

# The Gospel World View

Hope Beyond  
This Present World

**DICKSON**

# The Gospel World View

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## INTRODUCTION

**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 gospel behavior to establish one's world view on the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who are directed in life by the world view that God revealed through the gospel will direct their lives according to His will. They will live in harmony with God who created us for the purpose of our eternal dwelling in His presence. Those who do not have a gospel defined world view will always view the Scriptures from a twisted point of view. They will never be able to see the whole eternal picture of the gospel. Because some have a shallow knowledge of the Bible, it is sometimes difficult for them to establish a correct whole view of God's work through the gospel. 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. The Bible is about God's revelation of the gospel. Once one understands the gospel, then he or she has come to a knowledge of God's work in creation in order to bring us into eternal dwelling.**

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 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).

As disciples of Jesus, it is our task to set our minds on those things that above. We must think of those things that are above this material world in order to better understand the spiritual realm of existence into which we are headed.

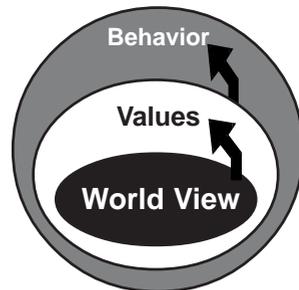
When we set our minds on those things that are beyond this world, it is very important that we identify and define some basic concepts. The problem with study in this area of biblical revelation is that we are often discussing subjects about which there is little revelation. And then when revelation is given, it is often in metaphorical language that is difficult to understand. This is true simply because we often venture into areas where we have yet to have experience. In fact, in this life we will never have adequate experience in this world in order to form word definitions that will allow us to fully understand 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, we must be patient 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.

Nevertheless, there is enough biblical information for us to establish a clear world view. Everyone has some type of world view. The Christian world view, however, must be established on the foundation of the Bible, not the culture in which one lives. Since we are all creatures of culture, there will be a continual struggle between the Bible and our culture in defining our world view. 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 use the Bible to define the reality of those things that stand behind the curtain of the material world.

### A. A biblical world view:

World view is made up of the fundamental beliefs that all of us have concerning what is real. **World view**



**refers 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. Our world view is formed in our thinking as we grow up in the world around us. Therefore, it is important to develop our subconscious world view by both experiences and studies that we conscientiously encounter every day. We can control and determine our world view by both study and obedience to the gospel. **Forming our world view must never in any way conflict with any of the fundamental truths of the gospel.**

**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 determines 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.

As Christians, it is our task to establish a biblical world view concerning what 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

on 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 gospel living 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 origins. 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. Our quest to develop a world view that has the gospel as the center, leads us to consider the following points:

#### **A. The body, soul and spirit:**

Man is composed of body, soul and spirit (1 Th 5:23). It is not our purpose to study God's existence in eternity before the existence of the world. Revelation that was given concerning God's eternal existence before the creation is limited. The revela-

tion that is given is often beyond the understanding of our finite minds. 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 in our studies begin with the creation and continue 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.

## B. Afterlife existence:

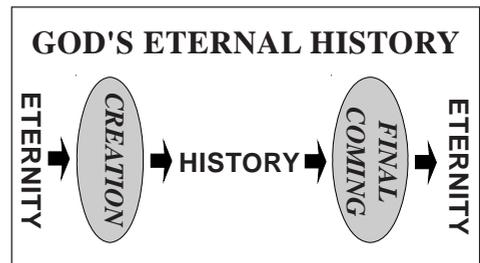
We must study that which exists now, but is beyond this world, beyond our empirical perceptions. This is often referred to as the hadean realm, or unseen existence of the spirit that has departed the body at the time of death and passed into either the loving care of Jesus or the torments of tartarus. One's destination after death depends on 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 unfortunately limited by our five senses to this present physical world.

The realities of this present world in which we live, and the unseen existence of the dead who are beyond our perception, are existences, or realities, that exist. These are subjects about which the first century 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 all of us have concerning that which is beyond the experience of this world.

## C. Final coming and judgment:

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. At the time when time and history terminate—our physical death—eternity will begin. The righteous and unrighteous are destined for two different consequences as a result their behavior in this world.

#### **D. Heaven and hell:**

The Scriptures teach the existence of heaven and hell, though little is revealed concerning the nature of both. Our world view is determined by what we believe will be the results of our behavior on earth. 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. Our understanding of our destiny after death will determine both our values and behavior in the present.

One might say that there are three “ages” of existence of God’s eternity in reference to man’s journey. 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 an 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 now exists is yet to occur. These two events in eternity divide existence into three realms: (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 only is eternal. Nothing else, nor anyone else, can be eternal as God, for only God has or can dwell in all three “ages” of existence.

There is little known of existence before the world was created. We have more information in the Bible of the age that now exists and that which is to come. It is important to study the age to come because the Bible states that the righteous have the opportunity of eternal existence (1 Jn 5:11).

All civilizations have had some concept of immortality. Even those civilizations that were not based on the revelation of the Bible have concepts concerning life beyond death and into eternity. The existence of such immoral aspirations reveal the desires of man to know what is beyond his present existence. Such also reveals 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 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).

Within all civilizations there have been those who have sought for that which is above and beyond this world. Man is truly a creature who has enough sense to know that this world is not all there is. This sense of existence proves that man is not an animal, for animals have no sense of life beyond death.

Our quest as humans who seek to reach beyond our present existence is to first determine 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 have in reference to comprehending what is beyond our experience. When study anything that is beyond our empirical experiences, there is a communication problem about which we must always caution ourselves. There is little revealed in the Bible about the destiny of the soul. Because these things are beyond our empirical experiences, what is revealed is often laid before us in meta-

phorical language. Through metaphor the Spirit challenges us to wonder. He thus uses our earthly defined words to paint a picture of what is beyond this world.

We must continually remind ourselves not to be too dogmatic about some matters. 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 metaphors of revelation.

Through metaphorical words and phrases we are challenged by the Holy Spirit to consider what is beyond our experience. When we interpret metaphors, we must caution ourselves not to trip over the source from which the metaphor was derived. Metaphors originate from what is of this world, from what is real to us and experiential in our lives. When a metaphor is used in Scripture, it is often used to explain what is spiritual. When a metaphor is used, we must thus keep in mind that something greater than this material world is under consideration. We must always look beyond the source of the metaphor—this material world—in order to consider what the Spirit is seeking to reveal

concerning that world beyond our present physical world.

When biblical revelation is centered around realities that are beyond life, such revelation must come to us in metaphorical language. The Spirit thus used 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 linked to their world. Therefore, we must be cautious not to allow the Hebrew or Greek dictionary of earthly definitions to define what is beyond the definitions of man’s experience. We can understand what the Jews or Greeks meant when they used such words metaphorically in their vocabulary in their culture. But 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. We feel this is an unfortunate mistake and one that causes much confusion in the study of that which is beyond our world.

We would suggest that we first understand the words the Spirit uses in the historical context in which the words were first used. For example, we should use a first century definition of the Greek dictionary to inter-

pret 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 a definition is determined that was contemporary with the original use of a particular word, then we can better 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. **We must allow the Bible to give the final definition of those things that are beyond our experience.**

The preceding thought is a very important point in reference to studies of those things that are beyond this world. Regardless of how a word was first used in the culture of the time when the inspired pen first touched the paper of the original autographs, we must allow the Holy Spirit to give the final definition of the word in the context in which He used the words. The Holy Spirit helps us by explaining concepts that are defined by earthly words, which words have limitations in defining what is beyond this world. We are limited by our inability

ity to understand that which is 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 concerning those things that are beyond this world.

Another influence that often hinders our understanding of the Scriptures in areas of study are **traditional interpretations**. These interpretations have a tendency to greatly affect our objective study of the Scriptures. However, simply because an interpretation is traditional, does not mean that it is wrong. Therefore, we must be cautious about rejecting traditional interpretations simply be-

cause they are traditional. Nevertheless, it is wrong to allow traditional interpretations to dictate our personal investigation of the Scriptures to the point that we lose our objectivity. We must understand God's revelation without being intimidated by what is commonly accepted. In this way we guard ourselves against being led astray by traditional interpretations that are false and misleading. When we study without the intimidation of the accepted interpretations of the theological world, we give ourselves a chance to study from different approaches. Great study often comes by sitting before an open Bible as if it were the first time we ever put our hands on a Bible.

## Chapter 1

### THE WORLD AROUND US

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 will "fly away" (Ps 90:10). Our spirit will return to God who gave it (Ec 12:7). After death we are 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 is impossible to understand this world unless we understand 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 15:12-19,32).

If there is no life or existence beyond this world, then we would simply be matter in motion without any direction or purpose. If there is no life beyond this world, then there would be no need for God. And if there is no God in our lives, then there is no unchanging 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 were no eternal purpose to motivate us to direct our lives toward an eternal dwelling.

When societies have no moral direction, they digress into moral 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 his existence 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 life. And if there is no moral standard for life, 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 what is in 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 culture hopelessness. If God is, then we will eventually give an account for our behavior. If we realize that we must give account of our behavior in this life, then we will seek to direct our behavior by the rules of the One to whom we will eventually give account. In this way, our moral behavior is directed and checked by what we 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 therein. We must also understand God's people who manifest the spiritual righteousness of God in 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 reason for the existence 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. Our conclusion would be that the sole purpose for the existence of all things is to prepare inhabitants (the church) for eternal dwelling in the presence of God.

We must never forget that God created the world for the purpose of those who would walk by faith 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 (the church) to eternal glory. The creation of the world, therefore, is only a speck of existence in God’s eternal purpose to produce inhabitants for heaven. In this time, we, 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. At this time, however, 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 the physical world:

Genesis 1:1 states the beginning of this physical environment. *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* 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 humanity. God also established **moral laws** because man was to multiply and populate the world (Gn 1:28). Since world was to be populated with more than one inhabitant, there was the necessity of establishing moral laws that would govern the interaction of all 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 or opportunity to violate such. When law is violated, the one who does the violation must suffer the consequences. When the law of gravity is violated there are often severe consequences that 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 laws are violated and great consequences have resulted. However, for the existence of a truly free-moral individual, **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 one individual alone were the only person that existed, then there would be no need for moral law.

But since all of us exist in this environment together, then there must be divinely established moral laws that will control our relationships with one another. This is necessary because one of us might decide that he was better than the others. Or even worse, one of us might decide that the others should not exist in the environment at all. Our selfishness might drive us to eliminate one another. Because man was created as an individual to make free choices, 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.

Our 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. Paul explained, "*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 following words: "*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 3:10,11,23). 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 the majority of

the world's population has 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 individual. Man's sinful choices against God's moral laws cause a great deal of pain and suffering that exists in this world. Man's sinful choices against God's physical laws cause pain and suffering. We must not blame God for the wrong choices that we make, which choices bring pain and suffering into our lives.

## B. Free-moral agency in the best of all possible environments:

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, 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. We must keep in mind what Paul said in reference to the predestination 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 people to stand alone without one another. We were not created to be alone, neither was the world created in a way that promoted individualism among the inhabitants. 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 ability of man as it is defined in the Bible.

Eternal destinies depend on 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 in which we live, as well as, our free-moral ability to make choices in this environment.

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 choice on the part of each individual. This brings us to the realm of law. Moral laws govern the moral behavior of people as they interrelate with one another in the physical environment in which they live. But in order for man to behave as an accountable free-moral individual in relation to moral law, three things must exist:

**1. 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 for his violations. 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. Likewise, free-moral individuals cannot exist in such an environment with-

out the choice of violating the moral 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 individual.

**2. 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 2:9,17; 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, then he would 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. The environment of the garden gave every opportunity for Adam to make choices.

We are also 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 to freely make choices. Joshua exhorted Israel to ex-

ercise 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. From our choices we must learn what is right in order to be the type of person that can dwell in eternity.

