

# What Does the Bible Say About Eternal Judgment?

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What happens to people after they die? What will happen to those who believe in God? What will happen to those who don't? What about people who have never heard of God? What about people who claim to "know God", but do evil? Do the things that we do in this life make any difference?

Yes they do! These questions are answered in the Bible. Many hundreds of Bible verses teach us about this subject. Unfortunately, they are not too often read—myths and fables are taught instead. But all of us should know the purpose for our life now, and understand how we will be judged for it later.

A few hours may be required to read this paper—which consists mostly of quotations from the Bible. But it may be one of the most significant few hours that you ever spend—whether you are just beginning to study the Bible or have studied it all your life. The important part of the message is contained in the first 40 pages. The appendices contain material for more extensive study and to answer specific questions.

I encourage you to read all of the Bible quotations as you go through—even if you are familiar with them. It is so easy for us to assume that we know what the Bible says on a certain subject—and then to read right over words that actually say something else. I have put some of the Bible words in boldface type to draw attention to words that are too often passed over too quickly. Because Bible translators have a variety of opinions on eternal judgment and related doctrines, their translations differ significantly on some related verses. I have chosen other translations when I believe they better represent the original Greek and Hebrew texts.

Be ready for some surprises. Many traditional Christian teachings come from the Bible, but some do not—they come from Greek philosophy or other religions. When studying a particular doctrine, it is always important to ask: "Where is this doctrine actually taught in the Bible?" Are there any scriptures that actually establish the doctrine? Or are there only scriptures that are compatible with the doctrine? In other words, can the doctrine be taught simply by reading scriptures? Or does someone have to teach the doctrine first and then read scriptures that go along with it, but do not teach it?

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Bible quotations are from the New International Version (NIV) unless otherwise noted.  
Other Bible abbreviations: Darby (The Darby Bible), KJV (King James Version), NAB (New American Bible), NASB (New American Standard Bible), NJB (New Jerusalem Bible), NKJV (New King James Version), NRSV (New Revised Standard Version), and YLT (Young's Literal Translation)

Words enclosed in brackets [] within Bible quotations are explanatory notes added by this author.

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## Facing the Issue

The idea of facing eternal judgment has never been easy for anyone—even for the bold and powerful. The powerful Roman governor Felix dealt with the problem this way.

As Paul discoursed on righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, Felix was afraid and said, “That’s enough for now! You may leave. When I find it convenient, I will send for you.” At the same time he was hoping that Paul would offer him a bribe (Acts 24:25-26).

Felix reacted in a manner common to human leaders who are over many people. He put the “judgment to come” out of his mind, and then went on to sin—in this case, to seek a bribe (Deut 16:19).

Is “eternal judgment” or the “judgment to come” something we should be concerned about in our daily living? Or is it more of a topic of discussion for learned theologians? How does the Bible classify it? **Hebrews 6** records six basic doctrines:

...the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God, Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment (Heb 6:1-2).

Nearly all Christian groups teach the first two of these doctrines. Most of them teach the second two doctrines; but not many teach the last two. How much do you know about the **resurrection of the dead** or **eternal judgment**? These doctrines go together—if there is no resurrection of the dead, then there is no *righteous* judgment for all (righteous judgment seldom occurs in this life). On the other hand, why raise people from the dead if there is no hope of changing them from a miserable life that so many have had before they died?

**The “Resurrection of the Dead” and “Eternal Judgment” are indeed important doctrines.** They tell us about what will happen to us for all eternity, and they tell us that what we do now *matters—it matters a lot!*

Unfortunately, not *all* the beliefs that most Christians commonly hold come from the Bible. Much Christian teaching does come from the Bible, so most Christians tend to trust their ministers. But that works against them in the

cases where non-Biblical teaching has crept into the churches.

Many people believe that *if* they are a member of a certain church, or *if* they believe a certain set of doctrines, *then* they will automatically be rewarded upon death. Some believe they are going to Heaven. Others believe they will be raised from the dead and immediately enter the Kingdom of God on earth. Still others believe other things.

Pastors and preachers often assure people that they are on the most direct path to eternal life by remaining a member of their group and continuing to give it generous financial support. This “buying your way to Heaven” approach may seem attractive to some, but the Bible simply does not teach it.

The Apostle Paul condemned the forming of factions around certain Bible teachers, even though the teachers were men of God (1Cor 1:11-15; 3:1-8). The Bible never mentions people being rewarded because they were a member of the “right group” or had “the right doctrines”. Even when Christ wrote letters to seven church groups (Rev 1:4,11 and chapters 2 & 3), He told each member to listen to each message to each church. Christ promised individual rewards “to him who overcomes” in each group.

Nearly all of the scriptures about judgment show that it is not “**who you know**” that counts, but “**who you are**” and “**what you do**”. At your time of judgment, the leader of your church group will **not be there to say** “he (or she) is in our group, no judgment is needed”.

“Now therefore, let the fear of the LORD be upon you; take care and do it, for there is no iniquity with the LORD our God, no partiality, nor taking of bribes” (2Chr 19:7).

God is perfectly fair in His judgment. He will not let someone else “get you off the hook” nor condemn you unjustly. “God is love” (1Jn 4:16). He makes a way for us to be forgiven from sin and judged favorably—but we have to do it His way. Let us learn what He says in the Bible. (If you have doubts about the Bible, please ask for our free article, *What is Christian Religion?*)

## Judgment for all Men

A common belief is: “**When good people die they go to Heaven, and when bad people die, they go to Hell.**” But does the Bible say

this? If so, which verses? Actually, there is no clear verse that states this. Rather, Hebrews 6, verses 1-2 speak of the fundamental doctrines of the “**resurrection of the dead**” and of “**eternal judgment**”. Many verses from many parts of the Bible tell us that all people are awaiting a resurrection and judgment. We will look at some of these clear “judgment” verses now, and then examine the Bible teaching on “Heaven” and “Hell” later:

For the Son of Man is going to come in his Father’s glory with his angels, and then he will reward each person according to what he has done (Matt 16:27).

And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment (Heb 9:27, NKJV).

In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead...(2Tim 4:1).

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Eccl 12:13-14).

The previous verse shows that even hidden things will be judged. **Unsolved murders and kidnappings** often make big headlines. Many remain unsolved—but God knows about them all. I have had things stolen from me, and you have probably had something stolen from you—not knowing who did it. God knows. We should not become bitter if people are not “brought to justice” at this time, because God will judge them later and their true motives will be uncovered.

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (1Cor 4:5).

I have confidence in you, in the Lord, that you will have no other mind; but he who troubles you shall bear his judgment, whoever he is (Gal 5:10, NKJV).

Judgment extends to every aspect of what we say and do:

But I [Christ] tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken (Matt 12:36).

## Doesn’t Jesus Save Christians from All Judgment?

**Before anyone stops reading** this paper because he/she says “it advocates salvation by works”, please finish this section. **We are not saved by our works!** We are saved by Christ’s works—by His sinless life, death and resurrection, and by His works in us today. We cannot do His work for Him, but we can resist His work in our lives and replace it with our own works. **But if we don’t see His works**—the fruits of His spirit in our lives—then we need to ask Him to show us where we need to change, and how to let Him do a greater work in our lives.

The basics of salvation are taught extensively by many Evangelical churches: **First**, all must recognize that they are sinners:

for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God (Rom 3:23),

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

For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls (1Pet 2:25).

**Second**, all must recognize that Christ came as a sacrifice for the sins of all people, and accept that sacrifice:

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a tree” (Gal 3:13).

Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set me free from the law of sin and death (Rom 8:1).

Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ (Rom 5:1).

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son (John 3:18).

Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life (John 5:24).

Blessed are they whose transgressions

are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord will never count against him (Rom 4:7).

If we read only the verses immediately above, we might conclude that those who have accepted Christ's sacrifice will not be judged at all. Indeed, His sacrifice is big enough to cover all sin—to deliver us from death and all judgment—but we sometimes get in His way. It further shows how we can reduce the judgment against ourselves now. Notice what Paul says:

So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God (Rom 14:12).

For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2Cor 5:10).

Christ made it very clear that He did not come to abolish the law, but to establish the law and make a way for Him to do good works through us.

I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me (Gal 2:20).

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill (Matt 5:16-17).

The law defines what sin is. "Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness" (1Jn 3:4). Christ offers forgiveness from our sins and a removal of the "curse of the law"—the death penalty—but He did not eliminate all laws and penalties. If He did, there would never be a need to judge anybody! Everyone could "accept Jesus" and then simply continue to live however he wanted. All penalties would be gone. When a person repents and asks for Christ's forgiveness of sin, this only covers his/her past sins. It is not a "blank check" to sin as much as one wants in the future. John, writing to believers, showed them that each must continually confess his or her own sin to receive forgiveness.

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness (1Jn 1:9).

I acknowledged my sin to You, And

my iniquity I have not hidden. I said, "I will confess my transgressions to the LORD," And You forgave the iniquity of my sin... (Pslm 32:5, NKJV).

The whole purpose of our repentance and Christ's forgiveness is so that we can live a good life as He lived:

[Christ] who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good (Titus 2:14).

First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds (Acts 26:20).

For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:8).

Christ **does** make His righteousness available to His followers, but even they do not always accept it. Have you ever seen someone who claims to be a Christian do something that the Bible clearly calls a sin? Have you ever seen Christians offend each other or get in a verbal "fight"? If you have known very many Christians very long, you probably have. Notice that the Apostles Paul and John still believed that even they sinned at times:

I know that nothing good lives in me, that is, in my sinful nature. For I have the desire to do what is good, but I cannot carry it out. For what I do is not the good I want to do; no, the evil I do not want to do—this I keep on doing (Rom 7:18).

If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us (1Jn 1:8).

It takes time for those who believe in Christ to "take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ" (2Cor 10:5), to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ" (2Pet 3:18), to "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt 5:48). They can sin in weakness as Paul mentioned above, or sin and not even know it.

King **David** of Israel was "**a man after God's own heart**" (Acts 13:22). Would it not be nice if God would say that about you? Or me?

Even though King David had the Holy Spirit (Pslm 51:11), he asked God about his “unknown sins”. He said, “Who can understand *his* errors? Cleanse me from secret *faults*” (Pslm 19:12, NKJV). David wanted to be as righteous as possible—he was not interested in trying to do “just enough” to obtain salvation.

At the opposite extreme, it is possible for some who know the truth to deliberately sin and disregard God. They will be judged—severely!

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, <sup>27</sup> but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God. <sup>28</sup> Anyone who rejected the law of Moses died without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. <sup>29</sup> How much more severely do you think a man deserves to be punished who has trampled the Son of God under foot, who has treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and who has insulted the Spirit of grace? <sup>30</sup> For we know him who said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” and again, “The Lord will judge his people.”

<sup>31</sup> It is a dreadful thing to fall into the hands of the living God (Heb 10:26-31).

What happens to a Christian who has some unknown or willful sin? How much is too much? What will God do about it? All of these questions will be solved by Christ’s righteous judgment, either in this life, or after a resurrection in the future.

### How Was David Delivered From Sin?

Before we study more scriptures on judgment, we need to understand something about the forgiveness of sin. People can have their sins forgiven without the **consequences** of their sins being removed. For example, a father may abandon his family, then repent of the sin when he is old—but his children will always remember the difficulties associated with “growing up without a dad”. A woman may crash into you with her car and cause great injury and repent before God, but you may not be instantly healed of your injury. Repentant persons can do things to try to make up for their sin, but they cannot “undo” the problem completely—and most of the time, God does not “undo” it either.

David was a man with the Holy Spirit (Pslm 51:11; Mark 12:36). He has been promised

eternal life by God (Jer 30:9; Ezk 37:25; Hos 3:5—all of these verses were written after David was dead). He is listed as one of the “faithful” in Hebrews 11 (Heb 11:1-3,32). But David sinned. He committed adultery with Bathsheba, then had her husband, Uriah, killed (2Sam 11). Such sins deserved the death penalty (Lev 20:10; 24:17). But God “put away David’s sin (see verse 13, below). Please read this important account of David’s **forgiveness** and **judgment**. Notice how God sent a prophet to tell David a parable so David could “see himself” and “judge himself”.

<sup>1</sup> The LORD sent Nathan [the prophet] to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup> The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, <sup>3</sup> but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him. <sup>4</sup> “Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.” <sup>5</sup> David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! <sup>6</sup> He must pay for that lamb four times over [David knew God’s judgments—Ex 22:1], because he did such a thing and had no pity.” <sup>7</sup> Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. <sup>8</sup> I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you the house of Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. <sup>9</sup> Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. <sup>10</sup> Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’ <sup>11</sup> “This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you. Before your very eyes I

will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will lie with your wives in broad daylight. <sup>12</sup>You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.” <sup>13</sup> Then David said to Nathan, “[have sinned against the LORD.” Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. <sup>14</sup> But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the LORD show utter contempt, the son born to you will die” (2Sam 12:1-14)

The Bible goes on to record the **fourfold** judgment (verse 6) against David. David’s life was spared, but the baby born to Bathsheba died. Later, David’s firstborn son, Amnon, raped his half-sister, Tamar, then was killed by her full brother Absalom (2Sam 13). Later Absalom tried to make himself king, did “lie with his father’s wives” as prophesied above, and was killed by David’s general, Joab (2Sam 15-18). When David was on his deathbed, another son, Adonijah, tried to make himself king and later had to be executed by Solomon, the King whom God chose (1Kngs 1-2).

All of this happened because of a sin that God “took away”. David’s punishment is not simply an “Old Testament” response from God. Even in the New Testament, God sometimes forgave sins while leaving a judgment in place. The apostle Paul started out persecuting the Church (Acts 8:1-4; 9:1-2). God spoke to him and told him that he was wrong and must repent and serve Him. God told Ananias to tell Paul, “I will show him how much he must suffer for my name” (Acts 9:16). Paul suffered greatly (2Cor 11:23-28). Paul understood it was linked to what he did: “For I am the least of the apostles and do not even deserve to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God” (1Cor 15:9).

God is love. He is also just. In His infinite wisdom, He knows that He cannot simply ignore all sin, but must clearly show us that sin has consequences.

### **Is David in Heaven?**

There is another lesson we need to learn from David’s life. We already saw several Bible verses showing he was a man of God. But is he in Heaven now?

<sup>29</sup> Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. <sup>30</sup> But he was a

prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup> Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. <sup>32</sup> God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. <sup>33</sup> Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, “The Lord said to my Lord: ‘Sit at my right hand <sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.’” <sup>36</sup> Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ (Acts 2:29-36).

David is not in “Heaven”, but in the grave awaiting a resurrection. Even though it is a common Christian belief, **the Bible does not teach that people go immediately to Heaven when they die!**

Abraham and Moses will also be in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:28). But what does the Bible say happened to Abraham and Moses?

Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people (Gen 25:8).

On that same day the LORD told Moses, ... There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people (Deut 32:48,50).

The expression “gathered to his people” refers to the literal Hebrew burial practice: Bodies of the dead were lain in tombs. When the next member of a family died, all that was usually left of the previous member was bones, were which gathered up and placed in a corner with bones of previous ancestors—a literal “gathering to his people”.

There is no mention of these great men of the Bible, “going to Heaven”, going to “meet their maker” or anything of the sort. All of the “faithful” mentioned in Hebrews 11 “all died in faith, **not** having received the promises” (v 13). They suffered “so that they might gain a better resurrection” (v 35). This resurrection has not occurred yet, but occurs at the Return of Christ to this earth:

<sup>13</sup> Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to

grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

<sup>14</sup> We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him.

<sup>15</sup> According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.<sup>16</sup> For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. <sup>17</sup> After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1Thes 4:13-17).

The Apostles, in their writings frequently compared death to sleep (1Cor 11:30; 15:6,18,51; Eph 5:14; 2Pet 3:4). During sleep, a person still exists, but they are not conscious. Where did they get this idea? Directly from Christ!

<sup>11</sup> After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." <sup>12</sup> His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." <sup>13</sup> Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. <sup>14</sup> So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, <sup>15</sup> and for your sake I am glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ... <sup>23</sup> Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." <sup>24</sup> Martha answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:11-15, 23-24).

Jesus used this analogy on another occasion, and told us a little more about what happens when a person rises from the dead.

<sup>49</sup> While Jesus was still speaking, someone came from the house of Jairus, the synagogue ruler. "Your daughter is dead," he said. "Don't bother the teacher any more." <sup>50</sup> Hearing this, Jesus said to Jairus, "Don't be afraid; just believe, and she will be healed." <sup>51</sup> When he arrived at the house of Jairus, he did not let anyone go in with him except Peter, John and James, and the child's father and mother. <sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, all the people were wailing and mourning for her. "Stop wailing," Jesus said. "She is not dead but asleep." <sup>53</sup> They laughed at him, knowing that she was dead. <sup>54</sup> But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" <sup>55</sup> Her spirit returned, and

at once she stood up. Then Jesus told them to give her something to eat (Luke 8:49-55).

The last verse, above, says that "her spirit returned". Our bodies are made of the same stuff as the dust of the ground. "For dust you are and to dust you will return" (Gen 3:29). Modern biology confirms this—yet still cannot figure out exactly what makes living things "live".

The LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being (Gen 2:7).

The Greek word for "spirit" is *pneuma*, which means "air" (from which we get our word "pneumatic"). The analogy between breath and spirit is made frequently in the Bible. God added the "breath of life"—a spiritual component—to make Adam a living being. It was that spirit or breath that had to be restored to the little girl so she could live.

But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. (Job 32:8)

For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the man's spirit within him? In the same way no one knows the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God (1Cor 2:11).

Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it (Eccl 12:7, NKJV).

These verses show that a body with a spirit is required for human life—that the spirit comes from God and returns to him at death. So how does Christ's analogy of sleep fit in with this? Obviously, a dead body does not sleep—it decays and is "recycled" by other living things. So it must be the spirit that sleeps. Is that what the Bible says?

Do not trust in princes, In mortal man, in whom there is no salvation. His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish (Pslm 146:3-4, NASB).

Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom (Eccl 9:10).

Turn, O LORD, and deliver me; save me because of your unfailling love. No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? (Pslm 6:4-5.)



"Look," he said, "I see heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."... While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep (Acts 7:56,59-60).

Steven was granted miraculous vision into Heaven before he died. But he did not say, "I'll be there in a minute!" He said his "spirit" would go and that he "fell asleep". Even when Jesus died, did He go immediately to Heaven?

For as Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of a huge fish, so the Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth" (Matt 12:40).

Jesus said [to Mary, shortly after His resurrection], "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father... (John 20:17).

Many scriptures show us that Jesus is *now* in Heaven with the Father and with many other spiritual beings. But does the Bible say that the other apostles and brethren are with him there? Do the expressions "gone to be with the Lord" or "gone to Heaven" appear in the Bible? James the brother of John was killed fairly early in the book of Acts (Acts 12:2), yet there is no reference to him being in Heaven or to any other believer dying and "going to see James". Rather, there are plain biblical statements:

No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven (John 3:13, NKJV).

For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "The Lord said to my Lord: 'Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet'" (Acts 2:34-35).

In spite of these many plain statements in the Bible showing that believers who are dead "sleep" until the resurrection, the teaching that "good people go to Heaven when they die" has so inundated us that the same scriptures are assumed to prove this doctrine even though they do not. The most common scriptures misused in this manner are:

If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body (Phlp 1:22-24).

We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord (2Cor 5:8, NKJV).

So is Paul saying that if people die they go immediately to Heaven? No! He is telling the story from his personal perspective? If he were to die, the next thing he would know is being "present with the Lord". As a child, I remember wanting to go to sleep early the night before a family vacation. Why? Because to be asleep is to be awake the next morning—from my perspective. But would my parents, who stayed up packing while I slept, say that I am already on the trip? No. I was simply asleep awaiting the event, just like the dead are awaiting the return of Christ, their resurrection and judgment. Let us continue in 2 Corinthians 5 (quoted above) and read the **very next two verses**:

Therefore we make it our aim, whether present or absent, to be well pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad (2Cor 5:9-10).

Paul clearly knows that he will not be with Christ until he is judged. This paper contains numerous scriptures showing that the judgment occurs just after the resurrection. Is it possible that the resurrection has already happened? According to Paul, that was a *false doctrine*:

<sup>19</sup> The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed. <sup>20</sup> For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope <sup>21</sup> that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. <sup>24</sup> For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what he already has? <sup>25</sup> But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently (Rom 8:19-25.)

Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have wandered away from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken

place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm, sealed with this inscription: "The Lord knows those who are his," and, "Everyone who confesses the name of the Lord must turn away from wickedness" (2Tim 2:17-19).

There are other scriptures that are sometimes accidentally assumed to support the idea that the dead believers are in Heaven. Most of the common ones are covered in the appendix titled *Are There "Go To Heaven" Verses?*

### What About Hell?

So if the Bible does not teach that we go to Heaven at death, what about the "other place"—Hell? Do some people go there? Does it make sense that the righteous are "asleep" awaiting a resurrection and a judgment, while the evil go immediately to Hell where they can still "keep up" with what is happening on earth—however uncomfortable they might be?

The concept of "Hell" believed by many Christians is based on Dante Alighieri's work, *The Inferno*, published in 1314 A.D. He described a place where people were tormented in all kinds of bizarre ways for all eternity. Dante's Hell had many levels, each progressively worse as one progressed lower and lower—very similar to *Dungeons and Dragons* and many other mystical or occult games of today. Many of Dante's ideas were borrowed from Greek mythology and other non-Christian teachings. There is no chapter or set of verses in the Bible that describes anything close to Dante's eternal torture chambers.

In many places, the Bible clearly states that eternal death is the punishment for those who insist upon being wicked:

<sup>1</sup> Surely the day is coming; it will burn like a furnace. All the arrogant and every evildoer will be stubble, and that day that is coming will set them on fire," says the LORD Almighty. "Not a root or a branch will be left to them. <sup>2</sup> But for you who revere my name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings. And you will go out and leap like calves released from the stall. <sup>3</sup> Then you will trample down the wicked; they will be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day when I do these things," says the LORD Almighty (Mal 4:1-3).

For the wages of sin is death, but the

gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom 6:23).

Yet the word "Hell" is in the Bible, along with other words like "lake of fire" and "eternal fire". How do we reconcile these scriptures?

First, it is important to realize that fire is used as a **symbol** of trial and judgment in the Bible:

This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, 'They are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God'" (Zech 13:9).

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you (1Pet 4:12, NKJV).

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work (1Cor 3:11-13).

It should be evident in the above three verses that the fire represents a trial or testing of people. This is something that God frequently does. (See later section *The Purpose of God* on page 37.) If a believer starts a ministry, God does not usually set the believer or the ministries physically on fire just to see what will happen. Nor does He "send believers to Hell" to judge their spiritual work. See the appendix entitled *Fire is a Symbol of Judgment* for many more scriptures. Even the very last fire mentioned in the Bible is clearly a symbol of "final death"—the second death:

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death (Rev 21:8).

If we see fire as a symbol for judgment (not a representation of Dante's *Inferno*), then it is easier to understand the rest of the Bible. Just as we do not find any Bible references to believers who are "already in Heaven" or "who have gone to be with Jesus", we do not find any references to any bad person who has "gone to Hell" or who is "suffering for all eternity". We

do find references to those who will suffer in the future.

The King James Bible makes the study of “Hell” somewhat difficult because it took three completely separate New Testament Greek words with different meanings and translated all of them “Hell”. By reading only the King James Bible, one cannot tell which original word was in a verse and what it really means. The NKJV, RSV, NRSV and most literal translations do a much better job of translating different original Greek words to different English words.

The three words translated “Hell” are *hades* (the grave or the Greek realm of the dead), *Gehenna* (a burning garbage dump) and *tartarus* (a place where fallen angels are confined). The Bible makes no mention of people in *tartarus* and it is only used one time. *Hades* is used 11 times and *Gehenna* is used 12 times. Neither of these two words would have conveyed the meaning of Dante’s *Inferno* to the Greeks and Jews who read the original New Testament.

Other words in the New Testament describe places or states of punishment: “everlasting fire” (or “age-lasting fire”), “the lake of fire”, “outer darkness”, “the Abyss”, etc. Some verses mention a place where there will be “weeping and gnashing of teeth”. The common thread of all of these places (except *tartarus*, which is a current holding place for fallen angels) is that they seem to be used in connection with the future resurrection and judgment. There is never a clear case where people are said to be in such a state now. The Old Testament spells out many different kinds of physical punishments and corrections. Why should we expect that God would work any differently in the resurrection and judgment of the world? Is it possible that there are multiple kinds of correction for sinners after they are raised from the dead?

For a rather lengthy study of the many verses that relate to a place of punishment, see the appendices beginning with *Verses Mentioning “Hell”*. From a personal standpoint, the punishment of wicked people matters little to those who are asking Christ to make them righteous. The Bible may not tell us exactly what will happen to every kind of unrepentant sinner. But we can know that God is just in His judgments and that He takes no delight in the death of the wicked.

And I heard the altar respond: “Yes,

Lord God Almighty, true and just are your judgments” (Rev 16:7).

Say to them, ‘As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live (Ezk 33:11).

We can also be assured that God will eventually eliminate sorrow and death:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev 21:3-4).

### **Judgment of all Nations Historically**

Before getting into the many Bible verses concerning the resurrections and judgment, we must take a step back and ask: “With whom is God working?” We must never forget that God created all people “in His image”; “male and female he created them” (Gen 1:27). God cares for all the billions of people who have lived, not just Christians and Israelites. While the majority of the Bible is about the nation of Israel and the followers of Christ, it is very clear that God is concerned about and judges nations that have little to do with either. Notice the following:

<sup>5</sup> The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. <sup>6</sup> The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. <sup>7</sup> So the LORD said, “I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them.” <sup>8</sup> But Noah found favor in the eyes of the LORD (Gen 6:5-8).

<sup>20</sup> Then the LORD said, “The outcry against Sodom and Gomorrah is so great and their sin so grievous <sup>21</sup> that I will go down and see if what they have done is as bad as the outcry that has reached me. If not, I will know.” <sup>22</sup> The men turned away and went toward Sodom, but Abraham remained standing before the LORD. <sup>23</sup> Then Abraham approached him and said: “Will you sweep away the righteous

with the wicked? <sup>24</sup> What if there are fifty righteous people in the city? Will you really sweep it away and not spare the place for the sake of the fifty righteous people in it? <sup>25</sup> Far be it from you to do such a thing—to kill the righteous with the wicked, treating the righteous and the wicked alike. Far be it from you! Will not the Judge of all the earth do right?" <sup>26</sup> The LORD said, "If I find fifty righteous people in the city of Sodom, I will spare the whole place for their sake" (Gen 18:20-26).

God eventually agreed not to destroy the city if there were 10 righteous men there (Gen 18:32). God was concerned about justice with these sinning people who apparently knew very little about Him. (There were not 10 righteous men, so God destroyed the cities.)

Sometimes God works with other nations over a long period of time. He allowed the nation of the Amorites to go on sinning for hundreds of years before he gave their land to the nation of Israel. Notice:

In the fourth generation your [Abraham's] descendants will come back here [Israel], for the sin of the Amorites has not yet reached its full measure (Gen 15:16).

Many years later, this prophecy was fulfilled—the sin of the Amorites was full and they were punished:

And the LORD drove out before us all the nations, including the Amorites, who lived in the land. We too will serve the LORD, because he is our God" (Josh 24:18).

