

PHASE TWO

by Roger Day

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In case you should die, ending the only life you have known so far, will you find yourself alive again? If so, your present life could be termed Phase One, and your next life termed Phase Two. It seems that it would be a good idea to plan ahead. This article is about what happens after death. While this ought to be a topic of intense interest and investigation by every human being, it seems that few spend much time on the subject. Depending on one's status relative to salvation, different scenarios for Phase Two are possible. And those scenarios reflect on the fundamental nature of God's character!

Is God weak or strong? Merciful or mostly judgmental? With boundless love, or just love under certain conditions? Depending on why God made mankind, and how much God desires salvation for every person, will reveal to what degree God is a God of love. How much hope anyone should have for their salvation, and the salvation of others, is closely tied to God's character. This article will show how God had a sweeping selfless vision, and has the power and determination to reach every soul that has lived, or is living, on this earth.

There is a wealth of scriptural content bearing on what lies ahead. But ironically, much of it does not square with, and is not part of, prevailing Christian teachings. If you do not want to consider any revision to your present concept, this article might be TMI (too much information). Amazingly, the Bible teaches a more merciful and hopeful picture than the prevailing view, and a much more merciful and loving God! If you would prefer to know this good news now, please continue reading. Of course whatever is not known now will certainly be known later.

"For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light." - Mark 4:22

Not to know is bad; not to wish to know is worse. -Nigerian proverb

While I frequently capitalize both Heaven and Hell in this writing, this syntax is not found in the Bible. But these are place names used by prevailing Christianity. Most all of the occurrences of the word **heaven** (or **heavens**) in the Bible are references to the atmosphere above the earth or to the starry universe beyond. Likewise, almost all occurrences of the word **hell** refer to the grave. There are several points and scriptures which will be repeated in this article, but I feel they bear repeating. All underlining is my emphasis.

I will refer to one's first life in a physical body as Phase One. Of course we human beings are not purely physical. We have a spiritual component, which many refer to as the soul. But as we'll see, that spirit is not immortal - it could die. You could say that we have both physical and spiritual DNA, seeing how God has set about creating children in His image. This, along with noting the numerous relationship references in the Bible to the Father, the Son, sons of God, and children of God, make us think that the vision of God is to have a family. But our present spirit component is not immortal, and without a body, it is neither conscious nor immortal. God must decide whether we will be given an immortal spirit and body - a resurrection to eternal life.

This creation of mankind is certainly different from the prior creation of angelic beings, and so it must have a different purpose. Otherwise, God would just create more angels. See chapters 1 and 2 of the Book of Hebrews, which paint a picture of mankind with a greater destiny than angels, sharing in the glory of God, and being given an eternal inheritance.

Both the Hebrew and Greek words translated as *soul* actually have the meaning "breath of life." Animals are referred to as having the same breath (Eccl 3:19). But besides breath, there is a spirit component in every human being, making us different than animals.

But there is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives him understanding. -Job 32:8

Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it. -Eccl 12:7

The second scripture above is sometimes cited as supporting that individuals go to Heaven, even in a conscious state. But this scripture does not discriminate between the saved and the unsaved. If it means that anyone goes to Heaven in a conscious state, then it includes both the good and the wicked. Of course this scripture doesn't say that the spirit of a dead individual goes to Heaven, as the meaning may simply be that the spirit returns to the possession or safekeeping of God, who could keep it anywhere He chooses. This scripture also does not say that the spirit is conscious after the death of the body. Proper scholarship requires us to not only carefully notice what any scripture says, but to also carefully note what any scripture does not say.

An additional spirit component is made available to us - the Holy Spirit. Like the word *soul*, we find it associated with breath and wind, though there are also some scriptures which compare the Holy Spirit to fire and to water. One must receive the gift of the Holy Spirit to have hope of eternal life. And then one must also be given a spirit body to have eternal life.

So Jesus said to them again, "Peace to you! As the Father has sent Me, I also send you." And when He had said this, He breathed on them, and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit." -John 20:21-22

When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. -Acts 2:1-4

It is clear that our physical bodies die at some point. While the first human beings, descended from Adam and Eve, lived for hundreds of years, the Lord chose to limit the human lifespan to 120 years (Gen 6:3). So our health will give out. It is said that excellent health is the slowest rate at which one can die. Regardless of all the difficulties which appear in life, most folks highly value living. And they would like to live much longer, especially with better health and under better conditions. The Bible describes such a wonderful possibility.

If there were no prospect of living forever, the Bible would not be a very popular book. Of course it contains plenty of guidance for making the best we can of our present lives. But if there were no reason to hope for a much better and unending life, one's motivation for doing anything in this world would have to come from some other source of inspiration. And all funerals would be events of very great grief if everyone knew that their dear departed was truly dead forever.

It is true that at some funerals, some folks sob because they don't believe they'll ever see their departed friend or family member again. This could indicate a lack of confidence in any belief they have about seeing loved ones again in an afterlife. But there could be those circumstances when they're sure the departed is heading to a different and much less desirable destination than the one they are anticipating for themselves. Yet if they understood the plan of God, they would know there is still real hope for those who die unsaved, in what I've termed Phase Two.

While most folks do really want to live again after they die (in a good state), how much time does anyone spend meditating about what such a life would be like? If we can identify some of the real blessings of such a life, that could help to motivate us now, and help us to endure suffering and adversities! The common images of an afterlife seem rather limited in scope, and would seem to become quite boring if they were applied for millions of years (or even a month, unless one was in some kind of drug like euphoric state). These include staring into the Master's face, eating milk and honey, walking on streets of gold, and floating among clouds while playing harps. I'd rather play guitar than a harp, but I'd like to do lots of other things. Surely God did not create human beings for never ending, but limited activities. And the Master must have other things to do than letting folks hang around staring into His face.

In fact, eternity is about ever growing relationships - with the Father, Christ, and billions of others who are saved; personal learning and growth; creative projects and activities; and no doubt a few things we cannot now imagine. There will be no more illness, death, or strife. With great energy and joy, we will burst forth to live life as it should be lived, and do so forever. And the Father will receive the praise and love of the huge family He selflessly envisioned.

Imagine the many joyful reunions of friends and family, and reconciliations between former enemies, now converted to God's ways. It could take some time to really get to know millions or billions of other individuals, but then again, eternity provides plenty of time to do so. Because we are made in the image of God, we will reflect God's qualities in our activities. There will still be music, art, humor, adventure, and learning. Anything lost that you think was worth saving could be recreated. Devote some time to imagining the possibilities of living forever, learning from God, developing truly lasting friendships, and what you and those friends - truly friends forever - might do!

DOGMA VERSUS TRUTH

The Bible contains many scriptures bearing on subjects related to the future disposition of human souls. Yet there are also many different interpretations of those scriptures. Selecting only specific scriptures which support a particular dogma, and adding a biased explanation to them, permits one to create whatever scenario they might prefer. But one cannot rely upon a dogma created in this manner. It is only the truth that will come to pass.

The Bible itself reads, "*...knowing this first, that no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation*" (2 Pet 1:20). So the Bible tells us not to come up with our own interpretation. Instead, we need to seek understanding of what we read. Sound scholarship requires a survey of all scriptures bearing on any subject at hand - in this case, a future life. Whatever picture emerges that is in harmony with all such scriptures is a teaching worthy of belief. No twisting, changing of word meanings, or special explanations are permitted, but only logical deduction. But to do this is difficult for many folks. Those who do manage to pry their fingers from their cherished dogma have often found the experience to have been fraught with trepidation and anguish. But the resulting understanding is worth the effort.

This writing is an article, not a book. Accordingly, it will not cover every single scriptural passage related to the subjects of the soul, judgment, heaven, hell, mortality, immortality, death, sleep, resurrection, and eternal life. But it covers many of them. The reader is encouraged to study further and meditate on the picture which emerges. Where one perceives a scriptural conflict, the reason is probably a flaw in one's concept, and not a flaw in the scriptures themselves. But there are a few instances where an original language word has been incorrectly translated to conform to the bias of the translator(s). I'll cover some of those. It is only the truth that will fit with all the scriptures related to a particular topic.

An added difficulty for many folks studying the Bible is that prevailing teachings have redefined the meanings of some words. Also, there are cases where different original words have all been translated as the same English word. For instance, almost all occurrences of the word **hell** simply mean "the grave" (Hebrew *sheol*, Greek *hades*). But one can also find where the word **hell** has been translated from the Greek word referring to fiery punishment (*Gehenna*), or in one case to a hell for angels (*tartaroo* - 2 Pet 2:4). God did not inspire the writers of the Bible to confuse us. It is we human beings who fail to study, and instead invent flawed teachings.

IS GOD LOSING TO THE DEVIL?

So now let's tour through some scriptures which can help us understand what Phase Two might be. For the saved, it must be eternal life with God. But is there any hope for the unsaved? What might be their Phase Two? Could there even be a Phase Three for most of them? Let's see what picture emerges from the Bible. We begin with the death of many unsaved folks.

Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the Lord said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord. -Gen 6:5-8

God instructed Noah to build a large ship, known as the ark. In it, Noah and his wife, his three sons and their wives, plus numerous animals, survived a flood that ended the lives of all other human beings and most other creatures then living on the earth (the fish had to fend for themselves), beginning 1656 years after the creation of Adam and Eve.

Are all the folks who died in that flood lost forever? Was the flood scored as God: 8, the devil: millions? (Or billions - estimates vary.) Noah had preached for 120 years. Did all the people on earth hear Noah, understand what he said, believe what he said, and yet rejected his preaching? Did they all have a full chance for salvation, but willfully and tragically threw it away? That is what some folks today claim - that these wicked people received their final judgment.

What if the people of the pre-flood world heard Noah preach, but didn't believe it or take it to heart? How much credibility might they have attributed to this man who was building a huge ship on dry land? The tours of the project may have been interesting, and worth the admission price, but was it easy to believe his preaching? What if they thought Noah was a religious nut and blew off what he said? After first drowning in the flood, did they next find themselves being tormented in the fires of Hell? Many would say yes, that is where they suffer to this very day.

Jumping forward in time, will there be yet another lopsided score between God and the devil as this present age ends?

"But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be. Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left."

-Matt 24:37-41

Will billions of souls die unsaved when their lives are taken away? Those who declare themselves to be Christians are certainly a minority of the present world population. Some claim that the word **taken** in the above scripture refers to being raptured, meaning that Christ will take the saved away from the earth before the worst trouble. But from the context, "taken" very clearly means death - lives being taken, like the lives which Jesus said were all taken in the Flood. And of course He was comparing conditions at the time of Noah with conditions at the time of His return. His point was that future events will see many die, just like at the time of the Flood, but some will remain alive on the earth. (Most preaching about a rapture utilizes the companion passage in Luke 17:26-36 which, conveniently for the rapture doctrine, does not use the word **taken** in relation to all those folks whose lives were taken in the Flood.)

Given the great loss of life in the flood, and the prophesied future loss of life near the time of Christ's return, is God's work of creation turning out to be a terrible experiment gone wrong? Are most human beings living in vain, never to be saved? Are billions of lost souls being tormented in Hell for all eternity for their failure to respond to preaching? Will the billions who were brought up in other religions, and who never investigated Christianity, also find themselves being tormented in Hell, but also forever wondering why? What about those who never heard of Christ? And of those who have heard the name, how many were never motivated to learn about Him or seek Him? Have their lives been lived in vain, without hope, pending eternal torment? If you receive a full chance, shouldn't they also be recipients of that same full chance?

Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved. -Acts 4:12 (referring to Christ)

If so many will not be saved, can we say with a straight face that God is a God of love? Or can we even say that God is competent, seeing how He is apparently losing most souls to the devil? If God cannot turn the score around, we should be very seriously concerned. But many wouldn't, because they are OK with the lost staying lost, and only a special few being saved. They believe they are "the few, the chosen, the saints." Many are even OK with the idea of unimaginable eternal torment for the lost. Men seem always to be underestimating God, and overestimating what they believe to be their own virtues. Too many have hearts of stone, unlike God.

"But many who are first will be last, and the last first." -Mark 10:31

If God is very loving, very intelligent, very capable, and very determined, then we would do well to consider that God is in control and has a plan. God will right what is wrong. But there must have been reasons to permit the sufferings which mankind has endured, and reasons why God has also directly ended the lives of many persons. If God is mean, weak, incapable, and losing to the devil, the saved should fear to spend eternity with such a God.

Thankfully, God's written word reveals that everything will be made well and wonderful in the end. There is hope for every soul in the salvation of God. And God also has hope for mankind, and the power to see that hope realized.

For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

-Rom 8:19-21

WHY KILLING?

Beside the pain and suffering God allows to transpire on the earth, God has clearly killed many human beings. It is God's prerogative to kill. There is a distinction between killing and murder. The sixth commandment, properly rendered, is to "do no murder." Murder is killing which is motivated by hatred or jealousy of a person. Killing for other purposes is found in the Bible, as a penalty for breaking particular civil laws, and as a judgment by God. One must believe that God does not kill out of a general hatred of particular individuals. Surely God does not do the devil's work! It appears that God hates the appearance of a person engaged in a sinful act, and certainly hates sins that harm the sinner and others. How does God really feel?

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

...'As I live,' says the Lord God, 'I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked'...

-Ezek 33:11

Sodom and Gomorrah, and cities around them in that same plain, were destroyed with fire and brimstone raining down upon them. God judged that these people should be killed. Clearly, God was not happy with how they were living. Did God hate them, or was it their sins which had to be stopped? If the latter, was it for their own good? Was it actually tough love, so that they could lead new and better lives later? If there is not a better future ahead for those who died in Sodom, then did they die by fire and brimstone, only to find themselves continuing to live with still more fire and brimstone in Hell? Many say yes. We should also ask what they could have done that would deserve torture forever and ever. Christ never suffered that much, and yet His torture and crucifixion is presented as being sufficient to cover the sins of all mankind.

Then He began to rebuke the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: "Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon in the day of judgment than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment than for you."

