

What Happens When People Die?

"If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, til my change come." (Job 14:14) Though perhaps being the most Enduring Question of all time, It has a Clear and Comforting Biblical Answer!

What happens to human beings at death? Do they go to heaven, or might they go to hell, or do they rest somewhere in between? Do they in fact go anywhere? Do we remain alive in another dimension, or do we simply cease to exist? If we study the Bible and believe what it actually says, these questions can be answered comprehensively.

Accommodating an Immortal Soul

Because the belief in the immortal soul is a central tenet of most religions, we find believers to have no real awareness of what the Bible actually says on the subject of what happens after we die. Though the prevailing belief system may provide some comfort, most people avoid thinking about the validity of the common Christian teachings about the deceased going to either heaven or hell when they die. That being the case, those clear and logical scriptures that speak of the state of the dead being something other than a continuing conscious existence are avoided like the plague, simply because they threaten the very foundation of the belief in humans having an immortal soul.

Although the beliefs of Catholics and Protestants differ radically in many respects, both believe in the immortality of the soul. They also believe that humans only die physically, but the spirit (i.e., the soul - the sentient being) remains alive in a sense, conscious, but in heaven, hell, or in some cases, a transitory state in-between.

However, the Catholic / Protestant doctrine of people going to heaven or hell immediately upon death cannot be proven from Scripture. In addition, the Catholic concept of purgatory as a place or condition of spiritual remediation is also a non-biblical teaching. Neither of these teachings are valid biblical concepts; they are simply figments of societal imagination, which were conceived to explain the state of the dead in the context of humans having an immortal soul.

In fact, researching the matter, a person would find that such ideas were 'borrowed' from pre-existing pagan religions in large part!

Two Aspects of Human Existence

In order to correctly understand the state of the dead, it's important to understand what human beings are. The full aspect of what God created as the human being is not visually discernible. Many religions teach, and others believe, that humans have a soul which they regard as a non-physical component. The Bible does say things that would tend to support that idea, but it also states that humans have a spirit. However, is this spirit a physically derived component or does it represent another dimension of human existence?

The scriptures show that there are two distinct dimensions involved in the make-up of a human being, and that we are composed of elements from both dimensions. There's both a physical dimension and a spiritual dimension of existence and each is separate from the other in making us what we are. But, both work together to enable humans to exist on a higher plane of consciousness than the rest of animate physical creation:

"And I say to you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell; [gehenna] yes, I say to you, Fear him." (Luke 12:4-5 KJV).

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28 KJV).

The English word 'body' in these two verses is the Greek word 'soma,' which means 'a human / animal body' or 'a corpse'. (In other words, referring to our physical form, living or dead,

distinct from our intellect-component.) The Greek word for 'soul' is 'psyche', which can be translated 'life' or 'mind'. (In other words, that gift which allows consciousness and intellect, as opposed to animal-level existence that animals exhibit: instinct, without the ability to think creatively. (We should keep in mind that the animation that our physical processes generate (on a physical level) is, in the Old Testament, also referred to as a 'soul'. But that term applies to ALL living air breathing creatures, distinct from any degree of intellect. The word there in the Hebrew is 'nephesh', commonly translated as 'soul'.¹)

These two scriptures mention two distinct elements of human life: physical and non-physical. Moreover, both elements can be completely destroyed by God, but other humans can kill only our physical bodies, depriving us of life, but not our ultimate existence.

The English word 'destroy' is a translation of the Greek word 'apollumi', which means 'to destroy fully', 'to kill', 'to perish', 'to completely do away with'. There is no doubt that the words used in Matthew 10:28 mean that God has the power to completely destroy all aspects of human life, and that degree of destruction transcends death as it might naturally occur. (On 'perish', see John 3:16)

Spirit, Soul and Body

Jesus says that there are two major elements of the human existence and we must fear God who can terminate both our physical and our non-physical aspects. Paul also refers to the elements of human existence in his letter to the Thessalonians. In fact, he does so with more comprehensive clarity:

*"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole **spirit** and **soul** and **body** be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Thess. 5:23, KJV). (Notice here, our bodies are to be preserved also!)

In verse 23, the English words 'spirit', 'soul', and 'body' are translated from Greek words: 'pneuma', which means 'the physical breath'² or 'the soul';

¹ It should be noted that the word for **soul** in the OT is not the exact equivalent of the word translated soul in the NT. *Nephesh* describes an air-breathing creature, human or animal, where *psyche* (soul) in the NT refers to the human spirit, an intellectual component not present in animals.

² This passage identifies the three aspects of our existence. Soul in this place is consistent with Old Testament referen-

'psyche', referring to 'the spirit' or 'the mind'; and 'soma', 'our physical body'.

The Physical Element

In our determining what the physical element of human life is, the accounts of the creation of mankind sheds light:

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7) Breath in this place is 'ruwach', a necessary function of the Hebrew 'nephesh', the word commonly rendered 'soul', as it applies to either mankind or animals.

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

"Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." (Psalm 104:29);

"Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." (Job 34:13-15). This explains that IF God should recall man's breath, he would altogether revert to the material elements of which he was composed.

In Genesis 2:7, the English word 'soul' is translated from the Hebrew word 'nephesh', which means 'a breathing creature or animal', 'vitality', 'beast', 'body', or 'breath'. Those are some of the ways the word is translated. There is absolutely nothing in the word 'nephesh' that indicates anything other than a temporary physical living being: human or animal. The Hebrew word 'nephesh' literally means 'a state of being alive'. God created a likeness of Himself, a lifeless body forming man, and made it a living soul (nephesh) by breathing air into his lungs; thus, He gave him life.

ces, which can mean that air-breathing characteristic of all of the animal kind. It is the crossover of or blending together of the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' which can cause confusion. Correctly identified, we should never regard the 'soul' as the conscious aspect of our existence! More correctly, the word refers to the physical air-breathing function which sustains our physical life.

However, the same is true of lesser air-breathing life forms also. They also are nephesh! There is nothing in the Hebrew word, 'nephesh' to indicate a conscious life apart from the physical.

"The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life" (Job 33:4 KJV).

Physical Life is Sustained by Blood

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; ... Therefore I said to the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood,... For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof:.." (Leviticus 17:11-14 KJV).

In this modern age, we can understand the biological implications of this scripture. The heart circulates the blood to the lungs, then throughout the body, which in turn performs its life sustaining functions.

If God had not generated Adam's life functions by inflating air into his lungs, Adam would not have begun living. But, is human life no more than a chemical-electric reaction of a well designed structure of gas, fluid, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli? Is this the sum of what God created as physical man? If so, humans would be no different from any other animal.

But humans are different from animals and from the rest of creation in many obvious ways. Humans exist on a much higher plane than the rest of creation. But, what is it that makes mankind different? The unseen spiritual element of the human creation makes it so vastly different from the rest of creation.

The All-Important Spiritual Element

There is another element to human life besides the physical. This element is the spirit in man that sets mankind apart from the rest of creation:

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

Here, the English word 'spirit' is a translation of the Hebrew word, 'ruwach', which means 'wind' or often can mean 'mind'. It does not mean a physical being or even a being at all. Rather, it denotes something that is non-physical.

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel,

says the Lord, which stretched forth the heavens, and laid the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1 KJV). Also see Ecclesiastes 12:5-7.

What we are being told is that the human spirit is an extra-physical element of the human being that truly separates humans from the rest of the physical creation. God calls this non-physical element the spirit in man and he has designed it to be the essential part of the human. It is this spirit that gives mankind the ability to exhibit a higher thought-plane than all other physical creatures on earth. We can think, reason and plan in ways that animals cannot. We possess what is recognized as intellect and emotion, whereas animals are instilled merely with instinct that dies when they do.

The spirit in man is the other of the two elements of human life that the scientific community does not understand, which they ascribe to human brain function. Nevertheless, the spirit in man represents a major consideration after death.

The GOD of Spirits

The scriptures show that God formed a unique spirit that functions within the human body.³ This spirit component, unique to man, is what provides him with conscious intellect. Animals do not have that, nor do they possess what carries with it, the potential for immortality. Animals possess pre-programmed instinct which functions to preserve their species and dictate their habits. They do not and cannot relate to their Creator in the same way humans do. They lack the ability to worship or interact with God like humans can. (Rom. 8:14-16):

"And they fell on their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?" (Numbers 16:22).

"Let the Lord God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation" (Num. 27:16)

The spirit in man is not an undefinable essence nor can it exist mysteriously apart from man. The

³ We should recognize that the spirit in man is not the same as the righteous Spirit of God. It is a spirit that imparts human intellectual ability, but does not exhibit the character of God in and of itself. Not until it receives the Spirit of God upon true conversion. That spirit in man is what we recognize as being carnal human nature.

spirit of man is what makes a man, man. The physical body is the habitation of the spirit, which is the sentient and conscious element of the human creation. But that spirit requires a functioning brain for it to add its intellectual contribution. It does not produce thoughts independent of our mentality! It is this spirit which should be the focus of our interest, not the soul! The soul is the life component that activates the physical body. It is not immortal any more than the body is!

Human life is unique in all of creation; a human being is the only life form on earth that is both physical and spiritual and has the potential to be elevated to the highest of all life forms: a spirit-born son in the Family of God. (Rom. 8:14-17)

What HAPPENS At Death?

The Bible describes two major things that take place at the death of a human being and these are of extreme importance to the final destiny of each individual, because each thing involves each individual's future destiny. The Bible describes what happens both to a human being's physical body and to his spirit at death.

What the Bible says about the physical and spirit record and the events that happen to humans after death is very different from what is taught by the religions of this world. According to the Bible, after humans die, a record is kept of their existence, kept in heaven, though our temporary physical form remains here on earth.

NO Mental Activity After Death

At death all cerebral functions cease; there is no more thought process, no reward, no memory, no knowledge, and no awareness of anything going on in this world. Death terminates an individual's consciousness and interactions with this physical dimension of existence. The Psalmist wrote:

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:3-4 KJV).

Solomon wrote: *"For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they*

have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 NIV). (We'll discuss the 'never again' consideration later.)

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

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psalm 115:17 KJV).

The reason the dead cannot praise God is because they are no longer alive; their life has ended. In death there is no ongoing thought process.

"Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Psalm 6:4-5 KJV).

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for you have cast all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot celebrate you: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth. The living, he shall praise you, as I do this day:..." (Isaiah 38:17-19 KJV).

It is obvious by the abundant scriptural proof that all conscious thought and life-functions cease at death. The scriptures that speak of human speech, desires, and admonitions after death are either poetic metaphors or analogies, or in certain cases they are relating demonic impersonations of dead people.

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible which indicates that the human life function continues in one state or another after death. Moreover, the Bible indicates just the opposite; it clearly shows that the physical life of a human is a temporary condition, which, in the case of the wicked, can be terminated forever in the 'second death'.

The SLEEP of DEATH

Many scriptures speak of the state of the dead as being analogous to sleep. Because the dead do not have a conscious thought process (Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6), sleep is an appropriate comparison to the condition of death.

Below we see a few references that show how God explains the condition of death:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2 KJV).

"He said these things. And after this He said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going that I may awaken him. Then His disciples said, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. But Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that He spoke of the sleep of slumber. Then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus has died" (John 11:11-14)

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:59-60 NIV).

"But man dies and is cut off, and man expires; and where is he? As the waters go from the sea, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Who will grant that You would hide me in Sheol; You would hide me until Your anger turns back; that You would set a limit for me and remember me? If a man dies, will he revive? All the days of my warfare I will wait, until my change comes" (Job 14:10-14)⁴

In these passages, there is reference to the idea of a resurrection from the dead. While death is an unconscious state, that 'sleep' is not permanent. This fact too exposes a consequence of the false teaching that the 'soul' is immortal and remains conscious after death: not understanding the resurrections.

Those billions of humans who have lived and died over the centuries are completely unconscious and remain unaware even of the passage of time. The interim period between the moment of death, when their conscious thoughts ceased, and the instant when they will awaken to life again at the resurrection does not exist for them. It will be as if they had gone to sleep and awakened without dreaming. The passage of time is meaningless to them.⁵ Long or short, they're unaware of it.

⁴ See also 1.Kg.2:10, 1.Cor.11:29-30; 1.Thes.4:13-17.

⁵ Request our 96 page booklet on "Understanding the Resurrections From the Dead and Eternal Judgment." See also chapters two and four.

Where DOES The Body GO At Death?

Science defines death as the cessation of the life function (i.e., all systems cease to operate—the heart stops circulating blood, the brain stops sending orders to the organs, all thought processes cease, the body becomes immobile, all regenerative processes stop, and the body starts to decay).

The Bible defines physical death in the same way as does science:

" In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19 KJV).

God says He made our bodies from the elements of the earth and they will return to these same elements once our life functions cease.

"All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust". (Job 34:15 KJV).

King Solomon Wrote: *" For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 KJV).*

Solomon insightfully explains that both man and beast experience the same physical death process; they both die and revert to the elements from which they were made. This is true of the body, but also the life of that body, the 'nephesh', the soul! There is no quarrel with the scientific definition here. At death the physical body in which God places the spirit of man ceases to function. However, there's more to the physical body than the elements from which it is made.

Where Does The SPIRIT Go At Death?

"Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:21).

Solomon, in his inspired wisdom, asked the same question many have asked over the centuries. He asks about the destination of the spirit in man. However, the great difference between Solomon and most others who ask this question is that Solomon knew the correct answer:

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7 KJV). Here we see an important detail. The spirit of man returns to God who gave it. King David and Jesus also understood that God was both the source of and the custodian of the human spirit after we die. Both He and Stephen acknowledged this.

"Into your hands I commit my spirit: you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" (Psalm 31:5 KJV).

"And crying with a loud voice, he said, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. And saying this, He breathed out the spirit" (Luke 23:46).

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:59-60)

At death, this spirit, which is composed of essence from the spirit dimension of existence, returns to God whose omni-presence creates and sustains both the material world and the spirit-world.

The Spirits Cry Out

The Book of Revelation contains an allegorical reference to the spirits of the righteous dead crying out for God to avenge their martyrdoms:

"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those having been slain for the word of God, and the witness which they had. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9-10 KJV). .

Although these spirits under the altar were all unconscious and unaware of anything happening on earth or anywhere else, they are briefly given consciousness to, at the appropriate point in time, cry out for justice. This scripture confirms that these human spirits have been returned to and retained by the Father from their earthly habitations. (See Genesis 4:10, Habakkuk 2:11; James 5:4).

Is MAN Mere Flesh and Blood?

The scriptures show that the human body is just a chemical-electric interaction of a well-designed structure of gas, fluids, and solid matter reacting to

internal and external stimuli, but with the spirit of man inhabiting it. At death, the body becomes lifeless and useless: its mental functions cease.

"Then shall the dust [physical body] return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7 KJV). (See also Genesis 2:7, Deuteronomy 32:18).

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (Jas. 2:26 KJV).

This last reference by James is interesting in that it shows the need for our spirit to be functioning in order for us to be a whole person. There are cases where the human spirit cannot function fully, often due to a brain injury, rendering the living person into what we call a 'vegetative state'! This phenomenon alone should clearly show how the physical brain is needed to allow the cognitive state that the spirit in man provides.

The Remains of the Body

Scriptures clearly show two separate components that combine to form the creation called a human being. There is the material (physical) form and the spirit in man. It is also extremely clear, as we've seen, that at death the body returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God. (See Ecclesiastes 12:7, Psalm 31:5; 49:14-15 Luke 23:46, Acts 2:27-29;34; Hebrews chapter 11, etc.).

We know that the body remains on earth. We also know that the remains of the body in time dissolves completely away. So, IF there is to be a resurrection, how is that body raised again?

There is a record of the physical body that is preserved, after the body dies. This record of the human creation is more important to the destiny of each individual than is generally realized. Most will need their physical bodies once again! When humans are resurrected, they will present the same appearance as they previously had. Though most likely in perfect physical form, free of any ailments or deformities they might have incurred, each will be recognizable to those who knew them! Each will exhibit the same character, at least at first, and will possess all the same memories that their former life experiences gave them. Each will rise with the same sins and faults as in their former lifetimes! Keep in mind, ALL who rise from the dead will rise in physical form, except only those privileged to be accounted

worthy to rise in the first resurrection at Christ's Second Coming.

Without an understanding of what the human really is and what his destiny really is, much of the Bible seems to not make full sense when it comes to the state of the dead.

The Rephaim

There is an allegorical picture presented in a number of places in the Old Testament that seems to suggest a 'realm of the dead'. Its inhabitants are referred to using the word 'rephaim'. Who or what are the 'rephaim'? Bible Scholars have had great difficulty fathoming the intended meaning of this Hebrew word, because its usage seems to indicate that all dead humans remain on earth instead of being wafted off to heaven or hell as is commonly believed. The Hebrew word rephaim is often used in an allegorical sense that describes the dead and gives vital insight into the Hebrew belief system of ancient times. What it shows us is that in the Old Testament era, people did not ascribe to the heaven and hell ideas like their various pagan contemporaries did.

The Hebrew word 'rephaim' has three basic meanings: 'giant men', 'ghost of the dead', or 'shades' (i.e., shadows). There are many places referring to the dead as 'rephaim'. These references also indicate that the 'rephaim' occupy 'sheol', (referring to the place of the dead) located within the confines of earth's environment.

