

The Mystery of Heaven

Do the Righteous “Go to Heaven” When They Die?

Do Christians go to heaven when they die? Is heaven the reward of the Saved? Do you have an immortal soul? What’s all this business about heaven? What do the Scriptures really teach about the fate of the righteous and the wicked? Just what is heaven, anyway?

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The apostle Paul wrote, “I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago – whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows – such a one was caught up to the third heaven. 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” (II Cor.12:2-4).

Isaiah, Ezekiel and Daniel all saw glorious visions of heaven and God’s throne in heaven (Isa.6, Ezek.1, 10, Dan.7).

Many believe heaven is where the righteous go when they die. But just what IS “heaven”? Does God promise the saints will go to heaven when they die?

What Do You Mean, “Heaven”?

But is heaven really the place where good people go when they die? Interestingly, Jesus Christ declared, “No one has ascended into heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13).

He also declared, “No one has seen God at any time. The only begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, He has declared Him” (John 1:18).

If no one has gone to heaven but Christ, what happened to all the righteous who died since the time of Adam? Is an eternity in heaven really the destiny of the righteous?

Just what do we mean by “heaven,” anyway? What is the destiny of man?

Many people believe that the saints will play harps for all eternity and gaze upon the face of God in heaven. They believe that when a man dies, his soul flies off to heaven to be with Christ forever.

But the Scriptures nowhere say such a thing!

Let’s understand this mystery!

The Mystery of Man

Let’s investigate this matter and go back to Genesis 2:7. “And the Lord (Yehovah, Elohim) formed man of the dust of the ground AND breathed into his nostrils the breath [*ruach*] of life and man BECAME a living soul (*nephesh*).” He became a living soul, or creature, or being – not an immortal soul; he became a living, breathing soul. .” So we are formed of dust.

When God put the breath in his nostrils, Adam became a living being. The word *ruach* is also translated spirit, so the same word means breath and spirit in Hebrew.

But what happens when we die?

God’s Word tells us God planted a garden in Eden, and in that garden was a special tree that man was not to eat of its fruit – the “tree of the knowledge of good and evil” (Gen.2:17). God said, “For in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (same verse).

What is “death”? It is simply the cessation of life. Adam and Eve transgressed God’s Law, and partook of the forbidden fruit, and incurred the death penalty. God told them, after they had sinned, “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” (Gen.3:19).

The apostle Paul wrote, “For the wages of sin is DEATH, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:23).

ONLY God Has Immortality

Human beings are made of dust. We are not immortal beings. Sin cuts us off from God and His immortality. And we have all sinned, much like Adam and Eve. We,

too have been deceived, and seduced into sin, at various points in our lives, by the cunning subterfuge of Satan the devil.

The apostle Paul says, “He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, WHO ALONE HAS IMMORTALITY, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power” (I Timothy 6:14-16). Notice! It is only God “who alone has immortality.”

We don't have an immortal soul, therefore. But we do have a “spirit” which God gives to each one of us. God gave us part of His spirit essence when we became a living, breathing human being, made in His image. He gave us a spark of Himself, which we also call “human spirit”, but it's really God's Spirit given to us – a portion of His spirit.

What Happens When We Die

Now in Ecclesiastes 12:7 – notice, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was.” But notice – “And the spirit will return to God who gave it.” Every man, every woman, every baby, every child has a spirit given to it, or them, by God and when they die that spirit returns to God, to His care, His safe keeping, His control and He keeps it until the resurrection.

Then at the resurrection that spirit is joined with a new glorious immortal body.

Solomon goes on, “For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals for all is vanity. All go to one place: (that's *sheol*, the grave, where the body turns to dust) all are from the dust, and all return to dust” (Eccl.3:19-20).

But now notice verse 21, Solomon says, “who knows the spirit of the sons of men, which goes upward, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?” So we just saw in chapter 12:7, that the spirit of men goes back to God who gave it. Where does the spirit of animals go? We don't know.

The Righteous Dead

We read in the book of Revelation that there will be a coming time of great tribulation on the earth, just before the return of the Messiah. At that time, a mysterious event will occur. It occurs during the opening of the fifth “seal” of the prophecy of Revelation, following the riding of the four horsemen of the apocalypse.

We read the following account: “When He opened the fifth seal, I saw *under the altar the SOULS of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’* Then a

white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should *REST a little longer*, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed” (Rev.6:9-11).