Another famous example of God judging a nation—and the nation listening—is Jonah and the people of Nineveh. The story of Jonah running away and being swallowed by a great fish is well known. But what did he preach to Nineveh? Did he tell them to come to Israel's temple to worship? Did he tell them to begin keeping the Sabbath and other Old Testament laws? It seems that there was little argument about what law was to be followed—the problem was that the Ninevites were doing what they of themselves knew to be bad. Notice:

<sup>4</sup> On the first day, Jonah started into the city. He proclaimed: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned." <sup>5</sup> The Ninevites believed God. They declared a fast, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. <sup>6</sup> When the news reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his

royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. <sup>7</sup> Then he issued a proclamation in Nineveh: "By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let any man or beast, herd or flock, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. <sup>8</sup> But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their violence. <sup>9</sup> Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish." <sup>10</sup> When God saw what they did and how they turned from their evil ways, he had compassion and did not bring upon them the destruction he had threatened (Jonah 3:4-10).

God could see that these people were serious about turning from violence and wickedness. There is no record that Jonah preached any significant part of the Old Testament to them. If he had, the Ninevites would have known not to make their animals abstain from food and water—the Bible never teaches this practice.

One final example of God dealing with a non-Israelite nation is found in Jeremiah 35. The Rechabites were not descended from Israel, but were blessed with continuing descendants throughout history:

<sup>12</sup> Then came the word of the LORD to Jeremiah, saying, <sup>13</sup> "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Go and tell the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, "Will you not receive instruction to obey My words?" says the LORD. <sup>14</sup> The words of Jonadab the son of Rechab, which he commanded his sons, not to drink wine, are performed; for to this day they drink none, and obey their father's commandment. But although I have spoken to you, rising early and speaking, you did not obey Me. <sup>15</sup> I have also sent to you all My servants the prophets, rising up early and sending them, saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way, amend your doings, and do not go after other gods to serve them; then you will dwell in the land which I have given you and your fathers.' But you have not inclined your ear, nor obeyed Me. <sup>16</sup> Surely the sons of Jonadab the son of Rechab have performed the commandment of their father, which he commanded them, but this people has not obeyed Me.'" <sup>17</sup> Therefore thus says the LORD

God of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Behold, I will bring on Judah and on all the inhabitants of Jerusalem all the doom that I have pronounced against them; because I have spoken to them but they have not heard, and I have called to them but they have not answered.'" <sup>18</sup> And Jeremiah said to the house of the Rechabites, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: 'Because you have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab your father, and kept all his precepts and done according to all that he commanded you, <sup>19</sup>therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: "Jonadab the son of Rechab shall not lack a man to stand before Me forever"" (Jer 35:12-19,NKJV).

Finally, when Christ was not being heeded in some of the cities of Israel, He said that the Gentile (non-Israelite) cities of Tyre, Sidon and Sodom would fare better than these Israelite people who refused to respond to the great miracles of Christ:

<sup>20</sup> Then Jesus began to denounce the cities in which most of his miracles had been performed, because they did not repent. <sup>21</sup> "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you" (Matt 11:20-24).

There are other examples of God dealing with peoples that are not Israel or His Church. As we shall see, He loves them all and judges them by what they know to be right to do.

## **Two Resurrections and Judgments**

The following four sections of the Bible clearly describe two resurrections. Some give more detail than others, but they are all consistent with each other. You can search the Bible from Genesis to Revelation and find no comparably clear or detailed text supporting the idea that the dead go to Heaven or Hell at death.

"But this I confess to you, that according

to the Way which they call a sect, so I worship the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the Law and in the Prophets. "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 24:14-15, NKJV).

<sup>21</sup> For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. <sup>22</sup> For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, <sup>23</sup> in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. <sup>24</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life. <sup>25</sup> Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live [<sup>1st</sup> resurrection].

<sup>26</sup> For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; <sup>27</sup> and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. <sup>28</sup> Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice [<sup>2nd</sup> resurrection], <sup>29</sup> and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. <sup>30</sup> I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me (John 5:21-30, NASB).

<sup>4</sup> I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. <sup>5</sup> (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. <sup>6</sup> Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years. <sup>7</sup> When

the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison<sup>8</sup> and will go out to deceive the nations in the four corners of the earth—Gog and Magog—to gather them for battle. In number they are like the sand on the seashore.<sup>9</sup> They marched across the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of God's people, the city he loves. But fire came down from heaven and devoured them.<sup>10</sup> And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them.<sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.<sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done (Rev 20:4-13).

Revelation 20:5 clearly shows that there will be 1000 years between the first and second resurrections. Christ and those in the first resurrection will rule. This thousand years is frequently referred to as "the Millennium" by Bible students, though that word never appears in the Bible. There are many other biblical prophecies that appear to refer to this time, including whole chapters of the Old Testament (Isa 2; 11; 61; Mic 4; etc). It appears that everyone will be offered salvation during this time, and righteously judged by Christ. However, a study of the Millennium exceeds the scope of this paper and only one paragraph will be devoted to it here:

For hundreds of years, Bible students and would-be prophets have predicted the soon-coming return of Christ to the earth to set up His Millennial Kingdom (the Millennium). As God created the earth in six days and rested the seventh, many people have foreseen 6000 years of man's rule (4000 years before Christ and 2000 after) and a seventh 1000 years of Christ's rule. If we calculate from Christ's birth, the time is already past. If we calculate from the beginning of His ministry or from His death, we have 20 to

30 years left. But the Bible does not say this for a certainty. Too many religious groups have placed too much emphasis on the timing of prophecy and the promise to members of the soon return of Christ and being in His Millennial Kingdom. **It would have been much better if they had placed more emphasis on their daily actions for all of which they will all be judged.** Only a small fraction of all the people who have been born thus far will have a chance to live into Christ's Millennial Kingdom. They all need to be concerned with their present way of life, and the first and second resurrections.

Before we leave the subject of the two resurrections, we might answer one question that was being raised during Paul's time:

But someone may ask, "How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?" (1Cor 15:35.)

Since all of those in the first resurrection have already be judged worthy of eternal life (the second death has no power over them), they will be raised with a spiritual body that cannot die:

So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable... it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body... (1Cor 15:42,44).

But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection (Luke 20:35-36).

The Bible also contains many accounts of individuals who were **raised again to physical life** (A widow's son, 1Kngs 17:21; The son of the Shunamite woman, 2Kngs 4:34; A man thrown into Elisha's tomb, 2Kngs 13:21; A little girl, Mark 5:41; A young man in a coffin, Luke 7:14; Lazarus, John 11:43; Dorcas, Acts 9:40; Eutychus, Acts 20:10). These people continued to live a normal physical life and at some time later, died again. When Christ rose from the dead, a large number of other righteous people rose, too:

The tombs broke open and the bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs, and after Jesus' resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many people (Matt 27:52-53).

The book of Ezekiel contains a very graphic

description of the second resurrection. Bones are first reassembled into bodies, then God adds back the breath—symbolizing the spirit—the non-physical component that makes physical things live.

<sup>1</sup> The hand of the LORD was upon me, and he brought me out by the Spirit of the LORD and set me in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. <sup>2</sup> He led me back and forth among them, and I saw a great many bones on the floor of the valley, bones that were very dry. <sup>3</sup> He asked me, "Son of man, can these bones live?" I said, "O Sovereign LORD, you alone know." <sup>4</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to these bones and say to them, 'Dry bones, hear the word of the LORD! <sup>5</sup> This is what the Sovereign LORD says to these bones: I will make breath enter you, and you will come to life. <sup>6</sup> I will attach tendons to you and make flesh come upon you and cover you with skin; I will put breath in you, and you will come to life. Then you will know that I am the LORD.'" <sup>7</sup> So I prophesied as I was commanded. And as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. <sup>8</sup> I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them. <sup>9</sup> Then he said to me, "Prophesy to the breath; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, 'This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe into these slain, that they may live.'" <sup>10</sup> So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army (Ezk 37:1-10).

A lot of questions can be asked about resurrections: Will people be raised at the same age as when they died? What if they were old and feeble? Will they be made out of the very same molecules that they were originally made from, or will they be different? What happens to people whose molecules were destroyed by a nuclear explosion?

Medical science has shown that people can receive blood, limb or organ transplants and still be "the same person". Of course God can do a perfect job of recreating the exact DNA and cell structure of a person—not like the crude transplants of medical science. Recovering one's same molecules is unnecessary and impossible. Many people have died and been buried, had a tree's roots absorb some of their molecules, had those molecules end up in the fruit of the tree and

had someone else eat the fruit of the tree. Yes, many people have shared molecules throughout history. If we can accept that God created the universe and created life from dirt, cannot we accept that He can effectively re-create a trillion people so they will "feel like themselves"? If we compare these people to the vastness of the universe, they are less than a speck of dust.

### **First Resurrection**

The Bible uses the term "first resurrection" in Revelation 20, verses 5 and 6:

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Rev 20:4-6).

Even though the words "first resurrection" do not appear elsewhere in the Bible, there are many other passages that talk about a resurrection with characteristics like the "first resurrection" described above:

1. The people in it were redeemed by Christ.
2. They have followed Him diligently.
3. They will reign with Christ on Earth, serving as kings and priests.
4. They cannot die—will be given Eternal life.

And they sang a new song, saying: "You [Christ] are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us [believers] to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth." (Rev 5:9-10)

<sup>3</sup> Our God comes and will not be silent; a fire devours before him, and around him a tempest rages. <sup>4</sup> He summons the heavens above, and the earth, that he may judge his

people: <sup>5</sup> "Gather to me my consecrated ones, who made a covenant with me by sacrifice." [Christ's sacrifice] <sup>6</sup> And the heavens proclaim his righteousness, for God himself is judge. Selah (Pslm 50:3-6).

Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous" (Luke 14:12-14).

Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. But those who are considered worthy of taking part in that age and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection (Luke 20:34).

<sup>1</sup> Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. <sup>2</sup> And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. <sup>3</sup> And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. <sup>4</sup> These are those who did not defile themselves with women [probably a symbol for false churches], for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. <sup>5</sup> No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (Rev 14:1-5).

These 144,000 certainly seem to have the characteristics of those in the first resurrection. It is possible that only 144,000 will be in the first resurrection, but this scripture does not say that—it just says that no others could learn a certain song. Revelation 7 also mentions 144,000 plus a "great multitude". This writer is not sure which of these groups overlap—if any.

*(Many modern-day writings on the book of Revelation will claim to tell you exactly who the*

*144,000 are—but this writer believes it is more important to do what God tells us to do than it is to try to figure out exactly what God is doing. Thousands have tried to figure out who the 144,000 are, and have been wrong. Many who trusted in those prophetic interpretations were devastated. But those who have done good works through the power of Christ will not be disappointed—those works will be remembered in the judgment.)*

<sup>15</sup> The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in heaven, which said: "The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ, and he will reign for ever and ever." <sup>16</sup> And the twenty-four elders, who were seated on their thrones before God, fell on their faces and worshiped God, <sup>17</sup> saying: "We give thanks to you, Lord God Almighty, the One who is and who was, because you have taken your great power and have begun to reign. <sup>18</sup> The nations were angry; and your wrath has come. The time has come for judging the dead, and for rewarding your servants the prophets and your saints and those who reverence your name, both small and great—and for destroying those who destroy the earth." (Rev 11:15-18)

<sup>42</sup> So will it be with the resurrection of the dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; <sup>43</sup> it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; <sup>44</sup> it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. <sup>45</sup> So it is written: "The first man Adam became a living being"; the last Adam, a life-giving spirit. <sup>46</sup> The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual. <sup>47</sup> The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. <sup>48</sup> As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven. <sup>49</sup> And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven. <sup>50</sup> I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. <sup>51</sup> Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—<sup>52</sup> in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be



raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

<sup>53</sup>For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality.

<sup>54</sup>When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory." <sup>55</sup>"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" <sup>56</sup>The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. <sup>57</sup>But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. <sup>58</sup>Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain (1Cor 15:42-58).

From these scriptures, the nature of the first resurrection is fairly clear. Compare these and the many other resurrection scriptures to all of the scriptures you can find that might be interpreted as saying "believers go to Heaven when they die". **There is no comparison.** The Bible teaches that the righteous dead are dead—they are awaiting a resurrection. The few scriptures used to teach that "the righteous go to Heaven" are mostly misunderstood—they do not teach that doctrine idea. The Greek philosopher Plato taught that each person has an "immortal soul" which continues to function after death. Other pagan religions teach that the dead are in a conscious state and still trying to have an effect on the present world (some good, some bad). But the Bible clearly teaches that the hope of the righteous is the first resurrection.

The ways in which believers are judged and whether or not they will be in the first resurrection is covered in detail beginning in the section *Judgment for Believers: Both Now and Later* on page 26. First, let us study the "second resurrection"

### Second Resurrection

The term "second resurrection" never actually appears in the Bible, but there clearly is another resurrection after the "first resurrection", so normal mathematical logic would designate the next resurrection as the "second resurrection". If the "second resurrection" occurs in multiple phases or parts, these parts might be called the "second", "third" and "forth" resurrections. However, the Bible does not clearly state that

there are more than two resurrections, so I use the terms "first" and "second". Jesus and various other individuals were miraculously raised from the dead *before* the biblical "first resurrection" (Rev 20:5-6), so these resurrections are not numbered—especially since only a very few people had opportunity to be in them, anyway.

<sup>11</sup> Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. <sup>12</sup> And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. <sup>13</sup> The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. <sup>14</sup> Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. <sup>15</sup> If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:11-15).

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about these men: "See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones to judge everyone, and to convict all the ungodly of all the ungodly acts they have done in the ungodly way, and of all the harsh words ungodly sinners have spoken against him" (Jude 1:14-15).

The above verses clearly show that the world will be judged at the second resurrection, and that those who will not follow God will die the second death. These scriptures do not indicate how long this process will take. Keep reading—we will find verses that address that question. A more pressing question might be: "How will God judge people who have never heard about God, Christ or the Bible?"

<sup>11</sup> For there is no partiality with God.

<sup>12</sup> For as many as have sinned without law will also perish without law, and as many as have sinned in the law will be judged by the law <sup>13</sup> (for not the hearers of the law are just in the sight of God, but the doers of the law will be justified; <sup>14</sup> for when Gentiles, who do not have the law, by nature do the things in the law, these, although not having the law, are a law to themselves, <sup>15</sup> who show the work of the law written in their hearts, their

conscience also bearing witness, and between themselves their thoughts accusing or else excusing them)<sup>16</sup> in the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ, according to my gospel (Rom 2:11-16).

The above scripture is a direct explanation of how God judges people. It contains an incredible amount of information in a small place. Notice the following points contained in the above:

1. God is fair. He is not partial to those who have His law or to those who do not.
2. If people sin, not having His law, they perish. “The wages of sin is death” (Rom 6:23). But they are not judged by the law, they will be judged by their own conscience—whether or not they did what they knew to be right and whether or not they treated others as they would like to be treated. (Slick, evil people who convince others that they are “good” will not fare well in the judgment.)
3. To the extent that people do the things that are in God’s law, they benefit. In several times in the Bible that God has destroyed whole cities or nations (men, women and children), it has been because they were totally evil (Gen 6:5-7; Deut 2:24-34 cf. 1Kngs 21:26, etc.). Apparently, God destroys the children with the parents in these situations to terminate the ongoing evil practices that the children would begin to learn at birth. God will work with these children in the resurrection.
4. Those who know God’s law will be judged by it—they cannot be judged by some other standard when they know His truth.
5. There is a day coming when God will judge everything—even that which is secret.

**Judgment is real!** It is not just a “something will happen someday” idea. The apostles frequently wrote about judgment as the solution to day-to-day problems:

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God’s wrath, for it is written: “It is mine to avenge; I will repay,” says the Lord (Rom 12:19).

Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works (2Tim 4:14, NKJV).

They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1Pet 4:4-5).

Even though the second resurrection and associated judgment will affect nearly everyone who has ever lived, does everyone believe in it? No. Many people do not want to be responsible for their actions in this life—especially ones which they have “gotten away with”. But a surprising number of people, who are not believers, are still interested in this topic. Notice what Paul said to a group of Greek philosophers:

When they heard about the resurrection of the dead, some of them sneered, but others said, “We want to hear you again on this subject” (Acts 17:32).

Not every scripture about the second resurrection gives every possible detail. When Christ returns, He begins to rule and judge. That judgment continues for 1000 years and then the second resurrection occurs (Rev 20). In the two Bible quotes, below, there is no distinction made between the judgment in the Millennial Kingdom when Christ returns and that judgment that occurs at the resurrection afterward.

<sup>5</sup> Which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; <sup>6</sup> since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, <sup>7</sup> and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, <sup>10</sup> 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 (2Thes 1:5-10).

Verse 8, above, sounds like people will be punished simply for not knowing about God. The Greek word for “know” there is *eido* and is translated “see” as much as it is translated “know.” Everlasting destruction will come upon those who refuse to “see God” in the picture or

who do not accept the Gospel of Christ.

<sup>31</sup> When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. <sup>32</sup> All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. <sup>33</sup> He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left. <sup>34</sup> Then the King will say to those on his right, "Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. <sup>35</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, <sup>36</sup> I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me." <sup>37</sup> Then the righteous will answer him, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink?" <sup>38</sup> When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you?" <sup>39</sup> When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?" <sup>40</sup> The King will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me." <sup>41</sup> Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. <sup>42</sup> For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, <sup>43</sup> I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." <sup>44</sup> They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" <sup>45</sup> He will reply, "I tell you the truth, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." <sup>46</sup> Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life (Matt 25:31-46).

We can be sure that the above scripture applies to the Millennial Kingdom and the second resurrection because it says "all the nations will be gathered in verse 32—completely different than the few chosen believers of the first resurrection. Also, the righteous people had no idea that being kind to others was like being kind to Christ—if they had heard the book of Matthew

read, they would not have been asking Christ the question that they did here. What is the end result of the second resurrection? Either eternal punishment (no eternal punishing) or eternal life.

<b>Table of Bible Order of Judgments</b>	
<b>Right now:</b> people are being judged.	Now is a judgment of this world (John 12:31, YLT).
The First Resurrection for those judged worthy in this present life to receive eternal life.	Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them... (Rev 20:6) ...Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection (Heb 11:35).
<b>Millennial rule of Christ and his saints:</b> Judgment of those on Earth.	[continued from above] ...but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Rev 20:6).
<b>The Second Resurrection</b> of all those who have lived before. Those who will not follow God will undergo the "second death"	(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.)... And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. ...The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:5,12,14-15).

**Judgment After Second Resurrection Will Take Many Years**

We have covered several scriptures showing that those who follow God will be given eternal life and those who do not will be given eternal punishment. Many people assume that this is a quick decision—that Christ will look each one in the eye, recount the significant events in their life and pronounce a judgment. But none of these scriptures give us **detail on how Christ judges!** There are many other scriptures that do!

Will Christ take people who have never heard about Him and punish them for rejecting Him? What about a Buddhist that heard a missionary ask him to accept Jesus once when he was 22, but rejected this strange teaching that was different than what he had always been taught by his kind and loving parents? Will Christ condemn this Buddhist forever?

We need to turn to other scriptures that tell us specifically how God judges. He told the Pharisees:

...If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin... (John 9:41).

What a person knows is very important to the manner in which they will be judged.. Christ is not eager to condemn the world, but to save it! Notice:

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17).

I urge, then, first of all, that requests, prayers, intercession and thanksgiving be made for everyone—for kings and all those in authority, that we may live peaceful and quiet lives in all godliness and holiness. <sup>3</sup> This is good, and pleases God our Savior, <sup>4</sup> who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth (1Tim 2:1-2).

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2Pet 3:9).

Look at the effort to which God went to show the ancient Israelites their sin and to try to bring them to repentance:

The LORD is slow to anger, abounding in love and forgiving sin and rebellion. Yet he does not leave the guilty unpunished; he punishes the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation (Num 14:18).

<sup>18</sup> If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. <sup>19</sup> I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. <sup>20</sup> Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit. <sup>21</sup> If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve. <sup>22</sup> I will send wild animals

against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.

<sup>23</sup> If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, <sup>24</sup> I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over. <sup>25</sup> And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands. <sup>26</sup> When I cut off your supply of bread, ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven, and they will dole out the bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied. <sup>27</sup> If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me, <sup>28</sup> then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over (Lev 26:18-28).

This scripture goes on to list even more punishments that will occur for those who do not listen to God. However, verses 40-46 of the same chapter show that people could humble themselves at any time, confess their sin, turn to God, and He would hear them. If God was so patient with the nation of Israel to give them His law and send them seven-fold punishments four different times hoping that they would repent and return to it, can we believe that He will condemn others in an instant for disobeying laws that they never knew?

There are many punishments prescribed for various infractions against the law that God gave ancient Israel (Ex 21-24; Lev 20, 24; Num 15; Deut 13; 19-25). Serious crimes were given the death penalty, but the vast majority of sins and mistakes were settled by banishment from Israel, a payment of money or some kind of physical punishment. The purpose of all of these non-death-penalty punishments was to remind people of the consequences of sin and, hopefully, to teach them not to sin in the future.

God is not as interested in what percentage of righteous things we do in our life as He is in whether or not our life experience has taught us to be righteous. Notice:

<sup>12</sup> Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, "The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns

from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness." <sup>13</sup> If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. <sup>14</sup> And if I say to the wicked man, "You will surely die," but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right—<sup>15</sup> if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. <sup>16</sup> None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live (Ezk 33:12-16).

**But what about those who have not accepted—even heard of—Christ?** There are scriptures that show that people must accept Christ in order to be saved (Mark 16:16; Acts 4:12; John 3:36). Let us consider Abraham and other righteous men in the Old Testament. The Bible says that they will be in the Kingdom of God (Luke 13:28, Heb 11), yet none of them plainly wrote that they would be saved because they accepted Christ as their Savior. There are hints about accepting Christ in some of the prophetic books, but even Christ's apostles did not understand how these prophecies applied to Christ—Christ had to explain the prophecies to them. So how then, for example, will Abraham receive eternal life if he never understood about the sacrifice of Christ? Consider these verses:

"Do not lay a hand on the boy," he said. "Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son" (Gen 22:12).

By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going (Heb 11:8).

God knew that Abraham wanted to obey Him—even if it meant sacrificing His own son. God knows that he will accept Christ when he realizes that is necessary for His Eternal life. God wants everyone to have a chance to hear and believe:

How, then, can they call on the one they have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without

someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent? (Rom 10:14-15).

The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea (Isa 11:7-9).

When they see among them their children, the work of my hands, they will keep my name holy; they will acknowledge the holiness of the Holy One of Jacob [Christ], and will stand in awe of the God of Israel. Those who are wayward in spirit will gain understanding; those who complain will accept instruction (Isa 29:23-24).

The fact that Christians have not taken the Gospel to most of the world does not mean that God cannot save most of the world—it means that Christians have not done their job. Isaiah 11, above, describes the Millennial Kingdom and afterward—where Christ will make sure that His ways are known. Many scriptures show us that God, in his infinite wisdom, will judge the earth in **His time**. Here are a few:

Rise up, O Judge of the earth; pay back to the proud what they deserve (Pslm 94:2).

God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well (2Thes 1:6-7).

When I choose the proper time, I will judge uprightly (Pslm 75:2, NKJV).

O LORD, correct me, but with judgment; not in thine anger, lest thou bring me to nothing (Jer 10:24, KJV).

But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind (Jer 11:20).

What of those who hear the Gospel and do not decide to do anything about it? Are they automatically condemned in this life? They will stay "in darkness" and certainly not have a chance to be in the first resurrection, but they will have to face that issue in the resurrection at the last day:

I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness. "As for the person who hears my words but does not keep them, I do not judge him. For I did not come to judge the

world, but to save it. There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day (John 12:46-48).

Are there any scriptures that clearly show that the judgment will take a long time for people to be judged? Yes. They show that some will go into the kingdom before others, and that some will have a “more bearable” judgment than others will. If the only possible sentences are “instant eternal life” or “instant second death”, how can judgment for some be “more tolerable” for some than others? Notice these scriptures which show that much will occur during the judgment:

...Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you. For John came to you in the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him; but tax collectors and harlots believed him; and when you saw it, you did not afterward relent and believe him (Matt 21:31-32, NKJV).

If anyone will not welcome you or listen to your words, shake the dust off your feet when you leave that home or town. I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town (Matt 10:14-15).

<sup>21</sup> “Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>22</sup> But I tell you, it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon on the day of judgment than for you. <sup>23</sup> And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day. <sup>24</sup> But I tell you that it will be more bearable for Sodom on the day of judgment than for you.” <sup>25</sup> At that time Jesus said, “I praise you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because you have hidden these things from the wise and learned, and revealed them to little children” (Matt 11:21-25).

[Beware of the scribes] who are devouring the widows’ houses, and for a pretence are making long prayers; these shall receive more abundant judgment (Mark 12:40, YLT).

<sup>31</sup> The Queen of the South will rise at the judgment with the men of this generation

and condemn them; for she came from the ends of the earth to listen to Solomon’s wisdom, and now one greater than Solomon is here. <sup>32</sup> The men of Nineveh will stand up at the judgment with this generation and condemn it; for they repented at the preaching of Jonah, and now one greater than Jonah is here (Luke 11:31-32).

Nothing in the Bible says that the Queen of the South or the men of Nineveh have already been granted Eternal life. It is not clear that they worshipped God in any significant way. But they will participate in the judgment—they will condemn people who understood God much better, but did not do what He said. In other cases, the Bible promises judgments that take a long time.

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book (Rev 22:18).

If you have a Bible that shows the variant readings of the different Greek manuscripts of the book of Revelation, you will see that somebody has added a few words here and there. (The NKJV footnotes show 122 discrepancies) I do not believe that Christ is just making a threat here, but that he really will add the plagues to someone who deliberately added words in the manuscript. Many of the plagues in the Book of Revelation are months or years in duration. How can a person have these plagues added to him unless he has some time to suffer with them—and hopefully repent?

<sup>9</sup> “As I looked, “thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. <sup>10</sup> A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened. <sup>11</sup> “Then I continued to watch because of the boastful words the horn was speaking. I kept looking until the beast was slain and its body destroyed and thrown into the blazing fire. <sup>12</sup> (The other beasts had been stripped of their authority, but were allowed to live for a period of time.) (Dan 7:9-12).

Whether the beasts in Daniel’s dream

represent individuals or whole groups of individuals, it shows that one was killed right away and the others lost their authority, but were allowed to live “for a period of time”. The description of being destroyed in the lake of fire clearly matches the “second death” description in Revelation 21:8 (quoted on page 10). The others were clearly allowed to live for a period of time—a time of judgment and correction.

After reading these scriptures, many Christians will ask the question: **Why should anyone want to be a Christian now if they have a chance to repent and receive Eternal life later?** Why do we simply not enjoy the pleasures of sin, now?

