be universal and in the company of all who represent righteousness (See 1 Th 3:13; 4:13,14). This seems to be the picture of all God’s judgment on the unrighteous. All the heavenly hosts and saints join in on the final judgment of Satan and those who have given allegiance to him.



### G. Jesus is coming with the departed saints.

Jesus will be coming “*with all His saints*” (1 Th 3:13). Paul wrote, “*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Th 4:14). The souls and spirits of those who have died in Christ will also be with



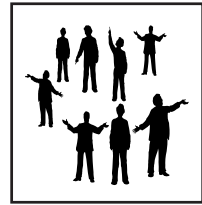
the heavenly host of Jesus’ appearing. When the last trumpet is sounded, we shall witness a cloud of heavenly hosts appearing for our deliverance from this world. It will be a spectacular event and a scene that every inhabitant of the world shall witness.

The departed saints will be coming to receive their resurrected bodies. During their lives on earth they groaned to be clothed with their habitation from God (2 Co 5:2). They will be coming with Jesus to be “*further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life*” (2 Co 5:4). And when mortality is swallowed up with immortality, death will exist no more.

### H. Jesus is coming in an unexpectant manner.

We must qualify what is meant by not being expected in relation to God’s judgments in time. Jesus told the disciples that He would

come in judgment on Jerusalem in a way that the **unbelieving** Jews would not expect it. It would be as in the judgment of the flood of Noah's day. The unbelieving in that day *"were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did*



**not know** until the flood came and took them all away ...” (Mt 24:37-39). The flood was not an unexpected happening to Noah. God told him, *“The end of all flesh has come before Me ... I will destroy them with the earth”* (Gn 6:13). In like manner, the destruction of Jerusalem was not unexpected by the disciples of Jesus. They knew



it would happen. Nevertheless, Jesus warned them to **watch** *“for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming”* (Mt 24:42). The point is clear. Christians must not be diverted from their hope by becoming entangled

in the affairs of this world as those during the days of Noah and the unbelieving Jews preceding the flood and the destruction of Jerusalem. If Christians become entangled in the affairs of this world, they will be distracted from Jesus' coming, and thus, will not be prepared. Faithful Christians expect Jesus to come. They expect Him to come at any time.

Jesus' comings in judgment in time and at the end of time are as a **thief** in the night upon the unbelieving (See Mt 24:43). We can know that a thief might break into our house. However, if we knew the certainty of the breakin and the exact hour, we would be waiting with the police. We do know that Jesus is coming. However, we do not know the exact hour He is coming. Therefore, Paul's following warning must be heeded. *“But you, brethren, are not in darkness, so that this Day should overtake you as a thief”* (1 Th 5:4). *“Therefore, let us not sleep, as others do, but let us watch and be sober”* (1 Th 5:6). Christians are not in the dark concerning the final coming of Jesus. They know that He is coming. Therefore, when He comes, they will not be overtaken as a thief would overtake his victims.



There have always been those unbelieving scoffers who have mocked Christians' beliefs of Jesus' coming by saying, "*Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation*" (2 Pt 3:4). But men have long since forgotten the judgment of Noah's day (2 Pt 3:5-7). For this reason, "*the day of the Lord will come as a thief*" on them (2 Pt 3:10). They shall all be taken away because they were not prepared for His coming.

## I. Jesus will come quickly.

Jesus said, "*And behold, I am coming **quickly**, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his works*" (Rv 22:12). This statement is not that easy to understand. If this "coming" is to be understood in the historical context of John's readers, then reference would be to the coming in judgment **in time** upon the immediate readers' persecutors. This very thing Jesus did do in reference to the unbelieving Jews in A.D. 70 when He brought judgment on them by the destruction of Jerusalem through the Roman armies. Even if the context has direct reference to John's immediate readers, the illustration of judgment would also apply to Jesus' coming in judgment at the **end of time**. All of God's judgments in time illustrate the final judgment to come at the end of time.

We must keep one thing clearly in mind when studying Jesus' final coming in judgment. **Jesus did not deceive John and his readers into believing that He was coming in His final coming in their lifetime.** Neither does the New Testament teach the imminent final coming of Jesus. The New Testament simply states that He is coming again. It teaches this concept to every generation of mankind on the earth. Therefore, every generation must be prepared.

So the point is that if the New Testament did not teach the imminent final coming of Jesus in the first century, then it does not teach such today. All these modern-day prognosticators who are

proclaiming dates and times for Jesus' coming in a few years are wrong. The New Testament is simply stating that Jesus is coming. There are no dates given for establishing specific times when He will come.

Jesus' statement in Revelation 22:12 concerning His coming quickly would be understood better in the context of **how** He would come in judgment, either in time or at the end of time. His comings are quick and decisive. Paul related that Jesus will appear with a **shout** and the **voice** of an archangel (1 Th 4:16). The bodies of living saints will be changed in a **moment**, in the **twinkling** of an eye (1 Co 15:52). All such occurrences indicate that Jesus' coming, and all that will transpire with it, will occur in an instant. It will be quick and decisive. There will be no processes that will take time. His coming will be instantaneous. Our resurrection will be instantaneous. The judgment will be instantaneous. It will all be over in the twinkling of an eye.

Now you have the picture. Believing that the Son of God will appear a second time from heaven should motivate all who believe to watch. "To watch" means that we must be prepared. His coming should comfort those who are suffering ridicule and persecution from unbelievers. It should give expectation of justice to those who have been unjustly treated. It should stay the revenge of those who have been innocently maltreated at the hands of those who have given themselves over to wickedness. His coming will be an exciting event. We should be looking forward to it with great anticipation.

There is a great day coming. To the righteous it will be a day of great joy, a day of answered prayer. To the wicked, however, it will be a day of wrath, justice and God's vengeance on all the ungodly. Therefore, we would, as John, pray, "***Even so, come, Lord Jesus***" (Rv 22:20).

## Chapter 8

# THE LAST RESURRECTION

Through history God has proved resurrection from the dead to be possible. Elijah raised a widow's son from the dead (1 Kg 17:17-24). Elisha resurrected the Shunammite's son (2 Kg 4:8-37). And then there was the man who sprang to life when his body was buried in the tomb of Elisha (2 Kg 13:21). God gave believers of the Old Testament just enough proof of resurrection to stimulate hope that there would be a greater resurrection to come.

Though the first five books of the Old Testament (the Pentateuch) make no clear mention of life after death through resurrection, Abraham, before the Pentateuch was written, believed in such. He obediently proceeded, therefore, to offer Isaac his son according to God's instructions because he believed "*that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead*" (Hb 11:19). When Moses appeared before God on Mt. Sinai, God reminded him, "***I am the God of your father – the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob***" (Ex 3:6). The present tense God used in this statement emphasized the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still alive in the spirit. Thus Moses did not misunderstand that God was the God of the living, not the dead (Mt 22:32). Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were still alive at the time God spoke to Moses on Mt. Sinai. They are still alive today in the spirit. They are awaiting a resurrection of their changed bodies in order to be embodied for eternity.

Throughout the Old Testament prophets there are numerous teachings on resurrection. Job believed, "*And after my skin is destroyed, this I know, that in my flesh I shall see God*" (Jb 19:26). David affirmed, "***But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me***" (Ps 49:15; see 16:9-11; 17:15; 31:5,17; 73:24,25). Isaiah proclaimed, "***Your dead shall live,***

**together with my dead body they shall arise.** Awake and sing, you who dwell in the dust; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, **and the earth shall cast out the dead**" (Is 26:19; see Is 25:8). Daniel declared, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth **shall awake**" (Dn 12:2). Hosea revealed God's promise by writing, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death" (Hs 13:14). From the testimony of these and other Old Testament prophets, it is obvious why the Hebrew writer wrote of them, "**Women received their dead raised to life again. And others were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection**" (Hb 11:35).

The faithful of the Old Testament knew that this earth was not all there was. Therefore, they "*confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*" (Hb 11:13) and "*waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*" (Hb 11:10). They sought a resurrection that would enable them to dwell in that city which was beyond this world.

When Jesus came, resurrection thinking was well established in the true believers of Israel by faith. Though the Sadducees did not believe in the resurrection, the Pharisees did (At 23:6; 26:6-8). It seems that the teaching of the Pharisees on this subject was greatly received among the people. When Jesus asked Martha if her brother Lazarus would rise again, she expressed a common belief of those of her day who followed after the faith of Abraham. "*I know that he [Lazarus] will rise again in the resurrection of the last day*" (Jn 11:24).

Not only did the Jews believe in a resurrection, they believed in a **bodily** resurrection. The grave would give up the dead. Jesus gave proof of bodily resurrection by raising Lazarus (Jn 11). However, there would be a resurrection to come that would be different than all those that had occurred in the past. Lazarus' same body was raised **unchanged**. He had to eat and drink and die again. But Jesus spoke of another resurrection. He illustrated this different resurrection by

His own. It would be different than all resurrections that had occurred in history. Because it would be different, His resurrection was the **firstfruits** of all those who have died. Jesus' resurrection was the firstfruits of all the dead for He was raised **never to die again** (1 Co 15:20). He was raised with a **changed body** that was suitable for eternal cohabitation with all who will experience a similar resurrection (See Ph 3:21; 1 Jn 3:2).

Keep in mind that the resurrection to come will be final and unique. There will be no more resurrections after Jesus comes. Thus, the resurrection in the end is the final resurrection. There has occurred in history no resurrection like the one to come. Thus, it will be unique, for it will be final.

### **A. Nature of the bodily resurrection:**

Resurrection assumes something coming forth from something that previously existed. In other words, there would be no need to talk about resurrection if the body that goes into the grave and returns to dust does not in some way come forth. If nothing will come forth from the grave, then the embodiment to come will be creation and not resurrection. The following are some thoughts that will help us focus on what will transpire in the final resurrection:

**1. The resurrection will occur in an instant:** Paul revealed that in the last day the trumpet will sound and “*we shall all be changed – in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye*” (1 Co 15:51,52). That's fast. There will be no drawn out procedure or process of resurrection. In fact, revelation concerning all end of time events on the last day indicate an instantaneous occurrence of all events in a flash of time. It will not be a time when men have time to think and prepare. Paul simply stated, “*The dead in Christ will be raised incorruptible and we shall be changed*” (1 Co 15:52).

**2. The resurrection will cause change:** Paul affirmed that the

Holy Spirit will **give life** to our mortal bodies (Rm 8:11). Paul wrote, *"But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you"* (Rm 8:11). By the Spirit, God *"will also raise us up by His power"* (1 Co 6:14; see 2 Co 4:14). There will be a **bodily** resurrection. However, it will not be a bodily resurrection in the sense of Lazarus' resurrection or any resurrection other than Jesus' resurrection. One word that Paul used in reference to our mortal bodies makes all the difference. We shall be **changed** (1 Co 15:51). And change means that the body that goes to the grave will come forth, but in a different form.

Romans 8:11 indicates that the actual mortal body will be raised. However, 1 Corinthians 15:51 indicates instantaneous change. What will be the relationship between the physical body that we bury at death and the spiritual body into which it is changed at the resurrection? This is one of those questions we cannot answer.

The point is that resurrection assumes that which goes to the tomb will come forth. There were no remnants of Jesus' body left in the tomb. So it shall be with our body. However, since our body will have seen corruption – Jesus' did not – God will use our mortal body as the seed from which the immortal will come. We must not assume that our body will be the same body. It will not, for it will be changed.

I am sure all of us have our questions concerning this most interesting event to come. So did the Corinthians, as Paul recorded, *"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"* (1 Co 15:35). Paul answered that *"what you sow is not made alive unless it dies"* (1 Co 15:36). A body must be sown. That which comes from the body that is sown is directly related to the mortal body that is sown. God will give us a new body as He pleases (1 Co 15:38). We will have a *"habitation which is from heaven"* (2 Co 5:2). The natural body of this world, therefore, will germinate that body which is from God.

In Philippians 3:21 Paul used the word "transform" in reference to

the change that is to come. Jesus will “**transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body.**” From this statement and the word “changed” in 1 Corinthians 15:51, one thing is clear concerning the resurrected body. It will be different than the one we now indwell. It will be the same, but changed. This is difficult for us to understand. Nevertheless, this is what the Scriptures say. As stated before, the bodily resurrection has not yet occurred. Therefore, there are no words or illustrations the Holy Spirit could have used to fully explain the nature of the resurrected body. We simply walk by faith on this matter.

### **3. The resurrection will result in a body for heavenly dwelling.**

We might as well forget **how** we are going to be raised. That is God’s business and beyond our understanding. However, there are in the New Testament a few statements concerning what the resurrected body will be.

**a. We shall have a body like Jesus.** John had witnessed the resurrected body of Jesus. However, he was still unable to define or explain it. “***It has not yet been revealed what we shall be,***” he wrote. However, he continued, “***We shall be like Him ...***” (1 Jn 3:2). This does not help much. After Jesus’ resurrection, He could appear in the disciples’ presence, and then, disappear (Jn 20:19). He had a body to which Mary could cling (Jn 20:17). He had a body that could be touched (Jn 20:27). It was not a spirit, but a body of flesh and bones (Lk 24:39). Now the question is, was this the changed body in which He now is, or was this the physical body yet unchanged? I suppose we can wonder over this until He comes again. My assumption is that He was still in the body of flesh and bones because of the statement of John in 1 John 3:2. John said “*it has not yet been revealed what we shall be*” (1 Jn 3:2). If Jesus was in the glorious body suitable for eternal dwelling which we shall have, then certainly John would have stated that at least in some way it had been revealed through Jesus’ resurrection what we shall be. The fact that he did not indicates that

Jesus was not in His glorious body immediately after the resurrection.

**b. We shall have a glorious body.** We will be transformed. This transformation will be into a body that will conform to Jesus' glorious body. Paul wrote that Jesus "*will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body ...*" (Ph 3:21). We will be changed, or transformed into what He now is. He has a glorious body. Paul states that we shall be transformed in order to conform to this glorious body. Your guess is as good as mine concerning what a glorious body is. One thing is certain, however. It will be a body, and it will not be a body as ours now is. We will not float in space, detached from presence. We will be embodied in order to have presence.

Jesus made the following statement in reference to the belief of the Sadducees who did not believe in angels, "*But those who are counted worthy to attain that age, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry nor are given in marriage; nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection*" (Lk 20:35,36). Luke uses here a most rare Greek word. It is the word *isaggeloi*. It is used only here in the New Testament and has reference to becoming immortal as angels. In recording this context of Jesus' discussion, Matthew and Mark use an easier word to understand. Matthew recorded, "*For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like the angels of God in heaven*" (Mt 22:30; see Mk 12:25). In the resurrection, therefore, Christians will be as immortal angels who are thus sexless in an environment that will not need procreation to

**1 CORINTHIANS 15:42-44**

**EARTHLY BODY**

- Sown in corruption
- Sown in dishonor
- Sown in weakness
- Sown a natural body



**ETERNAL BODY**

- Raised in incorruption
- Raised in glory
- Raised in power
- Raised a spiritual body



sustain the existence of an immortal race.

**c. We shall have a spiritual body.** Paul's discussion in 1 Corinthians 15:35-54 is the best explanation we have concerning the body in which we shall dwell in eternity. He contrasts this present body with that habitation we will have from God. Note the following contrast that Paul makes between the body in which we now dwell and the one that will come from God after the resurrection.

The natural body is the source from which the spiritual body will originate. The natural body is flesh and blood. However, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Co 15:50). Therefore, the natural body must be transformed; it must be changed. This present body will see corruption, for it will decay away when it dies. The body to come will not be able to decay, for it will be incorruptible. When this body dies, its honorable presentation while it was alive will be turned into a decayed dead body of dishonor. However, the body to come will be honorable for eternity. This present body is weak in that it is frail and has the capacity of death and decay. The body to come is powerful in that it will dwell in eternity. This body is of this natural world for it was created to be subject to the physical laws of this world. However, the resurrected body will be suitable for dwelling in a spiritual environment in the new heavens and earth.

We may not know all the answers concerning the true nature of the resurrected body to come. However, we do know that if this body *"is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house **not made with hands**, eternal in the heavens"* (2 Co 5:1). *"For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven"* (2 Co 5:2). Therefore, we trust in God that He will present us with this heavenly habitation for our eternal dwelling.

## **B. Participants in the resurrection:**

In one statement Jesus answered the question concerning who was going to be resurrected in the end. *"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”* (Jn 5:28,29). This direct statement clearly teaches that both the righteous and unrighteous shall be resurrected in the “hour” to come.

Daniel had earlier prophesied what Jesus stated during His ministry in John 5:28,29. *“And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Dn 12:2). Both Daniel and Jesus affirmed that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and unrighteous. No one will be left in the grave in the last day.

**1. Resurrection of the righteous:** Those who are **in Christ**, and thus, with Christ, shall be resurrected first. In the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, I assume that the righteous will be the first to be resurrected, not only before the ascension of the righteous living, but also before the resurrection of the wicked. Paul wrote, *“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven ... and the dead in Christ will rise first”* (1 Th 4:16). After the instantaneous event of Jesus' revelation from heaven with a shout, the next thing that will occur is the resurrection of the righteous. This is why Jesus is coming again. He is coming specifically to take the righteous from this world in order to usher them into eternal dwelling in the new heavens and new earth.

The righteous dead shall be raised to be reunited with their spirits and souls that will come with Jesus (1 Th 3:13; 4:14). They will then ascend unto the new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3:13). In the resurrection, the New Testament explains the purpose for their resurrection. Here is why the righteous will be resurrected.

## RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS

- a. Raised to forever be with the Lord (1 Th 4:17).
- b. Raised to everlasting life (Jn 5:29).
- c. Raised to go into certain eternal life (Mt 25:46).