Notice! Here the souls of the righteous dead are pictured as “crying out” to God in anguish, and they are told to “rest a little longer.”

Certainly, it does not seem from this passage that the righteous dead are completely dead and unconscious, in the graves! What goes on here? What is this speaking about? How could this be?

Just what is the state of the dead, anyway? Does this passage prove that we all have an “immortal soul” that survives the death of the body?

Those who believe that the dead are simply “gone” – out of existence – when they die, and have no consciousness whatsoever until the resurrection, have great difficulty explaining this verse! Like the verses in Isaiah 14, and Ecclesiastes 3, it seems to be quite clear that although the bodies of the dead are long perished and turned to dust, there is still something remaining of the deceased which continues in existence, and which has *limited consciousness, ability to discern events, and to communicate!*

Those who believe there is no existence of any kind after death until the resurrection are forced to conclude that these strange passages in Scripture are mere allegories and are not literal fact. Yet, there is no evidence in the context that these passages are allegorical, and not true reality! What is the solution to this mystery?

When we die, are we “dead,” totally unconscious, just like any animal? Or is there a difference between human dead and animals?

The State of the Dead

Solomon wrote on this issue. He declared, “For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust” (Eccl.3:19-20). Sounds like when we die, we are just like any animal. But whoever heard of a dead animal speaking to or greeting another dead animal when it dies and is buried? What is the difference here?

Solomon goes on, “Who knows the *spirit* of the sons of men, *which goes upward*, and the spirit of the animal, which goes down to the earth?” (verse 21).

Here we read that human beings have a “spirit.” It goes upward to God when they die. But the spirit of animals goes downward. However, the Septuagint has this a little different, and says, “Who has seen the spirit of the sons of man, whether it goes upward? and the spirit of the beast, whether it goes downward to the earth?”

Adding more to the mystery, Solomon wrote, “Whatsoever thine hand shall find to do, do with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in Hades, whither thou goest” (Eccl.9:10, LXX). The New King James Version has this: “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.”

The dead body of both animals and men are consumed in the grave by worms and bugs, and eaten, and eventually turns to dust. Just as God said. But what of the “spirit” of a man? Solomon wrote, “No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, and no one has power in the day of death” (Eccl.8:8).

Solomon also wrote, “As you do not know what is the way of the wind [“spirit”), or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not know the works of God who made everything” (Ecc.11:5). He concluded that at death, “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and *the spirit will return to God who gave it*” (Eccl.12:7).

The body of the dead, then, is put in a grave – a hole in the ground – and covered up with dirt. Bodies are usually put in a casket, first, of course, but not always, as in wars when many dead have to be buried on or near a battlefield. But, Solomon says, the “spirit” of each man, when he dies, returns to God who gave it to him. In the grave, as Solomon wrote, there is no knowledge, or wisdom, device, or life – just a dead corpse, rotting and returning to dust.

However, the Scriptures interpret the Scriptures. A parable given by Jesus Christ tells us the truth about heaven and hell and what happens when we die and thereafter.

Lazarus and the Rich Man

In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus gives the parable of Lazarus and the Rich man. We read: “There was a certain rich man [Jesus meant there really was] who was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day. . . there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate full of sores, and desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. . . and it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died and was buried; and in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame. . .”

This story says Lazarus died and was carried to Abraham's “bosom.”” What exactly is a bosom? If we can find out what a “bosom” is -- in this case Abraham's -- we will know where the beggar was taken.

Any dictionary will tell you that a bosom is the breast of a human being, with the

arms as an enclosure; a loving embrace by the arms of one person about another; an intimate relationship. Lazarus then, was carried into an intimate relationship with Abraham. Lazarus is pictured here as a Gentile who received salvation, by becoming Christ's follower or disciple. Notice "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye *Abraham's* seed (children), and *heirs* according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29).

Through Christ, Gentiles may become Abraham's children. Through faith we all become "the children of Abraham" (Gal. 3:7).

The Promise to Abraham

Abraham is an heir of God. God gave Abraham a promise and his children will become heirs of it. But what was this promise that Abraham will receive, and the beggar who is his heir?

In Genesis 12 we read where God told Abraham of the land of Canaan: ". . . Unto thy seed will I give this land." The land of Canaan is called Israel/Palestine today. Again, later God promised Abraham: "For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed FOREVER" (Gen. 13:15).