<sup>23</sup> Then one said to Him, “Lord, are there few who are saved?” And He said to them, <sup>24</sup> “Strive to enter through the narrow gate [1st resurrection], for many, I say to you, will seek to enter and will not be able. <sup>25</sup> “When once the Master of the house has risen up and shut the door, and you begin to stand outside and knock at the door, saying, ‘Lord, Lord, open for us,’ and He will answer and say to you, ‘I do not know you, where you are from,’ <sup>26</sup> “then you will begin to say, ‘We ate and drank in Your presence, and You taught in our streets.’ <sup>27</sup> “But He will say, ‘I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.’ <sup>28</sup> “There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out. <sup>29</sup> “They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God. <sup>30</sup> “And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last” (Luke 13:23-30, NKJV).

### **Each Individual Judged by What they Individually Know**

Jesus said, “If you were blind, you would not be guilty of sin; but now that you claim you can see, your guilt remains” (John 9:41).

If I [Christ] had not come and spoken to them, they would not be guilty of sin. Now, however, they have no excuse for their sin (John 15:22).

Jesus held these Jewish leaders accountable because they knew the Scriptures. But if they really were blind, then they would

have “no sin.” People cannot be judged by “every word of God” because most have not known it or understood it. Throughout all history, most people have had **no** Bible teaching and very, very few had thorough, true Bible teaching. Some people have owned a Bible; some have not. Some have owned many translations; some owned one. Some have had access to many good Bible teachers; some have had access to few—or to poor teachers. While teachers do not create truth, they are very important. Even among staunch Bible-believing Christians, much of what they believe they learned through a teacher—not just by reading the scriptures themselves.

Suppose someone offered to pay you for 10 years to search and find as much Bible truth as you could. You could do your own study, read others books or travel to hear Bible teachers. You would certainly pray and ask God to show you truth. At the end of 10 years, you could either write the most important teachings of the Bible yourself or designate the teachers that you had found to have the best understanding of the Scriptures. However you determine this body of Bible truth, and whatever you believe it to be, **do you think that most of the world throughout most of history has had any way to learn that truth?** Certainly not! God simply has not provided equal access to His Truth.

But God has declared that the more truth a person has, the more he is responsible for:

[Jesus said:] <sup>13</sup> Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour. <sup>14</sup> Again, it will be like a man going on a journey, who called his servants and entrusted his property to them. <sup>15</sup> To one he gave five talents of money, to another two talents, and to another one talent, each according to his ability. Then he went on his journey. <sup>16</sup> The man who had received the five talents went at once and put his money to work and gained five more. <sup>17</sup> So also, the one with the two talents gained two more. <sup>18</sup> But the man who had received the one talent went off, dug a hole in the ground and hid his master’s money. <sup>19</sup> After a long time the master of those servants returned and settled accounts with them. <sup>20</sup> The man who had received the five talents brought the other five. ‘Master,’ he said, ‘you entrusted me with five talents. See, I have gained five more.’ <sup>21</sup> His master replied, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant! You have

been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' <sup>22</sup> The man with the two talents also came. 'Master,' he said, 'you entrusted me with two talents; see, I have gained two more.' <sup>23</sup> His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!' <sup>24</sup> Then the man who had received the one talent came. 'Master,' he said, 'I knew that you are a hard man, harvesting where you have not sown and gathering where you have not scattered seed. <sup>25</sup> So I was afraid and went out and hid your talent in the ground. See, here is what belongs to you.' <sup>26</sup> His master replied, 'You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I have not sown and gather where I have not scattered seed? <sup>27</sup> Well then, you should have put my money on deposit with the bankers, so that when I returned I would have received it back with interest. <sup>28</sup> Take the talent from him and give it to the one who has the ten talents. <sup>29</sup> For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him. <sup>30</sup> And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth'" (Matt 25:12-30).

Verse 29, above, is not saying that some people have nothing because they were given nothing. The English verb "to have" is totally passive—a person who "has" something need not be *doing* anything to "have it". The Greek verb, (*echo*) is a little more active in meaning than the English—possibly closer to "possessing". Young's literal translation tries to convey that:

for to every one having shall be given,  
and he shall have overabundance, and from  
him who is not having, even that which he  
hath shall be taken from him (Matt 25:29, YLT);

It is the one who "is not having"—is not doing anything to have spiritual truth—that loses whatever little spiritual truth he has.

The first three chapters of the book of Romans deal with the sins of all people and how God views them. Notice what Paul says about each person in chapter two

<sup>5</sup> But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself for the day of God's

wrath, when his righteous judgment will be revealed. <sup>6</sup> God "will give to each person according to what he has done." <sup>7</sup> To those who by persistence in doing good seek glory, honor and immortality, he will give eternal life [1<sup>st</sup> resurrection]. <sup>8</sup> But for those who are self-seeking and who reject the truth and follow evil, there will be wrath and anger [2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection]. <sup>9</sup> There will be trouble and distress for every human being who does evil: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile; <sup>10</sup> but glory, honor and peace for everyone who does good [even in the 2<sup>nd</sup> resurrection]: first for the Jew, then for the Gentile (Rom 2:5-10).

Verses 11-16 continue this theme—they have been covered on page 17. Every action we take in our life is important—whether we know a lot of God's way or very little.

Many of the judgments rendered in the Bible were from the words of the people being judged. If, for example, a person steals from you and you condemn the action as "wrong", those words may be quoted back to you if you are judged for stealing from another. Notice Christ's teaching:

<sup>20</sup> Then another servant came and said, "Sir, here is your mina; I have kept it laid away in a piece of cloth. <sup>21</sup> I was afraid of you, because you are a hard man. You take out what you did not put in and reap what you did not sow." <sup>22</sup> His master replied, "I will judge you by your own words, you wicked servant! You knew, did you, that I am a hard man, taking out what I did not put in, and reaping what I did not sow? <sup>23</sup> Why then didn't you put my money on deposit, so that when I came back, I could have collected it with interest?" (Luke 19:20-23).

This servant complained that the master was sinning by getting more than what was rightfully his, yet the servant committed the exact same sin by refusing to give the master what is rightfully his—his money with interest. We have already discussed how David was judged by his own judgment that he pronounced on the rich man who stole the poor man's lamb (page 6). Later, Solomon used a similar approach to judge Shimei, a man who had cursed David when he was fleeing from his rebellious son.

"And remember, you have with you Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, who called down bitter curses on me



the day I went to Mahanaim. When he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the LORD: 'I will not put you to death by the sword.' But now, do not consider him innocent. You are a man of wisdom; you will know what to do to him. Bring his gray head down to the grave in blood" (1Kngs 2:8-9).

David did not believe that Shimei was repentant for his sin. His wise son Solomon devised a plan where Shimei could be his own judge:

<sup>26</sup> Then the king sent for Shimei and said to him, "Build yourself a house in Jerusalem and live there, but do not go anywhere else. <sup>37</sup> The day you leave and cross the Kidron Valley, you can be sure you will die; your blood will be on your own head." <sup>38</sup> Shimei answered the king, "What you say is good. Your servant will do as my lord the king has said." And Shimei stayed in Jerusalem for a long time. <sup>39</sup> But three years later, two of Shimei's slaves ran off to Achish son of Maacah, king of Gath, and Shimei was told, "Your slaves are in Gath." <sup>40</sup> At this, he saddled his donkey and went to Achish at Gath in search of his slaves. So Shimei went away and brought the slaves back from Gath. <sup>41</sup> When Solomon was told that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath and had returned, <sup>42</sup> the king summoned Shimei and said to him, "Did I not make you swear by the LORD and warn you, 'On the day you leave to go anywhere else, you can be sure you will die'? At that time you said to me, 'What you say is good. I will obey.' <sup>43</sup> Why then did you not keep your oath to the LORD and obey the command I gave you?" <sup>44</sup> The king also said to Shimei, "You know in your heart all the wrong you did to my father David. Now the LORD will repay you for your wrongdoing. <sup>45</sup> But King Solomon will be blessed, and David's throne will remain secure before the LORD forever." <sup>46</sup> Then the king gave the order to Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and he went out and struck Shimei down and killed him. The kingdom was now firmly established in Solomon's hands (1Kngs 2:36-46).

Shimei was initially glad to accept Solomon's punishment. If Shimei had no immediate plans to take a trip out of Jerusalem, it was almost like no punishment at all. He had escaped punishment during the entire reign of David and it looked like he could escape

punishment even longer now. If Shimei believed that he was wrong for cursing David and was truly sorry about it, he would have taken Solomon's words very seriously. But when he was faced with the economic loss of a couple of slaves, he put his own financial interests above Solomon's decree—and lost his life.

Similarly, God tells us now that there are consequences for evil. But because these consequences do not always have an immediate effect, people more often seek to escape the consequences of sin a little longer, rather than trying to stop the sin. God hopes that people will see sin as He does and turn from it on their own. But if they do not, then He often gives them one last "do or die" time of judgment. If they do not obey this time, it is over. Shimei did not obey and he died. The people of Nineveh (see story on page 12) were given a final forty days, but they listened, repented and lived. **Shimei died, not because of an obscure law that he did not quite understand, but for disobeying a judgment he had clearly agreed to!**

Another excellent example of this kind of judgment was given to King Ahab when he made a treaty with an enemy king, Ben-Hadad, rather than killing him as God commanded. A prophet gave the king a fictitious story, the king gave his judgment, and the prophet showed the king that the judgment applied to the king, himself.

<sup>38</sup> Then the prophet went and stood by the road waiting for the king [Ahab]. He disguised himself with his headband down over his eyes. <sup>39</sup> As the king passed by, the prophet called out to him, "Your servant went into the thick of the battle, and someone came to me with a captive and said, 'Guard this man. If he is missing, it will be your life for his life, or you must pay a talent of silver.' <sup>40</sup> While your servant was busy here and there, the man disappeared." "That is your sentence," the king of Israel said. "You have pronounced it yourself." <sup>41</sup> Then the prophet quickly removed the headband from his eyes, and the king of Israel recognized him as one of the prophets. <sup>42</sup> He said to the king, "This is what the LORD says: 'You have set free a man I had determined should die. Therefore it is your life for his life, your people for his people'" (1Kngs 20:38-42).

Some people may think that God was unfair to expect ancient Israel to obey so many

laws. But His law is tiny compared to the complex legal codes of modern western nations. The entire Bible can be read in a few weeks of concentrated effort. But the total number of code sections affecting a person living in the United States probably cannot be read and understood in his or her lifetime. By contrast, in ancient Israel, the people heard all of God's law, they agreed to do it, and it was written on stones where everyone could read it.

"These are the laws you are to set before them (Ex 21:1):

When Moses went and told the people all the LORD'S words and laws, they responded with one voice, "Everything the LORD has said we will do" (Ex 24:3).

And you shall write very clearly all the words of this law on these stones you have set up" (Deut 27:8).

God held the Israelites responsible for the physical laws He gave them. When one of the Jewish leaders commanded someone to hit Paul at a trial, he let him know that he was doing what he should have known not to do:

Then Paul said to him, "God will strike you, you whitewashed wall! You sit there to judge me according to the law, yet you yourself violate the law by commanding that I be struck!" (Acts 23:3).

But we must remember that ancient Israel existed in some form for about 1500 years before Christ came. They could be held accountable for the physical law they had, but not for the spiritual teachings of Christ and His Apostles. Christ clearly stated that if His miracles had been performed even in Gentile cities, they would have listened and repented. But the millions of ancient Israelites and Gentiles who never heard Christ's teaching simply are not responsible for it:

<sup>12</sup> I tell you, it will be more bearable on that day for Sodom than for that town. <sup>13</sup> "Woe to you, Korazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. <sup>14</sup> But it will be more bearable for Tyre and Sidon at the judgment than for you (Luke 10:12-14).

At the opposite extreme, Christ will give a much more stringent judgment to those who do have spiritual knowledge:

...From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48).

Those who need to fear the judgment of Christ are those who know they are doing much evil or those who convince themselves that their evil is good. They will not be able to fool Christ!

A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse [King David's father, an ancestor of Christ]; from his roots a Branch will bear fruit. The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked (Isa 11:1-4).

### Judgment for Believers: Both Now and Later

**This specific subject seems to be misunderstood by nearly all religious groups.** The Bible clearly teaches that Christians are being judged now—and, that they will be judged later. Some, by their current way of life, will be judged worthy to be in the first resurrection. Even those will still receive a kind of judgment when Christ returns—primarily related to the rewards that they will receive. Other things will happen to other believers. Let us read the verses that explain this in clear detail. The background is Christ explaining what people should be doing while waiting for Christ to return:

<sup>35</sup> "Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, <sup>36</sup> like men waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him. <sup>37</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. I tell you the truth, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. <sup>38</sup> It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the second or third watch of the night. <sup>39</sup> But understand this: If the

owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. <sup>40</sup> You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him." <sup>41</sup> Peter asked, "Lord, are you telling this parable to us, or to everyone?" (Luke 12:35-41).

Peter asked a good question. He wanted to know who should be getting ready to meet the master. Christ did not say that his statement applied only to apostles, ministers or some humanly-observable group of people. He said that the blessing applied to whoever was doing certain things. Christ went on to give **four categories** of people and what would happen to them.

**Category 1: Faithful & Wise Stewards:**

And the Lord said, "Who then is that faithful and wise steward, whom his master will make ruler over his household, to give them their portion of food in due season? Blessed is that servant whom his master will find so doing when he comes. Truly, I say to you that he will make him ruler over all that he has" (Luke 12:42-44).

These faithful and wise stewards are promised rulership when Christ returns. This is clearly the first resurrection. They are those through whom Christ is living—those who do the many things that Christ said His servants would do.

**Category 2, Unfaithful servants:**

But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the menservants and maidservants and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers (Luke 12:45-46).

First note that these are servants of the Master (Christ); they are not strangers or foreigners. But these unfaithful servants have three problems: 1) They are not doing the things that Christ said they should do. 2) They are fighting with their fellow servants—making life difficult for other believers. 3) They have severe personal sins. History is full of cases where various Christian groups fought against each

other—trying to gain members, money or preeminence over each other. Christ will certainly judge them for this. People in this category will not be in the first resurrection and will be no better off than **unbelievers** in the second resurrection.

**Category 3, Lazy Servants:**

That servant who knows his master's will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows (Luke 12:47).

These servants knew what Christ told them to do, but did not do it. I believe that many Christians are in this category, today. The Bible and many Bible helps are available, but not enough believers read it and do what it says. These believers are not promised rulership (the first resurrection), but they are promised correction. A "beating" is a corrective punishment so that a person will change. It makes no sense to "beat" a person, then give him or her eternal life. What would the beating accomplish? Nor does it make sense to beat a person, then give them the second death. It makes a lot of sense to correct people after the second resurrection and give them time to improve. These "blows" may be literal blows or symbolic of other corrective punishments, but it is the corrective concept that is important. **Many "believers" think they are guaranteed a place in the first resurrection,** but Christ is here addressing the very issue of what will happen to His servants, and He is saying that some will need to be corrected when the Master comes.

**Category 4, Unknowing Servants:**

But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows. From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:48).

Christ will not expect as much from the many believers who did not have Bibles to study—or who were deceived by false teaching that they thought to be of God. These people are not promised a place in the first resurrection, but their correction will be much lighter in the second.

These four categories, as well as the

various categories of unbelievers are summarized on the table on page 30. **It should not be our purpose to judge others and assign them to a category. We should assign ourselves to a category—and change if necessary.** There are times when we may need to decide to stay away from someone who claims to be a believer—because they are an unacceptable influence on us or an unacceptable example to others. (For more on this see the appendix titled *Situations Where We Must Judge*.) It is important to make a distinction between believers who are making mistakes, and those claiming to be believers when they are not.

These are some of the scriptures that describe **believers who are making mistakes:**

And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual people but as to carnal, as to babes in Christ (1Cor 3:1, NKJV).

For anyone who eats and drinks without recognizing the body of the Lord eats and drinks judgment on himself. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.... If anyone is hungry, he should eat at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions (1Cor 11:29-30,34).

As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge (1Tim 5:11-12).

These are some of the scriptures that describe **people who claim to be believers, but who are not:**

Many will say to me on that day, "Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?" Then I will tell them plainly, "I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!" (Matt 7:22-23).

God they profess to know, and in the works they deny {Him}, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work disapproved (Titus 1:16, YLT).

For certain men whose condemnation was written about long ago have secretly slipped in among you. They are godless men, who change the grace of our God into a license for immorality and deny Jesus Christ our only

Sovereign and Lord (Jude 1:4).

There are indeed very many scriptures that show that **believers are now being judged both to determine which resurrection and also to determine their reward:**

Dear friends, I urge you, as aliens and strangers in the world, to abstain from sinful desires, which war against your soul. Live such good lives among the pagans that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us (1Pet 2:11-12).

Since you call on a Father who judges each man's work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear (1Pet 1:17).

Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly (Jms 3:1).

<sup>12</sup> Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; <sup>13</sup> but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ's sufferings, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. <sup>14</sup> If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. <sup>15</sup> But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. <sup>16</sup> Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. <sup>17</sup> 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? <sup>18</sup> Now if the righteous one is scarcely saved, Where will the ungodly and the sinner appear? <sup>19</sup> Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God commit their souls to Him in doing good, as to a faithful Creator (1Pet 4:12-19, NKJV).

<sup>8</sup> What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things. I consider them rubbish, that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup> and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God and is by faith. <sup>10</sup> I want to

know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death,<sup>11</sup> and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead.<sup>12</sup> Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already been made perfect, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me.<sup>13</sup> Brothers, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead,<sup>14</sup> I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.<sup>15</sup> All of us who are mature should take such a view of things. And if on some point you think differently, that too God will make clear to you.<sup>16</sup> Only let us live up to what we have already attained (Phlp 3:8-16).

The above is obviously the first resurrection that Paul is attempting to attain, though he does not specifically use the term. The same is true for the verses below:

<sup>3</sup> Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,<sup>4</sup> and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade—kept in heaven for you,<sup>5</sup> who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.<sup>6</sup> In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while you may have had to suffer grief in all kinds of trials.<sup>7</sup> These have come so that your faith—of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire—may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed...<sup>13</sup> Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed.<sup>14</sup> As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance.<sup>15</sup> But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;<sup>16</sup> for it is written: “Be holy, because I am holy.”<sup>17</sup> Since you call on a Father who judges each man’s work impartially, live your lives as strangers here in reverent fear.<sup>18</sup> For you know that it was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life handed down to you from your

forefathers (1Pet 1:3-8,13-18).

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames (1Cor 3:11-15).

The verse above clearly shows that a reward is separate from salvation. People can lose their reward, but still be “saved”.

<sup>35</sup> But someone may ask, “How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?”<sup>36</sup> How foolish! What you sow does not come to life unless it dies.<sup>37</sup> When you sow, you do not plant the body that will be, but just a seed, perhaps of wheat or of something else.<sup>38</sup> But God gives it a body as he has determined, and to each kind of seed he gives its own body.<sup>39</sup> All flesh is not the same: Men have one kind of flesh, animals have another, birds another and fish another.<sup>40</sup> There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another.<sup>41</sup> The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.<sup>42</sup> So will it be with the resurrection of the dead (1Cor 15:35-42).

The references to the diversity of creation indicate that the spirit world may be similarly diverse. There are literally millions of different kinds of plant and animal species on the earth. Is it possible that God may reward people with thousands or millions of different kinds of spiritual bodies? Before anyone answers “God wouldn’t do that”, we need to answer why He made nearly a million different species of bugs. Are bugs more important than spiritual bodies? This author does not have the answer to these questions, but he knows that we should not limit God.

Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known (1Cor 13:12).

<b>Table Summarizing Various Classes of People in Judgment</b>		
<p><b>Unbelievers:</b> For you have spent enough time in the past doing what pagans choose to do—living in debauchery, lust, drunkenness, orgies, carousing and detestable idolatry. 4 They think it strange that you do not plunge with them into the same flood of dissipation, and they heap abuse on you. 5 But they will have to give account to him who is ready to judge the living and the dead (1Pet 4:3).</p>	<p><b>Those <u>not</u> claiming to be believers..</b> .</p>	<p><b>Who were <u>not</u> kind to their neighbors:</b> ...Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me (Matt 25:41-43)</p>
		<p><b>Who loved their neighbors:</b> They also will answer, “Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?”...but the righteous [will go] to eternal life (Matt 25:44,46)</p>
	<p><b>Those who thought they are believers but were not:</b> “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, ‘Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?’ And then I will declare to them, ‘I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!’” (Matt 7:21-23.)</p>	<p><b>Those who were once believers, but deliberately sinned and rejected Christ:</b> If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Heb 10:26-27).</p>
	<p><b>Believers:</b> ...For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. It is written: “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’” So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God (Rom 14:10-12).</p> <p>For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2Cor 5:10).</p>	<p><b>Those who did not help feed or serve the other believers:</b> Bad servants of Christ are treated like unbelievers (Luke 12:45-46; Matt 24:48-51). “But if anyone causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a large millstone hung around his neck and to be drowned in the depths of the sea” (Matt 18:6).</p>
<p><b>Servants of Christ who were not ready to rule with their master:</b> The end of Matthew 24 parallels Luke 12, but the parallel to Luke 12:47-48 seems to be the 5 wise and 5 foolish virgins story (Matt 25:1-13).</p>		<p><b>Those who knew better and did wrong anyway:</b> That servant who knows his master’s will and does not get ready or does not do what his master wants will be beaten with many blows.... From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked (Luke 12:47-48).</p>
		<p><b>Those who did not know what to do:</b> But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows (Luke 12:48).</p>

<b>Effect of Various Christian “Eternal-Destiny” Doctrines If They Were True</b>		
<b>Various Explanations of Who Will Receive Eternal Life</b>	<b>If the doctrine at left were true, it would have this affect on <u>believers</u> (people who believe the doctrine):</b>	<b>If the doctrine at left were true, it would have this affect on <u>unbelievers</u> (people who do not believe it):</b>
Predestination: God determines whether a person will be saved or not when he or she is born (or even before). Some groups tie those predestined to be saved to specific races and nationalities, others simply say that people are chosen according to some method known only to God. The effect of the belief is the same.	There is no need to do good or avoid sin because those predestined for eternal life will have it even if they sin, and those not so predestined cannot get it no matter what good they do. People who believe this spend a lifetime worrying about what God has decided for them. Evangelism is unimportant because it is not possible to change anyone’s eternal destiny.	People can live their lives any way they want. Those not predestined for eternal life might as well take as much as they can from others as long as they don’t “get caught”. If this doctrine were true, people would be better off not knowing it—it is better to believe one’s life is meaningful. God would be responsible for the suffering of the billions whose existence is pointless.
Churchism: Those “in good standing” with a human church organization will be given eternal life. While most organizations theoretically teach that God is the final judge, their day-to-day actions tells the members that the best thing they can do to receive eternal life is to follow the doctrines of their denomination and obey their leaders. The Catholic Church, some Protestant churches and many cult-like groups are in this category.	To the extent that the Church teaches sound Biblical principles, this approach is helpful. People will attempt to do those things that are taught as helpful to receiving eternal life. However, if the church organization becomes corrupt and begins to teach that “some evil is acceptable as long as it benefits the church organization”, then members do evil things thinking that they are doing good.	Those who are not members of church organizations that God accepts are “forever lost”. This leads people in those “true Church” organizations to think that anything they do to get these “forever lost” people into their church organization is acceptable. This leads to the breakup of friends and families, and to persecution and forced conversion—as in the Catholic inquisition. To unbelievers, this makes Christianity appear as a hypocritical political organization, not the purveyor of truth and love that Christ taught.
Once Saved Always Saved: Any person who claims Jesus as his or her savior will have eternal life no matter what they do afterward. This is taught by some Evangelical groups and other small groups.	This is almost like a self-elected predestination. Once a person is saved, there is little need for continued study and teaching of the Bible—they are saved. Unlike predestination, there is a great need for evangelism—to get people to “accept Christ”—whether He changes their present life or not.	This doctrine makes God seem to be incredibly unfair to those who never hear about Christ. According to it, a lifelong criminal who “accepted Christ” when he was 18 (or maybe even 8) will still receive eternal life, but a kind-hearted Indian farmer who never heard of Christ but freely fed hundreds of hungry people will have the same fate as the wicked.
Any of the Above Doctrines Combined with Judgment for Unbelievers: Some teach the above doctrines, but that those who were never reached with the Gospel can be saved if they do good works now.	This modification does not affect a believer’s salvation, but does affect his approach to gospel preaching. If a person who never heard of Christ can be saved by his deeds, preaching Christ to every person is no longer a matter of eternal life and death.	This modification means that what the unbeliever does is important. It also means that he needs an additional reason to come to Christianity other than just “being saved”.
Any of the Above Doctrines Combined with Judgment for the Believer: Some teach that salvation comes by one of the above methods, but that even if the “chosen” do not show Godly fruits, they can be lost.	The effect of this modification makes this doctrine essentially the same as the next one. Anyone who considers him or herself saved must still judge his or her own life and be sure that it is producing fruit.	This doctrinal modification motivates the “chosen” to do something with their life, but makes little difference for unbelievers. If nobody reaches them with the truth, they are forever lost.
All People Will Be Judged and Must Be Saved Through Christ—but Can Be Saved After a Resurrection.	People strive to be like Christ because they will be judged more stringently than those without the truth. Life is more joyful and meaningful when its purpose is known.	No matter how little or how much Bible truth one knows, the more good they do now, the better their life will be—now, and in the resurrection to judgment.

### Minimizing Our Own Judgment— Loving Our Neighbors as Ourselves

There are many scriptures that directly tell us how we can cause ourselves to either avoid judgment or be judged more leniently. It seems that we can classify them into two general categories—the two great commandments given by Christ:

<sup>37</sup> Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.” <sup>38</sup> This is the first and greatest commandment. <sup>39</sup> And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ <sup>40</sup> All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments” (Matt 22:37-40).

We will start with the second category first because those principles are easily understood by everybody, whether they know God or not. “Love God with all your heart” will be covered in the next section.

The “love your neighbor as yourself” principle was first given in the Old Testament: “Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but **love your neighbor as yourself**. I am the LORD (Lev 19:18). It is repeated in the New Testament seven times (Matt 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Jms 2:8). Please read these scriptures that show how we can affect our own judgment. Afterward, I will summarize their general principles.

<sup>31</sup> But if we judged ourselves, we would not come under judgment. <sup>32</sup> When we are judged by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be condemned with the world (1Cor 11:31).

<sup>8</sup> If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup> If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. <sup>10</sup> If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word has no place in our lives (1Jn 1:8-10).

He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death (Rev 2:11).

“Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use,

it will be measured to you (Matt 7:1-2).

<sup>1</sup> You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things. <sup>2</sup> Now we know that God’s judgment against those who do such things is based on truth. <sup>3</sup> So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God’s judgment? <sup>4</sup> Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God’s kindness leads you toward repentance? (Rom 2:1-4).

<sup>2</sup> One man’s faith allows him to eat everything, but another man, whose faith is weak, eats only vegetables. <sup>3</sup> The man who eats everything must not look down on him who does not, and the man who does not eat everything must not condemn the man who does, for God has accepted him. <sup>4</sup> Who are you to judge someone else’s servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand. <sup>5</sup> One man considers one day more sacred than another; another man considers every day alike. Each one should be fully convinced in his own mind. <sup>6</sup> He who regards one day as special, does so to the Lord. He who eats meat, eats to the Lord, for he gives thanks to God; and he who abstains, does so to the Lord and gives thanks to God. <sup>7</sup> For none of us lives to himself alone and none of us dies to himself alone. <sup>8</sup> If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord. <sup>9</sup> For this very reason, Christ died and returned to life so that he might be the Lord of both the dead and the living. <sup>10</sup> You, then, why do you judge your brother? Or why do you look down on your brother? For we will all stand before God’s judgment seat. <sup>11</sup> It is written: “As surely as I live,” says the Lord, “every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.” <sup>12</sup> So then, each of us will give an account of himself to God. <sup>13</sup> Therefore let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother’s way (Rom 14:2-13).