-Matt 11:20-24

From the scripture above, it sounds like folks are going to live again in "the day of judgment." If God is a God of love, don't you think that God would leave no stone unturned in reaching every heart of every soul who is part of His creation? And indeed, our powerful and loving God has the intelligence and determination to bring about a successful plan to heal and reach all of His children. There will be a time period and circumstance - a Phase Two - for every human being to fully know and understand the truth, and apply it by living as God intended. Every human being will one day have to get truly serious about their life. And Jesus' sacrifice will still be available to be applied toward the salvation of anyone who desires it and repents.

...God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time

- 1 Tim 2:3-6

THE WORK OF THE DEVIL

If God wants to save all of His human children, then there must be a way to facilitate that goal. Surely, the devil and the other rebellious angels could not get the best of their Creator. If that were possible, it would have been madness for God to allow the devil into the Garden of Eden. And it would have been madness to allow the devil to roam the earth to this present day, causing deception, havoc, and suffering. But since God is all powerful, there must be a plan by which the devil does not ultimately win.

Yet, prevailing teachings seem to acknowledge that the devil has racked up billions of lost souls on his scorecard. God knows the nature of the devil - an angel, filled with pride and lust for power, who rebelled against God, and also convinced other angels to rebel. The devil goes by the names Satan and Adversary in the scriptures. And he is also referred to as "the god of this age," and the "prince of the power of the air" in the scriptures below.

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

-2 Cor 4:3-4

And you He made alive, who were dead in trespasses and sins, in which you once walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit who now works in the sons of disobedience, among whom also we all once conducted ourselves in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, just as the others.

-Eph 2:1-3

For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into apostles of Christ. And no wonder! For Satan himself transforms himself into an angel of light. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also transform themselves into ministers of righteousness, whose end will be according to their works. -2 Cor 11:13-15

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you. To Him be the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen. -1 Pet 5:8-11

It is clear that God generally allows men to suffer. God has allowed the devil to deceive and cause trouble ever since the Garden of Eden. There must be a purpose for allowing this. And God must have a plan whereby the suffering will end. And it must be fair to all. In fact, we'll see that God's plan is more than fair. But until Christ returns, the devil will continue to do his contemptible work, motivated by irrational hatred, vindictiveness, and jealousy. He will be restrained for most all of the Millennium. In the next scripture, the devil is characterized as a dragon, and the woman is symbolic of the church.

And the dragon was enraged with the woman, and he went to make war with the rest of her offspring, who keep the commandments of God and have the testimony of Jesus Christ. -Rev 12:17

...For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time. -Rev 12:12

Satan the devil, a former angel, wanted to usurp God, and did not succeed. Hurting us appears to be one way he has chosen to express his hatred of God. Perhaps he thinks he can keep some folks from being saved, and attaining the glory he cannot now have. Clearly, he knows that his time of influence will end. God will turn the present situation around, and provide all of His children a full opportunity to be converted and saved. And note that the potential for human beings is greater than for the angels. When it is achieved, God's work of creating humans to be in His image will have been fully accomplished.

It is quite clear that God put two special trees in the Garden of Eden, which represented two very different choices. And mankind has had the right to choose ever since. God also allowed Satan into the Garden to speak to Eve and deceive her. God didn't stop Cain from killing Abel. He hasn't stopped a lot of cruelty since. On top of that, Christ stated that He spoke in parables to conceal the meaning from those listening, although He did explain the parables to His disciples. This seems counter to the idea of saving folks. Shouldn't missionaries be horrified that Jesus would ever hide His teaching from the masses? Could it be that the time for the salvation of most of mankind is scheduled for a different age to come?

*And the disciples came and said to Him, "Why do You speak to them in parables?" He answered and said to them, "**Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.**" -Matt 13:10-13*

So what is really going on here with God's plan? When will God be able to save all of His children? Why did God allow Satan to deceive Eve, and to continue to roam around on the earth? Has God decided to sabotage His creation, or is there a plan of which most are not fully aware? Well, it is certainly the latter, and it includes an event called the second resurrection, a key part of God's plan to save His children. And after that event and the completion of judgment for all men, here is how God's plan plays out - with pain and suffering forever ended.

Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away."

-Rev 21:1-4

This Bible description of the New Jerusalem - the City of God - with it's "pearly gates" and streets of gold, is often used to describe Heaven.

¹For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven...

- 2 Cor 5:1-2

If one reads only verse 1 above, they might think they go to Heaven to live in God's building. But verse 2, along with Revelation chapter 21, tell us that it will be brought here to the earth after the Millennium. To be accurate, since we read that God will make a new heaven and a new earth, the City of God descends to the new earth. But since it is to be a home for the saved, one must conclude that Heaven, as it were, comes to the earth. So earth will be home, or at least home base, forever. The devil and his rebel angels will be judged and will no longer cause trouble (Matt 25:31, Jude 1:6, Rev 20:10). Pain and crying will be no more.

SOME HEAVEN SCRIPTURES

Many have been told, and so have always believed, that the saved go to Heaven upon death. And there are a few scriptures which, while they do not clearly support that notion, also do not rule it out, if considered separately from the full body of scriptures bearing on life after death. I will cover a sampling of these. To build a case out of the Bible for the saved going to Heaven is a real challenge, unless one is very selective, ignores the weight of other scripture, and the hearer or reader is already strongly inclined to want to believe that idea.

Of course it is a predominant concept in prevailing Christianity that the saved go to Heaven upon death. The expression "get to Heaven" is heard frequently, because this is the one thing everyone is supposed to want to achieve, the alternative being very undesirable. There are a number of scriptures which tell about Jesus ascending into heaven, and that He is there with the Father. Here is one example.

So then, after the Lord had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven, and sat down at the right hand of God. - Mark 16:19

Such scriptures about Christ going to Heaven are often cited in tracts on the subject of the saved going to Heaven. The reasoning is that since Jesus has gone to Heaven, and since there are numerous scriptures which state that the saved will be with Jesus after death, then that must mean that the saved go to Heaven to be with Jesus. This reasoning ignores or reinterprets the numerous scriptures which clearly tell us that Jesus will return to this earth, and only at that time will anyone be resurrected to eternal life. So while certainly the saved will be with Jesus for eternity, their home will be the earth. In fact, the Father also comes from Heaven to the earth after the end of the Millennium, bringing with Him the City of God / The New Jerusalem to be the home of the saved. The Kingdom of God is established on earth by Jesus.

“Let not your heart be troubled; you believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”

- John 14:1-3

Some theologians propose that the Kingdom of God is synonymous with Heaven. In turn, scriptures about inheriting the Kingdom of God, or conversely not being part of it, should be taken as saying some folks go to Heaven, and some folks go to Hell. There are a number of references to the Kingdom of God (Matthew calls it the Kingdom of Heaven). Some folks think of these terms only as they relate to a location, with that location always being in Heaven (though it might be more accurate to think of Heaven as more of a spiritual location).

The Kingdom of God is the governing entity of the entire universe. A kingdom must have a king, laws, and people. And the Kingdom of God is something of which we should want to be a part, and to which we should have the greatest loyalty, and even patriotism, if you will. The Kingdom of God obviously rules from Heaven at this time. But scriptures tell us that this Kingdom will govern the earth under Jesus Christ at His return. It will subdue all nations, and at the completion of His mission, Jesus will turn it over to His Father. Those who are judged to never become an eternal being in the Kingdom of God do not go to a place called Hell. Instead, they are destroyed, both body and soul, in a lake of fire / Gehenna fire. Let's examine a few scriptures which are often taken as indicating the saved will go to Heaven.

“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.”

- Matt 6:19-21

How many folks are focused on storing up treasure in Heaven? Not many. Pretty much everyone scurries around every day storing up treasure on the earth. And when they die, they can't take that treasure with them. Just what is the treasure in Heaven to which Christ referred? It is certainly nothing like money or other commodities, none of which will be needed when one has eternal life.

Jesus was clear that He wants us to have life more abundantly (John 10:10). He did not say money more abundantly. It should be clear that the treasure He meant was eternal life, and the great opportunities and blessings that will accompany that life. And the greatest perquisite of that life is the blessing that derives from the love between God and God's children, including the love among those children. Eternity is about great relationships!

But returning to the scripture above, it states that if our treasure is in heaven, our hearts will also be there. If we are still physically on the earth, while our treasure and hearts are in heaven, this scripture is speaking to our attitude. It is not predicting that we will go to Heaven. The scripture contrasts earthly treasure, which one must go out to get, with accumulating treasure in heaven, which is created by giving of one's time and resources to benefit those in need.

For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself. -Phil 3:20-21

Like our treasure and our heart, this scripture states that our citizenship is in Heaven. But none of these facts require that we go to Heaven. This scripture points out that the saved await Jesus coming from Heaven to transform them into spirit beings. This is in harmony with those scriptures which describe the resurrection of the saved at Jesus' return - first the dead in Christ, and then those alive at that time (more about this in the later section entitled "Resurrections").

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven. For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." -Matt 5:19-20

This scripture points out what particular individuals will be called in the Kingdom of Heaven. But does this mean they are there, or is this what is being said about them there? Clearly, the Pharisees were in no condition to enter when Jesus spoke this to them. There can be a difference about what is being said about a person in the Kingdom of Heaven, and whether they will later enter it. This scripture emphasizes that even the least commandments are very important. Someone who teaches the breaking of commandments would surely not enter. But does one have to go to the present location of Heaven to enter the Kingdom of Heaven? No, one can enter it after it is set up on the earth. Jesus, the Father, and the angels will be coming to the earth.

"Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you."

-Matt 5:11-12

For someone who believes that Heaven is "the reward of the saved," this scripture sounds just fine. It might even be regarded as supporting that concept, though it is also part of the Beatitudes, of which verse 5 tells us that the meek shall inherit the earth. Probably some folks would have preferred verse 5 to read Heaven instead of earth.

When someone dies, it is often said, "they have gone on to their reward." But let's carefully note what this scripture does and does not say. It says one can have a great reward that is in Heaven. It doesn't say that Heaven itself is that reward. It doesn't say that the reward remains in Heaven. It doesn't describe the reward. The reward cannot be eternal life, because that is something that cannot be earned. Instead, eternal life is a gift - it is free (Rom 6:23). So we need to look elsewhere to learn more about the reward.

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works." -Matt 16:26-27

From this scripture, it is apparent that being saved is far more important than gaining the whole world, but losing their soul. It also tells us that the saved will be rewarded in proportion to their works, as does the next scripture.

"And behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to every one according to his work." - Rev 22:12 (See also Isa 40:10)

So we understand that Jesus returns to the earth from Heaven, bringing with Him the rewards that had been kept in Heaven. So one does not go to Heaven to receive their reward. Jesus brings it to the earth, which also happens to be the first time that anyone is resurrected to eternal life, and can even receive a reward. What is the nature of this reward? It is not gold, silver, or diamonds, because spiritual things are of a different and better nature altogether.

In the parable of the talents (Matt 25:14-30), we read how those who make an effort to do something with the gifts God has given them, are rewarded in proportion to their effort. The rewards in this parable are to be given responsibility for the welfare of two, five, or ten cities (in this case, apparently during the millennial rule of Christ). So in this parable, the reward for service in this life is the opportunity to serve much more when Christ returns. And someone with a properly motivated heart would love such an opportunity because they love serving.

You may have heard the expression "service is its own reward." It applies here. Someone with a selfish attitude might think that a reward might be lounging by a swimming pool while angels bring ice tea, lemonade, or snacks on demand. But the reward for a heart that has cheerfully done good works is to be able to give still more. Salvation is not by works, but is free. But those who are saved do good works now because they want to, and receive rewards later in proportion to the motivation of their hearts.

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. - 1 Pet 1:3-5

This scripture refers to an inheritance for the saved that is reserved in Heaven. Of course it does not say that Heaven is the inheritance, or that one will go to Heaven to receive it. As we've been seeing, when Christ returns to this earth, He brings with Him all the things we have reserved or stored in Heaven. This scripture also notes that salvation is revealed at a future time.

Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ - 1 Pet 1:13

Preconceptions easily cloud what one reads. Hopefully, this article will clear up some of these. Many of the faithful understand the focus of the Bible to be Messianic - the return of God to the earth to set things right. You cannot find scriptures in which any faithful individual is pining to be in heaven, but instead wanting to be with the Lord. Since the Lord returns, and then resurrects the saved, that is how one comes to be with the Lord. Nor can one find scriptures referring to anyone as having gone to Heaven, other than Christ. But one scripture along that line does require an explanation, since in most Bible translations, it has been punctuated in a manner which indicates to many readers that someone went to Heaven. It concerns the conversation between Jesus and one of the thieves crucified next to Him. Here is how it typically appears.

*Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom."
And Jesus said to him, "**Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.**" - Luke 23:42-43*

While punctuation is part and parcel of modern languages, it was not found in the early manuscripts of the scriptures. Part of translating the scriptures into a particular language must also include adding punctuation. In the case of the scripture above, the position of a comma can make a huge difference. If the comma shown after the word **you** is instead positioned after the word **today**, then Jesus was telling the thief that day that at some unspecified future time, he would be with Christ in Paradise. But how would we know where to place the comma? The first rule is to see if the scripture is in harmony with the clear conditions of other scriptures. We know that the only sign Christ gave of His Messiahship was that He would be in the grave for three days and three nights, and then be resurrected.

And He began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected by the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. - Mark 8:31

If Jesus was in Paradise with the thief on the same day that He died, then He would have had to be resurrected that same day, not three days later. And this would clearly be in conflict with the scripture above. So we must conclude that Jesus could not have been in Paradise with the thief on the day that He died. In turn, Luke 23:43 is not punctuated correctly in most Bibles.

*But He answered and said to them, "**An evil and adulterous generation seeks after a sign, and no sign will be given to it except the sign of the prophet Jonah. For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so will the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.**" - Matt 12:39-40*

Some theologians put forth a concept of Christ being dead for parts of three days and three nights, instead of three full days and nights. They explain that the Greek words for day and night could mean either full or partial time periods. The partial meanings are proposed in order to squeeze three days and nights into the time period between Friday sunset and Sunday morning. But Jesus cited Jonah, and the Hebrew language of that account means full days and full nights.