The promise was not heaven. The promise God gave to Abraham was the land of Israel/Palestine, on this earth. It was forever, so the promise given to Abraham and his seed (which the beggar became spiritually) included eternal life, and eternal inheritance on planet earth!

The beggar, like all Christians, is an heir to the promise to Abraham.

In Acts 7:1-5, Stephen, the first Christian martyr, speaks of Abraham: "And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our Father Abraham . . . and said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into THE LAND which I will show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans. . . into this land, wherein ye now dwell [the Holy Land]. And He gave him none inheritance in it . . . yet He promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him."

This truth is also stated in Hebrew 11:8-13: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise . . . These all died in faith, NOT HAVING RECEIVED THE PROMISES, but having seen them afar off."

In John 8:52 we read "Abraham is dead" -- Notice: Abraham was not up in heaven, but dead, in the days of Christ!

Jesus said Abraham would receive the promises, including eternal life, through

the RESURRECTION: “But *as touching the resurrection* of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living” (Matt. 22:31-32).

Jesus told the Pharisees they would see Abraham in the Kingdom because Abraham, now dead, will be RESURRECTED from the dead (Luke 13:28).

Abraham is dead, and so is the beggar. When will they receive the promises? Both will receive the promises at the resurrection when Christ returns to set up His kingdom: “When the Son of man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matt. 25:31-34).

Carried by Angels

In Luke's account we read where Lazarus was to be carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. We know that Lazarus is in a state of sleep as is Abraham awaiting the return of Christ when the resurrection will occur. In Matthew 24:31 we read that Christ shall “send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds” -- out of their graves in a RESURRECTION. Lazarus and Abraham are to be carried by the angels through the air to meet Christ, at His return.

There is no doubt as to how the Bible uses the word “bosom.” In Isaiah 40:11 God shows he will care for His people as a shepherd cares for his sheep, which He will carry “in his bosom.”

Jesus says He was in the bosom *of* the Father (John 1:18), enjoying the Father's blessings and close relationship.

To be in one's bosom is to have that one's love and protection, and share his blessings and inheritance. So it will be at the RESURRECTION that Lazarus will be in Abraham's bosom.

The Rich Man in “Hell”

What did Jesus mean when He said “. . . the rich man also died, and was buried; and in *hell* he lift up his eyes, being in torments . . .” (Luke 16:22-23).

The Greek word used for “hell” in this verse is *hades* which I have already shown to mean “grave” or “tomb” or “abode of the dead.” Jesus said, “When the rich man lifts up his eyes he will see Lazarus and Abraham.” Lazarus and Abraham will not be together till the resurrection -- this is when the rich man will open up his eyes and see them.

Daniel speaks of the resurrection of the just, and of the unjust: “And many of them that sleep [their eyes are closed while sleeping] in the dust of the earth [their graves -- buried -- in *hades*], shall awake [lift up their eyes] some to everlasting life [Lazarus and Abraham] and some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Dan. 12:2).

Jesus said: “. . . the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto THE RESURRECTION OF LIFE: and they that have done evil [including the rich man], unto the RESURRECTION OF JUDGMENT” (John 5:28-29).

Here Jesus speaks of TWO DIFFERENT, SEPARATE RESURRECTIONS. The first resurrection will be of the righteous at Christ's coming and the resurrection of judgment will occur one thousand years later -- after the Millennium!

So, while Jesus in speaking about the rich man and Lazarus, did not say WHEN the rich man will open his eyes and be resurrected out of his grave, other scriptures do reveal that it will be after the Millennium! This story of Lazarus and the rich man does not contradict everything else we have read in the Bible. It does not support an eternal, subterranean, pagan “hell” or the “hell” of Dante's *Inferno*, or the Roman Catholic concept of “hell.” Not at all! Notice further!

What Is This Flame?

When the rich man is resurrected after the Millennium, along with the rest of the “wicked,” he will open his eyes and see Lazarus and Abraham. But he will also see a mighty wall of fire, a massive, incredible inferno of flames and billowing smoke -- a tremendous fire, approaching him. What is this fire -- this “flame” which torments him? In what sense is he “tormented”?

This is no doubt the Age-ending, incredible “Gehenna” fire -- the “lake of fire” -- that God Almighty will use to destroy the incorrigibly wicked! This is the second death, which will be by incredible fire. This death is for all eternity! ETERNAL PUNISHMENT -- but not eternal punishing!