<sup>4</sup> For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but sent them to hell, putting them



into gloomy dungeons to be held for judgment; <sup>5</sup> if he did not spare the ancient world when he brought the flood on its ungodly people, but protected Noah, a preacher of righteousness, and seven others; <sup>6</sup> if he condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah by burning them to ashes, and made them an example of what is going to happen to the ungodly; <sup>7</sup> and if he rescued Lot, a righteous man, who was distressed by the filthy lives of lawless men <sup>8</sup>(for that righteous man, living among them day after day, was tormented in his righteous soul by the lawless deeds he saw and heard)—<sup>9</sup> if this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgment, while continuing their punishment. <sup>10</sup> This is especially true of those who follow the corrupt desire of the sinful nature and despise authority. Bold and arrogant, these men are not afraid to slander celestial beings; <sup>11</sup> yet even angels, although they are stronger and more powerful, do not bring slanderous accusations against such beings in the presence of the Lord (2Pet 2:4-11).

Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door! (Jms 5:9).

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things. Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me—put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you (Php 4:8-9).

Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up. Brothers, do not slander one another. Anyone who speaks against his brother or judges him speaks against the law and judges it. When you judge the law, you are not keeping it, but sitting in judgment on it. There is only one Lawgiver and Judge, the one who is able to save and destroy. But you—who are you to judge your neighbor? (Jms 4:10-12.)

<sup>36</sup> Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful. <sup>37</sup> "Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.

<sup>38</sup> Give, and it will be given to you. A good

measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you" (Luke 6:36-38).

Because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment! (Jms 2:13).

If a king judges the poor with fairness, his throne will always be secure (Prv 29:14).

"Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment." (John 7:24).

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12:2-3).

I warn everyone who hears the words of the prophecy of this book: If anyone adds anything to them, God will add to him the plagues described in this book. And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book (Rev 22:18-19).

We can summarize the general principles of minimizing our own judgment based on our relationship with others:

1. Judge ourselves—confess our sins as we find them and seek forgiveness. Overcome them through Christ.
2. Judge others the way we would want to be judged—in love and mercy. **Don't judge others at all**, unless they are affecting us in a way that we must judge. (There are times when we need to make judgments about others. We sometimes must judge our children, those who work for us, and others for whom we may be responsible. We also must judge whom we will keep as friends and whom we will regard as spiritual teachers. See the Appendix titled *Situations Where We Must Judge* for more information.)
3. Judge with righteous judgment. Really seek to understand the spiritual truth of a matter, whether we are judging ourselves or others.
4. Do not grumble or complain about others—be a "nice person to be with".
5. Help others live righteously.

### Minimizing Our Own Judgment— Loving God with All Our Heart

The biggest difficulty with people is that their religion has become a clearly defined “part” of their life: So much time at church meetings, so much time at church activities, so much money sent to a good cause and so much prayer and study. None of these things are bad in themselves. When people think about completely dedicating their life to God, they think about extreme things such as selling everything they own, giving it to the poor, then walking down the street with a Bible to talk about God to whomever will listen.

If God clearly shows you to do the latter, then you should do it. God sometimes gives unusual missions (Ezk 4-5; Hos 2), but if He does, it will have a purpose. On the other hand, if God has **not** given you an unusual mission and you invent one of your own, you will probably make many people think that the God you worship is “weird” because you changed from an effective citizen to an ineffective preacher who now has to rely on handouts from others.

Earning a living and raising a family are tasks that God has given most of us. In the process of doing them, we learn a lot and we can teach a lot to others. Recreational, artistic, educational, and social endeavors are also an important part of life where we can learn and help others. Most people have found that life does not work well if they try to do only one—only work, only play, etc. Some people live for one and fit the others in as necessary. For example, some people love their job and find just enough time for recreation and social events to hold their health and family together. Others may love their recreation or artistry, and work primarily to support themselves and “the love of their life”.

We all have our ways of deciding what we will do: At times, we decide that we will work more, play more, take a new job, move somewhere else, take a vacation, join a group of some kind, start a new hobby, entertain ourselves more or whatever. We can look at our past life and see how we have made important decisions.

God does not want us to dedicate just “some percentage of our time or money” to Him, but He wants to be at the top of our priority list when we make our life decisions. He wants us to choose our mate, jobs, friends, hobbies, and

recreation in a way that will most please and be of service to Him. If we ask, He will often show us what is best. Other times, He lets us decide. We should not ask, “What is the least we have to do to be in the first resurrection?” We should ask, “What do we have to do to live like Christ?”

Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving (Col 3:23-24).

“If you love me, you will obey what I command (John 14:15).

Then he said to them all: “If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? (Luke 9:23-25)

Sometimes, following Christ can bring us into very difficult times. Nevertheless, it is His strength that enables us to go through those difficult times: “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Phlp 4:13). We should know that those difficult times may come and that they are for our good:

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshiped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years (Rev 20:4).

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, <sup>33</sup>who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised; who shut the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup>quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection.... <sup>39</sup> These were all

commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. <sup>40</sup> God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect (Heb 11:32-35,39-40).

<sup>1</sup> Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. <sup>2</sup> Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. <sup>3</sup> Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart. <sup>4</sup> In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. <sup>5</sup> And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, <sup>6</sup> because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." <sup>7</sup> Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? <sup>8</sup> If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. <sup>9</sup> Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! <sup>10</sup> Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. <sup>11</sup> No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it. <sup>12</sup> Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. <sup>13</sup> "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed. <sup>14</sup> Make every effort to live in peace with all men and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. <sup>15</sup> See to it that no one misses the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many (Heb 12:1-15).

While the above scriptures sound quite grim, the Bible does not teach that every believer will experience great physical suffering and die a

miserable death. There are many scriptures that indicate God sometimes protects his people from great trouble. Here are a few:

Since you have kept my command to endure patiently, I will also keep you from the hour of trial that is going to come upon the whole world to test those who live on the earth (Rev 3:10).

Be always on the watch, and pray that you may be able to escape all that is about to happen, and that you may be able to stand before the Son of Man (Luke 21:36).

As a shepherd looks after his scattered flock when he is with them, so will I look after my sheep. I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness (Ezk 34:12).

Seek the LORD, all you humble of the land, you who do what he commands. Seek righteousness, seek humility; perhaps you will be sheltered on the day of the LORD's anger (Zeph 2:3).

Christ clearly explained the Christian life is a combination of persecution now, with some blessings now and then eternal life in the future:

So Jesus answered and said, "Assuredly, I say to you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My sake and the gospel's, "who shall not receive a hundredfold now in this time—houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and lands, with persecutions—and in the age to come, eternal life. "But many who are first will be last, and the last first" (Mark 10:29-31).

Is it fair that some believers are persecuted greatly and others live a long, relatively peaceful life? Christ answered that question:

<sup>18</sup> "I [Jesus] tell you the truth, when you [Peter] were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go." <sup>19</sup> Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!" <sup>20</sup> Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") <sup>21</sup> When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" <sup>22</sup> Jesus

answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me" (John 21:18-22).

We do not need to worry much about Christ's plans for others. We need to seek His plan for our own life and to live it boldly. If we ask Christ for His perfect love, we will not fear:

<sup>15</sup> If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in him and he in God. <sup>16</sup> And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in him. <sup>17</sup> In this way, love is made complete among us so that we will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like him. <sup>18</sup> There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, "I love God," yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother (1Jn 4:15-21).

### The "Unpardonable Sin"

Sometimes people who have made a commitment to follow God and live by His Word have so much difficulty that they think they are beyond hope. They wonder if they have committed what theologians often call the "unpardonable sin". There are scriptures that seem to indicate that this is possible. But if a person is still concerned about repenting, changing and obeying God, there is almost certainly still hope. Please read the scriptures, then the comments at the end.

If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to those whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that (1Jn 5:16).

If we deliberately keep on sinning after we have received the knowledge of the truth, no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God (Heb 10:26-27).

It is impossible for those who have once

been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, who have shared in the Holy Spirit, who have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age, if they fall away, to be brought back to repentance, because to their loss they are crucifying the Son of God all over again and subjecting him to public disgrace (Heb 6:4-6).

If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them. Of them the proverbs are true: "A dog returns to its vomit," and, "A sow that is washed goes back to her wallowing in the mud" (2Pet 2:20-22).

<sup>22</sup> Then they brought him a demon-possessed man who was blind and mute, and Jesus healed him, so that he could both talk and see. <sup>23</sup> All the people were astonished and said, "Could this be the Son of David?" <sup>24</sup> But when the Pharisees heard this, they said, "It is only by Beelzebub, the prince of demons, that this fellow drives out demons." <sup>25</sup> Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, "Every kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and every city or household divided against itself will not stand. <sup>26</sup> If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand? <sup>27</sup> And if I drive out demons by Beelzebub, by whom do your people drive them out? So then, they will be your judges. <sup>28</sup> But if I drive out demons by the Spirit of God, then the kingdom of God has come upon you. <sup>29</sup> Or again, how can anyone enter a strong man's house and carry off his possessions unless he first ties up the strong man? Then he can rob his house. <sup>30</sup> He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters. <sup>31</sup> And so I tell you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven men, but the blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>32</sup> Anyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who speaks against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come" (Matt 12:22-32).

<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, when a crowd of many

thousands had gathered, so that they were trampling on one another, Jesus began to speak first to his disciples, saying: "Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees, which is hypocrisy. <sup>2</sup> There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed, or hidden that will not be made known. <sup>3</sup> What you have said in the dark will be heard in the daylight, and what you have whispered in the ear in the inner rooms will be proclaimed from the roofs. <sup>4</sup> I tell you, my friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body and after that can do no more. <sup>5</sup> But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell. Yes, I tell you, fear him. <sup>6</sup> Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? Yet not one of them is forgotten by God. <sup>7</sup> Indeed, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Don't be afraid; you are worth more than many sparrows. <sup>8</sup> I tell you, whoever acknowledges me before men, the Son of Man will also acknowledge him before the angels of God. <sup>9</sup> But he who disowns me before men will be disowned before the angels of God. <sup>10</sup> And everyone who speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven, but anyone who blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will not be forgiven. <sup>11</sup> When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, <sup>12</sup> for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say" (Luke 12:1-12).

It seems that God does not forgive those who continually, willfully sin after they have accepted Christ's sacrifice, and those who knowingly attribute the work of the Holy Spirit to Satan. It is hypocritical people who know much about God and still sin who are in danger of committing the "unpardonable sin", not those who are weak or know little about God. The only people *specifically* mentioned as being in danger of the "unpardonable sin" in the Bible are the **religious leaders of Jesus' day**. These leaders were not agonizing over the sins they had committed wondering if they could possibly be made worthy some day—they *thought* they were righteous! A person who recognizes that he or she is sinning and need to repent has half the battle won. The rest of the battle is realizing they must then **not fail to go to God (again!)**, in

humility, and ask for mercy and forgiveness:

<sup>10</sup> Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee [who considered himself righteous] and the other a tax collector. <sup>11</sup> The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: "God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector. <sup>12</sup> I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get." <sup>13</sup> But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, "God, have mercy on me, a sinner." <sup>14</sup> I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted (Luke 18:10-14).

### The Purpose of God

It is probably only natural for people to ask: "Why is God doing what He is doing?" Why has He put man on the earth, given Him the ability to reproduce and make billions of people, yet allowed most of them to live out their entire lives with little or no understanding of God? Why does He allow some people to make other people suffer greatly? Why does He give his truth to a few people and expect them to live righteous lives amid a largely sinful world? Why did a perfect God create sin-prone human beings in the first place?

A thorough study of that subject in the Bible could fill a book by itself. But we can see the basic answer in just two short passages:

How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope in him purifies himself, just as he is pure (1Jn 3:1-3).

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God (Rev 21:3).

**God wants children to live with Him!**  
Why do human couples, who have a nice house

and a comfortable income, decide to have children? Children are a lot of work. They cost a lot of money and may mess up a nice house! But rearing children is in many ways the ultimate creative act. They are somewhat like their parents, yet different—a similar, yet separately existing entity. Parents hope their children will like and honor them; they hope they will do something worthwhile with their lives.

So it is with God and His children (us). But God has something even more important to deal with than human parents do. God gives eternal life to His children. God does not want to create a child that will be miserable and make others miserable forever. He uses this physical (capable of dying) existence to test us so He can know what we are like and what we will do in many different situations:

Some time later God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" "Here I am," he replied (Gen 22:1).

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands (Deut 8:2).

If a prophet, or one who foretells by dreams, appears among you and announces to you a miraculous sign or wonder, and if the sign or wonder of which he has spoken takes place, and he says, "Let us follow other gods" (gods you have not known) "and let us worship them," you must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deut 13:1-3).

Test me, O LORD, and try me, examine my heart and my mind (Pslm 26:2).

Oh, let the wickedness of the wicked come to an end, But establish the just; For the righteous God tests the hearts and minds (Pslm 7:9, NKJV).

The refining pot is for silver and the furnace for gold, But the LORD tests the hearts (Prv 17:3, NKJV).

"I the LORD search the heart and examine the mind, to reward a man according to his conduct, according to what his deeds deserve" (Jer 17:10).

But, O LORD Almighty, you who judge righteously and test the heart and mind, let

me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause (Jer 11:20).

O LORD Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance upon them, for to you I have committed my cause (Jer 20:12).

This same Hezekiah also stopped the water outlet of Upper Gihon, and brought the water by tunnel to the west side of the City of David. Hezekiah prospered in all his works. 31 However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart (2Chr 32:30-31, NKJV).

Because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance (Jms 1:3).

That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ (1Pet 1:7, KJV).

I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds (Rev 2:23).

Before writing this paper, I was unaware that there were so *many* verses explaining that God tests us. It seems that people fit somewhere into one of four general categories:

1. People who cannot or will not live a righteous life in any environment.
2. People who can live a righteous life if others around them are righteous.
3. People who can live a righteous life even though others around them are openly sinning.
4. People who not only live a righteous life while others around them are sinning, but can take abuse from evil people and still love them, serve them and encourage them to live righteously.

Christ was the ultimate example of "category 4". He lived a *perfect* life, taught truth, and continually helped others even though He was resisted by Satan, the government of His day and even His own followers. Obviously, there are people who may fit between categories 2 and 3—

some may be able to remain righteous in the face of some kinds of sins, but not others. Similarly, some people will fit between categories 3 and 4—some can handle more abuse than others, and some can be of more service than others.

In general, it seems that God wants category 4 (and maybe some 3) people in the first resurrection so they can help to judge and teach the others during the Millennial Kingdom and final judgment. The rest of category 3 and 2 people can be given eternal life in the second resurrection. Category 1 people, sadly, can only be given eternal destruction.

(You may also wish to read the Appendix, *Why Does God Allow People to Believe So Many Different Things?*)

### **God Provides the Strength We Need**

Much of this paper speaks of what God expects believers to do—indeed, much of the New Testament speaks about what a believer should do. As we stated at the beginning (page 4), this paper is not teaching “salvation by our own works”, but salvation *by* letting Christ do His works through us.

For through the law I died to the law so that I might live for God. I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me. (Gal 2:19-20).

Nevertheless, it falls our lot to judge ourselves—to look for those works in ourselves and to ask Christ to put them in us.

I [the apostle Paul] know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me (Phlp 4:12-13).

And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus (Phlp 4:19).

Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from him anything we ask, because we obey his commands and do what pleases him. And this is his command: to believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and to love one another as he commanded us (1Jn 3:21-23).

Keep your lives free from the love of

money and be content with what you have, because God has said, “Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.” So we say with confidence, “The Lord is my helper; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Heb 13:5-6)

For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline (2Tim 1:7).

Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective (Jms 5:16).

I pray also that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints, and his incomparably great power for us who believe. That power is like the working of his mighty strength, which he exerted in Christ when he raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms (Eph 1:18-20).

We all go through stages in our lives when we either begin a new sin or we see an old sin clearly for the first time. The sin may overcome us for a while, before we begin to seek God to overcome the sin. After the sin is overcome by the power of God, there may be good times—when we feel good and a lot is accomplished. Then a new trial or sin comes along and the cycle repeats. The important thing is that we have cycles of overcoming, not cycles of defeat. The formula is the same, whether we are first accepting Christ’s forgiveness, or have done so long ago:

1. **See our sin.** “Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness” (1Jn 3:4). “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom 3:23).
2. **Repent, be baptized and receive the holy spirit.** “Peter replied, ‘Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit’” (Acts 2:38).
3. **Continually learn God’s way.** “...Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” (Matt 4:4).
4. **Live our life for God.** “In the same way, faith by itself, if it is not accompanied by

action, is dead. But someone will say, 'You have faith; I have deeds.' Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do" (James 2:17-18).

5. **Stay in contact with God.** "Be joyful always; **pray continually**; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1Thes 5:16-18).
6. **Stay in contact with other believers.** "Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching" (Heb 10:25).
7. **Endure till the end.** "He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1Cor 1:8).

### Summary

There is a tendency for people to want to believe that God is reserving a "special place" for them because they "claim Jesus", because they are a member of the "right" church group or because they believe the "true" doctrines. Romans 2:11-16 shows that it is better to believe the right doctrine than false doctrine, but just knowing the truth is not enough. "For it is not those who hear the law who are righteous in God's sight, but it is those who obey the law who will be declared righteous" (Rom 2:13).

For scripture references, please see the appropriate sections of the paper. To summarize as briefly as possible:

1. The traditional idea that "people go to either Heaven or Hell when they die" is not in the Bible. Everyone who has died is awaiting a resurrection from the dead and a judgment at that time.
2. Those that have done much evil will be judged and punished more severely than those who have done little—whether they are defying the laws of the Bible or simply their own understanding of right and wrong.
3. Those who know they are doing evil will be judged more severely than those who did it in ignorance.
4. Those that have judged others harshly will be harshly judged.
5. Those who have done good works will be rewarded for them, whether they know about

God or not.

6. Christ offers forgiveness for all sins, and grants it for sins that we repent of. But those who believe in Him may die not knowing all of their sins or not having repented of them. Believers who have not learned enough, or have not done what Christ wanted them to do will receive additional correction in the Millennial Kingdom or after the second resurrection. They may receive eternal life at that time.
7. Those judged more righteous will be in the first resurrection and cannot die the second death. To be in the first resurrection, we must dedicate our entire life to God now, and learn to judge ourselves with God's righteous judgment.
8. Christ wants to save everyone. He will do His good works through us if we ask Him and let Him. He will not cast away anyone who comes to Him, but He will not force anyone to obey him. Those who insist on rejecting Him will ultimately die the second death—be destroyed forever.
9. Exactly what will happen to each person in regard to judgment, correction, punishment and reward is not completely spelled out in the Bible. God is clearly not pleased with people who try to do as little as possible in this life, but "just enough" to escape the second death.
10. The purpose of God is to test and to know the hearts of people while they are physical—before giving them Eternal life.

He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God (Mic 6:8).

The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil (Eccl 12:13-14, NRSV).

After this I heard what sounded like the roar of a great multitude in heaven shouting: "Hallelujah! Salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and just are his judgments..." (Rev 19:1-2).



## Appendices

The appendices cover specific issues and do not necessarily need to be read in order. They were published several months after the first 40 pages. The first two appendices contain some significant new information which should have been in the main section.

### Judgment After Second Resurrection Will Take Many Years (continued)

This is a continuation of the section beginning on page 19 (with the same name). An important concept was left out. that section ended with the following verse:

“And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last” (Luke 13:30, NKJV).

This verse is frequently quoted to show that “there are people who think they are important that are not, and people who think they are not important, who are.” This is an understandable interpretation as the verse is similar to this one: “Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve and said, ‘If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last, **and the servant of all**’” (Mark 9:33). The context is clearly a discussion of humility among brethren; the phrase “servant of all” is added here, though it is not found in the other scriptures that talk about people being “first” and “last”.

Nevertheless, the emphasis on importance and greatness does not necessarily belong in Luke 13:30 and the other scriptures below. The primary meaning of the Greek words is “first” and “last” in “**time sequence**” (“first”, *protos*, Strong’s #4413 and “last”, *eschatos*, Strong’s #2078). Looking through a concordance will show that this is their common usage. **The subject in Luke 13** (see entire quote on page 23) is “**when will people go into the kingdom of God?**” We find this same statement at the end of another discussion about the kingdom of God:

<sup>25</sup> When the disciples heard this, they were greatly astonished and asked, “Who then can be saved?” <sup>26</sup> Jesus looked at them and said, “With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.” <sup>27</sup> Peter answered him, “We have left everything to follow you! What then will there be for us?” <sup>28</sup> Jesus said to them, “I tell you the truth, at the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will

also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. <sup>29</sup> And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life. <sup>30</sup> But many who are first will be last, and many who are last will be first (Matt 19:25-30—Mark 10:26-31 is similar).

Another valuable parable about eternal life in the Kingdom of God shows that people will enter into it from a diversity of backgrounds.

<sup>1</sup> For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire men to work in his vineyard. <sup>2</sup> He agreed to pay them a denarius [symbolizing eternal life] for the day and sent them into his vineyard. <sup>3</sup> About the third hour he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. <sup>4</sup> He told them, “You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.” <sup>5</sup> So they went. He went out again about the sixth hour and the ninth hour and did the same thing. <sup>6</sup> About the eleventh hour he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, “Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?” <sup>7</sup> “Because no one has hired us,” they answered. “He said to them, “You also go and work in my vineyard.” <sup>8</sup> When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, “Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.” [“first” and “last” are clearly a time sequence]. <sup>9</sup> The workers who were hired about the eleventh hour came and each received a denarius. <sup>10</sup> So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. <sup>11</sup> When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. <sup>12</sup> “These men who were hired last worked only one hour,” they said, “and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.” <sup>13</sup> But he answered one of them, “Friend, I am not being unfair to you. Didn’t you agree to work for a

denarius? <sup>14</sup> Take your pay and go. I want to give the man who was hired last the same as I gave you. <sup>15</sup> Don't I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?" <sup>16</sup> So the last will be first, and the first will be last (Matt 20:1-16).

Rather than being thankful that these last workers received a day's pay for their families, the all-day workers were envious that they did not receive more. The lesson of the parable is that if someone is envious of others who apparently did not "work as hard" to receive eternal life, they may take longer to get into the kingdom than those who accomplished less but are simply "grateful to be there". The attitude of those who will dwell with Christ forever is one of joy for anyone who repents and comes to Him, no matter how little they may be or how little good they may have done (Luke 15:7). Those who do not understand that will have to come into the Kingdom **later**—after they have learned it.

### Scriptures About Punishment for Sin

An incredible variety of thought exists about the kind of punishment God will give in the judgment. Some believe He will make people suffer in "hell" forever simply because they died never having heard about Christ. Others believe that there will be no punishment at all in the afterlife—some will say "yes" to Christ and immediately be given Eternal life, others will die forever. **But the Bible says a lot about punishment in the after life—even "torment".** The "many stripes" and "few stripes" in Luke 12:42-49 have been covered extensively in previous sections. But there are many other verses that show what God intends to do.

The New Testament contains a lot of different Greek words for "punishment", each with a slightly different meaning. This makes me think that the way God will judge the world is indeed complex. Most Bible translations do not translate the Greek words regarding punishment consistently: one Greek word is translated to several different English words, and in other places several different Greek words are translated to the same English word.

Let us start with this passage.

<sup>6</sup> Since it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you, <sup>7</sup> and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven

with His mighty angels, <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power (2Thes 1:6-9).

The Greek word for "taking vengeance" is *ekdikesis* (Strong's #1557), meaning to take vengeance or to revenge—doing something to somebody because of what they did to you. This word is used for situations among humans:

He saw one of them being mistreated by an Egyptian, so he went to his defense and avenged him by killing the Egyptian (Acts 7:24).

Or unto governors, as sent by him for vengeance on evil-doers and for praise to them that do well (1Pet 2:14, ASV).

Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is Mine, I will repay," says the Lord (Rom 12:19, NKJV).

It is used even more often to show that God will take revenge on those who sin—not because He likes to see others suffer, but because they need to understand that their sin was wrong:

And shall God not avenge His own elect who cry out day and night to Him, though He bears long with them? I tell you that He will avenge them speedily. Nevertheless, when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth? (Luke 18:7-8, NKJV.)

For these are the days of vengeance, that all things which are written may be fulfilled (Luke 21:22, NKJV).

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?" (Rev 6:10, NKJV.)

"For true and righteous are His judgments, because He has judged the great harlot who corrupted the earth with her fornication; and He has avenged on her the blood of His servants shed by her" (Rev 19:2, NKJV).

The Greek word for "punishment" used in 1 Thessalonians 1:9 (the first quotation in this section) is *dike* (Strong's #1349) which is a legal term for a sentence against someone. It is illustrated here:

When I was in Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me

about him and asked for a sentence against him (Acts 25:15, NRSV).

Sodom and Gomorrah, too, and the neighbouring towns, who with the same sexual immorality pursued unnatural lusts, are put before us as an example since they are paying the penalty of eternal fire (Jude 1:7, NJB).

Another Greek word for punishment is the verb *timoreo* (Strong's #5097) and the corresponding noun *timoria* (Strong's #5098). They describe the action of a person who serves as a guardian to make sure that a wrong was righted. Most translations simply say "punish", and the "righting of a wrong" aspect of this word is lost. Paul thought he was fulfilling this when he persecuted Christians for their belief. God will serve in that role toward those who knowingly reject Christ.

"And I punished them often in every synagogue and compelled them to blaspheme; and being exceedingly enraged against them, I persecuted them even to foreign cities (Acts 26:11, NKJV).

Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace? (Heb 10:28-29, NKJV)

Yet another Greek word for punishment should convey the idea of correction, but it is lost in translation. The Greek *kolazo* (Strong's 2849) literally means "to prune" such as one might do to a tree or bird's wings. Even though it is sometimes used for a punishment that results in death, it is always used in a corrective sense—a punishment to stop something that the "punisher" does not want done. The book of Maccabees in the Greek Septuagint was translated in the same general timeframe as the writing of the New Testament. The word *kolazo* is used several times in it—we can see an example of what it refers to a corrective type of punishment here:

For the law prevails even over affection for parents, so that virtue is not abandoned for their sakes. It is superior to love for one's wife, so that one rebukes her when she breaks the law. It takes precedence over love for children, so that one punishes [corrects] them for

misdeeds (4 Maccabees 2:10-12).

It is also used in the New Testament when the leaders in Jerusalem tried to stop the Apostles from preaching:

After threatening them again, they let them go, finding no way to punish [correct] them because of the people, for all of them praised God for what had happened (Acts 4:21, NRSV).

The leaders certainly knew ways to punish the apostles—they could put them in jail or beat them, but they could not find a way to **correct** them—a way to stop them from working miracles and preaching about Christ.

Finally, this same word, *kolazo*, is used to describe what God will do on the day of judgment. Translations vary quite a bit as to meaning and order of words, but Darby seems to have it correct. Darby uses braces {} for words that were not in the original Greek.