To presume that Jesus was put in the grave on a Friday evening is to be aware of the weekly Sabbath time period from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset, but to be embarrassingly ignorant of the Bible holy days and their high day Sabbaths. Jesus died on the Passover day, He being "our Passover" and "the Lamb of God," whose sacrifice the Passover had foreshadowed. The day after the Passover is the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which is an annual Sabbath day which may fall on any day of the week.

So if Jesus died on a Wednesday Passover day, was placed in the grave on the Thursday Sabbath immediately following, and rose on Sunday, the first day of the week, He would have been in the grave for three full days and nights. Scriptures which tell us of women buying spices both after and before a Sabbath while Jesus was in the grave, are not in conflict. Buying would have been permitted on Friday, falling between the Thursday Unleavened Bread Sabbath and the Saturday weekly Sabbath. If one bothers to exercise just a little scholarship regarding the scriptures, all sorts of conflicts and difficulties can be cleared up. In turn, it is not necessary to engage in all of the fancy footwork that some theologians perform.

Many folks also presume that Paradise, which Jesus mentioned to the thief, is synonymous with Heaven. But Paradise appears to be the description of the condition of the earth after the City of God (the New Jerusalem) arrives. In Paradise there is a river, along which grows the tree of life (Rev 2:7; 21:1-3; 21:23-27; 22:1-3). In fact the meaning of the word itself is that of a park or garden. The Garden of Eden is often thought of as a paradise. It was lost, but will again be found on the earth. If you will, Heaven is coming to earth - no one is going to Heaven. To find any support for the idea of going to Heaven either upon death, or later on, one must read other meanings into scriptures, while ignoring those which describe an earth-focused scenario.

Notice that the thief asked Jesus to remember him when Jesus came into His Kingdom. It seems that the thief knew that there would be a future Kingdom of God set up on the earth, and headed by Jesus. The thief also seemed to have known that he would have an opportunity for salvation after that Kingdom is set up. If only prevailing Christianity understood this future scenario as well as the thief! The thief will be with Jesus in Paradise in the future, after it is established here.

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus - Heb 3:1

To have a heavenly calling, as in the scripture above, does not mean one is called to go to Heaven, but rather that the calling has come from heaven. And who does the calling? It is the Father, according to John 6:44. It is a calling to be a Christian, not a calling to go to Heaven. Of course, if one is sure they go to Heaven when they die, they will likely read "heavenly calling" as implying they will be going there.

On several occasions, Jesus used the phrase, "many are called, but few are chosen." Some Bible scholars believe this was an idiomatic expression in common use at the time. A relatively few individuals may be chosen during this age of man to be given eternal life at the return of Christ. However, those so chosen will assist Christ as priests in helping the unsaved find salvation. That work will take place on the earth, according to the scenario we find peppered throughout the Bible. But there are no descriptions of what any saint might be doing in Heaven. This is not to be confused with the saints meeting Christ in the clouds of heaven (the atmosphere) to greet Christ as he returns to earth (1 Thes 4:13-18). In fact, it seems likely that the Marriage Supper of the Lamb would also take place there before Christ does battle (Rev 19:7-9, 11-21).

SOME HELL SCRIPTURES

The prevailing teaching is that if you don't get to Heaven, you go to Hell. This is because if you don't accept Christ as your Savior, God wants to torment you forever for your stupid refusal to accept Christ. What would be the point of such torment? Is God sadistic? Would the tormented have a change of heart? Or is God merciful enough to end the lives of the wicked in a fiery instant in a lake of fire? This is not to say there would not be mental torment for one who is about to experience such an end, and hence references to "wailing and gnashing of teeth."

Most concepts of Hell include being burned by flames, but never quite being burnt up or dying. A few church denominations teach a kinder and gentler version of Hell that is described as an eternal conscious separation from God. Yet wouldn't those folks who didn't choose God's ways prefer to be separated? They could party forever in their separated Hell!

Of course there are scriptures which are said to support the concept of everlasting torment in Hell for those who reject God. Let's look at some of them. Anyone who already believes in Hell might not read these as carefully as they deserve.

"And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." - Matt 25:46

These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power - 2 Thes 1:9

In the two scriptures above, note that they do not use the verbs punishing or destroying, but rather the nouns. So the punishment and destruction is final - it is lasting. In other words, these folks are not coming back. They are gone forever. Indeed, the only two eventual outcomes for every human being are permanent life or permanent death. There is no gift of eternal life for purposes of continual torment, torture, or separation.

"The Son of Man will send out His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth."
- Matt 13:41-42

"So it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come forth, separate the wicked from among the just, and cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth." - Matt 13:49-50

Being cast into a furnace of fire does not mean one will be tortured in it forever, but not ever being burnt up. In fact, a physical human body will not last long in a hot furnace of fire. We do see reference to the lake of fire elsewhere, but the concept is the same. Wailing and gnashing of teeth indicates the emotions of self pity and self loathing. One should feel like this if they know it is only their fault that they have blown their opportunity for salvation.

"If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched" - Mark 9:43

The scripture above is a portion of Mark 9:42-48 in which Jesus issues warnings. Verses 44, 46, and 48 do not appear in early manuscripts. They each read, "*where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched.*" Even so, those added verses need not indicate unending suffering. Remember that Jesus chose Gehenna to characterize the end for those who insist on being wicked, and said to fear Him who could destroy both body and soul in Gehenna fire, as opposed to being tortured forever.

Gehenna was a garbage dump outside Jerusalem where fires were always burning, while underneath, worms worked at devouring that which had not burned. In these scriptures, the feeding worm is alive, but that does not mean that any body thrown into the burning dump does not die. The worm feeds on any part of the dead body that didn't burn. Likewise, fire that is not quenched does not mean that it burns forever, but rather that it must burn itself out. If the fire was to never burn out, scripture would refer to it as the fire that burns forever.

as Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them in a similar manner to these, having given themselves over to sexual immorality and gone after strange flesh, are set forth as an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire. - Jude verse 7

Since Sodom and Gomorrah stopped burning a long time ago, an eternal or everlasting fire must be one whose effects are lasting.

Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone. - Rev 19:20

and the devil who had deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever. - Rev 20:10 (ESV)

The original Greek for the scripture above does not include the word translated as **were**. Other translations insert the word **are**. The most obvious implication of the scripture is that the devil was thrown into the lake of fire where the beast and the false prophet were thrown. And of course this scripture must be viewed and studied in light of other scriptures. The beast and the false prophet were cast into the lake of fire 1000 years before the devil is cast in there. To cast a wicked spirit being into a lake of fire would seem more symbolic, just as we read of death and hell also being cast into the lake of fire.

So who is being tormented forever in Revelation 20:10? In regard to the beast and the false prophet, it should be noted that their power comes from Satan, referred to as "the dragon" (Rev 13:2). Unclean spirits (Rev 16:13-14) enter and control them during the time they have power on the earth - apparently a period of 3 1/2 years (Rev 11:3, 12:6,14; Dan 7:25, 12:7). They are heads of political and religious systems, also referred to as beasts (Rev chapter 13). Those evil spirits are the identifiable essence of the beast and false prophet. So these unclean spirits are just as deserving of being called the beast and the false prophet. And those unclean spirits are surely separated from the human individuals they controlled when fire burns up the human bodies. This would also apply in the case of the next scripture.

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels'" - Matt 25:41

So we see that the devil and the rebellious angels must face a fire prepared for them. When Jesus ordered a number of unclean spirits out of a man, the response is of interest, as the spirits seemed well aware of a future torment that awaits them.

And suddenly they cried out, saying, "What have we to do with You, Jesus, You Son of God? Have You come here to torment us before the time?" - Matt 8:29

It is the devil and the lesser devils (demons, unclean spirits) who serve him, who cause and have caused torment for human beings. So it seems fitting that he/they would in turn suffer torment. The devil understands the scriptures telling of his future. For example, this portion of Revelation 12:12 which reads, "For the devil has come down to you, having great wrath, because he knows that he has a short time." Also, James 2:19 reads, "You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe - and tremble!" Satan made references to scripture in his temptation of Christ, but his spin on scripture was not in harmony with its intent. It is likely the devil can quote scripture better than any Christian - but he has a major attitude problem.

Because the devil and his angels are spirit beings, physical fire cannot hurt them. But there is apparently a type of fire that has a lasting effect upon them. The symbolism of their unending torment is clear. Notice that these scriptures speak to the punishment of the devil, not human beings. So forget the lame idea of the devil, holding a pitchfork, in charge of torturing human beings in Hell. As noted previously, physical human bodies don't last very long in a fire that is so hot it cannot be quenched. Human beings who experience everlasting or eternal fire do not survive, just as those who lived in Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed by "eternal fire."

...since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ. These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes, in that Day, to be glorified in His saints and to be admired among all those who believe, because our testimony among you was believed. - 2 Thes 1:6-10

The scripture above concerns the Day of the Lord - the return of Christ. He will do battle with those ready to fight Him at that time. He takes vengeance on those who do not know God, but this is not sending them to Hell, but rather totally destroying their physical bodies. As we'll see, they will be resurrected at the end of the Millennium.

Jesus' parable of the wheat and the tares is found in Matthew 13:24-30. The tares are gathered together to be burned up. If this is analogous to final judgment, then note that they are burned up, and not tormented forever. This is also the case in the following scriptures.

Every tree that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.

- Matt 7:19

"His winnowing fan is in His hand, and He will thoroughly clean out His threshing floor, and gather His wheat into the barn; but He will burn up the chaff with unquenchable fire." - Matt 3:12 (spoken by John the Baptist about Christ)

Reference in the next scripture to "the gates of Hades" is simply a reference to the grave. Death will not prevail against the church, because those composing it will be given eternal life. Just because there is a metaphorical reference to "the gates of Hades" should not be taken to mean that there is a literal place of torment with actual gates, much less that the devil is the gatekeeper.

And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it. - Matt 16:18

We read in Revelation 1:18 that Jesus has the keys of Hades and of Death. This means that Jesus can bring folks out of their graves - he can resurrect them back to life. And He will do so.

Next, Job describes death as a land of darkness, a poetic way to describe the grave, as opposed to an eternal place of fiery torment. Despite Job's brooding frame of mind when he spoke those words, the Lord has the keys to Hades to bring Job out of the grave. While Job knew he would not return from the grave in his present age, he knew he would live again, as shown in the second scripture that follows. That scripture also indicates that Job did not expect to be resurrected the moment he died, but rather at a future time when the Lord would call.

"Are not my days few? Cease! Leave me alone, that I may take a little comfort, before I go to the place from which I shall not return, to the land of darkness and the shadow of death, a land as dark as darkness itself, as the shadow of death, without any order, where even the light is like darkness." - Job 10-20-22

"Oh, that You would hide me in the grave, that You would conceal me until Your wrath is past, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; you shall desire the work of Your hands. - Job 14:13-15

Next, we read of torment for those who worship the beast. There is no need to presume that use of the word **torment** means "everlasting torment." Torment can be experienced by human beings for a finite time. Those worshipping the beast as this age ends are tormented with fire and brimstone, and have no rest during that time. But the smoke of that torment ascends forever.

Then a third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, "If anyone worships the beast and his image, and receives his mark on his forehead or on his hand, he himself shall also drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out full strength into the cup of His indignation. He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name." - Rev 14:9-11

There are varying opinions on the proper rendering of the Greek phrase "*eis tous aionas ton aionon*." In different translations of the Bible, it is variously rendered "for ever and ever," "forevermore," "to the ages of ages," and "into the ages of eternity." Smoke that rises out of sight may be thought of as continuing to rise indefinitely. But the torment described in the above passage is for those still alive and worshipping the beast. It does not describe them being tormented forever, only that the smoke of the fire and brimstone rises on out into eternity - wherever smoke might go after it has been generated. Being tormented in human form, they could not be tormented forever, since humans are mortal.

The time period for the beast power will cease, being limited to 3 1/2 years. And worship of the beast will also cease. The beast, as it were, goes up in flames. There is another flavor of torment that takes place prior to Christ's return. It is a five month period of torment for those who do not have the spirit of God. It is associated with the fifth trumpet of the seventh seal of Revelation.

Then out of the smoke locusts came upon the earth. And to them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. They were commanded not to harm the grass of the earth, or any green thing, or any tree, but only those men who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads. And they were not given authority to kill them, but to torment them for five months. Their torment was like the torment of a scorpion when it strikes a man. In those days men will seek death and will not find it; they will desire to die, and death will flee from them. - Rev 9:3-6

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man is found in Luke 16:19-31. It is a key scripture used to support the concept of torment in the flames of a place called Hell. It is also said to support the idea of angels taking the saved to Heaven. If one is convinced of these prevailing teachings, and that one goes to one place or the other immediately upon death, this parable appears to offer support. In fact, teachings of unending torment in a bad place for the wicked, and ascending to a place of delight and comfort beyond the earth, are of non-Biblical origin. Note that parables are stories of events which never happened, constructed to drive home a moral lesson.

In the parable, the rich man dies and is buried. But sometime after his burial, he is again conscious, being tormented by a flame, and he speaks. This seems analogous to the yet future lake of fire. So the rich man is no longer in the grave (hell). But for purposes of the parable, the rich man does not die instantly in the fire, but instead expresses his thoughts. He sees that Lazarus is with Abraham, clearly saved. The rich man asks for Lazarus to cool his tongue, but Abraham tells the rich man that there is a great gulf between him and them, across which one cannot pass in either direction - the difference between salvation and punishment.

This parable does not say that the rich man is tormented forever. It does not say that Lazarus and Abraham are in Heaven. Abraham speaks in the parable, despite the fact that he was dead at the time Jesus told this parable. Jesus had not yet died for anyone's sins, or been resurrected. In turn, Abraham could not have been alive. And in fact Abraham will not rise to eternal life until Christ returns, according to 1 Cor 15:20-23. Further, since Jesus is the firstborn from the dead (first born to eternal life from a fleshly body), and preeminent in all things (Col 1:18, Rev 1:5), clearly no one, including Abraham or Lazarus, could have been resurrected to eternal life before Jesus. This should be obvious, if one is thinking carefully about what they read. The moral purpose of this parable appears to be that those who value riches and comfort, but do not help those in need, ought to have a change of heart, lest they be lost.