**One cannot be a true free-moral individual 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 choose.** Since this is now the situation of all humanity, God expects us to make choices. He expects us 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 on the fact that man

is a free-moral agent with the ability to make choices. His freedom to choose makes him responsible for his choices. Our eternal destinies will depend on our present choices concerning moral law. It is important, therefore, that in their world view, people have a concept of final accountability for their choices. **Final accountability in judgment motivates us to make the right choices.**

**3. 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 rather than rebel.

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 to make predetermined choices according to His law. Because He has not, means that individuals are responsible for the choices they make. It is each person’s responsibility to exercise his or her freedom to choose right over wrong.



Our understanding of final judgment and eternal destinies make sense only if we understand the preceding fundamental points. 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 of our moral behavior. 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 to hell those who are supposedly programmed to do evil?

**There can be no justice of God in judgment if the minds of men are biased in either choosing good or evil.** If just one person is lost in hell, how can we understand God, who supposedly biased anyone to choose evil? If just one person ends up in heaven, how can we understand God to be a just and fair God by rewarding one with such without conditions? **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 on our understanding of the free-moral agency of man. When we discuss judgment, we must consider law upon which judgment is made. And when we discuss law, we must discuss free-moral individuals. We must conclude that man has the ability and freedom to make choices concerning the law by which he will eventually be held accountable. Therefore, we must understand that a fundamental teaching concerning the nature of man is that he is a free-moral individual. Because we are free, we will eventually be held accountable for our personal behavior in relation to God's law. Our eternal destiny will depend on how we respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ. If we respond in a positive manner, then we will reap an unending life in the new heavens and earth. On the other hand, if we respond in a negative manner, there is nothing to which to look forward other than punishment and destruction.

## Chapter 2

# THE CHURCH IN THE WORLD

The church, the body of Christ, is composed of those who have made a positive response to the gospel. Members of the body have chosen to obey the gospel by immersion for the remission of their sins, and thus, as a group, each gospel obedient person has become a member of the chosen of God who are destined for heaven.

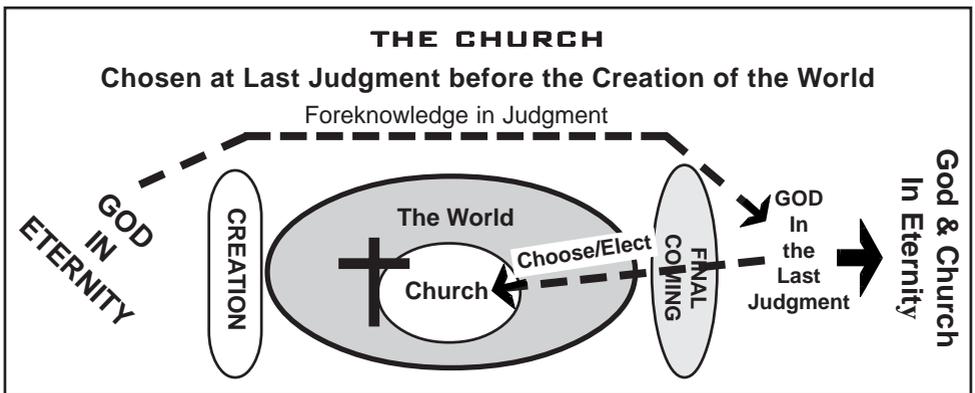
The church exists in a world that has chosen sin and rebellion against God. Satan is the prince of this world (Ep 2:2) and the god of this age (2 Co 4:4). He is the spirit of evil that now “works in the sons of disobedience” (Ep 2:2). Jesus also pronounced that Satan is the “*ruler of this world*” (Jn 12:31). However, he is the ruler of this world who has been cast out 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 that about which John wrote:

*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 for the first time in history. 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 members of the body, the church.** 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 hearts as it is done in heaven. The church is the group of those who have been made a kingdom of 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. In his or her obedience to the gospel, 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 members of the body walk in the light, and thus, they are 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 that God "*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 gospel, it is not in the darkness. The church thus resides in a world of darkness, but it is not of the darkness of the world. 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 body of Christ 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, in their obedience 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). Members of the body 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, the members have set their "mind on things above, not on things on the earth" (Cl 3:2; see Mt 6:19-21).

**4. The body of Christ is not known by the world.** Because the church of the submitted 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 the gospel of 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 the simple gospel of Jesus.

In God's foreknowledge of eternity beyond the existence of this present world, He foreordained that the church would go into eternal heaven. Before the creation of the world, 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 who would be saved out of the world. At the final judgment, God will choose only the obedient for eternal life. The condition for being chosen out of the world in the end, therefore, is to choose to be a part of those who are in Christ. In the end, God will see in the population of the world only those who have been cleansed in their obedience to the gospel. It is this

group He will choose out of the world.

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 gathered for heaven out of this world **because we have free-morally chosen to obey the gospel. In our obedience to the gospel we were added to the membership of the predestined group (the church) that is now headed for heaven.**

The church is now the group of the chosen because the members will in the end be chosen out of the world for eternal inheritance. All those who will be chosen out of the world when Jesus comes again will be those who now free-morally choose obey the gospel. 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: (1) There is the group of **the faithful**. (2) There is the group of **the fallen**, the unfaithful. It is not difficult to understand the relationship of the faithful with Jesus. They have submitted themselves to walk in the light of the gospel (1 Pt 1:22,23; 1 Jn 1:7).

The group of the unfaithful, however, in relation to eternal destinies, is often misunderstood. They have given up living according to the gospel, and thus, they have turned again to the world (Hb 6:4-6; 10:26; 2 Pt 2:20-22). However, the faithful Christians' relationship with the unfaithful is different than their relationship with the world. In order to understand this difference, we must consider both groups in their relationship with God.

**1. The faithful:** Faithfulness to God is a continual process of behavior and is based on the free-will choice of the Christian to walk in the light and God's grace, that is, living the gospel of Jesus. John placed 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). When living the gospel of Jesus Christ, 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 encourage one another (See Gl 6:1,2).

It is the responsibility of the faithful, therefore, to live according to the gospel. 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 are motivated to live

according to the gospel because of their 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 on our continuing in the light of the gospel on earth. The faithful must, therefore, make their calling and election sure. Peter cautioned, "***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 to be a common thing (Hb 10:29). For this reason, 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).*

In a state of apostasy, the relationship of the faithful to the unfaithful changes. This relationship is different than the relationship of the

faithful have with the world. Those who walk disorderly, that is, those brothers and sisters who do not live according to the gospel 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 unfaithful living according to the gospel. John wrote, “*And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son*” (1 Jn 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 on the faithful commitment of the believer to the gospel. One can exercise free-moral choice in order to turn away from the cleansing blood of Jesus. He or she can give up eternal life by forsaking the sanctification of the cross. 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 disciple of Jesus 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 on our present faithfulness. Our present eternal life is **conditional** until the final judgment. Our faith in the grace of God is our assurance that we are destined for eternal dwelling in the presence of God. At this time, however, we know that we must remain faithful to His calling through the gospel. Faithful disciples must manifest in their lives through good works their gratitude for the gospel in which they live. *“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 the members have chosen to submit to living the gospel of Jesus. 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.

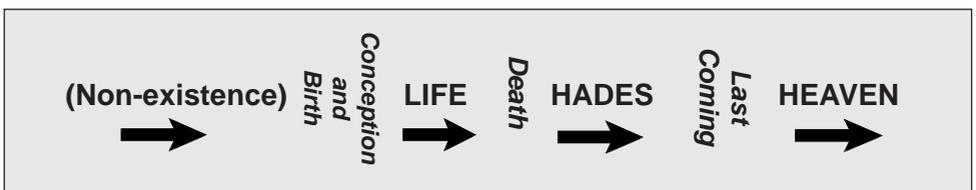
As long as one maintains his or her submission to the will of God, he or she remains in fellowship with God, and thus, in fellowship with those who are also maintaining faithfulness in their walk in the gospel. The apostle John wrote in word of God *“that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly 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, the Holy Spirit, the apostles and all Christians.

### Chapter 3

## BIRTH INTO POSSIBLE ETERNALITY

Eternity begins at the point of physical birth for all humanity. After one reaches the age at which he or she can make a rational and emotional

decision to respond to the gospel of Jesus, one is redirected to eternal heaven by being added to the eternally bound family of God (At 2:47). One



is first physically born into the world. However, in order to be born into eternity, 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 that 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.

Before we were conceived in the womb of woman, we had no existence. We transitioned into life in the womb of woman, and then into existence outside the womb through physical birth. Life is a state of 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 heaven for eternity (2 Co 5:1-8). The Bible teaches that our transition into eternity will happen when Jesus appears a second time. At that time all will be resurrected from the grave. The righteous

will be 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) that 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 living person is 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 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.” He was instructed not to speak concerning what he saw. He wrote the following 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 obviously neither can we. Even if he

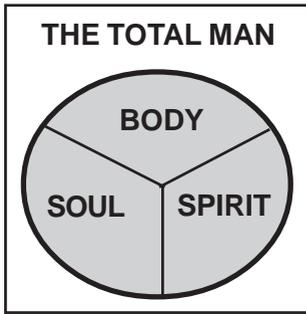
were allowed to speak concerning what he saw, we could not have understood, for there are no earthly words that can adequately explain that which is beyond this world.

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 experience was to remind us that there is something there. We may not fully understand it, but it is still there. We have faith in his experience which he recorded through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

We must not, therefore, be cautious about discussing those passages in the Bible that do give us complete information about 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 only brief glimpses into what is beyond. We will thus wonder, as Paul, and possibly speculate. We are sure that 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.

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 science, must stop short of what cannot be placed in a test tube or under a microscope. We are thus left with many questions concerning that which is beyond this world. It is simply not the work of science to discuss the "soul" and "spirit." These are things that belong to the world that is outside the realm of the physical. We cannot expect science, that is limited to the perceived 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 information 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 direct revelation from God through the Holy Spirit (See Ep 3:3-5). Through



this revelation, God has given us just enough information to encourage our faith. He expects us to trust in Him for the rest of the answers when the right time comes. That time will be when time ceases.

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 into this world, he or she is born with a **spirit** that is given from God. The spirit animates the **soul** that 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 functions 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 (Jn 4:24).

We have found it interesting that some interpreters have an irresistible urge to create God after the physical image of man. But this reasoning is backwards. As children, we often seek to form in our minds a God whom we can understand and perceive. We thus interpret the word “image” in Genesis 1:26,27 to refer to some physical form of God. If we do this in our interpretation of Genesis

1:26,27, then we end up creating God after the physical image of 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 on the physical nature of man. Such misunderstandings manifest our emphasis on 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. Forming God after our image is the spirit of idolatry, for the idolater seeks to create a god after his own image in order that he might in some way better relate to his 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. We know where one another is located because of the presence of our flesh and bones.

We cannot escape one another’s eyesight unless we hide our 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 in order to make its presence known to our senses. Spirit is not 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, movement, or 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. This is explained in Exodus 33:22: “*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 doing 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 in word a physical image of our concept 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.

If we assume that God has physical features as man, then we have denied the incarnation of the Son of God. The Son first existed in the form of God, that is, in spirit (Ph 2:6). But He emptied Himself of this form in order to incarnate into the flesh of man (Jn 1:14; Ph 2:7). But if the Son of God were already in the form of physical man with a literal face and eyes, then there was no incarnation. He simply changed places of habitation from heaven to earth. And, we have denied the gospel.

**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 at first be difficult to accept. 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 all 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 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 after 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 destroyed by God (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 dead”* (Js 2:26). Job was more graphic in his description of 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 spoke of the body as if it were separate from, 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 added, “*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 is formed in the womb of woman, and then takes flight from this earth at death. The body is important as a dwelling place of the real self, but it is not more important than the real self that dwells within the body.

We must not defile 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 that we must “*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 Bible student feeling that he has not completed his research when he has diligently searched the Scriptures. When all the passages are considered, there is still the sense that one’s studies are incomplete. The reason for this arises from two challenges on our part concerning this investigation of Scriptures. First, we are investigating what is beyond our sense perception. We are venturing into the realm of the unseen, the untouched, or that which has not been personally encountered. 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 on God's Spirit-inspired revelation to define both soul and spirit.