There were two basic beliefs in the Hebrew community prior to the time of Christ, which is reflected in places such as Acts 23:8-9. One persuasion believed that death is permanent, that the dead are in sheol (the grave) and that's IT! Dead is dead forever! The other persuasion allows the same, but that there is to be a resurrection from the dead. But notice, neither persuasion back then thought anyone had ascended conscious into heaven! (Acts 2:29) These scriptures mentioning the rephaim reflect the prevailing belief system.

The following scriptures reveal the allegorical use of the word 'rephaim' to describe dead humans:

"Sheol below is excited for you, to greet your coming, waiting for you rephaim, all the rulers of the earth. Raising them from their thrones, all the kings of the earth". (Isaiah 14:9 Literal Translation)

The King James Version words it this way: *"Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations."*

"The dead will not live, rephaim will not rise, therefore you have punished and eliminated them, and caused their memory to perish". (Isaiah 26:14 Literal Translation).

"The dead will live, their corpses will rise, Awake and shout for joy, dwellers in the dust! For dew of lights [morning] is your dew, and earth will give birth to rephaim." (Isa. 26:19 Lit. Translation).

In verse 14, Isaiah laments the state of the dead, but in verse 19, he speaks of the hope of the resurrection. He says that the 'rephaim' (the dead) that are dead in the dust of the earth will be resurrected. Notice, it indicates that dead bodies will rise again. This is not just the spirit component being brought to a conscious state, but a reuniting of body and spirit. The spirit component does not preserve physical appearance, but in the resurrection, their physical form will be reconstituted. They will again appear just as they once did.

Not Presently Conscious

Psalms 88 speaks of those who are dead in the depths of the earth being devoid of life or conscious thought.

"For the dead will you do a wonder? Will the rephaim rise and praise you? Selah!" (Psalm 88:10 Literal Translation). The KJV has: *"Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah."*

Proverbs shows that the foolish will occupy sheol where the rephaim are:

"The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" But little do they know that the dead [the Rephaim] are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave". (Prov. 9:13-18 NIV).

"And he does not know that the rephaim are there. In the depths of sheol are her invited guests". (Proverbs 9:18 Literal Translation).

The scriptures show that the rephaim are in sheol, have no conscious thought, they're lifeless, and will be resurrected. (See also Psalm 6:5, 31:17, Proverbs 9:18, 21:16, Isaiah 14:19; 26:14-19).

Yes, A REAL Body!

The spirit of man returns into God's hands at death. Yet, even after a human body decomposes and returns to the elements from which it came there is a record of the person kept by God for the purpose of resurrecting the body. When humans are resurrected, they will be restored to their physical form and image which they were provided during their lifetimes. That body will be reunited with that spirit in man which they once possessed. The resurrection from the dead will replicate that living form, together with the character, personality and memories which the persons were once endowed by their spirit.

And, we should say at this point, (with only the exception of those raised to immortal spirit form in the first resurrection), people will be resurrected with the same record of sins once committed back in their former lives! Death itself does not absolve guilt! The resurrections from the dead (those after the 1000 years) will see the full restoration of the physical bodies of those who died throughout history, with them being reunited with their former spirits! This is SO different from what mainstream Christianity teaches.

If this were not the case, how could the person retain guilt for sins committed and face judgment?

Spirit and Physical Dimensions

Many scriptures show that spirit-beings and spirit-essence can manifest within this physical dimension (See Genesis chps.18,19; Numb. chps.22; Job 1:6-12; Luke chps.24; Revelation 12:7-9). However, the scriptures also show that physical beings cannot exist in the spirit dimension. (See John 3:3-5; 8:13-23; 13:33-36; 1.Cor.15:50).

Therefore, it makes sense that while the spirit component of the human creation returns to God at death (Psalm 31:5; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:46), the physical component of the human

creation remains on earth after death. (Genesis 3:19; Job 34:15; Ecclesiastes 3:19-20).

Because God designed the human life-form with both spirit and physical elements, both of these components will be needed to reconstruct the individual at the time of their resurrection.

The DEAD Shall Rise FIRST

In Paul's writings to the Corinthians and the Thessalonians, he speaks of the first general resurrection of the dead at which time the elect of God will be given immortality at Christ's coming:

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1.Cor.15:51-52 KJV).

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which sleep [are dead], that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep [are dead] in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep [are dead]. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead shall rise first" (1.Thes.4:13-16 KJV).

These scriptures are insightful, because Paul says that the dead will be raised and it is obvious that Paul understood that the dead remained in the grave on earth awaiting their resurrection. (See 1st Sam.2:6; Psalm 49:14-15; John 3:13; Acts 2:29-34; Heb. 11). Note: These in the first resurrection are raised in an incorruptible body, not a physical body, as are all 'the rest' who will be raised later.

The Resurrection of Ethnic Israel

Another key to understanding the rephaim and the ancient belief system is found in Ezekiel, chapter 37. This chapter speaks of the resurrection of all the twelve tribes of Israel to physical life some-time after the millennium.

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me

down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry" (Ezek. 37:1-2 KJV). (Think about the Rich Man: Luke 16:24.)

This profound event will transpire involving dead people on earth, and these bones allegorically represent a massive congregation of people who will be brought back to life in physical form.

*"And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know. Again he said to me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones; Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put **breath** in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord"* (Ezek.37:3-6 KJV).

Here, God promises to resurrect these dead Israelites to physical life (Ezk.37:11). The word for 'bones' in Hebrew can also be used allegorically to allude to numbers of dead persons.

*"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophecy to the wind, prophecy son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the **breath came into them**, and they lived and stood upon their feet, an exceeding great army"* (Ezek. 37:8-10 KJV).

There are graphic similarities between this resurrection and the creation of Adam and Eve. God made Adam's body from the elements of the earth; then, he took a bone from Adam's body and made Eve. In this resurrection, God takes the bones (an allegorical picture of the dead Israelites) to use as the foundational substance with which to reconstruct each individual. Adam, Eve, and these resurrected Israelites are constructed from the elements of the earth. And like Adam, these Israelites have no life force until air is placed into their lungs and they begin to breathe.

*"Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, [sheol] and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And shall **put my spirit in you** and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the Lord have spoken and performed it says the Lord"* (Ezek.37:12-14 KJV).

In order for these reconstructed bodies to function as sentient beings, the spirit of man must be put back into their body:

"For as the body without the spirit is dead..." (James 2:26).

At death, the body dies and without brain function it becomes useless to the spirit placed within it.

DEAD but NOT Forgotten

God has not only promised to resurrect all of the Israelites who have ever lived and died without an opportunity for salvation but also he has promised to resurrect the rest of humanity who haven't had their opportunity. In order to accomplish this task, He has a record of each person's intellect (mind). And this record is in His hands in heaven.

God maintains a record of each individual that has ever existed. The physical record of man exists in God's infinite memory. He knows every aspect of our existence (even each of the hairs on our head are numbered) and can bring physical elements together to replicate what we once were. That is what the resurrection amounts to!

The Resurrection Process

The spirit record of a human is kept in heaven, the physical remains are on earth, with each ready in God's Mind for the resurrection. The scriptures show that there will be two kinds of resurrections: one is to spirit life as a spirit-being, and the other is to physical life as a human being. That being the case, it is important to know the process and timing involved in each. The resurrection directly to life will involve the Saints of God only: all those converted prior to the Second Coming.

Resurrection to a Mortal State

Paul, in this place in 1st Thessalonians refers to that first resurrection.

"The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." (1st Thes.4:16-17 KJV).

This booklets chapter, however, is more oriented to the resurrection that all the unconverted from all ages will experience. (Those referred to as ‘the rest of the dead’ in Revelation 20:5). Every human being who ever lived will experience a resurrection, that in order to stand alive and conscious before the Judgment Seat of Christ, first for spiritual Evaluation, then for Final Sentencing.

During the resurrection of the **righteous** dead, in the first resurrection, the following will occur:

- Each person's unique body form will be replicated in the spirit dimension, using the pattern that is preserved in God's memory,
- Each person's unique spirit will be returned to earth from where it was preserved in heaven and placed into their replicated body, restoring their personality, intellect and character,
- Each person, not yet deceased, will, with them, then be changed into an immortal spirit-being.

Resurrection to Physical Life

During the resurrection of the **unconverted** dead to physical life for the purpose of giving them an opportunity for salvation (only after the 1000 years are completed) or for destroying them because of their incorrigible wickedness, (at the Sentencing event, after the second resurrection era is completed) the following will occur:

- Each person's unique physical body will be reconstructed of physical matter using the pattern that is preserved in God's memory,
- Each person will then have the breath of life placed into their lungs to restore their physical life processes,
- Each person's unique spirit will be returned from where it was preserved in heaven; then, it will be placed into their re-formed body.

These who are raised just after the millennium for the purpose of providing them their opportunity for salvation, which their first life did not allow them, will be sentenced at the ends of their restored lifetimes, as we read in Revelation 14:14-20. Those converted during the millennium and during the second resurrection era, will then be enjoined with the others of the first resurrection, (the ‘firstfruits’) being changed into Spirit-form Immortals at the time of Final Sentencing.

Those who had their opportunity for salvation in their first lifetimes, and who spurned it, will not rise in the second resurrection, but will sleep on through and stand alive for Sentencing in the third resurrection.

■ ■ IN SUMMARY ■ ■

The dead are simply dead; they have no life function; they are not conscious; they are as if they were **asleep** and remain so, awaiting a resurrection.

Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments clearly and abundantly support this understanding.

Some of the dead will be resurrected to eternal life and immortality at Christ's Return. These are the select few which comprise the ‘firstfruits’ unto salvation. The rest will be resurrected later to a physical life, with some being consigned to the punishment of eternal death, from which there is no resurrection: the Second Death in the Lake of Fire. This Final Sentencing event is well described in Christ's own words in Matthew 25:31-46:

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.” 

How Ancient Jews Understood Death

We all should Realize that the Hebrew Peoples of the First Century held a very different view of the State-of-the-Dead than do More Modern Societies. When we interpret Their Scriptures in light of Our Main-Stream Religious perspectives we can often Seriously Misconstrue the real intent of those passages!

It isn't fully acknowledged by our many Bible Scholars that there was a fundamental shift in the post-Christian era from what was commonly believed about death in what we might call the "Old Testament era". While the basics of what is revealed in the New Testament about death and a so-called 'afterlife' is also found in the Old, such matters were not generally understood or believed with the same degree of clarity prior to the ministry of Jesus Christ.

We need to consider is that the ministry of Christ was not directed to peoples of our persuasions today so much as it was to those of His day. He aimed His messages at His contemporaries, taking into consideration what they understood at the time. For us to consider those teachings only in light of how people understand things today can distort the real intent of what was said.

We also need to realize the difference between an erroneous belief system and an uncompleted belief system. What the ancient peoples of God understood was not wrong. Nor do New Testament teachings contradict those previously held beliefs so much as they clarify and expand them. That being the case, it is important for us to know what the Old Testament reveals about the institution of death and what it says mankind's long-term hope and destiny is.

Highly erroneous belief systems were well represented in pagan cultures in the first century, and had been for centuries. Many of those pagan errors were later embraced and incorporated into what is regarded as 'orthodox Christian theology' over the centuries. As a result, people today operate under seriously misconstrued ideas of what happens when people die.

A Matter of Perspective

Not only do peoples of today understand certain matters incorrectly, but they also miss the point of many parables that Christ spoke and the situations that He described, because of interpreting those messages from the point of view that's common today, not as things were understood back then.

That perspective in mind, we will reconsider what the Sadducees and Pharisees believed; we will reconsider the "Lazarus and the Rich Man" account as well as what Jesus said to the "Thief on the Cross". (We'll consider these also in their respective chapters.) We will factor-in the clear statements of believers in Christ's day, such as Martha regarding her brother Lazarus' death, (John 11:24) and even the scene presented in Revelation 6 of the early Martyrs for the Faith.

The Realm of the Dead

We can begin to understand the belief system of the Old Testament era by noting the many passages which speak of the dead, particularly the congregate dead, as individuals held captive in sheol, which is the Hebrew word for the grave.

There is an allegorical picture presented in a number of places in the Old Testament that suggests a 'realm of the dead'. Its inhabitants are referred to using the Hebrew word 'rephaim'. Who or what are the 'rephaim'? Bible Scholars have had great difficulty fathoming the intended meaning of this Hebrew word, because its usage seems to indicate that all dead humans remain in the grave here on earth instead of being wafted off to heaven or hell as is commonly believed today.

The Hebrew word rephaim is often used in a sense that describes the dead and gives us a vital insight

into the Hebrew belief system of ancient times. What that term shows us is that in the Old Testament era, people did not ascribe to the heaven and hell ideas as their various pagan contemporaries did. This term 'rephaim' is covered in the previous chapter.

Hebrew peoples of the first century understood that the dead were dead, that they possessed no ongoing consciousness, and derived that belief from many abundantly clear scriptures, such as:

"The dead know not any thing..." (Eccl. 9:5-6)

"That very day his thoughts perish..." (Ps. 146:4)

"As dies the beast, so dies the man..." (Eccl. 3:19)

"For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Ps. 6:4-5)

Two Belief Systems

There were two basic beliefs about death within the Hebrew community prior to the time of Christ, which is explained in places such as Acts 23:8-9. One persuasion believed that death is total and permanent, that the dead are in sheol (the grave) and that's IT! Dead is dead forever! The other persuasion allows much the same, but that there's to be a resurrection from the dead at some future time. But notice, neither persuasion back then thought anyone had any ongoing consciousness, nor did they believe any had ascended into heaven! Even David, a man after Gods own heart, had not! (See Acts 2:29) Those scriptures mentioning the rephaim reflect their prevailing belief system:

No doubt, passages such as in Daniel support the position of those Pharisees who believed in the resurrection, where the Sadduceean persuasion did not. *"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and ever-lasting contempt"* (Daniel 12:2). This passage adds another consideration, detected by believers of ancient times, that of there being a sentencing event and consignment to a just reward after this resurrection.

Job Also Understood

Job also spoke of death and the resurrection in undeniable terms, reflecting his understanding of a resurrection. He also spoke of his dead body

being brought back to a state of consciousness and in his flesh seeing God! He said, *" But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the flood decayeth and drieth up: So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep. O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, until my change comes"* (Job 14:10-14 KJV)

Then Job goes on to state this, *"For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me."* (Job 19:26-27) Insightful words from a man who likely was a contemporary of Abraham or possibly even Noah. (Noah lived another 350-years after the Flood and died some 2-years before Abram was born.) Job anticipated experiencing a physical resurrection and a restoration of his spirit to reawaken him to a conscious state.

So, as far back as many generations prior to Moses, those people with whom God was working understood death as a complete cessation of life and an absence of consciousness, and held the hope of the resurrection.

This was the belief system of Old Testament times, not the Hellenized Judaism that was written into later historical and religious accounts. Hellenistic Culture (the Greeks) was deeply engrained with a belief in a conscious afterlife.

Martha Speaks to This

After the death of her brother Lazarus, Martha had this insightful exchange with Jesus: *"Then said Martha unto Jesus, Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee. Jesus saith unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."* Notice, Martha did not suggest that she

thought her brother was anywhere other than there in his grave. In saying what she did, she also acknowledged her understanding that he would rise in the general resurrection, the one that is to come “at the last day”. This is significant, as it reveals she had an awareness of the sentencing event associated with the resurrection, such as we read of in Matthew 25:31-46.

Solomon Described Death

Why would King Solomon be regarded as being the wisest man who ever lived IF later religionists thought he was all wet when it came to understanding the state of the dead? Solomon wrote this, “...because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets: Or ever the silver cord be loosed, or the golden bowl be broken, or the pitcher be broken at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern. Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. Vanity of vanities, saith the preacher; all is vanity.” (Eccl. 12:5-8 KJV) This in no way suggests a conscious afterlife.

He also wrote: “This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead. ... For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. ... Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” (Eccl. 9:3-10 KJV)

The Psalmist Wrote

“Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psalm 146:3-4 KJV). So, what possible use would there be of a teaching that the ‘soul’ goes some place after death, when the deceased person is completely unaware of it? In any belief system, what sense would it make?

We can see from these representative passages that the belief system of the time of Christ did not carry a perception that the dead were in any way still in a conscious state after death. But when we read the New Testament examples and narratives with the presumption that the dead remain conscious, in some ‘place’, we risk altering their real message by reading into them an idea that was not originally intended.

Lazarus and the Rich Man

Perhaps a more recognizable example of ‘reading into’ a narrative an idea that was not originally there is Jesus illustration of people of His day. Individuals that all could identify with. What isn’t addressed is the virtue of the poor man or the wickedness of the rich man. Other than indifference toward the more unfortunate or disinterest in spiritual matters, we have little else to work from. This narrative is typically taken to describe a man in an ever-burning hell. Here’s the account according to the New King James:

“There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; And in **hell**⁶ he lift up his eyes, being in **torments**, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am **tormented**⁷ in this **flame**.⁸ But Abraham said, Son, remember

⁶ Hades (Strong's #86) the place (state) of departed souls; - grave, hell. The place where Christ indicated His Father would not leave His soul! (Acts 2:27)

⁷ Odunao (Strong's #3600) from #3610 grief; to grieve; - sorrow, torment.