When the rich man opens his eyes, he will see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom -- his embrace. He will also see this awful flame of fire -- this lake of fire which is about to destroy him forever! He becomes terrified. His mouth suddenly becomes *very dry*, and his tongue sticks to his mouth. The rich man cries out in mental anguish, “Father Abraham have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.”

The rich man will be in a condition of WEEPING AND GNASHING OF TEETH at this time, for he knows he is about to be burned up and destroyed! Jesus said this same thing to the Pharisees in Luke 13:27-28: “Depart from me, ye workers of iniquity. There

shall be *weeping and gnashing of teeth*, when ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the Kingdom of God, and *you yourselves thrust out*”

What Is the Great Gulf?

Jesus continues the story of the rich man in verse 25, describing what Abraham would say to the rich man. That he had his reward in material things he sought and craved, in this life, and because of his wicked choices, he is now doomed!

The "great gulf", mentioned in verse 26 by Abraham, represents the power and fact of IMMORTALITY which separates the righteous from the wicked. The fact of immortality prevents the righteous from being burned in Gehenna fire, but the wicked don't have immortality – so the wicked will not escape the penalty of death by the flames of Gehenna-hell fire.

The rich man, realizing he is doomed, in verse 27, now asks if Abraham would send Lazarus to his father's house to plead with his brothers, lest they come to his terrible fate. Abraham replied they had the writings of Moses and the prophets. But the rich man realized they would not hear these Scriptures. “Nay, Father Abraham," he screamed, "but if one went unto them *from the dead* they will repent!” (Verse 30).

Obviously, the rich man, having just come up out of his grave, having been DEAD and insensate for untold hundreds or thousands of years, had absolutely not the vaguest idea -- no idea at all -- of the passage of time while he had been dead. He *assumed* his brothers were still alive. In talking to Abraham, it seemed to him only a split second between his death and his resurrection. Therefore he assumed his brothers were still alive.

The rich man, however, knew Lazarus was RAISED FROM THE DEAD! This one statement proves that the whole experience of Lazarus and the rich man was given by Jesus to show the *truth of the resurrection* -- not to teach any immediate going to “heaven” or “hell” at the instant of death. It demonstrates the mortality of the wicked, who will die, and be DEAD for all eternity -- as opposed to the eternal life which will be enjoyed by the righteous, such as Lazarus.

This amazing parable of Christ does not teach an eternal punishing in an imaginary “hell” of Dante, but rather the annihilation of the wicked in Gehenna fire at the end of the age!

"Unquenchable Fire"

Another much misunderstood scripture is Mark 9:43 where Jesus speaks of “the fire that never shall be quenched.” Does this mean the fire burns forever?

Not at all. Take a match, light it and set a piece of paper on fire. Let it burn. Don't put it out, or snuff it out. Just let the paper burn, until it burns up. Soon it will burn itself

out. Now, what do you have? A burned-up piece of paper. But did you put it out? Did you "quench" it? No. You left it unquenched. It was *not* quenched. Not at all!

Even so, the final *Gehenna* fire will not be "'quenched," or "put out." Nevertheless, in time, *it will burn itself out when the wicked and all their wicked works are burned up!*

Any fire will go out when it runs out of fuel. That's the way the final *Gehenna* fire will be. In time, it will naturally burn itself out!

There you have it. The fate of the wicked, in the Bible, is death -- the second death in the lake of fire. The wicked will die (Ezek. 18:4, 20). Their consciousness will be destroyed for all eternity. They will have no feelings, thoughts, emotions. They will be dust and ashes under the feet of the righteous! As we have seen before, man is composed of dust. He is dust. He does not have an immortal soul abiding within him. Therefore, when the wicked are destroyed, there will be nothing left of them to show they ever existed.

Only those who obey God -- who really repent of their sins, and turn to God in true heartfelt repentance and obey His commandments, accepting Christ Jesus as their Saviour and Redeemer -- will inherit *eternal life* (John 3:16). True Christians and saints of God will receive this gift at the return of Jesus Christ, at the "first resurrection."

All others will come up in an awesome general resurrection of all the remaining dead, at the END of the Millennial age. Some -- perhaps the vast majority who ever lived, even billions of people -- will learn God's truth, repent, and qualify for eternal life.