Second, in revelation, the words "soul" and "spirit" are used in many different ways, depending on the context in which each word is used. It is easier to understand the use of the word "spirit." However, because the word "soul" is used with various contextual meanings, 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." Therefore, we must be cautious not to use one definition of the word to apply to all contexts in which the word is used.

We can sort through a number of passages in order to determine a contextual definition of both soul and spirit. 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 with the English word "soul" by most translators. *Nephesh* 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 Tes-

tament. At least one thing is understood from these many translations and uses of the word. *Nephesh* is a generic word that has a wide variety of definitions.

The Greek word *psyche* does not help us much in determining a specific meaning for 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 understanding of the translators of a particular translation, the word is rendered into English by using many different English words.

Contexts in which the Hebrew word *nephesh* is used help us understand some of the various 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* refers 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).

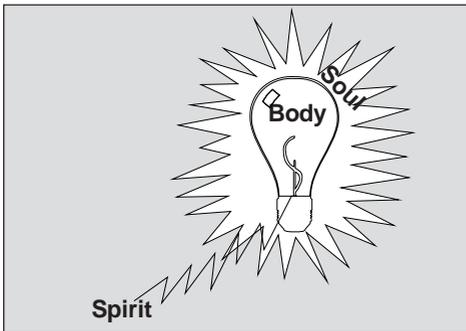
The word “soul” can refer to the whole person, including the soul, spirit and body (At 2:41; 1 Pt 3:20). In such cases the word is being used to refer to the totality of the person. However, the word “spirit” is never used in such a manner. The word “soul” can refer to the higher spiritual nature of man as opposed to the “natural man” (1 Co 2:14). It can refer to the “life nature” that 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 that is used with different meanings, but spirit is specific.

From the many contexts in which the Hebrew and Greek words for “soul” are used in the Scriptures, a general meaning would be that **the soul refers 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.**

The spirit is defined as that which generates 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 that 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 that is in the image of God which 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, and thus is not inherently eternal. 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 who “*moved upon the face of the earth*” in creation (Gn 1:2). It is also the word that was 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. This 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* 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 also 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 commonly translated in the New Testament with the word “spirit.” However, 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 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 interests 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, then 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 because God created both the soul and spirit of man. All that man is has originated from God. So truly the words of Paul are informative: “*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 (Js 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, 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 inherent eternity simply because the spirit of the righteous will be sustained throughout eternity by the power of 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 terminating 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 ani-

mation of the soul. The soul’s existence is dependent on 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). We 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 was 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 their obedience to the gospel (Hb 2:14,15). When we better understand death, we better understand eternity. We better understand the purpose for which this world was created. It is then that we finally comprehend the comfort that was revealed through the gospel and the significance of the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.

#### 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 comes to an end. 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 difficult 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 when Jesus comes in His 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.** There can be no discussion concerning a 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 will 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. 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). In 2 Corinthians 5:1 Paul refers to our body as the “earthly tent” or tabernacle. He mentions that in death 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 will 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 to be permanently disembodied. 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 will not be found naked (2 Co 5:3).

In physical death we are unclothed from our physical body. But we will not be “naked” in eternity, that is, without a body. We will 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 to be. In order to have that close relationship with Jesus for which we yearn, 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.***” At the time, 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 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.

In the context of death, the destiny of children who die always arises. The destiny of children who die is usually based on 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 that was char-

acteristic of those in the context of Matthew 18 who were seeking greatness. The nature of children is humility and purity. In conversion, one must become as this nature in order to enter the kingdom. We would wonder why Jesus would refer to this innocence and purity if children actually have an impure nature 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 the nature of 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.

We 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. Death is a 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).

We 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 dwell.

## Chapter 5 AFTER DEATH

In physical death the body returns to that from which it was created, the dust of the earth. However, we are challenged in our studies to determine the destiny of the spirit of man. We are told that the spirit returns to God who gave it, but we do not know exactly what this means.

There have been a host of scholarly studies in this field. Too often, however, there has been so much speculation from the misguided religious world that it is often difficult to sort through all the misinformation. The influence of world views that have been based on speculation has often distorted objective Bible study. Misguided religionists have been the basis for a host of mystical beliefs and Hollywood films that are based on the fanciful speculations of life after death.

Mystical beliefs are usually founded on 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 studying this particular subject, we must keep in mind that there is too much confusion in the world concerning life after death to ignore these influences when we study the subject. 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. This is a realm of study where there is little room for dogmatism simply because there is little revelation on which we can base concrete conclusions. As we study, therefore, we must guard ourselves from over-speculation and too much confidence in our deductions. We would that God had revealed more. But He did not. What is re-

vealed is enough to guard our faith to trust in Him to take care of everything when we draw our last breath. He has also given us enough revelation to guard us against the speculations of those who are guided more by mystical feelings than by revelation from God.

There are some basic concepts in reference to this study on which we base our preliminary thoughts. 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 very 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.

Though we do not understand the state of consciousness after death,

there are a few examples that prove the point that we will be in some 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 [Jesus]*” (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 Endor 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, then 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).

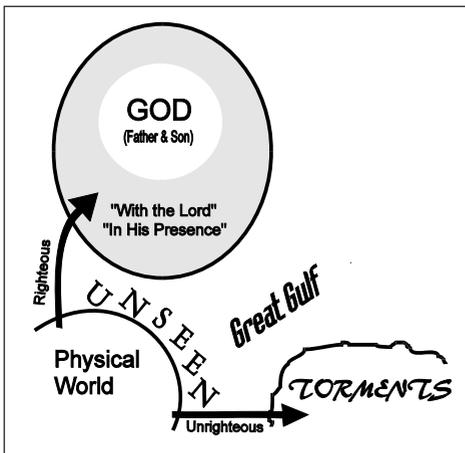
God is the God of the **living** (Mt 22:32; Mk 12:26,27; Lk 20:37,38). Though the “living dead” have physically died, God is still their God, and **they are still living**. Though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob had already died when Moses stood before God on Mt. Sinai, God still said to Moses that He was their God (Ex 3:6). When we die,

God is still our God. We do not go out of existence. We do not cease worshipping him.

Though the body is asleep, therefore, the soul does not sleep in death. One is conscious. In the eternal existence of the righteous, 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? We 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 that we are with Him.

## 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.

**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 **heav- enly**.

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 will be present in His care in this existence when we die, for we will 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.

We 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, we are allowing ourselves to be misled if we attach our literal definitions of an earthly dwelling to that which is of God. We must not believe the Holy Spirit ever intended that we completely understand the realm 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.

At least in the statement “with Christ” **presence** is communicated. We will be in some relationship with Jesus that assumes presence or fellow-

ship. We believe Paul is trying to convey to us the fulfillment of our present desires. We feel distant from Jesus while on this earth and in this body. When we die, we will no longer have this 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. It is after death, therefore, that we will truly have a personal relationship with Jesus.

**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 personal 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 His final coming.

We would question the view that the word “presence” in the context of life after death was used by Paul to explain our being with Jesus in a manner of location as we are presently located 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, we believe emphasis is more on 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 provides eternal existence for 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” in order 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).

Concerning the hadean, or unseen existence, it is 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 often referred to as sheol. One goes into an **unseen state of existence**. (More on this later.) We 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 God where we remain until the final coming and bodily resurrection. Hades is simply that realm of existence of our spirits that is not perceived by those who are living. Our spirits pass into an unseen state of existence.

### 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 will 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 will 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. When we die, we do not immediately go into the state we will be in the eternal new heavens and earth simply because the new heavens and earth is something that will exist after the coming of Jesus.

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul ex-

plained 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 final resurrection and bodily transformation that will occur when Jesus is revealed from heaven.

We must keep in mind, however, that those who are dead in Christ are not subject to time. They are disembodied during our time on earth, but we would not assume that they are “waiting” as we would wait in time in order to be embodied. From the time of their death, until their embodiment, would simply be a blink of an eye in reference to our time. They will be embodied at the final resurrection. For the living, this event seems to be long in the future. But for the departed saints, it is only a moment after their death, for they pass immediately into the care of Jesus.

## 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 will go away into the new heavens and earth, that eternal dwell-

ing 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, and eventually, in a certain destruction.

Beginning with physical death,

and continuing to the final coming of Jesus, the righteous dead are in a disembodied 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 some 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. The Old Testament writers often referred to the concept of sheol as the abode or existence of the dead. There are also some references in the Old Testament to the future resurrection. 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. With the completion of the New Testament, our understanding of what God wants us to know concerning that which is beyond this world is sufficient to encourage our faith. In the New Testament we discover a greater revelation concerning life after death, which revelation gives hope of existing in eternity in the presence of the Lord. Because of our greater privilege in having greater revelation concerning this matter, our hope is based on a strong faith.

As Christians, we have the privilege of walking in the light of a greater revelation concerning life after death than those who lived before the cross and resurrection of Jesus. If the Old Testament heroes of faith remained faithful in view of death, then surely we have no excuse if we doubt concerning what God has in store for us who have a more complete revelation in the New Testament.

### **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 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 con-

textual 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 sheol. Hades is the “unseen state” of the dead. It is the unseen exist-

ence 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 allow the interpreter to determine a definition from the biblical context 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 was the case with Job when Job said, "*Oh, that You would **hide me in the grave [sheol]***" (Jb 14:13). Consider also the *New International Version* translation of Deuteronomy 32:22: "*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).

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.

Second, **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 personified the inhabitants of sheol to be carrying on conversations with one another (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 used the Septuagint translation in making this quotation. The word he quoted 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" as they are used in both the Old and New Testaments.

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 com-

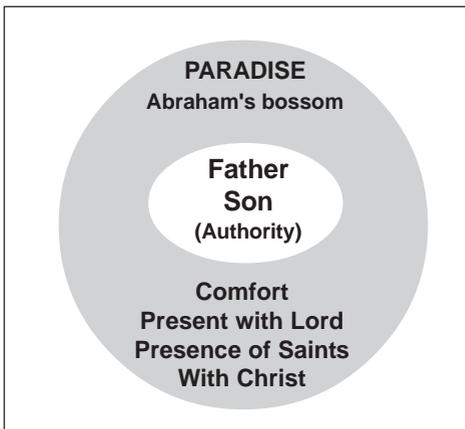
ing of Jesus and resurrection:

### 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 that 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 different 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.” The word “gehenna” refers 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

- “*And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades*” (Mt 11:23; see Lk 10:15).
- “*The gates of Hades shall not prevail against it*” (Mt 16:18).
- “*Because You will not leave my soul in Hades*” (At 2:27).
- “*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).
- “*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).

- “*And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and Hades followed with him*” (Rv 6:8).
- “*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).

If we simply define hades in the sense of being the unseen existence of the dead, instead of a particular place, then our interpretation and understanding of Bible statements concerning the existence of the death is much easier. The use of the word “hades” refers 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 they are 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 down to 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 would go into a state of not being seen or noticed by the living.

**b. Matthew 16:18:** The word “gates” was 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 world that claims all men will not prevail over 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 down from heaven, will not perish at death, nor in the world to come. Death and hades, therefore, will not exist where there is immortality.

**c. Acts 2:27:** Peter quoted Psalm 16:10 in Acts 2:27. In doing so, he 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 reach 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 will 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 will be raised. Those of the populations of the world (sea) who are spiritually dead, but living when Jesus comes, will be delivered

to judgment. Those in the unseen state (hades) will also be judged. In Revelation 20:13-15, John's emphasis is on the unrighteous who are either living or dead when Jesus comes again.

The unrighteous will be judged according to their works. They will be judged because they do not know the heart of the gospel of God. This judgment, however, always ends in the 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 perfect law-keeping, but by faith in Jesus Christ (Gl 2:16). Their motivation to escape the second death, therefore, is obedience to the gospel of Jesus Christ. Those who do not obey this gospel, will suffer the judgment of eternal destruction from the presence of God (2 Th 1:6-9).