RESURRECTIONS

While the word *resurrection* refers to being given life after having been dead, there are different types. There is a resurrection back to physical life, and a resurrection to eternal life, the latter featuring a spirit body. The Bible describes several resurrections from death back to physical life. These were performed through such persons as Elijah, Jesus, Peter, and Paul.

It may sound shocking, but prevailing Christianity does not teach the need for a true resurrection from the dead. This is because it teaches that all men have immortal souls. When someone appears to die, they aren't really dead because their soul is still conscious and alive somewhere. The prevailing teaching is that the soul goes immediately to another place, such as Heaven or Hell. If one is Roman Catholic, Purgatory is a possible first stop for some. So if everyone has an immortal soul, why are there so many scriptures about the subjects of mortality, immortality, resurrection, and the state of the dead? Why did Paul say the following things?

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: "Death is swallowed up in victory." - 1 Cor 15:53-54

But if the spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His spirit who dwells in you. -Rom 8:11

Was Paul deranged, or was he telling the truth that we are mortal, and must acquire immortality? He clearly explained that God must give eternal life. Some clergy will state that we have mortal bodies, but immortal souls. But why did Jesus teach the following?

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." -Matt 10:28

In the scripture above, the word *hell* is translated from the Greek word *Gehenna*, a reference to a dumping area outside of Jerusalem, described previously, where fires were always burning, while at the same time worms also worked to devour that which didn't burn. The dead bodies of criminals and unknown individuals were also dumped there with the garbage. Elsewhere, we read about a lake of fire as the destination for the willfully wicked, which will totally consume them - permanent death. Jesus' reference to Gehenna points to the future lake of fire, not as yet burning. And despite the prevailing teaching about all mankind having immortal souls, there is no clear scripture which states that when one dies, they will next find themselves living in Heaven or Hell (with a capital H, versus the hell that is simply the grave).

There is a reason why human beings have physical bodies. It is so that life can be ended permanently for any who refuse God's ways. The unsaved dead will be given physical bodies in the second resurrection, covered in more detail in the later section on that subject. I doubt that many would reject God. But permanent death is the only merciful judgment possible for those who do. They would not have been happy living forever, not being in harmony with all that is good, pure, loving, and beneficial. Every human being will have to choose, but only after first being fully informed. For most, it will take a second resurrection to physical life, a lot of teaching, and time to apply it.

Some clergy define resurrection as a change from a physical body to a spirit body, but that would not be a resurrection from being dead - it would just be a body change. Being raised from earth to Heaven might also be labeled as a resurrection, but that would be a relocation, not being raised from being dead to being alive. A few folks believe Christians acquire immortality at the time of baptism, but eternal life is not granted to anyone until the return of Christ.

Again, if all men have immortal souls, there is no need for a resurrection to eternal life. They would just consciously go somewhere upon the apparent death of the physical body. But if folks go to Heaven or Hell upon death, then raising someone back to physical life means ripping them out of there and bringing them back to their former existence on this earth. The concept of the immortal soul does not square with clear Bible teachings. Let's start with a favorite memory scripture that gets repeated a lot, but not thought about very carefully.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." - John 3:16

If human beings have immortal souls, they already have eternal life. They are not in danger of perishing, as they will live on in Hell. And they don't need the sacrifice of Christ to have everlasting life, as they already have it. So this oft-quoted scripture is directly at odds with the teaching of an immortal soul. According to that prevailing teaching, it is only a matter of where that soul will spend its time for all eternity. And one might then ask why Christ was sacrificed.

Yes, the wicked are destined for eternal destruction, but as indicated in the previous section, not eternal destroying (2 Thes 1:9); everlasting punishment, not everlasting punishing (Matt 25:46); and everlasting fire, which is a lasting purification (Matt 18:18; 25:41) - removal from the land of the living (Psa 27:13). Sodom and Gomorrah experienced eternal fire (Jude 1:7), but they are not burning today. The effect of the fire is what lasted - they died, and their sinning was halted.

If one has an immortal soul, it must be judged at the moment of physical death. In turn, scriptures bearing on a future judgment can only be regarded as symbolic or metaphorical. But a future period of judgment is essential if the unsaved billions presently lost are to be saved by God - the God who, as we read above, is not willing for any to be lost, but rather find repentance. So Jesus does have priestly salvific work to do on this earth, and will be assisted by the saints. You wouldn't want the lopsided score between God and the devil to remain as it is, would you?

If it was not your idea to be born, would it be fair for God to give you eternal life in the form of an immortal soul, and then basically force you to live in either a good or bad place forever, depending on your attitude? Would you want to forever serve a being who would also torment other souls forever? What would such torment accomplish? Would anyone change their attitude? Or is God a loving being that would put the willfully wicked out of their misery? Wouldn't it be more loving and fair to provide either permanent life or permanent death, according as each soul might choose of their own free will? Of course it is, and we read above that Christ said to fear Him who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Gehenna fire / lake of fire - Matt 10:28).

I've heard the stories of "near death experiences" during which individuals claim to have seen a bright light, and thought it might be Heaven. But note that these stories are not limited to Christians. So if any Christian believes that the bright light represents Heaven, then these stories are evidence that folks from other religions also go to Heaven. In fact, seeing a bright light

during trauma to the body is a physiological symptom that can happen to saint and sinner alike. Medical researchers have written articles about this. They have identified why individuals see a bright light. There will always be someone trumpeting a miracle, new revelation, or amazing experience. Only comparison to Bible teachings will tell whether a claim may be credible.

Beyond seeing a bright light, there are now books and movies presenting the detailed descriptions of those who claim or believe that they have spent several minutes or hours in either Heaven or Hell, and then returned. Some of these are presented as the tales of children. Perhaps these folks had some realistic dreams. Perhaps some just feel a mission to evangelize with such "tools." However, we must not be easily deceived by stories that are in conflict with the Bible. As we'll see, the Bible tells us that no one has or can go to Heaven. It also tells us that Satan the devil works to deceive the whole world, and one should not underestimate his ability to do so.

Let's now go back to the Garden of Eden again, where Adam and Eve were given choice by way of the two trees which God planted there (Gen 2:8-9). Satan spoke with Eve, who explained that the Lord told her that if they ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they would surely die (Gen 2:16-17; 3:2-3). Satan then told her that they would not surely die, and so deceived her. In turn, she ate of the fruit of that tree (Gen 3:4-6). We must conclude that Satan was lying. After all, telling the truth would not have deceived Eve.

In fact, Christ stated that Satan was a liar from the beginning, and that Satan was the father of lies (John 8:44). But if men have immortal souls, then Satan told Eve the truth - that they would not surely die. Satan was propagating the concept of the immortal soul in his deception of Eve. This should be a fundamental observation. As long as Christ's words are true that both body and soul can be destroyed, one cannot say that a person will not surely die.

When Satan told Eve she would not surely die, was this about physical death of the body, or also death of the spirit in man? Since the Garden, it is clear that all physical bodies die. All human beings have a spirit that can live again when placed in another viable body. But for one to live forever, they must also acquire the Holy Spirit by way of conversion and faith in Jesus, and be given an eternal spirit body, neither of which anyone has by birth. So it cannot be said that any human being by nature will not surely die. All have free choice, and can choose to reject God's ways and be destroyed from existence, a step beyond physical death of the body. Note that the Lord drove Adam and Eve out of the Garden, lest they eat of the Tree of Life and live forever, which would have been salvation not yet merited for them (Gen 3:22-24).

The account of the death of Jesus' friend Lazarus, and Jesus' resurrection of His friend, tells us quite a lot. It is found in John chapter 11. Lazarus had been very sick. Jesus told His disciples that Lazarus was sleeping, and that He was going to go wake him up. The disciples thought Jesus was talking about regular sleep, so Jesus clarified, "*Lazarus is dead.*" So Jesus likened death to sleep. Jesus met Lazarus' sister Martha.

Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." - John 11:23-24

So Martha knew there would be a future resurrection at "the last day." She didn't think her brother was in Heaven. Lazarus had been dead for four days, and placed in a tomb. Jesus had the stone removed, and commanded Lazarus to come out, which he did, alive, and still bound by grave clothes. Jesus had awakened Lazarus from the sleep of death, back to physical life.

In another circumstance, Jesus was called to visit a girl who was sick, but the girl died before He arrived. The following scripture describes what transpired.

*While He was still speaking, someone came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying to him, "Your daughter is dead. Do not trouble the Teacher." But when Jesus heard it, He answered him, saying, "**Do not be afraid; only believe, and she will be made well.**" When He came into the house, He permitted no one to go in except Peter, James, and John, and the father and mother of the girl. Now all wept and mourned for her; but He said, "**Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping.**" And they ridiculed Him, knowing that she was dead. But He put them all outside, took her by the hand and called, saying, "**Little girl, arise.**" Then her spirit returned, and she arose immediately. And He commanded that she be given something to eat. And her parents were astonished, but He charged them to tell no one what had happened. -Luke 8:49-56*

So again Jesus raised a dead/sleeping individual back to life. Death is clearly likened to sleep in the Bible. The teaching that folks go to Heaven or Hell at the time of death fails in the face of so many scriptures referring to folks sleeping in their graves, awakening from their graves in a resurrection, or rising from the dead at the return of Christ. As for sleeping in death, here is a sampling of scriptures.

Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; Enlighten my eyes, Lest I sleep the sleep of death -Psa 13:3

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption -Acts 13:36

And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

-Matt 27:50-53

For this reason many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep. -1 Cor 11:30

Then he knelt down and cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not charge them with this sin." And when he had said this, he fell asleep. -Acts 7:60

...knowing this first: that scoffers will come in the last days, walking according to their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of His coming? For since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation." -2 Peter 3:3-4

After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. -1 Cor 15:6

But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.

-1 Thes 4:13-17

Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

-1 Cor 15:51-52

Ascending to meet Christ in the clouds is sometimes taken as going to Heaven, but in fact it is going only a short distance to heaven - the clouds above the earth. All shall see Christ in those clouds at His return (Matt 24:30). The saints will not remain in the clouds, but will accompany Christ to Jerusalem, where He will first stand on the Mount of Olives (Zech 14:4).

Some folks sneer at what they call the "soul sleep" doctrine. But if souls were alive somewhere, such as Heaven, why would there be any references in the Bible to sleep in association with death? Why must the dead in Christ arise, if they are already alive and well in Heaven? Why do the scriptures refer to folks falling asleep, instead of reading that they went off to Heaven, or "on to their reward?"

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live." -Matt 11:25

If human beings have immortal souls, they don't need Jesus to be the resurrection and the life. They would already have that life. And they would not actually need resurrecting, being immortal. Their souls would only need to be relocated to where they are supposed to go next.

"For as the Father raises the dead and gives life to them, even so the Son gives life to whom He will." -John 5:21

If folks have immortal souls, the Father and the Son would not need to give life to anyone, as clearly described in the scripture above. And they would not have a choice about it if human beings have immortal souls. When someone dies, the phrase "rest in peace" is often used. It is sometimes added to a tombstone, sometimes shortened to "R. I. P." This is truly appropriate if death is like a deep sleep. Yet, if folks have immortal souls, they cannot be resting in peace, but instead engaged in the activities of the afterlife, at whatever location.

A common remark is heard at funerals, to the effect that the dear departed individual is now smiling down upon us from Heaven. But seriously, how many individuals really want their departed relatives to be looking at what they are doing? I find it noteworthy how there are sometimes ugly fights over the estates and belongings of the departed. And during these struggles, the participants do not seem at all concerned about the departed watching them. If the departed could see them, they would no longer be smiling down upon them, like they supposedly were doing at the funeral.

For one can see that wise men die; foolish and stupid men also pass away. Then they leave their wealth to others. Their graves are their eternal homes, their homes from generation to generation, though they have named estates after themselves. - Psa 49:10-11 (Holman)

It is apparent that throughout history, after anyone dies, their possessions and assets end up in the hands of others (except when some of their possessions are buried with them). No one seems worried that the departed will show up one day and ask for their stuff back, because that has never happened. This means that the departed have found something better to do, don't want to return, or can't return. In fact, they are all still dead, still sleeping, and that is why we don't hear from them. But wait! What about seances and visions of the ghosts of departed folks? These owe to the capabilities of demons, along with other "paranormal" circumstances and events, such as UFOs. There really are ghosts, but the ghosts are images created by demons - fallen angels who rebelled, and who can mimic the departed.

So when a person dies, they are not conscious. It is like a deep sleep. They must be resurrected by God if they are to again be called alive. The dead cannot resurrect themselves.

For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing... - Eccl 9:5

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. - Eccl 9:10

The dead do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down into silence. - Psa 115:17

And now let's read about folks awakening from the sleep of death in their graves. What are they doing waking up in graves? If they had immortal souls, they should have been having a great time in Heaven, or a tormented time in Hell, according to prevailing teaching.

"At that time Michael shall stand up, the great prince who stands watch over the sons of your people; and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation, even to that time. And at that time your people shall be delivered, every one who is found written in the book. And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness like the stars forever and ever." - "But you, go your way till the end; for you shall rest, and will arise to your inheritance at the end of the days." - Dan 12:1-3, 13

So Daniel was told about folks being resurrected at a far future time, and that he would rest and not arise back to life until the end of the days (of the age of man). His soul is presently sleeping.

I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust. -Acts 24:15

In the scripture above, Paul refers to a future resurrection of the dead. If folks had immortal souls, they would not need to be resurrected, but instead simply have their souls relocated to another place of eternal existence upon death. Note that both the just and the unjust will be resurrected. Why resurrect the unjust if they don't deserve to live? Why not leave them dead? Or are they resurrected to give them an opportunity to repent and be saved?

"Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment."