⁸ Phlox (Strong's #5395) (to ‘flash’ or ‘flame’); a blaze: - flame(ing). This word is used just 7 times in the New Testament: here; Acts 7:30; 2nd Thess. 1:8; Heb. 1:7; & Rev. 1:14, 2:18 & 19:12. Only in 2nd Thessalonians does the word suggest physical harm of being burnt (up). In Hebrews, it describes God’s ministers! And in Revelation, God’s eyes.

that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art **tormented**.⁹ And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence. Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house: For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of **torment**.¹⁰ Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them **from the dead**, they will repent. And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one **rose from the dead**." (Luke 16:19-31)

There are a number of important things to note about this story. It was presented to Pharisees who believed in the resurrection. These were also an upper class who loved money. (See verse 14.) It is very difficult in our generation to read this story without injecting into it a heaven and hell point of view. Yet, as we should realize, the underlying picture is a scene at the TIME of the resurrection. We should realize that from verses 23 and 31. In the grave (hades / 'hell') the man 'lifted up his eyes'. If he were elsewhere, he wouldn't be described as returning to a conscious state from the place where he was buried!

So, in the grave (hades – the place of the dead – comparable to the Hebrew word sheol) the rich man 'lifts his eyes'. Eyes that see are a feature of a resurrected person. (compare Job 19:27) He sees Lazarus and Abraham as fellow living beings and carries on a conversation with Abraham! He sees Lazarus as also being alive again, and wishes that he be sent to his brothers. Another observation we should discern from this is the fact that the rich man had no real idea of the current state of his five brothers. In other words, he had no awareness of the passage of time while in death until he was

⁹ Phlox (Strongs #3600) as in verse 25.

¹⁰ Basanos (Strongs #931) (a notion of going to the bottom) torture: - torment. Used only 3 times in the NT, twice in this passage and in Matt. 4:24. It describes mental anguish.

restored to this state of consciousness.¹¹ He was unaware if his brothers had also by then joined them in hades, the grave.

What IS the REAL Point?

But perhaps the overriding point of this story is the consequences of non-repentance. It's the prime issue except for the matter of his personal torment and extreme dryness. His concern was that his brothers not experience the same rejection that he had. (Abraham's bosom being a metaphor among Jews of the day for being reserved to a better destiny.) Notice that this term is not used anywhere else in the New Testament. Only with these Pharisees. It did not represent the belief system of the Church, soon to be.

It is interesting to note that the JF&B Commentary does not interpret this passage in a Heaven & Hell sense, though many preachers invariably do so! Instead, they acknowledge that this story illustrates "not the final region of the lost, for which another word is used ... but what we call 'the unseen world'." ¹² In other words, a transitional state prior to final sentencing, which is to occur after the resurrection. This too reflects the true teaching of the Bible! It is consistent with the truth that the dead remain in their graves, unsentenced and unconscious, (asleep) until raised to stand before Christ in Judgment. (Hebrews 9:27)

But, why would religious teachers want us to believe that this story proves that the rich man was in an ever-burning hell, only to be resurrected and sentenced again at some future date? Had it been the intent of this story to present such a message, the word gehenna would have been used in place of hades. Gehenna refers to a place of burning, named from the Valley of Hinnom where the criminal dead were burned up.

¹¹ Could his five brothers still have been alive at this point? Abraham doesn't make a point of telling him whether they were or not. Does that suggest that they might have been still living? And, had they not been still alive, why would this man not have known of having been joined by them? Why is it that the man saw Lazarus and Abraham only? If the brothers were in fact dead also, it would show that there is no awareness of one another in death!

¹² Jamieson Fausset Brown *Bible Commentary*, Volume 3, Hendrickson Publishers, Inc. March, 1997, Page 295 commenting on Luke 16:23.

Dead Being Rendered Conscious?

Considering this matter more comprehensively, we should consider two other passages. They are Ezekiel 37 and Revelation 6.

In Ezekiel 37 we are presented a vast valley filled with the remains of uncountable dead. They are representative of the whole House of Israel (both Judah and Israel – the Jews and the ten tribes!) In verse 11 they are shown to speak of their hopeless condition, both for their dead state but also for their disunity as a nation. The point is, these are shown to be speaking while yet in their dead state. While they are promised a physical resurrection (and an opportunity for salvation, v. 14; & 23-28) that day is well into the future. While dead, they are temporarily brought to a state of consciousness to express their dismay over their dismal situation.

Martyrs Awaken (Temporarily)

In Revelation 6:9-11, we see another instance where sleeping saints (martyrs) are brought into a state of consciousness to ask how long they must wait until their tormenters are brought to justice. Not all are made awake (without being resurrected) just these. They are told they must wait a while longer, are given white robes, and told to resume their sleep until that time! (v.11)

Then, is it so illogical that for the purposes of making a point against the compassionlessness and arrogance of wealth, a similar story should be told? Having someone speak from the grave? Abel's blood did so! The rich man sought just a small expression of compassion from Lazarus, while he in his lifetime offered him none whatsoever. Dogs showed more compassion for Lazarus than this man ever did. Lack of compassion was the MAIN point of this story!

Further Light from the Cross

Another passage that is distorted in what it reveals due to being re-interpreted under a heaven and hell understanding is what Christ said to the thief on the cross. Hebrews 13 explains that Abraham (the same who is featured in the Lazarus and rich man story) waited for and looked forward to a city "whose builder and maker is God." (Heb. 13:8-10) People assign Christ's statement of "today you shall be with me in paradise", a meaning not

intended, by focusing on the word "today". It wasn't that the thief would be with Him in paradise (interpreted to mean Heaven) that very day, rather, it was that day – then and there – that He was assuring the thief that he would rise again and have his day in the post-millennial Kingdom. The passage would be better rendered, "I say to you today, you shall be with Me in paradise."

The same was true of the other malefactor, (provided he hadn't already been given the 'heavenly gift – God's Spirit – and hadn't rejected it), when we understand the purpose of the second resurrection, but it wasn't said of him, as he hadn't asked anything.

That day, 'today' was when He was saying it, not when it would happen. Jesus was including him in the event described in Ezekiel 37.

And, how could He say what He did with such truthful certainty to an acknowledged unconverted criminal? (Did anyone ever think to ask?)

Christ was referring to that same "city" and that same time-frame that Abraham (and his 'bosom buddies') awaited, that they also would experience after their resurrections. Paradise is a reference to the post-millennial Kingdom that the resurrected peoples will experience: those to be brought-up in the second resurrection after the 1000 years.¹³ That could be stated with absolute certainty to anyone (presuming they hadn't already rejected their one opportunity for salvation.) The Paradise-like environment of the millennial Kingdom is also a major component of the early Church belief system.

Reading such accounts with a first century perspective, rather than a more modern take, makes a distinct difference. That's why understanding what the early Jewish community believed is important in these matters.

Paul Taught the Resurrection

A Pharisee of Pharisees,¹⁴ a highly trained¹⁵ theologian, both under the eminent Gamaliel¹⁶ and it's

¹³ Revelation 20:5

¹⁴ Acts 26:5; Acts 23:6

¹⁵ Galatians 1:14

believed under the direct tutelage of Jesus Himself,¹⁷ Paul's teachings also reflected a consistency with the beliefs of the time. (see Acts 24:15 & 21 & 26:8) We'll not repeat here all of the clarity that can be seen in many places like 1st Corinthians 15, except to point out one passage that is insightful.

Regarding the matter of the resurrection of the Saints, that resurrection that will involve the called-and-converted Saints only, at the Second coming, Paul states this: *"For this we say unto you **by the word of the Lord**, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent¹⁸ them which are asleep. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."* (1st Thess. 4:15-17) Now, in this explicit passage, Paul makes clear that those resurrected at Christ's coming will not be ushered into His presence before those who have died previously. That tells us something definitive about Paul's beliefs and those of his day.

IF Paul and his fellow believers actually believed that the dead had already gone 'to be with the Lord', (as so many do) then this point of clarification would not have been necessary. If Paul thought that his hearers believed that the dead in Christ had already 'gone to be with the Lord' right at the times of their death, then this would have seriously contradicted that belief. The point here is that Paul's words make it undeniably clear that that isn't at all what they believed back then!

For it to have been their belief that the dead in Christ had all gone to be with the Lord long before, then there never would have been such a question that Paul saw need to make clear.

¹⁶ Acts 22:3

¹⁷ Acts 26:12-18 The LORD spoke to him personally! Acts 22:6-10 here and later in Arabia, Galatians 1:12-17.

¹⁸ Prevent is an old English word, better rendered in modern English as "precede" as the New King James renders it.

Further, Paul states what he does on the direct authority of the "word of the Lord". In other words, he's establishing for us that this is consistent with what Christ Himself had taught, and with the written Word (the Old Testament).

Not Just the Resurrection

It wasn't just the fact of the resurrection that formed the basis of Paul's theology. He was also the strongest advocate of the idea that death was likened to sleep, a state of unconsciousness. Not only in this verse, but in many others. 1st Corinthians 15 and 1st Thessalonians 4 refer to the dead specifically as being 'asleep', as does Daniel in chapter 12, verse 2. Peter affirms the same in 2nd Peter 2:4. This was fully consistent with the belief system of the Jews of the day, but with the added consideration of an awakening, "at the last day".

In these places also, we see that the belief system of the time was that death was not a conscious state. Though the Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection, while the Pharisean persuasion did, they both believed the same in this respect, that those dead were in their graves and unconscious.

We should read each of these New Testament accounts with this awareness and not conceptually adding to them by reading into them any heaven and hell idea that was introduced into the so-called Christian belief system at a much later time. 

*See pages 47 and 48 for additional **free** booklets that relate to and develop further the topic of this booklet.*

◇ Chapter Three ◇

The Thief on the Cross

One Simple Sentence is often cited which has Interjected Profound Considerations into Christian Main-Stream Theological Processes.

What Does Christ's Seemingly Straightforward Assurance Actually Indicate?

With such a dearth of clear and unequivocal Scriptures stating that it the destiny of the saved to ascend up to Heaven at the moment of death, it is no surprise that less direct passages are brought into the forefront to make up for what is lacking otherwise. In response to the condemned man's request to be remembered when He came into His Kingdom, Christ said, *"This day shall you be with me in Paradise."* And with the possible exception of the account of Lazarus and the rich man, this passage provides effective confirmation, as many see it, that the thief would be 'with the Lord' in Heaven on that very day!

Thus, religious people say, we believers also can rest assured of a transfer up to a 'heavenly abode' as it's the destiny of our souls when we die. The vast majority of 'christian' religions teach this with great dependence!

What Was Actually Said

The passage in question reads thus: Luke 23:39-43 *"And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise."* Now this passage is a little more specific than are the other two synoptic Gospel accounts. The other two, in Matthew 27 and Mark 15 indicate that the two had both reproached Him also, like the crowds were doing!

That brings out an important question. Was this man converted? Did he ever have the opportunity

to be 'called of God' and respond appropriately? Was he ever baptized, with hands laid upon him, and did he receive God's Spirit? I suspect that most people would surmise that he in fact was an unconverted man. And, if so, the statement to him raises other profound considerations. Was it that he came to 'believe' ('belief only' is the sole requirement for salvation as some proclaim) at this one specific moment, and did that 'belief' make all the difference?

Then, is faith, repentance, baptism and the receipt of God's Spirit unimportant? Because, IF the common take on this particular assurance is correct, that issue is before each of us. It suggests a momentary pre-death plea outweighs all of these other issues. It suggests a full life of overcoming can effectively be bypassed. Are YOU comfortable with that thought?

WHAT Did He Know?

Let's be realistic. If WE know with reasonable certainty that the thief was unconverted, wouldn't Christ have known that? Was Christ's statement to the man indication that one's conversion status doesn't matter as it regards going to heaven? How would that idea be received among diligent and faithful overcomers?

Further, was Christ responding to the thief's actual request, and did He answer him appropriately?

What Did the Thief Know?

The thief's request is typically interpreted from the point of view that people have today. He didn't necessarily mean what people today take him to have meant. The common belief system in the first century did not include the idea of people going to heaven at death. That was a later idea (though it was found in pagan religions of the

time.) we need to ask, what was the thief actually asking? Because, if we don't know what was being asked or what either of them meant, then we're left to interpret-in a change of subject, missing the real intent of the conversation.

Both Were Facing Imminent Death!

Why would the thief ask for something that Christ wasn't teaching? Also, the thief knew that Christ was going to be dead, as he himself would be, not many hours hence. The question had to involve them both being restored back to life.

We can see from the understanding that the Disciples had, even very late in Christ's ministry, that they expected Christ's Kingdom to be set-up within the nation in their generation. As late as just weeks after His crucifixion, the Disciples asked this question, reflecting what THEY understood: "*When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?*" (Acts 1:6) They thought in terms of His Kingdom taking Power over the nations on earth, as so many Old Testament prophecies describe. WHY would the thief have thought otherwise?

Nor does the final written New Testament book present a different picture. Christ's spirit-born Saints will rule all nations with Him here on the earth! "*To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.*" (Rev. 3:21) "*And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give **power over the nations:***" (Rev. 2:26) "*And they sung a new song, saying, Thou art worthy to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred, and tongue, and people, and nation; And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and **we shall reign on the earth.***" (Rev. 5:9-10)

This reflects what the early Church believed even a full generation later when the book of Revelation was written. Christ's Kingdom was to be a world-ruling administration, here on earth, with the Saints (the Bride of Christ) ruling with Him. The Disciples' after-resurrection question mirrored the same idea. Then, why would we assume the thief was asking something totally different?

When we interpret the thief's request in light of this understanding, a very different picture emerges. But, when we interpret it with the 'heaven and hell' belief system in mind, the whole picture is changed. That's where we are with this.

Did Christ Mislead the man?

We are also faced with the question of whether or not Christ **lied** to him. This question is obvious, as we know that He wasn't up in heaven That Day! Many religions (even those who claim that the thief was taken to heaven with Christ that very day) also teach that Christ instead was in hell preaching to the dead at the time! That's not true either!

Christ fully understood what "His Kingdom" meant, as He taught it, and what was in the mind of the thief. He knew of the man's conversion situation, that even IF heaven was the destiny of the 'saved', the man wasn't Kingdom worthy just then. So, what do we make of His answer?

But, is the assurance that he would be in His Kingdom a certainty? Was there a possibility of a 'maybe' involved? Why was Christ so sure? How could He know?

What IS Paradise?

When we know the dynamics of Christ's Earthly Kingdom, which He came to earth to reveal in greater detail, and when we understand the matter of the resurrections of the dead (a major doctrine of the Church) Christ's assurance is profoundly understandable.

Christ wasn't assuring an unconverted man that he would go to heaven that very day, but He was assuring him that he would rise again, in the resurrection, along with the rest of the dead, after the 1000 years¹⁹ in the second resurrection era. There he would live in a paradise-like society, a physical society, but without Satan's influences, and be able to pursue conversion, something he hadn't been provided opportunity to do in his current life experience.

This message is applicable not only to him, but it extends also to all who have ever lived, who were not yet 'called of the Father' (John 6:44). 

¹⁹ Revelation 20:5

Lazarus and the Rich Man

The narrative regarding the contrast between the Spiritual Conditions of these two individuals is an Enigma among certain religious denominations and a springboard to conclusions among others. What is the real message being presented here? Does it describe being conscious in an ever-burning Hell?

Absence of clear and specific information on the particular teaching, that in the afterlife people go to either Heaven or Hell immediately at death, puts greater emphasis on the few passages that could be used to make a case for such a belief system.

Much focus has been placed on what appears to be a very revealing narrative, one interpreted as describing what happens to the ‘unsaved’ person after death that we find in Luke chapter 16. Here we find described the after-condition of two different individuals, presumably one ‘converted’ and the other apparently ‘not converted’, despite those terms not being specifically used.

That ‘Other Place’

The general take on this story is that, presumably, the Rich Man had been sent to an ‘ever burning’ hell, but the unfortunate beggar was accepted into heaven. At least, that’s the conceptualization from which the story is typically represented. The ‘interpretation’ of the majority is that ‘hell’ in this place is referring to what later religious people have described as an ever-burning place of torment for the wicked, rather than just ‘the grave’.

The particular passage that has been given such rapt attention is found in Luke chapter 16. Starting in verse 19, we read: “*There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day:*

20. *And there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores,*

21. *And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.*

22. *And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;*

23. *And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. (This pictures a resurrection.)*

24. *And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.*

25. *But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.*

26. *And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that would come from thence.*

27. *Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:*

28. *For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.*

29. *Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.*

30. *And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but if one went unto them **from the dead**, they will repent.*

31. *And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one **rose from the dead.**”*

What is unmistakable in this story is that, despite obvious mention, the subject of the resurrection typically isn’t factored into the question. The usual focus is on the destination of each person at the time of ones’ death, leaving aside any consideration of a resurrection. In fact, there are many other points of interest that are conveniently left aside. Perhaps our question should be, was as much added into their explanations as was left out?

As we’ll see, much WAS left out!

Overlooking the Obvious?

First, in evaluating this story, we should consider the situation with each individual. What was the beggar's virtue, and what was the rich man's fault? Are we told anywhere that the beggar was righteous in any way? Are we made aware of any particular fault of the rich man, other than perhaps callous indifference? Is indifference alone sufficient to justify an eternity of everlasting torment? Such a hard and fast conclusion tells us a lot about some religious persuasions.

Is Conversion a Factor?

What we begin with is a situation of a materially unfortunate versus a fortunate (wealthy) person. There is no suggestion of converted versus unconverted, except as it might be implied from ones' compassion quality. But if the tables were reversed, and it was the beggar who was the well-endowed person, would the story change? This, we aren't told. We're left to presume and our presumptions can be greatly influenced by the perceptions of our individual religious persuasions, not necessarily fact. If our belief system was different, would we be posing different answers?