- d. Raised to receive glory (Rm 8:18; 1 Co 15:43).
- e. Raised to have an incorruptible body (1 Co 15:42).
- f. Raised to receive immortality (1 Co 15:50-54).
- g. Raised to receive a reward (Lk 14:12-14).

**2. Resurrection of the unrighteous:** Contrary to the resurrection of the righteous, the unrighteous will be raised to face a different destiny. Though there will be different punishments for the crimes of the unrighteous – this will be explained later – the following are general statements concerning the purpose for the resurrection of the unrighteous.

### RESURRECTION OF UNRIGHTEOUS

- a. Raised for judgment (Mt 7:23; 24:41; At 10:42; 2 Co 5:10).
- b. Raised for certain punishment (Mt 25:46).
- c. Raised to experience God's wrath (Rm 2:5; 1 Th 1:10).
- d. Raised for certain destruction (2 Th 1:9; Ph 3:19).

### C. Time of the resurrection:

Too many religious speculators have confused the religious world concerning the time of the final coming of Jesus. This confusion has often made it difficult for interpreters to correctly come to the Scriptures with an objective mind. This confusion surrounds the final coming of Jesus. Since the resurrection is connected with the final coming of Jesus, the confusion surrounding the final coming also affects the time of the resurrection. Concerning the resurrection, the Scriptures reveal the following clear concepts concerning the time of this great event to come:

**1. The resurrection will be in the end.** An end of all things is coming. Paul made the statement, “*Then comes the end,*” in the context of Jesus’ final coming when all things will be terminated that do not pertain to eternity (1 Co 15:24). The final resurrection will occur when Jesus comes again at the end.

**2. The resurrection will be in the last day.** In the end, there will be a last day. Concerning the righteous, Jesus said, “*I will raise him up at the last day*” (Jn 6:40,44; see 11:24; 12:48). The righteous, therefore, will be raised from the dead on the last day when Jesus comes.

**3. The resurrection will be in the last hour.** Jesus affirmed that **the hour** is coming in which the dead shall hear the voice of command to come forth from the grave (Jn 5:28,29). This will be the last hour of time on earth and the end of all things.

**4. The resurrection will be in a moment.** Paul taught that our bodily change will be “*in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed*” (1 Co 15:52). There will be no process in resurrection. It will happen in an instant. There will be no time for thought, no time for moral change or decision making. The last trumpet will sound and all things that pertain to this earth will be terminated. We will then enter into eternity.

#### **D. Expectation of the resurrection:**

Paul's statements of 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 are very descriptive of the Christian's hope concerning embodiment for the new heavens and earth. It is not our final goal to simply die and be with the Lord in a disembodied state. Our final goal is to be embodied again, with a habitation from God.

Paul uses the metaphors “house” and “tent” in 2 Corinthians 5 to explain the temporary and perishable nature of our present physical bodies (vs 1). We know that if our present bodily house and tent are destroyed, we walk by faith that God has another habitation “*not made with hands, eternal [certain] in the heavens*” (vs 1). “*For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*” (vs 2).

It is not our desire to be unclothed, that is disembodied (vs 3).

Being disembodied and existent only in spirit is called by Paul being “naked.” Therefore, we groan, “*not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed ...*” (vs 4).

God has prepared us to be clothed with a habitation from Him (vs 5). We must understand, therefore, that while we are at home in this body, “*we are absent from the Lord*” (vs 6). We thus “*walk by faith, not by sight,*” trusting that God will deliver on His promise to give us the glorious habitation which is from Him (vs 7; see Ph 3:21). For this reason, “*we are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord*” (vs 8).

There have always been those who have denied the possibility of a resurrection of the dead (See At 23:6; 26:6-8; 1 Co 15:12ff). The Christian’s hope rests on the fact that there is such a thing as resurrection. Jesus was proved to be the Son of God by resurrection from the dead (Rm 1:4). The resurrection of Jesus was a principal theme of New Testament preaching (At 2:24; 17:18; 24:15; Rm 6:5; Ph 3:10). The fact of Jesus’ resurrection is inseparably linked to our resurrection in the last day. “*For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again,*” wrote Paul, “*even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Th 4:14). If we question Jesus’ resurrection, we will question ours in the future. Both Jesus’ resurrection and our resurrection stand or fall together. Jesus was the **firstfruits** of all those who have died (1 Co 15:20,23; At 26:23). He was the “*firstborn from the dead*” (Cl 1:18; Rv 1:5). He was the first to be raised never to die again. His resurrection, therefore, is the promise and guarantee of ours to come.

After the resurrection, comes eternal destiny. The final judgment is the separation of the righteous from the wicked in order that each receive the result of their behavior on earth. Each shall go away into their destinies after all have been raised. For this final judgment, the Christian waits. It will be a time of deliverance for the Christian, an event that will mark the end of struggle and anticipation for the new

heavens and earth. However, it will be an event that will be horrifying for the wicked. It will be the beginning of the end for them. It is for this reason that the unbeliever puts final accountability at a final judgment out of his or her mind. However, it is an event that the disciple of Jesus holds dear because it will be an event by which justice will be measured out by the One who holds all eternal justice within His hand. Vengeance will be measured out to those who have unjustly persecuted and killed those who were the sons of God on earth. It will be a time of final justice.

## Chapter 9

# THE LAST JUDGMENT

The last day of time is coming. In this last day will be the events of resurrection and last judgment. It will also be the end of this physical world as we know it.

In the history of the world, God has brought judgment upon man at different times. These judgments have all been judgments of God **in time**. However, there is coming a last and final judgment at the **end of time** that will conclude all judgments of God in relation to the affairs of man on earth. For this reason, the **last** judgment will terminate all judgments of God in relation to this created world and its inhabitants.

Jesus is coming to judge both the living and the dead. Paul wrote that He “*will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom*” (2 Tm 4:1). There will be those who are living when He comes. They will be judged. There will also be those who have been reserved in the disembodied existence of both paradise and torments. They have already received judgment but must receive their final destinies. Between the time Jesus was seated upon His throne (Ep 1:20-22), and the time He shall return kingdom reign to the Father (1 Co 15:24-28), all shall stand before His judgment seat. “**For**

***we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad***” (2 Co 5:10).

So here we are on this side of last judgment. We are looking to a final time of discovering who we really are and what we have really done in relation to God’s will. This should spark soberness in the minds of thinking people. When Paul “*reasoned about righteousness, self-control, and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid ...*” (At 24:25). And so should we be if our lives are out of harmony with God’s will. Knowing that we will be accountable for our actions in this life should motivate us to right living.

For the wicked, the concept of accountability for wrong-doing is a terrifying thing. It is a concept that is not part of the world view of those who have given up the knowledge of God or have any conscious knowledge of accountability to His will. The wicked find comfort in the fact that they will never have to give account for their sins. Since they often believe that this world is all there is, they believe that consequences in this life are the only payment they will incur from wrong behavior.

On the other hand, the righteous look forward to judgment because of the cleansing blood of Jesus. He is our Advocate (lawyer) who is pleading our case before the Father (1 Jn 2:1,2). He “*is the propitiation for our sins*” which will make it possible to stand cleansed of sin in judgment. We can, as John stated, “***have boldness in the day of judgment***” (1 Jn 4:17). “***When He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming***” (1 Jn 2:28).

To the Christian, judgment will also be a time of deliverance from this world and a reward of the new heavens and earth. It will be a time when God will avenge those who have been persecuted for righteousness sake (Rm 12:19). It will be a time when the righteous will have peace from the turmoil of this world, a time when they will be in the eternal comfort of God.

## A. Facts about final judgment:

There are certain facts about the last judgment that must be understood in order to enhance our hope of this coming event. Too many false ideas have been promoted throughout the religious world that have confused those who are religiously oriented but biblically ignorant. Therefore, consider the following important facts that emphasize some very important biblical concepts of the last judgment:

**1. Judgment will take place.** Judgment is certain, “*for we must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ*” (Rm 14:10). Paul said that we must be **made manifest** before the judgment seat (2 Co 5:10). “*Each one’s work will become manifest ...*” (1 Co 3:13). “*Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts ...*” (1 Co 4:5). Jesus said, “*There is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known*” (Mt 10:26; Mk 4:22).

The biblical world view concerning judgment is that each one is responsible for his or her actions based upon the fact that “*all things are naked and open to the eyes of Him to whom we must give account*” (Hb 4:13). “*For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, nor hidden that will not be known*” (Lk 12:2,3; see 8:17). Jesus said, “*But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment*” (Mt 12:36). The fact that we will be held accountable for everything we do emphasizes the fact that people should check their behavior by the standard of the One before whom judgment will take place.

The concept of judgment that all will give account of all actions was the world view that was taught in the Old Testament. Solomon wrote, “*For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or whether it is evil*” (Ec 12:14; see 11:9). The fact that God is omniscient necessitates



accountability of all that one might do (See Jr 23:23,24). God knows all things. Nothing is outside His ability to call into judgment. Omniscience, therefore, demands that all things be brought to account before Him.

**2. Jesus will judge.** Those who have lived from the ascension to the final coming stand in judgment before the omniscient Jesus who presently has all authority (Mt 28:18). “*God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ ...*” (Rm 2:16). Jesus said, “*For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son*” (Jn 5:22). Therefore, God “*has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained*” (At 17:31; see 10:42). God has ordained that He will judge the world through Jesus.

Since Jesus will judge, it is His “judgment seat” we will stand before. “*We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ*” (2 Co 5:10; Rm 14:10,12). Jesus “*will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom*” through the authority of His word (2 Tm 4:1; see Mt 25:31-34; Jn 12:48). The judgment seat in Roman law was simply the place of authority upon which a judge sat to make pronouncements. What was spoken from the judgment seat was final. This metaphor is used by the Holy Spirit to emphasize the fact that Jesus will assume the position of judge in the end. What is spoken from this position of authority will be final.

**3. God’s law will be the standard of judgment.** In order for judgment to be just, law must be given to those who will be judged. God has thus given law to man as the measure (standard) by which He shall judge the world. Those who live during the dispensation of God’s work from the cross to the final coming of Jesus, and have opportunity to hear the gospel, will be judged according to the word of Christ. Jesus said, “*He who rejects Me, and does not receive My words, has that which judges him – the word that I have spoken will judge him in the last day*” (Jn 12:48). Notice that one must have had opportunity to reject the word of Christ in order to be judged by

the word of Christ. At least one thing is clear from this passage. Jesus does not mention the standard of judgment by which those who have not had an opportunity to hear will be judged. This may pose some difficulty for those who would believe that God is just and fair, but at the same time, judges according to the gospel which many have never had a chance to believe and obey. In other words, how can God be just by judging someone according to a standard he or she has never received? This is a question that must be answered, not ignored.

Paul wrote that God will judge the “*secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel*” (Rm 2:16). In John’s visionary picture of judgment, “*books were opened*” (Rv 20:12). “*The dead were judged according to their works by the things which were written in the books*” (Rv 20:12). Judgment was according to the standard of what was written and what one did in reference to what was written. If men are to be judged according to what is written, then certainly they must have had opportunity to either receive or reject what is written. It would be fiendish of God to judge and condemn one to endless punishment on the basis of law that one did not have the opportunity to hear. In order to be judged according to what is written in the Book, one must hear the Book.

When this subject is discussed, there are always questions that I have found which biblical interpreters usually chose to ignore. The questions are, if judgment will be by the word of Christ, what will be the standard of judgment for those who never had a chance to hear the gospel? Will those who never heard be judged according to the same standard of judgment as those who have heard? Most attempts to answer these questions usually lack substance, or they are the meandering attempts of man to manipulate the behavior of God in judgment after our human mentality. The reason we do such is that we are neither God nor the judge. There are things about final judgment we do not know and cannot know. Nevertheless, there are some points we must consider that will help give some substance to these questions that concern Christians.

**a. Judgment by known law:** Consider the fact that judgment is only fair when it is according to law that has been given to those who are to be judged. The law must be given **before** the judgment occurs. The ones judged must have opportunity to either obey or disobey the law. Could God be considered a just and fair God if He condemned to unending punishment those who never had an opportunity to receive and respond to His law? Any teaching that makes God fiendish, is simply not true. How could a just God condemn to endless torment those who have never had the opportunity to obey the gospel? It seems that we need to look for another answer here that does not turn the loving Father the Bible discusses into an unjust fiend who will condemn to a devil's torment those who have never had the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel.

**b. Salvation only in Christ:** We must consider the teaching in the New Testament that there is salvation in none other name than the name of Jesus (At 4:12). All must hear the name of Jesus, the gospel, and submit to the gospel in order to be saved. Most would agree with this. But what about those who do not have the opportunity to hear the gospel? This is the point. Will they be held accountable according to that which they have not heard? Or, will they be held accountable because we did not preach the gospel to them? What we usually do is condemn the ignorant to an unending torment because of their ignorance and somehow justify ourselves when we were too lazy or indifferent to preach the gospel to the world. They are destined to hell because of our indifferent laziness and we go on to eternal bliss in heaven. What self-righteous Pharisees we are.

Unless we stray from our point, we must contend that salvation in this dispensation is in Christ (2 Tm 2:10). All those who would stand justified before God must do so on the foundation of His grace that has been revealed through Jesus (Ti 2:11). For this reason, Peter said that there was salvation in no other name (At 4:12).

**c. Judgment by other standards:** Consider the point that before the establishment of the church and the activation of the

testament of Christ for this dispensation, the Jews lived under the Old Testament covenant and law. Their standard of judgment will be the Old Testament law. However, the Gentiles were under the law unto themselves, the law of conscience (Rm 2:15). The Gentiles of the Old Testament era will not be judged according to the Old Testament law in final judgment simply because they were not subject to the law when it was in force. The point is this. The Jews and Gentiles who lived while the Old Testament law was in force will be judged in the last judgment by two separate standards of judgment. The Jews will be judged according to the Old Testament. The Gentiles will be judged according to the law unto themselves. Could such also be true today? Christians will be judged according to the standard of the law of Christ. Those who have not heard the law of Christ, will be judged according to another standard. Consider this thought as we move to the following points.

Now this may sound good at first. However, remember that by law no man shall be justified before God (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). No one can keep law perfectly so as to justify himself before God, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rm 3:23). Sin separates one from God (Is 49:1,2). Add to this the problem that meritorious works cannot atone for sin (Ep 2:9). While under law, Paul recognized this dilemma. There is no justification by law-keeping or meritorious works. Under law one is stuck. He is stuck in sin. In realizing this, Paul was drawn to the grace of God that was revealed through Christ (Gl 2:16). Therefore, we are back to Christ, and salvation only in His name. The point is, regardless of what standard by which one shall be judged, no standard is able to save simply because no one can keep any standard perfectly. Without the grace of God all will stand condemned in the day of judgment. So what does Paul mean in the following point?

**d. Judgment based on deeds:** Consider the following point that judgment will be based upon our deeds. Now the Christian is saved by the grace of God because he or she has obediently submitted

to the gospel. However, “*by deeds of the law no flesh will be justified in His sight ...*” (Rm 3:20). Paul also said “*that a man is not justified by the works of the law but by faith in Jesus Christ ...*” (Gl 2:16). One simply cannot keep law perfectly so as to be saved. Neither can one do good deeds so as to atone for a single sin. We’re trapped. So how can one be judged by deeds if deeds cannot save? The answer would be in what James stated. “*Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works*” (Js 2:18). Deeds are simply **expressions of faith**. Thus, we are “*created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them*” (Ep 2:10). We can be judged by our works because works are the manifestation of our faith in Jesus. Faith is our door through which we access the grace of God. Paul wrote, “*Therefore, having been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom also we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand ...*” (Rm 5:1,2).

Christians work because they are saved by grace, not in order to be saved. Of his own life, Paul wrote, “*But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me*” (1 Co 15:10). When we recognize the grace of God in our lives, we work more abundantly. With this in mind, consider the following point:

#### **4. Works will determine our faithfulness at the judgment.**

Jesus’ parable of judgment in Matthew 25:31-46 makes one thing very clear. Those who would go away to certain punishment would be those who did not do those works which God has prepared that we walk in them (See Ep 2:10). To those on His left who did not feed the hungry, visit the sick or those in prison, or clothe the naked, Jesus said, “*Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me*” (Mt 25:45). That which

determined their acceptance or rejection was their behavior in response to the will of God.

Since obedient works are the expression of our faith (Js 2:18), then deeds are a judgment of our faith. Little deeds, little faith. Therefore, in giving account of what we have done we give account of our faith (2 Co 5:10). Jesus said, *“I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work”* (Rv 22:12; see 2:23; 20:12). In fact, Jesus said, *“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment. For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned”* (Mt 12:36,37).

Now consider one’s thankfulness for the grace of God in his or her life as a result of one’s obedience to the gospel. Again, Paul wrote, *“But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me”* (1 Co 15:10). This is the same person who wrote, *“For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast”* (Ep 2:8,9). Is there a contradiction here? Certainly not! Paul said he was saved by God’s grace. But this saving grace in his life was not a useless venture on the part of God. Paul labored in thanksgiving **because of his salvation**. In other words, the cross was not a vain effort on the part of God to save Paul. It was not vain because it produced in Paul’s life a labor of thanksgiving. The more Paul recognized God’s grace, the more he worked. Herein is a similar principle as working faith. The more one believes, the more he or she works. The more one is thankful for his salvation by God’s grace, the more he or she thanks God by works. It is easy to understand, therefore, why judgment is by deeds. If there are no deeds, there is no faith. If there are no labors, there is no thankfulness for the grace of God that was manifested on the cross (Ti 2:11). Not only will each person’s works be made manifest at the judgment (1 Co 3:13), but each one’s works

will manifest his or her faith and appreciation to God for one's salvation.