{the} Lord knows {how} to deliver the godly out of trial, and to keep {the} unjust to {the} day of judgment {to be} punished [corrected] (2Pet 2:9, Darby).

The noun form of *kolazo* ("to punish for correction") is *kolasis* (Strong's #2851), meaning "corrective punishment". It is used twice in the New Testament:

And these [that would not serve others] shall go away to punishment [correction] age-during, but the righteous to life age-during (Matt 25:46, YLT).

There is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear; for fear has to do with punishment [correction], and whoever fears has not reached perfection in love (1Jn 4:18, NRSV).

These verses show that corrective punishment will be given to those who do not follow God. Fear comes from knowing that one is "not right with God"—indeed, correction is what is needed!

The last pair of Greek words in this section have to do with **torment—an arduous, difficult ordeal**. This may not be a fun thing to think about, but God would not have put it in the Bible if He did not want us to think about it. Some translations actually use the word "torture", but that has a strictly negative meaning in English. The Greek words *basanizo* (Strong's #928—verb) and *basanismos* (Strong's #929—noun) came from the use of a touchstone to test molten metals for purity. These words deal with a purposeful

ordeal, more than arbitrary pain or punishment. Notice some of the uses in Scripture:

Saying, "Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented" (Matt 8:6, NKJV)

Then being with child, she cried out in labor and in pain [torment] to give birth (Rev 12:2, NKJV).

But by this time the boat, battered [tormented] by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them (Matt 14:24, NRSV).

And he saw them harassed [tormented] in the rowing, for the wind was against them, and about the fourth watch of the night he doth come to them walking on the sea, and wished to pass by them (Mark 6:48, YLT).

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 (Rev 9:5, NKJV).

And delivered righteous Lot, who was oppressed by the filthy conduct of the wicked (for that righteous man, dwelling among them, tormented his righteous soul from day to day by seeing and hearing their lawless deeds) (2Pet 2:7-8, NKJV).

And the inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and celebrate and exchange presents, because these two prophets had been a torment to the inhabitants of the earth (Rev 11:10, NRSV).

From the last two verses, above, we can see that "torment" can be mental as well as physical. Torment also applies to demons:

And he cried out with a loud voice and said, "What have I to do with You, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? I implore You by God that You do not torment me" (Mark 5:7, NKJV—Luke 8:28 is similar)

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, NKJV)

The verse immediately above seems to indicate that the demon knew of a time of torment coming in the future—and was complaining about it coming too soon.

With this background, it is much easier to understand one of the verses commonly used to "prove" that there is a place of "eternal torture": Revelation 14:11. Let us read the verse in context:

<sup>9</sup> A third angel followed them and said in a loud voice: "If anyone worships the beast and his image and receives his mark on the forehead or on the hand, <sup>10</sup> he, too, will drink of the wine of God's fury, which has been poured full strength into the cup of his wrath. He will be tormented with burning sulfur in the presence of the holy angels and of the Lamb. <sup>11</sup> And the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever. There is no rest day or night for those who worship the beast and his image, or for anyone who receives the mark of his name." <sup>12</sup> This calls for patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus. <sup>13</sup> Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them" (Rev 14:9-13)

After this verse takes place, there is a blessing for physical human beings who will "die in the Lord from now on". All judgment has not taken place.

Verse 11 is not discussing the final end of the wicked, but part of the sequence of events during the "last days". It is important to note that verse 10 speaks of the future ("will be tormented"), where verse 11 is in the present tense ("smoke...rises", "there **is** no rest", "those who **worship**"). Verse 11 is talking about things that are happening at that time—it does **not** say "those who **worshipped** the beast". Young's Literal Translation has it even more clearly:

And the smoke of their torment doth go up to ages of ages; and they have no rest day and night, who are bowing before the beast and his image, also if any doth receive the mark of his name (Rev 14:11, YLT).

This shows that the torment of those who accept the mark and follow the Beast will not "have it made", but will be miserable "day and night" because of their decision. These same people have additional trials and opportunities to repent described in chapter 16. It makes no sense for a person to "be in Hell forever" in one chapter, then go on to be a person on the earth in the next chapter. Why, then, does verse 11 use the expression "the smoke of their torment rises for ever and ever"? Consider this story:

"The truck was right in front of me, so to avoid hitting it I drove into the ditch. The car turned over and I was upside down, still being

held by my seatbelt. How do I unbuckle a seatbelt while I am hanging by it? I began to smell gasoline and I became frantic. It took me *forever* to get the belt undone, but I finally did and then crawled out the window just before the vehicle burst into flame.”

The above story is perfectly correct English. The word “forever” here is used as a metaphor to represent only a few seconds, but seconds that “seemed like an eternity” at a very tense time. To those people who worship the beast or accept his mark, this corrective torment seems to take forever—even the “saints who obey God’s commands” require “patient endurance” (v 12). If you knew nothing about seatbelts, but someone falsely told you that they were designed to imprison people in cars, you might read the above story and think that it took a long time or even forever to loosen the belt. But if you read it carefully and realize that something else takes place after the “forever”, then it is obvious that this is a metaphor—a comparison.

The following verse uses an even more complex expression “day and night forever and ever” to describe what happens to the devil for his evil work in deceiving the nations. It may mean a process that never ends. Fortunately, this does not apply to people.

And the devil who had deceived them [the nations of the Earth] 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, NRSV).

**How much punishment or torment will people receive in the judgment?** The answer is neatly explained in this verse:

As she [Babylon] glorified herself and lived luxuriously, so give her a like measure of torment and grief. Since in her heart she says, “I rule as a queen; I am no widow, and I will never see grief” (Rev 18:7, NRSV).

The people of Babylon lived in luxury at the expense of other’s suffering. So they will receive a similar amount of suffering in return. As Christ said:

For with the judgment you make you will be judged, and the measure you give will be the measure you get (Matthew 7:2, NRSV).

These verses give the fundamental starting point for eternal judgment. All sins have their penalty and this is what people deserve. Christ extends mercy and forgiveness to those with real

repentance who believe in Him. (But even this life teaches us that a person who squanders his money on worthless pursuits can repent before Christ and be forgiven but will probably not miraculously receive his money back.)

Most of the crimes and punishments listed in the Bible are very physical in nature: worshipping idols, murder, adultery and kidnapping deserve the death penalty; thieves restore twice what they stole; false witnesses receive the punishment that would have gone to the person whom they witnessed against; etc. The Bible also commands people not to hate others, not to speak evil of others, not to take advantage of the less fortunate and to help those in need. But it does not specify a penalty for men to invoke if someone does those things. Rather, God promises to take care of it Himself (Exodus 22:21-24). It is wise that God did not ask men to punish other men for “sins of the mind”. It is not really possible to *witness* what is in a person’s mind, and corrupt administration of such punishment might produce more evil than the original crimes. Righteous, “read the person’s mind” judgment is necessary for this:

<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD will rest on him [Christ]—the Spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of power, the Spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD—<sup>3</sup> and he will delight in the fear of the LORD. He will not judge by what he sees with his eyes, or decide by what he hears with his ears; <sup>4</sup> but with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked. <sup>5</sup> Righteousness will be his belt and faithfulness the sash around his waist. <sup>6</sup> The wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the goat, the calf and the lion and the yearling together; and a little child will lead them (Isa 11:2-6).

Christ will be able to judge people with evil thoughts and intents. His instrument of judgment will be “the rod of his mouth”. The last verse, above indicates an atmosphere of great peace. While indeed the most rebellious may be literally “slain by Christ’s words,” the same terminology is used for those who seeking God—convicted of their sin and desirous of repentance.

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the

other apostles, “Brothers, what shall we do?” Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:37-38).

...The sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God (Eph 6:17).

Several scriptures picture Christ coming to judge with a “sword in his mouth” (Rev 1:16; 2:12; 19:15). This is obviously not a normal way to fight with a sword, but an analogy for the power of His words. One more scripture showing the “slaying” analogy used for judgment:

For the word of God is living and active.

Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart (Heb 4:12).

As a sword could cut a person in pieces, so it can divide the good and bad thoughts in a person. The revealing of these evil thoughts is often punishment enough. The salesman who lies to his customers for his own profit will be utterly embarrassed when they find the truth of what he has been doing. So will the housewife who always claims to be “busy” when her neighbor asks her over, but really does not go because her neighbor’s house is so neat and she cannot stand to hear others praise her for it. These problems and thousands of others like them need to be irrefutably revealed by Christ in judgment so everyone can see every person for what they are (Luke 12:1-3; Rom 2:16; 1Cor 4:5).

While many scriptures mention physical punishment—or use physical punishment as an analogy to teach about God’s judgment, we should not envision judgment as a barbaric place where “everyone will be beaten until they are ready for the kingdom”. (That sounds more like Dante’s concept of Hell or Purgatory.) Those who have sins of a violent nature may need physical punishment to learn their lesson. But those who have other kinds of sins will need other kinds of lessons.

Christ’s judgment and mercy will be perfect. No one will be treated too harshly, no unrepentant person will be able to “talk his way into the Kingdom”. Those who repent and accept what Christ has done will receive eternal life, those who do not, the second death. Even a lifetime of unrepentant sin does not qualify one to suffer forever in an ever-burning “hell”.

## Is Sin Really So Bad?

Some people have no question about the enormity of difficulty caused by the sins of others. They have suffered from war, oppressive government, man-induced disease, an abusive spouse or have been the victim of a major crime. They know how bad sin is. They understand why God needs to do judge it and do something about it so people will not go on repeating it.

Others of us may have grown up in a relatively peaceful atmosphere not having suffered from the sins of others in a great way. Nevertheless, we all probably suffer a lot more than we realize because of the sins of others. Think about these things that are the result of sin:

- Family difficulties—how many family members cannot get along with each other? (They may put on a “nice face” to the outside world, yet within, all are unhappy.)
- Personal relationships. How often have you felt miserable due to the way you were treated by others at your school, job or social activities?
- How many places do we “not go” in because they “are not safe”?
- How many people do we know whose lives have been ruined by drugs (legal or illegal), alcohol, gambling or other excesses?

The economic cost of sin is indeed staggering if we think of all of the ways it affects us. Everyone could have a standard of living several times what they have without sin.

- We pay higher prices for almost everything from milk to auto repair because of theft and fraud in businesses and government.
- Most insurance goes to pay for sins—avoidable problems—not for genuine accidents.
- We spend too much money on inferior products that were designed for higher profits rather than to provide a lasting value for their purchaser.
- We have illnesses caused by food grown primarily for quantity—not for quality.
- We pay for and suffer from medical treatments designed for profit—not for health.
- We pay many times the amount of taxes that we would need if we did **not** have to defend ourselves against warring (sinning)

nations, pay for people who can't work (often due to some sin), pay for people who won't work (sin) and pay for corrupt (sinful) politician's pet projects.

Surely the arm of the LORD is not too short to save, nor his ear too dull to hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; your sins have hidden his face from you, so that he will not hear (Isa 59:1-2).

Sin separates us from God—both individually and collectively. How bad can this get? Bad enough that God considered the destruction of the entire human race:

The LORD saw how great man's wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time. The LORD was grieved that he had made man on the earth, and his heart was filled with pain. So the LORD said, "I will wipe mankind, whom I have created, from the face of the earth—men and animals, and creatures that move along the ground, and birds of the air—for I am grieved that I have made them" (Genesis 6:5-7).

Obviously, God allowed mankind to continue. But He still promises judgment of sin:

But with righteousness he will judge the needy, with justice he will give decisions for the poor of the earth. He will strike the earth with the rod of his mouth; with the breath of his lips he will slay the wicked (Isa 11:4).

### **"Universal Salvation" and "Predestination"**

"Universal salvation" is the idea that God will eventually give salvation to everyone, whether they are now diligent to follow God or hate and oppose God. "Predestination" is similar, except that only *certain* people are included in the process—in other words, some will be saved no matter what they do, and the others cannot be saved no matter what they do. Both of these ideas assign little or no control to the individual over his or her own destiny. They assume that God has planned out every individual's life before the world was created—that humans really do not make decisions, but are simply doing what God has already planned for them to do.

To a large degree, these concepts seem completely opposed to the concept of eternal judgment. How can God judge anyone if they are only doing what He planned for them to do?

Furthermore, if we look at the previously quoted Bible verses (Gen 6:5-7), how could God have been "grieved that He made man" and consider destroying them, if He knew from the beginning exactly what they would do?

Part of the reason for this confusion comes from confusion related to the definition of God. If we look in the Bible for a definition of God, we see that He is the creator of all that exists (Gen 1:1). He is the one who "always exists" (Ex 3:14). He is above all other "gods" (Ex 18:11). He is love (1Jn 4:8). He teaches, heals, rules, forgives and judges. But if you look in a dictionary, you might something about Him being "omnipresent" (located everywhere at once) "omniscient" (knowing everything), and "omnipotent" (having all power—capable of doing anything). These terms are borrowed from Greek philosophy and do not correspond exactly to any word in the Bible. Philosophers like to define God in a theoretical sense, and then figure out what He must be like by human reason, rather than listen to what He says. They will ask questions like: "Can God make a stone so heavy that He can't move it?" or "Can God kill Himself?" I believe the answer to both of these questions is either "no" or "He will not"—and that arguing the difference between the two is pointless. God has righteous character—He is not a mindless impersonal force that happens to be capable of anything. The Bible teaches us that no other has power like God (Deut 4:35), but does not try to completely define His power. Men might find it impossible to understand the full power of God if He explained it to us, **so there is little reason to try to guess at His power through our own reason** (Pslm 131:1). It is probably best to discard the omnipresent, omniscient and omnipotent ideas, and just believe that God can do whatever **He wants** (Isa 46:10).

We cannot impose our values on God. We cannot take a statement like "God is Love", and then say that it means He is going to save every single person because that is our definition of "love". There is no verse that says, "God knows what every person is going to do before they do it." But there are thousands of verses commanding people to make the right choice. Do they have a choice if God knew what they would do before they were born?

Nevertheless, there are some verses, when read by themselves, that seem to indicate that either "every last person will be saved" or that

“certain select people will be saved no matter what they do”. Those verses are listed below, with clarifications to their translation as necessary. They will be followed by verses that specifically show how God is *both* able to let people make decisions on their own **and** bring about his overall plan.

#### Verses Seeming to Support “Universal Salvation”

And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws (Ezk 36:27). [The word “translated “move” here is a very general word, shamar (Strong’s #8104) which means “to do” or “to make”—it does not mean “to force against one’s will”.]

But in the LORD all the descendants of Israel will be found righteous and will exult (Isa 45:25).

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him (John 3:17).

And so all Israel will be saved... (Rom 11:26).

For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive... (1Cor 15:22).

...we are convinced that one died for all, and therefore all died.... God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them (2Cor 5:14, 19).

[God] who wants all men to be saved and to come to a knowledge of the truth. 5 For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, 6 who gave himself as a ransom for all men—the testimony given in its proper time (1Tim 2:4).

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2Pet 3:9).

He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world (1Jn 2:2).

#### Verses Clearly Refuting “Universal Salvation”

If all we read were the above and other similar verses, we might indeed conclude that God plans to give salvation to every person no matter what they do. But there are at least four things wrong with taking this approach.

1) The surrounding context of some of the above verses shows that there are exceptions—not every last person necessarily receives salvation. Immediately after John 3:17:

Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God’s one and only Son (John 3:18).

Similarly, after 1 John 2:2 comes verse 4:

The man who says, “I know him,” but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him (1Jn 2:4).

2) The word “**all**” used in many verses above does not necessarily mean “every single person”. It means the overwhelming majority, but not “every last one”. This can be easily shown with a concordance (either English or Hebrew and Greek). A number of verses use the word “all”, but do **not** mean every last one—there can be exceptions to “all”. Deuteronomy 2:16: “So it was, when **all** the men of war had finally perished from among the people.” Joshua and Caleb were men of war, but had not perished. Numbers 14:30 explains the exceptions to “all”: “**Not one of you will enter the land** I swore with uplifted hand to make your home, *except* Caleb son of Jephunneh and Joshua son of Nun.” In 2 Kings 11:1 Athalia destroyed **all** the royal seed, but there was a survivor mentioned in verse 2. Also, Mark 3:28 says: “I tell you the truth, **all** the sins and blasphemies of men will be forgiven them”, but verse 29 goes on to say: “But whoever blasphemes against the Holy Spirit will never be forgiven; he is guilty of an eternal sin.”

3) There are many other verses that show that some will **not** be saved. Several are listed in *The “Unpardonable Sin”* section beginning on page 36. Other verses put clear requirements (like believing in Christ) on those who would be saved:

And everyone who calls on the name of the Lord will be saved (Acts 2:21).

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell (Matt 10:28).

“Not everyone who says to me, ‘Lord,



Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of my Father who is in heaven. Many will say to me on that day, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform many miracles?' Then I will tell them plainly, 'I never knew you. Away from me, you evildoers!'" (Matthew 7:21-23.)

Romans 9:27 Isaiah cries out concerning Israel: "Though the number of the Israelites be like the sand by the sea, only the remnant will be saved.

4) Finally, most scriptures used to support "universal salvation" say something like "God wants **all** men to be saved". There are no scriptures that say that God will force repentance or salvation on those who do not want it.

#### Verses Seeming to Support "Predestination"

Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker, to him who is but a potsherd among the potsherds on the ground. Does the clay say to the potter, "What are you making?" Does your work say, "He has no hands"? (Isa 45:9.)

When the Gentiles heard this, they were glad and honored the word of the Lord; and all who were appointed for eternal life believed (Acts 13:48).

For those God foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the likeness of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. And those he predestined, he also called; those he called, he also justified; those he justified, he also glorified (Rom 8:29).

<sup>18</sup> Therefore God has mercy on whom he wants to have mercy, and he hardens whom he wants to harden. <sup>19</sup> One of you will say to me: "Then why does God still blame us? For who resists his will?" <sup>20</sup> But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" <sup>21</sup> Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use? <sup>22</sup> What if God, choosing to show his wrath and make his power known, bore with great patience the objects of his wrath—prepared for destruction? <sup>23</sup> What if he did this to make the riches of his glory known to the objects of his mercy, whom he prepared in advance for glory—<sup>24</sup> even us, whom he also called, not only from the Jews but also from the

Gentiles? (Rom 9:18-24.)

For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will (Eph 1:4-5).

In him we were also chosen, having been predestined according to the plan of him who works out everything in conformity with the purpose of his will (Eph 1:11).

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do (Eph 2:10).

In addition to these verses, advocates of "predestination" will mention the cases where people were called of God before their birth. Cyrus was prophesied by name to rebuild Jerusalem (Isa 45). Jeremiah (Jer 1:5) and John the Baptist (Luke 1) were called before birth. People have been prepared to sit on either side of Christ (Mark 10:40). Twelve Apostles will judge 12 tribes (Matt 19:28). There other scriptures, but some of them probably do not apply to the authors of the books as the entire chapter is a prophecy about Christ (Pslm 22; Isa 49).

#### Verses Clearly Refuting "Predestination"

The above verses definitely show that God planned to call and put His Spirit in people before the world was created. They show that He had a specific purpose in mind for a few individuals before they were born. But there just are **not** any verses that say: "every person who is a member of the body of Christ was already selected before he was born". Nor is there a verse that says: "Once God has selected you, you are saved no matter what you do." Nor is there a verse that clearly says, "Some people were made having no possibility of salvation." (Even those who were made to be "objects of His wrath" in this life will still be judged in the resurrection.)

God has created the world and given men and women choices to make. He put Adam and Eve in a nice garden and told them not to eat of one tree (Gen 1-3). You probably know what they chose to do. On the other hand, God has His plans for what He will accomplish. He is quite able to alter, steer and control what is happening on this Earth, and still leave people free choice. He does this in a way that is complex beyond our understanding. "...He has also set eternity in the

hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end” (Eccl 3:11).

All we can do is see some of the ways He works—in the many instances recorded in the Bible. Isaiah 45 and Romans 9 (quoted above) certainly show that He does not always deal the same way with everyone all of the time. But to think that God’s prophetic plans are always fulfilled by Him writing the history of the world in advance, and then causing people to be born to “play each part” is wrong. He can plan events, and then find people who are willing to fulfill them. If He needs a righteous man for His plan, He can correct him each time he sins to make him more righteous (Heb 12:5-7). If He needs an evil sinner, He can allow him to go unpunished (Eccl 8:11). Notice:

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen (Acts 4:27-28).

This verse does not say that Herod, Pilate, or individual Gentiles and Israelites were planned from birth to execute Christ. The events were planned and the various people fulfilled them. It is interesting to note they were fulfilled in many different ways. The Bible records that Herod mocked Jesus (Luke 23:11). Pilate wanted no part of His execution and, except for the crowd, would have released Him (Matt 27:15-24). Christ asked forgiveness for the soldiers who crucified Him (Luke 23:34), but no similar statement is recorded about those who scourged him, etc. Some of the Israelites gladly took responsibility for His death (Matt 27:25). But a Roman centurion and many other Israelites were saddened by what happened (Matt 27:54-60). God was able to make His plan happen with a diversity of people and attitudes.

A study of Abraham (Gen 12-26) shows that God made many promises to him as he continued to obey (Gen 26:4-5). God did not promise him everything right away because “He knew he would obey”, but He had to “test” him:

Sometime later God tested Abraham. He said to him, “Abraham!” “Here I am,” he replied... “Do not lay a hand on the boy,” he said. “Do not do anything to him. Now I know that you fear God, because you have not withheld from me your son, your only son” (Gen 22:1, 22).

Other scriptures show that God tests all of his people at various times:

Remember how the LORD your God led you all the way in the desert these forty years, to humble you and to test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands (Deut 8:2).

You must not listen to the words of that prophet or dreamer. The LORD your God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and with all your soul (Deut 13:3).

In at least one case, God removed His presence from someone in order to see what he would do without it:

However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon, whom they sent to him to inquire about the wonder that was done in the land, God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart (2Chr 32:31, NKJV).

Saul, David and Solomon are excellent examples of how God works with men. Each was chosen by God to be king in Israel and each was promised a perpetual dynasty if they would follow God. One failed soon, one did extremely well with only one big mistake, and the other did well for a long time but turned from God in the end.

The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you [Saul] in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you (1Sam 10:6-7).

Saul was given the Holy Spirit and a chance to be a successful king. But when he did not follow the big things that God gave him to do, that spirit was taken away from him:

Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him (1Sam 16:14).

“You acted foolishly,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. 14 But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD’s command (1Sam 13:13-24).

Saul’s loss of the kingdom was clearly due to what he did, not what God did. God was so

pleased with David that He promised him that he would establish his son's throne forever. Did that mean that his son was predestined to receive the Holy Spirit and have a place in the Kingdom? Did that mean that his son "had it made" no matter what kind of life he lived?

<sup>12</sup> When your [King David's] days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup> I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men, with floggings inflicted by men. <sup>15</sup> But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup> Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever" (2Sam 7:12-16).

God has untold options. He removed the kingdom of many kings who disobeyed him, but in Solomon's case, He promised not to do that, but "punish him with the rods of men". Solomon pleased God at first, and God gave him wisdom and riches like no other (1Kngs 3). Solomon built the magnificent temple of God and He appeared to him a second time:

I will establish your royal throne over Israel forever, as I promised David your father when I said, 'You shall never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.' But if you or your sons turn away from me and do not observe the commands and decrees I have given you and go off to serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land I have given them and will reject this temple I have consecrated for my Name (1Kngs 9:5-7).

Solomon knew exactly what God expected of him: not perfection, but a continual effort to follow God. What did Solomon do?

<sup>9</sup> The LORD became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice. <sup>10</sup> Although he had forbidden Solomon to follow other gods, Solomon did not keep the LORD's command. <sup>11</sup> So the LORD said to Solomon, "Since this is your attitude and you have not kept my covenant and my decrees, which I commanded you, I will most certainly tear the kingdom away from you and give it to

one of your subordinates. <sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, for the sake of David your father, I will not do it during your lifetime. I will tear it out of the hand of your son. <sup>13</sup> Yet I will not tear the whole kingdom from him, but will give him one tribe for the sake of David my servant and for the sake of Jerusalem, which I have chosen" (1Kngs 11:9-13).

Before this time, Solomon had had peace on all sides. But the rest of 1 Kings 11 shows that God allowed enemies of Solomon to rise up. One of Solomon's officers, Jeroboam, rebelled against Solomon (vv. 16-28). At times, God punished people who rebelled against His leaders. But in this case, Solomon was to be **punished "with the rod of men"**, and Jeroboam was given part of the majority of the kingdom by God (v 31). (The Bible does not give Jeroboam's reasons for rebelling—they may have been good reasons.) Solomon tried to kill Jeroboam, but did not succeed (v 40). Both Jeroboam, and Solomon's son, Rehoboam, turned out to be evil kings. When Rehoboam tried to fight Jeroboam to regain his part of the kingdom, God sent them a prophet and told them they were not going to do it (1Kngs 12:22-24). God can steer history through little events or big ones. Even in our day, we can think about which assassin's bullets missed, and which hit. We can also think about big nations that failed in their military objective against a smaller nation—and vice versa.

We could consider many more specific examples of people to whom God gave a job—some following God while they did it, others displeasing God. Moses and Joshua are examples of men who obeyed. When Israel rebelled against God, He intended to destroy the nation and make a new nation from Moses, but Moses convinced Him not to (Num 14:11-20). That was a big decision. Jesus Christ descended through the tribe of Judah, not through Moses (Matt 1:2; Luke 3:33). Had Moses not spoken up, Christ would have come—but would have had a different genealogy.

Jehu was a disobedient example. He was anointed King of Israel and told to put an end to certain sins. But after he had killed the people and destroyed the idols, notice what God said:

The LORD said to Jehu, "Because you have done well in accomplishing what is right in my eyes and have done to the house of Ahab all I had in mind to do, your descendants will sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation." Yet Jehu

was not careful to keep the law of the LORD, the God of Israel, with all his heart. He did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, which he had caused Israel to commit (2Kngs 10:30-31).

Most everyone knows what happened to Jonah when he tried to escape from his task of preaching to Nineveh: God made a fish swallow him and sent him on his way. After Jonah preached and his message was heard, he was unhappy with God (Jonah 4:1). Of interest, the people of Nineveh were told: “Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned” (Jonah 3:4). There was no “if” in the message. But their king said: “Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish.” God heard and He changed! God’s general approach to dealing with prophecy is explained here:

<sup>7</sup> If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, <sup>8</sup> and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned. <sup>9</sup> And if at another time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be built up and planted, <sup>10</sup> and if it does evil in my sight and does not obey me, then I will reconsider the good I had intended to do for it. <sup>11</sup> “Now therefore say to the people of Judah and those living in Jerusalem, ‘This is what the LORD says: Look! I am preparing a disaster for you and devising a plan against you. So turn from your evil ways, each one of you, and reform your ways and your actions’” (Jer 18:7-11).

Even when Jesus was on the Earth, He was able to be moved to change his mission by a pleading person:

<sup>22</sup> A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is suffering terribly from demon-possession.” <sup>23</sup> Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.” <sup>24</sup> He answered, “I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.” <sup>25</sup> The woman came and knelt before him. “Lord, help me!” she said. <sup>26</sup> He replied, “It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to their dogs.” <sup>27</sup> “Yes, Lord,” she said, “but even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their masters’ table.” <sup>28</sup> Then Jesus answered, “Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted.” And her daughter was healed from that very hour (Matt 15:22-28).