We have the respective deaths of both individuals. If heaven or hell were the destinations involved here, wouldn't this be an excellent place to say so? But we don't see those terms used. We are introduced to "Abraham's bosom" (not heaven or paradise) and "the grave"! (*Hades*, not *gehenna*). It would have been so easy to say heaven or hell! Any word association as to what these used terms indicate is highly presumptive.

Is the Resurrection a Factor?

A reader asked, "With the full explanations on **the resurrections**, how do we explain the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in Luke 16? How does this fit in with the parable of the Sheep and the Goats in Matthew 25:31-46?"

We need to understand the Lazarus and Rich Man situation based on what it actually says, rather than on what religionists usually read into it. First, the rich man in the grave opened his eyes (was awakened to a consciousness that he didn't previously have while he waited in the grave.) Was he in fact resurrected back to a physical life?

If not, how could he experience any pain, other than perhaps mental agony? He wasn't aware of the passage of time, which proves he was **unconscious** for a period of time, nor was he aware of the current spiritual condition of his brothers. He presumed they were as he last knew of them. If he was aware of the passage of time, then he would know of his brothers' situations, in that they would've, before long, have joined him in death! If he saw Lazarus in death, wouldn't he have seen his brothers in death also? He seemed to know what their spiritual conditions had been, during his lifetime when he knew of them, to be making such a plea on their behalf.

So, a point of note in this narrative is that his unawareness of the passage of time reveals that he had not been in a perpetually conscious state prior to coming to this 'place (or point-in-time) of torment' that he refers to!

We also can only surmise that Christ was drawing upon the popular sentiments of the day. (Did the old pagan 'heaven & hell concept' influence their belief system and was He using that to make His point that the Old Testament was an adequate and appropriate resource ²⁰ for the brothers' change of heart?) What we don't usually address here is the actual timeframe of 'the event'. Was this time-setting the final sentencing at the very end of the age?

An Uncrossable Great Gulf

That idea has support in the fact that a '**great gulf**' between himself and those in father Abraham's bosom was at this point in time **fixed** (v.26) suggesting that the rich man's opportunity period was long past. There is no further chance for him to change his destiny at this point. He could not cross over, from a condemned state to a non-condemned state. (The best he could hope for was the sympathetic act of a drop of water! And, doesn't that suggest he was physical at this point?) If so, we're at the point in time when he was feeling the heat and facing being consigned to the Lake of Fire. That consideration would place this scene at the end of the post-millennial era, the event described in places such as Matthew 25:46 and Revelation 14:17-20.

²⁰ John 5:46 and 2nd Tim. 3:15-16

Now, the use of the term “Abraham’s bosom” is also interesting. Here would have been a perfect opportunity to use the word “Heaven” or “Paradise” if He wanted to, and IF that was the true afterlife situation. Also, being in “Abraham’s bosom” suggests someone converted, but not yet raised for assignment to Life. That person was, as could be said, “in-holding”, awaiting his imminent change to immortal Spirit Life. He (Lazarus) was due it, tho’ being in holding within the Abrahamic Covenant’s provision in its age-appropriate time-frame, having not yet received it!

Do Souls Sleep?

This picture is more supportive of the belief that the deceased **wait** in their graves, **unconscious**, unaware of the passage of time, until awakened for their sentencing at the end of time. (Daniel 12:2, Job 14:14, Psalm 146:4, etc.) A condition some people derogatorily refer to as ‘**soul sleep**’. Effectively, this understanding holds that the deceased are unconscious in their graves, (in fact the Bible uses the comparative term ‘asleep’ for them), and are totally unaware of the passage of time. They come out of that unconscious condition when resurrected. One of that persuasion would never interpret the Lazarus and the Rich Man narrative the same way as do those who expect that people go to their reward in heaven or hell immediately at death, fully conscious of the experience!

(Also consider, both the Rich Man and Lazarus were shown dead together. Now, if Lazarus didn’t die at the same time as the Rich Man, how did either wait for assignment to their respective destinies until such time as his counterpart died?)

What KIND of Torment?

Luke 16:24 is an apparent scene of a person awakening to an awareness of imminently being cast into the Lake of Fire, without awareness of any passage of time. The rich man, in order to be in this situation, must have had opportunities which he neglected taking advantage of in his lifetime. If so, the scenario Christ posed would take us to the time of the final sentencing of the wicked. Matthew 25:44-46 would correspond to the man’s imminent situation. He was among ‘the goats’. Revelation 14:17-20 also pictures this scene: The wicked then personally paying the penalty for their

sins with **their own blood** being shed, before being passed on to the angel having power over Fire.

Raised Physical!

Such a scene indicates that those people who are resurrected for ‘final sentencing’ are to be raised **physical**, again composed of flesh and blood. Those ‘reaped’ by Christ to Life (Rev. 14:14-16) are at that time changed from a fleshly existence to their Spirit existence, while those, immediately afterward, reaped to wrath, (verses 17-20) are pressed in God’s winepress and then are burned-up by angels, while still in their physical state.

It’s also interesting to note that this conversation is shown taking place directly between the Rich Man and Abraham, not Saint Peter or God. That would illustrate that the narrative was oriented to the belief system of that day among those of Jewish persuasion, not anyone of a Catholic persuasion, a belief system that formed much later among Christianity, (though present in pagan societies!)

Preconceptions Factor In!

When we read this particular account from the perspective of the common belief system of our day, we are prone to inject into it conclusions that were never conceived by the narrator and who never intended we draw such conclusions.

When we factor in the Truth of the resurrections from the dead, that the New Testament is so clear about,²¹ the point of this message takes on an entirely different relevance. Christ’s message was to those being called in their lifetimes. Neglect of their calling has serious consequences. An unbridgeable gulf exists between those who have neglected so great a salvation and those who have availed themselves of it. Stated simply, there IS a point where there is NO turning back!

“Therefore we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and

²¹ Request my free booklet “*Understanding the Resurrections of the Dead and Eternal Judgment*”, a 96 page explanation of all resurrections involving humanity, from the one occurring at Christ’s return to the one for the purpose of assigning a just and final sentencing after the millennial age. (Rev. 20:5)

disobedience received a just recompence of reward; How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him;” (Heb. 2:1-3)

“Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end;” (Heb. 3:11-14)

*“For it is **impossible** for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Spirit, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, **If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.**”* (Heb. 6:4-6)

Another Example

To this point we’ve considered that the Rich Man’s ‘awakening’ was during the sentencing resurrection. That could well be. But, perhaps there’s yet another dynamic – another possibility in this narrative that we should consider before leaving the matter. While we typically try to ‘interpret it’ with regard to the common perception of a heaven or hell after-life scenario, there is another set of considerations.

In Revelation chapter 6, there’s another insightful example. In verses 9-11, we have a scene, similar in ways people haven’t considered. These are people on ‘the other side’ of the great gulf. These are the eminently righteous, but like in the other scene, they are brought to a state of consciousness, (tho’ not yet raised to Life) for the purpose of illustrating a point: that there were to be others killed as they were! (thus delivering a warning message to the living while, theoretically addressing those already deceased.) (Not unlike Lazarus & the Rich Man story in that respect.) They were rendered temporarily conscious, while ‘under the altar’ (in a reserved state awaiting the resurrection – the first resurrection in their case), but were later put back into a ‘sleep state’ until the proper time for their resurrection as Spirit-born immortals to occur.

They are due the highest positions in the Kingdom due to their victory over the assaults of the forces opposed to the Way of Truth! This event is obviously well in advance of the first resurrection, as more time was destined to pass, as more Saints had yet to be martyred, as they had been. They are ‘kept’ there in a ‘waiting state’ until receipt, just as Lazarus was, though he wasn’t a martyr.

What this Lazarus and Rich Man story actually was intended to convey was **a warning to the living**, it was not to support any ‘heaven or hell’ scenario. .

In the third resurrection, the ‘sentencing resurrection’, all the world’s dead will be raised together. We will see those who disqualified for Life from the pre-millennial ages and those who qualified for Life (or not) from the millennial age raised to stand with those of the post-millennial age (the second resurrection generation) all brought up together for separation and their due sentencing. The Rich Man theoretically would be in that great crowd. For purposes of His warning to the living, Christ related it as a personal conversation between Abraham and the Rich Man, one-on-one. That was to make the point, to scare the listeners into getting their spiritual lives in order **while they had time** to do so, because in the grave there is no further time for that. This presumes the hearers had the Word, in the form of the Old Testament (Moses), which was sufficient witness for their generation.

Christ warned them: *“Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?”* (John 5:45-46)

Paul to Timothy: *“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, **which are able to make thee wise unto salvation** through faith which is in Christ Jesus. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.”* (2nd Tim. 3:15-16)

A warning to the living was the real point of this narrative! We need to be attentive to our spiritual conditions. 

To Be Absent From the Body AND Present With the LORD!

***A Well Known Passage in Second Corinthians 5 Has Become almost a Cliché
for Those Who Anticipate Being Taken To Heaven After This Life is Over.
What Does This Potent Passage Actually Establish?***

Despite the admitted lack of direct scriptures referring to one's transport to Heaven immediately upon one's decease, yet the fundamental premise remains in most religious persuasions of that very certainty. No scripture on the subject enjoys the degree of familiarity as does the mention, in 2nd Corinthians 5:8, that, "To be absent from the body **IS** to be present with the Lord!" (That's how it's usually quoted). This statement alone is sufficient proof, of and by itself with most people, that the deceased go immediately to Heaven.

At a recent funeral, the minister once again reminded the audience of this comforting thought, largely on the strength of this adage: That, "To be absent from the body **IS** to be present with the Lord!"

Though abundantly familiar, few, it seems, have taken the time to examine this passage, and to note what it reveals. As with most of Christianity, a casual perusal seems sufficient. Except, in this case, there is much more revealed than meets the casual eye! We do need to be more attentive!

Often, the Context Matters

What so many miss in the underlying context of Paul's statement is the matter of the extreme stresses the ministry has to go thru on behalf of the Saints. Paul introduces his general subject in Chapter 3:3, declaring the obvious, that the Saints are the 'Epistle of Christ', to whom he and his counterparts minister with the Spirit: The ministry of the New Testament (v.6), a ministry even more glorious (impressive) than that of the Old, in fact, beyond comparison (v.7-11). What makes it so is the Life which we live, when we express Christ's Character.

Both 2nd Corinthians 3:7 and 4:6 refer to God's Gloriousness, He being another Moses type, to us, when God's Law becomes written in our hearts, as the New Covenant provides, (Heb. 8:8-10), by Christ.

But, it's the ministry and its burden in service to the Saints that is Paul's contextual point. Chapter 4:1, "*Therefore, seeing we have this ministry...*" and in verse 5: "*For we preach not (about) ourselves...*" Verse 7: "*But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.*"

Then in verse 8 he begins to lay out the matter: "***We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; Persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed; Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body. For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.***"

Now, here he makes his point: "***So then, death works in us, but life in you.***" It's important to notice here the "**we**" and the "**you**" references. He is not talking about all Christians unilaterally being distressed, but more specifically, those extreme trials that 'go with the territory' of the ministry. Verse 14: "***Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might thru the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, works for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.***"

The Vision of Hope.

The ministry, bearing every affliction, in order to serve and enhance the spiritual state of the Saints in general, had little to look forward to in this life, other than more of the same, and perhaps even paying the extreme price. So many did pay!

It is from within this context that Paul lamented about facing death. Continuing on, he states: *“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.”* Paul here refers to that new **spirit** body, which we anticipate, to replace this physical body.

Consistent with his lengthy narrative in 1st Corinthians 15, Paul acknowledges there IS a physical existence and there is to be a Spiritual existence. The way most people understand Paul’s reference to this in 2nd Corinthians 5 is that one existence is immediately eclipsed into the other! That’s why they are confident to re-word what Paul actually wrote, by saying: “IS to be present...”, instead of: “AND to be present...” Their common quote is as stated above: “To be absent from the body **IS** to be present with the Lord!”, where Paul actually wrote: “... to be absent from the body **AND** to be present with the Lord!” So, what’s the big difference?

What So Many Have Missed!

By extracting just the proverbial ‘sound bite’, the overall point becomes lost. It’s lost on the vast majority of believers. You see, Paul clearly acknowledges three states of being, not just two! And, he does so more than once here in this chapter.

2nd Corinthians 5:1-2. *“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.*

*2. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: 3. If so be that being clothed we shall not be found **naked**.”* Notice: he acknowledges such a state as ‘being found naked’!

4. *“For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: **not** for that we would be **unclothed**, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.”* ²² Here expressing a preference of being changed **directly** into that new existence, without having to experience the interim state: death. This ‘unclothed’ state he refers to occupies that interval BETWEEN this physical existence and the one to be invested upon us in the future! Here is what so many have overlooked. Paul acknowledges not **two** conditions, but **three**! 1. Clothed, 2. un-clothed and 3. re-clothed! In both verses 3 and 4 he acknowledges that un-desirable state, of being ‘naked’, in other words, having put off this body, **but not yet having received** that new living form!

You see, he acknowledges an intermediate state, in between this life and the next. He does not state what many have taken this one passage to be saying, that we pass directly from one state into the other, thus bypassing any ‘unclothed’ state and any real need for the resurrection from the dead. There **is** an intermediate condition. The interval of death: being ‘absent’ of this form, (unclothed), but not yet having been ‘presented’ into our Spirit manifestation, an essential prerequisite to being accepted into the presence of the Lord!

This is what happens when the word ‘**and**’ is exchanged to read: ‘**is**’! See the difference?

5. *“Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit,*

6. *Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:*

7. *(For we walk by faith, not by sight;)*

8. ***We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”*** That renewed state being preferable to this one! (Paul did not yet realize how long it was going to be before Christ’s Return!)

²² Here Paul alludes to his earlier affirmations, that we receive our Spiritual bodies AT the Last Trump, at the resurrection that occurs concurrently with Christ’s return. That some will be ‘alive and remaining’ at that time, and will enter into their Spirit manifestation directly, without experiencing death! See 1st Corinthians 15:49-54 and 1st Thessalonians 4:14-17.

Admittedly, it would be preferable to be found in that ‘present’ state, but we must first receive our presentable Spirit bodies in order for that to be possible! When that occurs, by Paul’s own words, is at the time of Christ’s return! Not at the moment of our personal deaths. The time when we become ‘changed’ is at the moment of Christ’s Second Coming. (1st Thes. 4:14-18 and v. 10 below!)

9. *“Wherefore we labor, that whether present or absent, we may be accepted of Him.*

10. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.”*

You see, it is at this event, the ‘sentencing’ to Life, which occurs at the resurrection, at Christ’s return,²³ that we are awarded this new body!

Paul didn’t omit that essential fact of our receiving our Spirit Bodies AT Christ’s Return, at the resurrection, (or being changed instantly, if still living) nor did he disregard that intermediate condition, between this existence and that one. We shouldn’t disregard it either!

Being Unclothed?

Now, to suggest an intermediate state, referred to as ‘unclothed’ or ‘naked’, (terms Paul uses), we are faced with another theological position that many find unacceptable. Having put off this body, but not yet having received the one created of God for us: is that intermediate state when we are basically nowhere! It suggests a period of time during which we remain unconscious. Despite numerous Scriptures to that effect, and particularly among them, those referring to the resurrection, most believers find the more prevalent belief system, of going directly ‘to be with the Lord’ at the moment of death, to be the preferable belief. After all, there’s another theological premise dependent on it also: That of the Immortal Soul. **If** we have a conscious immortal soul, it needs to

²³ Revelation 20:6 & 5 *“Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.”* **Question:** Why is there any need for a ‘second death’?

be somewhere after death. This of course, presumes that our ‘soul’ is the ever conscious component of our existence: An idea that warrants separate consideration! (See the previous chapter.)

The idea of going to Heaven at death is not a minor issue, nor is it an isolated one. To embrace that view, it’s necessary to accept certain other beliefs, and to disregard a number of clear scriptures.

We Shall Not All Sleep.

Paul says in 1st Corinthians 15:51 that *“We shall not all **sleep**, but we shall all be changed.”* He calls this statement a ‘mystery’. He refers to that ‘naked’ period between death and the resurrection as being ‘sleep’. Not only here, but in other places, such as 1st Thessalonians 3:14-18, defining ‘sleep’ as those who are ‘**dead** in Christ’! (v.16) Now, earlier, we realized that it was those “***in Christ***” who would be made alive! (Why would that be necessary if we never were **not** alive, only transferred over into another ever-conscious state of being, with Him in heaven?)

Though it would be **preferable** to be immediately ‘present with the Lord’, Paul’s statement of the obvious, that we all will, at some point become ‘absent from this body’, does not, by itself, indicate that we transfer from one state over to the other immediately, without any intermediate ‘waiting period’. That period he refers to in these same passages as being ‘unclothed’! A period that ends abruptly at the resurrection from the dead. The ‘dead in Christ’ will be raised incorruptible’! (1st Corinthians 15:52) Then, in what state were they prior to being raised? In what state do those who are NOT “in Christ” remain, *‘the rest of the dead’*, who are assigned to the post-millennial resurrection? (Re. 20:5)

Obviously, the casual approach to this revealing passage leaves the reader under-informed. Don’t accept casual conclusions. Pursue this Truth! The assumption that at death we transfer immediately in to our new “Spirit Form’ disregards other essential doctrines, such as the resurrection from the dead. The common take also presumes we can remain conscious at death without first being ‘quickenened’ (resurrected) in the manner and at the time described. 