Judgment that is based upon deeds is a picture of **judgment from man's perspective**. We could only judge by observing the deeds of someone. But God knows our hearts. He can judge according to faith and thanksgiving. We cannot so judge. In order to emphasize the fact of accountability in judgment, God wants us to know that even we can know them "by their fruits" (Mt 7:16). However, the problem with judgment by fruits is that it is imperfect. We have a tendency to view only the bad fruits in one's life and not the good. And besides this, man can never fully understand the heart of his brother by the works he does. Only God can exercise true and just judgment that is based upon the heart and not simply deeds.

But will works profit in judgment to those who are outside Christ? The answer to this question would be no when we consider 1 Corinthians 15:58. Paul exhorted the Corinthians to always abound in the "*work of the Lord, knowing that **your labor is not in vain in the Lord.***" Now I know that in the Lord my labors are not useless, that is, in vain. But what about the labors of those who are not in the Lord? Would we be right to say that their labors are useless? They are useless in reference to salvation. This certainly would be the correct conclusion to what Paul stated. John revealed, "*Blessed are the dead who die **in the Lord***" (Rv 14:13). Those who die in the Lord are blessed for they shall receive "*rest from their labors, and **their works follow them***" (Rv 14:13). Those who are not in the Lord do good works. However, such good works are useless in reference to eternal salvation. Their works will not follow them after death.

I have said all the above in order to establish one simple point. **Good works will not profit those who are outside the grace of God.** Therefore, one cannot be saved on the merit of good works. One is saved on the basis of being **in the Lord**. From this perspective, therefore, we must form our views of judgment.

The above points do not fully answer the questions concerning the judgment of those who have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. However, whatever we believe on this matter must take into consideration that God is a fair judge. He is not fiendish. He does not take pleasure in the punishment of man. His punishment has always matched the crime. He is not a mean God seeking an opportunity to unendingly torment those who are good in character and deeds, but ignorant in those days of the gospel of Christ. These thoughts must be considered when forming one's world view concerning last judgment and the punishment of the ignorant. We do not know all things concerning final judgment. Therefore, we must be careful not to form theologies that contradict the nature of the loving God taught in the Bible. (More on this in chapter 10 and 11.)

## **B. Judgment of those who are now dead:**

The term final judgment has reference to the last judgment that will take place. This judgment will be on the last day. However, judgment with eternal consequences occurs when one dies. In other words, one's eternal destiny is sealed at death. There are two reasons for this conclusion. First, the Bible makes a clear statement concerning this judgment, and secondly, the two different realms of existence to which the righteous and unrighteous go in the hades existence of the dead assume that some degree of judgment has taken place in the existence of the dead.

**1. Bible statements of judgment after death:** The Hebrew writer clearly stated, "*And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hb 9:27). The *American Standard Version* has the following translation of Hebrews 9:27, "*And inasmuch as it is appointed unto men once to die, and after this cometh judgment.*" The wording of the statement assumes that judgment takes place immediately after one physically dies. The



reason for this is obvious. There would be no need for judgment to be postponed.

In a true sense, therefore, when one dies he or she meets final judgment in his or her case. This is the individual's final judgment. In reference to the existence of the world, there will be a last judgment of God on the last day. However, everyone who has died before that last day has already received his or her final judgment. Those who are presently with the Lord in the hades (unseen) existence are simply awaiting their embodiment for the new heavens and earth. The unrighteous are awaiting the final destruction. Their final judgment has already occurred. They are simply waiting in torments for their final consignment in the "everlasting fire" which is for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41).

**2. *Destiny of torments for the wicked and comfort for the righteous:*** Jesus said of the Rich Man in Luke 16 that he found himself in torments when he died (Lk 16:22,23). Though in a disembodied state in torments, his destiny was sealed; the great gulf between him and Abraham's bosom was fixed. He could not change his destiny. Lazarus, on the other hand, was carried away to Abraham's bosom when he died. He was in a different "location" or relationship with Christ than the Rich Man. In some way, therefore, judgment had taken place at the time of death of both the Rich Man and Lazarus. This judgment which resulted in two different destinies, took place at death. There is no reason why this judgment would be reversed at the final judgment.

When Jesus was on the cross, He said to the repentant thief beside Him, "... *today you will be with Me in Paradise*" (Lk 23:43). So what about the other thief that was on the other side of Jesus? He certainly did not go to paradise. **His destiny was different.** It was the same as the Rich Man. Both were consigned to torments in the unseen existence of tartarus. Once they died, their destinies were sealed. Final judgment had taken place for them.

Existence after death in a realm of torments, assumes that

judgment has already taken place. Those in an existence in the presence of the Lord are destined for the new heavens and earth. Those in torments are destined for destruction. The final announcement will be in the last day. However, there will be no change for the dead until then.

Some have assumed that those in torments will have a second chance for salvation at the final judgment. However, we would ask what these who are eventually to be saved are doing in torments after death? Why would they not simply go on to be with Jesus at the time of death if God knows that they will eventually be saved anyway?

Some may ask why there is torment in a disembodied state of the hadean existence. I would respond by saying that the Bible teaches there will be a bodily resurrection. **All** will be raised (Jn 5:28,29). Those in torments will be bodily raised to be destroyed in hell (Mt 10:28; 2 Th 1:9). Punishment will be just and will match the sin. It might be assumed that the “type” of punishment that is to be endured in hell can only be experienced in a bodily state. Therefore, the disembodied wicked must wait for embodiment in order to fully experience the judgment of their crimes against God. However, there might be some argument against this conclusion since there is no promise that the wicked will ever be resurrected and embodied as the saints. There is no promise that they will receive a glorious body (Ph 3:21). There is no promise that they will receive a body of honor and power. There is no promise that they will be raised and changed. All such promises are made to Christians in the context of inspired letters that are written directly to Christians.

I would state that we often make an assumption here that the Bible does not clearly state. This assumption is that the wicked will receive a “habitation” from God as the Christian. It is also only an assumption that the wicked will be raised with a changed body just as the righteous. However, the Bible never states this. Jesus simply stated that “*all who are in graves will ... come forth*” (Jn 5:28,29). Paul wrote, “*For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made*

*alive*” (1 Co 15:22). In this statement, Paul indicates the same thought as Jesus in John 5:28,29. However, it seems that Paul’s emphasis is upon those who are **in Christ**. When he talks about resurrection in the following verse, he discusses only the Christian. *“But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming”* (1 Co 15:23). In the contexts where Paul discusses the resurrection, he addresses the resurrection of the righteous, not the wicked (Read 1 Co 15; 2 Co 5; 1 Th 4:13-18). In fact, there is little discussion in the New Testament concerning the resurrection of the unrighteous. But there will be a resurrection of the unrighteous. In Acts 24:15 Paul stated that there *“will be a resurrection, both of the just and unjust.”* These would be those *“who have done evil”* (Jn 5:29). They will be raised, but raised to condemnation.

If we assume that the resurrection of the unjust will be a “bodily resurrection” as the saints, then we must assume that they will be raised to face their destruction in the body. However, I would conclude that all promises concerning a bodily resurrection and transformation into a **heavenly body** from God are only for those who are in Christ. This does not exclude the fact that there will be some kind of “bodily resurrection” for the wicked in order that they go away into a destruction where both soul and body are destroyed (See Mt 10:28). After all, Jesus did say that the unrighteous will be raised (Jn 5:28,29). They will be raised for destruction of body and soul in gehenna (2 Th 1:9).

### C. Judgment in the end:

Both Old and New Testaments of the Bible proclaim that there is a final accounting of one’s behavior in this world. This is a last judgment before the Creator of the world. There will be a judgment of those who will have died before the end. However, the fact is that these who will already have died before the last judgment have

received their judgment. The last judgment to them will be a final assignment. In a sense, they are judged righteous because God is reaffirming in reference to the condemned, that they are His saints, and thus, rewarded with heaven.

However, the wicked will be assigned to the continuation of their torment, but in gehenna. There will also be judgment of those who are living at the time of the end.

Those forces that were in opposition to God during the history of the world, Satan and his hosts, will reap the reward of destruction at the final judgment. God will do away with their influence upon the righteous who go away into life. Judgment is thus a central teaching of the Bible, and one upon which the Christian world view is thoroughly based.

Paul wrote, “*I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who **will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom***” (2 Tm 4:1). Jesus is coming to judge both those who are living at His coming and those who have already died.

**1. Judgment of the living:** Those who are alive at the time of the end when Jesus comes again, will “*appear before **the judgment seat of Christ***” (2 Co 5:10). Jesus will enact the authority of Deity on the heavenly “judgment seat” and determine the destinies of all men.

We have too often carried our earthly understandings into the Bible’s picture of the judgment. Regardless of the literal and earthly source from which the metaphor “judgment seat” is taken, and the illustration we use to portray final judgment, we must keep in mind that there will be no literal chair upon which Jesus will sit in order to judge. “Judgment seat” simply illustrates Jesus’ assumption of divine authority in order to enact Divine law in judgment. We must all be reckoned before the divine authority of Jesus.

We will be individually judged but will not individually stand before

a literal judgment seat. The picture of events in the end indicates instantaneous accomplishment. In other words, what will transpire in the final hour, will happen in “a moment, in a twinkling of an eye.” There will be no long drawn out process of each inhabitant that has lived on the earth individually standing before Jesus and arbitrating his or her rights before God. Judgment will take place in an instant of the last trumpet and we shall go away to be with the Lord. The living “*shall be caught up together with them [the resurrected saints] in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord*” (1 Th 4:17). The unrighteous will go away unto destruction (2 Th 1:9). As soon as the living are caught up in the clouds, their judgment has happened. Those who are not caught up will immediately know their judgment.

In Paul’s statement of 2 Timothy 4:1 that Jesus would judge the living when He comes again, he simply meant that those who are alive when Jesus comes will also give account of themselves before God. In Jude 15, Jude refers to a prophetic statement that was made against the ungodly of Noah’s day. The ungodly living were judged by the flood that took them away. Jude uses this prophecy of Enoch in reference to the ungodly who persecuted the church prior to the judgment of God upon Jerusalem in A.D. 70. Jesus was coming in judgment on Jerusalem in order “*to execute judgment on all, to convict all who are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have committed in an ungodly way, and of all the harsh things which ungodly sinners have spoken against Him.*”

If Jude used God’s judgment of condemnation in time upon Noah’s generation to refer to God’s judgment in time upon Jerusalem, then we could use God’s **in time** judgments as illustrations of judgment to come. The execution of judgment, therefore, is meant to be an encouragement to the faithful who are living at any one time in history. Judgment to the living means that their persecution will eventually be taken away. God will bring vengeance on the ungodly. “*Vengeance*

is Mine, I will repay” (Rm 12:19; see Dt 32:35). God’s comfort to the living faithful is that He will not allow the persecution of the righteous to go unpunished. The persecutors will give account of their harsh things that they have spoken against the saints, which things were actually spoken against the Lord.

**2. Judgment of the dead:** Those who have died by the time of the end will have already been judged. The Rich Man found himself in torments (Lk 16:22,23). In the unseen existence of the disembodied dead, he had begun his punishment. Final judgment to him would only be an assigning in a resurrected state in the continuing punishment of gehenna. Time had not ceased for the Rich Man, though he had died. He was **experiencing torments** while his five brothers **lived** on earth. When he died, he did not immediately experience a transfer to final judgment in order to be cast into the destruction of gehenna. The earth and his five brothers were still in existence at the time of his torments (Lk 16:27-31). He had to await the resurrection in order to endure the second death.

The wicked dead must experience torments in tartarus until the end and final judgment. Final judgment to the wicked dead, therefore, will only be a change of punishment from the disembodied experience to their resurrected state of torment in gehenna. My assumption would be that their torment will increase until just punishment has been meted out for their deeds on earth.

The righteous dead are presently in the presence of the Lord (2 Co 5:8). They are in the comfort of Abraham’s bosom (Lk 16:22,25). However, their bodies will be raised and changed in the end (1 Co 15:50-52; 1 Th 4:15,16). The righteous dead will be appointed a dwelling in an embodied state in the new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3:13). Final judgment to both the righteous and wicked dead will be an appointment to the continuation of what they have experienced in the state of being disembodied during the history of the world. What will change is their state of existence. They will change from being disembodied to embodiment in order to experience the fulness of their

destinies. As the righteous will experience a greater comfort in an embodied existence in the presence of the Lord, so the wicked will experience a greater torment in an embodied existence in gehenna.

**3. Judgment of Satan and his angels:** Christians have often wondered why God has allowed Satan to exist in this present world. The answer to our questions concerning his existence is in the fact that we must now live in an environment in which free-moral agency can be exercised. For choices to be made, there must be occasions where we can choose between right and wrong. However, there will be no Satan in the new heavens and earth. Satan and his league of angels will not escape the judgment of Jesus. And in the judgment of Jesus they will face their doom of eternal destruction, and eventually, termination from existence.

Satan will be judged and condemned. Eternal gehenna is specifically prepared for Satan and his angels. Jesus said to those who were condemned because of their lack of response to His will, “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels*” (Mt 25:41). Hell is specifically prepared for the devil and his angels. Satan’s angels have been cast “*down to hell [tartarus]*” where they have been delivered “*into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment*” (2 Pt 2:4; see Jd 6). They and the unjust are reserved “*under punishment for the day of judgment*” (2 Pt 2:9). The day of their final state of torment is coming (Mt 8:29). The unjust dead who are reserved in torment know their final destiny. It is a destiny of torment in a devil’s hell.

The Bible pictures the totality of humanity experiencing the final assignment of judgment. In prophetic language John pictured, “*The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were all judged each one according to his works*” (Rv 20:13). The “*living and the dead*” will stand before Jesus who will judge according to the authority of His word (2 Tm 4:1; Jn 12:48). Satan and his angels will

be judged and “*cast into the lake of fire and brimstone ...*” (Rv 20:10). The unrighteous will also be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2 Th 1:9). The final judgment is coming and it is imperative that every man on earth be forewarned that he will give account of his actions before the Creator of all things.

## Chapter 10

### **TIME AND ETERNITY**

It is impossible for the human mind to comprehend the existence of time without end. It is impossible because we are creatures of time. We say “spend eternity” in heaven. But the statement betrays our inability to say what we need to say. “Spend” is a word of time. It is a word of duration. Eternity is not something we “go through,” “live in,” “pass through,” or “go into.” It is existence that has no time references, no points of reference from which we can clock time. Eternity simply is, not something that will transpire or happen.

We must not miss the point here in interpreting the Bible concerning the existence of eternity. The Holy Spirit knew that we would have difficulty in this area. He knew that He would have to use our dictionary in order to explain something that was beyond the definition of our experiences. Therefore, it is my contention that neither the Greeks nor the modern-day scholar can understand the concept of eternity. And really, could any word of man, whether Greek or English, communicate something that is beyond the experience of man?

Nevertheless, our challenge is to first understand the meaning of the Greek words used in reference to life everlasting as they were conceived in the minds of those who first defined them when the Holy Spirit used them to convey Holy Writ. Secondly, we would



define these words by the context in which they, and their derivatives, are used in the New Testament. This may seem to be a simple matter. However, let me assure you that when objectively considered, the definition of the common word *aionios* (adjective, *aionion*) and *aion* will challenge some of our traditional understandings of favorite passages, if not, treasured doctrines. Nevertheless, we must keep in mind that our quest is not to please the theological dogmas of man, but to the best of our ability, determine a biblical explanation of unending time in relation to the soul and spirit of man.

We must keep in mind that the Bible is its best commentary. We must not twist any passage to fit some preconceived theology that is either traditional or convenient. Neither should we shy away from changing some prized sermon that is based upon a past misunderstanding of handed-down interpretation. We must seek truth and apply such to your lives and beliefs.

### **A. Two views of hell:**

There are two views held by biblical scholars concerning the final punishment of those who do not have faith in God and keep His word. One view supposes that God will without end torment the lost. The other supposes that the lost will receive just punishment, and then, be terminated from existence. There has been for centuries a debate between the proponents of these two views in reference to the final punishment of those who do not obey God's commands. It is fair that we present evidence for both views in the material of the next two chapters. This is necessary because of the fact that there is the existence of gehenna (hell) beyond the last judgment. In order that we fully understand the two views, consider the following explanations of the views:

- 1. *Hell is an unending existence of torment for the lost.*** This is the understanding of hell in the sense that the wicked will be tor-

mented without end regardless of the nature of one's sin. The souls of all the lost will be in conscious agony throughout the existence of the righteous in heaven, which is without end. God will maintain their punishment regardless of the seriousness of their crimes. Morally good people, who have not obeyed the gospel, will suffer forever and ever. Those who have never had a chance to hear and obey the gospel, but died in ignorance, will also suffer the unending torment of hell. It is affirmed that though one was morally good, but doctrinally wrong, he or she shall suffer the same punishment for the same time of existence as the most wicked person who has ever lived.

**2. *Hell will be an existence of torment for the lost according to the measure of their crimes.*** In other words, each lost person will suffer the punishment of their sin. However, the length of torment will be determined by the severity of the crimes. After due punishment has been meted out, the wicked will then be annihilated from existence. The lost will not exist without end because they will have been separated from the life-giving presence of God. They will thus exist no more.

Both of the preceding views are defended by good Bible scholars. Though the latter view has what I believe greater and more biblically consistent evidence for its truth, it is not the case that one view has overwhelming proof so as to make the other impossible. As we study through the next two chapters, I will present evidence that must be considered which will challenge our reasoning concerning hell and its time of existence.