-John 5:28-29 (ESV)

What were those folks doing in their graves? Why aren't they somewhere else? Why don't they hear His voice until a particular future hour? Is it not because they are sleeping in their graves? The "resurrection of judgment" in the above scripture is the second resurrection. Some Bible translations incorrectly use the words *damnation* or *condemnation* instead of *judgment*. We read above that the evil are resurrected for judgment. Why bother if they are evil? If it is known that they are evil, doesn't that imply that they have already been judged negatively? It does, but that is not their final judgment, or else there would be no reason to resurrect them.

The final judgment of the unsaved, including those who have done evil, is a time period for learning, living, and deciding what type of person they want to be. It is not a sentencing hearing with the strike of a gavel, as some common teachings portray. Instead, it is an opportunity for the evil and unjust to learn what they missed, have a change of heart, and be saved. Otherwise, why bother to resurrect them? Again, why not just leave them dead?

In the scripture above, those resurrected to eternal life were judged worthy of it during their first life on earth, and receive it at Christ's return. So the gift of eternal life is their Phase Two at the start of the Millennium. Later, the unsaved are resurrected to physical life in the second resurrection 1000 years later. The Phase Two life that they lead at that time will be judged.

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live on in the flesh, this will mean fruit from my labor; yet what I shall choose I cannot tell. For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you. -Phil 1:21-24

We saw how Paul is the author of a number of scriptures telling us that death is like sleep, and that we must acquire immortality in a future resurrection. So Paul understood that when he died, he would be asleep, and that upon waking, he would find himself with Christ. Even so, some folks think Paul implied he would immediately go to Heaven. But note that Paul did not say that he would immediately be with the Lord, and didn't say it would be in Heaven. Remember, Paul wrote many scriptures describing the return of the Lord to this earth, and how the dead in Christ would then rise to meet Christ in the clouds above the earth as He is returning.

Reading on, Paul stated that he would continue to serve the brethren. Indeed, Paul is a huge example of zealous service to others. He endured a lot of persecution and physical pain during his ministry. This didn't change his faith or devotion.

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment, so Christ was offered once to bear the sins of many. To those who eagerly wait for Him He will appear a second time, apart from sin, for salvation. -Heb 9:27-28

Why would Christ appear on earth again if every soul goes either to Heaven or Hell upon death? Why wouldn't He just wait in Heaven for all men to die? But He is returning for the purpose of completing the work of salvation. And Christ will be assisted by the saints who are resurrected to eternal life at His return. Billions of unsaved folks must be resurrected, and taught under better conditions, with the goal of helping them to be saved. In turn, while all men must die once, the second death is optional. That second death will be discussed in a later section

Next, we read how "those under the earth" - those in their graves - and in fact every tongue of every person will confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. For this to happen, there must be a resurrection of every human being, and for all to know of the true God. So God will certainly get the attention of every single person. Angels in heaven, and men both living and dead, will all bow and confess to Jesus.

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

-Phil 2:9-11

In the next scripture, Jesus makes reference to raising up the saved at the last day. Remember, Lazarus' sister Martha had stated that she knew her brother would be resurrected at the last day. Consider that the last day is a reference to a 1000 year period, in this case the Millennium. At the beginning of that day is the first resurrection of the saved when Christ returns. Many physical human beings will be living during the Millennium. At the end of that last day is the second resurrection for all the unsaved to have a chance to live, learn, repent, and be converted.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day." - John 6:38-40

If no one is resurrected until the last day, then they are in their graves, and still in the sleep of death. In turn, they cannot be alive in Heaven, or being tormented in a place called Hell. That teaching is of pagan / heathen origin, and found in similar forms in other world religions. The truth is in the Bible, if one bothers to study it. But for most, it is understandable that the power of prevailing teaching makes it almost incomprehensible to entertain anything else but the Heaven or Hell at time of death scenario. Some scriptures indicate that men do not and cannot go to Heaven. And the first scripture below also indicates that only Jesus has immortality.

I urge you in the sight of God who gives life to all things, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate, that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing, which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen. - 1 Tim 6:13-16

"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." - "For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'" - Acts 2:29, 34-35

In this next scripture, Jesus refers to Himself as the Son of Man, as He frequently did.

"No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven—the Son of Man." - John 3:13 (NIV)

So we see that there are two types of resurrection - to mortal physical life, and to immortal spiritual life - in appropriate bodies. And the only one to live in human form and be resurrected to an eternal spirit body so far is Jesus Christ, the "first of the firstfruits". All human beings who have died, both saved and unsaved, are still in their graves - in the sleep of death - awaiting resurrection. When Jesus returns, the saved will be resurrected to eternal life. At the end of the Millennium, all the unsaved dead will be resurrected to physical bodies for their first undeceived opportunity to be saved.

CHRIST IS KEY

This next scripture states that Christ is the firstfruits to be resurrected. The Feast of Firstfruits, also known as Pentecost, concerns the saved also becoming firstfruits when they are resurrected at Christ's return. By the time Jesus was resurrected from the dead, a number of other human beings had already experienced resurrection to a physical body by way of miracles at the hands of Jesus and others. But to be one of the firstfruits is to be resurrected to an eternal spirit body.

And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable. But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.

-1 Cor 15:17-23

The scripture above tells us that if Christ is not risen, saved folks who are sleeping in death have truly perished - dead and staying dead. It tells us that they can be made alive through Christ, which would not be necessary if they had immortal souls.

One could not ask for a clearer scripture describing the timing of when the saved are resurrected than 1 Corinthians 15:17-23, above. Yet this scripture must be skipped or explained away by those who believe folks shoot off to a conscious life in either Heaven or Hell upon death. They don't want to accept that no one is resurrected until Christ returns. But clearly Christ was the first in human form to be resurrected to eternal life in a spirit body. This adds special significance to the event of His resurrection. And we can only hope to follow Him, by being resurrected to eternal life at His return to this earth.

And He is the head of the body, the church, who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead, that in all things He may have the pre-eminence. - Col 1:18

...and from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood... - Rev 1:5

The scriptures above state that Jesus is the "firstborn from the dead." This has the same meaning as "first of the firstfruits," namely that Jesus is the first to live in the flesh and then be resurrected to eternal life. But what if Christ had not risen from the grave? We know that His torture and gruesome death can be applied for our healing, and as the penalty for our sins. But if Christ had not also been resurrected, could we have any hope for resurrection? No, because we can hope to live forever only because He was the trailblazer who went first.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?" -John 11:25-26 (NIV)

For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. -Rom 5:10

Some resurrections of individuals back to physical life are described in both Old and New Testaments. But some folks believe that various individuals were resurrected to eternal life prior to Christ's resurrection, in spite of scriptures referring to Christ as the "firstborn from the dead."

These include Enoch and Elijah in the Old Testament, and Abraham, Moses, and Elijah (again) in the New Testament. Enoch's life was taken. And Elijah was taken up into the heaven - the atmosphere - and redeposited, since scripture tells us that he wrote a letter about ten years after that event (See 2 Kings 2:11 and, 2 Chron 21:12). We must be careful about scriptures referring to heaven, as most references are to the sky above us, not the place where God has His throne.

While the images of Moses and Elijah appeared in the transfiguration of Christ (Matt 17:1-9), their images soon disappeared, and Christ told the disciples to tell the vision to no one until after He was risen. So it was just a vision - Moses and Elijah were not really there.

Note that all these circumstances occurred before Christ's sacrifice and resurrection, which would have been needed for any human being to be resurrected to eternal life. Abraham is also mentioned By Christ in His parable about Lazarus and the rich man. Enoch, Elijah, Abraham, and Moses all died a long time ago, and remain in the sleep of death.

...knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb without blemish and without spot. He indeed was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you who through Him believe in God, who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory, so that your faith and hope are in God.

-1 Pet 1:18-21

As the scripture above indicates, before the world was made, God knew that the sacrifice of Christ would be necessary. God apparently foresaw that men would go astray at the influence of Satan and his rebels. In turn, God planned a way by which mankind could be saved. And indeed Christ paid the penalty for all who have been led astray, and who have a change of heart and accept His sacrifice. So it makes complete sense that Jesus stated that He is the resurrection and the life. Without Christ, there would be no resurrection to eternal life for anyone. We would die and stay dead. We must be resurrected to live longer than this first physical Phase One life.

For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord. -Rom 6:23

We need that gift of eternal life to live forever. Perhaps there will be some individuals who refuse it. Adam and Eve did not have that gift when confronted by Satan. So Satan lied when he told Eve she would not surely die if she ate the forbidden fruit. There are no works that we could possibly do to earn such an incredible gift as eternal life. God knows this, and is happy if we will have a change of heart, resolving to live according to the law of peace and love, repenting, being baptized into the family of God, cheerfully serving others in need, and striving to live in harmony with God. But if we already have immortal souls, why would we need the gift of eternal life? We would already have it! And the scripture above would be in error.

Christ was not sacrificed to pay for the sins of mankind until thousands of years after Adam and Eve. Apparently it would take some time for God's plan to play out. The timing of the sacrifice would not matter, as long as it was accomplished, seeing how the dead sleep until Christ returns.

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going. -Eccl 9:10

EARTH IS THE FOCUS

Christ will return to this earth at the 7th trumpet of the 7th seal of Revelation (Rev 11:15). And He will remain on the earth through the Millennium and beyond. He brings the reward of the saved with Him. And having prepared a place for the saved, it arrives after the Millennium in the form of the City of God (Rev chapter 21). Earth is the focus of future events - where the completion of the plan of God will take place.

"And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." -John 14:3

But the meek shall inherit the earth, and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace. -Psa 37:11

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." -Matt 5:5

"Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven." -Matt 6:10

Christ does not simply swoop down to rapture a few folks off to Heaven. Indeed, for human beings, Heaven comes to earth. Prior to Christ's return, the tribulation is the fifth seal in Revelation, and the heavenly signs are the 6th seal. The Bible describes how some Christians will be martyred during the tribulation, while many others will receive supernatural protection. But clearly they are living on the earth, not hanging out in Heaven.

"Then they will deliver you up to tribulation and kill you, and you will be hated by all nations for My name's sake." -Matt 24:9

Now when the dragon saw that he had been cast to the earth, he persecuted the woman who gave birth to the male Child. But the woman was given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness to her place, where she is nourished for a time and times and half a time, from the presence of the serpent.

-Rev 12:13-14

When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed. -Rev 6:9-11

Revelation 12:13-14, above, is metaphorical. The dragon and the serpent represent the devil; the male Child is Christ; the woman is the church; and the wings of a great eagle symbolize God's divine help. This recalls how the Lord said He bore the Israelites out of Egypt on eagles wings, but of course there was no literal eagle involved (Ex 19:4).

In Revelation 6:9-11, in an allegorical picture, the saved dead martyrs ask when their blood will be avenged, and are told that more individuals must yet be martyred. And so they must continue to rest (in the sleep of death). This happens as the fifth seal, which is the future tribulation, is opened. If all saved individuals were raptured prior to the tribulation, none of them would be around to be martyred. Then after the 6th seal (the heavenly signs), we read in Revelation chapter 7 of 144,000 individuals from the tribes of Israel, plus an innumerable multitude from all nations and tongues, being sealed with the spirit of God.

Many portions of the book of Revelation are poetic, symbolic, and metaphorical. Some individuals read these portions too literally, when it would be best to view them within the structure formed by other scriptures. For instance, the martyrs pictured under the altar are not really conscious and speaking, as we know that no saved individual is resurrected prior to the return of Christ. And the fifth seal is well before Christ's return. John was only seeing a vision. Of course there are other portions of the Bible which use poetic literary devices. Indeed, the Bible is regarded as great literature, owing to its descriptive power.

We should be savvy enough to grasp the meaning of a passage without actually taking every word literally. For example, Abel's blood was not literally crying out from the ground (Gen 4:10), and wisdom is not a literal woman (Proverbs chapter 8). Jesus did not mean that one should literally pluck out their eye or cut off their hand (Matt 18:8-9) - He was simply making a point in a dramatic way. And Jesus' parables were just that - metaphorical fictitious stories, not accounts of events which actually took place.

There will be a "beast" power (political / military / economic) on the earth for 3 1/2 years near the end of this age. It will be supported by a religious power, referred to as "another beast" (Rev 13:11-13). There will be a "false prophet" (Rev 16:13; 19:20; 20:10); also referred to as the "man of sin" and the "lawless one" (2 Thes 2:3-10). (The word *antichrist* is not used in the book of Revelation, even though it is currently a popular term.)

The Bible warns Christians not to accept the mark of that beast power. If the saints were already raptured, such a warning would not be necessary. As covered earlier, the 5th trumpet of the 7th seal results in five months of intense pain for those without the spirit of God (Rev 9:3-6). So clearly there are saved Christians alive on earth during the difficult times preceding the return of Christ. Those who do not take the mark of the beast will reign with Christ. If they had been in Heaven, they would not have been on earth to show their faith by refusing that mark.

And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. -Rev 20:4

As explained earlier, the picture is that everyone whose life is not taken is "left behind" until the return of Christ. Some rapture proponents might want to explain away that all these folks are those who become Christians after the rapture. But the truth is found in 1 Cor 15:20-23, presented earlier, which clearly states that not until Christ returns will anyone be resurrected. And Christ does not return until after the tribulation and other troubling events of the 5th, 6th, and most of the 7th seals. (But the saints do avoid the last plagues of the 7th seal.)

All Christians remain behind on the earth until Jesus returns. And if when He returns at the 7th trumpet of the 7th seal, they should fly off to Heaven, who will hang around on the earth with Jesus to assist Him during His Millennial mission? But they stay, and serve, as we can read.

And from Jesus Christ, the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler over the kings of the earth. To Him who loved us and washed us from our sins in His own blood, and has made us kings and priests to His God and Father, to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen. -Rev 1:5-6

"And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." -Rev 5:10

There is a genre of books and movies termed "post apocalyptic," which portray a depressing picture of the remnants of mankind attempting to survive after worldwide cataclysm. But in fact, after what folks think of as "the apocalypse," the world will be great!

Yes, there will be trouble and desolation before Christ returns. It culminates with Christ defeating armies arrayed against Him at His return (Rev 19:11-21). After that, there may be some reluctance by some nations and individuals to recognize His Kingship (Zech 14:16-19). But the earth trends toward a state of peace and renewal according to numerous prophecies, of which the following are a sampling.