It is also necessary to note in the book of Revelation that John pictured the termination of the hadean existence after the final coming. When death is taken away by the final resurrection, and the revelation of the incorruptible and immortal bodies of eternal dwelling are made known, then there will be no need for an unseen state for the dead. The righteous will dwell in existence with no more terminal 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 be terminated. 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 until the coming of Christ. 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.

There is a difference between the state of existence of 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 existence 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.

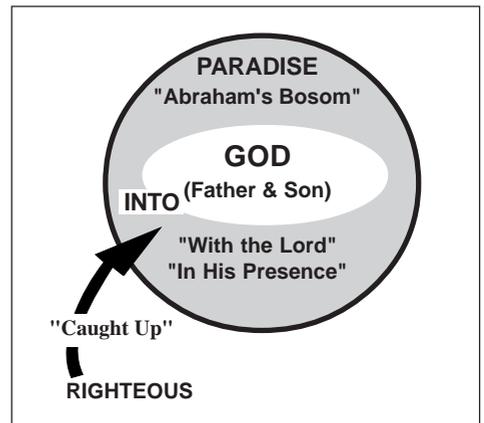
**a. Paradise:** When Mary encountered Jesus in the garden immediately after His resurrection, He said to her, *“Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father”* (Jn 20:17). However, by the time of this encounter with Mary, Jesus had already in the spirit descended into the hadean existence (At 2:27,31). In the context of His statement to Mary in John 20:17, Jesus was referring 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 [announced] to the spirits in prison”* (1 Pt 3:19), and by this *“the gospel was preached [announced] also to those who are dead”* (1 Pt 4:6).

**In the spirit**, Jesus announced the gospel to the dead. He did not do this in the body. How this was done without embodiment, is left to our imagination. It is possible that those who had died before the cross did not know of the finality of the gospel for which they had faith trusted was coming. Since the dead are not aware of events on earth, Jesus informed all those who had by died in faith that their sins had finally been washed away through the blood of the cross (See Rm 3:25).

At the time Jesus had not yet bodily ascended to heaven after His death and before His ascension in Acts



1. He 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. As stated before, we would suggest 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’”* (G1 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

that God had planned before the foundation of the world had finally been accomplished through the outpouring of the sacrificial blood on the cross. The righteous by faith would rejoice because their faith paid off. The agony of the unrighteous would be increased because they would realize what they had missed because they refused to obey God.

The fact is that Jesus did go to paradise the same day He died on the cross. 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. 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 for 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 origins 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 middle 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, introduce 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 begin their living 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 that is hidden from the living, but one in which the righteous are “with Christ” (Ph 1:23) and in the “presence of the Lord” (2 Co 5:8).

**b. Abraham’s bosom:** In Luke 16, and after his death, Lazarus 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 for 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. He was in the loving preservation and comfort 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 victim 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 and comfort of the Lord until they are clothed with a spiritual body from God at the final coming of Jesus (2 Co 5:1-8).

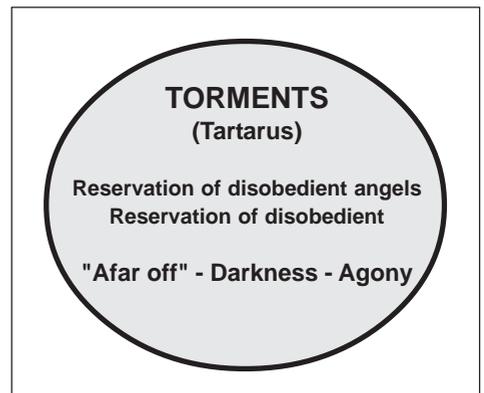
We must keep in mind that this dwelling is not the final goal of the righteous. Paul said that we “*groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from God*” (2 Co 5:2). We are “naked” in paradise; we are without a body. This is not our final destiny or desire. We do not want to be “unclothed,” that is disembodied (2 Co 5:4). We seek embodiment at the resurrection in order that we may 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. We would again caution ourselves about using literal definitions of this world to explain those things that are beyond this world. Doing this sometimes makes it challenging to understand exactly what exists beyond this 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. It would of course 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. He requested that if only Lazarus could touch his tongue with a drop of water from his fingertips. The metaphorical statement surely means that the rich man was seeking relief from the tormenting condition in which he was. But there was no relief. His destiny was sealed. His judgment had been pronounced (Hb 9:27). In his “far off” realm he had to wait for the final pronouncement and assignment of destruction at the end of time.

The rich man was 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 was also denied. It was denied because 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 how Lazarus went “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, and 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. However, in the language Jesus used, He said 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. Therefore, we would wonder what the word “torment” means when there is no flesh to suffer pain? At least what we can conclude from this existence that 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. He was in a realm to which none of us would want to go.

Peter used another interesting word that defines the existence of the rich man. He used 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 refers 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 said that God has reserved these disobedient angels *“in everlasting chains **under darkness** for the judgment of the great day”* (Jd 6). At this present time in the history of the world, they are still reserved in the darkness of tartarus for the 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. We 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 state of existence that is not influenced by our measurements of time. They do not grow old as we do in the physical body. It could be that the moment we die, we will awake immediately for the resurrection and eternal glory. Of course this is God’s business. By faith we believe He has everything under control, regardless of our feeble understanding that is limited to this world and time. However, consider the following thoughts that suggest that the dead

in some way are subject to 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 refer to time on earth, not to time in their realm of existence.

The Lord responded to their requests by saying that they must “**rest a little longer**” (vs 11). This statement suggests 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:

The righteous are with Jesus (Ph

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

We do not suppose to understand completely all that is beyond the limits of our world. Therefore, we are cautious about being too dogmatic in this area. We have only the Scriptures to paint a metaphorical picture for us, and sometimes, this picture is not painted as clearly as we would like it to be. At least the picture is subject to our understanding of the metaphors that are used by the Holy Spirit. Those who want to argue over this matter often move from the realm of what is revealed in metaphorical language to an interpretation that is based on human reasoning. Too many interpreters literalize the metaphors that the Spirit used to only excite our thinking concerning those things that are yet to be revealed in full.

We often here the statement that when one dies he or she goes directly

to heaven. In some way this is true. At least, one does go into a heavenly realm of existence. However, one does not go in a disembodied state to the eternal new heavens and earth that is yet to come. This will happen only at the final coming of Jesus and the resurrection.

A partial answer to our questions would be Paul's experience that he explained in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4. In verse 2 Paul said he "*was caught up to the third heaven.*" The Jews taught 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" refers to the Jews' concept of the third heaven, then we could assume that in this unique experience Paul was caught up unto the dwelling of God. However, he simply states that he was caught up to the third heaven, not caught up into the dwelling of God. But in verse 4 he stated that "*he was caught up into Paradise.*" The conclusion is that paradise and third heaven have a close "relationship" or "proximity" to one another. Some might suggest that they are the same place. But we think not. He was certainly caught up into a heavenly place, for that is exactly what he stated. But he was not caught up into a place that does not yet exist, that is, the eternal new heavens and earth that is yet to

be revealed.

There is no argument here concerning beliefs that when one dies he goes to heaven. The point is, one does go "into" an existence in a heavenly realm that is paradise. **We would conclude that all paradise is heavenly, but not all the heavenly that is reserved for the righteous is paradise.** Paul was caught up into paradise that is heavenly. One need not parallel paradise and the eternal new heavens and earth 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 that we interpret 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 in the book of John, no one had been caught up into heaven wherein is the Father and Son. However, we 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).

But we might wonder how close to God one must be before he is considered to be in heaven? Must one actually sit at the right hand of God before being considered to be in

heaven? Certainly not. Being “in heaven” does not refer to location. And being in the presence of God does not refer to “how close” we are to the very presence of God. These are all terms and concepts of this world that refer to our location in reference to people and things of this world. Therefore, we would caution ourselves about using earthly definitions in reference to the realm of the heavenly, and thus 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 refers 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 our spirits are embodied, will there ex-

ist 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 re-

turn to the dust of the earth.

The righteous who have died 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 expectations 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 struggles of this present world. 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 came 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 in the flesh in order to be seen (1 Jn 3:2).

We live in a world of religious speculators who never cease to captivate the public's attention by their speculations as to when Jesus will come. We never cease to be amazed at the emptiness of the message of those who place specific dates on Jesus' coming in order to generate a fearful following who seek to join in their fascination with final things. It is interesting that no matter how many unfulfilled predictions of the end that fall by the historical wayside, adherents will still continue on in their 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. Perfect love casts out fear (1 Jn 4:18). So here we are, being surrounded by those who are constantly building a following that is based on fear and not hope.

Naturally, we are excited about the future coming of Jesus. 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 rev-*

*elation 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 that will eventually pass away (See Mt 6:24; Js 4:4; 1 Jn 2:15,16).

So what will happen when Jesus comes? How will 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, we must be cautious about inventing our own imaginations concerning that which the Bible teaches of future events in reference to the end of time. Here are a few important points the Bible reveals about the final coming of Jesus. These points answer some of the questions we have about this coming event. Understanding these characteristics concerning the coming of Jesus will help guard

ourselves against the 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). He said that the word that He has spoken will judge the rebellious in the **last day** (Jn 12:48). Therefore, this last day of earth history will be a tremendous event to begin 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 numbered 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. Though this statement contains some metaphors, we assume that there will be some finalization of that which now exists.

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

- Jesus will come (Jn 6:40,44).
- The dead will be raised (Jn 5:28,29).
- The righteous living will be bodily changed (1 Co 15:52).
- The righteous dead will be reunited with their resurrected bodies (1 Th 4:14-16).
- Judgment of the living will occur (Jn 12:48).
- All the righteous will ascend to heaven (1 Th 4:16,17).
- The earth and heavens in their present form will pass away (2 Pt 3:10,11).
- Satan, his angels and the wicked will be cast into the destruction of 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 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" refers to heavenly glory that is manifested from heavenly authority. We would assume, therefore, that Jesus' coming in like manner at the end of time as His ascension will be in the clouds, that is, in heavenly glory with all authority. 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 simul-

taneous throughout the whole world.

We should not assume that He will come at a particular location, and then another. The New Testament does not speak of 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 in conjunction with events that are beyond our understanding. There is nothing that has happened in history that will compare to that which will 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 will **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 that *“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** will see Jesus when He comes. We will see His glorious body (Ph 3:21). There will be no secret comings, for He will 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 fi-

nal coming will not be a quiet matter in some far off corner of the world. At the time of His revelation from heaven, every inhabitant of the earth 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 because of the fact 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 gospel living (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 speaks of fire to come, there is destruction coming.

## F. Jesus is coming with His angels.

Jesus will 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 also 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 judgments 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 at Jesus’ appearing. When the last trum-

pet is sounded, we will 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 will 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 unexpected 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 break-in and the exact hour, then 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 the Christian's beliefs of Jesus' coming. They mock, "*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 will 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 difficult 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 persecutors of John's readers. This very thing Jesus did do in reference to the unbelieving

Jews in A.D. 70 when He brought judgment on the unbelieving Jews by the destruction of Jerusalem through the proxy of the Roman armies. Even if the context refers directly 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.

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.

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 detour the revenge of those who have been innocently maltreated at the hands of those who have given themselves over to wickedness. For believers, 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

Throughout history God prepared the Jews for the resurrection of Jesus from the dead by giving many examples of resurrection. 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 that God used in this statement emphasized the fact that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were at the time 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 is not all there is. Therefore, they “*confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth*” (Hb 11:13). They “*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 is beyond this world.

When Jesus came, resurrection thinking was well established in the minds of the true believers of Israel. 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 a 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. 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). 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). He 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 will 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. We do not know 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 while in this body.

The point is that resurrection assumes that which goes to the tomb will come forth. There were no rem-

nants of Jesus' body left in the tomb. So it will 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.

All of us have our questions concerning the resurrection 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. What comes from our physical body that is sown is directly related to the immortal body with which we will be resurrected. God will give us a new body according to His designs (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 coming. 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 dif-

ferent than the one in which we now indwell. It will be the same, but changed.

These things are difficult for us to understand while we are in this physical body. 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 future 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 will 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? We suppose we can wonder over this until He comes again.