We must keep in mind that we are discussing an existence that is beyond our present experience. Therefore, the Bible reveals the existence of hell through many metaphors, about which we must wonder. I would caution us, therefore, not to be too dogmatic concerning our view of the duration of hell. We know that it will exist. The lost will be punished. How long they will be punished is debatable. How they will be punished cannot be completely understood.

But the fact that they will be punished is without question.

Our first task in defining the duration of hell is to study those words which are applied by the Holy Spirit to its time of existence. We use the English words “forever” and “eternal” to translate the Greek word *aionios*. Our understanding of this word must be consistent with fundamental Bible teaching. If our understanding of the word makes the Bible contradict itself, then we can be assured that we are not defining the word properly as it is used in the Scriptures.

Thayer defined *aionios* as it is used in biblical contexts with three statements of definition: (1) “without beginning or end, that which always has been and always will be,” (2) “without beginning,” and (3) “without end, never to cease, everlasting” (*Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon*). Arndt and Gingrich defined the word to refer to “long ages ago,” “without beginning or end,” and “without end” (*Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament*). *Aion* often has reference to a specific period of time. It is used to refer to the end of the Jewish age (See Greek of Mt 13:22-49). It refers to the “cares of this age” (Mk 4:19; see also Lk 16:8; 20:34; Rm 12:2; 1 Co 1:20). The word thus refers to an era, epic, or specific period of time that has conclusion. *Aion* has specific reference to time, whereas, *aionios* emphasizes that which is without end. W. E. Vine wrote of *aionios*, that the word “describes duration, either undefined but not endless, as in Rom. 16:24; 2 Tim. 1:9; Tit. 1:2 ...” (*Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*).

The context in which *aionios* and *aion* are used, therefore, will determine the meaning of the words. When we bring these words into the New Testament context, our theology on the endless or temporary nature of specific realities will determine how we understand these words. Since there is no real concept of endlessness within human experience, the Bible will have to be our final dictionary on this matter. However, though the Spirit will discuss the existence of that which is in eternity, we will have difficulty comprehending exactly what is revealed.

The following are some things to consider concerning the use of *aionios* in reference to concepts to which it is applied. Much of our belief concerning the existence of gehenna and heaven is centered around the use of this word and its adjective *aionion*. Therefore, it is important that we understand its meaning, both in its historical and biblical use.

## **B. Secular use and definition of *aionios*:**

There are two definitions of *aionios* with which we will struggle to determine or apply. We will have to determine if *aionios* means (1) duration of existence without end, or (2) certainty or quality of existence throughout a predetermined and definite period of time. And possibly, there may be those contexts where both definitions are inferred. On the other hand, there are those contexts where one definition is emphasized to the exclusion of the other. One thing of which we must constantly remind ourselves is to be consistent in our interpretations and definitions. This is easy to say. But when it comes to applying consistent definitions that bring into question preconceived ideas, it is often too great a task to make the application. Nevertheless, it is not the task of the biblical student to read into the text preconceived thoughts. It is his task to allow the Bible to speak for itself.

Some scholars have contended that the first understanding – duration of existence without end – is the only meaning that is to be emphasized in Scripture when the word *aionios* is used. This is especially contended in those contexts that have reference to the final destiny of the wicked. However, we must challenge this assumption simply because of the definition of the word as it is used in contexts where a specific, but predetermined period of time is meant. As will be seen, it is difficult to be consistent in some doctrinal matters if we understand that the definition of time without end is the only definition of the word that is used in the Scriptures.

Some have used Matthew 25:46 to affirm that “eternal” life and “eternal” punishment have to be the same in defining the time of existence of life and punishment. It is assumed that both are without end simply because Jesus used *aiōnios* in the same context in reference to the righteous and wicked. Therefore, the word *aiōnios* must mean “without end” simply because heaven is without end. However, I would remind you that we must first determine which meaning of *aiōnios* Jesus is emphasizing. Is He emphasizing the meaning of certainty of effect that has resulted from a particular action in time or the definition of time without end?

I would suggest that in order to understand passages as Matthew 25:46 we must first look into the minds of those Jews to whom Jesus made this and other statements concerning “eternal” and “everlasting.” Our understanding must be as their understanding because Jesus was talking to them in terminology they could understand. I say this with caution. The biblical text must be the final dictionary of any word or concept. As is seen with the definition of *aiōnios* in secular literature, it is often difficult to determine if emphasis is upon time without end, or the quality of existence within a determined period of time.

I am of the opinion that we must not allow the concepts of this world to be read into the Bible. Words that we use to express things of this world come with worldly baggage when they are used in a scriptural context. We must therefore be careful not to emphasize the understanding of words of the world to override the same words as they are used in the context of explaining biblical concepts. The Bible must be the final dictionary of the words it uses to explain spiritual concepts.

With the above in mind, consider some of the uses of the words “eternal” and “everlasting” as they are used in the context of the Old Testament. Also keep in mind that the New Testament is written with the Old Testament as the background. This would mean that we should refer to the Old Testament as our dictionary when we

run into difficulty with certain words or concepts in the New Testament. Romans 15:4 should express a real meaning and use of the Old Testament as a help to understand words and concepts of the new Testament. Paul wrote, “*For whatever things were written before [in the Old Testament] were written for our learning.*” In the context of our study of the word “eternal,” specifically the use of the word *aionios*, we must survey this concept as it is referred to in the Old Testament. As Jesus and the apostles spoke revelation in the New Testament, we would correctly assume that at least in the Jewish context they would communicate to the Jews in words and concepts that they would understand. Therefore, in those New Testament epistles that are Jewish in audience, we must learn through the Old Testament, how the Jews first understood the message of Jesus that was spoken specifically to them. And in order to do this, we must refer to the Old Testament that was revealed to the Jews.

When the Jews made the Septuagint translation in the third century B.C., they used the word *aionios* to translate Hebrew words that referred to time. Therefore, when we consider the Old Testament words that are used in reference to time that are translated with the word *aionios*, we are receiving a Jewish understanding or interpretation of time in reference to the Jews' understanding of both Hebrew and Greek words. The Old Testament therefore becomes a dictionary on how the Jews understood the meanings of both Hebrew and Greek words. With this in mind, consider the following points:

1. “***Eternal***” and “***everlasting***” in the Old Testament: The Hebrew word *olam* is the word used in the Old Testament in reference to everlasting and eternal. The Old Testament speaks of God who is eternal (*olam*) (Dt 33:27; Is 57:15). Without question, the meaning of time without end must be understood in Old Testament contexts when *olam* is used in reference to the existence of God. However, the Old Testament also speaks of physical things of this

world as being everlasting. The mountains are everlasting (*olam*) (Hk 3:6). But the mountains will not exist without end (See 2 Pt 3:10,11). One's conclusion to a definition of *olam* in many Old Testament contexts is that it does not always mean time without end. I make this point because when the Jews translated the Old Testament, they used the Greek word *aiionios* to translate *olam*. This would indicate that we should not always interpret the word *aiionios* to mean time without end.

Consider the use of *olam* in reference to ordinances of the Old Testament law and covenant which were established as “everlasting” practices. However, their practice, or existence in reference to the covenant, **was to last only throughout God’s intended time of their defined duration**. God made an **everlasting** (*olam*) covenant with Israel (Lv 24:8; Jr 32:40; Ez 16:60). However, this covenant would end with the establishment of the new covenant (Jr 31:31-34; Hb 8:8-12; 10:16,17). God gave Israel the land of Canaan as an **everlasting** (*olam*) possession (Gn 17:8). However, their possession of the land would terminate when the fullness of time would come and the physical Israel of God would give way to the spiritual Israel of God, the church (Rm 9:6; Gl 3:26-29). The Passover was an **everlasting** (*olam*) ordinance of the law (Ex 12:24). However, Jesus, our Passover Lamb, has annulled the need for the sacrificial Passover lamb, for He has become a sacrifice once and for all. There is now no need for an animal passover lamb to be offered for the sins of men (1 Co 5:7; Hb 9:23-28; 10:1-4). The high priesthood of Aaron was an **everlasting** priesthood (Ex 29:9; 40:15; Lv 3:17). However, Jesus is now our new high priest (Hb 8:1-6). Aaron's priesthood was terminated. From Aaron was established an **everlasting** priesthood of the Levite tribe (Nm 25:13). However, every Christian is now a priest (1 Pt 2:5,9). The priesthood of the Levites was terminated. Consider also that Caleb’s inheritance was **forever** (Ja 14:9), Gehazi’s leprosy of his descendants was **forever** (2 Kg 5:27), Solomon’s temple was a dwelling place of God **forever** (1 Kg 8:12,13) and the period

of a slave's bondage was **forever** (Dt 15:17). **But all these things and events had an end.** Thus, "forever" does not always mean time without end.

The word "forever" (*olam*) in the Old Testament carries with it the meaning that something would last for a predetermined length of time, and then, come to an end. When the Jews translated the above use of *olam*, they used the Greek word *aiionios*. This should immediately alert us to the fact that there should be another meaning of the word *aiionios* that does not have reference to time without end.

From the use of the words "everlasting" or "forever" in a biblical context in the Old Testament, one discovers that emphasis is not always upon time without end. In the previously mentioned contexts where the word *olam* is used in the Old Testament, the emphasis is upon **God's determination that some things would exist throughout His appointed time of their duration.** When God brought the "forever" laws of the covenant and the "forever" covenant itself to a close, they terminated. They stopped. **Thus, emphasis is upon the certainty or surety of the existence of what God had ordained until such had accomplished or fulfilled its divine purpose.** In other words, the "forever" priesthood of Aaron would not go out of existence until it had fulfilled its purpose. In this sense, it was **everlasting.** God never intended that Aaron's priesthood exist without end. Aaron was to make atonement for Israel as an **everlasting statute** (Lv 16:34). However, Jesus has made a final atonement. No more will atonement need to be made, or will be made. Thus, the everlasting atonement statute given to Aaron was "everlasting" only until Jesus came to make an all-sufficient atonement on the cross for all men. In this context, therefore, **everlasting does not mean time without end.** The same was true of the sabbath that was of "an everlasting covenant" (Lv 24:8). However, the sabbath is no longer a part of God's covenant relationship with man. Neither will we keep the sabbath in the new heavens and earth after the passing away of the sun which determines when a



sabbath exists (See 2 Pt 3:10,11).

In the Old Testament, the use of *olam* (Gr., *aiionios*) referred to aspects of the covenant of God with Israel. Though these aspects of the covenant had a definite end, the final results of their practice would continue on into the new covenant, and thus, heaven. For example, the priesthood of Aaron had a definite end. However, priesthood was carried on through Jesus who is now our high priest. The concept of the Levitical priesthood was carried on in the priesthood of the church (1 Pt 2:5,9).

Though the Old Testament priesthood terminated, the principle was carried on in the New Testament. Simply speaking, Aaron's priesthood had "time without end" effect. Similarly speaking, the "everlasting" covenant God made with Israel was terminal, but it had "time without end" effect in the lives of those who kept it and the new covenant that is built upon it as a foundation (See Jr 31:31-34).

The preceding is a very important understanding when coming to the New Testament. When the words "everlasting" or "forever" are used, termination can be understood, though there is also something that carries on as a result of the termination. The effect of the termination has unending effects.

Keep in mind also that the word *aiionios* is used fifty-one times in the New Testament in reference to the final existence of the righteous in a heavenly state. However, also keep in mind that the term is used in at least seventy times where the context defines it to have reference to that which is of a temporary nature. Our challenge in many contexts, therefore, is to determine if a definition of "time without end" is meant, or a "determined existence in time with a definite end." Now we must determine if the word is emphasizing time without end when it is used in reference to heaven and hell. Only the context in which the word is used can determine the correct meaning. At the same time, we must be careful not to allow our theology to form our meanings of the word before we even get to the context

in which the word is used.

2. **“Everlasting” and “eternal” in the New Testament:** When Jesus came, He came to those who were under the Old Testament law that He might redeem them from sin (Gl 4:4,5). He came using the words “everlasting” and “eternal” in reference to teachings on heaven and hell that were of the age to come. Here is where we would reflect upon the Jewish understanding of these terms in reference to that which was to come. We cannot ignore the fact that Jesus, in speaking to His Jewish audience, did at times use the **qualitative** definition of the word *aionios*, that is, **use of the word with reference to a divinely predetermined time of existence with a definite end**. At least, one would certainly not be objective by completely bypassing this understanding of the word in reference to the future of the wicked.

When we study some events that have already happened, *aionion* defines an event that has unending results or consequences. In other words, the New Testament mentions events that have occurred or will occur that will have effects that continue on after the occurrence of the events. Thus, these are “*aionion*” events that have unending results.

For the above reason, we must reconsider some passages in reference to the use of the adjective *aionios* when it is used to modify actions that had a definite end, but unending result. The following are examples in the New Testament where actions that occurred in time had eternal (*aionios*) consequences or results. In other words, there are certain events that happened in time that are modified with the word eternal (*aionios*). However, these actions happened only once. The results of the actions have consequences or results that exist without end. Emphasis, therefore, is not so much on the unending nature of the following, but on the effect such has in relation to man. Consider these actions in reference to the word *aionios* that is used to modify their results. Consider the following scriptures:

**Eternal punishment** (Mt 25:46)  
**Eternal life** (Mt 25:46)  
**Eternal condemnation** (Mk 3:29)  
**Eternal destruction** (2 Th 1:9)  
**Eternal salvation** (Hb 5:9)  
**Eternal judgment** (Hb 6:2)  
**Eternal redemption** (Hb 9:12)  
**Eternal fire** (Jd 7)



UNENDING RESULTS OR  
 CONSEQUENCES

**a. Matthew 25:46:** “*And these will go away into everlasting (aionion) punishment, but the righteous into eternal (aionion) life.*” When the Christian was baptized, he entered into eternal life in the Son (1 Jn 1:2; 2:25; 5:11,13). This life is sure in the sense that it is based upon the cleansing blood of Jesus and the forgiving grace of God (1 Jn 1:7-9). The Christian received eternal life at the point of baptism, and thus, this life will carry on with certainty throughout eternity. The life happened when one came out of the waters of baptism. It does not happen in this sense again. It is not a matter of continually receiving life. The life has been received by the grace of God. Because the Christian has received life, the results of life will continue past the final coming and judgment.

The punishment of the wicked begins at death (Lk 16:22,23). The wicked reap the consequences of their sin in this life (Gl 6:8). However, they have a punishment that is yet to come in gehenna. It is certain that the wicked will be punished. The length of the punishment is God’s business. However, the consequences of the punishment will be without end. The Christian has life now, and the wicked receive some punishing consequences of their sin in this life (See Gl 6:7,8). However, the fullness of the life and the fullness of the punishment will not happen until the final coming of Jesus. Only then will the reality of both be known. The word “eternal” as an adjective that modifies life and punishment is conveying to us that there is a great quality of both life and punishment that is yet to come. It is a quality that has not yet been experienced.

**b. Galatians 6:8:** Notice how Paul referred to the punishment of the wicked and everlasting life of the righteous in Galatians 6:8. “*For he who sows to his flesh will of the flesh reap corruption, but he who sows to the Spirit will of the Spirit reap everlasting life.*” We could argue over the present action and effect of one's living either after the flesh or Spirit. However, one thing is clear from Paul's statement. Living after the flesh in life will eventually lead to decay (corruption), that is termination. Decay means that something is coming to an end. Something will stop.

On the other hand, living after the Spirit affects one so as to continue present obtained life into existence beyond life. The “corruption” of the wicked has effect both in life, as well as, after life. Also, the “everlasting life” of the righteous has effect in life, as well as, after life. The corruption of the wicked will eventually bring an end to the wicked. The life-giving behavior after the Spirit will continue the righteous into time without end.

Those who are **now** living after the flesh are **now** reaping corruption. Those who are **now** living after the Spirit are **now** reaping everlasting life. Though the earthly living on this earth will come to an end, the effect of the earthly behavior of both the wicked and righteous will have afterlife consequences. The consequences of the wicked person's behavior will eventually decay him away. However, the present righteous behavior of those who live after the Spirit will preserve the righteous into time without end. His present everlasting life will have an unending affect on his existence

**c. Mark 3:29:** Jesus said that those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit are “*subject to eternal [aionios] condemnation.*” Some translations render this “eternal sin.” Either translation makes the point. In the context, the Jews were assigning the work of the Holy Spirit through Jesus to the devil (Lk 11:14-16). They were committing an act of denial, denying that Jesus' power was from God. Those who do such are subject to certain condemnation; they commit an eternal sin because they have not recognized the work of

God through Jesus. Therefore, they will not listen to or obey the word of Jesus so as to be saved. They have committed an action. The result of that action is condemnation. Of course, they could repent by believing in Jesus. However, as long as they assign the work of the Spirit through Jesus to be of Satan, they will remain in a state of condemnation. Their condemnation is certain and without end. In other words, the action of assigning the work of Jesus to the devil will have unending, “eternal” consequences in relation to their salvation.

When Jesus comes, those who have committed this “eternal” sin will know for certain that Jesus is the Son of God. They will not continue denying Him into eternal existence. In this sense, therefore, the “eternal” sin they committed in life of denying Jesus is not without end. The word “eternal” in this sense does not mean that they would continue without end to deny Jesus. It refers to the certainty of their condemnation that results from their present denial of Jesus. The denying is not without end. **It is the consequence of the denial that is without end.**

**d. 2 Thessalonians 1:9:** Paul wrote that those who do not know God or obey the gospel, “*shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord ...*” Keep in mind that what takes place here takes place in the last day when Jesus is revealed from heaven (2 Th 1:7,8). The occurrence of punishment will happen at that time. Emphasis is not on duration or beginning, but upon the fact that those who know not God and obey not the gospel will be punished at the time of Jesus’ coming. The punishment at that time will be destruction with eternal consequences. The destruction is certain and the consequences are also certain to happen.