Heaven & Hell or a REAL Future?

Among the Most Prevalent Subjects in all of Christianity, the Eternal Destination of the Human Soul occupies First Place in Interest of Believers.

Why are Churches so Adamant on a Subject where Scriptures are so Unclear?

Rarely will a week go by where the typical church-goer isn't reminded of the assurance that one's eternal destiny is conditioned upon their adherence to the tenets of the particular religion that their own church espouses. It seems to be the main focus and intent of religiosity, to bring all believers into a condition where a blissful eternity in Heaven is assured. After all, what greater quest could there be? Religious pitch men will press passers-by with the question: "Brother, are you sure you're going to Heaven"? Those who are self-assured will usually respond in the affirmative, and those who aren't sure, or who are afraid they aren't, will cringe and move on, pretending they didn't hear the question.

A Deep-Rooted Belief Structure

The teaching that peoples' immortal soul, at death, will be assigned to either of two diametrically opposed destinies, is deeply-rooted both in religion and even in the secular world. It has been from time immemorial! It's a universally foregone conclusion! Few, it seems, ever thought to ask the insightful questions, and those who have raised any question are generally dismissed.

But people **have** asked the important questions. Only, too few have engaged their thought faculties, sufficiently to pose a credible challenge to the overwhelming preponderance of opinion.

A Most Pressing Question

Human destiny, beyond this lifetime, has proven to be the most enigmatic question of all time. Is there a conscious 'afterlife'? Believe it or not, the matter wasn't introduced by the Christian religion, nor for that matter, by the patriarchs of the Old Testament, despite the fact that Judaism to some degree had accommodated a heaven and hell concept in their belief system from pre-Christian times. But, their source of that isn't well publicized!

Moses even grew up and was educated in a culture that had long regarded that there **was** a conscious afterlife. Particularly as it involved their nobility and their Pharaohs! Yet, despite this, we find little in the Old Testament to support the belief in a conscious afterlife. In fact, quite the contrary!

From an On-Line Overview:

The following several paragraphs, indicated by the different typestyle, were taken from a reputable religious website, explaining the common persuasions regarding the ideas of 'going to Heaven' (or Hell)! **These quotes DO NOT reflect the views of this booklet's author** or of all Sabbatarian Churches of God. What it does for us is to present insight into the common perceptions found in the religious world today.

"What is our eventual condition after we die? Do we eventually land up in Heaven, Hell or Purgatory? Do we simply disappear and cease to exist in any form? Do we just sleep for a long time after death before waking up for a final judgment? Are we reincarnated into new bodies?"

Different Judeo-Christian faith groups and writers over the past few thousand years have proposed a variety of scenarios, covering these options and more! All have based their beliefs on their interpretations of the Bible. Generally speaking, we find these views:

The Roman **Catholic** Church bases its belief on Heaven, Purgatory and Hell on some main biblical passages in the Hebrew and Christian Scriptures (Old & New Testaments) and the 14 books of the Apocrypha, supplemented by church wisdom.

Conservative and mainline **Protestant** denominations tend to base their belief on the literal interpretation of certain passages of the Bible, and symbolic interpretations of others. They arrive at very different beliefs from the Roman Catholics because they select different passages to read literally.

Liberal Christians generally believe that the beliefs of the authors of the Bible evolved greatly over the approximately one millennia of years during which the Bible was written. Thus, there is little internal consistency in the Bible about the afterlife. Many liberals remain undecided on the existence and nature of any form of afterlife.

Humanists, Atheists, Agnostics, etcetera, are generally skeptical about the existence of an afterlife. Most see no evidence for any form of human consciousness continuing after death. However, a person's influence lives on in their children and in other lives that they have touched.

Faced with such a diversity of beliefs about life after death -- even within Christianity -- some people conclude that nobody really knows what happens when a person dies. But most Christians hold tenaciously to the beliefs taught by their own particular denomination. Most followers of other religions also follow the teachings of their faith tradition. This satisfies one of the main needs that many people have of their religion: to give them a sense of security in the face of an uncertain and frightening world and the inevitability of their personal death.

Where Are these Places?

Perhaps one of the most daunting premises of Christianity and all Bible-based belief systems is the question: Do Heaven and Hell really exist? Most would reply in the affirmative! But based on what? Solid clear Scriptures? Are these real places or are they 'ethereal'?

Now, the component that 'goes there', as we say, is non-material. The 'soul' is regarded as being a non-physical component of our existence. So why would these locations even need to be real in the sense of having a defined location and finite dimensions? Many people think of heaven and hell as places, removed from the Earth. They may see Heaven as a place where "good" people go when they die. Many see Hell as another place, possibly under-ground, where "bad" people face endless torture in burning pits of fire and brimstone.

Heaven IS Real!

The Bible describes a heaven where Jesus has ascended, where His Father's Throne exists and where angels worship God. Jesus tells His disciples about what is perceived by some as referring to heaven in John

14:2, saying, *"In my Father's house are many mansions (rooms); if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you."*

Comment: What is left out of consideration is the picture that He will return for them, and be with them! Already a concept contrary to the common take. But the following paragraphs present more common explanations regarding belief in an ever-conscious 'afterlife'.

The Apostle Paul tells us, *"Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands".* (2nd Corinthians 5:1).

In 2nd Kings 2, the Prophet Elijah is swept into (the first) heaven in a whirlwind. And in Mark 12:25, Jesus tells the Pharisees what happens when married people die, saying, *"When the dead rise, they will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven."* (Notice: When they rise from the dead!)

Jesus says in Matthew 8:11-12 that people of faith will join saints and prophets from the Old Testament at the Lord's table, while others will be left outside: *"I say to you that many will come from the east and the west, and will take their places at the feast with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*

Those outside would, presumably, be sent to hell. Perhaps the most detailed story is from Luke 16:22-24, which tells of the disparate fortunes of a rich man named Lazarus and a beggar: *"The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'"*²⁴

Several biblical passages indicate that heaven and earth will one day, without fanfare, be destroyed to make way for the glorious return of Christ. *"But the day of the Lord*

²⁴ Much is read into this passage, while an equal amount is overlooked. Read my article on this insightful narrative titled *"Lazarus and the Rich Man"*. The word for Hell in this verse is the grave, (*sheol*) not an ever burning hell! (*gehenna*).

will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare.” (2nd Peter 3:10).²⁵

Peter goes on to caution all of us to be prepared for God's judgment whenever that day comes: *"For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men (for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard) - if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to **hold** the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority.” (2nd Peter 2:4-10)*

Comment: We should notice that in the verse given above, the unrighteous are held pending sentencing which will come at “the Day of Judgment”, not the date of their death. This revelation sheds light on the condition of the ‘rich man’ of Luke 16:22-24, being described as being in a holding condition, (as is Lazarus), anticipating his pending (imminent) sentence to punishment. Most religious explanations dis-regard this situation!

Heaven: Our Intended Destination?

Based on Jesus' teachings and other sources of revelation, Christians believe that God created human beings to live eternally in fellowship with Him. The future as described in the Bible includes the **resurrection** of all people, a **judgment**, and eternal life in either heaven or hell.

Comment: Another insightful passage, and another obvious technical oversight: The resurrection precedes the judgment and the judgment precedes assignment to ones' just reward. However, one assignment is to eternal life, but the other is to a condition referred to as having ‘perished’, (e.g. John 3:16) not an ever-conscious state.

²⁵ This passage is commonly mis-identified as to what event it describes. See my article on the subject.

All of the descriptions of heaven and hell in the Bible are strongly metaphorical. Most Christians think of heaven as a realm of some sort out of normal space-time. However the Biblical description often suggests a renewed earth. This could either mean that the heavenly realm is separate, but with a certain degree of similarity to our current world (the most common Christian view), or that God will **renew and transform the earth**.²⁶

Christians are not agreed on the exact details of how this will happen. However the differences tend to involve details of timing, and other issues that don't seem worth dealing with here.

The fact that human beings are created with an eternal destiny should have a significant impact on our priorities. It often seems that governments, nations, and other institutions are the enduring feature of human history, and people are transient elements. Christianity says that this is radically wrong. One cannot treat people as disposable adjuncts to the nation or other institution: ultimately it is the people who matter.

Note that there is a subtle difference between resurrection and the existence of an eternal soul. Many religions have held that human beings have an immaterial soul, which does not die when the body does. Christians generally agree with this (although a small number do not). **However the distinctive Christian doctrine is not the eternal nature of the soul, but the resurrection of the body.** Humans are unified beings. The body is an essential part of the person. In heaven (it is posed that) there will be some analog of the body.

Judgment

Christians believe that there will be a judgment. In this, everyone's life will be evaluated. Those who depend

²⁶ Why transform the earth if it's not to be inhabited? Actually, there are to be **two** major ‘transformations’. A material one after Christ's return to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, and another dramatically different total transformation that will occur after the millennial age ends when Christ surrenders up the Kingdom to the Father **after** all of humanity has been taken completely thru the salvational process and final sentencing (to life or eternal death) has been accomplished, and the ‘last enemy (death) has been destroyed’. (We read of that in places such as 1st Cor. 15:24-28, 2nd Pet. 3:10-13 & Rev. 21:1) This ‘day of God’ mentioned in 2nd Peter is often mis-identified with the ‘day of the Lord’, that series of events associated with Christ's second coming. Rather, this event is after the 1000 years.

upon Christ for salvation can be assured that they will pass this judgment. However the quality of their lives will still become known, and everything in their lives that was not built on Christ will be purged. The Bible talks of their work being tested with fire.

The common belief is that there are two different outcomes for eternal life: heaven and hell. There is not a precise description of either heaven or hell, nor are we told how many people will end up in each. They are described using terms that seem metaphorical: a city built of gold in heaven, a lake of fire for hell.

Comment: Rather than being declared metaphorical (a situation made necessary by the creation of the heaven / hell idea), both this City and the Lake of Fire are described as being **on earth!** Even the 'New Jerusalem', the one after the earthly millennial Jerusalem, described in Revelation 21 is shown being brought out of heaven to earth. Why? That's where the people of God are and are going to be!

Accountability

All major Christian traditions say that in the end everyone will end up in either heaven or hell. At first glance, it sounds like we won't be held accountable for what we did, as long as we manage to meet the minimal criteria for salvation. In fact there are several ways of maintaining some kind of accountability.

Catholics believe in a condition called "purgatory". This is a "place" (not necessarily an actual physical place, of course) where those who will end up in heaven are purified. Traditional Catholic theology says that when God forgives sins, he removes the guilt. However there may still be consequences. One of those consequences is that "temporal punishment" is still owed. The goal of this punishment is to be cleansed, and made fit for heaven.

Note that purgatory only applies to people who will be admitted into heaven. It is not part of hell, nor is it some kind of intermediate state between heaven and hell. It is in a sense the entranceway into heaven.

Traditionally, Catholics believe it is appropriate to pray for those that are in purgatory. These prayers, as well as masses said for them, etc, may in some way ease their process of purgation. This is one aspect of the general Catholic concept that those on earth and those in heaven retain a spiritual connection with each other. (This is called the "communion of saints".) Those on

earth may ask for intercession from the saints, and may intercede for those in purgatory.

Protestants do not normally accept the concept of purgatory. There are several objections. Among the most important are: It implies that Christ's death for us isn't enough. The Bible says in several places that any interaction with the dead is forbidden.

The concept was also discredited by various abuses with which it was surrounded in the 16th Century. These made it look like the Church was selling salvation, or at least release from Purgatory.

Thus Protestants normally object to anything that looks like Purgatory, as well as prayers for the dead. It is often said that prayers for the dead suggest a lack of trust in God, since God will judge them justly.

You can see the difference clearly if you attend both Protestant and Catholic services. When someone in the congregation has died, Catholics will ask for prayers for them and their family, while Protestants will ask only for prayers for their family. Despite the rejection of Purgatory, many Protestant groups are still concerned to maintain accountability for what has been done during life.

Many Protestants believe that there will be different levels of honor in heaven. Many Protestants also believe that even saved people will go through a process where their entire lives are reviewed and judged, even though their final destination is not in doubt. This is sometimes described as the "bema seat judgment". As a result of it, Christ's followers will be rewarded according to the quality of their work. This is contrasted to the "great white throne" judgment, which determines whether someone will spend eternity in heaven or hell. ²⁷

(It should be noted that the terms "bema seat judgment" and "great white throne judgment" are not standard among all Protestants. They are based largely on one specific eschatological system.)

²⁷ This is where clear biblical teaching contrasts with common teachings. Recognition of the 'problem' is what necessitates this convoluted explanation. In fact, once we understand that the 'soul' is unconscious and un-sentenced until the resurrection and the time judgment (its sentencing phase) occurs, these problems are resolved. As to the different levels of honor, those are the result of their 'works', a word typically shunned with regard to salvation. Read the chapter: "*Grace, Works and Reward*" for explanation of Rev. 14:13 & 20:13.

Note that Protestants do believe that those who are in heaven have been freed from sin. However the way in which this happens is thought of somewhat differently. For Protestants, our righteousness comes from Christ, because we are united to him in faith. When our nature is perfected in heaven, this happens because our union with Christ is perfected, and his righteousness fills us fully. (Presuming we've taken in His righteousness!)

The same difference occurs here as in the doctrine of justification: Catholic theology tends to envision the Christian life as due to the growth of grace in us, while Protestant theology tends to envision the Christian life as due to an increasing transparency to the presence of Christ. The doctrine of Purgatory seems oriented towards the Catholic description.

Why Does Hell Exist?

Currently there is a good deal of discussion among Christians about the morality of hell: it is said that a good God would not **condemn people to an eternity of torture**. However that has been the belief of most Christians through most of Christian history. It is alleged to be supported by the Biblical account. The alternative seems about as bad: that God will force himself on people who do not want Him. ²⁸

Note that it is not necessary to say that God imposes hell as punishment. It may be the automatic (indeed logically unavoidable) consequence of rejecting God. It is not clear that God makes it intentionally unpleasant. It may be the nature of the people who are there, and the fact that they are finally given what they want: freedom from God's rule in their lives.

Many criticisms of judgment suggest that it is arrogant to say that Christian ideas are true and others are false. "How can you be so arrogant to believe that Christians will go to heaven and everyone else will go to hell"? As we will see below, most Christians don't believe this. However the idea that this is arrogant seems odd. We don't criticize mathematics teachers for saying that $2 + 2$ is always 4, and that believing sincerely in 5 is not acceptable. Either there is a God or there isn't.

²⁸ It is the creation of the concept of an ever-burning Hell that creates this obvious objection. Gehenna fire is not everlasting in its duration, but in its finality. The Lake of Fire consumes both body and soul, creating an extinction from which there is no further consciousness or chance of resurrection.

Either Christ died to save us or he didn't. If he did, it's hard to see how it can be arrogant to say so. If he didn't, then Christians are wrong, but not arrogant.

I would say that ultimately hell is a result of the "hardness" of created reality. Let me try to explain: Christianity believes that the universe has a real existence, and that it is distinct from God. (This is a specific position, which not all religions and philosophies accept. For some, there isn't a real distinction between God and the universe.) In order to provide us with a region (could we say 'opportunity period') in which we can make our own decisions and take our own actions, God set up a universe that operates under dependable laws. Possibly there are other ways he could have worked. But we don't know of any other way to set things up so that we have real lives of our own.

The existence of a real universe with dependable laws has consequences. One of those consequences is the fact that people can have incorrect ideas. If they misunderstand the way the universe works, damage may result. Most of us understand this in the realm of science and engineering. There is no reason that theology should be different. If there weren't any distinction between truth and falsehood, nor any consequences to error, we would be living in an amorphous mess (the metaphysical equivalent of "gray goo"). There would be no way to live sensibly.

The standard Christian position is that salvation is only available through Christ. This isn't because God is biased towards Christians. Rather, it's a consequence of the way the universe works. Heaven is by (assigned) definition eternal life with God. But Christ is God's way of establishing relationships between human beings and Himself. He is the divine logos, the agent of creation. It is inherently impossible to be with God without being in Christ. If a human being somehow managed to be in God's presence bypassing Christ, that person would be unmade. (Better said, incinerated. 1st Tim. 6:16)

The only alternatives I can see to hell are for God to arrange for everyone to accept Christ, or for him to destroy everyone who does not. As you'll see below, each of these alternatives has its supporters. However most Christians believe that if everyone ends up choosing God, human existence is a sham: God loaded the dice to such an extent that there were no real human decisions. Most Christians also believe that a part of us is immortal. For God to destroy it would be an

interference in the created order that would seriously violate its integrity. Before judging these issues, I'd ask you to look at some additional considerations.

Is Hell's Punishing Unfair?

The standard Christian position is that anyone who rejects Christ will end up in hell. Does this mean that only Christians can be saved? The Catholic church and many Protestant churches don't think so.²⁹ They believe it is possible that Christ can come to someone in an inward and spiritual way, even if they've never heard of Christ. Thus someone can be an "anonymous Christian." That is, they can know Christ spiritually without realizing it is Christ.³⁰

Most Christians also believe that God's judgment will take into account the sorts of **opportunities** a person had to learn the truth.³¹ A person who has never heard the Gospel can't be said to have rejected Christ. An even worse situation occurs when Christians have persecuted other groups. A person who sees Christ as a persecutor has hardly had a real exposure to the Gospel. (Historical note: It's worth noting that two major classical Protestant writers thought it was possible for non-Christians to be saved: Zwingli and Wesley did. Calvin did not.)