Our assumption is that He was still in the body of flesh and bones with which He was resurrected 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 that we will have, then certainly John would have stated that at least in some way it had been revealed through Jesus’ resurrection what we will be. The fact that he did not indicates that Jesus was not in His glorious body immediately after the resurrection.

We must also consider the body in which Jesus will dwell with us in eternity. The 1 John 3:2 statement reveals that “*when He appears, we will be like Him, for we will see Him as He is.*” If Jesus is as we will be, then He is now as Paul explains we will be in 1 Corinthians 15. Jesus is now in a spiritual body. He has a heavenly body. If we would seek to better understand how Jesus is now, then we must study Paul’s explanation of how we will be when we “*see Him as He is.*”

**b. We will have a glorious body.** We will be transformed. This

transformation will be into a body that will conform to Jesus’ glorious body in which He now exists. 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 will be transformed in order to conform to this glorious body. Your guess is as good as ours 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).*

In recording this information, Luke used a rare Greek word. It is the word *isaggeloi*. It is used only here in the New Testament and refers to becoming immortal as angels. In recording

this context of Jesus' discussion, Matthew and Mark used 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 sustain the existence of an immortal race.

**c. We will 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 will dwell in eternity, and thus, the body in which Jesus now dwells. He contrasts this present body with that habitation we will receive 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:

(1) 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.

(2) 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 our present 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.

(3) 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.

(4) 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 will be resurrected in the final “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, will be resurrected first. In the context of 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, we 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 first thing that will occur on earth 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 will 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.

## **RESURRECTION OF THE RIGHTEOUS**

- Raised to forever be with the Lord (1 Th 4:17).
- Raised to everlasting life (Jn 5:29).
- Raised to go into certain eternal life (Mt 25:46).
- Raised to receive glory (Rm 8:18; 1 Co 15:43).
- Raised to have an incorruptible body (1 Co 15:42).
- Raised to receive immortality (1 Co 15:50-54).
- 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—more later—the following are general statements concerning the purpose for the resurrection of the unrighteous.

### RESURRECTION OF UNRIGHTEOUS

- Raised for judgment (Mt 7:23; 24:41; At 10:42; 2 Co 5:10).
- Raised for certain punishment (Mt 25:46).
- Raised to experience God’s wrath (Rm 2:5; 1 Th 1:10).
- 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 approach the Scriptures with an objective mind. Most of this confusion surrounds the events that will transpire when Jesus comes again. 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 event of the resurrection, the Scriptures reveal the following clear concepts concerning the time of the final coming:

**1. The resurrection will be in the end.** An end of all things is coming. Paul made the statement, “*Then comes the end.*” This is 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 to conclude earth history.

**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 at 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 will 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*” (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 new habitation from God.

Paul used the metaphors "house" and "tent" in 2 Corinthians 5 to explain the temporary and perishable nature of our present physical bodies (2 Co 5:1). 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*" (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).

It is not our desire to be unclothed, that is, disembodied (2 Co 5:3). Being disembodied and existing only in spirit is called by Paul being "naked." Therefore, we groan, "*not because we want to be un-*

*clothed, but further clothed ...*" (2 Co 5:4).

God has prepared us to be clothed with a habitation from Him (2 Co 5:5). We must understand, therefore, that while we are at home in this body, "*we are absent from the Lord*" (2 Co 5:6). We thus "*walk by faith, not by sight,*" trusting that God will deliver on His promise to give us the glorious habitation that is from Him (2 Co 5:7; 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*" (2 Co 5:8).

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 in the fact that there will be a resurrection. This is a central message of the gospel. Jesus was proved to be the Son of God by His resurrection from the dead (Rm 1:4). The resurrection of Jesus was a principal theme of the gospel that was preached throughout the world in the first century (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, then we will question our resurrection 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. If there is no resurrection, then there is no gospel message.

After the resurrection will come our 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 will 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. It will be an event that will mark the end of struggle and anticipation for the new heavens and

earth.

On the other hand, 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.

Christians live according to the gospel because they believe in the resurrection. If there were no resurrection of Jesus, then we are truly as what Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "*If we have hope in Christ only in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied*" (1 Co 15:19).

## Chapter 9

### THE LAST JUDGMENT

The last day of time is coming. In this last day will be the events of the 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 **in time**. However, there is coming a last and final judgment at the **end of time** that will conclude all the judgments of God in relation to the affairs of man on earth. For this reason, this will be

the **last judgment**.

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 they must receive their final destinies. Between the time Jesus was seated on His throne (Ep 1:20-22), and the time He will return kingdom reign to the Father (1 Co 15:24-28), all will 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).

We are on this side of last judgment, awaiting for His coming when the last judgment will occur. We are looking to a final time of discovering the reality of that for which we have hoped throughout our lives. The fact that we must all give account before Jesus 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 the gospel of Jesus Christ. Knowing that we will be accountable for our actions in this life should motivate us to conduct our lives according to the gospel.

For the wicked, the concept of accountability for wrongdoing 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 their accountability before Him. The wicked find comfort in the fact that they think 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 for wrong behavior.

On the other hand, the righteous look forward to judgment because of the cleansing blood of Jesus. Jesus is our Advocate (lawyer) who is pleading our case before the Father (1 Jn 2:1,2). He “*is the propitiation for our sins*” that 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). Our sanctification by the blood of Jesus that was poured out at the cross

is our confidence to face our Redeemer when He comes again.

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. It will be a time when they will be in the eternal comfort of God.

There are certain facts about the last judgment that must be understood in order to build our hope in 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 of some basic Bible facts concerning the final judgment. Therefore, consider the following important biblical concepts of the last judgment:

### A. **The certainty of judgment:**

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 on 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.

## B. The judge of judgment:

Those who have lived and died from the time of the ascension to the when Jesus comes again, will 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” before which we will stand. *“We must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ”* (2 Co 5:10; see 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 on 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 because His coming will mark the end of time on earth.

## C. The standard for judgment:

In order for judgment to be just, law must be given to those who will be judged. There can be no surprises on the part of those who are judged at the time of judgment. God has thus given law to man as the measure (standard) by which He will hold all men accountable. Those who live during the dispensation of God’s work from the cross to the final coming of Jesus, and have opportunity to hear and obey 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 statement. Jesus does not mention the standard of judgment by which those who have not had an opportunity to hear the gospel 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

that many have never had the opportunity 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). Though this is a metaphorical picture that is painted from how judgment took place in the courts of the Roman Empire, it does give a picture of final judgment according to written standards. Judgment for Roman citizens 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 an opportunity to either receive or reject what is written. It would be fiendish of God to judge and condemn one to 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 we

have found that biblical interpreters usually chose to ignore. Some of the questions are the following: If judgment will be by the word of Christ, then 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 attempts to manipulate the behavior of God in judgment after our human thinking. 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.

**1. Judgment is made fair 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 an opportunity to either obey or disobey the law. God could never be just and fair if He condemned to 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 hear and obey the gospel?

It seems that we need to look for another answer here that does not turn the loving Father the Bible reveals into an unjust fiend who will condemn to a devil's eternal torment those who have never had the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel.

### **2. *Salvation is only in Christ:***

We must consider the teaching in the New Testament that there is salvation in no other name than the name of Jesus (At 4:12). All must hear the name of Jesus, the gospel, and respond to the gospel in order to be saved. Most would agree with this. But we must also consider those who have not had the opportunity to hear the gospel. 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 while we were too lazy or indifferent to preach the gospel to the world. The untaught are destined to hell because of our indifferent laziness, but at the same time we go on to eternal bliss in heaven. There is an illogical contradiction in these considerations with which few Christians are willing to

recognized. We must keep in mind that any theology that is contradictory, or consigns God to being fiendish in judgment, is simply a false theology.

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). There is no salvation in the presence of God outside the realm of those who have heard and obeyed the gospel.

**3. *Judgment is by other standards:*** Consider the point that before the establishment of the church and the activation of the gospel of Christ for this dispensation, the Jews lived under the Sinai covenant and law. Their standard of judgment will be their obedience to the Sinai law on the basis of their faith. However, the Gentiles were under the law unto themselves, the law of the conscience (Rm 2:15). The Gentiles of the Old Testament era will not be judged according to the Sinai law in final judgment simply because they were not subject to that law when it was in force.

The Jews and Gentiles who lived while the Sinai 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

Sinai law. The Gentiles will be judged according to the law unto themselves. Christians will be judged according to their obedience to the gospel. Those who have not heard the gospel, will be judged according to another standard.

Now this may sound good at first. However, remember that by law no man will be justified before God (Rm 3:20; Gl 2:16). No one can keep law perfectly in order 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 the gospel of Jesus 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 will be judged, no standard other than the gospel is able to save simply because **no one can keep any standard of law perfectly in order to save himself**. Without the grace of God all will stand condemned in the day of judgment.

#### 4. *Judgment based on deeds:*

The Christian is saved by the grace of

God because he or she has obediently submitted to the gospel. In view of the grace of the gospel, Paul reminded the Galatian disciples that ***“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 in order to be saved. Neither can one do good deeds in order to atone for a single sin. We are thus self-condemned if we trust in ourselves. There is no such thing as self-sanctification by good works in order to be justified before God.

So how can one be justified before God 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**. They are works of gratitude for the grace of God. Thus, we are ***“created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them”*** (Ep 2:10). We are not created in Christ **by** good works. We are created **for** good works. We are not saved by good works. We thank God for the good works He has prepared for us in Christ.

We can be judged according to our works because works are the

manifestation of our faith in the cross. Christians work out of gratitude for the salvation that they have received in Christ. Faith is our thanksgiving for the salvation that we have received in our obedience to the gospel. 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. It is our faith in the cross of Jesus that stimulates us to work in thanksgiving for the cross. Good works outside the grace of God are of no profit in reference to salvation.

#### **D. Gospel living for 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 that God prepared for His children (See Ep 2:10). To those on His left who did not walk in gratitude to 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 based on their behavior in response to the gospel. If our appreciation for the gospel does not inspire gospel living, then we are not by faith walking in gratitude of the cross.

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 view of works being the expression of our thanksgiving, then we will give account of how the gospel was reflected in our lives through our appreciation of the gospel. 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 thanksgiving 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 in the preceding statements of Paul? 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 according to the standard of "works." 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 the gospel of the Son of God.

Judgment that is based on 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 on the

heart and not simply deeds.

But will works profit in judgment 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 we know that in the Lord our 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 in reference to salvation? They are. 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 will receive “*rest from their labors, and their works follow them*” (Rv 14:13). Those who are not in the Lord also do good works. Society appreciates their good works. However, such good works are useless in reference to eternal salvation. Their works will not follow them after death.

We have said all the preceding 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 having obeyed the gospel in order to come **into the Lord.** It is from this perspective that we must basis our understand of the judgment to come.

The above points do not fully answer all the questions concerning the final 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 any of His creation. His punishment has always matched the crime. He is not a mean God who is seeking an opportunity to torment without end those who are good in character and deeds, but uninformed of the gospel of Christ. These thoughts must be considered when forming our world view concerning the last judgment and the punishment of those who have not had the opportunity to hear and obey the gospel. 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 that the Bible reveals. (More later.)

## Chapter 10

# JUDGMENT OF THE DEAD

The term “final judgment” refers to the last judgment that will take place in reference to the affairs of this world. 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. This judgment means that there are no second chances. Once one dies, judgment is finalized.

### A. Judgment after death:

The Hebrew writer 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 final judgment takes place immedi-

ately after one physically dies. The reason for this is obvious. There would be no need for judgment to be postponed for those who have died for they have already secured their fate.

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 when Jesus comes again. 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” that is for the devil and his angels (Mt 25:41).

### B. Destinies after judgment:

Jesus said of the rich man in Luke 16 that after he died he found himself in torments (Lk 16:22,23). Though in a disembodied state in tor-

ments, 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 that resulted in two different destinies, took place at the time of death. There is no reason why this judgment would be reversed at the final judgment since both the rich man and Lazarus had completed all their works while alive.