In the last days the mountain of the Lord's house will be established at the top of the mountains and will be raised above the hills. Peoples will stream to it, and many nations will come and say, "Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob. He will teach us about His ways so we may walk in His paths." For instruction will go out of Zion and the word of the Lord from Jerusalem. He will settle disputes among many peoples and provide arbitration for strong nations that are far away. They will beat their swords into plows, and their spears into pruning knives. Nation will not take up the sword against nation, and they will never again train for war. But each man will sit under his grapevine and under his fig tree with no one to frighten him. For the mouth of the Lord of Hosts has promised this. -Micah 4:1-4 (Holman)

The wolf will live with the lamb, and the leopard will lie down with the goat. The calf, the young lion, and the fatling will be together, and a child will lead them. The cow and the bear will graze, their young ones will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. An infant will play beside the cobra's pit, and a toddler will put his hand into a snake's den. None will harm or destroy another on My entire holy mountain, for the land will be as full of the knowledge of the Lord as the sea is filled with water. -Isa 11:6-9 (Holman)

None of them shall teach his neighbor, and none his brother, saying, 'Know the Lord,' for all shall know Me, from the least of them to the greatest of them.

-Heb 8:11

The Greek word ***apocalypse*** simply means revealing, and has been translated as ***revelation***. Because there are some scary things in the Book of Revelation (or Book of Apocalypse), it has taken on an association with devastation and desolation. But in Revelation, and in other prophecies, there are also descriptions of many wonderful things that will take place - the things for which all mankind should hope with all their being.

It used to be that many churches taught that Jesus would return to the earth and stay here for 1000 years, otherwise known as the Millennium. And in fact He will. We know about this from the Bible. But it is becoming increasingly popular to believe that He is only going to swoop down to grab the saved and rapture them away to Heaven, in which case the earth will have to fend for itself. If that were to be the case, it would indeed be like the post-apocalyptic world portrayed in many movies. The unsaved would live under harsh conditions, and eventually die.

Earlier, we reviewed scriptures telling us that men have not and cannot go to Heaven. Jesus Christ is coming here with many angels. After the events of the Millennium, Jesus does not return to Heaven. Instead, the Father also comes to earth, bringing the New Jerusalem city.

At that time, having completed His mission as King and Priest, Christ turns the Kingdom over to His Father, as we read in the next scripture.

Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.

-1 Cor 15:24-26

If at the time Jesus turns the Kingdom over to the Father, you were able to go visit Heaven, there could be a sign posted there, reading, "Closed - Gone to Earth." The blessings of eternity are not where one is, but with whom (and with Whom). It is about relationships with God and countless other brothers and sisters in a family God had the vision to create.

Now during the Millennium, there will be human beings living on the earth and having children. Because Satan will be stopped (metaphorically in chains), he will not be able to influence them. Some may choose salvation, and some may not. But at the end of the Millennium, God, according to His purposes, will loose Satan for a short period to go out and work his deception upon some folks living on the earth.

Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while. -Rev 20:1-3

In turn, despite Christ ruling the earth with the assistance of the saints, it is prophesied that many human beings will be deceived after Satan is let loose again. Satan inspires them to attack Jerusalem. They will clearly not appreciate the futility of what they are doing - coming to do battle against the power of God. And the battle, if one could even call it that, will be quite lopsided, with all of them destroyed by fire from the sky. But thanks to the second resurrection soon to follow, they will have their opportunity to see their error, gain much better perspective, truly appreciate the opportunity to live in harmony with God, and be witnesses for God.

Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them. -Rev 20:7-9

Some would say that the next experience for these folks who are destroyed by fire will be to experience yet more fire in Hell. The reasoning is that anyone destroyed by God with fire has been judged to be lost forever. Recall the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. And the victory of Christ over armies resisting Him at His return is prophesied. It should be clear that whenever God is your opponent, God wins, and death comes mercifully quickly.

We know that God deeply desires for all to be saved. If God can end the lives of men, He can also resurrect them at a time and in a setting conducive to reaching their hearts. After all, it would be unfair to pass permanent judgment upon anyone who has been deceived by Satan, the enemy of God. That would give Satan the victory. But it is Jesus who will be victorious. Every human being deserves the opportunity to live life undeceived, at least if God is fair. And who wants to serve an unfair God? To provide that opportunity for salvation to those who never had it because they were deceived is the ultimate mission work of God. And the saints will be able to participate in that mission work.

Since the earth will be full of the knowledge of God during the Millennium, those attacking Jerusalem at the end of that period should have been educated about the results of attempting to wage war against God. But then again, effective deception can get in the way of sound reasoning. Ironically, their deceiver, Satan, also previously waged war unsuccessfully against God. War with God is irrational, but it has and will occur.

Those destroyed by fire when they attack Jerusalem at the end of the Millennium will find themselves alive yet again on the earth. Someone might ask them how that attack worked out for them. They will be resurrected with billions of others to physical existence in that momentous event of future history - an event testifying to the incredible fairness and great love of God for all mankind - an event that is simply not part of prevailing Christian doctrine - the second resurrection!

THE SECOND RESURRECTION

There is an all important purpose for the second resurrection. It is Phase Two for most of mankind. It would not happen except for the vision, determination, and love of God for all. And it takes place on the earth. Christ will have returned 1000 years earlier, and will still be King and Priest here, doing the will of His Father. He will turn the Kingdom over to the Father when His mission to reach all the unsaved is complete, and all enemies and death itself no longer have power over God's children.

At the end of the Millennium, all the unsaved of mankind throughout history - many billions - will be resurrected from the sleep of death. This is the second resurrection - a resurrection to physical life for purposes of judgment - the culmination of the Judgment Day. It is not simply a sentencing hearing as to how they had lived during their first life. Instead, it is a time period during which they can learn and voluntarily choose to live the right way. It is their first full and fair opportunity to understand God's teachings and respond as they may choose.

Some might wonder how some very evil folks who have lived in this age could ever come to repentance in another life. But they will be healed both mentally and emotionally, so that they can see just how evil they had been. Hearts of stone will be replaced with hearts of flesh, and in turn they will feel compassion for others. They will be given the Holy Spirit in order to understand spiritual things. The veil of deception, discussed in a later section, will be removed from them.

The truth will be quite new to almost all folks given life in the second resurrection. Many will have never even heard of their Savior Jesus Christ. Jesus, with the saints and angels, will have an educational / evangelistic mission to reach every soul. The saints will have a role as priests. They will be Jesus' witnesses of how salvation is possible. If there was no hope for the resurrected unsaved dead, there would be no need for priests to be there to guide them. But in fact, all will know the Lord. All must discover whether they love Him.

Those brought back to life again will be taught from the books of the Bible. The Bible provides the context for human existence, and how each individual may attain salvation. The billions resurrected to live again will be judged according to how they respond to Bible teachings in this their second life, and not how they lived during their first life. After all, in their first life they were deceived, and most had never even heard of Christ. It would be most unfair to judge them by a standard they had never fully understood, if at all. This doesn't mean that as their hearts turn to God, they will not come to abhor and repent of the sins they committed during their first lives, even if many or all of those sins were committed through ignorance.

The Book of Life will be opened so that names can be added to it. There would be no other reason to open it. Those whose names were previously entered in it were all given eternal life 1000 years earlier at the start of the Millennium. Now we are at its end. When the period of judgment is complete, the disposition of all souls will be complete,

After having lived their Phase Two lives, those resurrected will have had a fully informed opportunity to choose God's ways or not. God has given man free choice since the very beginning, but of course God desires all mankind to become His eternal children. In turn, the better conditions of what I've termed Phase Two, has always been part of God's plan.

I personally hope and expect that most will come to love God and want to live forever in harmony with all their brothers and sisters. So perhaps one should be aware that everyone you come into contact with in your life, if not already saved, is probably your future brother or sister in Christ. Treat them accordingly, and remember that God loves them more than you, and deeply desires the best for them. Yes, God hates sin, and the plan is for it to someday be extinct.

The possibilities of eternity are just so wonderful and amazing. Those saved during Phase Two will be resurrected to eternal life - Phase Three for them. Any who are not interested will be mercifully destroyed in the lake of fire. After all, what Father would torture his children forever for behaving badly? Certainly God the Father is more loving than any human father. If they will never bring themselves to repent after having understood the truth and given choice, the very sad, but most loving and merciful outcome for them, is permanent death, achieved in a fiery instant.

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire. -Rev 20:11-15

Besides the scripture above, there are several other scriptures which indicate that the unsaved dead will live again. These include Dan 12:1-3, Acts 24:15, and John 5:28-29. listed under the heading "Resurrections" above. Together, these tell us that both the saved and unsaved will be resurrected to live again. The next scripture tells us that the unsaved dead from different time periods in history will be resurrected to live again during the same future time period.

"The men of Nineveh will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and indeed a greater than Jonah is here. The queen of the South will rise up in the judgment with this generation and condemn it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and indeed a greater than Solomon is here." -Matt 12:41-42

The great and encouraging reason for resurrecting the unsaved is so they may have the opportunity to be educated, understand, repent, and be saved. Note that some Bible translations reflect the bias of the translators. Where the word **judgment** would have been proper, one sometimes sees it translated as **shame**, **contempt**, **condemnation**, and **damnation**. Shame on those translators! God has not yet finally judged the unsaved. The Judgment Day for them begins with their resurrection to physical life in Phase Two. Notice these scriptures.

For to this end Christ died and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living. -Rom 14:9

I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom: -2 Tim 4:1

And when I saw Him, I fell at His feet as dead. But He laid His right hand on me, saying to me, "Do not be afraid; I am the First and the Last. I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death." -Rev 1:17-18

If Christ is Lord of both dead and living, this indicates that the dead are still dead. But they must live again to acknowledge Him as their Lord. And if He will not judge the living or the dead until His appearing, then all who have died are still dead. Again, the Judgment is a future event. Why would Christ declare that He had the keys to Hades - the grave - if they were not needed to bring folks out of the grave? Sinners will not inherit the Kingdom of God (1 Cor 6:9-10), so they'll have to live again and change!

All the prosperous of the earth shall eat and worship; all those who go down to the dust shall bow before Him, even he who cannot keep himself alive. - Psa 22:29

Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in heaven, and of those on earth, and of those under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

-Phil 2:9-11

For it is written: "As I live, says the Lord, every knee shall bow to Me, and every tongue shall confess to God." -Rom 14:11 (also see Isa 45:23)

It is not possible for the above scriptures to be fulfilled unless everyone who has died is resurrected, given a voice, and taught about the true God to whom they must bow and confess.

Those who are "under the earth" are those still in their graves. Some might claim they are being punished in the fires of Hell. But how could they bow and confess, being distracted by flames? And what would be the point to pull them out of Hell for this exercise? Would they feel like bowing and praising the God who was torturing them? That would be more than highly unlikely.

In fact, rather than a pointless forced bowing and confessing, if you consider the loving nature of God, and how God desires to reach all souls, you will understand that confessing is repentance, and bowing is an act of worship. One cannot repent or worship if they do not first come to understand God's ways, and decide to change their outlook.

So there must be future circumstances (Phase Two) by which the unsaved dead will be able to come to the point of repentance and worship. And would that not be the case if they found themselves alive again, and given the spirit of God to help them understand what they could not understand during their first life (Phase One)? A good time for that to occur is after Christ's rule is established, and the entire earth is filled with the knowledge of God as the waters fill the seas (Isa 11:9, Hab 2:14).

Those alive on the earth at the time of Christ's return will see Him upon His arrival. Others will see Him when they are resurrected from the dead to again live in the flesh, including those who put Him to death in the early first century.

Behold, He is coming with clouds, and every eye will see Him, even they who pierced Him. And all the tribes of the earth will mourn because of Him. Even so, Amen. -Rev 1:7

The reference to "those who pierced Him" surely refers not only to the Roman soldiers who carried out the crucifixion, but all of the Jewish and Roman authorities who were part of Jesus being charged, tortured, and crucified. It is possible that a few of these individuals could have repented back then, and will rise in the first resurrection. But the rest will still see Jesus again in their next physical life on this earth. And they will no doubt quickly reconsider the errors of their former views, attitudes, and actions.

A future resurrection of Israel to physical bodies is found in the Old Testament. Many folks are familiar with the spiritual song about the bones coming together, entitled "Dry Bones," but may not have thought much, if at all, about where this might fit in God's plan. Instead, it is just a quaint song or story. But the scripture describing bones coming together, flesh appearing upon them, and then the breath of life entering them, is not in the Bible simply for entertainment purposes. And one should ask just why that scripture is there, when will it happen, and why.

The salvation of many people depends upon this prophecy being fulfilled. The event in question concerns a resurrection of unsaved Israelites to physical life. Paul explained how all Israel will be saved after being shamed by the salvation of the Gentiles (see Romans chapter 11). Israelites from throughout history simply can't be shamed unless and until they are raised up in a second resurrection, and then learn of the salvation of the Gentiles.

In general, not limited to Israelites, we read how God calls the weak and base things to confound the wise and strong (1 Cor 1:26-29). When would that confounding happen, if not after the second resurrection? When the strong see that the weak have been saved, that should give them assurance that they can also be saved.

The hand of the Lord came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it was full of bones. Then He caused me to pass by them all around, and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and indeed they were very dry. And He said to me, "Son of man, can these bones live?"

So I answered, "O Lord God, You know."

Again He said to me, "Prophesy to these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord! Thus says the Lord God to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live. I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and you shall live. Then you shall know that I am the Lord."'"

So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to bone. Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but there was no breath in them.

Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live.'" So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.

Then He said to me, "Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' Therefore prophesy and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God: "Behold, O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. Then you shall know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken it and performed it," says the Lord.'" -Ezek 37:1-14

When the unsaved dead are resurrected, they can't be given eternal spirit bodies, because that is the ultimate gift for them after they have been saved. They must be given physical bodies with mortal souls, in case they choose to reject the teachings they receive. And this physical resurrection will work out just fine, since they are resurrected on this same earth, designed to support physical life.