This is one of those texts where one’s theology can determine which way the text should be translated. Consider the following two possibilities that can be understood from the Greek text, and thus, translated one of two ways.

(1) *The destruction goes on without end.* Some would

suggest that the action of “destroying” goes on without end. The “destruction” of the wicked never comes to an end. Thus, the translation “everlasting destruction” would mean an unending destroying process.

The problem with this understanding is that destruction always has an end. Translators differ on what the destruction is. Some feel that the everlasting destruction comes forth from the Lord and is unleashed upon the wicked. Others believe that the exclusion of the wicked from the presence of the Lord is the destruction, or will result in destruction. Different translations emphasize one or the other of these two understandings. Such leads us to conclude that because this verse could be translated in one of two ways, our understanding of the verse cannot be final or determined from the verse itself. Our general understanding of the destiny of the wicked must be brought to this verse in order to understand exactly what Paul is saying. I would therefore suggest that we keep our minds open. Since the context does not fully explain what the meaning is, consider a second interpretation of the verse.

**(2) *The destruction is certain and final, but with unending consequences.*** Jesus is coming with certain judgment on the wicked. This judgment will result in their destruction. The duration of the punishment is not known, other than the fact that God issues forth punishment according to the crime. Nevertheless, destruction has an end. Herein is the “eternal” judgment of Hebrews 6:2. (More on this verse later.) It is certain. The results of the destruction of judgment, however, have unending consequences. The results of the destruction will not be reversed. The destruction will be an irreversible action taken upon the wicked.

There may be in Paul’s mind an element of both understandings that are listed above. The destruction would be an action that proceeded from the Lord upon the wicked. However, there would be an unending qualifying time of destruction. In other words, the punishment would last throughout God’s appointed time of duration.

However, the result of the destruction would last without end. It would not be reversed. In other words, when the wicked have received their just punishment, they are destroyed from existence. The result of the destruction is without end. The wicked will never come back into existence. In this sense, therefore, **it is certain destruction with unending consequences.**

**e. Hebrews 5:9:** Of Jesus, the Hebrew writer wrote, “*And having been perfected, He became the author of **eternal** salvation to all who obey Him.*” When one is baptized, he or she is saved because of the cleansing blood of Jesus (Mk 16:16; At 22:16). **This salvation is a once and for all time event in the life of the individual.** This does not mean that one cannot fall away so as to be lost. It does mean, however, that if one remains faithful to his or her calling by the gospel, the certainty of one's salvation will continue and be realized in its fullness at the final coming of Jesus. Once one is saved, he is saved. Salvation in one's life does not keep happening over and over again. This does not mean that he cannot lose his salvational standing with God, for one must continually walk in the commands of God's word in response to the grace of God. Nevertheless, once the redemptive work of God takes place in one's life, it is full and complete.

Through the call of the gospel, Jesus is now saving people. However, this saving process will eventually end. After the final coming, there will be no more opportunities for salvation. So what is meant by one receiving “**eternal** salvation” in this time when the saving process itself will have an end at the final coming of Jesus? **The meaning is that when one is saved, there are unending consequences that result from that salvation.** Though the saving process, or calling through the gospel, will have an end at the end of the world, the consequences of salvation for those who have obeyed the Author of this salvation, will go on without end.

**f. Hebrews 6:2:** The Hebrew writer spoke of the elemen-

tary principles of Christ, one of which was “**eternal** (*aionios*) judgment.” This is listed in the context of Hebrews 6:2 in reference to the resurrection to come. The eternal judgment, therefore, has reference to the **final** judgment that is yet to come and will happen on the last day. This judgment will not go on throughout eternity. **There will be an end of the judgment.** It will stop after it has occurred on the last day. But the Hebrew writer uses the adjective “eternal” (*aionios*) in reference to this **one time action** of final judgment. What’s the point? The point is that the judgment will take place in the last day. However, **the results of the judgment will last without end.** The consequences of judgment will have no end, though the actual act of judging will have an end. In this sense, therefore, the word “eternal” emphasizes the certainty of God’s final action of judgment that will have unending consequences.

**g. Hebrews 9:12:** The Hebrew writer has stated that through His own blood, Jesus “*entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal [aionios] redemption.*” Here is explained the fact that the act of Jesus’ redeeming has eternal consequences. Jesus came to offer Himself as a sacrifice that would be the redemption of all who obey Him (Hb 9:25-28). “*In Him we have redemption through His blood ...*” (Ep 1:7). **This act of redemption on Jesus’ part happened only one time in history.** It will never take place again. But how is such an act an “eternal” act?

By use of the word “eternal,” the Hebrew writer is emphasizing the **consequences** of the redemptive act of Jesus, not the act itself. Jesus was offered once upon the cross. That act of redemption was a sufficient sacrifice for the sins of all who are obedient to the gospel. When one is obedient, his or her personal redemption by the blood of Jesus carries on without end. Jesus completed the act of redemption. The result of this act will carry on without end in the lives of those who obey the gospel. When one obeys the gospel, he is redeemed by the blood of Jesus. Though the actual obedience to the gospel (baptism) is a one time action, the result of the action



<b>OLD TESTAMENT</b> <i>olam</i> (Septuagint translation: <i>aionios</i> )	<b>NEW TESTAMENT</b> <i>aionios</i> (from <i>aion</i> )	
<b>Unending existence?</b> or <b>Predetermined time?</b>	<b>Unending existence?</b> or <b>Predetermined time?</b>	
Gn 17:8: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) possession" Lv 24:8: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) covenant" Dt 15:17: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) slavery" Ex 12:24: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) passover" Ex 31:16: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) sabbath" Ex 40:15: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) priesthood" 2 Kg 5:27: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) leprosy" Hk 3:6: "Eternal ( <i>olam/aionios</i> ) mountains"		Mt 25:46: "Eternal ( <i>aionios</i> ) punishment" Mk 3:29: "Eternal ( <i>aionios</i> ) condemnation" 2 Th 1:9: "Eternal ( <i>aionios</i> ) destruction" Hb 5:9: "Eternal ( <i>aionios</i> ) salvation" Hb 6:2: "Eternal ( <i>aionios</i> ) judgment" Hb 9:12: "Eternal ( <i>aionios</i> ) redemption" Jd 7: "Eternal ( <i>aionios</i> ) fire"

carries on into time without end.

**h. Jude 7:** Jude speaks of Sodom and Gomorrah “*suffering the vengeance of eternal [aionios] fire.*” In view of the previously mentioned examples of the adjective use of *aionios* in reference to action, how would we consistently interpret this statement? Is emphasis upon an unending fire? Or, in conjunction with the previous interpretations, is emphasis upon the result of a consuming fire of judgment? In order to be consistent with the previous uses of “eternal” (*aionios*) as an adjective to modify a noun, we would have to say that the action of the fire took place at a point of time, but the consequences of the fire are without end. In other words, emphasis is not on an unending fire, **but on the unending result of the fire.** The fire was a time-oriented happening as the destruction of 2 Thesalonians 1:9 is a one time event. The fire or destruction takes place over a period of time. Sodom and Gomorrah were at one time in history consumed with fire from heaven. But there was an end to the consuming fire. The destroying action of the fire terminated. However, the consequences of the fire and destruction are without end. The results are irreversible. That which was destroyed by the fire will never come back into existence. The results of the “eternal fire” will carry on.

One of the challenging thoughts one must consider in reference to the definition of *aionios* as it is used in the New Testament is its

use, as previously mentioned, as a Greek word to translate the Hebrew word *olam*. Since the Jews used the word *aionios* as a word to translate *olam*, then consider the implications of such in the following chart:

The above presents the challenge of how one will be consistent in understanding either Old Testament or New Testament concepts with which the words *olam* and *aionios* are used. Should we use the Old Testament usage of *olam* that is translated with the Greek word *aionios* in order to understand the New Testament usage of *aionios* in reference to New Testament teachings? Or, should we use the New Testament usage of *aionios* with a definition of unending time to interpret its use as a word to translate the Hebrew word *olam*? If we choose to do the latter, then we will have to deal with the sabbath, priesthood of Aaron, and even the mountains as having unending qualities. You can make your choice. However, you must be consistent in your interpretation.

One must maintain a consistent conclusion to the preceding points of this chapter. In reference to the righteous, Jesus has once and for all time carried out the act of redemption. The results of the one time act have unending consequences. Those who obey the Author of salvation are immediately saved at the time of their obedience to the gospel. The result of the saving act of obedience to the gospel will go on without end. The acts of “redemption” and “salvation,” therefore, will not continue throughout eternity. Jesus has already accomplished redemption on the cross. The redeemed have already been saved by the gospel. However, the results of both actions will continue throughout eternity. The saved will remain saved throughout time without end because of a one time redemption and obedient action in the past.

Now consider the situation of the wicked. Those who refuse to recognize that Jesus’ work is from God, have committed an act of denial; they have committed the eternal sin. The result of this action

will have unending consequences for they will eventually be condemned at the final judgment. When Jesus comes again, the wicked will be punished with destruction. The result of the destruction will have no end. In this sense, therefore, they will be punished and the consequences of the punishment will have no end. The result of their judgment is without end. Though the judging process does not go on without end, the results of the judgment do. Therefore, the punishment, judgment, condemnation and destruction of the wicked will be a one time event, as the redemption, salvation and life of the righteous is a one time action. However, the consequences of all these actions will have no end. In this sense, they are “eternal.” The consequences are without end, though the actions are one time occurrences.

The preceding view of the punishment of hell does not affect any fundamental teachings of Scripture. It does solve many inconsistencies in our interpretation of those teachings we maintain concerning the justice and character of God. At least one thing is certain. God will work according to how He has planned concerning the punishment of the wicked. Our feeble efforts to understand that which is beyond our experience will not affect or change His mind. The wicked will be punished for their wickedness. No one will go unpunished for rejection of God or the persecution of the saints. God is a just God and will render unto all according to their deeds (2 Co 5:10).

The preceding view also places great responsibility on the disciple of Jesus in reference to evangelism. If the wicked will be terminated for eternity, then the righteous now must make every effort to give the wicked a chance to have a piece of eternity. Only a selfish disciple would not feel compelled to preach the gospel to the lost.

## Chapter 11

# HELL

Since man is a free-moral agent with the ability and freedom to choose between good and evil, he must be in an environment for choice-making and made aware of the results of his choices. He must know the reward for good choices. He must also be aware of the consequences of bad choices. If he makes bad choices, he must know that he will have to eventually give account of those choices and suffer the consequences.

Accountability must be a part of our world view concerning choices that are made in our environment of choice making. So here we are, in an environment where God allows us to make choices concerning His law. God has revealed the reward of good choices. Existence without end in a heavenly realm is the hope of the righteous (Ti 1:2). For those who make right choices, God will reward a dwelling in the unending new heavens and new earth that are yet to come (2 Pt 3:13). This hope is an anchor of the soul (Hb 6:18,19). It is an encouragement to be obedient to the will of God.

Therefore, in man's environment of choice-making, there must be a deterrent to voluntarily making wrong choices. We must know that we will be held accountable for wrong behavior toward our fellow man. In the biblical world view, this deterrent is gehenna, the second death or hell. Though we do not understand the totality of gehenna, there are enough clear statements in the New Testament to assure the disobedient that there is punishment waiting for them.

We live in an environment where there is divine law. God has delivered to man both a law of the conscience and a law that has been written by the direction of the Holy Spirit. The Gentiles were given "*the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness*" (Rm 2:15). The Jews were given the "*oracles of God*"

written in stone (Rm 3:1,2). Christians have received the law of liberty (Js 1:25; 2:8). All men have thus been under law. And since all have been under law, each person will be held accountable for willful violation of law.

Where there is no law there is no sin (Rm 4:15; 5:13). But God has revealed law (Rm 2:11-16), and thus, those who violate law will suffer the punishment of God which is separation from His presence for eternity. There will be no excuse for those who end up in hell. All will stand before a just and fair God who will render to each according to his or her deeds in relation to the law of God (2 Co 5:10).

The realization of the authority of God's law rests in the knowledge of punishment for those who violate the law of God. Those who willfully sin have only "*a certain fearful expectation of judgment and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries*" (Hb 10:26,27). The punishment of hell becomes the deterrent to violating law. Men must fear God "*who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell*" (Mt 10:28). Jesus exhorted, "*But I will show you whom you should fear: fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!*" (Lk 12:5; see Ps 119:120; Hb 10:26-31). Soberness concerning judgment comes from a knowledge that we will give account of every idle word that we shall speak (Mt 12:36). We are thus motivated to do right in living in order to enter the narrow gate into life (Mt 7:13,14). An understanding of hell is necessary, therefore, in order to deter us from disobedience of God's law. It is necessary in order that we direct our lives by the word of God.

### **A. Definition of hell:**

The word hell is from the Greek word *gehenna*. Though the word hell was used to translate both *hades* and *gehenna* in the *King James Version*, these two words have two different meanings. They refer to two different existences. Hades has reference to the unseen

existence of the disembodied, whereas **gehenna** refers to the final punishment that will be meted out to the embodied wicked at the last judgment. Gehenna is used in the New Testament in the following passages:

### GEHENNA

1. **Matthew 5:22:** *"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 [gehenna] fire."*
2. **Matthew 5:29,30:** *"... it is profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [gehenna] (See also Mk 9:43,45,47)."*
3. **Matthew 10:28:** *"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 and body in hell [gehenna]."*
4. **Matthew 18:9:** *"And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell [gehenna] fire."*
5. **Matthew 23:15:** *"For you [Pharisees] travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of hell [gehenna] as yourselves."*
6. **Matthew 23:33:** *"Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell [gehenna]?"*
7. **Mark 9:45:** *"And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into hell [gehenna] into the fire that shall never be quenched" (See vss 43,47).*
7. **Luke 12:5:** *"Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell [gehenna]; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"*
8. **James 3:6:** *"The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by hell [gehenna]."*

The word gehenna is a Jewish word. It is used by Matthew, Mark and Luke in recording the words of Jesus when He refers to the end of the wicked. Except for the epistle of James (Js 3:6), it is not used in the rest of the New Testament. Therefore, at least one conclusion can be made from the word's use in the New Testament. It is a Jewish word, and was used when inspired literature was written to the Jews. They knew the meaning of the word.

It is interesting to note that gehenna is not used in secular Greek literature. It is not used in the Septuagint. In the later part of the first

century, Josephus did not use the word in all his writings. One could conclude, therefore, that this is a Jewish "religious" word. It is one that the Jews used specifically in reference to the destruction of the wicked.

Gehenna is a transliterated Greek word that was used to translate the Hebrew word which referred to the "valley of Hinnom" or "valley of the sons of Hinnom." The circumstances surrounding the valley of Hinnom serves to define what Jesus and James wanted to convey to their Jewish readers by use of the word gehenna.

The valley of Hinnom is south and west of the city of Jerusalem. This area was called the "valley of the son of Hinnom" (gehenna) as early as the days of Joshua (Ja 15:8; 18:16). During the days of Ahaz and Manasseh, apostate Israel offered their children as sacrifices to the god Moloch in this valley (2 Kg 16:3; 21:6). The valley eventually was given the name "Toplet," or a "place of abhorrence, to be spit upon."

Some scholars believe that this valley was the place where the 185,000 dead bodies of the slain Assyrian army of Hezekiah's day were burned (See Is 30:31-33; 37:36). If so, then the definition of the place was set for the history of Israel. At least, when Jeremiah wrote he stated that because of their rejection of God, apostate Israelites would be burned in this valley just as they sacrificed their children there and also burned the bodies of Assyrians (See Jr 7:31-33; 19:1-13).

Isaiah pictured a judgment to come which would be by a consuming fire. "*The Lord will come with fire,*" he wrote, "*to render His anger with fury, and His rebuke with flames of fire*" (Is 66:15). God will consume the bodies of the wicked in judgment. "*And they shall go forth and look upon the corpses of the men who have transgressed against Me. For their worm does not die, and their fire is not quenched. They shall be an abhorrence to all flesh*" (Is 66:24; see Mk 9:44-48).

The Jews understood Isaiah's message. By the time Jesus came,

the Jewish thinking concerning the valley of Hinnom (gehenna) was firmly established. When Jesus used the word, those of His Jewish audience who heard understood that something would be consumed. As physical bodies were consumed throughout their history in the valley of Hinnom, Jesus warns that they must fear another consumption that was to come. Jesus proclaimed, “*And do not fear those who kill body but cannot kill the soul. **But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [gehenna]***” (Mt 10:28). Jesus' audience knew what He meant. Those who are thrown into gehenna will be destroyed. They will be consumed. This is Paul's point in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. The wicked “*shall be punished with everlasting **destruction.***” It is a destruction that will not be undone. It will be final. It is a destruction that will take place after just punishment has been given to those who have sinned against God and brought hardship upon the flock of God. All those who are not in a covenant relationship with God, therefore, will suffer the consequences of eternal destruction from the presence of God.

## **B. Description of hell:**

The New Testament is loaded with metaphors that describe hell. The reason the Holy Spirit used metaphors to explain hell is that nothing has ever existed that will give us a literal meaning of what hell will actually be like. It is an existence that has not yet happened, and therefore, must be explained to us through metaphors. Because metaphors are used, we must be cautious about being dogmatic in this discussion. Every writer's words must be taken with a “grain of salt,” for no one can know exactly what will be. All we have to work with in this discussion are the words of this world that the Holy Spirit uses in revelation to take our minds to an existence beyond this world.