Alternatives to Hell?

There is a substantial minority view, which says that God will find some way to reach everyone. This is called "**universalism**". A few 20th Century thinkers have also suggested that those who are not destined for heaven are simply destroyed. This is called "**annihilationism**".³²

²⁹ This, of course, contradicts Acts 4:12.

³⁰ We see here obvious conflicts against what is logical and just. The conflict being generated by misunderstandings due to the false concepts of Heaven and Hell. Once we come to understand the overall Plan of God correctly, with the millennial age and the resurrections from the dead and eternal judgment as the bible really presents, better answers are seen. The unfortunate idea that rides with this approach could be to dissuade the person being offered an opportunity for salvation now to defer responding appropriately, thus missing his chance.

³¹ This expectation is correct, and explains the purpose for the post-millennial second resurrection.

³² Interesting thing: there is a grain of truth in each of these two approaches. Universally, all **will** be presented with an opportunity for salvation. The second resurrection provides that to those who died without having had a real opportunity in their lifetimes. All who reject their opportunity (no matter when it is provided them) will be annihilated in the Lake of

Most Christians think that both of these alternative views are ruled out by teachings in the Bible. Jesus himself speaks of judgment, and of "Gehenna" and "the outer darkness". **Comment:** Gehenna suggests being consumed by fire, while 'outer darkness' suggests an unconsciousness state!

While most Christians reject universalism and annihilationism as doctrines, many orthodox Christians hold positions that are very close. Let's look at them briefly:

There is no statement in the Bible about how many will be damned. When someone asks Jesus this, he deflects the question. He does say that the way to salvation is narrow, and that many follow the road to destruction. However we can still hope that in the end God will deflect those on the easy road to destruction to the narrow road. I believe universalism as a doctrine is unorthodox, but desire that a hope for all is possible.

A number of orthodox 20th Century writers point out that those who are in hell are not the same kind of people as those in heaven. Human beings are designed to live with God. In heaven our humanity is perfected. Hell is not described in any detail in the Bible. **The descriptions that most people hear are based on speculative fiction, such as Dante's.** However if humanity is created to be with God, then it is reasonable to believe that those who are finally separated from God in hell are less than fully human. Several writers refer to them as equivalent to "ashes", the remnants of what used to be a human life. Thus we may not have two groups of people living next to each other, with the saved watching the damned living in torture. Hell, whatever it is, has less reality than heaven. This is suggested by Jesus' most common way of referring to it. He calls it Gehenna. This was the garbage pit outside of Jerusalem, although the term also was used in discussions of the last judgment.

Could Hitler end up in Heaven?

Heaven and hell are not a matter of totaling up good deeds and bad deeds and seeing which predominates. From the Christian perspective, if it comes to merit, no one merits heaven, and we've all done enough bad for hell to be justified. However God doesn't want anyone to end up in hell. Anyone who depends upon Him for

Fire at the very end of time. The free 96-page booklet "*Understanding the Resurrections of the Dead and Eternal Judgment*" explains how each of the resurrections factors into the Plan of God. Request your free copy from this author.

rescue will be saved from hell. **Comment:** This internet author might benefit from reading passages such as Matthew 7:21-23. Lawlessness (iniquity), even religious lawlessness among the devout, carries serious consequences!

There are several questions that are asked so commonly that I think they're worth looking at here. Here are two examples:

Could Hitler end up in heaven if he repented at the last minute? ³³ **Comment:** We should keep in mind that it is God who grants repentance. It is not something that the likes of Hitler could 'pull out of his sleeve' at the last moment, as this internet author poses. Such an idea disregards what the conversion process is all about and how it works.

It seems unfair for God to save people just because they are Christians. There are lots of rotten Christians and lots of good non-Christians.

I'm going to try to deal with that whole class of questions here. Note that in doing so I'm going to make my own opinions a bit more obvious than I do elsewhere in these essays. I am quite sure that there are answers from Catholic and Orthodox perspectives, but I'm not in a position to argue convincingly from those viewpoints.

First, the Bible doesn't give us precise information as to who will end up in heaven or hell. We are warned particularly not to judge other people (except to the extent that we have specific responsibilities for church discipline or as officials involved with the legal system). This means that discussing specific people such as Hitler is dangerous. We don't know what is going on with individuals. Hitler looks particularly evil. But someone completely unremarkable may be just as evil, but may not have had enough political power to have the terrible effect that Hitler did. Perhaps Hitler was completely insane, and not responsible for his actions. (I seriously doubt it, but we don't know for sure what was going on in his heart.) ³⁴

³³ Such a question reveals a lack of understanding as to how the salvation process works!

³⁴ This consideration is faulty in that it disregards the development of righteous character, a prime requirement (result) of conversion, which is predicated upon the receipt of God's Spirit. When did Hitler have occasion to do that? Deathbed conversions are similarly ineffective. When we allow the understanding of the second resurrection to factor into the picture, these moot questions become answerable!

However more important, I need to warn you that heaven isn't a reward for being good. The basic Protestant model for salvation is as follows: God chooses us. We respond with faith, which basically means that we rely on God for salvation. God forgives us, and simultaneously starts renewing us and getting rid of our sin

There is certainly a connection between faith and being good: Faith is our side of the bond that connects us to God. God will use that connection to regenerate us and get rid of our sin. **The process isn't finished in this life,** ³⁵ but it certainly is started. Christians should be better than if they weren't Christians. Jesus said that you will know His followers by the fruits that they bear.

It would be nice if we could say that the best half (or whatever) of mankind are Christians and the worst half are non-Christians. Unfortunately, I'm afraid it isn't going to be quite that neat. Some people become Christians late in their life, and so the process has only started when they approach death. Some Christians may be in more dangerous positions than non-Christians. Some Christians may have been born with bad tempers, etc, which makes them look more evil than they actually are.

So I'd say that there should be real evidence of regeneration operating in the lives of Christians, but you shouldn't expect that all the people who look good are Christians and all those who look bad are non-Christians, as it would involve knowing their hearts.

Here's one thing to think about: What happens to someone who is relatively good in this life, but who does not have faith? Unfortunately, he may end up rejected. In theory this person could be the best person who ever lived (except Jesus, who was without sin). The problem is that by not having faith, they do not have the connection through which God will take care of their remaining sin. Even though there aren't very many visible problems, they (and the underlying addiction to sin of which they are symptoms) can't be dealt with. Thus these persons can't be made fit for salvation.

Now the obvious response to this is: so why shouldn't people just go ahead and be evil, if heaven isn't based on being good? While salvation isn't a reward for reaching a certain quota of good acts, you won't attain it unless you have a relationship with God through which you can be renewed. Someone who says "let me be evil for my whole life, and repent at the last minute" almost certainly isn't going to be capable of repenting in any way that does him any good. In having that intention, he

³⁵ This astute admission, of salvation being an ongoing process, is rare in the evangelical world.

has already rejected the kind of faith that is needed for salvation.

Comment: Those who advocate this view are apparently unaware that repentance is a gift of God, not something that a person can genuinely conjure up from within himself at will. (Rom. 2:4-5) Knowing that one needs to repent and failing to do so creates a hardness of heart from which a person cannot of himself break away.

Strictly speaking, salvation isn't even a reward for having faith. It's not that God is rewarding you for faith and punishing you for not having faith. Rather, it's that God uses a certain kind of relationship in order to make you fit for salvation. Faith is a key part of that relationship. If you're sloppy about building a bridge it may fall down. Nature isn't consciously punishing you. It's just the way the universe is built. In my view, one of the spiritual laws of the universe is that in order to end up saved, you have to have justifying faith (not just intellectual belief -- justifying faith means that you rely on and commit yourself to God as your Savior)." (End of essay.)

Common Views = Common Misperceptions

In this lengthy essay we have seen many misconceptions which are the result of the heaven & hell belief system. While the general conceptions of main-stream religion are well represented, many obvious biblical Truths are of necessity laid aside. What should be evident at this point is that it is nearly impossible to correctly understand the process of conversion and the ultimate destiny of mankind while operating under the prevailing heaven & hell orientation.

It can be seen from the above explanations what the heaven & hell belief system obscures:

- 1) It mis-identifies what a **soul** is,
- 2) It negates the **resurrections** (and any real need for them),
- 3) It fails to factor-in the opportunity for **salvation** to all who ever lived,
- 4) It barely alludes to the true **destiny** of mankind,
- 5) It mis-defines the millennial **Kingdom of God**.

What IS the Soul?

It is well known that human existence involves three basic components. Body, soul and spirit! What is commonly referred to as 'the soul' is more correctly identified as the human spirit. It is the spirit in man that accounts for intellect and consciousness. (1st Cor. 2:11) The soul, as defined biblically, is the physical **life** imparted to our bodies. Animals are described as not having souls, but as being souls. Just as an example, the Hebrew word, *nephesh*, (Heb. #5315) used in places such as Genesis 2:7 and also (1:21, 1:24 & 2:19, etc.), is alternately translated 'soul' or 'creature', even if specifically referring to animals. The soul is the animal life component of humans and animals. We each experience death in similar manner. (Eccl. 3:19) It is the **spirit** (our mentality) that distinguishes us from the animal kind, and is what we should be referring to if we want to indicate a person's conscious intellect.

What Purpose the Resurrections?

If the common idea is correct, that a person is awarded his just reward immediately upon death, is taken to heaven (or not), then what possible reason would there be for the doctrine of the resurrections of the dead? But, as we see even in the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, a resurrection factors heavily into the equation. Further, the resurrection is a vital component of the overall Plan of God to offer opportunity to those billions who died not ever having had a real opportunity. Thus, their being in everlasting torment in hell complicates any explanation as to when and why they would be resurrected and have 'the books' opened to them.

Man's TRUE Destiny

What is absent among traditional believers is the comprehension of what mankind's ultimate purpose is. We are created mortal, but need to take on immortality. (1st Cor. 15:53) That condition can only be acquired at and after the first resurrection, which occurs only at the second coming. (1st Cor. 15:52) Immortality at that time can be bequeathed only to those who have God's Spirit and who live in the Spirit. God is in the process of making of us a new creation, fit to live eternally with Him where He is. Just shedding our physical lives and discarding our mortal bodies is not sufficient modification to warrant that new form of existence.

This mortal must **put on** immortality, and the place that affirms that tells us WHEN that condition will be attained: at the resurrection at the Last Trump! (1st Cor. 15:35-54)

One might ask, then what is the situation when a person dies? We are clearly told that human consciousness (the spirit) is placed in God's hands and is preserved in a sleep-like state, until the appropriate resurrection, the first, or a later one. (There is more than one! (Rev. 20:5; Luke 23:46; John 5:24-29; Acts 7:59; Matt. 25:31-46; Ezek. 37: etc.)

It is God's purpose to replicate the Character of His Son in His human creation. We are to eventually become LIKE Him in both nature and form. (1st Jn.3:2) It's that regenerate condition (what is referred to as true conversion) that can be justified before the Throne of THE Father as being a person worthy of eternal preservation.

Opportunity for Salvation

We all can cite many situations where individuals have been denied a true opportunity for salvation, through no fault of their own! Start with infants who die before attaining any level of awareness. Consider those vast multitudes who lived and died before the first century. Vast areas of earth were never evangelized prior to the last three centuries. Are those who were not provided opportunity to suffer the same inescapable fate as those who rejected salvation and adamantly refused to repent of their sins?

The writer above poses that question. (Page 24, left column) **Would a good God condemn people to an eternity of torture?**, doing so as recompense for just a few decades of casual indifference? Add to that these questions. Would God rightfully consign ignorant offenders, who were never provided opportunity to the same fate as desperately evil reprobates? Is it justice that people who died millennia ago would suffer hundreds or thousands of years longer than those who die more recently?

No, logically, a Just and Loving God would provide the same opportunity for salvation to any and all before consigning them to eternal condemnation. But, if that is the case, when and how will that be?

That is where the resurrections of the dead factors

in. Be sure to request the free 96-page booklet "*Understanding the Resurrections of the Dead and Eternal Judgment*", available from the address given on the inside front cover. God has a plan to provide opportunity to those who died without ever having had a true opportunity to repent, be baptized and to receive God's Spirit.

The TRUE Kingdom of God

Despite the clear statement that 'flesh and blood can not inherit the Kingdom of God', religious people incessantly define just such a condition. They define the Kingdom of God as being here and now on earth, composed of imperfect humanity. (In other words, Christendom! Even apostate Christendom!) Rather, the Bible is clear that a Kingdom is coming to earth with and after the return of Christ when He will assume power over the nations. (So, IF Christ is here on earth, then who will be spending eternity up in Heaven? How could they 'ever be with Him' if He is here and they are there?)

The Apostles will head up each of the twelve tribes of Israel, (Mt. 19:28) under the resurrected King David. (Ezek. 37:24-25) The Saints (made immortal) will rule on earth with and under Christ. (Re. 20:6 & 5:10) The nations of earth will become the exclusive and unchallenged domain of Christ and His Spirit-Born Saints. (Rev. 11:15 & Dan. 7:14) Intrinsic with this situation is the removal of Satan from being able to influence society. (Rev. 20:1-3) The Kingdom of God is a real ruling government, not just an ethereal concept of well-intentioned humans living in a satanic world. Beside that, we are made aware that the ruling Christ will have left Heaven and come to Earth to set up His Kingdom, that will never be destroyed. (Dan. 7:27).

Far from being a reticent retirement condition, as people view Heaven, the Kingdom of God will be the active world ruling generation of Spirit-Born sons of God. (1st John 3:1-2) (Rom. 8:19)

Let's face it honestly, the heaven and hell concepts as commonly taught crowd aside many essential biblical truths! It obscures the real destiny of God's True Saints, living and ruling with Christ as His kings and priests, immortal, on earth, until the human redemption experience is completed. Then when the full harvest of humanity is complete, God the Father will descend to earth to join His ultimate Family. (1st. Cor. 15:24-28 and Rev. 21:) 

The OTHER FIVE Virgins Who They Really Represent

Matthew 25 Presents a Wedding Scenario that has long been Understood in the Context of JUST our being Saved or Lost. Actually, there's More to this Message than meets the Casual Eye. What REAL Point is Jesus Making?

Innumerable sermons over the centuries have been given that focused on the well-known passage beginning Matthew chapter 25, which relates the situation of ten virgins, five wise and five foolish, ALL anxiously awaiting the appearance of their beloved Bridegroom. Invariably, the take on its message is that of being accepted or rejected for salvation, based on ones' state of readiness.

This isn't entirely illogical, but when carefully noting the specifics of this parable's scene, an even more revealing message becomes apparent.

An Inter-related Set

It was given just two days before Christ's arrest, (Matt. 26:1) and is set into a **series** of parables that themselves present an overall context. Ending chapter 24 is the Parable of 'the Fig Tree', presenting the fact that the present generation would be the one to see the return of the Son of man in power, and that it is incumbent upon all to '**watch**', lest it find us **not** in a state of expectant readiness, as it surely will with most of humanity. Following that, the theme is developed that not only are we urged to be watchful, but that we, as servants of our Lord, are to also be faithfully performing our expected and profitable service. (Matt. 24:46)

The parable immediately following the one of the 'Ten Virgins', that of 'the Talents', specifically relates to all disciples, and repeats the matter of readiness but with productive gain, stressing the prospect of rejection should we be too reticent or too fearful in fulfilling our assigned enterprise.

This entire narrative was presented **privately** to His Disciples, not to the general public, (being part of what is called the Olivet Prophecy). So, we should

note that these 'Parables' were not given with the same purposeful vagueness³⁶ intended for the general public, but were aimed directly at, and intended to be clear to, His True Disciples. Notice, He doesn't need to re-explain it to them afterward.

All Nations to be Evaluated

The final Parable in this pre-Passover set, deals with the 'Judgment of all the Nations', completing the picture of that **vital** part of God's Plan under-explained previously, showing how those who were never afforded opportunity for salvation would be brought back and placed in a time-setting allowing them to be evaluated based on their spiritual character. As verse 32 explains, all will be gathered before Him. For that to happen, they would have to be in a conscious state, also affirmed by their verbal exchanges with their Lord, as we see in verses 37 to 45. But for them to be in a conscious state, their being gathered together (just and unjust **together**, please notice) must represent a period of time after a resurrection but prior to any sentencing to their just rewards. This passage is also known as 'the Sheep-from-the-Goats' parable, which presents a distinct resurrection from those generally understood and distinct from the one Christ also referred to in places like Matthew 12:41-42. (This fantastic resurrection is explained in detail in other articles such as, "*The Rejected Resurrection*".)

But, once we see more of the general idea being addressed in the greater context of this set of related situations, as posed in this private 'sermon', we can better appreciate the situation with regard to these

³⁶ Parables were intended to **obscure** certain things from those not being called at the time, as explained in Matthew 13:10-15, quoting Isaiah 6:9-10.

'Ten Virgins'. An 'overlay' in this set is the relationship between the disciple and his Lord.

In these parables, we see these issues: 1) Readiness for the second coming, 2) Our need for faithful performance using the talents invested in us, 3) that not all will be successful in their quest, and 4) that initial non-attainment isn't necessarily an automatic death sentence, but additionally, 5) that there **is** an appropriate time for each and every person who ever lived, each in his proper time-frame! Christ brings us from the individual Disciple thru the greater Church scene then to a future inclusion of the full number who have ever lived. His Full Plan encompasses **all** without exception, but each in his own order. (1st Cor. 15:23) That in itself is a hopeful message! It should also be our message!