There is no good reason to resurrect all of the unsaved dead, if it is only to kill them again. But they are resurrected so that they might repent and be saved. This demonstrates the determination and extremely important loving character of God. We can love a really loving God - the true God - much more than one portrayed as only saving a clear minority of mankind, and sending the rest to be endlessly tormented.

If there were no future chance for any soul who died at the hands of God, such as those who died in the flood, and those who died in Sodom and Gomorrah, then we have a problem. We would have to conclude that God has a mercurial personality - loving and merciful at times, but severe and unmerciful at other times. And how could we live with such a God? But if God's destruction of those behaving wickedly represents "tough love" to cut short their wickedness, so that they could be saved under better circumstances, then God is truly loving, and wants to save everyone. We should not underestimate the determination and ability of God.

And He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world. -1 John 2:2

How could Christ be the propitiation for the sins of the whole world, if most of the world is not saved and is condemned to Hell with no chance of salvation? If Christ's torture and death is sufficient payment for the sins of anyone who repents, how could God impose an even worse penalty upon the unsaved, according to the all too common dogma about an eternal Hell of torment? How sinful must someone be during a finite life to deserve infinite punishment?

One early Bible text, the Sinaitic from the year 331, omits from Revelation 20:5, these words, "*But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished.*" Some folks get bent out of shape over this omission from one manuscript, claiming that this reference to another resurrection should not be in the Bible. Probably they don't like that scripture. Probably they want the unsaved dead to not really be dead, but instead suffering in Hell.

Yet, the Sinaitic text does not omit Rev 20:6, which reads, "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power." Verse 6 implies that there is a second resurrection, since it mentions a second death. Of course if there is a second death, it would have to take place sometime after a first death, and a second intervening period of life. We find in the scriptures the terms "first resurrection," "better resurrection," and "second death." So there must necessarily be a second resurrection and a first death.

Some argue that because the term "second resurrection" does not appear in the Bible, there is no such event. This is not being intellectually honest. If you have read this far, you have read much which shows the second resurrection will not only happen, but that it is the prime event by which we can be assured that God is loving, competent, and will not lose billions of souls to Satan.

It is permissible to use sound logic when analyzing the meaning of scriptures, and in this case conclude that there is a "second resurrection." It is when one stretches way too far to come up with a conclusion, redefines words, or concocts an elaborate explanation to get around the apparent clear reading of a scripture, that one is not being intellectually honest. Such an approach cannot arrive at the truth, but instead only at a point of personal preference or bias - a private interpretation. And that would be a vain exercise, since it won't pan out. To conclude that a sentence missing from one of many manuscripts means it should not be in the other manuscripts is clearly a ridiculous stretch, and suggests a biased motive for such a claim.

It happens that another early text, the Vatican Manuscript No. 1209, does not contain the book of Revelation at all. Does this mean the entire book of Revelation is spurious? It would be silly to conclude that, based on a single manuscript. The fact that many manuscripts were extant was not only a way to insure that the word of God would not be lost, but that it would be easy to spot one that has been altered. That same Vatican manuscript is missing the letters to Timothy, and also half of the book of Hebrews. But God has seen to it that His word has been sufficiently preserved for us.

The Bible contains redundancies scattered throughout, which also protect us from missing an important teaching, should one scripture be lost or altered by men (Isa 28:10). Of course both old and new testaments contain important warnings to those who would alter the word of God (Deut 4:2, Rev 22:18-19). It's quite apparent that some folks don't take those warnings seriously.

Note that in the following scripture, the reference to "the rest of the dead" in verse 5 is a parenthetical remark, and has been indicated here in that manner.

⁴And I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was committed to them. Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years ⁵(But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished.) This is the first resurrection. ⁶Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. -Rev 20:4-6

We do not need Rev 20:5 to tell us that there is a second resurrection at a different time than the first one. We read about thrones of judgment for the saints in the first portion of Rev 20:4 (see above). We find mention of a great white throne in Rev 20:11, and then verses 12 and 13 describe the dead being resurrected to judgment of their works after the opening of books (apparently books of the Bible), and the opening of the Book of Life, as covered earlier. So the saints are clearly already resurrected and are enthroned well before the dead are resurrected.

"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne." -Rev 3:21

It was explained above that the role of the saints is to be kings and priests under Christ, the King and High Priest, and that a priest helps an individual to achieve a proper relationship with God. And again, to point out the obvious, there would be no need for any priests if all men who are going to be saved were already saved. And there would also be no need for priestly service if all the unsaved are already judged as deserving death, with no hope remaining for them.

"For the Father judges no one, but has committed all judgment to the Son, that all should honor the Son just as they honor the Father." -John 5:22-23

The lives of those called now during this Phase One age are being judged now as to how they live their lives.

For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God? - 1 Peter 4:17

The Judgment Day is over 1000 years long. For those born and living during the Millennium, it is the period of their lives that is judged. For those resurrected after the 1000 year period has expired (see Rev 20:7-13), their entire Phase Two life in the flesh will be judged.

It is during the Judgment Day that the working of the New Covenant will take place on the grandest scale, spreading into the hearts of the resurrected multitudes. And while that covenant states that it is between God and Israel (See Jer 31:31-33 or Heb 8:8-10), scripture tells us clearly that anyone can become an Israelite - a child of Abraham - through Christ. And in fact they must become Israelites to be saved. This is clearly meant in the spiritual sense, the only sense that truly matters, as opposed to an ethnic affiliation.

There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise. - Gal 3:28-29

*...and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.
-Col 3:10-11*

Or is He the God of the Jews only? Is He not also the God of the Gentiles? Yes, of the Gentiles also, since there is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith. - Rom 2:29-30

For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. - Rom 10:12

*For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.
- 1 Cor 12:13*

Let's return to the Judgment Day, and the second resurrection for the unsaved dead. If they are to be judged by what is written in the books of the Bible at the first moment of their resurrection, they will all fail. Since they are unsaved, and have had no time to reform, they must be sentenced to permanent death. Or if the unsaved dead are to be judged as unsaved if their names are not in the Book of Life that is opened, then they also must all be judged to be lost. Because of course the only names in the Book of Life at the time they are brought to life are the names of the saints who were resurrected at the return of Christ 1000 years earlier.

So what a ridiculous exercise it would be to raise the unsaved dead to life, only to inform them that they don't measure up, their names are not in the Book of Life, and so they will be put back to death again, this time in the lake of fire. But if the books of the Bible are opened in order to teach the unsaved, and the Book of Life is opened to add names, then this would be in harmony with the plan of a loving God. That plan would have to include a time period for folks to be taught, have a change of heart, and grow in spiritual maturity during a regular lifetime.

Most everyone who has ever lived, and the majority of folks alive on the planet today, are not saved. And that is largely due to the fact that God gives all men choice, and has allowed the devil to work deception during this age. In the next age, these conditions will be reversed, because God is not only fair, but actually more than fair. The devil will be bound, and the knowledge of the Lord will fill the earth.

Those who do have their first real opportunity to be saved during Phase Two, and take it, will be changed into spirit beings who will live forever. For them, it will be their Phase Three. And it would seem that it should not be possible for any of them to reject that opportunity. This is because if one truly understands good versus evil, and has experienced the blessings of a relationship with God, choosing life is an absolute no-brainer. This is true not only on an intellectual level, but also in one's heart. How could such an individual then choose to be lost? Time will tell if nevertheless, some should be lost forever - permanent death.

A few church organizations have forwarded teachings about "the third resurrection," a term not clearly indicated in scripture. The stated purpose of this resurrection is to raise up the wicked of this age who knew better, and throw them into the lake of fire. The reference given in relation to this concept is Hebrews 6:4-6. But this scripture makes reference to tasting the powers of the age to come, and so may still apply to folks who live again by way of the second resurrection.

In theory, the only unsaved individuals who could be in this "third resurrection" category are those who had really fully understood the import of their calling; had repented and been baptized; had a close relationship with God through prayer; lived a Christian life of service to others in need; and then for some stupefying reason, willfully decided to reject it all. I can't say that I know any such individuals. Maybe there are some, but if so, why shouldn't they have an opportunity to become unstupefied during the second resurrection? Time will tell. For most of mankind, their third resurrection, as it were, will be to a wonderful Phase Three - eternal life, as a result of having been converted during their Phase Two lifetime.

Certainly there are a lot of folks in the world who have shown interest in God and in the truth, and then have seemed to lose interest. But it is most likely that they just didn't have sufficient understanding of the import of God's ways and God's plan. Or maybe they had lots of head knowledge, but conversion did not reach into their hearts. We should not underestimate God's love and ability to reach every one of His children, including those whom others think are hopelessly lost. The second resurrection is key to God's plan of fairness, mercy, and the full opportunity for salvation for every individual.

THE SECOND DEATH

It's surely safe to say that most folks are not familiar with the term "the second death," since it would seem to require being given a second physical life. And there just isn't room for that idea within the prevailing teaching of being judged at the time of death, with one's immortal soul going immediately and consciously to live in either Heaven or Hell. The prevailing teaching is that this Phase One life is the only opportunity for salvation. And if true, the devil wins big time in the battle for souls.

As described in the above section "Earth Is The Focus," Millennial period populations, identified as Gog and Magog, come against the peaceful land of Israel, and are destroyed by God (Rev 20:7-9). If the second resurrection had already occurred, there would be no chance for them to be given another physical life after their destruction. But in fact, the second resurrection occurs after this attack. God is fair, and so all of His children receive full opportunity for salvation.

Those who rebel at the end, and are wiped out so dramatically with fire, will find themselves alive again, and will no doubt be interested in how their attitude must change to avoid dying by fire a second time - the second death. The second death is how life ends permanently for those who, fully reached, decide they do not love God or all the goodness of His ways and His plan.

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death." -Rev 2:11

Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years. -Rev 20:6

It would be most unfair to die a second time without having had a completely informed opportunity to be saved. When the unquenchable lake of fire burns itself out, and its smoke has ascended indefinitely out of sight, the disposition of all souls will be complete. All who have been saved and lost will have been decided. The saved will be alive forever. Any who died in the lake of fire will not have a grave from which to ever be resurrected again.

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son. But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death." -Rev 21:7-8

So there is a stark contrast between the promise of eternal life via the new testament and the alternative. When all have been judged and given either permanent life or permanent death, then evil, ignorance, and deception will have ceased. Death and hell (the grave) will also be eliminated, since all who will ever die have now done so permanently.

The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

-Rev 20:13-14

THE VEIL

Numerous scriptures indicate that only a relative few individuals are saved during the present age. In turn, many folks presume that the vast majority of mankind will be lost forever. This is an uninformed and unstudied assumption which does not give God credit for being an immensely loving and capable being. How could the relatively few saved folks be joyful in their salvation, knowing that most of mankind, including many family and friends, are lost, and experiencing unending torment in Hell at the decree of the god they should now praise forever? What is there to praise such a god about, other than for saving their necks? Could any saved individual ever totally put out of their mind the awareness that billions are shrieking in Hell day in and day out?

But as we've seen, there is a second resurrection, planned by the true and loving God, who desires that all repent and be saved (2 Pet 3:9). But why has suffering been permitted on the earth? Why have many Christians been persecuted and some martyred? Why was choice provided ever since the Garden of Eden? We must trust that this was the only way.

Free will choice between good and evil must be essential as indicating the condition of one's heart. It is not that all has gone out of God's control, or that Satan is going to win the battle over souls, seeing how God is all powerful. Rather, God has permitted a veil of deception to descend upon most of mankind, so that they can be saved later under greatly improved conditions.

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; because the creation itself also will be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

- Rom 8:20-21

While it was necessary to subject the creation to corruption by way of offering free choice to all, Isaiah prophesized what we also find in Revelation. The blindness, deception, and evil in the world will be turned around. The veil of death and deception, which separates most of mankind from the wonderful life God wants to make available to all, will be taken away. Satan will be bound. Everyone will learn the truth and be judged by how they choose to live after being enlightened. Finally, death itself will be eliminated.

And he will swallow up on this mountain the covering that is cast over all peoples, the veil that is spread over all nations. He will swallow up death forever; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from all faces, and the reproach of his people he will take away from all the earth, for the Lord has spoken.

- Isa 25:7-8 (ESV)

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away. - Rev 21:4

The present veil of deception, like a blinder, and like a funeral death shroud, owes to the work of God's enemies - Satan the devil, the rebellious angels who joined him, and the men influenced to assist in evil works.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. - 1 Pet 5:8

The next scripture tells us that a love of the truth is something essential toward salvation. Yet we read of God sending strong delusion. Surely God would not send strong delusion with the aim of making sure some folks are never saved! It also refers to perishing and condemnation. But this is not to an infinite torture in Hell, as some might want to read it. Instead, folks perish physically, and are condemned to die physically in this age, awaiting the future second resurrection.

The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved. And for this reason God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie, that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness. - 2 Thes 2:9-12

The next scriptures tells us that the devil - "the god of this age" - has blinded folks, creating a veil through which they cannot see the gospel. It wouldn't be fair if this veil forever kept folks from being saved, would it?

But even if our gospel is veiled, it is veiled to those who are perishing, whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.

- 2 Cor 4:3-4

So how is it that some folks are not blinded - not under the veil? It is not simply a choice that they have made, since the next scripture tells us they must be drawn by the Father, and the second scripture following tells us that the veil is taken away when they turn to the Lord.

No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day. - John 6:44

Nevertheless when one turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty. But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord. - 2 Cor 3:16-18

There is much more to the subject of the veil, including the symbology of the veil in the temple, that was miraculously torn in half from top to bottom when Jesus died on the cross (Matt 27:51). And of course Jesus qualified to be the High Priest, replacing the Levitical high priest (Heb 7:1-19; 9:11-15). The latter had burned incense behind the veil of the temple (Lev 16:12), and we can read how the prayers of the saints reaching Heaven are likened to incense (Rev 5:8; 8:3-4). Teaching about a veil of blindness and deception upon the world is not part of prevailing Christian theology, much less that this will not prevent every human being from living again and having an excellent opportunity to be saved.