But the truly wicked, the incorrigibly wicked, those who demonstrated by their wicked and malicious works that they would never fit in God's Kingdom, will be punished by being cast into *Gehenna* fire. They will die the "second death." For them, there will be *no more resurrection -- ever!*

Do you see? God has placed two paths before us. One leads to eternal life. One leads to eternal death. Those are the two alternatives God places before you: *eternal life* on the one hand, and everlasting *death* on the other hand. And God says: "'CHOOSE'!"

Almighty God thunders, to every human being: "I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you *LIFE AND DEATH, blessing and cursing*: therefore *CHOOSE LIFE*, that both thou and thy seed may live" (Deuteronomy 30:19).

The TRUTH of God Revealed

Millions today suppose that the righteous go to heaven when they die -- and abide in the presence of Almighty God. But is this very common belief really Biblical?

If the Bible teaches that the righteous go to heaven when they die, then certainly

such Biblical heroes as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, David, and Daniel must be in heaven right now. Yet, hundreds of years after all those great men died, and when Jesus began his public ministry, he remarked to his disciples, "*No man* hath ascended up to heaven . . ." (John 3:13).

After the death and resurrection of Christ, the apostle Peter told a large crowd of people in Jerusalem, on Pentecost, A.D. 30, that David "is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day." He added, so that he would not be misunderstood, "For David is NOT ascended into the heavens . . ." (Acts 2:29, 34).

These two scriptures disprove the fond illusions and cherished beliefs of millions of people who assume that the Bible teaches that the righteous *go to heaven* when they die!

David was a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22). Yet the Scriptures plainly state that he did NOT "go to heaven." The only one who ever "went to heaven" other than Christ was the Devil, and he was immediately kicked out!

Then where did David go? What really happened to David and the Biblical patriarchs?

Let's strip away the spiritual blinders Satan has used to hide the truth, and see what God's Word has to say on this subject.

The Reward of the Righteous

To begin to answer these questions, the apostle Paul made an important statement in the book of Galatians. He asserted: "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and *heirs* according to the promise" (Galatians 3:29).

Christians, then, are Abraham's spiritual "children" or "seed." They are to inherit something that was "promised." To learn what Christians are to inherit, then we must see what was promised to Abraham.

The biography of Abraham is recorded in the book of Genesis. Abraham left the sophisticated city of Ur of the Chaldees to journey to the land of Canaan toward the west. He determined to obey God and do the things He commanded.

God, in return for Abraham's obedience and submission to his way, made a specific promise to Abraham and his descendants. "And the Lord said unto Abram . . . Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: For all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever" (Genesis 13:14-15).

God later confirmed the promises to Abraham (Genesis 18:18; 22:15-18) and made the same promise to Isaac, Abraham's son (Genesis 26:2-5). Notice that this

promise primarily included an inheritance of land forever. In order to inherit this land forever, eternal life also must have been part of the promise!

The promise made to Abraham, then, was the land of Canaan, which he and his "seed" would inherit for all eternity. Later, however, God expanded this promise to include the whole world. The apostle Paul in Romans 4:13 called Abraham "the heir of the *world*," not just of the land of Canaan.

This, then, is the promise which all Christians, as the seed of Abraham, are to inherit!

New Testament Evidence

This same promise is reaffirmed in the New Testament. Jesus Christ plainly told his disciples: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall *inherit the earth*" (Matthew 5:5).

In the book of Revelation, we read the crystal clear statement: ". . . thou [Christ] wast slain and by thy blood didst ransom men for God from every tribe and tongue and people and nation, and hast made them a kingdom and priests to our God, and *they shall reign on earth*" (Revelation 5:9-10, RSV).

The Psalms of David also make this truth clear. David wrote: "For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth" (Psalm 37:9). This entire psalm is full of similar references. Verse 29 adds: "The righteous shall inherit the *land*, and *dwell therein for ever*."

However, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, and all the rest of the patriarchs are still waiting to receive what was promised to them. To this very day, they have not yet inherited the earth.

In the book of Hebrews we read: "By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should *after* receive for an inheritance, obeyed. . . . By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise. . ." (Hebrews 11:8-9).

Notice further that these all "died in faith, *not* having received the promises" (verse 13). Also: "And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise. . ." (verse 39).

Clearly, then, the idea of the righteous going to heaven when they die is not Biblical.