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 who 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 both the rich man and the unrepentant thief.

Existence after death in a realm of torments assumes that final judgment for the unbeliever 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 in the destiny of the dead.

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. We would respond by saying that the Bible teaches that 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 and humanity. However, there might be some argument against this conclusion since there is no promise in the Bible 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 in the Bible are made specifically to believers.

We would state that we often make an assumption that the Bible does not clearly state. This assumption is that the wicked will receive a “habitation” from God as the Christian. But the Bible makes no statements that the wicked will be raised with a changed body as the righteous. 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 on those who are **in Christ**. When he writes about the 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 resurrection of 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. However, though little is spoken of the resurrection of the unrighteous, they will certainly be resurrected. In Acts 24:15 Paul stated that there “*will be a resurrection, both of the just and unjust.*” The unjust 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 the unjust will be raised to face their destruction in the body. However, we 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 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 have died before the end. However, the fact is that these who have died before the last judgment have already received their final judgment. The last judgment for them will be a final assignment. The wicked will be assigned to the continuation of their torment, but in the consuming “fire” of 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 on the righteous who go away into life. Since God will no longer allow the righteous to be tempted by the existence of an entity as Satan, then there will no longer be a need for the existence of Satan. He will be terminated in hell.

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. Every soul that has lived on the face of the earth will stand in judgment.

### 1. Judgment of the living:

Those who are alive at the time of the end when Jesus comes again will “ap-

pear before **the judgment seat of Christ**” (2 Co 5:10). Jesus will enact the authority of God on the heavenly “judgment seat” and assign the destinies of all men.

Unfortunately, we have taken our earthly understandings of judgment into the throne room of the final 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 on which Jesus will sit in order to judge. “Judgment seat” simply illustrates Jesus’ function with 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 instant occurrence. In other words, what will transpire in the final hour will happen in “a moment, in the 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 case before God. Judgment will take place in an instant of the last trumpet. Afterward, we will 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 taken place. 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 who were living prior to the flood were judged by the flood that took them away. Jude used 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. At that time 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 the final judgment to come. The execution of judgment, therefore, is meant to be an encouragement to the faithful who are living at any 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 suffer the eternal consequences of his unrighteousness.

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 the consuming fire of gehenna. Our 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 of 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 fullness of their destinies. As the right-

eous 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 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, we can find comfort in the fact that there will be no Satan in the new heavens and earth to come. Satan and his league of angels will not escape the judgment of Jesus and his total consummation. In the judgment of Jesus, Satan and his angels will face their doom in judgment and termination in hell.

Satan will be judged and condemned. Eternal gehenna (hell) 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 because hell marks the finality of Satan's temptation of the saints

of God. 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 existence is coming (Mt 8:29). The unjust dead who are reserved in torment know their final destiny. It is a destiny of consummation in a devil's hell.

The Bible pictures the totality of humanity experiencing the final assignment of judgment. In the prophetic language of John, the finality of death and hades are 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 them 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. It is imperative, therefore, that every person on earth be forewarned that he or she will give account of their actions before the Creator of all things.

## Chapter 11

### TIME AND ETERNITY

It is impossible for the human mind to comprehend existence 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 ref-

erence 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 our contention

that neither the Greeks nor the modern-day scholar can fully understand the concept of eternity. No words can be found in the Hebrew, Greek or any dictionary of the world, that can define eternity. In order for the Bible student to in some way comprehend the concept of eternity, he or she must first come to the conclusion that there are no words of this world that are adequate to define that which is beyond this world.

Nevertheless, our challenge is to at least first understand the meaning of the Greek words that are used in reference to everlasting life. We must understand them as they were originally understood by those who defined them when the Holy Spirit chose them from the Greek dictionary to reveal eternal concepts.

Second, we must 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, we must be assured that when objectively considered, the definition of the common Greek words *aionios* (adjective, *aionion*) and *aion* that are used in reference to eternity 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 defend our heritage theology, but to determine a biblical explanation of

unending time in relation to the soul and spirit of man.

We must keep in mind as we journey through this adventure of biblical study that the Bible is our best dictionary and 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 on a past misunderstanding of a handed-down interpretation. And above all, as we journey into this often controversial realm of study, we must never allow our feelings for revenge or retribution against the enemies of righteousness to prejudice our understanding of what the Bible actually says on this matter. As we venture into this study, the reader will understand this. We must simply seek truth and allow such to determine our 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 do not obey the gospel. One view supposes that God will torment the lost without end. 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. 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:

**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 tormented 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 will 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

punishment for their sins. 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 cease to exist.

Both of the preceding views are defended by good Bible scholars. We believe the latter view has greater and more biblically consistent evidence for its truth. The first view has some serious logical contradictions that must be considered. As we study through the next two chapters, we must investigate all biblical evidence that must be considered that 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. When a metaphor is used to explain that which is beyond our experience, there is room for a great amount of wonder, and little room for dogmatism. We must caution ourselves, therefore, not to be too over-enthusiastic 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 that were used by the Holy Spirit to explain the duration of hell. We use the English words “forever” and “eternal” to translate the Greek word *aionios*. Our understanding of the Greek word must be consistent with other fundamental Bible teachings. 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's Greek Lexicon* defined *aionios* with three statements of definition in reference to its use in the New Testament: (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.” 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*).

The Greek word *aion* often refers 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 a conclusion. *Aion* refers specifically 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, must 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 (hell) 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 context.

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

There are two definitions of *aionios* that must be explained and applied to those nouns that refer to end-of-time concepts. In our study of both heaven and hell, we must 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. There are also 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 very challenging to be objective. Nevertheless, it is not the task of the Bible student to read into the text preconceived ideas. It is our task to allow the Bible to speak for itself. If we allow preconceived theologies to prejudice our study, we may miss a correct interpretation of a text or miss a newly discovered truth in the Bible.

Some scholars have contended that the first definition of *aionios*—duration of existence without end—is the only meaning that is to be em-

phasized in Scripture. This is especially assumed in those contexts that refer to the final destiny of the wicked. However, we must challenge this assumption simply because of the definition of the word is used in some contexts where a predetermined period of time is inferred. 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 *aionios* as it is used in the Scriptures.

Some have used Matthew 25:46 to affirm that “eternal” (*aionios*) life and “eternal” (*aionios*) punishment must 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 *aionios* in the same context in reference to the righteous and wicked. Therefore, the word *aionios* must mean “without end” in reference to hell simply because heaven is without end. However, we must remember to first determine the meaning of *aionios* that Jesus is emphasizing. Is He emphasizing the meaning of certainty of effect (qualitative) that has resulted from a particular action in time, or the definition of time without end?

We 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 in ref-

erence to teachings that were “eternal” or “everlasting.” Our understanding must be as the original audience understood Jesus’ statements because Jesus was speaking in the terminology they could understand. The biblical text must be used to determine if emphasis is on time without end, or the quality of existence within a determined period of time.

We are 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 the Holy Spirit used to explain spiritual concepts.

With the above in mind, consider some of the uses of the words “eternal” and “everlasting” as they were 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 “commentary” of New Testament teachings. 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 *aiōnios*, we must research the use of this word as it was used to explain concepts in the Old Testament. As Jesus and the apostles delivered the revelation of truth 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 the Jews could understand. Therefore, in those New Testament epistles that have a predominately Jewish audience, we must learn through the Old Testament how the Jews first understood the message of Jesus that was spoken specifically to them.

When the Jews developed the Septuagint translation of the Hebrew Scriptures in the third century B.C., they used the word *aiōnios* to translate Hebrew words that referred to eternity. Therefore, when we consider the Old Testament words that are used in reference to eternity that are translated with the word *aiōnios*, we are accepting a Jewish understanding or interpretation of eternity in reference to the Jews’ understanding of both Hebrew and Greek words. The Old Tes-

tament 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 considered 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 to be 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. We 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 Sinai law and covenant that were established as “everlasting” codes of obedience.

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 came 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 for sin once and for all. There is now no need for an animal Passover lamb to be offered for our sins (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" (*olam*) 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* in the Old Testament, they used the Greek word *aionios*. This should immediately alert us to the fact that there should be another meaning of the word *aionios* that does not refer to time without end. This would be the qualitative emphasis of the word.

From the use of the words "everlasting" or "forever" in a biblical context in the Old Testament, we discover that emphasis is not always on time without end. In the previously mentioned contexts where the word *olam* was used in the Old Testament, the emphasis was on **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 were terminated.

They stopped. **Thus, emphasis was on the certainty or surety (qualitative) of the existence of what God had ordained until such had accomplished or fulfilled its divine purpose.**

For example, 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. Atonement for ours need never be made again. 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 part of "an everlasting covenant" (Lv 24:8). However, the sabbath is no longer a part of God's New Testament covenant relationship with His people today. Neither will we keep the sabbath in the new heavens and earth after the passing away of the sun that would determine when a sabbath should occur during the week (See 2 Pt 3:10,11).

In the Old Testament, the use of *olam* (Gr., *aionios*) referred to aspects of the covenant that God had estab-

lished with Israel. Though the “eternal” aspects of the covenant had a definite end, the final results of the “eternal” ordinances of the covenant would find their end in the new covenant. For example, the priesthood of Aaron had a definite end in the establishment of the new covenant. However, high 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). But the Levitical priesthood of the Jews was terminated when Jesus became our high priest, and priesthood was extended to all those who obeyed the gospel (See Hb 8).

Though the Old Testament priesthood was terminated with the coming of the new covenant, the principle of priesthood was continued. Aaron’s priesthood continued on with “time without end” effect in the sense that Jesus continued the high priesthood of Aaron. 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 the new covenant that is built on its principles (See Jr 31:31-34). There were changes, but there were also the continuation of principles.

The preceding is very important to understand when coming to the New Testament. When the words “ev-

erlasting” or “forever” are used, termination can be understood, though there is also something that carries on after the termination. The effect of the termination has unending effects.

Keep in mind also that the word *aionios* 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 at least seventy times in contexts that define the word to refer 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 to be understood, or a “determined existence in time with a definite end.”

Our challenge is to 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 determine our understanding 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 the Jews who lived under the Sinai law. He came that He to offer redemption to them and all mankind (Gl 4:4,5). He came using the words “everlasting” and “eternal”

in reference to teachings concerning heaven and hell that were of the age to come. It is in this context that we must reflect on 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, **the use of the word in reference to a divinely pre-determined time of existence with a definite end**. At least, one would certainly not be objective to completely bypass 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 this 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 an end with unending results. The following are examples in the New Testament of 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 had consequences or results that exist without end. Emphasis, therefore, is not so much on the unending nature of the consequences, but on the effect that such events have in relation to man. Consider these actions in reference to the word *aionios* that is used to modify the results.

**a. Matthew 25:46:** “*And these will go away into everlasting [aionion] punishment, but the righteous into eternal [aionion] life.*” When the Christian obeyed the gospel (was baptized), he entered into eternal life in the Son (1 Jn 1:2; 2:25; 5:11,13). This eternal life is sure in the sense that it is based on the sanctifying blood of Jesus and our justification before God according to His grace (1 Jn 1:7-9). Because the obedient believer was sanctified by the blood of Jesus, and thus all sins were washed away at the point of baptism

**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**

(At 2:38; 22:16), he or she was justified before God.

The Christian, therefore, came into a realm of eternal life at the point of baptism, and thus, he will carry on in this eternal life with certainty throughout eternity because of the cross. The obedient came into eternal life when he or she went down into and out of the waters of baptism. In one's life of living the gospel, it is not a matter of continually receiving life. The life was received by the grace of God when one obeyed the gospel. Because the Christian has received life, the results of life will continue past the final coming and judgment.

The punishment of the wicked, on the other hand, begins at the time of physical death (Lk 16:22,23). Because they have not obeyed the gospel, they are the "walking dead" in life, but will eventually be consigned to the second death when they physically die. 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 upon their death. 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 reap some punishing consequences for 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 revealed. The word "eternal" as an adjective that modifies life and punishment in Matthew 25:46 reveals 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 realized.