Regardless of the debate concerning the duration of hell, it is pictured with the most graphic metaphors that portray it as a horrible destiny. All who would study this subject should cringe at the



horribleness of this place as it is metaphorically painted by the Holy Spirit. The following are some of the graphic pictures of the destiny of the wicked:

### GEHENNA

1. A place of **punishment** (Mt 25:46; Hb 10:29).
2. A place of **condemnation** (Mt 23:33; Jn 5:29).
3. A place of **everlasting judgment** (Hb 6:2).
4. A place of **eternal destruction** (Mt 7:13,14; 2 Th 1:9).
5. A place of **fire and brimstone** (Mt 18:8; 25:41; Mk 9:48; Rv 19:20; 20:10,14,15; 21:8).
6. A place of **outer darkness** (Mt 8:12; 25:30; Jd 13).
7. A place of **pain and anguish** (Mt 8:12; 25:30).
8. A place of **no rest** (Rv 14:11).

The Holy Spirit uses those terms that are most terrifying in our understanding in order to describe the nature of hell. It is a place of “fire and brimstone.” “Fire and brimstone” are associated with that which is physical and of this world. Such is the most terrible experience our physical bodies could go through in this life. The metaphor, though of this world, would suggest something that is greater than this world. To say that “fire and brimstone” is metaphorical does not detract from the severity of hell’s environment. It would suggest that a metaphorical understanding would explain hell to be a greater punishment than literal fire and brimstone.

Hell is an environment of “outer darkness” (Jd 13). God is light (1 Jn 1:5). Since the wicked will be vanquished from the presence of God (2 Th 1:9), then they will be separated from the light of God’s glory.

Whether the “darkness” has reference to a spiritual environment of darkness or literal darkness is not important. The metaphorical fire will burn with darkness, thus indicating that the tormenting fire will not be as we experience in this world. Since this world will pass away (2 Pt 3:11), we must assume that the fire will be different than that which is of this world. Therefore, the darkness will be different than what we experience in this world. But in conjunction with this, there will

be no spiritual light in this place of the condemned. Certainly, what the Holy Spirit is trying to do is to use those metaphors that are most graphic in order to paint the most horrible picture possible for the destiny of the wicked. The reason the Spirit has given such a graphic picture of the condemned is obvious. Everyone should be horrified with the possibility of being condemned to such.

The Holy Spirit uses the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” on several occasions in reference to the punishment of the wicked. I would suggest that the emphasis of the phrase is in reference to extreme terror, or the realization of great loss, or both. This meaning would better fit the contexts where the phrase is used. This meaning would be better than the meaning of pain.

Consider the context of the phrase “weeping and gnashing of teeth” as Jesus used it during His ministry. *“The sons of the kingdom will be **cast out** into outer darkness. There will be **weeping and gnashing of teeth**”* (Mt 8:12; see 22:13; 25:30). Those *“who practice lawlessness”* will be **cast out** where there is **weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Mt 13:41,42). At the end of the Jewish State, Jesus said that the rebellious wicked who reject the gospel would be **cast into the furnace of fire**. There will be **wailing and gnashing of teeth** (Mt 13:49,50). The unmerciful servant would be appointed the destination of the hypocrites, where there is **weeping and gnashing of teeth** (Mt 24:55). The point is what Jesus said of the wicked, *“**Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity**”* (Mt 7:23). The wicked thus have great regret concerning what they have lost. They are cast away from the blessings that come from obedience to the will of God. Therefore, *“there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, **when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out**”* (Lk 13:27,28).

From the preceding context in which “weeping and gnashing of teeth” is used, emphasis is upon the result of separation. When the wicked are cast out they are separated from the presence of God.

When the wicked realize their separation from God, they will suffer great anguish. In their torment they will realize what they have missed.

### C. Occupants of hell:

John concluded, “*And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Rv 20:15). In a specific sense, therefore, all who have not come into a covenant relationship with God, will find their destiny in an existence that is separate from the presence of God. The Bible identifies the following as the ones who are destined to hell:

**1. Hell is for Satan and his angels.** The words of Jesus in Matthew 25:41 clearly indicate that hell is specifically prepared for those who were the first to rebel against the will of God. “*Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels.*” Hell has been prepared for the devil and his spiritual hosts of darkness.

Satan’s demons know that they are destined for hell. During Jesus’ ministry, they pleaded with Jesus, “*Have You come here to torment us before the time?*” (Mt 8:29). They were, by the time Peter wrote 2 Peter, delivered “*into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment*” (2 Pt 2:4; see Jd 6). This torment into which some demons begged Jesus not to be cast is identified as **the abyss** in the parallel account of Lk 8:26-39 (See vs 31). Both Matthew and Mark use the word torment (Mt 8:29; Mk 5:7). Luke says **abyss**. The abyss is the existence of torment into which Satan is cast (See Rv 20:1,2).

The Greek word *abyssos* (abyss) is used nine times in the New Testament. It is used to refer to the abode of demons (Lk 8:31) and the abode of the dead (Rm 10:7). It has been translated "bottomless pit" in the *King James Version* in reference to a place of torment (See

Rv 9:1,2,11; 11:7; 17:8; 20:1,3). Its meaning as used in the New Testament should not be associated with the final place of condemnation of Satan and his angels. It is presently that realm of confinement by which God confines Satan and his hosts (Rv 20:1-3).

**2. Hell is for those who know not God and who do not obey the gospel.** 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 mentions two groups of people who are destined to hell. Paul writes that Jesus is coming “*in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of God and from the glory of His power.*” It is easy to identify those who do not obey the gospel, and thus, will go to hell. However, those who “do not know God” are often ignored in our discussions because of some unanswerable conclusions we have developed as a result of inconsistently defining the duration of hell. In order to understand what Paul is saying, we must understand precisely who he is talking about in the verse.

**a. Those who do not know God will go to hell.** Taken literally, this would be those of all history who have never come to a knowledge of the one true God. All civilizations of the world have had some concept of a supreme being. However, this being has often been created after the likeness and desires of the worshiper. Thus, idolatry has existed throughout the world and throughout history. Idolaters are those who have “*exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator ...*” (Rm 1:25). They have “*... changed the glory of the incorruptible God into an image made like corruptible man ...*” (Rm 1:23).

There is also the teaching that those who do not know God refers to those who know of God, but because of sin, do not understand (know) His character or being. This is a New Testament teaching, for John wrote, “*Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments*” (1 Jn 2:3). One does not know the true God

unless he emulates the character of God. “*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). Those who do not love, cannot understand the true character of God, and thus, do not know God. Those who do not obey the commandments of God cannot know who God really is. Those who do not know God will thus be punished with the destruction that is to come. Therefore, whether 2 Thessalonians 1:8 is referring to those who do not have a knowledge of the one true God, or those who do not know God by emulating His character, the result is the same, destruction.

In this dispensation of time on earth, we must include in Paul's statement of those who know not God in 2 Thessalonians 1, the millions of the world who have never heard the truth about the true God of heaven. They will also suffer the punishment of “eternal destruction.” Does this sound hard? Possibly so, if understood from some theological viewpoints. It is specifically hard if understood from the viewpoint that God will burn in unending cosmic fire those who have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. Such a theology may sound good in “fire and brimstone” sermons, but there are some serious erroneous conclusions to such a doctrine. (More on this later.) What is clear from the statements in 2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 is that Paul states that those who have never known God will go to hell.

Whatever our understanding of what hell is like, or the duration thereof, everyone who has not known the one true God about whom the Bible speaks, will go to this hell. This would include the Buddhist monk, Hindu priest, Islamic imam and all others who have not had a copy of the Bible so as to read and obey or who have refused to hear when they did have an opportunity to know God. 2 Thes-salonians 1:7-9 consigns all who know not God to hell.

To some, this sounds too hard. It sounds hard only because of our understanding of hell. In order to understand the encompassing condemnation of all who do not know the one true God, then possibly we should start by restudying our concept of hell. There seems to be a conflict of interpretation in the minds of some Christian thinkers on

this point.

The conflict is thus. The nature of God is loving and merciful. He is just, not fiendish. However, He is supposed to cast into an unending fiery torment billions of souls who have lived on the earth but never had a chance to hear the gospel. In eternity, He will occasionally check on these burning souls in order to make sure their torment is carrying on as usual. It will be the nature of unending existence that there will be those who are enjoying heaven, but their enjoyment will also be in the fact that there are those who are over in hell being tormented for their crimes against the righteous. In view of this, how can God be a loving God, and at the same time, fiendishly punish in such a manner? How can the righteous enjoy heaven when they know that friends and loved ones who never obeyed the gospel are somewhere over in eternity burning away in a never ending torment? It takes no great theologian to figure out that there is something fiendishly wrong with this belief.

I have found that most preachers or writers simply ignore preaching on the subject of hell because they recognize the above inconsistency in maintaining a doctrine of hell that questions the very character of God. Christian teachers have dodged the issue by often refusing to even talk about the matter. When was the last time you heard a sermon on hell? There are also those who have developed the theology of universalism, that is, God will not send anyone to hell. Everyone will eventually be saved. Then there are those who have developed a theology of salvation by good works. In other words, regardless of whether one has heard and obeyed the gospel, he or she will be judged and saved on the merit of their good works. In other words, one can be saved by living parallel to the cross of Christ. And then there is the doctrine of salvation by ignorance, that is, as long as one did not have a chance to hear the gospel, he or she will be saved. I suppose there are other theologies that have been developed in order to dodge the inconsistencies we develop as a result of a distorted concept of hell.

What seems to be the case is that Christian thinkers are somehow fearful of challenging traditional concepts of hell, even though these concepts of hell develop contradictions in understanding the Bible. Some would rather invent false doctrines to steer souls around hell than to understand hell in a way that is consistent with the character of God. Others have simply written off the issue by saying that this is God's business and we should not concern ourselves with the matter. But any doctrine that is developed that questions the very character of God is not just God's business. It is our business because we are the ones who have developed the inconsistent doctrine.

In the context of 2 Thessalonians 1, Paul's second group of those who will go to hell **includes** all those who do not submit to the gospel.

**b. Those who do not obey the gospel will go to hell.** The gospel is the good news about the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins. It is His burial and resurrection to give us hope. Paul wrote, "... *I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you ... 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 Co 15:1-4). In order for one to **obey the gospel**, therefore, he or she must be buried with Christ and raised with Him. Paul explains this in Romans 6:3-6. He wrote, "*Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life*" (Rm 6:4). Therefore, **by immersion in water one obeys the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus.** Those who are immersed with Christ will not go to hell. However, those who do not obey the gospel when they have been given the opportunity to obey, will continue on their road of condemnation.

#### **D. The destruction of hell:**

Paul says that the destruction of hell is "eternal." In review of the

previous chapter of this book, keep in mind that the word *aionios* (eternal) in this passage would emphasize the **quality** or **certainty** of the destruction with results that will continue without end. It is everlasting (*aionios*) destruction in the sense that it will not be deterred. Those who know not God and do not obey the gospel will suffer a certain destruction that will be complete after just punishment has been meted out for their crimes, and the results of the destruction will not be reversed.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 should thus be translated that “these shall be punished with destruction that has unending results.” The word “destruction” means that something is terminated. The action of destruction would not continuously go on forever and ever. Destruction would take place after just punishment has taken place. The result of the destruction would continue forever. In other words, those destroyed will not come back into existence. Taken literally, **they are destroyed**. This interpretation makes more sense when we consider the nature of a just and merciful God who measures punishment according to the sin of man.

We must also deal with the one who has lived according to Christian principles but has not obeyed the gospel. I have read and heard numerous theories concerning what God will do with those who have never had a chance to hear and obey the gospel. Some conclusions that are made make God a fiendish and unjust God. Some have simply been led to believe that hell is an unending torment in literal fire and brimstone, and then simply shrugged off illogical conclusions concerning what this might teach concerning our idea of the nature of God. I want to challenge you to deal with harmonizing our concept of the nature of a loving and just God with the supposed doctrine of punishment in unending torment that far exceeds the crime. We cannot simply say that it is God’s business and leave it at that. Any doctrine that makes God a fiendish and unloving entity simply cannot be true. The atheist has us cornered here if we cannot answer this question. He would ask, “You Christians believe in a



benevolent and just God. And yet, you teach that He will punish beyond reason. Is not your God fiendish and unjust?”

We cannot simply sidestep this accusation of the atheist. We must deal with this dilemma. Here are a few thoughts, therefore, I would like for you to seriously consider.

**1. *God is not fiendish.*** Will those who have never heard the gospel be punished with the same degree of punishment as the most wicked person on earth? Will the Buddhist priest suffer the same hell as Hitler? Will the denominationalist who has lived according to Christian principles, but has never obeyed the gospel, be punished with the same fiery hell as Idi Amin? Will the good neighbor and good citizen of the community go to an unending hell because he has not known God, or having known, never obeyed the gospel? These are questions which we must deal with. We simply cannot just say these will all go to an unending hell, and ignore the conclusions to our theology concerning the nature of God. Our answer to these questions reflects our world view. It is important to come to some conclusion concerning these questions because they manifest a very important part of our world view concerning the nature of God and the punishment of those who have not obeyed the gospel.

As stated before, the atheist has often trapped the Christian on this point. He would question the Christian, “Do you believe that your God would confine to an endless fire and brimstone those who have lived good lives on earth but have never had a chance to know God or obey the gospel?” Our misunderstanding of the Scriptures on this point has made it impossible for us to answer this question without promoting the concept of a fiendish God. In other words, God would be fiendish to burn in eternal fire and brimstone those who never had a chance to obey the gospel. The point is that we must answer the question. We cannot simply answer that it is God’s business and leave it at that. Certainly, the destruction of hell is God’s business. He will take care of the matter. However, I find it hard to believe that God has

presented to mankind a doctrine that obviously teaches that He is fiendish and unjust.

**2. Punishment is measured by duration, not intensity.** Jesus presented the parable of the faithful and wise steward in Luke 12:42-48. He spoke of the servant “*who knew his master’s will, and did not prepare himself or do according to his will, shall be beaten with many stripes*” (vs 47). On the other hand, “*he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few*” (vs 48). Does Jesus teach degrees of punishment in this parable? If we read the passage for what it says, it is hard to miss the interpretation that He teaches that “*to whom much is given, from him much will be required; and to whom much has been committed, of him they will ask the more*” (Lk 12:48). I believe Jesus' emphasis is on duration, not degrees of punishment.

Some have interpreted Jesus to refer to the **intensity** of hell and not to the duration. In other words, God will turn up the flames on Hitler, but lower them on the good religionist who never obeyed the gospel but lived according to Christian principles. We have often affirmed that both will suffer the flames in endless duration, but with different intensities. Both would suffer hell without end, but with different degrees of torment. I question this interpretation.

I would challenge us to consider an understanding that does not make God either fiendish or unjust. If emphasis in Jesus' parable of Luke 12:42-48 is on **duration** and not intensity, then the picture changes. Those who have lived good lives, yet were out of covenant relationship with God, would suffer hell, but their punishment would be with “few stripes.” It takes less time to suffer few stripes than many stripes, though the pain of each stripe is just as severe. I would not want to suffer a single stripe in hell simply because all stripes are of the same intensity. The length of enduring the few over the many would certainly be less. Nevertheless, the intensity of each stripe would be the same.

After the stripes have been given, then the destruction occurs for

which there is no reverse. Punishment has thus been meted out for the crime and the lost are lost forever.

**3. *Punishment matches the crime.*** God's punishment in the Old Testament always matched the crime. God is not pictured in the Old Testament as a mean or unjust God. The Old Testament law was given with laws that were just and fair. In the law "an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" was the principle where punishment was given to match the crime (See Ex 21:23-27). The same is true of God's punishment of the lost in the hell to come. What purpose would it fulfill for the lost to still be suffering in hell a billion earth years into eternity? Once the price of punishment for the crime has been satisfied, what reason would God have in continuing the punishment beyond reason and purpose? God never worked in this way in His just punishment in the Old Testament. It is hard to believe that He would do such in eternity.

We simply must be careful in this area of study lest we develop a theology that accuses God of being fiendish and unjust. In other words, if we believe in the unending punishment of the behaviorally good person who has not been baptized into a covenant relationship with God, then we must teach that God is unjust and unfair in punishment. This would only lead to the fact that God is also fiendish, that is, He takes delight in the punishment of the wicked. A billion earth years from now He would be this cosmic sadist who continually went to some far corner of existence to make sure the lost were still tormented for their forty or fifty years of ignorance a billion earth years in the past. In another billion years He will check again, and then, again and again. Is this the type of God we proclaim to the world? Is this the God of love, mercy and justice that we read about in the Bible? This is not God, but a god some have created after their own vengeful nature.

Keep in mind that the "lack of knowledge" on the part of the ignorant in 2 Thessalonians 1:8,9 was the fault of the Christian and not

the unbeliever. If those who know not God in this dispensation are lost, then who is responsible for their dilemma? Whose sin is greater? Is it the sin of the person who never knew Jesus existed in the first place? Or, is it the sin of the Christian who never made the effort to preach the gospel? I have often found that Christians are swift to condemn the “ignorant” to an unending punishment in hell for not knowing God, while at the same time, rationalizing or excusing themselves from responsibility of not proclaiming the name of Jesus to all the world. Who should suffer the punishment, the innocent ignorant or the knowledgeable lazy Christian?

I have heard of another alternative interpretation to deal with those who “know not God” but are condemned to destruction. This is the teaching that those who have never heard will be judged by their good works. Though they have not known of the one true God, or the gospel of Jesus, they will stand before God in final judgment upon the merit of their works. In other words, after death, good workers will be reserved for judgment and will have to take their chances with God on the merit of their good behavior on earth.