What does God promise to the saints, and when will they receive His promise? What about those who will receive salvation, and eternal life? When will this happen? Just how will the plan of God work out?

Let's turn to the Book of Revelation, and see what God says! The truth is far more wonderful, and more glorious, than you have ever imagined possible!

First of all, when will the patriarchs, like Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, along with Moses, Enoch, Samuel, Joshua, David, and the Old Testament servants of God, along with true Christians -- those who truly follow the teachings of Jesus Christ, repent of their sins, and accept him as Saviour -- receive the promises? When will we receive ETERNAL LIFE and SALVATION?

The Incredible Resurrection

The apostle Paul stated an important truth in the resurrection chapter of the Bible - he declared in no uncertain words, speaking of the hope of the resurrection: "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But *every man in his own order*: Christ the firstfruits [the literal Greek says "firstfruit," singular, not plural]; *afterward they that are Christ's AT HIS COMING. Then cometh the END*, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father . . ." (I Cor.15:22-24).

Notice! When Christ returns from heaven, the SAINTS will inherit their reward! Many Scriptures spell out this wonderful truth. In this same chapter, Paul goes on, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, AT THE LAST TRUMPET: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (vs.51-52). Paul explained further to the Thessalonians, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven, with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God: and the *dead in Christ shall RISE FIRST*: Then we which are alive and remain shall be *caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air*: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess.4:16-17).

The "last trumpet" is the seventh trumpet, blown at the second coming of Christ the Messiah! In the book of Revelation, we read the words of the apostle John about this awesome, mind-boggling, staggering event: "And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, the kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ: and he shall reign for ever and ever. . . . And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, *and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldst give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, both small and great*; and shouldst destroy them that destroy the earth" (Rev.11:15-18).

At the Olivet prophecy, Jesus Christ Himself declared of this awesome event, when He returns to this earth: "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man *COMING IN THE CLOUDS OF HEAVEN with power and great glory*. And he shall send his angels, with a great *sound of a trumpet*, and they shall *gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven [the sky] to the other*" (Matt.24:30-31).

This is the FIRST RESURRECTION! It occurs at the second coming of Christ!

John writes of this incredible event: “And I saw thrones, and they [the saints, the ones resurrected at Christ's coming!] sat on them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and *THEY LIVED AND REIGNED WITH CHRIST A THOUSAND YEARS. But the rest of the dead lived not again UNTIL THE THOUSAND YEARS WERE FINISHED. This is the FIRST resurrection*” (Rev.20:4-5).

This is the *first* resurrection! Of that, there can be no doubt whatsoever! It is the resurrection of the saints at the coming of Christ, at the beginning of the Millennium, or thousand year reign of Christ!

John goes on, regarding these saints, and those who are in the first resurrection: “Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall *reign with him a thousand years*” (v.6).

When Christ returns to this earth, the patriarchs, prophets, saints, and truly converted Christians will be raised from their graves. At that time, Jesus Christ – Yeshua – will reward the righteous, and they will then assist him in ruling over the entire earth for 1,000 years (see Revelation 20:4; Daniel 2:44 and 7:27).

But what then? What about the “rest of the dead” – all the billions upon billions of people who ever lived? And what about the “wicked”? What does the Word of God say about them?

The SECOND RESURRECTION!

In the 20th chapter of Revelation we find a brief summary of God's plan for the future. When Christ returns, Satan the devil will be bound (Rev.20:1-3), the saints will be resurrected, and they will reign on the earth with Him for one thousand years (verses 4-5).

“*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished,*” the Apostle John writes (verse 5). Therefore, at the end of the thousand years, all those who lived and died, who were not saints, will be resurrected. This tremendous resurrection, of untold billions of people, is recounted in verses 11 and 12:

“And I saw a GREAT WHITE THRONE, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And *I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God;* and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the *book of life:* and the dead were *judged* out of those things which were

written in the books, *according to their works.*”

Notice. This is a resurrection to life. The book of LIFE was opened. Those coming up in this resurrection will be judged “according to their works”! This is not a resurrection to condemnation – but it is a resurrection to JUDGMENT!