Considering the Ten Virgins

Perhaps it's the added component of that special relationship between Christ and His Bride that sets this parable's message apart. The matter was heavy on Christ's mind, as he was about to propose marriage to His prospective Bride, about a day later during His last earthly Passover observance.³⁷ When reading the narrative, we should remain aware that these were a people **special** to Christ, a people committed to Him, not at all like the generation we read of in the latter verses of the chapter.

In Matthew 25, we find the following narrative:

1: *"Then shall the kingdom of heaven be likened unto **ten virgins**, which took their lamps, and went forth to meet the bridegroom. 2: And five of them were wise, and five were foolish. 3: They that were foolish took their lamps, and took no oil with them: 4: But the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. 5: While the bridegroom tarried, **they all slumbered** and slept. 6: And at midnight there was a cry made, Behold, the bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him. 7: Then all those virgins arose, and trimmed their lamps. 8: And the foolish said unto the wise, Give us of your oil; for **our lamps are gone out**. 9: But the wise answered, saying, Not so; lest there be not enough for us and you: but go ye rather to them that sell, and buy for your-selves. 10: And while they went to buy, the bride-groom came;*

³⁷ Presenting the cup, Jesus borrowed a phrase from a formal Jewish marriage proposal. See my article "Passover and the Bride of Christ" for a more thorough explanation.

*and they that were ready went in with him to the marriage: and the door was shut. 11: Afterward came also the other virgins, saying, Lord, Lord, open to us. 12: But he answered and said, Verily I say unto you, **I know you not**. 13: Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh."*

It is the common take on this parable that accounts for the general mis-understanding as to its greater point. With most, the issue of salvation or condemnation dominates their thinking. With that perceptual limitation, it wouldn't occur to the average worshipper to consider more. But once we realize that there are different resurrections, (with one better than another³⁸) and differing levels of relationship between God and man, the oft posed contrast here of merely being saved or lost misses the mark.

What Jesus' marriage proposal, offered by the cup, reveals is that there's a very special relationship between Christ and His Bride. The opportunity to enter that relationship is time-limited, the 'betrothal period' (like being engaged) is limited to the interval between the first offering of the cup to His chosen Disciples at that New Testament Passover and the 'fulfillment' of the opportunity period occurring when He formally accepts their consensual determination to become betrothed to Him, by partaking of that cup Himself with His resurrected disciples 'in the Kingdom'.³⁹

This explains the reason for His refusal to partake of that cup at its first presentation. It was to leave the opportunity period **open for others** throughout all the coming generations of the Christian Era. There's a select echelon of 'called out' individuals who will comprise **the Bride of Christ. Those counted worthy to attain the first resurrection.** There is another echelon to be called after that door of opportunity is closed just prior to the Marriage Supper, who will be called to conversion, but not in time for being part of the Bride! That awareness is

³⁸ A 'better resurrection' is referred to in Hebrews 11:35

³⁹ Explaining why He deferred drinking at that time: Luke 22:18 "For I say unto you, I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, until the kingdom of God shall come." and Matthew 26:29, "But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father's kingdom." My article "Passover and the Bride of Christ" explains the cultural ceremony incorporated into the Passover in detail.

the key to understanding the real intent of the Ten Virgins parable. (And I suppose this distinction is what qualifies this narrative as a parable, in that God's chosen Saints will come to see the point, while those not destined to be among His Bride might not at this time!) There will be a great number of individuals called AFTER the Marriage Supper of the Lamb, called jointly by Him **and** His Bride, as we can see in such places as Revelation 22:17, except these will be the children of that Union, awarded salvation, but not of the same station as those who were called and chosen earlier to be a part of the Bride! This understanding requires that we also understand the timing and purpose of the various resurrections, a doctrinal area largely set aside in the greater religious world!

Regarding the Evidence

In coming to a correct understanding of the 'Ten Virgins' parable, we should take into account all of the evidence contained within it.

First, the direct symbology. Lamp oil is here representative of the indwelling of God's Spirit. The Bridegroom is Christ, the Bride is the Church.

Indirectly, the message conveys that there is to be a lengthy and indeterminate waiting period and also that that waiting period has a definite cut-off date! The 'closed door' presents that reality. This compares to the interval between Christ's ascension and just after His second coming. Another subtlety is the fact that their oil is not transferable between individuals, just as God's Spirit is not.

What is usually disregarded is the clear fact that all ten **have**, and come with, oil. All ten fall asleep! They are not faulted for that. The primary distinction is that the supply among the second five is insufficient for readiness at the final hour. In the final moments of preparation, their lamps were obviously fading. They are told to go and resupply their oil, which they promptly did, knowing of the only source from which to acquire it.

When the second five virgins return, they **don't** say, 'we couldn't get more oil but let us in anyway.' What this tells us is that they **did** acquire more oil, but just **not in time!** For that to have happened, they had to have acquired it from God alone. The issue here isn't the presence or absence of God's Spirit, they did have and once again have a

sufficient supply of God's Spirit. The issue here is the timing and readiness **at that critical time!** (An interesting cross comparison is the abrupt but anticipated announcement coming at midnight, the same hour as the original Passover.)

A Closed Door

But what the door represents is the distinct cut-off time after which the opportunity to be part of the Bride is closed. This does not automatically bar others from conversion. Why would God have re-supplied their oil if they were destined to become consigned to eternal damnation? This is a key consideration.

What is said to them is also revealing. Their Lord says, "**I know you not.**" Often the comparison is made with Matthew 7:21-23, which says to an entirely different category of people, "*I never knew you, Depart from me, ye that work iniquity.*" Also, a mental association is often made with the separation-for-sentencing scene in the latter verses of Matthew 25. But what actually is said is revealing in its own right. Here He says, "*I don't know you*", which is a curious thing to say to people who He'd just re-supplied with His Spirit! He had to have known them in the first place to have specifically called them to be a part of His Bride. We can't logically understand the word 'know' in a cognitive sense, because their exclusionary fault, as related, **wasn't sin** but simply the matter of readiness. At the moment the Bride contingent was admitted into the chamber and the door was closed they at that time weren't in possession of a supply adequate for inclusion. But they were re-supplied and came back with it, just not in time!

What we're drawn to conclude is that the word 'know' is to be understood in a conjugal sense, not a cognitive sense. He doesn't cast these into outer darkness, He merely excludes them from being in the marriage ceremony. These 'too late arrivers' though not accepted as part of the Bride, are **not excluded** from ultimate salvation. Another thing we don't see here is the statement about '*weeping and gnashing of teeth*' like is in Matthew 25:30. More evidence that this isn't that kind of situation. It is **not** a matter of saved versus lost, but rather being part of Christ's Bride versus not being. These 'other five' will not be among those with whom Christ will engender uncountable numbers of additional children into His Eternal Family. 

Biblical Predestination

The Protestant Reformation brought forward many Novel Interpretations. None had more Severe and Discouraging effect on Evangelical Theology than the Commonly Taught Understanding of the subject of Predestination!

Giant religious personalities who figured heavily in the Reformation of the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, laid a foundational base for understanding that remain enduring to the present day. The concepts around which their theology was framed led to the establishment of involved doctrines, even providing a foundation for entire denominations.

While the general intent of the matter of certain individuals being “predestined” as stated in the New Testament was positive, it is understood and is represented by modern theologies, especially those known as being “Calvinistic”, as decidedly **severe**, posing seemingly difficult obstacles to those conscious of their personal faults. Not the least of which is the contrasting position of those **not** “predestined” for salvation being hopelessly lost, no matter how much of a desire to be “saved” they may possess and how much anxiety and effort they put forth in pursuit of it.

The places that mention predestination are actually rather few in number. It’s from these that the doctrine as we know it was formed. We will consider those Scriptures shortly.

Irreversibly Lost?

The Doctrine of Predestination is built upon the foundational premise that predestination involves whether or not a person is destined to be saved. It is commonly held that “some are destined to be called, while others are not”! The net effect of this premise is that there is a contingent of people, (and we might logically observe that, if true, it represents the vast majority) who just are not ever to be called to salvation and in reality have no possible chance to ever really become ‘saved’.

This premise is closely interlocked with the position of those who hold to the teaching that this is the **ONLY** day of salvation. In fact, it **requires**

that view. If there is another day of salvation, then the foundation of what’s known as the Predestination Doctrine is seriously undermined, because we can’t have the final word on all individuals until the redemption process has run its full course!

The doctrine as it came to be understood in the Reformation Era was heavily influenced by prior theologies, those largely put forth by the Catholic Church, developed within the Dark Ages. We can see much of what was believed in those years reflected in religious fiction such as Dante Alighieri’s “*Divine Comedy*”. We gain from that work such references as Dante’s Inferno, a concept of an ever-burning Hell, common in the minds of a great number of religious peoples even prior to Dante’s time. So, it’s from that theological swamp of misconception that worshippers today have formed a concept of what Predestination involves as it regards all “the rest”, the un-predestined.

The point above is that Predestination in the minds of people is to a great extent what we bring into it from past pre-conceptions. The prevailing concept is that it means some are predestined to be saved while others are not. Those who are **not** are destined to Hell no matter what their desire or what effort they put forth in attempts to attain it. In other words, the Predestination Doctrine presents a contrast between being saved or being lost, with there being no personal choice in the matter.

But, in order to fully understand the matter. We must have good answers to the questions: Is there but one day of Salvation? And, is the concept of an ever-burning Hell, where those consigned there are tortured in merciless agony, Biblically valid?

Worthy of thoughtful consideration also is the concept of the nature of God this particular predestination idea poses. Would a loving and just

God be so uncaring and unmerciful toward what obviously is the vast majority of humanity? Most thoughtful people have considered this question.

Let's consider the basic premises of John Calvin's Predestination Theology for a moment. Much of what's taught in a number of main-stream religions carries a certain measure of this understanding embedded within.

Predestination According to Calvin

Gleaned from the internet

John Calvin was an influential French theologian and pastor during the Protestant Reformation. He was a principal figure in the development of the system of Christian theology later called Calvinism. Originally trained as a humanist lawyer, he broke from the Roman Catholic Church around 1530. Calvin's writing and preachings provided the seeds for the branch of theology that bears his name. The Reformed, Congregational, and Presbyterian churches, which look to Calvin as the chief expositor of their beliefs, have spread throughout the world.

"According to John Calvin, predestination is **God's unchangeable decree from before the creation of the world** that he would freely save some people (the elect), foreordaining them to eternal life, while the others (the reprobate) would be "**barred from access to salvation**" and sentenced to "eternal death..."

"Calvin described the **basis of predestination** in several ways. In general he affirmed that there is no basis for election outside of God. Referring to **Eph. 1:9**, Calvin noted that God purposed election "in Himself," basing his decree of predestination on "nothing outside Himself." Calvin attributed the salvation of the elect to God's free decision to favor them. He variously described this as God's "mere generosity," His "freely given mercy," and the "good pleasure of His will; (cf. **Eph. 1:5**)." Moreover, Calvin based the damnation of the reprobate solely in God's decision ..."

"Since God's reasons for predestination are wholly internal to His being, they are opaque to humanity. Ultimately, then, the basis of God's predestination is mysterious and "utterly incomprehensible" to people. This mystery points to one of God's purposes in predestination, to inspire wonder and reverence in believers. The things hidden in God are not to be understood by people, but rather revered in their "wonderful depth..."

"Despite the mysterious basis of predestination, it is possible for the elect to be certain of their status as children of God. The first and seemingly most important indicator of election is what Calvin referred to as "the calling of God." His use of this term seems to refer to a subjective inward certainty that God has chosen a person for salvation."

Pertinent Scriptures

From an *Englishman's Greek Concordance*⁴⁰ we find the translated word "predestinate" (or predestinated) to have several other translations. Using a *Strong's Concordance*, it might not be so obvious. The Greek word is **proorao / proorizo**, *Strong's* #4308 / 4309, which is translated in a number of ways. In each of the below verses, the word in question is shown in bold type.

Ac. 2:25 *For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:*

Ac. 21:29 *(For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)*

Ac. 4:28 *For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.*

Rom. 8:29 – 30 *For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. [30] Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.*

1 Cor. 2:7 *But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory:*

Eph. 1:5 *Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,*

Eph. 1:11 *In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will:*

⁴⁰ The Englishman's Greek Concordance of the New Testament, Zondervan Edition, 1971

It is from these few mentions that the Predestination teaching was developed, a teaching that has shaped a great deal of Christian theology. Not only does it influence our perceptions of the process of salvation, but also shapes our perceptions of God and His mercy, or seeming lack thereof.

The major point of this teaching (some call it a doctrine) is that certain individuals were known or chosen in advance by God for salvation, even long before their birth, while the rest (obviously the vast majority) have **no chance whatsoever!** God has (supposedly) decreed this and no-one can change His pre-set determination in any way!

What IS Predestination Really?

From the above verses we can discern a little more than Predestinationists would admit. First, there IS a foreknowledge on God's part, but it is not a rigidly unalterable consignment to damnation of the great majority. Biblical pre-destination is NOT exclusionary, though it's a major component in their line of reasoning. Second, of those "predestined", their destiny is to be conformed to the image of His Son, as Romans 8:29-30 explains. It is WHAT we will become that is pre-determined, not so much WHO will be called. Ephesians 1:5 conveys some of the same idea. Our destiny is to become Spirit-born sons in the greater Family of God. In other words, God has fully thought out His Plan and Purpose for humanity in advance.

Where Predestinationists have missed the point is in their failure to understand that there are two "days of salvation". And in missing that detail, they are forced to see the vast majority consigned to never being given any opportunity for salvation. We see this view as being a result of their firm belief that "this is the ONLY day of salvation".

When we realize that, NO, there is **more than one** day of salvation, the whole picture of predestination and what it represents changes.

Their idea is that, since this is the ONLY day of salvation, anyone not saved in this age, during this lifetime, is "destined" to automatic condemnation, consigned to an ever-burning hell! This premise gives some believers fits of anxiety, both for their loved ones but even more for infants and young children who die young, too young to be able to

comprehend repentance, let alone be baptized and become truly converted. There are a number of unique teachings developed by various denominations to address this obvious "problem".

What Does God Foreknow?

Much of what is believed on this subject is based on what God has foreknowledge of. Perhaps we should back-up a little and realize that it is in fact God who "calls" individuals. It is a fact that no man CAN come to His Son for conversion without being "called" and that calling is of and by the Father's pre-determination. John 6:44 tells us that no man can come except the Father draws him! ⁴¹ Most of Christianity generally teaches that we're on a "whosoever wills" basis, except where the Predestination Doctrine confounds that premise. Under that teaching, not all can come or exhibit even the will to come! A Calvinists view is that God has already unalterably consigned them to their fate, and nothing they might do can change it.

Effectively, the typical Predestination Doctrine denies the fact that God has given all individuals free moral agency, alleging mankind has no choice where their salvation is concerned. Yet, so many scriptures present choices and encourage mankind to make the right choice. What is repentance and how does it work if choices are not involved?

It was mentioned earlier that God can and does know certain things in advance. There IS such a thing as predestination, but it is not the severe exclusion from any opportunity for salvation that Calvinistic teachings allege. What God knows is WHO can make it IF called. He also knows who would likely NOT make it if they were called in this lifetime. Those who CAN successfully make it through the process of salvation are those whom God the Father opts to call now. That does not preclude their success. As many scriptures explain, ⁴² those called in this or any age **can fail** and many do fail in their quest. It's a matter of their personal choices and determination. Salvation is not a foregone conclusion based solely on ones calling.

⁴¹ This is stated in the context of the spring Holy Day season, while the 'whosoever wills' statement is mentioned in the context of the fall Holy Day season. My article on "*Whosoever Wills May Come*" addresses this seeming contradiction.

⁴² Hebrews 6:4-8; 1st Timothy 1:19; Hebrews 10:27.

Where the Premise Fails.

Where is the common Predestination Doctrine wrong? It's faulty due to being based on two significant errors. First, the teaching that this is the **ONLY** day of salvation, and second, overlooking the fact that **ALL ARE** destined to be called. It's a matter of **WHEN**. Predestination cannot be that some are to be called while others never will be, because **ALL** are destined to be called. It's a matter of **WHEN** they are to be called!

Yes, there **IS** to be a "whosoever wills" opportunity period, when **ANY** who wish may receive God's Spirit and become converted, but **that is not now**. It will exist in the Millennial Age and beyond. Those not destined, (by the grace of God) to be called **now** will have their opportunity **LATER!** (with most churches, there is no "later".) But, there **IS!** That is what the subject of the resurrections from the dead ⁴³ brings into the picture. Religionary for the most part fails to understand or teach the Truth on this matter. There **IS** a time when all nations will be called. All of humanity will be invited to "come" (Rev. 22:17). There is a resurrection where the "books" (biblos) will be "opened to them"! ⁴⁴ They are not opened to them presently. The world in general just cannot understand the Bible! And notice, it is the Spirit and the Bride which issues this open invitation. This positively places the timeframe after the first resurrection, when Christ's Bride is alive in Spirit form, co-laboring with Christ to effect the open opportunity for world salvation, which is the theme of the Feast of Tabernacles. (See Zechariah 14:16-21.) (With Satan removed from society. (Rev. 20))

A Post-Destined Contingent?