This Gentile woman received mercy from Christ because of what she said and did. Similarly, the first Gentile church member was already trying to please God, before God called him:

At Caesarea there was a man named Cornelius, a centurion in what was known as the Italian Regiment. He and all his family were devout and God-fearing; he gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly (Acts 10:1-2).

The entire concept of prayer seems to make little sense for those who believe in predestination. Why ask God for anything if He has already planned one’s life: Notice that when Christ had an important decision, He prayed a long time. Why would He take any time to pray about who His apostles should be if they had been picked out before the world was created? He also taught us that one reason *we* do not have things we need is because we do not ask:

One of those days Jesus went out to a mountainside to pray, and spent the night praying to God. When morning came, he called his disciples to him and chose twelve of them, whom he also designated apostles (Luke 6:12-13).

You want something but don’t get it. ... You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God (Jms 4:2).

Even in the important subject of salvation, we are frequently reminded that there are things that we need to do to receive it. This is not “salvation by works”—a child who asks his parent for a new change of clothes does not earn the clothes by asking, but he might not get them if he does not ask.

Peter replied, “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38).

Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes. ... That if you confess with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved... For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved (Rom 10:4,9,13)

And Peter having opened his mouth, said, ‘Of a truth, I perceive that God is no respecter of persons, <sup>35</sup> but in every nation he who is fearing Him, and is working righteousness, is acceptable to Him (Acts 10:34, YLT).

And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit (Eph 1:13).

Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne (Rev 3:20-21).

If we want to have an understanding about how God looks at those who do good or evil, please read this rather specific passage:

<sup>11</sup> Say to them, "As surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, I take no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but rather that they turn from their ways and live. Turn! Turn from your evil ways! Why will you die, O house of Israel?" <sup>12</sup> Therefore, son of man, say to your countrymen, "The righteousness of the righteous man will not save him when he disobeys, and the wickedness of the wicked man will not cause him to fall when he turns from it. The righteous man, if he sins, will not be allowed to live because of his former righteousness." <sup>13</sup> If I tell the righteous man that he will surely live, but then he trusts in his righteousness and does evil, none of the righteous things he has done will be remembered; he will die for the evil he has done. <sup>14</sup> And if I say to the wicked man, "You will surely die," but he then turns away from his sin and does what is just and right—<sup>15</sup>if he gives back what he took in pledge for a loan, returns what he has stolen, follows the decrees that give life, and does no evil, he will surely live; he will not die. <sup>16</sup> None of the sins he has committed will be remembered against him. He has done what is just and right; he will surely live.... <sup>20</sup> Yet, O house of Israel, you say, "The way of the Lord is not just." But I will judge each of you according to his own ways (Ezk 33:11-16,20).

Even in regard to the salvation of other people, the Apostle Paul knew he was commissioned to preach, but also believed that **his own actions could have a positive effect on the salvation of others:**

I am talking to you Gentiles. Inasmuch as I am the apostle to the Gentiles, I make

much of my ministry in the hope that I may somehow arouse my own people to envy and save some of them (Rom 11:13-14).

<sup>16</sup> Yet when I preach the gospel, I cannot boast, for I am compelled to preach. Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel! <sup>17</sup> If I preach voluntarily, I have a reward; if not voluntarily, I am simply discharging the trust committed to me. <sup>18</sup> What then is my reward? Just this: that in preaching the gospel I may offer it free of charge, and so not make use of my rights in preaching it. <sup>19</sup> Though I am free and belong to no man, I make myself a slave to everyone, to win as many as possible. <sup>20</sup> To the Jews I became like a Jew, to win the Jews. To those under the law I became like one under the law (though I myself am not under the law), so as to win those under the law. <sup>21</sup> To those not having the law I became like one not having the law (though I am not free from God's law but am under Christ's law), so as to win those not having the law. <sup>22</sup> To the weak I became weak, to win the weak. I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some. <sup>23</sup> I do all this for the sake of the gospel, that I may share in its blessings (1Cor 9:16-23).

#### Conclusion on Universal Salvation and Predestination

Even after reading these scriptures, it may still be hard to understand why God would leave such an important issue as who will be given eternal life in the hands of mere men and women. Could He leave such important decisions to people who do not fully understand His plan? Could He even leave some of them to chance? Think about the creation of human life. God commanded men and women to form lifetime marriages before "making babies"—but billions of children have been conceived by couples "having fun" and taking no thought for their future. Some children are raised by parents who love and care for them; other children are hated or killed by those who conceived them. God often does not stop most of the disasters that men create. Notice this teaching of Christ:

<sup>1</sup> Now there were some present at that time who told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices. <sup>2</sup> Jesus answered, "Do you think that these Galileans were worse sinners than all the other

Galileans because they suffered this way? <sup>3</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish. <sup>4</sup> Or those eighteen who died when the tower in Siloam fell on them—do you think they were more guilty than all the others living in Jerusalem? <sup>5</sup> I tell you, no! But unless you repent, you too will all perish” (Luke 13:1-5).

Christ taught that disastrous deaths sometimes happen to people who were not the worst sinners (but that death is the ultimate end for everyone who does not repent, because we all have sinned and deserve it). Nevertheless, Christ indicated that these two disasters were **not** specifically the “hand of God”. But then He goes on to give a parable showing that some disasters are “the hand of God”:

Then he told this parable: “A man had a fig tree, planted in his vineyard, and he went to look for fruit on it, but did not find any. So he said to the man who took care of the vineyard, ‘For three years now I’ve been coming to look for fruit on this fig tree and haven’t found any. Cut it down! Why should it use up the soil?’ ‘Sir,’ the man replied, ‘leave it alone for one more year, and I’ll dig around it and fertilize it. If it bears fruit next year, fine! If not, then cut it down’” (Luke 13:6-9).

This parable shows that God goes out of His way to try to correct people who are not bearing fruit. It may seem difficult to the person at the time, but it is ultimately the best for them: “because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son” (Heb 12:6). God refers to himself as a Father and to people as his children in many Scriptures. A good parent will know in general what his small children will do, without specifically knowing exactly what they will do at any one time. He may be pleasantly surprised at some decisions, and disappointed in others—but capable of handling any situation and steering it for his children’s learning and benefit. Sometimes, he lets his children learn from their own mistakes, other times he saves them from what would otherwise be a disaster. Our father is a lot like that.

One final comment on the doctrines of “universal salvation” and “predestination”: ***If they were true, there is still no point in teaching either doctrine. If*** everyone is going to be saved, or just certain “elect” are going to be saved, then whether or not people even know the doctrine makes no difference in who will be saved. ***If***

these doctrines were true, our entire lives would be pre-programmed and pointless. One could not argue against a person who believed these doctrines and wanted to commit suicide—if they were destined to be saved, suicide would instantly put them with God and **if** they were destined *not* to be saved, they would be “putting themselves out of their misery”.

But the overwhelming teaching of the Bible is that our lives **do** matter. We need to “Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to” (Luke 13:24). We do not want to be like the man who hid his “talent in the earth” (Matt 25:25). God gave us minds to think and make decisions, a Bible to read, a Holy Spirit to teach us and a promise to hear our prayers. We need to use these gifts.

### Does the Bible Teach a “Rapture”?

The word “rapture” means a state of extreme emotion or joy—being “carried away”. In theology, it refers to the doctrine that all of those who are “saved” will physically rise in the air to meet Christ. There are many variants on this doctrine. Some religious groups teach that it will happen in a rather reckless fashion: planes will crash as “saved” pilots are “raptured” from their cockpits, thousands of auto crashes will occur as “saved” drivers leave their vehicles and possibly “unsaved” passengers careening out of control. You may have seen bumper stickers that say: “Warning! In event of the rapture, this vehicle will be un-occupied!”

Obviously, a person using such a bumper sticker is trying to do God’s job of judgment for Him. How can he be sure he will be chosen? Actually, the entire concept of “chaotic rapture” is not in the Bible. Even the word “rapture” is not found in any common Bible translation. Nevertheless, some Bible teachers spend a great deal of time teaching this “sudden” or “secret rapture” doctrine—even producing whole books and movies on the subject. Some believe that the “rapture” will occur before the “great tribulation”, and others believe it will occur after.

The Bible does teach that some believers will rise to meet Christ in the air. Let us see what it says, rather than basing our belief on a “rapture theory”, and then finding scriptures that seem to ***fit*** the theory but do not really ***prove*** it. Here is what the Bible says:

<sup>38</sup> For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; <sup>39</sup> and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. <sup>40</sup> Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. <sup>41</sup> Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left (Matt 24:38-41).

I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34-35).

According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever (1Thes 4:15-17).

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1Cor 15:51).

There are many other scriptures where God promises protection to those who obey Him. But those scriptures say nothing about disappearing or rising to meet Christ. On the other hand, the verses above seem to indicate that the event described is not a secret event, but one that everyone will see. Notice, what we read only a few verses before the “one taken one left” scripture in Matthew 24:

At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other (Matt 24:30).

This event seems to be known to everyone. There is no proof of a “secret rapture” There are **no** verses about accidents occurring because a

“raptured” person suddenly left his farm animals, grain mill, oven or whatever. God could cause those that He is taking away to leave in an orderly manner or He could allow great destruction. The Bible does not say—so we should not make a doctrine out of it.

### Are There “Go To Heaven” Verses?

Most people grow up believing that “when good people die, they go to heaven”. Yet the Bible continually compares death to “sleep” (see quotes on pages 7 to 10). Nevertheless, there are some scriptures that do seem to talk about people in heaven.

The book of Matthew contains many references to the “Kingdom of Heaven”. Is this about believers “going to Heaven” to be with God when they die? Notice, however, that this Kingdom is not specifically *in* Heaven but *of* Heaven. “Kingdom from Heaven” or “Heavenly Kingdom” better translate Matthew’s words. We can be certain that the “Kingdom of Heaven” spoken of by Matthew is the same as the phrase “Kingdom of God” used by the other Gospel writers, Mark, Luke and John. There are places where several Gospel writers record the same words of Jesus and Matthew says “Kingdom of Heaven” and the others say “Kingdom of God” (see Matt 13:11; Mark 4:11; Luke 8:10). The “Kingdom of God” occurs at the return of Christ, when he returns to the **earth** to take over the earthly kingdoms and rule as King of Kings and Lord of Lords (Dan 2:44; Job 19:25; Rev 11:15; 17:12-14; 19:16-19).

Along a similar line, some people think this verse tells about mansions *in* heaven that are being prepared for believers:

“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 14:2-3, NKJV).

If you will notice, though, this verse does not mention the word “Heaven” Verse 3 clearly shows that Christ will **come again** to Earth—that is the place he “came” the first time:

...This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven (Acts 1:11).

I know that my Redeemer lives, and that

in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God (Job 19:25-26).

Did Jesus promise one of the criminals hanging on the crosses that he would go to “Heaven” that day? Notice what it says.

Then he said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” Jesus answered him, “I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.” (Luke 23:43)

The original language word here is a Persian word for an ideal hunting ground—a wonderful place: *paradeisos*. Does it mean the “Heaven” where God dwells? Probably not. The same word is used in only two other places in the Bible, one in Revelation 2:7, which is a reference to the tree in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2:9). The other use of this word describes the location of a vision in 2 Corinthians 12:3-4. It is very unlikely that it means heaven as Paul just described a vision in verse 2 that *did* take place in the “third heaven”. “Paradise” appears to be used for a non-specific, but happy place.

After that criminal died, the next thing he will remember is a favorable judgment—there is no consciousness between. He repented of his sin and suffered an awful death for it. It does seem impossible that he could be with Jesus in Heaven on that very same day because Jesus had to wait three days for His resurrection (1Cor 15:3-4) and He did not ascend to His Father until **after** he rose from the dead (John 20:17). The word for “today” in the above verse can be used for a time (a “today”) in the future. Notice this scripture where the exact same word is used twice:

Therefore God again set a certain day, calling it Today, when a long time later he spoke through David, as was said before: “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 4:7).

Another rather unusual scripture that some say proves that “the saved” are now alive in heaven is this rather unusual story:

<sup>7</sup> Saul then said to his attendants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.” “There is one in Endor,” they said.... <sup>11</sup> Then the woman asked, “Whom shall I bring up for you?” “Bring up Samuel,” he said. <sup>12</sup> When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!” <sup>13</sup> The king said to her, “Don’t be afraid. What do you see?”

The woman said, “I see a spirit coming up out of the ground.” <sup>14</sup> “What does he look like?” he asked. “An old man wearing a robe is coming up,” she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. <sup>15</sup> Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” “I am in great distress,” Saul said. “The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do” (1Sam 28:7,11-15).

Was the prophet Samuel alive in heaven? Did he come back to speak to Saul? First, let us find God’s opinion of “mediums”—people who claim to communicate with the spirits of the dead: “A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads” (Lev 20:27). Even though the message that this “Samuel” gave to Saul corresponded with what the God said before, could Saul really be sure that he was talking to Samuel? Notice, that God sometimes does His work through false prophets—especially when people trust in false prophets to begin with:

<sup>20</sup> “And the LORD said, ‘Who will entice Ahab into attacking Ramoth Gilead and going to his death there?’ One suggested this, and another that. <sup>21</sup> Finally, a spirit came forward, stood before the LORD and said, ‘I will entice him.’ <sup>22</sup> ‘By what means?’ the LORD asked. ‘I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouths of all his [Ahab’s] prophets,’ he said. ‘You will succeed in enticing him,’ said the LORD. ‘Go and do it.’ <sup>23</sup> So now the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouths of all these prophets of yours. The LORD has decreed disaster for you” (1Kngs 22:20-23).

This writer thinks that a lying spirit pretending to be Samuel spoke to the medium and to Saul. False prophets sometimes speak true messages, because God requires them to do so (see Balaam’s example—Num 22:18). But even if one were to assume that the medium at Endor did really contact Samuel, what do the verses quoted above say? They say that Samuel came “up out of the ground” and asked “why did you disturb me”. They do not say he “came down from heaven”! So either way, the “Samuel was in heaven” idea does not fit. But this writer



certainly prefers the “lying spirit” explanation. There is no example in the scripture of Satan or his demons raising somebody from the dead.

The “**transfiguration**” (Matt 17:1-9) is sometimes thought to be evidence that the righteous of the Old Testament are already in the Bible. After all, here we find Jesus talking with Moses and Elijah (not some medium). Nevertheless, we need to realize that this was not reality of the time, but Jesus interacting with a “**vision**”. “Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, ‘Tell the **vision** to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead’” (Matt 17:9, NKJV). The Greek word *horama* (strong’s #5719) appears to have this same meaning in all of the 11 other places it is used. If modern technology can produce three-dimensional moving, talking images from the mind of an artist, so can the mind of God produce visions of the future to whomever He will.

Most of the other scriptures which might be used to claim that “people go to Heaven when they die” are in the book of Revelation. The words “heaven” and “earth” are found 56 and 81 times respectively in the book of Revelation. Beside this, there are references to temples, altars priests and other things that are in both Heaven and earth—it is not always easy to tell where a specific verse takes place.

Additional difficulty comes from the fact that most of the book is symbolic. For example, almost nobody believes that there is a literal, real animal with seven heads and ten horns (Rev 12:3, etc.). Whereas many Bible students believe that there will be a literal new Heaven and earth (Rev 20). But many other scriptures are uncertain: Are they literal or figurative in some way? Are the people and heavenly creatures mentioned prophecies of literal things in Heaven or on the earth? Or are they symbols of greater things? Our particular approach to prophetic interpretation will make a big difference as to whether any of these scriptures say that there are literal people in Heaven. Furthermore, we must ask the question, is it possible that all people who have died up to this point are still in the ground awaiting a resurrection (compatible with the rest of scripture), but that at some time in the future some will be in Heaven?

Before we accept an explanation of the meaning of the Book of Revelation from a particular teacher, we ought to realize that most

teachers have borrowed much of their teaching from previous prophecy teachers—and almost all of those previous teachers came up with some prophetic time-table which proved to be in error. If they were in error, they were probably not inspired of God. (It seems preferable to simply ask God to give us understanding of the parts of prophecy that we need in our lives now. What if He does not reveal anything? It may be for the best. Think of the thousands of people who thought they had “figured out” how prophecy would be fulfilled and Christ would return in the 1800’s. They would have been better off admitting that they did not know, but living their lives in a way that would please Christ all the time.)

One outstanding example of questions between literal or symbolic are the “two witnesses”. Are they two actual men, or do they represent groups of people?

<sup>3</sup> And I will give power to my two witnesses, and they will prophesy for 1,260 days, clothed in sackcloth.” <sup>4</sup> These are the two olive trees and the two lampstands that stand before the Lord of the earth. <sup>5</sup> If anyone tries to harm them, fire comes from their mouths and devours their enemies. This is how anyone who wants to harm them must die. <sup>6</sup> These men have power to shut up the sky so that it will not rain during the time they are prophesying; and they have power to turn the waters into blood and to strike the earth with every kind of plague as often as they want. <sup>7</sup> Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them. <sup>8</sup> Their bodies will lie in the street of the great city, which is figuratively called Sodom and Egypt, where also their Lord was crucified. <sup>9</sup> For three and a half days men from every people, tribe, language and nation will gaze on their bodies and refuse them burial. <sup>10</sup> The inhabitants of the earth will gloat over them and will celebrate by sending each other gifts, because these two prophets had tormented those who live on the earth. <sup>11</sup> But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet, and terror struck those who saw them. <sup>12</sup> Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, “Come up here.” And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on. <sup>13</sup> At that very hour there was a severe earthquake

and a tenth of the city collapsed. Seven thousand people were killed in the earthquake, and the survivors were terrified and gave glory to the God of heaven (Rev 11:3-13).

The underlined words, above, sound like they apply to literal men. But, if we look at the definition of the “two witnesses” in verse 4, we find that they are “two olive trees” and “two lampstands”. Revelation does not mention olive trees anywhere else, but Revelation 1:12-20 clearly show that Christ is among seven lampstands and “the seven lampstands are the seven churches” (Rev 12:20). Could the two witnesses be two churches? Could they be both churches (“lampstands”) and men (“olive trees”—Zech 4:11-15)?

Without answering these prophecy questions, it is hard to say that this scripture teaches that the “two witnesses will go to heaven”. We also must consider whether or not the two witnesses actually went to the heaven where God’s throne is, or simply up into the air. The verse says that they went in a cloud—clouds are around the earth. Similarly, Elijah was taken up to “heaven” in a “whirlwind” (winds are in the air, not in outer space) in 2 Kings 2:11, but must have continued living on earth because he later wrote a letter (2Chr 21:12). We must realize that the Bible uses the same words for the “heaven” that could be 1) the atmosphere, 2) outer space and 3) the dwelling place of God. Paul, to make his point clear, uses term “third heaven” one time (2Cor 12:2). All of these places were basically “off limits” to people of that time. Today, we can send airplanes into the atmosphere and rockets into nearby outer space. We can be fairly sure that the heaven where God dwells is either invisible to us, or very far away.

Let us look at some more scriptures which some people believe refer to “heaven”.

When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. They called out in a loud voice, “How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?” Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed (Rev 6:9-11).

Are these souls under an altar in Heaven? Actually, the location of the altar is not given, though there probably is one in Heaven (Rev 9:13). But if we realize that the blood of sacrifices poured out under the altar, then it is easy to see that these “souls under the altar” represent martyrs who were slain, and the white robes symbolize the righteousness of the saints (Rev 19:8). When “righteous Abel” (Matt 23:35) was killed, we find very similar language: “What have you done? Listen! Your **brother’s blood cries out** to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which **opened its mouth** to receive your brother’s blood from your hand” (Gen 4:10-11). The ground does not have a “mouth”, Abel was dead and his blood did not make an audible sound. Similarly the souls under the altar need not be “alive” in order for their deaths and righteousness to be symbolically recognized.

But there are other cases that are not so simple:

<sup>9</sup> After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. <sup>11</sup> All the angels were standing around the throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the throne and worshiped God, <sup>14</sup> ... “These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. <sup>15</sup> Therefore, they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will spread his tent over them. <sup>16</sup> Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat upon them, nor any scorching heat. <sup>17</sup> For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; he will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes” (Rev 7:9,11,14-17).

The “great multitude above appears to literally be around God’s throne in Heaven—serving Him. Yet, the underscored words in the last two verses seem very symbolic (do people need to avoid the sun and be lead to water in Heaven?) We must also realize that these are just people who have come out of “the great

tribulation”. This scripture does not apply to all believers everywhere.

<sup>1</sup> Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father’s name written on their foreheads. <sup>2</sup> And I heard a sound from heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps. <sup>3</sup> And they sang a new song before the throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the earth. <sup>4</sup> These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they kept themselves pure. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among men and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. <sup>5</sup> No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless. <sup>6</sup> Then I saw another angel flying in midair, and he had the eternal gospel to proclaim to those who live on the earth—to every nation, tribe, language and people (Rev 14:1-6).

In these verses, Christ (the Lamb) is on Mount Zion—which is on the earth. There is no mention of a “Mount Zion” in Heaven in Revelation. The 144,000 follow the Lamb, so they must be where He is. Yet, the harpists playing and singing in verses 2 and 3 seem to be teaching a song to the 144,000. Are they hearing the heavenly song on the earth? Or did the Lamb take them back to Heaven. I cannot be sure.

<sup>14:20</sup> They were trampled in the winepress outside the city, and blood flowed out of the press, rising as high as the horses’ bridles for a distance of 1,600 stadia. <sup>15:1</sup> I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them God’s wrath is completed. <sup>2</sup> And I saw what looked like a sea of glass mixed with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the beast and his image and over the number of his name. They held harps given them by God <sup>3</sup> and sang the song of Moses the servant of God and the song of the Lamb: “Great and marvelous are your deeds, Lord God Almighty. Just and true are your ways, King of the ages. <sup>4</sup> Who will not fear you, O Lord, and bring glory to your name? For you alone are holy. All nations will come and worship before you,

for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

<sup>5</sup> After this I looked and in heaven the temple, that is, the tabernacle of the Testimony, was opened (Rev 14:20-15:5)

Where are these harp players who were victorious over the beast? Chapter 1, verse 20 clearly takes place on the earth, but verse 1 mentions an angel in Heaven. This sea of glass in verse 2 is mixed with fire—not the same as the one in Revelation 4:6 which is “clear as crystal”. In verse 4, the nations come to worship the Lamb—probably on earth? Then verse 5 is clearly in heaven, but it is introduced almost like a “change of scene”. Only a few verses later we find:

Then I heard a voice from heaven say, “Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Yes,” says the Spirit, “they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them” (Rev 14:13).

Here, as in most of the scripture, the dead are pictured as resting or asleep. One of the most detailed chapters about the resurrection of the dead is Revelation 20. Certainly some verses of Revelation could be interpreted to say that there are people in heaven—but we are dealing with a highly symbolic book. There are no scriptures that clearly say, “Righteous people go to heaven when they die.” Nor are there any scriptures that describe deceased righteous people watching over living people, talking to God, etc.

Numerous studies have been made where people have promised to contact living friends or relatives after they died (if possible), and no provable results have been obtained. Some have advanced the theory that when people die, they go to some kind of state where they are alive but unable to communicate with either God or the Earth in any way. If this is true, but God has not told us about it, then it is impossible to study or confirm because by its own definition, we cannot communicate with it to find out anything about it.

If you still have some doubt about this section, please reread the chapter *Is David in Heaven?* beginning on page 7.

### **Fire is a Symbol of Judgment**

Many scriptures show us that fire is a symbol of judgment in the Bible. The Bible certainly talks about many literal fires, but it also makes clear that many are symbolic. Fire burns things that are temporary in nature (straw, paper, wood, etc), but tends to strengthen and purify

things that are durable in nature (metal, glass, brick, etc.). This is a good analogy to the trial and judging process of God. We need to understand this before we interpret every “judgment of fire” in the Bible as an eternal “hell fire”.

This third I will bring into the fire; I will refine them like silver and test them like gold. They will call on my name and I will answer them; I will say, “They are my people,” and they will say, “The LORD is our God” (Zech 13:9).

But who can endure the day of his coming? Who can stand when he appears? For he will be like a refiner’s fire or a launderer’s soap. He will sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; he will purify the Levites and refine them like gold and silver. Then the LORD will have men who will bring offerings in righteousness (Mal 3:2-3).

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you (1Pet 4:12, NKJV).

For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work (1Cor 3:11-13).

There are *many* other scriptures in the Bible where fire is used as a symbol of judgment, though it is not specifically explained. The first judgment in the Bible is against Adam and Eve for their sin. How does God mark this judgment?

So the LORD God banished him [Adam] from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life (Gen 3:23-24).

Much later, God began to work with Abraham, the father of the faithful (Rom 4:16). God told Abraham to “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you” (Gen 12:1). Where did Abraham leave from? He left from the city of “Ur”. What does “Ur” mean? A Bible dictionary or concordance will show that it means “flame”. The Bible does not say that Ur was destroyed by flame, but Abraham had to leave that godless city.

Later, God told righteous Lot to leave the corrupt city of Sodom (Gen 19; Luke 17:29). “Sodom” means “burning”. In this case, God actually sent “fire and brimstone” from Heaven to destroy the city. An interesting comment is made about this fire in the book of Jude:

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal fire (Jude 1:7).

Is the fire of Sodom still burning? Are the people suffering? No, it burned out and the people are dead. The expression “eternal fire” is probably a mistake in Bible translation. Most Bible translators believe in an ever-burning Hell, so they tended to write “ever-lasting” or “ever-burning” when the Greek word *aionios* (Strong’s #166) is used in conjunction with fire. However *aionios* simply means “age-lasting” (or “age-during” in Young’s Literal Translation)—referring to the end of a particular thing of long duration. The same Greek word, *aionios*, is also used for the expression “eternal life”. Here, “eternal” probably is a good translation since the God’s “kingdom will never end” (Luke 1:33). No verse mentions any fire that will “never end”. Young’s literal translation has this verse correct:

As Sodom and Gomorrah, and the cities around them, in like manner to these, having given themselves to whoredom, and gone after other flesh, have been set before—an example, of fire age-during, justice suffering (Jude 1:7, YLT).

This fire ended the **age** of those cities, they burned up ending the lives of those people at that time. But they will live again in a future age, another time of judgment:

I tell you the truth, it will be more bearable for Sodom and Gomorrah on the day of judgment than for that town (Matt 10:15).

The very same expression “age-during fire” is found in other verses in Young’s Literal Translation, but the New International Version unfortunately translates it “eternal fire”:

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal [age-during (YLT)] fire (Matt 18:8).

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the

eternal [age-during (YLT)] fire prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matt 25:41).

These verses show that the fire represents a judgment that ends an age, but not necessarily eternal, nor necessarily a final end. There are other scriptures that specifically spell out when people are raised from the dead and what can happen to them.

Let us look at some of the many more examples where fire represents judgment, and then conclude this section with the biblical explanation of why fire is used as such a symbol:

O house of David, this is what the LORD says: "Administer justice every morning; rescue from the hand of his oppressor the one who has been robbed, or my wrath will break out and burn like fire because of the evil you have done—burn with no one to quench it" (Jer 21:12).