Who are all these people who will stand before God at the END of the Millennial reign of Christ and the saints? They will be the uncountable billions who lived and died in this life, who did not qualify to be in the FIRST RESURRECTION, at the return of Christ – to be a part of the firstfruits of God! The vast majority of them never even had a chance for salvation – they grew up, lived and died in a society which didn't have the knowledge of God, or His truth. They are those who lived and died in ignorance, those who never really understood, or in many cases even heard the *true* Gospel of Christ during their lives!

At that future time they will be judged *according to their works* – *how they LIVED* – *that is, what they DID with the limited understanding and knowledge that they HAD!*

They will be judged HOW? “**ACCORDING TO THEIR WORKS**”! – *that is, by their DEEDS! God will weigh them in the scales, as it were, and judge them according to what they did with what they had!*

Paul explains this truth very clearly. Many who come up in this resurrection will be those dead who never understood God's Law – who lived and died in ignorance and darkness. Some of them, because of their conscience which God gave them, were basically “good” people. Paul writes about them in Romans, chapter 2, where he says:

“For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, *do by nature those things contained in the law*, these, having not the law, *are a law unto themselves*; which shew forth the work of the law written *in their hearts*, *their CONSCIENCE bearing witness*, and their thoughts the meanwhile accusing or else excusing one another;) in the day when God shall JUDGE *the secrets of men* by Jesus Christ . . .”
(Rom.2:14-16).

This will be a time of judgment -- but not a time of total condemnation. Many will be given an opportunity then for salvation -- to live out their natural lives, with the knowledge of God, and will be judged according to how they perform. This would include little babies, who had died in infancy, young children, and even elderly people who simply never really understood God's truth, about His Law, or understood the identity of the Messiah, or His teachings!

How will these be judged? Yeshua tells us the standard of judgment He will use. Notice His own words:

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels

with him, then shall he sit on the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered ALL NATIONS: and he shall *separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats*: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left.

“Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, *inherit the kingdom prepared for you* from the foundation of the world: *for I was hungered, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: Naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me.*

“Then shall the righteous say unto him, Lord, *WHEN* saw we thee an hungred, and fed thee? or thirsty, and gave thee drink? When saw we thee a stranger, and took thee in? or naked, and clothed thee? Or when saw we thee sick, or in prison, and came unto thee?

“And the King shall answer and say unto them, Verily I say unto you, *Inasmuch as ye have done it to ONE OF THE LEAST OF THESE, my brethren, ye have DONE IT UNTO ME*” (Matt.25:31-40).

Do you see? The Messiah will judge those who come up in this vast resurrection “according to their works” – according to how much love and compassion and mercy they showed to their neighbor – their fellow man!

He will judge them according to what they *did* with the heart, knowledge, and understanding and opportunities that they *had*!

The Final Resurrection

But now, notice what will happen to those who don't qualify for eternal life -- those who are so evil that they lose out on salvation, and whose final judgment is to be destroyed and put to death in the lake of Gehenna fire. This same Great White Throne judgment scene continues, in Revelation 20, in the verses which immediately follow:

“And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [*hades*, meaning “the grave”] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [*hades*] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And *whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire*” (Rev. 20:13-15).

Here are those of the second resurrection who do NOT qualify for eternal life – those who have been incorrigibly wicked. They will be cast into Gehenna fire!

As Malachi wrote: “For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall BURN THEM UP, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor

branch. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall *tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet* in the day that I do this, saith the LORD of hosts” (Mal.4:1-3).

This awesome fire that will consume and annihilate the wicked is called the “second death” (Rev. 20:14). It is the FINAL DEATH from which there is no resurrection! This death is the penalty of sin (Rom. 6:23). It is the death Christ Jesus came to spare all of us from!

John writes, “But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death” (Rev. 21:8).

The Tremendous Holocaust

What about this “hell fire?” Where will it be? How hot? How big? How long will it last?

Peter helps us understand. “But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the *works* that are therein shall be *burned up*”(II Peter 3:10).

Notice verse 7: “But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the *day of judgment* and perdition of ungodly men”!

This great fire is the same as the lake of fire, mentioned in Revelation, when God judges the incorrigibly wicked. It will sweep around the entire earth! The elements themselves will be dissolved, the surface of the earth will be purged and consumed with tremendous heat. Every remnant of man's sin, every sign of iniquity, every last trace of evil will be devoured by the heat of this fire.

Then there will be new heavens and a new earth, in which the immortal, everliving sons of God will live and reign, throughout all eternity (Rev. 21).