This may seemingly answer the problem of those who know not God. At least, it is an effort to steer us clear of a doctrine that teaches that God is fiendish and unjust. However, there are some other New Testament teachings that must be harmonized with this teaching in order to justify salvation that would be based solely upon the merit of works.

First of all, Paul clearly stated that by works of law no one can be justified before God (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). One cannot be saved by works of law simply because all men have sinned (Rm 3:23). Neither can works atone for sin, “*lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:9). The blood of Jesus would have been a useless, or at least, an unnecessary effort on the cross if one could be saved by meritorious works. In other words, if men could be saved by works, then why the whole gospel plan of salvation in the first place (See Gl 2:21)? If men could have been saved by good works, it seems that instead of the cross,

God could have simply stayed with the law of conscience of the Gentiles instead of going through the entire struggle with Israel and the church in order to bring the obedient into heaven.

It is my belief that *“there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved”* (At 4:12). It is also my belief that in order for all men to partake of the eternal existence of heaven, they must hear the gospel. Christians, therefore, have the responsibility of sharing what they have with those who do not have it. I would be selfish if I did not share that which I have in the spiritual realm with those who do not have it. The Christian has a “piece of the pie.” He has eternal life and is destined, because of the blood of Jesus, to a new heavens and earth (2 Pt 3:13). If the Christian does not share this information with others, then certainly he or she will be held accountable, not because we did not share the gospel, but because we were introverted, selfish, and unconcerned about the state of condemnation in which others are.

The whole world is headed for hell. All those who do not obey the gospel will suffer the punishment of hell. Though the duration of suffering may be different and according to the sin of the condemned, the fact remains that we live in a world that is headed for a devil’s hell. As Christians, we have the hope of eternal life. We have been entrusted with the gospel of reconciliation that will give the lost a share of the hope that we have. The sharing nature of a true Christian will motivate evangelism. True Christians cannot simply stand by and watch a condemned generation be lost to hell.

## Chapter 12

# HEAVEN

Some concept of heaven is found in all cultures that have existed

in history. A different word than heaven is used to explain the concept, but the idea is an understood belief of all religions that have existed. Different ideas surround the mental heavenly picture of particular cultural groups. Nevertheless, men have always had enough sense to perceive that there is something beyond this material world that is the real “home of the soul.” It is only when we turn to the Bible that we find a true and undistorted view of life beyond death in a realm called heaven.

When Jesus sensed the anxiety of the disciples after they heard His words of departure, He gave them hope by saying, “*In My Father’s house are many mansions [abiding places]; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also*” (Jn 14:2,3). We seek an eternal “homeland” wherein the confines of this world have passed out of existence. The Hebrew writer revealed that those fathers of faith in the Old Testament era “*died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them, and confessed that **they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth. For those who say such things declare plainly that they seek a homeland. And truly if they had called to mind that country from which they had come out, they would have had opportunity to return. But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country***” (Hb 11:13-16). They sought the homeland that is “*incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you*” (1 Pt 1:4). However, they had only a shadow of revelation concerning heaven in comparison to what we have in the New Testament. The New Testament has brought to light many things about which the Old Testament believers had only little written revelation.

Herein is our hope, our refuge, our present comfort in a world of despair, suffering and pain. We are now “*in hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began*” (Ti 1:2).

We have “*fled for refuge to lay hold of the hope set before us. This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast ...*” (Hb 6:18,19). We thus seek this hope “*which is laid up for you in heaven*” (Cl 1:5). This hope is our security in this life; it is that which gives meaning to existence, to the struggles through which all who believe must go.

## A. The nature of heaven:

From an earthly standpoint, it is difficult to understand the nature of heaven. It is simply hard to understand that which we have not experienced. However, one way we can understand heaven is to understand the nature or character of those faithful believers the Bible says are there or will be there. To some extent we can also comprehend this realm of existence by the Spirit’s metaphors that excite our thinking concerning how it will be. We also understand heaven by understanding God who is there. Therefore, the nature and character of Deity which is revealed in the Bible, and the nature of the faithful who will be there, explain to some extent the environment of heaven.

1. *Heaven is an existence after the nature of Deity.* During His earthly ministry, Jesus spoke of the Father who is “*in heaven*” (Mt 6:9; 10:31,32; Jn 12:28). The Old Testament writers spoke of the Father **in heaven** (1 Kg 8:30; Ps 14:2; Ec 5:2). Jesus spoke of angels in heaven when He said, “*... for I say to you that in heaven their angels see the face of My Father who is in heaven*” (Mt 18:10; see Mt 24:36). Of Jesus the Hebrew writer stated, “*For Christ has not entered the holy places made with hands, which are copies of the true, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us*” (Hb 9:24). Jesus has now ascended into the heavenly and has been seated at the right hand of God (Hb 8:1; 10:12). Therefore, the Father, Son and angels are presently in

this realm which is called heaven.

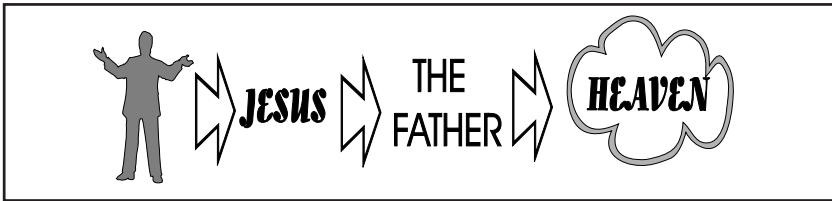
Our first step to understand the nature of heaven, therefore, is to understand the personality, character and being of Jesus, for it is Jesus who reveals the character of God. Jesus said, "*He who has seen Me has seen the Father*" (Jn 14:9; see Jn 1:18; 6:32; 8:42). We can understand heaven by the nature of the Father who resides there. But we can understand the nature of the Father only through Jesus who has revealed Him to us. In other words, **the better we know Jesus, the better we will understand the nature of the realm of the heavenly.** Those who do not know the nature of Jesus cannot know the nature of that realm to which we are headed as Christians.

Jesus "*came from the Father*" (Jn 16:28; see 13:3; 16:5,10,17). He and the Father are one (Jn 10:30; see 17:11,21-24). The only way, therefore, to understand that realm to which we are destined is to understand the One who came from it and returned to it.

It is true that Scripture describes God after the attributes which man possesses. "*God is love*" (1 Jn 4:8). God is merciful (Nm 14:18). God is patient (2 Pt 3:9). God is kind (Ne 9:17). In reading these and many other anthropopathisms in reference to God, we in some way can understand Deity by understanding these very traits that are characteristic of us. However, there is still a limitation here in understanding the fulness of the "love" or "mercy" or "kindness" of God. We would not limit God's loving to the maximum limits of our capacity to love. Neither would we limit His kindness, or any emotional capacity of man, to the most kind person on earth. God can love or be kind beyond our maximums. He can be patient long after our patience has run its course. Therefore, we must remind ourselves not to place limits on God's character by the limitations of our maximum spiritual capacities. God is far greater in character than we would ever hope to be. We will never "out love" God.

It is important to understand the above point when studying the nature of God's character as such is revealed through Jesus who





“emptied Himself” and “*made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant*” and came in the likeness of man in order to reveal the Father (Ph 2:6-8). Jesus’ ability to manifest the maximum of the nature of the Father through an “emptied state” is a challenge to understand. Was the greatness of the character of Jesus the maximum character of God? We cannot know this, for we see only that which was manifested through Jesus on earth. He is our only “living dictionary” of the Father. And what a marvelous dictionary it is. We are limited to reading the story of His life. The time is coming, however, when we shall see Him as He is (1 Jn 3:2).

God knew our inability to understand the fullness or extent of His tenderness, His capacity to love, to show mercy, to be patient. In order to open Himself to man, however, He had to begin with Jesus in the humbled state of existence in the flesh of man. “*No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him*” (Jn 1:18; see Ex 33:20; 1 Tm 6:16). Jesus “*proceeded forth and came from God*” in order to reveal the nature of the Father (Jn 8:42). “*All things have been delivered to Me by My Father,*” Jesus said, “*and no one knows the Son except the Father. Nor does anyone know the Father except the Son, and he to whom the Son wills to reveal Him*” (Mt 11:27). Those to whom the Father is revealed are those who accept the Son. These are those who perceive the Father through the Son.

Therefore, we must seek to know Jesus. We must be loving in order to understand the love of Jesus, and thus, the Father. “*He who does not love does not know God, for God is love*” (1 Jn 4:8). The greater we love, the more we will understand the Father

who is in heaven. Our loving, therefore, defines our understanding of that realm to which we are headed. The environment of heaven is illustrated by the loving nature of the Father, the Son, and you and me.

**2. *Heaven is an existence after the nature of faithful Christians.*** Peter stated that heaven is a place “*where righteousness dwells*” (2 Pt 3:13). It is a dwelling wherein resides those who have suffered through life in order to enter this rest (Rv 14:13). It is a place for the persecuted (Mt 5:12). It is a place reserved for the meek, merciful, pure in heart, and peacemakers (Mt 5:4-10). It is for those who have been faithful, even to the point of suffering death for the name of Jesus (Rv 2:10). In order to understand heaven, therefore, look for a faithful Christian. Heaven will be of the character of the faithful who are now headed for it.

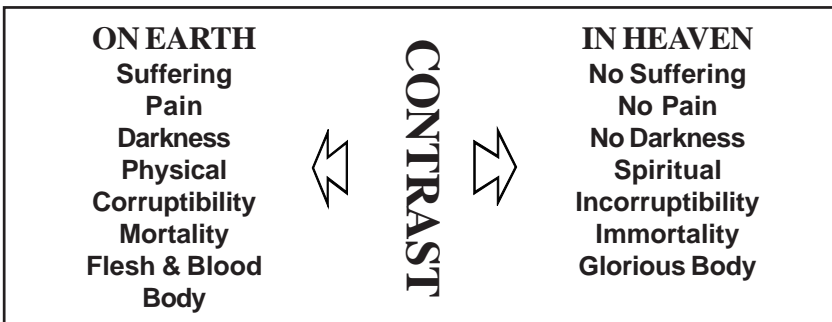
Nothing defiled shall enter into heaven. “*But there shall by no means enter it anything that defiles, or causes an abomination or a lie ...*” (Rv 21:27). “*But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie*” (Rv 22:15). Paul was very clear on this point in Galatians 5:19-21. Those who practice the works of the flesh “*will not inherit the kingdom of God*” (Gl 5:21). On the contrary, heaven will be after the nature of those who practice the fruit of the Spirit (Gl 5:22,23). Heaven will not be polluted with sin. It will not be a place of those who seek sinful behavior against their fellow man. Heaven will be a place for those who love one another and seek to serve the needs of others.

**3. *Heaven is an existence that is in contrast to the present.*** Peter revealed, “*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 Pt 3:10). This present existence, this material world, is temporary, physical and subject to deterioration. It is a world of pain and suffering, of natural calamity.

It is thus a dwelling that urges us to look for another. And this is Peter’s point. “... *we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells*” (2 Pt 3:13). Because Peter reveals that this present heavens and earth will come to a destructive climax, he teaches that there will be something different and better to come. We must, therefore, contrast this present heavens and earth with the one that is to come.

Though this contrast does not allow us to completely understand that which is on the other side of this material world, we must at least envision the new heavens and earth to be in many ways what we do not see in this world. In other words, this world inflicts pain and suffering (Is 35:10; 51:11; 65:19; Rv 7:11; 21:4). In the world to come, there will be no pain and suffering (Rv 21:4). Using this argument to understand the world beyond this world is not a perfect argument. At least, however, there are some things in this world that are certainly the opposite of what will be. The opposite of this world paints a glorious picture of the world to come.

We could assume that heaven is not a physical realm as we understand physical in defining the word heaven. Paul stated that “*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Co 15:50). Heaven is not physical after our definition of what is “flesh and blood.” In some way, the heaven to come is a place of “incorruption” and “immortality.” It is a place where our body that is designed for this present dwelling, must be changed in order to dwell in the heavenly realm (1 Co 15:50).



This present heavens and earth will pass away (2 Pt 3:10,11). Our present physical bodies will put on incorruption and immortality (1 Co 15:52-54). The fact that our present body will be changed in order to provide a new habitation for our spirit (2 Co 5:1-8), indicates that the new heavens and earth will be a tangible dwelling. That is, it will not be a place where we will float around in oblivion or space, detached from presence. The Bible does not teach the Buddha concept that we will eventually reach Nirvana, an existence where we become as a drop of water that enters the ocean and loses its individual identity but not its existence. We will maintain our identity, and in order to do such, we must in some way in heaven maintain our presence, our ability to maintain location. “Flesh and blood” that are now dependent upon this present physical environment will not inherit what is to come. But this does not mean that we will disappear into nothingness. We will be changed. This corruptible and mortal body will put on a “spiritual body” that will dwell in a new heavens and earth that is created for its presence (1 Co 15:43,44).

At the final coming of Jesus, it will be our physical bodies that will be changed, not our spiritual self. We will retain our spiritual identity. In other words, God will not transform us into some kind of “spiritual robot.” We will retain our spiritual identity that was fine tuned through the trials and sufferings of this world. This is not to say that we will not continue to grow spiritually in heaven. I do not see heaven as a place where we will cease spiritual growth. Since we will spiritually be in the beginning of the heavenly dwelling as we are when we ascend unto it, then we can at least assume that heaven will be as the nature and character of those spiritual and faithful saints we encounter in our every day life in this world. The nature of heaven, therefore, will at least be as the nature of the faithful of the church. We will dwell in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. But we will also dwell in the presence of a great cloud of faithful witnesses as Abraham, Paul, and those we presently see in

the church who are faithful to the Lord (See Hb 12:1). If heaven is just this, then certainly it is a place where all of us want to be.

It is not reasonable to assume that we will lose our free-moral agency in heaven. We will not become heavenly robots. Free moral agency demands choice and choice is the foundation for spiritual growth. It is thus not reasonable to assume that spiritual growth will cease upon entrance into the realm of the new heavens and earth. What is exciting about our vision of heaven is to view it from the perspective of having been there a million “earth years” from the time of its beginning. We must view the environment of heaven as the dwelling of saints who have had the opportunity for spiritual growth throughout millions of “earth years” of existence in the presence of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. We must view ourselves as being affected by the holiness of Deity. That effect will certainly spiritually grow us to heights beyond what we could possibly reach on this earth.

## **B. The description of heaven:**

The Bible makes numerous statements concerning what heaven is or will be like. Though it is difficult to fully understand the nature of what is beyond our experiences, the tranquil nature of this eternal environment is conveyed to some extent through our earthly defined words the Spirit uses in order to metaphorically take our minds beyond this world to a realm of wonder. When we assimilate the meaning of all these statements into the concept of heaven, then truly the words of Paul in Romans 8:18 are significant. *“For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.”* What Paul is saying is that the sufferings of this life are not sufficient to earn the tremendous reward of glory that is to come. We cannot suffer enough trials and persecutions, in other words, in order to be equally awarded the prize of the glory to come. The prize far outweighs any price

that we might have to pay. It is for this reason that heaven is received by grace, not works.

**1. *The environment of heaven:*** Heaven will be an environment different from this present world. It is often difficult, therefore, to describe it with words of this world. Regardless of the inadequacies of our words, the following are some of the key statements of the Holy Spirit that explain the environment of heaven that is to come for the disciple of Jesus:

#### HEAVEN IS ...

- a. Heaven is a place of **rest** (2 Co 5:1-10; Rv 14:13; Hb 4:1-4,9-11).
- b. Heaven is a place of **joy** (Mt 25:21; Lk 15:7,10; see Rv 7:13-17; 21:4).
- c. Heaven is a place of **righteousness** (2 Pt 3:13; see Rv 22:15).
- d. Heaven is a place of **no physical inflictions** (Rv 7:16,17; 21:4).
- e. Heaven is a place of **no death** (Lk 20:35,36; see Rv 20:14; 21:4).
- f. Heaven is a place of **no sorrow** (Rv 7:16,17; see Rv 21:4).
- g. Heaven is a place of **glory** (Rm 8:18; 2 Co 4:17; Cl 3:4).
- h. Heaven is a place of **worship** of God (Rv 4:5; 7:11-15; 21:22).
- i. Heaven is a place of **no night** (Rv 22:5).
- j. Heaven is **not a place of flesh and blood** (1 Co 15:50).
- k. Heaven is a place **where there is no need of marriage** (Lk 20:35,36).
- l. Heaven is a **dwelling place of angels** (Mt 18:10).

**2. *The reward of heaven:*** Heaven is special for those for whom it is prepared. It is a promised dwelling for God's sanctified who have endured the trials of this present world (Mt 5:10-12; Rm 8:18; 2 Co 4:17). Because the saints have endured and overcome this world by their faith, God will give to them the eternal habitation of heaven (See 1 Jn 5:4). They will have an existence of rest because of their toil in the world. For those who remain faithful to the Lord, heaven will be a place of eternal rest in the comfort of God. Disciples thus yearn for this environment in order to be with Jesus for eternity. It is their desire on earth to be with Jesus forever.

**3. *Metaphors of heaven:*** Through metaphorical statements

and words, the Holy Spirit seeks to excite our thinking concerning the nature, environment and character of heaven. Only through metaphor can He take our minds off this present world to focus our thinking on what is above the environment in which we live. The following are some of the beautiful metaphors of the Bible that the Spirit uses in order to explain the environment of heaven:

**a. Heaven is a dwelling for a *spiritual house*.** In contrast to the physical body we now possess, Paul promised that there is a “house” that is not made with hands which will clothe us in the eternal dwelling of heaven. *“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a **building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens**”* (2 Co 5:1). It is for this house that we yearn. *“... we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the **redemption of our body**”* (Rm 8:23; see 2 Co 5:2-8). We seek to put off this tabernacle in order to be clothed with a “**spiritual body**” that is from God (1 Co 15:44; 2 Co 5:3). We yearn for the redemption of this body out of its present environment of death, mortality and corruptibility.