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2Thes 2:8, NKJV).

For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God (Deut 4:24).

The above verse is quoted in the New Testament, below:

<sup>25</sup> See to it that you do not refuse him [God] who speaks. If they did not escape when they refused him who warned them on earth, how much less will we, if we turn away from him who warns us from heaven? <sup>26</sup> At that time his voice shook the earth, but now he has promised, "Once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens." <sup>27</sup> The words "once more" indicate the removing of what can be shaken—that is, created things—so that what cannot be shaken may remain. <sup>28</sup> Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe, <sup>29</sup> for our "God is a consuming fire" (Heb 12:25-29).

The above verses clearly relate fire to judgment and rulership.

I saw heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called Faithful and True. With justice he judges and makes war. His eyes are like blazing fire, and on his head are many crowns. He has a name written on him that no one knows but he himself (Rev 19:11-12).

I baptize you with water for repentance.

But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire (Matt 3:11, similar in Luke 3:16).

Many scriptures show that Christ has a first and second coming. John said that He would baptize with both the Holy Spirit and with fire. When Christ came the first time, He left the gift of the Holy Spirit (John 16:7). The next time He comes, it will be for judgment and rulership—with fire. Notice the verse below, Jesus told that the baptism of the Holy Spirit would be coming, and then His disciples immediately asked Him about the rulership part. Christ told them that they did not need to know when that would come.

<sup>5</sup> For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit." <sup>6</sup> So when they met together, they asked him, "Lord, are you at this time going to restore the kingdom to Israel?" <sup>7</sup> He said to them: "It is not for you to know the times or dates the Father has set by his own authority. <sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:5-8).

But Christ wished that the time for Him to come and judge, symbolized by fire, was soon. Notice this verse that concludes a most important section on judgment in the Bible:

I have come to bring fire on the earth, and how I wish it were already kindled! (Luke 12:49).

Another commonly misunderstood scripture:

<sup>6</sup> By these waters also the world of that time was deluged and destroyed. <sup>7</sup> By the same word the present heavens and earth are reserved for fire, being kept for the day of judgment and destruction of ungodly men. <sup>8</sup> But do not forget this one thing, dear friends: With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day. <sup>9</sup> The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. He is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance. <sup>10</sup> But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare. <sup>11</sup> Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be? You ought to live holy and godly lives

<sup>12</sup> as you look forward to the day of God and speed its coming. That day will bring about the destruction of the heavens by fire, and the elements will melt in the heat. <sup>13</sup> But in keeping with his promise we are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth, the home of righteousness. <sup>14</sup> So then, dear friends, since you are looking forward to this, make every effort to be found spotless, blameless and at peace with him (2Pet 3:6-14).

Some people believe this scripture is about the new heavens and earth in Revelation chapter 22. But the time looks more like the return of Christ, from the underlined portions of the verses, above. The Greek word *stoicheion* (Strong's #4747) used here for "elements" means physical elements in other Greek literature (earth, air, water and fire), but never seems to be used that way in the Bible. The other five places it is used, it means "basic principles" or "governing law". In four places (Gal 4:3,9; Col 2:8,20) it refers to worldly principles, and in one place the principles of God (Heb 5:12). The meaning here is not "the destruction of the universe as we know it" because that does not fit the timing of the other prophecies about Christ returning as "a thief" (1Thes 5:1-11; Rev 3:3; 16:15). It fits much better with the "elements"—the foundational laws and political and military systems of man being destroyed by the judgment of the returning Christ. All the evil secrets will be "laid bare" by Christ. Fire is again a symbol of judgment here.

The final scripture in the Bible which speaks of fire and judgment is in Revelation 21. It clearly shows that this final fire is a "second death", not an eternity of suffering.

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 21:8, NKJV).

### Verses Mentioning "Hell"

The Bible contains a number of different expressions for the place of the dead or various places of punishment. Before reading this section, please read the main section, *What About Hell?*, beginning on page 10 and the previous section, *Fire is a Symbol of Judgment*, beginning on page 59. This section and the next two will cover virtually all of the scriptures that mention "hell"

and other places of the "dead" or punishment. The reader may be surprised to find how many words from Greek mythology show up in the Greek New Testament. This does not mean that Christ and the Apostles were teaching Greek mythology. But sometimes, the only common word in a language to express an idea comes from its religion. In our own language, we could say "the fifth day of the week", but we almost always say "Thursday", even though it means Thor's day (Thor was a Norse god). There are many other such examples in our language. We have to communicate with the words available to us.

The three Greek words translated "Hell" in the KJV New Testament are *hades* (used 11 times for the "grave" or the Greek "realm of the dead"), *Gehenna* (used 12 times for a "burning garbage dump") and *tartarus* (used 1 time for a place where fallen angels are confined).

Please try to throw away previous preconceived ideas and read what the Bible says.

### The Hebrew *sheol* Used 65 Times

In most Bibles, there is only one Old Testament Hebrew word that is translated "hell": *sheol* (Strong's #7585). In the King James Version, it is translated "hell" 31 times, "grave" 31 times and "pit" 3 times. However, all of these scriptures will make sense if one reads "grave" wherever *sheol* appears. The NIV translates *sheol* as "grave" in nearly every case. Some versions, such as the NKJV and NRSV actually say "Sheol" and let the reader decide what it means. There is no verse about anyone eternally suffering or for that matter, doing anything in *sheol*. It is nothing like Dante's *Inferno*.

All the verses containing *sheol* are: Gen 37:35; 42:38; 44:29,31; Num 16:30,33; Deut 32:22; 1Sam 2:6; 2Sam 22:6; 1Kngs 2:6,9; Job 7:9; 11:8; 14:13; 17:13,16; 21:13; 24:19; 26:6; Pslm 6:5; 9:17; 16:10; 18:5; 30:3; 31:17; 49:14,15; 55:15; 86:13; 88:3; 89:48; 116:3; 139:8; 141:7; Prv 1:12; 5:5; 7:27; 9:18; 15:11,24; 23:14; 27:20; 30:16; Eccl 9:10; Isa 5:14; 14:9,11,15; 28:15,18; Isa 38:10,18; Isa 57:9; Ezk 31:15,16,17; 0; Hos 13:14; Amos 9:2; Jonah 2:2; Hab 2:5.

Some sample uses of *sheol* are:

But Jacob said, "My son will not go down there with you; his brother is dead and he is the only one left. If harm comes to him on the journey you are taking, you will bring my gray

head down to the grave in sorrow" (Gen 42:38).

Jacob is going to be "in the Kingdom" (Luke 13:28). He did not "go to hell". This verse at the other end of the Old Testament is similar:

I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. Where, O death, are your plagues? Where, O grave, is your destruction? I will have no compassion (Hosea 13:14).

At times, the King James version seems to be seriously distorted in an effort to support the idea of an ever-burning hell. Most modern translations are much more faithful to the Hebrew. Notice:

The wicked shall be turned into hell, and all the nations that forget God (Pslm 9:17, KJV).

The wicked return to the grave, all the nations that forget God (Pslm 9:17, NIV).

The sorrows of hell compassed me about: the snares of death prevented me (Pslm 18:5, KJV).

The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me (Pslm 18:5).

The Hebrew *schachath* Used 23 Times

A second Hebrew word for a place of death is *schachath* (Strong's #7845), though it is not translated "hell" in most Bibles. Sometimes it means a literal pit or whole in the ground (Job 9:31; Job 17:14; Pslm 7:15; 9:15; 35:7; 94:13; Prv 26:27; Ezk 19:4,8). Here is one example:

Whoever digs a pit will fall into it, And he who rolls a stone will have it roll back on him (Prv 26:27, NKJV).

The word *schachath* is also used in a symbolic fashion to represent a place of death or destruction. It is still commonly translated "the Pit", but some Bibles capitalize it as if it were a specific place (though there is no capitalization in the Hebrew). **All** of the other occurrences of *schachath* are included below. Clearly, none the examples picture ongoing activity in "the Pit", but it represents death—and end of life.

He keeps back his soul from the Pit, And his life from perishing by the sword (Job 33:18, NKJV).

Yes, his soul draws near the Pit, And his life to the executioners (Job 33:22, NKJV).

Then He is gracious to him, and says, "Deliver him from going down to the Pit; I have found a ransom" (Job 33:24, NKJV)

He will redeem his soul from going down to the Pit, And his life shall see the light (Job 33:28, NKJV).

To bring back his soul from the Pit, That he may be enlightened with the light of life (Job 33:30, NKJV).

For you do not give me up to Sheol, or let your faithful one see the Pit (Pslm 16:10, NRSV).

What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness? (Pslm 30:9, NRSV).

Truly, no ransom avails for one's life, there is no price one can give to God for it. For the ransom of life is costly, and can never suffice that one should live on forever and never see the grave (Pslm 49:7-9, NRSV).

But You, O God, shall bring them down to the pit of destruction; Bloodthirsty and deceitful men shall not live out half their days; But I will trust in You (Pslm 55:23, NKJV).

Who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy (Pslm 103:4, NRSV).

Indeed it was for my own peace That I had great bitterness; But You have lovingly delivered my soul from the pit of corruption, For You have cast all my sins behind Your back (Isa 38:17, NKJV).

The captive exile hastens, that he may be loosed, That he should not die in the pit, And that his bread should not fail (Isa 51:14, NKJV)

They shall throw you down into the Pit, And you shall die the death of the slain In the midst of the seas (Ezk 28:8, NKJV).

At the roots of the mountains. I went down to the land whose bars closed upon me forever; yet you brought up my life from the Pit, O LORD my God (Jonah 2:6, NRSV).

The Greek *hades* Used 11 Times

In the New Testament, the Greek *hades* (Strong's #86) means the "realm of the dead" without regard to good or bad. It appears 11 times and is always translated "hell" in the King James. However, its meaning appears to simply be "the grave"—many Bibles translate it that way. We have included all of the verses using *hades* from the NIV, which is not very consistent, as it translates them to "the grave", "the depths" and "death"—and does not translate some, but leaves them "Hades".

And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths. If the miracles that were performed in you had been performed in Sodom, it would have remained to this day (Matt 11:23).

And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it (Matt 16:18).

And you, Capernaum, will you be lifted up to the skies? No, you will go down to the depths (Luke 10:15).

In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side (Luke 16:23).

because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay (Acts 2:27).

Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay (Acts 2:31).

"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?" (1Cor 15:55)

I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades (Rev 1:18).

I looked, and there before me was a pale horse! Its rider was named Death, and Hades was following close behind him. They were given power over a fourth of the earth to kill by sword, famine and plague, and by the wild beasts of the earth (Rev 6:8).

The sea gave up the dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death (Rev 20:13-14).

Of interest, the Greek *mnemeion* (Strong's #3419) means a *memorial*-type grave and is usually translated "tomb" or "sepulchre" in most Bibles. The word refers to the structure whether there is anyone buried in it or not. It is used in Mark 16:2, 5; Luke 23:55; 24:12, 22, 24; John 11:31,38; 19:41,42; 20:1,3,4,6,8; Acts 13:29.

#### The Greek *Gehenna* Used 12 Times

Also in the New Testament, the Greek *Gehenna* (Strong's #1067) is taken from the Hebrew name of the valley of Hinnom outside of Jerusalem where garbage was thrown. It has nothing to do with Greek mythology, but is

consistently translated "hell" by most Bible versions. The word "hell" makes English speaking people think of a hot place where people suffer forever, but it is extremely unlikely that *Gehenna* meant that to any first-century believers.

Included in the trash of *Gehenna* were the bodies of dead animals and the bodies of criminals not deserving a burial. Those who were literally thrown into *Gehenna* were rejected by men, not necessarily by God. For sanitary reasons, the valley was frequently set on fire. Did the things that were thrown into the valley burn forever? No they were burned up. Were the fires of *Gehenna* ever quenched to spare things in the valley? No. They burned until they burned out. This information is helpful to understand this verse:

And if thine eye may cause thee to stumble, cast it out; it is better for thee one-eyed to enter into the reign of God, than having two eyes, to be cast to the gehenna of the fire—where their worm is not dying, and the fire is not being quenched (Mark 9:47-48, YLT);

Does this mean that people were to burn forever in fire? Does it mean that there are worms that live forever and never die? No! Fires in garbage dumps tend to burn slowly, wandering into areas where new fuel has been added. A body thrown into *Gehenna* might be destroyed by worms or fire, depending upon which got to it first. The point of the verse is that a person thrown into *Gehenna* will not be rescued. Matthew more clearly states that a person will be **destroyed** in *Gehenna*:

'And be not afraid of those killing the body, and are not able to kill the soul, but fear rather Him who is able both soul and body to destroy in gehenna' (Matt 10:28, YLT).

The *Gehenna* fire certainly matches the consistent biblical use of fire as a symbol of judgment. It also portends the destruction of the wicked who do not repent. It does not portray suffering forever. After God allowed the Romans to destroy Jerusalem and depopulate it in 70 A.D., the fires of *Gehenna* ceased—that age was over.

Here are all of the other scriptures that use *Gehenna*:

But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, 'Raca, 'is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell [*Gehenna*] (Matt 5:22).



If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell [Gehenna] (Matt 5:29).

And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell [Gehenna] (Matt 5:30).

And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell [Gehenna] (Matt 18:9).

“Woe to you, teachers of the law and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You travel over land and sea to win a single convert, and when he becomes one, you make him twice as much a son of hell [Gehenna] as you are (Matt 23:15).

“You snakes! You brood of vipers! How will you escape being condemned to hell? [Gehenna] (Matt 23:33)

If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell [Gehenna], where the fire never goes out (Mark 9:43).

And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell [Gehenna] (Mark 9:45)

But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell [Gehenna]. Yes, I tell you, fear him (Luke 12:5).

The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell [Gehenna] (Luke 12:5).

The Greek *tartarus* Used Only One Place in the Bible:

For if God did not spare the angels when they sinned, but condemned them to the chains of Tartarus and handed them over to be kept for judgment; (2Pet 2:4, NAB)

The Greek word *tartarus* is used in Greek mythology as a lower section of *hades* reserved for punishment for evil, disobedient spirits. In Greek mythology, Tartarus might be likened to the common concept of “hell”—an awful place with endless suffering. However, the Bible never

mentions any people going there. Apparently, the fallen angels, or demons, have deceived many people into thinking that they will receive the fallen angels’ punishment! The Bible never recommends prison or continual torment as a punishment for sin. It teaches that people should overcome their problems and work to compensate those whom they have injured or from whom they have stolen.

This concludes the words that have been translated “hell” in the King James Bible. However, there are far more words that are used to describe a place of holding or trial after death.

### Other Words for “Places” or “States” of Trial and Punishment

Greek *abussos* (“Abyss”) Used 9 Times.

The Greek word *abussos* (Strong’s #12) is from Greek mythology. It is supposed to be the lowest part of *hades* (the realm of the dead). It is more of a place of confinement than a place of punishment as *tartarus*, above. The concept of an Abyss also shows up in Jewish mythology. The King James Version and many other translations use the words “bottomless pit” or “the deep”—most other translations say “Abyss” in all 9 places the word is used.

Some pagan religions of the first century had the idea that it was necessary for a hero to ascend to heaven to bring one of the gods down to earth—or to go down into the Abyss to bring him up from where he was imprisoned. Paul had to refute this pagan idea so that people would not bring it into Christianity:

But the righteousness of faith speaks in this way, “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down from above) or, ‘Who will descend into the abyss?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead).” But what does it say? “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart” (that is, the word of faith which we preach) (Rom 10:6-8, NKJV).

Paul needed to clearly show them that they had access to Christ now, there was no need for somebody to do some “great thing” first. Other references to the Abyss all regard the Devil and his demons. Apparently, they normally have access to the earth (Job 1:7) and are allowed to lie and cause a certain amount of trouble for people (John 8:44; 1Pet 5:8)—but only within limits God places on them (Job 1:12). If they try

to go against specific commands of God, then they can be sent to “the Abyss” as a prison:

Jesus asked him, “What is your name?”

“Legion,” he replied, because many demons had gone into him. And they begged him repeatedly not to order them to go into the Abyss (Luke 8:30-31).

The rest of the references to the Abyss are in Revelation. It is a place where the Devil and his demons are sometimes confined, and other times from which they are released.

The fifth angel sounded his trumpet, and I saw a star [symbol for an angel] that had fallen from the sky to the earth. The star was given the key to the shaft of the Abyss. When he opened the Abyss, smoke rose from it like the smoke from a gigantic furnace. The sun and sky were darkened by the smoke from the Abyss. And out of the smoke locusts came down upon the earth and were given power like that of scorpions of the earth.... They had as king over them the angel of the Abyss, whose name in Hebrew is Abaddon, and in Greek, Apollyon (Rev 9:1-3,11).

Now when they have finished their testimony, the beast that comes up from the Abyss will attack them, and overpower and kill them (Rev 11:7).

The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come (Rev 17:8).

And I saw an angel coming down out of heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the dragon, that ancient serpent, who is the devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years. He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended. After that, he must be set free for a short time (Rev 20:1-3).

The Greek *phulake* (“prison”) Used 4 Times

The Greek *phulake* usually means a literal “prison” or a “night watch”. It is used 43 times in a clear sense like this. However, four times, it is used as a “prison” for Satan and his demons. This is simply another way of talking about the Abyss.

In Revelation 20:3, above, Satan is put in the Abyss for 1000 years, and then he is released from “his prison”:

When the thousand years are over, Satan will be released from his prison (Rev 20:7).

And he cried mightily with a loud voice, saying, “Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and has become a dwelling place of demons, a prison for every foul spirit, and a cage [same Greek *phulake*—“prison”] for every unclean and hated bird! (Rev 18:2.)

<sup>18</sup> For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit, <sup>19</sup> through whom also he went and preached to the spirits in prison <sup>20</sup> who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. In it only a few people, eight in all, were saved through water, <sup>21</sup> and this water symbolizes baptism that now saves you also—not the removal of dirt from the body but the pledge of a good conscience toward God. It saves you by the resurrection of Jesus Christ (1Pet 3:18).

The last passage, above, contains very long sentences and can be hard to follow. Some Bible teachers claim that it means Christ preached to “spirits in prison” during the three days between his death and resurrection. **Actually, this passage is drawing the relationship between two things:**

1) The **physical** ark and the flood at the time of Noah and the corresponding **spiritual** event of putting evil spirits in prison.

2) The current **physical** practice of baptism and the corresponding **spiritual** events: the sacrifice of Christ for sins, the giving of the Holy Spirit, and the salvation of individuals.

Noah’s flood was a type of baptism for the world: the sinful people died—which was all but eight people. Similarly, when we are baptized, the sin in us dies, and we ask Christ to take over the little that is left. The ark represents Christ—both represent God’s method of salvation. The evil spirits disobeyed “long ago”, probably before the flood—not when Christ died, which would have been only about 20 to 30 years before Peter wrote this. The spirits were put in this prison (the Abyss) to restrain their disobedience.

“Eternal Destruction” Phrase Used One Time

These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of

the Lord and from the glory of His power (2Thes 1:9, NKJV).

The word for “destruction” above is the Greek *olethros* (Strong’s #3639) which means, according to every lexicon I found, “destruction” or “ceasing to exist”. Several lexicons claimed that Paul was clarifying it by saying that it was really “separation from the presence of the Lord”, but the meaning of the Greek appears to mean “destruction (that comes from) the presence of the Lord”. This is in exact agreement with:

And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord will consume with the breath of His mouth and destroy with the brightness of His coming (2Thes 2:8, NKJV).

These and other scriptures seem to indicate that Satan and his demons will be destroyed forever. Others seem to indicate that he will be restrained forever. This writer is certain, though, that this question has so little effect upon us today that it is not worth one believer losing one friend over it. We should not let Satan divide us over which of two miserable outcomes he will receive.

For more about what will happen to the Devil and his demons, see the section titled *Angels Judged, Also* beginning on page 73. The rest of the words used for places of punishment all apply to people to some degree.

#### “Eternal Fire” or “Age-during Fire Phrase Used 3 Times

Page 60 contains the explanation of the Greek word *aionios*. It is translated “eternal”, but more accurately means “age-lasting” or “age-during” as Young’s Literal Translation translates it. The YLT uses King James English and is difficult to read in these verses, so we inserted its word (“age-during”) into the appropriate places in the NIV:

If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal [age-during] fire (Matt 18:8).

Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal [age-during] fire prepared for the devil and his angels [messengers]” (Matt 25:41).

In a similar way, Sodom and Gomorrah and the surrounding towns gave themselves up to sexual immorality and perversion. They serve as

an example of those who suffer the punishment of eternal [age-during] fire (Jude 1:7).

As previously noted, the “age-during fire” of Sodom and Gomorrah is not burning forever—those people and their cities were destroyed, the fire burnt out and they are awaiting judgment (Matt 10:15). The other two passages, above, may refer to a similar temporary judgment, or they may refer to an eternal “second death”. In any case, I would hope we would all want to avoid either one!

While it may appear that Matt 25:41 applies just to Satan and his demons, the context of that verse is “people who have not helped others” (see quote on page 19). The Greek *aggelos* (Strong’s #32) is used for both human and divine messengers. The YLT says “messengers” in this verse. This fire is reserved for the devil and those who follow him.

#### “Lake of fire” Used Five Times in Revelation

The Book of Revelation refers to a “lake of fire” five times—in three different places. This lake burns with sulfur (called “brimstone” in the King James). Why is sulfur mentioned? Sulfur is occasionally mentioned in other “judgment of fire” scriptures—including Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:24, Pslm 11:6; Isa 30:33; Ezk 38:22; Rev 9:17-18; 14:10). Sulfur is used in the process of **refining** metals. It is also important to realize that metal-refining fires were the **hottest** fires known to the ancient world. They were created in specially-designed furnaces with air being forced in.

These “fires burning with sulfur” seemed to be emphasizing the destructive aspects of the fire far more than the refining or purifying ones. For example, the fire and sulfur that rained on Sodom and Gomorrah did not correct the people, but killed them (though they will live again—Matt 10:15). The sulfur fires below seem to deal more with destruction than with correction.

And the beast was captured, and with it the false prophet who had performed in its presence the signs by which he deceived those who had received the mark of the beast and those who worshiped its image. These two were thrown alive into the lake of fire that burns with sulfur (Rev 19:20, NRSV).

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.... Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire; and anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:10,14-15).

But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted, the murderers, the fornicators, the sorcerers, the idolaters, and all liars, their place will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death (Rev 21:8, NRSV).

Sometimes, Revelation 20:10 (above) is used as a proof that people suffer in hell forever. The KJV and other translations say “the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet *are*”—implying that they were still in the fire (having been thrown in Rev 19:20). But “are” is an incorrect translation. The NRSV and other translations correctly say “were” (past tense) or something similar.

The last two verses clearly say that this “lake of fire” is the **second death**. This seems like a final judgment—not a corrective judgment. Revelation 20:14 says that “death and Hades” were thrown into the lake of fire. This appears to mean that **death (the action of humans, made in the image of God, dying) and Hades (the existence of dead humans with an as-yet uncertain fate) will be over**. Those two things which both presently exist will exist no more. This fits well with this verse:

He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away (Rev 21:4).

“Darkness” Scriptures using “Zophos”

In great contrast to hot fires, we also find Scriptures that talk about “darkness” as a place for the unrepentant. Whether there is a literal place of darkness or if this is a symbol of spiritual darkness, is not clear. There are many Bible analogies to “light” being good and “darkness” being evil: “...God is light; in him there is no darkness at all (1Jn 1:5). One Greek word for “darkness” is *zophos* (Strong’s #2217). It means the “darkness and gloom of the nether world”—another Greek mythology word. It is used only in the following scriptures. When it appears as “blackest darkness”, below, it is used along with another Greek word for “darkness”, *skotos* (Strong’s #4655).

This place or state is apparently reserved for those who deliberately teach and practice error—knowing the truth. It seems that these scriptures refer both to men and to the fallen angels—demons.

For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell [tartarus] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment (2Pet 2:4, NKJV).

<sup>17</sup> These men are springs without water and mists driven by a storm. Blackest darkness is reserved for them. <sup>18</sup> For their mouth empty, boastful words and, by appealing to the lustful desires of sinful human nature, they entice people who are just escaping from those who live in error. <sup>19</sup> They promise them freedom, while they themselves are slaves of depravity—for a man is a slave to whatever has mastered him. <sup>20</sup> If they have escaped the corruption of the world by knowing our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ and are again entangled in it and overcome, they are worse off at the end than they were at the beginning. <sup>21</sup> It would have been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than to have known it and then to turn their backs on the sacred command that was passed on to them (2Pet 2:17-21).

And the angels who did not keep their positions of authority but abandoned their own home—these he has kept in darkness, bound with everlasting chains for judgment on the great Day (Jude 1:6).

These men are blemishes at your love feasts, eating with you without the slightest qualm—shepherds who feed only themselves. They are clouds without rain, blown along by the wind; autumn trees, without fruit and uprooted—twice dead. <sup>13</sup> They are wild waves of the sea, foaming up their shame; wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever [“to the age” in the YLT] (Jude 1:12).

The reference in Jude 1:6 says they are “awaiting judgment”, so this *zophos* darkness is not some kind of “eternal punishment” place. The expression “twice dead” does not seem to mean the “second death” as it appears that the people spoken of are still alive when Jude was writing about them. Rather “twice dead” means that they have sinned, deserving death, received life from Christ, then rejected that, and are hence “dead” again.

“Outer darkness”, Where There Will be  
“weeping and gnashing of teeth”

The expression “outer darkness” is used for people who are not ready to go into the kingdom, but are not the people who are knowingly evil as described in the “*zophos* darkness” verses above. Indeed, these verses describe people who thought they should have been in the Kingdom, but were not allowed in:

And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. 12 But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 8:11, NKJV).

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, “Friend, how did you come in here without a wedding garment?” And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, “Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth” (Matt 22:11-13, NKJV)

And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 25:30, NKJV).

Some try to equate the “outer” part of “outer darkness” with “outer space” or outside the universe—maybe even in a “black hole”. (A “black hole” is an astronomic body that is so large and has such powerful gravity that nothing physical can escape from it—not even light). While God certainly understands these things and may have written about them in scripture, this is probably not the meaning that was understood when the New Testament was written. The expression is more likely about being shut out of a city where there would be lights from fires and lamps on the inside, but none on the outside. Revelation 22:14-15 is an example: “Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates **into the city**. **Outside** are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.”

The “**weeping and gnashing of teeth**” comes about from people who are on the outside, but wish they were inside. “Weeping” is an expression of sorrow that things did not happen

the way someone liked. It can include repentance—genuine admission of guilt and a desire to change—or it can simply be sorrow that one “got caught”. “Gnashing of teeth” or “teeth grinding” usually comes with extreme emotional upset. Things are not going well for people in this condition. Hopefully, they will think about repenting and looking to God.

“Fiery furnace” Where There Will Be  
“weeping and gnashing of teeth”

This “weeping and gnashing of teeth” mentioned above also occurs in a “fiery furnace”. This is probably symbolic in some way as one would not expect to see literal tears in the midst of a real burning fire. This seems to be another place where fire symbolizes judgment. The situation seems to be similar to the previous section—the people were among believers or thought they were believers, but Christ sent them out of the Kingdom. They weep and grind their teeth because they hoped to be in the Kingdom.