**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 and never started again.

On the other hand, living after the Spirit affects one in order to continue one's 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 be-

havior 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 cause him to decay 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. They were denying the revelation of the gospel through Jesus. Those who do such are subject to certain condemnation; they commit an eternal sin because they have not recognized the gospel work of God through Jesus. Therefore, they will not listen to or

obey the gospel of Jesus in order to be saved.

They have committed an action of denial. The result of this action is condemnation. They could, of course, repent by believing in Jesus. However, as long as they assign the gospel 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 gospel of Jesus to the devil will have unending consequences. There will be “eternal” consequences of this belief and behavior.

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 throughout unending existence. They committed the denial in life, but their denial will result in their termination for eternity. In this sense, therefore, the “eternal” sin they committed in life by denying Jesus will result in their end. Their disobedience of the gospel will lead them into eternal destruction. 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 in life. 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 on the fact that those who do not know the love God that was revealed through the gospel, and do not subsequently obey the gospel, will be punished at the time of Jesus’ coming. The punishment at that time will be destruction with eternal consequences. Both the destruction and the consequences are certain to happen when Jesus comes again.

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 process of destruction.

The problem with this understanding is that destruction always has an end. Destruction infers termination. Translators differ on what the destruction is. Some feel that the everlasting destruction comes forth from the Lord and is unleashed on 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. We 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 in reference to our understanding of the word *aionios*.

**(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 certain destruction. The duration of the punishment is not known, other than the fact that God issues punishment according to the crime. Nevertheless,

destruction has an end. Herein is the “eternal” judgment of Hebrews 6:2. (More on this verse later.) The judgment 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:** The Hebrew writer wrote of Jesus, “*And having been perfected, He became the author of eternal salvation to all who obey Him.*” When one obeys the gospel, 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 one cannot lose his salvational relationship with God, for one must continually walk in the light of God’s word in response to the grace of God (1 Jn 1:7). Nevertheless, once the redemptive work of God takes place in one’s life, it is full and complete forever.

Through the call of the gospel, Jesus is now saving people. However, this saving process through the call of the gospel will eventually end. After the final coming, there will be no more opportunities to respond to the gospel. 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 when Jesus comes

again, the consequences of salvation for those who have obeyed the gospel will go on without end.

**f. Hebrews 6:2:** The Hebrew writer spoke of the elementary principles of Christ, one of which was “**eternal** (*aionios*) judgment.” This eternal judgment is listed in the context of Hebrews 6:2 in reference to the resurrection to come. The eternal judgment, therefore, refers to the **final** judgment that is yet to come and will happen on the last day. This judgment will not go on without end. **There will be an end of the judgment.** It will stop after it has occurred on the last day.

The Hebrew writer used the adjective “eternal” (*aionios*) in reference to this **onetime action** of final judgment. He did so in order to establish the fact that there will be certain judgment on the last day. However, **the results of the “eternal” judgment will last without end.** The consequences of judgment will have no end, though the actual event of judgment 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 stated that through His own blood, Jesus “*entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal [aionios] redemption.*”

The fact of Jesus’ work of redemption 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. Jesus’ offering of redemption on the cross was a onetime event that has unending consequences.

By using the word “eternal,” the Hebrew writer was emphasizing the **consequences** of the redemptive act of Jesus, not the act itself. Jesus was offered once on 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 have obeyed 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 onetime action, the result of the action carries on into time without end.

**h. Jude 7:** Jude spoke 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, we would conclude that the fire about which Jude wrote was a consuming fire. In conjunction with the previous interpretations, the emphasis is on the result of the consuming fire. In order to be consistent with the previous uses of the word “eternal” (*aionios*) as an adjective to modify a noun, we must conclude 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 Thessalonians 1:9 will be a onetime 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 after the fire has ceased.

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 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 chart below:

The chart presents a challenge in reference to being consistent in understanding either Old Testament or New Testament concepts that use the words *olam* and *aionios*. 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

<p><b>OLD TESTAMENT</b> <i>olam</i> (Septuagint translation: <i>aionios</i>)</p>	<p><b>NEW TESTAMENT</b> <i>aionios</i> (from <i>aion</i>)</p>
<p>Unending existence? or Predetermined time?</p>	<p>Unending existence? or Predetermined time?</p>
<p>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”</p>	<p>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”</p>



reference to New Testament teachings? Or, should we use the New Testament usage of *aiōnios* 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. The point is that we must be consistent in our interpretation.

One must maintain a consistent conclusion to the points of this chapter. In reference to the righteous, Jesus has once and for all time carried out the sacrificial offering for our redemption. The results of that onetime sacrifice on the cross has unending consequences. Those who obey the gospel are immediately saved at the time of their obedience of the gospel. The result of the saving act of obedience of the gospel will go on without end. The acts of “redeeming” and “saving,” therefore, will not continue throughout eternity. Redemption and salvation are accomplished in a moment of time. Jesus has already accomplished redemption on the cross. The redeemed have already been saved by the redeeming blood of the gospel. However, the results of both actions will continue throughout eternity. The saved will remain saved without end because of a onetime re-

demption 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 of the gospel; they have committed the eternal sin. The result of this action will have unending consequences because 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 will lead to termination. 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 onetime event, as the redemption, salvation and eternal life of the righteous are onetime actions. 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 onetime 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 rejecting the gospel 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 must now make every effort to give the wicked an opportunity for eternity. Only a selfish disciple would not feel compelled to preach the gospel to the lost. He would be selfish because he does not feel that others should have the opportunity of eternal life as he does. Our spirit of evangelism is generated by our desire to encourage others to have the salvation we have in Christ.

## Chapter 12

### 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. He must also be made aware of the consequences of his choices. He must know the reward for good choices. He must be aware of the consequences of bad choices. If he makes bad choices, he must know that eventually he will 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 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. Before and after the giving of the Sinai law to Israel, and before the establishment of the new covenant, the Gentiles lived under *“the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness”* (Rm 2:15). At Mount Sinai, 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 His law (Rm 2:11-16), and thus, those who violate law will suffer the punishment of God. 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).

We must also consider that those who do not know the God who is revealed through the Bible, will also suffer the consequences of being sepa-

rated from God. This was the meaning of the Holy Spirit in 2 Thessalonians 1:8. Jesus will come *“in flaming fire, taking vengeance on those who do not know God and who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.”* The meaning of *“those who do not know God”* must be understood in the context of those who do not obey the gospel. It is the God of love who loved all humanity through the gospel of Jesus Christ. Men have conceived of many gods that they have created after their own imagination. But the true God of heaven is a God of love who would give His only begotten Son for humanity (Jn 3:16). It is for this God that honest and sincere people will seek (Rm 1:20). It is this God who *“made of one man all nations of men to dwell on all the face of the earth ... so that they should seek the Lord”* (At 17:26,27). If one is not seeking to know this God, then he is not worthy to be in the eternal presence of this God.

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 reject the God of love 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 rejecting a knowledge of the one true and living

God of love. Men must fear this 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 will 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). A healthy understanding of hell is necessary, therefore, in order to deter us from disobedience of the God who offered His Son in an eternal sacrifice for sins. It is necessary in order that we direct our lives by the word of God.

### A. Definition of hell:

The word “hell” is the English word that is used to translate 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 refers 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

- **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.*”
- **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).
- **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].*”
- **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.*”
- **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.*”
- **Matthew 23:33:** “*Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell [gehenna]?*”
- **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 vs 43,47).

- **Luke 12:5:** "*Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell* [gehenna]; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"
- **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 referred 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 use of the word in the New Testament. It is a Jewish word, and was used when inspired literature was written to the Jews. The Jews 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 word of Jewish theology. It is one that the Jews used specifically in reference to the final destruction of the wicked.

The English word "gehenna" is a transliteration of the Greek word.

The word 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 were the real and actual events of both Jesus and James' metaphorical use of the word gehenna.

The valley of Hinnom was southwest 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 "Toplevel," or a "place of abhorrence," or "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 metaphorical use of the place throughout the history of Israel. At least, when Jeremiah wrote he stated that because of Israel's 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 that 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 the history in the valley of Hinnom, Jesus warned 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 exactly what He meant. Those who were thrown into gehenna would be destroyed. They would be consumed. This was Paul’s point in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. The wicked “*shall be pun-*

*ished with everlasting **destruction.***” Gehenna (hell) 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 on the flock of God. All those who are not in a covenant relationship with God, therefore, will suffer the consequences of destruction.

## **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. 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 used 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 described by the Holy Spirit. The following are some of the graphic pictures of the destiny of the wicked:

### GEHENNA

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

The Holy Spirit uses those terms that are most shocking 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” refers 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. 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. We 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.

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 weep-*

*ing 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 on 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 those who are destined for 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, the demons 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 Luke 8:26-39 (See Lk 8:31). Both Matthew and Mark used the word torment (Mt 8:29; Mk 5:7). Luke says **abyss**. The abyss is the existence of torment into which Satan will be 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 was saying, we must understand precisely who he was 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 loving character. 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 gospel have, by their lack of obedience, testified to the fact that they do not know the God, who out of love, gave His only begotten Son for the sins of the world.

Those who do not know the God who gave His Son will thus be punished with the destruction that is to come for they are not of the heart of God that would move them to obey the gospel. 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 loving

character, and thus responding to the gospel, the result is the same.

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 and obey the gospel. Such a theology may sound good in “fire and brimstone” sermons, but there are some serious contradictions to such a doctrine. (More on this later.)

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 searched for the one true and living God. It would thus include those who have refused to hear and obey the gospel when they were given the opportunity.

To some, this sounds too hard. It sounds hard only because of our misunderstanding of hell. In order to understand the encompassing con-

demnation of all who do not know the one true God and obey the gospel, then possibly we should start by re-studying our concept of hell. There seems to be a conflict of interpretation in the minds of some Christian thinkers on this point. In fact, there is a logical contradiction.

The contradiction is that the Bible teaches that the nature of God is loving and merciful. He is just, not fiendish. However, it is supposed by some that He will cast into an unending fiery torment billions of souls who have lived on the earth but never had a chance to hear and obey the gospel. In eternity, He will occasionally check up on these burning souls in order to make sure their torment is continuing without end.

At the same time there are those burning endlessly in hell, there will be those who are enjoying heaven. But part of their enjoyment will be in the fact that there are those who are over in hell being tormented for their crimes against the righteous.

The preceding poses a logical contradiction. The Bible defines God to be loving. However, the Bible at the same time cannot define God to be loving while He is fiendish in reference to the burning without end those who did not obey the gospel. Also, 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 never ending torment? It takes no complex logic to figure out that there is something fiendishly wrong with this belief. **It is simply not possible for God to be both loving and fiendish at the same time.**

We have found that many preachers simply ignore preaching on the subject of hell because they recognize the above logical contradiction in reference to the traditional teaching of hell that contradicts the very character of God. Christian teachers have dodged the issue by often refusing to even talk about the matter. 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 gospel 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. We are sure there are other theologies that have been developed in order to dodge the inconsistencies we develop as a result of the traditional understanding

that hell is a place of unending burning.

What seems to be the case is that Christian thinkers are somehow fearful of challenging traditional concepts of hell, even though these concepts deny the very nature of the God of love. 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 loving character of God is not just God's business. It is our business because we are the ones who have developed the inconsistent doctrine. If God is fiendish, then we have denied the God of love. We have questioned the gospel of Jesus Christ that is the revelation of the love of God for humanity.

**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 explained that the gospel is the fact *“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 gos-**

**pel**, 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 reveals that the destruction of hell is “eternal.” We must keep in mind that the word *aionios* (eternal) in the 2 Thessalonians 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 do not know 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 sin. The results of the destruction will not be reversed.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 should thus be understood with the interpretation

that “these will 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 of love who measures punishment according to the sin.

We must also deal with the one who has lived according to Christian principles, but has not obeyed the gospel. We 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 and contradictory conclusions concerning what this might teach concerning our understanding of the nature of God.