The literal meaning of the word “house” means “dwelling.” A house is a place of location, presence, and substance. In a figurative significance, therefore, we will have a spiritual body that will give us presence in heaven. We will have a spiritual body in which to dwell. We will not be found naked, that is, without a bodily presence. Paul stated, *“For in this we groan, earnestly desiring **to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven**”* (2 Co 5:2). Therefore, we do not seek to be “unclothed” from bodily presence. We seek to be clothed with a spiritual body that will exist in an environment suited for its dwelling.

Paul continued, *“For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, **not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has***

*prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has given us the Spirit as a guarantee. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord” (2 Co 5:4-6).*

**b. Heaven is the place of the temple.** The word “temple” is used in the New Testament in reference to our body (1 Co 6:19) and the church (1 Co 3:16). Jesus even used the word metaphorically to refer to His own body while on earth (Mt 26:61; Jn 2:19). The word “temple” is also used in reference to God’s dwelling in heaven. John recorded, “**The temple of God** was opened in heaven, and the ark of His covenant was seen in His temple. And there were lightnings, noises, thunderings, and earthquake, and great hail” (Rv 11:19).

We would not assume that there is a literal temple of wood and stone in heaven. What John wants us to do is to look beyond the physical temple of Jerusalem to a meaning for which it stands. Jews sought to go to the temple of God in Jerusalem. It was symbolic of **God’s presence among His people**. It was a place of **solitude, worship** and **closeness** to God. All such feelings are with those who will be in heaven. Heaven is solitude, a place of worship and closeness to God. It is a place where God is among His people. It is a place where the righteous can “snuggle up” to the spiritual presence of God and feel the warm security of the divine presence.

**c. Heaven is a country.** The Hebrew writer referred to those of the Old Testament who sought a **homeland** (NKJV), or country (NIV) (Hb 11:14). They never found such in this world. “*But now they desire a better, that is, a heavenly country*” (Hb 11:16).

We seek our own homeland, one in which we can have identity and citizenship with fellow citizens. A homeland, or one’s own country, means a place of **permanent residence**, a place in which one is **not a stranger or pilgrim**. Heaven will be such to all who discover that this world is not their home. To those who “*confess that they*



are strangers and pilgrims on the earth,” there will be in heaven a dwelling of permanent citizenship and dwelling (Hb 11:13). Thus heaven is a place through which one does not journey as a foreigner. It is a dwelling in which citizenship is established and one does not have to wander anymore.

**d. Heaven is a city.** The Hebrew writer stated, “*For here we have no continuing city, but we seek the one to come*” (Hb 13:14; see Rv 22:14). This is the “*city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God*” (Hb 11:10). It is the city of God that has been prepared for those who have journeyed through the desert of life (Hb 11:16). Its foundations have been made by God and are thus sure and steadfast to last for eternity.

The Hebrew writer was discouraging the Hebrew Christians from returning to the law and the Jerusalem of this world. The earthly Jerusalem would be destroyed (Mt 24). However, the heavenly Jerusalem would never be destroyed. It will continue because it is built and made by God, not man.

In travel one does not make some bush in the countryside his destination. We do not travel simply to reach a signpost that states how far it is to the next stop. We seek the city, for in it there is refreshment, security and companionship of others. Once we reach the city we feel that we have accomplished the purpose for our journey. Heaven will be such for those who are strangers and pilgrims on a tempestuous journey through life. In heaven we will find that place of destination, rest and eternal companionship with those who have also struggled through the journey of life. In heaven we will find an existence (house) that is founded upon God Himself. God has built the foundations, and thus, the building is sure, stable and permanent. These foundations will not crack or give way as those foundations of this world that have been made by man’s hands.

**e. Heaven is an “abiding place.”** Jesus said to the disciples, “*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*” (Jn

14:2). The Greek word here translated “mansions” by the King James translators means “abiding places.” Heaven is not physical “castles in the sky,” but dwelling. We shall not be dislocated from presence, but will be abiding in the presence of God in an embodied state. What Jesus wanted the disciples to know was that there was a definite place reserved for them after this life. He thus seeks in John 14 to give them emotional security for the tremendous persecutions they were about to endure for His name.

The preceding five metaphors picture heaven as an existence beyond this world. It will be a realm in which our spiritual building (our resurrected body) will dwell. We will be in a worshipful relationship with the Father. We will be close to the presence of God. In this presence, we will have God’s preservation in order that we exist throughout eternity. We will no longer be “on the move” to another country. We will be where God destined us to be before the creation of the world. We will have arrived at the “city,” the intended destination of our journey. And thus, we will dwell or abide with God in a presence which has been prepared especially for us. This is the emotional security of the saints. This is the dream that brings Christians together in order to comfort one another in this journey of life.

### **C. The duration of heaven:**

As previously stated in chapter 10, there is no other Greek word the New Testament writers could have used to express the duration of eternity. Endless time is not a concept of our being. We think that we understand this concept, but such is far from the case of its reality. The inadequacy of the word *aionios* to define time without end is evident in the fact that it has a double meaning. Objective biblical interpreters will recognize this double meaning. In the Old Testament, emphasis was more on surety, or quality, and not time without end. Something could be “eternal,” and yet, emphasis might be on

the results of that which was considered unending. In reference to heaven, this qualitative meaning of *aionios* is very important. When the subject of heaven is discussed in the New Testament, it is usually in the context of giving encouragement to Christians who live in a world that does not bring peace of mind. The encouragement of **eternal** heaven, therefore, carried the meaning of a certain and sure place of rest and relief. The giving of the reward of heaven will be a one time happening after final judgment. However, the results of the giving will continue on without end.

While in the turmoil and stress of persecution and labor, we seek a secure place of relief. God talks of eternal heaven in the sense of promising the persecuted that there is certainly a final rest waiting for them. This is what is important. **The unending existence of the rest is simply understood.** The duration of time without end is evident in the context where heaven is discussed. Eternality is inherent of the realm of the new heavens and earth. In other words, when we discuss God, His nature is synonymous with time without end. Thus, when we discuss heaven, the realm of God's existence, its eternality is synonymous with the eternity of God who dwells in it.

The Bible teaches that Christians will be in the presence of God in the eternity of heaven. Only God is indigenously without end. He in and of Himself can only be that which has no beginning and no end. This quality of existence, therefore, must originate from Him. Therefore, when we talk about the unending existence of the righteous, we conclude that such originates from being in the presence of God who only is unending in existence. It will be from Him that we source our ability to continue in existence without end. Everyone else will not have this privilege.

Peter wrote "*to the Pilgrims of the Dispersion*" (1 Pt 1:1). His epistle was thus directed primarily to a Jewish audience. It is interesting to note that when he discusses the subject of heaven, he does not use the word *aionios*. He wrote that God has "*begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ*

from the dead, to an inheritance **incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you**" (1 Pt 1:3,4). It is possible that Peter does not use the word *aionios* with his Jewish audience in order not to be misunderstood. He is emphasizing the unending nature of an existence that is not subject to the terminal curses of all that we experience in this physical world. The inheritance that is reserved in heaven is not terminal. It is incorruptible, that is, imperishable. It cannot be defiled with sin. Neither will it fade away. Peter wants to emphasize the fact that this dwelling or existence is without end. It is an existence in which the Christian will dwell in the absence of persecution and conflict with those who are of this world.

The following are points that emphasize the unending duration of what is in store for the faithful. Consider them in view of the fact that these promises are given in the Bible in order to encourage Christians with an existence that is in the presence of God who is unending in nature and being.

**1. Heaven is sure and certain salvation.** The Hebrew writer stated concerning Jesus, "*And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him*" (Hb 5:9). It is certain that our salvation is sure in Christ, not because we earned such, but because of the grace of God (Ep 2:8,9). The certainty of our salvation is without end as we remain in the light (1 Jn 1:7). And since we will remain in the presence of God who is light, we will continue existence without end. In heaven we will remain in the light throughout eternity (Rv 22:5). We will be eternal because we will have a spiritual body from the Lord that is immortal because it will dwell in the light of God (2 Co 5:1-8). It will be eternal because it will be in the presence of our life-giving Creator. We will be sustained in heaven by the light of Jesus who will have eternally redeemed our body from this present physical world of mortality.

By His blood sacrifice Jesus has already redeemed (purchased) our soul for eternity (Ep 1:7). We have eternal life in Christ (1 Jn

5:11). Now we groan for the redemption of our body. “*We groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven*” (2 Co 5:2). We groan because we know that our present physical body is temporary. It does not have the capacity to dwell without end. In the context of the whole creation that also “*groans and labors with birth pains together until now*” (Rm 8:22), Paul says “*even we ourselves groan within ourselves, eagerly waiting for the adoption, the redemption of our body*” (Rm 8:23). We groan in this temporal body for an immortal, incorruptible body from God that will eternally dwell in the presence of God.

The “eternal salvation” of which the Hebrew writer speaks is a salvation we have received through the grace of God. The effects of the cleansing blood of Jesus will exist in our lives without end. Our timelessness, therefore, is dependent on God's work, not because we are inherently eternal. It is only by and through Him that we will exist in eternity.

Our soul has been redeemed. Now we wait for the redemption of our body which has been guaranteed by Jesus' resurrection from the dead (1 Co 15:20-22). Those who have been raised with Christ from the grave of baptism will be raised again with an eternal body from God (Rm 6:4,5; 1 Co 15:22). It will be in this body that we shall dwell in the presence of God, and thus, draw from His eternity in order that we dwell with Him without end.

**2. Heaven is sure and certain life.** Jesus said, “*I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die*” (Jn 11:25,26). “Death” is used in this context in contrast to life. Jesus added, “*Most assuredly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death*” (Jn 8:51). Death means separation and separation means that something will be terminated. In reference to our physical body, it is the termination of that body for it will never exist again as it did while alive on earth. The contrast of physical death is an immortal body that will not suffer physical

death. The contrast of spiritual death is eternal existence. Jesus came to give us hope for both an immortal body and eternal existence in the presence of God. In the eternal existence of heaven, there shall be no concept of separation from God, and thus, no death. There will be no concept of the termination of something that exists. He who believes on Jesus will never die from the presence of the Lord. He will not suffer the second death (See Rv 20:13,14; 21:8).

In the present life one's eternal life is certainly conditional. It is conditioned on the fact that one must continue in obedience to God. The apostate loses his eternal life in this life because he has turned away from God (2 Pt 2:20-22). He has lost his eternity because he has voluntarily given himself over to that which separates him from the One who can give him unending existence. Sin has separated him from God who only has the power to maintain our unending existence.

The surety of heaven's existence is defined in Matthew 25:46 as Jesus uses the Greek word *aionion* in making a contrast with the certain destruction of the disobedient. *"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."* The wicked will definitely receive punishment for their transgressions. Regardless of what one may believe on the duration of hell, there is one concept of hell that is without question. The wicked will suffer punishment in a tormenting hell that has been prepared for the devil and his angels. The unrighteous have nothing to which to look forward than the tormenting punishment of hell. On the other hand, **the righteous will definitely receive life because of their obedient faith.** As one destiny is certain, so is the other. The unrighteous will receive punishment that will have unending consequences. The righteous will receive life that will also have unending consequences.

Jesus spoke of the reward for those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers in this life, but will gain spir-itual houses, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers in this life, *"and in the*

*age to come, eternal life*” (Mk 10:29,30). Though the phrase “age to come” in the ministry context of Jesus could have reference to the gospel dispensation where the obedient have eternal life (1 Jn 5:11), we will certainly carry this life into heaven where we will dwell with all who remained faithful while the world existed. In Christ we have a worldwide extended family of brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers. This same spiritual family will go together into eternal life in heaven.

**3. *Heaven is a sure and certain place of abiding.*** John revealed, “*And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever*” (1 Jn 2:17). In contrast to the passing away of the world (2 Pt 3:10,11), the obedient will not so pass away. The will of God abides. We thus assume that those who submit to His word will also abide. There is an abiding existence planned for those who remain faithful to God’s word as opposed to a termination of this world. The righteous are destined for a habitation where there is no “passing away.”

**4. *Heaven is a sure and certain dwelling.*** Paul wrote, “*For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens*” (2 Co 5:1). This present physical body will die. After it dies, it will go through corruption, that is, decay away to dust. Paul contrasts the temporary nature of this earthly body with that “habitation” with which we will be clothed for heavenly dwelling. It will be a habitation that will not die as this earthly body. And since it will not die, it is a habitation that will exist with surety in the heavens. God is here making us a promise through Paul’s statement. “*Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*” (1 Co 15:50), thus, we want to be “... *further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life*” (2 Co 5:4). Therefore, we must be raised a “*spiritual body*” (1 Co 15:44) in order to dwell in the spiritual environment of heaven where our bodies will never go through corruption. In that dwelling our building from God cannot be destroyed.

This is God's promise.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul uses the words “corruptible” and “mortal” in reference to the body of this present world. Such terms have reference to what is temporary, that is, that which has end or is terminal. The words “corruptible” and “mortal” are used in contrast to “incorruptible” and “immortal.” “Incorruptible” and “immortal” refer to what is not terminal. These words indicate unending nature, that which will go on forever and ever. This is the nature of heaven. This is also the nature of our spiritual bodies that will exist in heaven. Heaven is a dwelling place for that spiritual body which has the nature of unending existence. Our resurrected bodies will be incorruptible and immortal because heaven is a place where decay and mortality do not exist. It will be such a place because we will dwell in the presence of God who is incorruptible and immortal.

**5. Heaven is being “always” with the Lord .** Paul revealed, *“And thus we shall always be with the Lord”* (1 Th 4:17; see 2 Co 5:8; Ph 1:23). He makes this statement in the context of the resurrection of the righteous and ascension in companionship with the living saints. The righteous shall “always” be with the Lord who exists in eternity. The righteous shall be in the **presence** of the Lord in an unending state of existence (See 2 Co 5:8).

We are servants of an eternal Lord who is the beginning and the end (Rv 1:8). Our Lord dwells in unending existence. Our dwelling, therefore, will be such. We shall unendingly be with Him in His presence. There shall be no end of our dwelling in co-existence with the Lord.

It is the presence of the Lord that gives us existence without end. The unrighteous shall be destroyed because they will be thrust from His presence (2 Th 1:7-9). However, the righteous will be in the presence of the Lord (2 Co 5:8). This presence maintains their endless existence.

In John 14:1-3 Jesus promised the apostles that He was going to



prepare a dwelling place for them. He used **future tense** in the statement as if it were a place to be prepared in the future. However, Paul wrote in the **past tense** when he revealed, “*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 Co 2:9). When Jesus was on earth with the apostles, it was not as if He had to go and construct some physical place for them in heaven. That which was in the future to the minds of the apostles before Jesus' ascension, was prepared by the time Paul wrote 1 Corinthians 2:9. The residence of disembodied spirits is there. However, the new heavens and earth are yet to come for our dwelling.

Heaven, the new heavens and earth, is a dwelling place for the resurrected and changed “spiritual body.” It is the place where soul and spirit will be embodied. In this sense, this heaven does not yet exist because the final resurrection of all saints has not yet happened. Only after the final resurrection, when we possess our “heavenly habitation from God,” will we dwell in that new heavens and earth. It is the dwelling for which we all long. It is in this habitation with Deity in an endless “time” that we seek to be.

## Epilogue

I am sure that the subject of this book has been very challenging to many people. Throughout history the doctrine of the eternal torture of the wicked by a loving God has been a precious belief to those who have a vindictive spirit against the unrighteous. However, I believe there are some serious inconsistencies in the teaching. Not only does the teaching reveal a questionable spirit of those who seek such vengeance against their persecutors, but it also attacks the nature of God. If we allow the Old Testament to define the nature of God, and that nature revealed through Jesus, then I have a problem with harboring a spirit of vindictiveness toward the wicked. The very nature of forgiveness that was uttered by Jesus on the cross in

reference to those who put Him there should give us a clue as to the true nature of God. The eternal torture of the wicked is contrary to this forgiving nature of God. It is for this reason that we should question any doctrine that would lead us to believe that God has this group of souls somewhere off in eternity that He is torturing forever and forever. Such a teaching seems to be totally contrary to the spirit of forgiveness that is at the very heart of the nature of God.

Justice must be measured out. But justice does not assume eternal torture. In fact, eternal torture would negate justice. How can any justice prevail throughout eternity with the existence of a special torture chamber for the wicked that is maintained by God? Can there be any real justice when every tooth has been extracted from the mouth of the wicked? If it is “tooth for a tooth,” then certainly once the punishment has matched the crime, the result is the end of the criminal.

I have found that theologians have a difficult time facing these contradictions. Too many sermons on hell have to be discarded. Too many religious social cliques have to be ignored. The intimidation of too many misguided religionists have to be ignored in order to maintain such a teaching. Nevertheless, the material of this book must be considered. In order to be consistent in interpreting words as *aionios*, one will have to come to a decision concerning the use of the word in reference to the punishment of the wicked. Past sermons, one’s present religious fraternity, or the religious groups for which one presently preaches cannot determine the truth of what is revealed in the word of God. If we would be zealous for the truth of the word of God, we have no option but to accept that which the Bible consistently teaches. I pray that the material of this book has challenged you to reconsider what I believe to be a very consistent teaching concerning the justice of a loving and forgiving God who seeks the best for His sons who endure the struggles of this world.