The key for us to understand is that pre-destination involves being chosen for a calling prior to the rest of humanity. Destined to be called early is another way of wording it. Based on God's awareness of a person's ability and personal dispositions, He calls some now, but the rest later. Those who couldn't make it, for whatever reason, will be called **later**. (This is called "mercy". ⁴⁵) We could call them the post-destined as opposed to the pre-destined.

⁴³ Revelation 20:5; Matthew 25:31-46; John 5:24-30.

⁴⁴ Revelation 20:12

⁴⁵ Romans 11:32, etc.

There are **TWO** harvests of humanity. What some theologians (and scripture) refer to as "the early and latter rains". ⁴⁶ There is a smaller (early season) harvest which will be reaped at Christ's Second Coming, but a much greater harvest when He, the Son of Man, seated on the White Cloud, reaps the Earth's righteous harvest once it is "fully ripened" as we read in Revelation chapter 14. This is what religionists for the most part do not understand, and they don't understand because they have rejected the essential teachings of the resurrections and what is revealed in the Biblical Holy Days of God.

Apparent Incongruities?!

Let's consider the subliminal effects of Calvin's Predestination Theology for a moment.

It makes God out to be insensitive to the vast majority, consigning them to eternal damnation.

It undermines the whole basis of Judgment. Why subject the unconverted to a condemned Judgment if they were afforded no choice?

It disregards God's basic intent, (being not willing that any should perish). How could He say that?

It presents God as unfathomably mysterious, not ever revealing His purpose to mankind, where He claims to do the opposite. (John 15:15)

This theology fails to realize that there are two harvests periods in the redemption of humanity.

It fails to factor-in the reasons for the resurrections.

But most importantly, the common predestination teaching is wrong because **ALL** are destined to be called (it's just a matter of when).

What We Haven't Considered

Of those of us who **are** called in this age, those predestined to be among God's firstfruits, it is still not a foregone conclusion that we will be successful. While our opportunity period is opened, it is still required that we make the right choices, to overcome sin in our lives, to receive and employ God's Holy Spirit as we pursue the perfection called for in such places as Hebrews 6. While we may not fathom the reasons for our being selected now, we must follow through, as there is no second chance! 

⁴⁶ James 5:7; Deuteronomy 11:14.

◇ Chapter Nine ◇

The Fire of HELL

The Prevailing Opinion in the Christian World is that anyone Unsaved Should Anticipate Spending all Eternity, Fully Conscious, Tormented in an Ever-Burning HELL ! Is That Perception TRUE?

Compassionate Christians of all ages have to some degree been self-traumatized by the belief that their loved ones, who have not or did not believe in and “accept Christ”, face a future of excruciating and unending torment for all eternity in a place called “Hell “! More than a few biblical passages, when casually read, seem to support this belief.

Thoughtful believers often detect an inconsistency in this, in that they regard such assignment as contrary to the nature of a merciful and loving God. It is also obviously incongruous that a person who is merely disinterested in ‘salvation’ is punished as extremely as any arch criminal like Hitler or Stalin. More than that, babies also, who for no greater fault than never having had an opportunity to pursue salvation, in some denominations, face the same awful fate. This belief system, perhaps, causes more consternation among believers than any other teaching.

It’s the rare individual who has ‘searched the scriptures’ and has considered carefully what the Bible actually says in this regard. Most just take for granted what their priests or ministers tell them. For many hundreds of years humanity has labored under concepts that have incorporated ideas drawn from extra-biblical sources – paganism even! No wonder the apparent incongruity.

The Sense of the Matter

Not only does this incongruity stand out, but also there are other presumptions regarding the prevailing teaching about Hell that make no sense. For example, in what body does the condemned person exist while in Hell in order to feel the agony of fire? Isn’t pain physical? Don’t we need a physical body in order to possess sensual capabilities? We don’t consciously feel pain when asleep or when under sedation. What senses come alive after our decease, and how do they do so?

It certainly isn’t our physical body that feels anything after death, so does either the soul or the spirit activate those senses after people die? Few believers have pursued this line of consideration.

Typically it’s alleged that ones’ immortal soul is what is consigned to Hell. So is it the soul that possesses the attributes of consciousness and sensation? If that were the case, then how would it lose such sensual capabilities when the body is asleep or under some form of sedation?

Religion correctly represents that ‘a person’ consists of body, soul and spirit. This is based on scripture such as what is found in 1st Thessalonians 5:23, which makes reference to these three essential components of human existence. At least, as it regards our physical life, we can’t ‘live and move and have our being’ without being in possession of all three of these. Body, soul and spirit: each providing the vital elements of our conscious and functional existence. If we lose any one of the three, we cannot exist as a living human being. For example, without the spirit in man providing cognitive consciousness, we exist only in what is called a ‘vegetative state’.

What IS a Soul?

Before we can consider the widely held teachings on the matter of ones’ eternal destiny, whether to a positive assignment or to eternal torment, we must understand what component of our former existence is what is preserved for all eternity after death. After all, if nothing of our former state is preserved, how then can we be conscious of the torments of such assignment? So, if the prevailing teaching is true, we must identify what it is that’s preserved in order to perpetuate consciousness and sensation.

The fundamental premise in this belief system is

that in some manner we remain alive even after we die. How can that be?

Body, soul and spirit: What are these? Now, in the secular or scientific world, we would recognize that a viable person exists in physical form, alive and with a consciousness. Any living thing would have the same, except that among animals, instinct would replace those cognitive skills unique to humanity. Religion often alleges that the distinction between humans and animals is that animals don't possess souls. But, is this idea biblical, is it scientifically accurate? Can we even legitimately involve science in addressing this theological question?

Adam Became a Living Soul

In the second chapter of Genesis, we are told that upon God breathing into his lifeless physical body, Adam became a living soul. Theologically, that seems to uphold the common teaching, unless and until we discover that the human kind isn't alone in being a soul. Being a soul, is a key consideration, not just our possessing one! Because you see, what Adam **became** was what other physical life forms had become before he was made! The word 'soul' is the Hebrew word '*nephesh*',⁴⁷ a word commonly applied to animals. However, our English translations don't convey that well, as the same Hebrew word is commonly translated 'living creature' (not soul) when referring to animal life. *Nephesh* is applied to animals, and refers to the animal kind in such places as Genesis 1:20, 21, 24, 30 and 2:19; 9:4 & 15-16. Genesis 9:5 is interesting, in that *nephesh* is there translated, "the life of man". The 'soul' is by definition the life which we possess, it doesn't represent our conscious cognitive ability or our character. The word 'soul' is what imparts life. It is what we lose in death. It does not convey the mental skills that we are also provided in addition to being made alive. That comes from a different component, the 'spirit in man', which gives us the unique cognitive mentality that is unique to the human kind.

The Spirit in Man

Paul understood this. He made specific reference

⁴⁷ Strong's #5315; a living air-breathing creature of the animal kind. (By no means unique to human beings as it's used.)

to the matter in 1st Corinthians 2:11-16. "*For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the **spirit of man** which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth; comparing spiritual things with spiritual. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.*" Not only does he refer to the source of human consciousness, but explains that that human spirit can receive the Spirit of God into our spirit, and thus take on His Mind above and beyond what our own natural cognitive skills allow us!

So, the teaching that animals don't have souls is technically incorrect. They are souls, just as man is. Adam became one just as had the air-breathing life forms created just before he was. As far as just being alive, man and animals are the same in that respect, and scripture tells us that. "*I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: **as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast:***⁴⁸ *for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? (Eccl. 3:19-21) "For the living know that they shall die: but **the dead know not any thing**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any*

⁴⁸ At least, in the sense of being alive. Humans and animals are similar in that respect: they exist under the same living characteristics and limitations. But, character development thru our conscious spirit is another matter entirely. We find it is that spirit that God preserves for restoration into our resurrected bodies. (Acts 7:59 & Luke 23:46)

more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. (King Solomon speaking in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 KJV)

David also affirms that our thoughts (consciousness) **cease** upon death. “*Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.*” Paul expresses the same understanding, likening death to sleep. (1st Cor.15:51; 1st Thes. 4:14 & 5:10, etc. (& Dan. 12:2)) In making a comparison to sleep, we see that they understood death to be an unconscious state.

With this, we face a theological dilemma!

Consciousness by Our Spirit

No, it’s in the spirit dimension that we differ from animals. They operate with the limited instinct-programming that God placed within them, and we with a free moral agency that allows us to operate on a vastly higher plane of conscious awareness.

Our consciousness is derived from our spirit component, not the animal life form that animates us that is our soul. The dead, as Solomon tells us, lose all conscious awareness. That’s profound! It’s especially profound when we consider how it factors into the Heaven and Hell teaching. With the person entering a sleep-like state at death, how does our conscious awareness and the supposed ability to sense pain become activated?

Restating our earlier question, If a person is consigned to Hell in a conscious and sensing state, which of our life components would provide such capability? We need to answer this question before we can ever affirm the prevailing teaching that the unconverted spend eternity in torment. One must be conscious to experience torment.

A further question: Would the Spirit of God that Paul refers to in the passage quoted above allow us to correctly understand this subject?

Two Kinds of Hell!

Another problem area that accounts for the typical belief in an ever-burning Hell is the result of translational factors. The Greek texts (and for that matter the Hebrew also) uses different words for ‘the grave’ and for ‘hell-fire’. Unfortunately, the English translators used one word to translate

either one, without making distinction. The Greek ‘*hades*’ refers to the grave, not a place of eternal torment, while it uses ‘*gehenna*’ in reference to fire. Religious leaders rarely explain which is which, when describing what they teach regarding the punishment of those whom they deem unconverted.

Now, *hades* refers to the grave, the place where either converted **or** unconverted are interred at death. Why didn’t the translators make a distinction that both converted and unconverted are placed in *hades*? Why don’t we see *hades* translated ‘heaven’ as often as it’s translated ‘hell’? The grave is omni-functional. It receives the good as well as the bad.

One instance where this is transparent is the passage in Psalm 16, “*For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*”⁴⁹ God’s Holy One (this isn’t David, its Christ)⁵⁰ wouldn’t be consigned to the ever-burning Hell. Anyone consigned there, as common teachings allege, would never be there only temporarily. Clearly, this Hell is referring to **the grave**, not *gehenna* fire – the grave from which a person anticipates being resurrected. If we make the distinction between what was written in the original Greek – between the grave and a hell-fire – a lot of clarity emerges.

Gehenna Fire

The Greek word *gehenna* is used only twelve times in the New Testament. (Matt. 5:22, 29-30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15 & 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; Luke 12:5 and Jas. 3:6) (Additionally, ten places in the New Testament where the English word Hell is used, it is *hades*, which means the grave.) In addition, in the book of Revelation, we find references to a feature called ‘the Lake of Fire’. Is the Lake of Fire that same place as the one people conceive of as the ever-burning Hell? *Gehenna*? Let’s consider what we’re told about this extraordinary ‘place’.

The Lake of Fire

In the book of Revelation, chapter 19, verse 20, we read: “*And the beast was taken, and with him the*

⁴⁹ Psalm 16 uses the Hebrew *sheol*, the equivalent of the Greek *hades*, indicating the grave, not Dante’s Inferno.

⁵⁰ Peter and Paul made that clear in Acts 2:27 and Acts 13:37.

false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.” From the context, we realize that this occurs just after the defeat of the Beast Power’s armies, at the onset of the millennial age. It involves, at this point, just these two individuals, living human beings.

In the next chapter, verse 10 we read, “*And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.*” Again, from the context, we see that this is a spirit being, Satan, who joins the Beast and False Prophet, but clearly AFTER the millennial age. He, as a spirit being, incapable of death, will remain in perpetual torment in this place. It doesn’t say the same of physical human beings.

The SECOND Death

Later on in chapter 20, we are introduced to a new concept: a second death. “*And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.*” (vs. 14-15) Now, we face another revelation. It tells us that people (whoever) will experience death more than one time! Then we must ask, why? If a person’s first decease results in their being consigned to their eternal destiny, then why is there a lake of fire and why is a second death at all necessary? Could it possibly be that the first death does not place a person in either hell-fire or heaven, that there has to be a time of judgment prior to such assignment? And, would such an idea be consistent with a first death being comparable to an unconscious sleep, with a day assigned when all will be resurrected and restored to consciousness on the Day of Judgment? Is there to be a resurrection of the dead, and if not for this reason, what for?

(Verse 13, the verse just before, explains that death and the grave will release up all who are in it for the purposes of sentencing, according to their works.)

But in addition, this passage explains that there will be a time when the symbiotic-institutions of ‘death

and hell’ (death and the grave) will become extinct (no longer necessary) by being consumed in this same Lake of Fire. What is this revealing?

Summing up, in chapter 21, verse 8, we read, “*But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.*” This presents us with the categories of people who will be consigned to extinction at this time. This consignment will be after the millennial age, not at the moment of ones’ death. (Rev. 20:5)

Clearly, these passages in the later chapters of Revelation do not picture people being consigned to everlasting torment in flames of fire. We see the Beast and the False Prophet first experiencing this lake of fire assignment, prior to the millennium, followed by Satan a short time after it. Then, a general resurrection in which all of humanity is raised, judged and sentenced before experiencing death a second (final) time. How could anyone experience a second death if they don’t ever live again? Being resurrected, in other words?

The resurrections of the dead is a very fundamental biblical teaching. In fact, it is an essential doctrine of true Christian theology. Those belief systems that dismiss such an event are under-informed.

Earlier in chapter 20 we read, “*And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.*” (v. 4-5) This tells us that there’s to be a resurrection, involving only the Saints, prior to the millennium (the 1000 years) but the rest will wait ‘til after the millennium for their time to be restored to living consciousness in a later (second) event.

Two Biblical Fundamentals

As has been presented, we see that the Bible clearly represents the event of death as first a state

not unlike sleep. We have seen that the soul is that component of our existence that is the air-breathing animal-like characteristic that all living creatures possess. It is our spirit that imparts consciousness. Secondly, we see that it is necessary for the individual to be resurrected back to a living state to stand before God in order to receive Judgment.

Think about it, if each person were to be assigned to an ever-burning Hell at the time of their deaths, then those who died thousands of years ago would have experienced thousands of years more of torment than someone who has died recently. Is this just? Not only is such an idea inherent in the common Heaven & Hell teachings that the unconverted, but otherwise ‘good people’, suffer the same torments as do the depraved wicked, but the early deceased suffer ages longer than their later-arriving counterparts. Is this biblical? Is this a blatantly apparent injustice the determination of an ‘all-knowing’ and ‘loving God’?

So we see biblical fundamentals presenting the first death as an **unconscious state**, where the individual is unaware of the passage of time – a state in which they remain, awaiting a **resurrection** in order to receive their just assignment, either to Life or to the second Death. Any belief system that dismisses these fundamental teachings is in clear disregard of God’s Word and mis-represents God’s benevolence.

Judgment of All Nations

Further illustrating this are Christ’s own words in Matthew 25:31-46. *“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and **he shall separate them** one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ... v.41 Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ... v.46 And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal.”*

From this we can see that the sentencing event will raise up the converted **and** unconverted together. This does not occur individually as each person experiences death, but is a congregate gathering at the end of time in which the two groups need to be separated for sentencing. Religious people could see this clearly, if they were to study the Word faithfully without the preconceived ideas that taint so much of the religious world’s basis of understanding.

Apostate Assumptions

Ideas were incorporated from the pagan world as the early church embraced apostasy toward the third and fourth centuries. It is well known that as masses of people were garnered into ‘the church’ after Emperor Constantine ‘legalized’ Christianity, many pre-existing pagan beliefs were simply ‘christianized’, mostly by re-naming prevalent beliefs and practices. The Heaven & Hell teaching is no exception.

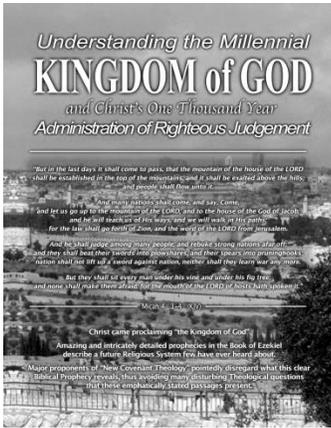
A case could also be made for the ‘going to Heaven’ idea. IF the Saints don’t receive their spirit bodies until the time of the second coming⁵¹ (Philippians 3:21), then in what form do they ascend to ‘be with the Lord’? Paul, in 2nd Cor. 5:2-4, refers to this interval, between our decease and the receipt of our glorified bodies as being ‘unclothed’! Not yet invested with our spirit form!

Eternal Judgment

The concluding chapter of the Old Testament leaves us with a picture of God’s intent toward the wicked. Rather than eternal torment, He describes an eternal punishment in the form of extinction from existence. *“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.”* Nothing remaining! This is by far more merciful than what religious people have been told, more merciful for both recipient and survivors. The post-judgment age will comprise a society of a pure refined state of righteousness. 

⁵¹ *“For our conversation is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: Who shall **change our vile body**, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.”* (Php. 3:21) (KJV)

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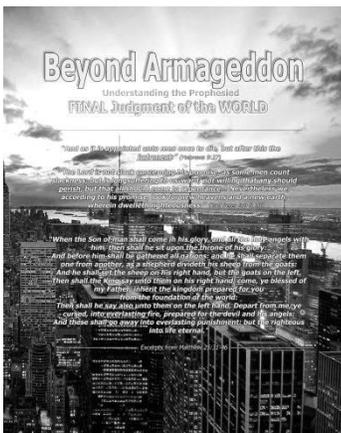
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Pastor Del Leger