We must deal with the challenge of harmonizing our concept of the nature of a loving and just God with the supposed doctrine of punishment in an 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 deity simply cannot be true. The atheist has the Christian logically cornered if we cannot answer this contradiction. 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 by the atheist. We must deal with this dilemma. Here are a few thoughts, therefore, that we must investigate in reference to our definition of hell:

**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 religionist who has lived according to Christian principles, but has never obeyed the gospel, be punished with a fiery hell? Will the good neighbor and good citizen of the community go to an unending hell because he or she has not known God, or having known, never obeyed the gospel? These are questions with which we must deal in reference to establishing a consistent world view as a Christian. We simply cannot just say these

will all go to an unending hell, and ignore the self-contradictions of a theology that attacks the very nature of God. Our answer to these questions reflects our world view and how we understand who God is. 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.

The atheist has often logically cornered the Christian in a logical contradiction. 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 unending fire and brimstone those who never had a chance to obey the gospel.

We cannot simply answer that it is God's business and leave it at that. It is true that the destruction of hell is God's business. He will take care of the matter. However, we find it hard to believe that God has presented to mankind a doctrine that assumes that He is fiendish and unjust, while at the

same time He so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

**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*" (Lk 12:47). On the other hand, "*he who did not know, yet committed things worthy of stripes, shall be beaten with few*" (Lk 12:48). 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). We 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. However, we need to question this interpretation.

We must challenge ourselves not to create an understanding that makes God either fiendish or unjust. If emphasis in Jesus' parable of Luke 12:42-48 is on **duration**, and not on intensity, then the picture changes. Those who have lived good lives, yet were outside a 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. We 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 gone forever. Their existence is terminated.

**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 Sinai 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 conclusion that God is also fiendish, that is, He takes pleasure 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 would 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. It may bring some peace of mind to our fiendish desire to measure out retribution to those who torment us, but our selfish desires of retaliation should not be the basis on which we would define the God of love that the Bible reveals.

We must 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 state of being lost?

We 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 the responsibility of not proclaiming the gospel of Jesus to all the world. Who should suffer the punishment, the innocent ignorant or the knowledgeable lazy Christian?

We 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 the gospel 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 be-

fore God in final judgment on 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 works 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 on the merit of good 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 good works atone for sin, “*lest anyone should boast*” (Ep 2:9). **The sacrificial offering 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 good 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 the conscience for the Gentiles instead of going through the entire

struggle with Israel and the church in order to bring the obedient into heaven.

It is our belief that “*there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved*” (At 4:12). It is also our belief that in order for all men to partake of the eternal existence of heaven, they must hear and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ. Christians, therefore, have the responsibility of sharing what they have with those who do not have it. We would be selfish if we did not share that which we 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

gospel information with others, then certainly he or she will be held accountable, not because he did not share the gospel, but because he was 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 destruction. 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.

## Chapter 13

### HEAVEN

**13** Some concept of life after death is found in all cultures that have existed in history. The reason for this is that men do not want to live without hope. Various words than heaven are used to describe this hope, but the idea is an understood belief of all religions that have existed. Different ideas surround the mental heavenly picture of each particular cultural group. Nevertheless, people 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 tangible reassurance 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 man-*

sions [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 brief glimpses of 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 reassurance in this life; it is that which gives meaning to existence and comfort in all 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. The nature and character of God that is revealed in the Bible, and the na-

ture of the faithful who will be there, explain to some extent the environment of heaven.

**1. Heaven is an existence after the nature of God.** 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). The Hebrew writer stated concerning Jesus, “*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 that 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 na-

ture 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.

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. And the only way we can understand this Messenger from heaven is through the words of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John.

It is true that the Scriptures describe God after the attributes that we possess. “*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 God by understanding the best of these traits that can be manifested in people. However, there is still a limit here in understanding the fullness of the “love” or “mercy” or “kindness” of God. We would not limit God’s love to the maximum limits of our capacity to love. Neither would we limit His kindness, or any emotional capacity of God to the most

kind person on earth. God can love or be kind far 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 capabilities. 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 it is revealed through Jesus. Jesus "emptied Himself" and "made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant." He came in the likeness of man in order to reveal the character of the Father (Ph 2:6-8). Nevertheless, Jesus' ability to manifest the maximum of the character of the Father through an "emptied state" is challenging for us 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 and written by the inspired writers. Nevertheless, 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 will see Him as He is (1 Jn 3:2).

God knew our inability to understand the fullness or extent of His ten-

derness, His capacity to love, to show mercy and to be patient. In order to reveal Himself to man, however, God 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 loving Christians.** Pe-

ter 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 partially understand heaven, therefore, we must look to a faithful Christian. Heaven will be of the character of the faithful who are now headed for it.

Nothing defiled will 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).

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. It is a world 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, however, 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 in heaven, 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 on 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. We do not see heaven as a place where we will cease to grow spiritually. 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 our 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 having been affected by the holiness of God. 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 will be. 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 used 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 was 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 this life, in other words, to be equally awarded the prize of the glory to come. The prize far outweighs any price that we might offer to purchase. 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 heaven with the 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:

#### DESCRIPTION OF HEAVEN

- Heaven is a place of **rest** (2 Co 5:1-10; Hb 4:1-4,9-11; Rv 14:13).
- Heaven is a place of **joy** (Mt 25:21; Lk 15:7,10; see Rv 7:13-17; 21:4).
- Heaven is a place of **righteousness** (2 Pt 3:13; see Rv 22:15).
- Heaven is a place **without physical inflictions** (Rv 7:16,17; 21:4).
- Heaven is a place of **no death** (Lk 20:35,36; see Rv 20:14; 21:4).
- Heaven is a place of **no sorrow** (Rv 7:16,17; see Rv 21:4).
- Heaven is a place of **glory** (Rm 8:18; 2 Co 4:17; Cl 3:4).
- Heaven is a place of **worship** (Rv 4:5; 7:11-15; 21:22).
- Heaven is a place of **no night** (Rv 22:5).
- Heaven is **not a place of flesh and blood** (1 Co 15:50).
- Heaven is a place **where there is no need of marriage** (Lk 20:35,36).
- 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 (See 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). The saints 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.

#### THE REWARD OF HEAVEN

- Heaven is a **reward** (Mt 5:11,12; Cl 3:24).
- Heaven is an **inheritance** (Ep 1:14; Cl 1:12; 3:24; 1 Pt 1:4).
- Heaven is **immortality** (1 Co 15:42,50; 2 Co 5:4).
- Heaven is a **crown of victory** (1 Co 9:24,25; 2 Tm 4:8; 1 Pt 5:4; Rv 2:10).
- Heaven is a **crown of life** (Js 1:12).

### 3. *Metaphors of heaven:*

Through metaphorical statements and words, the Holy Spirit seeks to excite our thinking concerning the nature and environment of heaven. Only

through metaphor can the Spirit take our minds above this present world in order 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 used 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 with which we will be clothe 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 present 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 assurance. In a figurative manner,

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 explained,

*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. ... 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 metaphorically 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 look beyond the physical temple of Jerusalem. He desired that we focus on the metaphorical meaning of his use of the word “temple.”

The 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 a place of solitude. It is a place of worship and closeness to God. It symbolizes God’s presence 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 His loving 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 Sinai law and the city of Jerusalem as their center of worship. Jesus said that 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 destina-

tion. 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 with 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 on 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 composed of physical “castles in the sky.” It is a dwelling. We will 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. They would not be separated from one another by going into their own “mansions.” He sought in John 14 to give them emotional security for the tremendous persecutions they were about to endure for His name. He reassured them that they would continue together throughout eternity.

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 be preserved by God 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 that 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 stated in a previous chapter, there is no Greek word that the New

Testament writers could have used to express the duration of eternity. Endless time is not a concept of our earthly understanding. We think that we understand this concept, but we must understand that our understanding is inadequate. 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, the 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 onetime 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 reveals eternal heaven in the sense of prom-

ising 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 of time without end. Thus, when we discuss heaven, the realm of God’s existence, its eternity 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. In and of Himself, He can only be that which has no beginning and no ending. 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, for they will not be in the presence of God.

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 discussed the subject of heaven, he did 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 did not use the word *aionios* with his Jewish audience in order not to be misunderstood. He was 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 wanted 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 these points 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.

Through His blood sacrifice on the cross, 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 physi-

cal 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, depends 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 that 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 will dwell in the presence of God, and thus, draw from His eternality in order that we dwell with Him without end.

**2. Heaven is sure and certain life.** Jesus said, “*I am the resurrec-*

*tion 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. Death is termination. Life is without end. 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 our body for it will never exist again as it did while alive on earth.

The contrast to the termination of our bodies in physical death, our immortal bodies will not suffer physical death. The spiritual, or second death, is termination from existence. But Jesus came to give us hope for both an immortal body and an eternal existence in our resurrected bodies in the presence of God. In the eternal existence of heaven, there will be no concept of separation from God, and thus, no death. There will be no concept of the termination of something that exists in the presence of the life-giving eternal God. 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 con-

tinue to live the gospel of Jesus. The apostate loses his eternal life in this life because he has turned away from the gospel (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. Obedience to the gospel, therefore, is not a onetime baptismal event in the life of the believer that brings life without conditions. One must continue to live in the light of the gospel in order that the blood of the cross continue to wash one of all sin (1 Jn 1:7).

The surety of heaven's existence is defined in Matthew 25:46 when Jesus used the Greek word *aionion* to establish a contrast between the destinies of the righteous and 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 fact 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, therefore, have nothing in the future 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 a reward for those who have left houses, brothers, sisters, fathers and mothers in this life, but will gain spiritual 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 refer 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 exists. 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 pass away. The will of God abides. We thus assume that those

who submit to the gospel will also abide. There is an abiding existence planned for all those who remain faithful to the gospel. Because of their commitment to the gospel, 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 the “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 new heavens and earth.

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 this dwelling our building from God cannot be destroyed.

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul used the words “corruptible” and “mortal” in reference to the body of this present world. Such terms refer to what is temporary, that is, that which has an 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 without end. 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 the spiritual body that 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 will sustain us for eternity.

**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 made this statement in the context of the resurrection of the righteous and ascension in companionship with the living saints. The righteous will “always” be with the Lord who exists in eternity. The righteous will 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 the same. We will be with Him in His presence without end. There will be no end of our dwelling in coexistence with the Lord. It is the presence of the Lord that makes this all possible. The unrighteous will be destroyed because they will be thrust from the presence of the Lord (2 Th 1:7-9). However, the righteous will be in the presence of the Lord who maintains their endless existence (2 Co 5:8).

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.

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 with a glorious body. 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 the new heavens and earth. It is the dwelling for which we all long. It is in this habitation with the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in an endless "time" that we seek to be.

## Epilogue

We are sure that the subject of this book has been very challenging to many people. Throughout history, the doctrine of the endless torment of the wicked by a loving God has been a belief of those who often have a vindictive spirit against the unrighteous. However, we believe there are some

serious contradictions 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 loving nature of God.

If we allow the Old Testament to define the nature of God, and that na-

ture revealed through Jesus, then we have a problem with harboring a vindictive spirit 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 forgiving nature of God. The endless torture of the wicked is contrary to this forgiving nature of God. In fact, if we would encourage God to unleash a vindictive fiery torment upon our present tormentors, we might disqualify ourselves from being in His forgiving presence. If God is love—and indeed He is—then any unloving spirit on our part would disqualify us from spending eternity in the presence of a loving God. Would we truly be loving and forgiving if we in the new heavens and earth occasionally reminded God to go check up on our former persecutors He had stored away in an unending furnace of fire and brimstone?

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. It is totally contrary to the nature of the God of the gospel who gave His only begotten Son on the cross because He loved us so much.

Justice must be measured out. But justice does not assume endless 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, then the result is the end of the criminal.

We have found that some theologians have a difficult time facing these logical contradictions in reference to the nature of God and the concept of hell. But we feel that the annihilation of the wicked after just punishment has been endured, is in harmony with reason and the very foundation on which the gospel is based. God so love the world, that He so gave His Son, not willing that any should perish forever.