But the incorrigibly wicked, those who deliberately persist in rebellion against God when they *know* better, will have no part in it. They will be annihilated in the lake of fire! God will never entrust the awesome powers of the God-Family to rebellious, selfish, spiteful, proud and perverse men who have repudiated His love and despised His government throughout their lives.

But this is not the end. The plan of God continues to unfold!

“New Heavens and a New Earth”

The apostle John records: “And I saw a NEW HEAVEN and a NEW EARTH: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away: and there was no more sea. And I John saw the holy city, NEW JERUSALEM, coming down from God out of heaven, *prepared as a bride adorned for her husband*. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, *I MAKE ALL THINGS NEW*” (Revelation 21:1-5).

John then describes this magnificent “holy city,” the New Jerusalem, “descending out of heaven from God, having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal: and had a great wall and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel . . . And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. And the city lieth *foursquare*, and the length is as large as the breadth: and he measured the city with the reed, *twelve thousand furlongs* [that is, approximately 1,500 miles to a side]. *The length and the breadth and the height of it are EQUAL*” (Rev.21:10-16).

John continues his description: “And the NATIONS *of them which are SAVED* shall walk in the light of it: and the *kings of the earth* do bring their glory into it. And the gates of it shall not be shut at all by day: for there shall be no night there. And they shall bring the *glory and honor of the nations into it*. And there shall in no wise come into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie: but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life” (Rev.21:24-27).

Here the rest of “saved” mankind is described -- those who will enter the Kingdom of God, during the Millennial reign of Messiah, and, those who are resurrected to mortal life to be given their chance for salvation after the Millennium, during the “Great White Throne” judgment period -- the “Great Day of Salvation” represented by Hoshana Rabbah, the seventh and final day of the Feast of Tabernacles.

However, the term “saved” also has a “present” connotation to it -- that is, the Greek word “saved” also means “those who are *in a saved condition*,” or “those who are *in the process of being saved*” (see I Cor.1:18, 15:2, II Cor.2:15, II Tim.1:9). Therefore, this verse also has another incredible meaning and fantastic implication. Let’s notice!

The Prophecy of Isaiah

Isaiah the prophet also describes this incredible scene of the new heavens and the

new earth. He prophesied, in chapter 65, of God creating the new heavens and earth, as something to be rejoiced in FOREVER -- that is, for all eternity! But notice what *else* he says about this stupendous, fantastic time. Isaiah quotes God as saying:

“For, behold, I create NEW HEAVENS AND A NEW EARTH: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind. But *be ye GLAD and REJOICE FOREVER* [Hebrew, *olam*, meaning forever, eternity, literally, “to the vanishing Point” or “time out of sight”] in that which I CREATE: for, behold, I create JERUSALEM A REJOICING, and her people a joy.

“And I will rejoice in Jerusalem [God Himself will rejoice!!!], and joy in my people: and the voice of weeping shall be no more heard in her, nor the voice of crying.

“There shall be no more thence an INFANT OF DAYS, nor an old man that hath not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; *but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed* [judged and condemned to the lake of fire].

“And they shall build houses and inhabit them; and they shall plant vineyards, and eat the fruit of them . . . for as the days of a tree are the days of my people, and mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands. They shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth for trouble; FOR THEY ARE THE *SEED [OFFSPRING, CHILDREN] OF THE BLESSED OF THE LORD, and their offspring with them* The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock: and dust shall be the serpent's meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in ALL MY HOLY MOUNTAIN, saith the LORD” (Isa.65:17-25).

Notice! This passage is clearly dual in application. It describes the Messianic Kingdom of Jesus Christ, Yeshua, who is coming soon to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, as the fulfillment of hundreds of Messianic prophecies. But it also describes in a vivid and clear sense the “new heavens and new earth” (Isa.65:17). It clearly states that in that New Heavens and New Earth, *there will be CHILDREN BORN* – that God's plan of pro-creation and multiplication of potential members of the Divine Family through human beings, will continue, throughout the ages, and perhaps even “beyond time”!

The awesome truth is that the saints do not “go to heaven” when they die. Rather, *HEAVEN IS COMING TO EARTH!* The throne of God Himself is coming to the EARTH where He will establish His everlasting headquarters for His government over the entire cosmos – the Universe!

Will you be a part of that celestial, wonderful, marvelous, glorious Kingdom?