CONCLUSION

Much of Christianity believes that if one does not attain salvation in this life, it is all over. Accordingly, unless the unsaved are reached before they die, it is too late for them. And so it is that someone very ill may have died before they could be converted by a missionary who was delayed by a flat tire. Without a full understanding of God's plan, many sincere missionaries toil in a desperate effort to reach the unsaved. And they conclude that those who refuse to hear or accept their testimony have sealed their fate. But the plan of the true God, who is far more loving and determined than any missionary, does provide a full salvation opportunity for all. No flat tire will ever keep someone from being saved. This is not the only day of salvation, as is commonly taught. This and other deceptions will one day be canceled for everyone.

Every human being is facing a real dilemma if 1) human beings are born immortal with an immortal soul, and 2) every human being must be sent to either Heaven or Hell upon death. The dilemma begins when no one may opt out of being immortal. On its face, this does not seem fair, since no one decided to be born.

Next in this dilemma, those who never learned much, if anything, about the true God, must be tormented in Hell forever, with most of them forever wondering why. After all, most folks throughout history, and those alive today, are not saved, and have not seriously investigated Christianity to know if there is anything to it.

Further in this dilemma, for those who do happen to learn of prevailing Christianity, the only alternative to torment in Hell is to serve a being who either didn't care enough, or was incapable of providing everyone with a full opportunity for salvation. Additionally, they must serve a being who would torment billions of souls forever, rather than at least mercifully ending their lives. And then the saved must also live forever with the awareness that their lost friends and relatives continually suffer the torment of Hell without respite or hope.

Thankfully, the dilemma just described does not exist. The teachings of prevailing Christianity underestimate the love, mercy, and capabilities of God. The result is fear religion, pursued for purposes of "Hell insurance." True religion is love religion. God will do absolutely everything possible to educate and reach the heart of every soul.

Please seriously consider whether you think God could create any human being with more love, mercy, or kindness than Himself. This is not logically possible. So if you or I would provide a time and circumstance to reach those who were unsaved during this life, wouldn't God? If you or I would provide a means for aborted babies to have a life and an opportunity to choose eternal life, wouldn't God? If there is nothing you wouldn't do within your power for your own children, wouldn't God do still more for His children than you could do for yours? Of course He would!

If every soul went to either Heaven or Hell as a final destination upon death, then the disposition of all souls would be settled at the time the last human on earth died. If there is no work of salvation for Christ to do on earth, much less for over 1000 years, why should He bother to return at all? Why not just wait in Heaven for the last saved soul to arrive? And then what use would there be for the earth? But the Bible is full of scriptures about Christ's return. We read about the peaceful conditions created during that time; the resurrection of all the unsaved for their opportunity for salvation; and then the Father arriving after the Millennium with the New Jerusalem city to dwell with the saved forever - on the earth, not in Heaven.

If there is no hope for the unsaved dead, why would God resurrect them, only to kill them again? If they are not in the sleep of death, but rather being tormented in a place called Hell, being brought up from Hell briefly might be a nice respite from the heat. But then again, we read, "*But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished*" (Rev 20:5). So this tells us that they have been dead, not being tormented in Hell. When they rise in the second resurrection, it is not for a second chance, but rather their first full and fair chance for salvation. No loving God would eliminate any soul, much less torment them forever, simply for being ignorant. And no Christian should be so ignorant as to marginalize the depth of God's love by subscribing to the concept that God would decree unending torture for billions of lost souls.

When one presumes prevailing dogma to be correct, they encounter scriptural difficulties. For example, presuming that human beings have immortal souls will bring one into conflict with Paul's teachings about how mortality must put on immortality, plus other New Testament teachings about how eternal life is a gift that must be received from God - one is not born with it. If the unsaved must spend eternity in Hell, they must also be given the gift of eternal life in order to suffer for eternity, far beyond what Christ ever suffered.

So what scenarios are in harmony with all of the scriptures covered? Sure, there are different scenarios one could imagine that would work with just selected scriptures. But that is the problem with the many flavors of Christian teachings. Intellectual honesty demands looking at all the scriptures to see what one must conclude if all the scriptures are true.

The picture that emerges is this. When the physical body dies, there is no consciousness, but rather the spirit of that person is in a state similar to a deep sleep. That spirit is not an immortal spirit or soul, or otherwise the devil told Eve the truth, and God was the liar.

Every person who dies will find themselves alive again. Only those folks who are saved, and do not die a natural death before the return of Christ, might be able to say that they never died. But even if they never "sleep," their physical body will die when it is replaced with a spiritual one. The saved, both dead and alive, will become eternal beings in the first resurrection at the moment Jesus returns to this earth. That is when the 7th trumpet of the 7th seal is sounded, well after the tribulation of the 5th seal. Accordingly, everyone on earth, both saved and unsaved, whose lives are not taken, are left behind until Jesus' return.

The church is portrayed as the Bride of Christ. Christ marries His bride when He returns to this earth. It is the first order of business. If the saved have been living in Heaven, why must they wait for the wedding? If they remain there, what would they do while Christ is busy with His return mission to the earth? And if so, it will be a very long time, since He will be staying here, and then the Father will come to join everyone after the Millennium.

When unsaved folks find themselves alive again, which is the second resurrection, it will likely not be in a setting, time period, or type of body for which some may have hoped. Some will wonder why they are in neither Heaven or Hell. Hindus might first presume that they have been reincarnated according to their beliefs. Devoted atheists may have some initial anxiety.

Because death is like a deep sleep, the passage of time will not be sensed, and so a person who dies will have the impression that they were immediately resurrected. But no doubt everyone will be fully informed of their situation. Many will ask why. They will be told how the devil worked deception on the earth. They will learn that while allowing them to know both good and evil was permitted, God's plan is for them to now understand and have opportunity for salvation under excellent conditions. And it is such a great plan, with so much potential, that surely most all of them will gladly pursue being a permanent part of it.

Those who reject salvation will have their bodies and souls mercifully vaporized in a very hot lake of fire, so hot that it cannot be quenched. It must burn itself out, but its effect is everlasting. As we read earlier, God does not delight in the death of the wicked, since all human beings have the potential to be a part of His family forever. But God gives choice to all. There are some folks who believe every human being will be saved. That would be great! But all would have to choose God for there to be universal salvation. And there must have never been anyone who was fully converted, who then willfully chose to reject God. Time will tell.

Many folks believe their unsaved relatives and friends will be tortured in Hell forever. But this presentation has shown that such a terrible burden of sorrow is unwarranted. Those presently lost will have full opportunity to be saved. Because of our very merciful and loving God, many joyful reconciliations and joyful family reunions lie ahead. Praise God!

God does things big. It doesn't fit if only a relatively few individuals are saved, since the focus of the "earth project" is the salvation of human beings. God created us in His image, as part of a selfless vision to share His existence with us. God calls each person according to His timing and wisdom, and then we must voluntarily choose to respond to that calling and be transformed. God clearly allows each person to experience good and evil. When one has seen enough, and are no longer blinded or deceived, they may repent and choose good, becoming militantly devoted to that new way of life and the principles and virtues that underlie it.

God has clearly allowed the majority of human beings to die unsaved, without real understanding and without changed hearts. So we should expect to discover that God has a plan to reach those who die unsaved. That plan is not very hard to find in the Bible if one looks for it. Hopefully, this article has shed some light on that plan. How could anyone who comes to understand the wonderful and precious things of salvation, not have a change of heart? How could they not commit themselves to the countless joyful relationships and activities of eternity?

"For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" -Matt 16:26

This scripture indicates that being saved is a far greater experience than gaining the entire world. It seems all too apparent that most folks do not hold this perspective about life. It has not entered the realm of their meditations that there is a potential future for them which far exceeds the value of all this world could offer. To understand this is to have one's perspective about life dramatically altered. But instead, most folks live only for this age, and what they may accumulate. Yet the true riches are not material, but spiritual and eternal.

But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you. -Rom 8:11

We are obviously mortal at present. The only route to become immortal is through the enlightenment provided by God, and the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. And God so loves His children, that He has planned on how to reach every one of their hearts. God is more than fair. It is men who are unfair and unmerciful, concocting the idea of the unsaved being tormented forever for their sins and failure to be converted. They even imagine that the devil will be in charge of Hell, as though that rebel would do God's bidding in such an assignment.

The angels were not created as robots. They also had free choice, and some, under the leadership of Satan the devil, chose rebellion. It is the devil and those angels who chose to join his rebellion, who face God's judgment for a campaign of harm and deception against God and God's children. The vindictive enemy of God, filled with irrational hatred, will not win the battle for souls. The lopsided victory will belong to God. God will have His family saved!

So from permitting mankind to have choice in the Garden of Eden, and all the trouble that has resulted since, to providing a greatly improved and complete future opportunity for salvation to all, God's fairness and love is shown. It would not be fair to create beings who have no choice about living forever. It would also not be fair to judge them before they receive such healing and enlightenment as needed. They must be of sound mind and body; guided by the Holy Spirit; taught all they should know; with deception removed; and time to apply what they learn. In turn, their hearts can transform.

The Bible holy days are mostly ignored by prevailing Christianity, and often referred to as "Jewish." But they all foreshadowed the work of Christ. The spring holy days portray a small first harvest of souls; and the autumn holy days a later great harvest. The autumn holy days paint the picture of Christ returning; atonement being made for all peoples and nations; and then Christ gathering all peoples and nations to Himself. Certainly this includes all the unsaved who are given another life in the second resurrection. Even the weekly Sabbath day prophetically pictures the rest and peace which Jesus will provide after His return to this earth.

The Father and the Son have demonstrated their love for mankind. They have each sacrificed, and know the sad history of how their children have hurt one another. Yet they envision the final outcome - the healing and salvation of a huge family. God has not always been judging and punishing sinners, though apparently it was necessary at times. God knows a better time lies ahead to save most everyone. Note that when Jesus was here around 2000 years ago, He had a mission to save the world through the sacrifice of Himself. The Passover lamb had foreshadowed that sacrifice, and it was Jesus who was sacrificed on the Passover day.

"And if anyone hears My words and does not believe, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world." -John 12:47

...looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. -Heb 12:2

It is often asked, "Why does God allow bad things to happen to good people?" This question not only presumes that everyone is good, but that they are somehow entitled to never have anything bad happen to them. In any case, if God has no plan to reverse the suffering and heartache his children have experienced, then God is cruel and uncaring. Do note that the Father sacrificed His own Son for us, and that Jesus, the Son, willingly gave His life in that sacrifice. So God has also suffered. God is not without compassion for our suffering, and will comfort us.

Jesus' next mission here will be to make salvation available for all - the Judgment Day. And He then must judge every heart after they have had a full chance. If they weren't given a chance, all the unsaved dead could be raised up, judged, and resented to death in a single 24-hour day. There would also be no reason to wait 1000 years to raise up those unsaved billions. There would also be no need for a Millennium, during which time many souls will live and be saved, and during which time the earth must be readied for billions to be resurrected and live here for some time. Imagine the many tasks to prepare buildings and food supplies in advance of billions of folks being resurrected to physical life!

The Greek word translated **day** in the next scripture can also mean **period** or **age**. From the context, considering that Christ will be carrying out His mission for over 1000 years, it should be taken to mean **age**. In the next scripture, "He" is the Father, and Jesus is "the Man."

"...because He has appointed a day on which He will judge the world in righteousness by the Man whom He has ordained. He has given assurance of this to all by raising Him from the dead." -Acts 17:31

In the next scripture, notice how the description of a thousand year long day is immediately followed with the point that God desires all to come to repentance. When? The Judgment Day.

But, beloved, do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance.

-2 Pet 3:8-9

The Judgment Day lies ahead, and there is an important reason for it. God wants to save His children. The Judgment Day includes 1000 years of mankind living on a peaceful earth, and being taught and guided by the saints who were resurrected by Christ at its beginning. The earth must be readied during this time for billions of new folks to live on it. Then when the 1000 years are complete, the second resurrection continues the Judgment Day. All the unsaved dead of history are provided a time period to live again, and have a very decent opportunity to obtain salvation. These huge and important parts of the plan of God are yet future!

The Bible tells us about two ages - the Age of Man, and the Age of God - on the earth. Earth is the focus of God's plan. It all happens here. The meek inherit the earth, not Heaven. If all souls went off to either Heaven or Hell upon death, there would be no need for Christ to return, no work for Christ or the saints to do, and no reason for the large body of scripture describing the return of Christ, and the events and conditions on the earth after His return.

Otherwise, when and where were all these events to take place? Why would God call some folks from this age, and assign them to be priests and kings assisting Christ for 1000 years plus on the earth? Christ is not returning to grab the saved and take them back to Heaven. He is coming here to stay. And when He is done perfecting the Kingdom of God on earth, He turns it over to His Father, whose arrival is described in Revelation chapter 21. Revelation 22:19 has a warning not to take away from the prophecies of Revelation. One does so if they deny the clear scenario revealed in that book.

Scripture tells us there is a veil of deception upon most of mankind at this time. This will be lifted with the return of Christ, because God desires to save all of His children, if at all possible. And we should not underestimate God's desire and ability to reach every soul. When the unsaved rise in the second resurrection, they should be able to sing the words of the hymn "Amazing Grace," "I was lost, but now I'm found; I was blind, but now I see!" God's amazing grace not only saves some folks in this age, but will be there later to save those thought to be lost according to presently prevailing dogma.

Sleeping and waking are a daily reminders of death and resurrection, though perhaps few folks pick up on this. All that any human being has to do to learn the truth is to die sometime. As soon as one awakens from the sleep of death, the learning process will begin about the nature of the true God and the vision and plan of God. Everyone who dies will next live again on the earth, not in Heaven or Hell, which should be clear from what has been covered above.

So those who are not blessed to be judged as saved during their first physical life (Phase One), will have the opportunity during their next physical life (Phase Two). Because God loves all of His children, it is within God's heart and power to raise them up to a full opportunity for salvation, and facilitate their success. The true God is more loving, merciful, and capable than the common conception. God is a visionary with the love, courage, and ability to bring that vision to pass. Be very glad of it! Let this understanding energize you in your Christian walk! Praise God, and spread this wonderful truth!