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will weed out of his kingdom everything that causes sin and all who do evil. They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:41-42).

<sup>47</sup> Once again, the kingdom of heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. <sup>48</sup> When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. <sup>49</sup> This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous <sup>50</sup> and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 13:47-50).

#### Miscellaneous Weeping and Gnashing of Teeth

There are two more scripture that mention “weeping and gnashing of teeth”, but do **not** have “outer darkness” or a “fiery furnace”.

And will cut him in two and appoint him his portion with the hypocrites. There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matt 24:51).

<sup>27</sup> But He will say, “I tell you I do not know you, where you are from. Depart from Me, all you workers of iniquity.” <sup>28</sup> There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you

see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out.<sup>29</sup> They will come from the east and the west, from the north and the south, and sit down in the kingdom of God.<sup>30</sup> And indeed there are last who will be first, and there are first who will be last" (Luke 13:27-30).

The expression "cut him in two" is probably symbolic of exposing their sin as we saw in the several scriptures beginning with Isaiah 11:2 on page 45. It is unlikely that the above verses mean people will be cut into two pieces but still literally live in order to cry and grind their teeth. The last wording again reminds us of the time sequence going into the Kingdom of God. Those who are not ready, even though they may think they are, will be "last" into the Kingdom.

#### Conclusion to "Punishment" Words

So what good are all of these "punishment" words if we do not know exactly what could happen to us? If we did completely understand them, would we try to structure our life so that we would avoid the punishments that sound the worst to us and maybe get one that we can handle better? **We had better not!**

God is interested in people who want to follow Him with their whole heart (Matt 22:37-38)—not in people who want to sin as much as they can "get away with". God wants to provide salvation to all through Christ and to make everyone righteous.

We can be assured from the Scriptures that the judgment of God will be fair, yet inescapable, and it will cover everything for which we have not repented and judged ourselves (1Cor 11:31; 1Jn 1:9). We also know that the more we sin, the more we will be judged, and the more punishment we will receive—the longer it will take to be in the Kingdom of God.

We should live our lives to please God—which will give us the most favorable eternal judgment. While eternal judgment may seem a long way off, it is in many ways more real than the earth we stand on and the air we breathe. We can look at any living thing on this earth and see a miracle—complexity far in excess of anything that mere men have ever designed. Men can map and alter the genes of a human, but they still can't build bacteria from scratch. Whoever made the trillions of living things on this earth did all

that work for a reason. Each time we see one of them, we should be reminded that we need to live our lives in accordance with that purpose, not in rebellion to God, our Father.

#### Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man

There is one more section of the Bible that seems to fit with the traditional concepts of "Heaven" and "Hell". To some people, these verses, by themselves are "proof" of the traditional teachings of "Heaven and Hell". Let us read them from Luke 16:

<sup>19</sup> There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day.<sup>20</sup> At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores<sup>21</sup> and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores.<sup>22</sup> The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.<sup>23</sup> In hell [hades], where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side.<sup>24</sup> So he called to him, "Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire."<sup>25</sup> But Abraham replied, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony."<sup>26</sup> And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us."<sup>27</sup> He answered, "Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my father's house,<sup>28</sup> for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment."<sup>29</sup> Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them listen to them."<sup>30</sup> "No, father Abraham," he said, "but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent."<sup>31</sup> He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead" (Luke 16:19-31).

Long after Jesus told this story, the Bible shows that Abraham was still dead, "in faith, not having received the promises" (Heb 11:13, NKJV). He is dead. Other parables of Jesus show that the time when evildoers see Abraham with God and themselves thrust out is in the future (Luke 13:23-39). When a real "Lazarus" died,

“Jesus said to her, ‘Your brother will rise again.’ Martha answered, ‘I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day’” (John 11:23-24). That Lazarus was not in a parable, and even though he was dead for four days, the Bible says nothing about him going to “heaven” or “hell”.

The question is, “Is Luke 16 a literal story of what happens at death, or is it another one of the symbolic parables of Jesus?” It is not specifically called a parable, but there are other parables told in the nearby chapters (Luke 15:3; 18:1,9). Furthermore, all of Christ’s major teaching seems to be in parables:

With many similar parables Jesus spoke the word to them, as much as they could understand. He did not say anything to them without using a parable. But when he was alone with his own disciples, he explained everything (Mark 4:33-34).

But would Luke, the Bible author, write a parable without telling us it is a parable? Yes, the parables of the “two debtors” (Luke 7:41-47); the “friend at midnight” (Luke 11:5-8) and even the famous “good Samaritan” (Luke 10:30-37) are not specifically labeled “parables” in the Bible. Nor are all parables explained.

So if this is a parable, what do the items in it represent? Lazarus obviously represents the poor and oppressed of the world. The “rich man” represents those with power, wealth and ability—those who could have made the world better, but used their capability to help themselves. The rich man was in *Hades*, the Greek realm of the dead, which here represents the afterlife in the second resurrection (see sections beginning on pages 13 and 17). Lazarus with Abraham pictures the poor believers united with the great men of faith, such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, etc. (If this were a literal story about Lazarus, would not Lazarus be pictured as being with Christ or all believers, rather than just with Abraham?)

Lazarus and Abraham have names in this parable—they represent people who are known to God—whose names are in the “book of life” (see section beginning on page 71). The rich man is not given a name—he represents those who may have been well known in the former life, but who in the latter resurrection will just be so many “former rich men”. The “great chasm” between them and Lazarus is the difference between the **first and later resurrections**. The two are separate. Indeed, there will be a time of judgment

and possibly torment for those in the second resurrection (see *Scriptures About Punishment for Sin* beginning on page 42).

The fire in the above parable is a symbol of judgment (not Satan’s fire—note that Satan is not mentioned here at all). The rich man represents those being judged—they wish that they could have lived this life differently, so they would not have so much of a trial in the judgment. They think, “Could not someone have been sent back from the dead to warn those while they were living?” But people who are able to sin without immediate punishment frequently continue to sin no matter what kind of warning they have (Eccl 8:11). Moses, the prophets, or even people’s own conscience (Rom 2:15) give plenty of warning. The problem is that people do not seek Christ and follow it up with action. Indeed, Christ did rise from the dead and warn the living, and most continue living their own way.

Concluding that “Lazarus and the Rich Man” is a parable and not a literal story is in line with many other scriptures. Even if one does not accept this, the story does not describe a “hell” with Satan, demons, and eternal tortures, nor does it describe a “heaven” with “St. Peter”, clouds, harps and people with wings. It is much better understood as a parable.

## God’s “Book of Life” and Other Books

How is God going to judge everyone? Is He going to ask them to remember what they did? Is he going to tell them what they did from His memory? While I have little doubt that God could remember it perfectly, it seems that he writes the important information in a group of books:

And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Rev 20:12).

As I looked, thrones were set in place, and the Ancient of Days took his seat. His clothing was as white as snow; the hair of his head was white like wool. His throne was flaming with fire, and its wheels were all ablaze. A river of fire was flowing, coming out from before him. Thousands upon thousands attended him; ten thousand times ten thousand stood before him. The court was seated, and the books were opened (Dan 7:9-10).

The “book of life” is mentioned frequently in scripture, as we shall see below. But what are the other books? Jewish tradition indicates there is a “book of the dead” (those for which there is no hope) and another book for those in between. It is possible that this tradition comes from something God told one of the prophets, but was not written in the Bible. I cannot find it in scripture. All we know is that there are other books. This Psalm indicates that there will be sentences written against “bad” people when the saints judge them:

<sup>5</sup> Let the saints rejoice in this honor and sing for joy on their beds. <sup>6</sup> May the praise of God be in their mouths and a double-edged sword in their hands, <sup>7</sup> to inflict vengeance on the nations and punishment on the peoples, <sup>8</sup> to bind their kings with fetters, their nobles with shackles of iron, <sup>9</sup> to carry out the sentence written against them. This is the glory of all his saints. Praise the LORD (PSLM 149:5-9).

It seems that the “book of life” is by far the most important book to God. It is mentioned by numerous Bible writers, sometimes being referred to as “the book”. Some writers hope that God will write people’s names in the book, others seem to know their name is already in the book and ask Him not to take it out.

But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written.” The LORD replied to Moses, “Whoever has sinned against me I will blot out of my book. Now go, lead the people to the place I spoke of, and my angel will go before you. However, when the time comes for me to punish, I will punish them for their sin” (Ex 32:32-34).

You number my wanderings; Put my tears into Your bottle; Are they not in Your book? (Pslm 56:8, NKJV.)

Charge them with crime upon crime; do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous (Pslm 69:27-28).

Those who are left in Zion, who remain in Jerusalem, will be called holy, all who are recorded among the living in Jerusalem (Isa 4:3, NIV).

At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time

your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever (Dan 12:1-3).

However, do not rejoice that the spirits submit to you, but rejoice that your names are written in heaven (Luke 10:20).

Yes, and I ask you, loyal yokefellow, help these women who have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow workers, whose names are in the book of life (Phlp 4:3).

To the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the judge of all men, to the spirits of righteous men made perfect (Heb 12:23).

All inhabitants of the earth will worship the beast—all whose names have not been written in the book of life belonging to the Lamb that was slain from the creation of the world (Rev 13:8).

The beast, which you saw, once was, now is not, and will come up out of the Abyss and go to his destruction. The inhabitants of the earth whose names have not been written in the book of life from the creation of the world will be astonished when they see the beast, because he once was, now is not, and yet will come (Rev 17:8).

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire (Rev 20:14-15).

Nothing impure will ever enter it [the new Jerusalem], nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb’s book of life (Rev 21:27).

Finally, we might ask the question: what is the format of these books that will be used for judgment? Are they huge scrolls that are miles long, or are they giant books with millions of pages? Is God limited by the “technology” that was available when the Bible was written? Obviously, we do not really know the format of the “books”. But when God communicates with



people, He frequently does it by “vision”—a sort of three-dimensional presentation with sound—it is as if the people are actually there. When men receive these visions and need to record them, the best they can do is transfer it to books.

The whole vision has become to you like the words of a book that is sealed (Isa 29:11, NKJV).

The burden against Nineveh. The book of the vision of Nahum the Elkoshite (Nahum 1:1).

Then the LORD answered me and said: “Write the vision And make it plain on tablets, That he may run who reads it (Hab 2:2).

Is it possible that the “book of life” and other books from which people will be judged contain a complete vision—picture, sound, touch, taste and smell—not just writing? The only recording device available in the first century was hand-writing—books. While the Bible does not try to describe how these things are recorded (we really do not know), it is hard to believe that mere humans with video cameras are recording events in more detail than God does!

### **Angels Judged, Also**

The Bible clearly teaches that fallen angels know that they will be judged and that believers will do it:

Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! (1Cor 6:2-3.)

We have already covered numerous scriptures about punishment for sin and will not repeat them for brevity. (See the sections titled *Scriptures About Punishment for Sin* beginning page 42, *Verses Mentioning “Hell”* beginning page 62 and *Other Words for “Places” or “States” of Trial and Punishment* beginning page 65.) Some of those verses clearly applied to Satan and his demons, others to people, and some to both. They show conclusively that Satan and his fallen angels (demons) will be judged and punished. Some are being kept in “prison” awaiting punishment.

When we think of an unrighteous person, we usually think of someone who does not “believe in God” at all. As humans, that is possible to do if we do not “see” Him every day. (We can see His creation, but our educational

systems have gone to great effort to put a scholarly stamp of approval on the otherwise ridiculous idea that the creation created itself!) But Satan and his demons know God exists, they just do not want to do what He says!

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! (Jms 2:19, NKJV.)

Christ’s words in the Gospels show that He frequently had to deal with demons. They sought to find either a person or an animal to “inhabit”. They knew that their time of judgment and punishment was coming. They were never the least bit interested in repenting or obeying God, but seemed obsessed with simply not receiving their punishment now.

<sup>8</sup> For Jesus had said to him, “Come out of this man, you evil spirit!” <sup>9</sup> Then Jesus asked him, “What is your name?” “My name is Legion,” he replied, “for we are many.” <sup>10</sup> And he begged Jesus again and again not to send them out of the area. <sup>11</sup> A large herd of pigs was feeding on the nearby hillside. <sup>12</sup> The demons begged Jesus, “Send us among the pigs; allow us to go into them” (Mark 5:8-12)

When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, “I will return to the house [person] I left” (Luke 11:24).

When he arrived at the other side in the region of the Gadarenes, two demon-possessed men coming from the tombs met him. They were so violent that no one could pass that way. “What do you want with us, Son of God?” they shouted. “Have you come here to torture us before the appointed time?” (Matt 8:28).

He shouted at the top of his voice, “What do you want with me, Jesus, Son of the Most High God? Swear to God that you won’t torture me!” (Mark 5:7.)

Where will the judgment of Satan and his demons take place? It seems that it will take place here on earth:

The great dragon was hurled down—that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him (Rev 12:9).

Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to

you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short (Rev 12:12).

Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on his heads. His tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth (Rev 12:3-4).

The third of the “stars” that were swept down from heaven are probably the fallen angels. Stars are often used as a symbol for angels, usually righteous angels, but sometimes bad: “wandering stars, for whom blackest darkness has been reserved forever” (Jude 1:13).

### Situations Where We Must Judge Now

Christians sometimes say, “I don’t want to judge anyone—Christ will do the judging”. They may cite scriptures such as:

Therefore judge nothing before the appointed time; wait till the Lord comes. He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of men’s hearts. At that time each will receive his praise from God (1Cor 4:5).

Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use, it will be measured to you (Matt 7:1-2).

Those words sound quite definite. Yet, most of the rest of this section will cover scriptures about the need to judge others in some way. How can we reconcile the two?

One hint comes in the last scripture. We will be judged in the way that we judge others. Do we want to be judged by some “passerby” who sees us do something, asks few, if any, questions and then quickly renders a judgment? Yet how often do we do this to others? How often do we render a judgment about someone with the few limited facts we may see on TV or in an article or heard from someone else? There are so many times in life where we make judgments that we do not have to make—in matters that do not directly concern us. If we are not going to do anything different based on our judgment, why make it?

This is why the scripture tells us not to judge so many times. Most of the time that we render judgments, they are not necessary. We will cover the times when it is necessary. But there is one thing that the scripture does tell us that we should never do in this life: eternally

condemn someone else:

“Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. (Luke 6:37).

The Greek word for “condemn” here is *katadikazo* (Strong’s #2613) which means “condemn as someone definitely guilty and subject to punishment”. It is used in only 4 verses. Unfortunately, many translators inconsistently render the several other Greek words sometimes as “judge”, sometimes as “condemn” or even other English words. Other places where the word “condemn” is used, it means an unfavorable judgment. The word *katadikazo* in the New Testament seems to be used for either the death penalty or eternal condemnation. Here are the other three verses:

If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’ you [the Pharisees] would not have condemned the innocent (Matt 12:7).

But I tell you that men will have to give account on the day of judgment for every careless word they have spoken. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned (Matt 12:36-37).

You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not opposing you. Be patient, then, brothers, until the Lord’s coming. See how the farmer waits for the land to yield its valuable crop and how patient he is for the autumn and spring rains (Jms 5:6).

From these scriptures, it should be clear that we should not attempt to pronounce anyone’s eternal sentence. Eternal judgment is Christ’s job. Nevertheless, there are many religious publications that claim those with certain doctrines or in certain groups cannot have salvation. These publications may go to great lengths and use hundreds of scriptures to “prove” their point. Nevertheless, eternally condemning someone else seems like one of the most dangerous things we can do in this life. To pronounce another individual or group as “eternally worthless” to God represents an arrogant spirit that “we know as much as God does”. That may be the attitude that He finds the most difficulty working with. We cannot see other’s hearts and minds and we just do not know them like God does. **“...Do not [eternally] condemn, and you will not be [eternally] condemned...”** (Luke 16:37).

This will not be an exhaustive study of all scriptures on judging others, but will cover the two main reasons we need to judge others. The first one, nearly everyone does, even though they may not think about it. **We need to judge which Bible teachers we will listen to.** The scriptures clearly show that there are false teachers—even false apostles. We must examine their teaching and example to see if it agrees with the scriptures.

For such men are false apostles, deceitful workmen, masquerading as apostles of Christ. And no wonder, for Satan himself masquerades as an angel of light (2Cor 11:13-14).

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world (1Jn 4:1).

I know your deeds, your hard work and your perseverance. I know that you cannot tolerate wicked men, that you have tested those who claim to be apostles but are not, and have found them false (Rev 2:2).

Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully. Anyone who runs ahead and does not continue in the teaching of Christ does not have God; whoever continues in the teaching has both the Father and the Son. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not take him into your house or welcome him. Anyone who welcomes him shares in his wicked work (2Jn 1:8-11).

Even if a teacher is “nice to us”, but we know they are doing a “wicked work”, we should not continue to help them and support them. This does not mean that we abandon a teacher because he makes one mistake. The problems must be substantial. Paul had to correct Peter one time for refusing to eat with Gentile believers (Gal 2:11). Paul told Timothy:

Do not entertain an accusation against an elder unless it is brought by two or three witnesses. Those who sin are to be rebuked publicly, so that the others may take warning (1Tim 5:19-20).

The purpose of judging leaders now is to be sure they are good examples and not leading believers astray. It is not to “snoop” into their business or to make us feel better because “we know something bad that they did”. Any false purpose for judging them will bring judgment

upon those doing the judging. The chapters of 1 Timothy 3 and Titus 1 give qualifications for leaders in the Church.

The **second** main reason for judging is when one believer offends another. It may be a sin directly against us, or a sin that brings a bad name on our entire congregation. Before we cover the scriptures on this, please realize that there are hundreds of scriptures on patience, love, forgiveness and mercy. Many little offences and problems would be much better forgotten rather than applying these following scriptures. Nevertheless, there are significant, on-going problems that occur and these scriptures provide the best solution:

“if your brother sins against you, [1] go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over. But if he will not listen, [2] take one or two others along, so that ‘every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.’ If he refuses to listen to them, [3] tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, [4] treat him as you would a pagan or a tax collector (Matt 18:15-17).

The above four-step process is God’s way of dealing with problems with others. It starts by involving as few people as possible. It ends by involving the church (the whole body of believers). The goal is to solve the problem as early in the process as possible. This process is far better than going to the existing legal authorities.

<sup>1</sup> If any of you has a dispute with another, dare he take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the saints? <sup>2</sup> Do you not know that the saints will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? <sup>3</sup> Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! <sup>4</sup> Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, appoint as judges even men of little account in the church! <sup>5</sup> I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? <sup>6</sup> But instead, one brother goes to law against another—and this in front of unbelievers! (1Cor 6:1-6.)

Frequently, problems center around believers who are offended or concerned about sins that they see in their fellow-believers. The

human tendency is to tell others about the sin. But the Bible tells us what to do and gives us an example:

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted (Gal 6:1).

<sup>1</sup> It is actually reported [universally reported—Darby] that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that does not occur even among pagans: A man has his father's wife. <sup>2</sup> And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? <sup>3</sup> Even though I am not physically present, I am with you in spirit. And I have already passed judgment on the one who did this, just as if I were present. <sup>4</sup> When you are assembled in the name of our Lord Jesus and I am with you in spirit, and the power of our Lord Jesus is present, <sup>5</sup> hand this man over to Satan, so that the sinful nature may be destroyed and his spirit saved on the day of the Lord (1Cor 5:1-5).

In this particular case, steps 1 and 2 of Matthew 18 had already been carried out. Everybody knew about this man's sin—they just were not doing anything about it. Paul gives his judgment from a distance, though he makes it clear that **the people who assemble together should be the ones to put him out of the congregation** ("hand him over to Satan"). In this particular example, all four steps of Matthew 18 have been followed. It appears that the man repented as a result. Paul speaks of restoring him in 2 Corinthians 2:5-8.

The ways in which a person might need to be involved in judging others vary considerably. Prayer for wisdom to do it correctly is always very important. We can illustrate

Suppose that your regular weekday driving takes you past a pornographic movie theater. Suppose that one day, you see a friend, a "pillar" in your church congregation, leaving that theater with another man whom you do not know. This is the first time you have seen this happen and you have no other evidence that the friend has a problem in this area. What should you do? This is probably a good time to "judge not that you not be judged". You do not know if it was a moment of weakness for your friend, or if your friend went there to get the other man out of that evil environment, or if the two of them were there to

measure the building in preparation for remodeling it to some more worthwhile purpose. You do not need to judge your friend, and certainly should not need to tell others that you "think your friend might be sinning".

Now, suppose that you begin to see your friend and that same man coming from the same theater on a regular basis. Is it time to stay away from your friend and tell everyone else that your friend is "weird"? No. It is time to judge righteous judgment and to "go to your brother". You need to get the facts so you can begin to make a righteous judgment if necessary. Your friend may explain to you that the unknown man's wife wanted someone to get her husband out of the theater—that the husband wants to change and hopes to overcome the problem very soon. You may think that your friend has no business trying to help that man if he has to go to such a place to do it. But you should be very slow to judge. God may want your friend to help that man. If you think your friend's behavior is completely wrong, then tell him so and use the principle in Matthew 18 of taking others to him as witnesses. Do not judge your friend in your mind or tell your judgment to others.

As another possible outcome, suppose that when you told your friend that you saw him at the theater, but then your friend claimed it was only one time. Then you mention the other times, and your friend said, "Yes, maybe there were a few other times but not as many as you say." Suppose that your friend goes on to say it was a big mistake, that he or she has been trying to overcome it and promises never to do it again, but wants you to promise not to tell anybody else. You cannot judge whether or not your friend is truly repentant, but you must decide how you will deal with your friend in the future. You may decide to spend more time with your friend to try to help him or her out of their difficulties. On the other hand, you may conclude that your friend is not trying to overcome the problem, but simply trying to keep it a secret. You may decide to avoid this friend's company and to never leave your family members alone with this "fiend" in the future. If you go as far as deciding that your friend is a danger to the congregation, then you should inform them of the facts about this person. Whatever you decide to do in this case, remember that "with the judgment you judge, you will be judged".

Finally, what would you do if your friend

insists that he doesn't go to that theater and it must be someone else you are seeing. So the next time you see the friend, you park your car, get out and confirm that you have the right person. What would you do if this "friend" tells you that you are like Satan—the accuser of the brethren—and that you have no right to be following people around, checking on their sins and judging them? What would you do if your "friend" went on to threaten you by saying: "If you tell any of the other church brethren about this, I'll make you regret that you did"?

This later case (Acts 20:29) is clearly a wolf among the sheep. Dishonest, corrupt people often make more serious-sounding accusations than humble people who are slow to accuse. But we must fear God and not people. As the false apostles were detected and rejected in Revelation 2:2 (quoted above), so must a false "pillar" be rejected in a local congregation (1Tim 3; Titus 1). If the lying "friend" in the above story will not repent and change at the words of you, other witnesses, and then the entire congregation, then the person must be removed from the congregation. Obviously, this is still a time to judge with righteous judgment. Any procedure designed to punish offenders also opens up the possibility for someone to misuse it to remove a righteous person. All who do so will be judged by God.

No matter what decision is made by humans in a governing structure, we must never condemn anyone as being "worthless" or "eternally lost". That is **not** our decision to make.

### **Why Does God Allow People to Believe So Many Different Things?**

We might start by asking why is this paper on eternal judgment so different than what other religious teachers teach on the subject? Actually, there are other people who have a view of Eternal judgment similar to this paper. If one reads "primitive" writings of pioneer Americans or missionaries who were cut off from main-stream church teaching, having only the Bible, they often place a big emphasis on the "resurrection" and "judgment day". There are thousands of verses in the Bible on these subjects and people left alone to read the Bible find them. No theology degree is required.

But even so, does every objective Bible reader come up with the same conclusions? No.

Would it work for Bible students to study in groups so that they would all learn together and come to the same conclusions? Maybe. But what happens when one study group forms different conclusions than another study group?

One does not need to study the history of Christianity long to see the incredible diversity of doctrinal understanding that exists. There are hundreds of denominations. Some are old, some are new. Some are rich; some poor. Some baptize by sprinkling, some by immersion, and some do not baptize at all. Some believe God speaks through one leader; others believe He speaks through every believer. Some try to evangelize; others do not. Some groups are willing to accept and work with other groups even though their doctrinal differences are major. Other groups have incredibly minor differences, yet cannot get along with each other. At times, one "Christian" group has gone to war against another "Christian" group.

For many people, Christianity is more like a political party than it is a way of life. If you asked most who claim to be Christians, "What makes you a Christian?", they would probably talk about their membership in a particular church, or their participation in baptism or certain other ceremonies at some time in their life. Some might actually say that they were "born a Christian".

Others would say that their relationship with Christ makes them a Christian. They would talk about the time they came to an altar, accepted Christ or became "born again". Some of these would say that single act was all that was necessary to become a Christian and be guaranteed eternal life. Others of this group would see a need for continual evidence of living a "Christian life".

If asked difficult Bible questions, most Christians would refer the questioner to either the pastor of the church they attend, or the leadership of their organization. Most Christians believe that their church is the closest to what God wants a church to be. (Some believers will graciously acknowledge that they believe their congregation is right for *them*, not right for *everybody*.)

If you ask the leader of almost any religious group, "What is needed to produce peace and harmony among Christians and the world in general?", the answer would almost always be some variant of this: "Teach everyone

to believe and practice what I believe and practice.” (They will say this even though the members in their group do not get along well.) Indeed, many religions spend much time, effort, and money attempting to teach their doctrines to others. Some Christian groups go as far as trying to prove that they are the “One True Church” and that all other churches are “false”.

Of course, many people who are actively seeking to follow God are looking for that “One True Church”. Others, simply grow up assuming that the Church they attend is the “right one” and they never bother to find out what other groups teach—or even what their own group teaches.

All of these groups and all of these people cannot be completely right! Even if God were to powerfully appear to the entire world right now and tell everyone that one particular religious group was “The One” that understood “His Truth”, we would still have to conclude that most of the world for most of history has not had access to that particular Truth. There simply is no history of any religious group teaching exactly the same doctrines to a significant part of the world for hundreds of years.

Some people take the opposite approach and say that God teaches truth primarily to individuals directly through the Holy Spirit. Those with His truth are then scattered around the world—some attending with various church groups, some probably removed from all church groups. While the Bible does show that God teaches individuals (1Jn 2:20,27), it is hard to show that He teaches them all the same truths in the same order. This writer has known thousands of serious Bible students—and cannot think of any two who believe **exactly** the same things. Furthermore, there are virtually no examples in the history of religion where numerous individuals study the Bible on their own, then come together to worship finding that they believe exactly the same thing about all doctrines.

If we were to limit our study to very basic and essential doctrines, more groups and individuals would agree—but still not perfectly. Most would agree that everyone ought to repent and accept Christ, though they might disagree on whether baptism was needed in that process, and the manner in which baptism is performed. Most groups would agree that everyone should “love their neighbor as themselves”—but some do not

apply that to peoples of other nations or races. Most would agree that people should keep the Ten Commandments, though some would claim doing so is replacing “grace” with “legalism”. There would certainly be disagreement on the keeping of the fourth commandment. When is the Sabbath? How does Christ want us to keep it?

I cannot solve all the sincere doctrinal controversies of the ages in one article. As a matter of fact, I cannot even read all the serious writing about doctrinal controversies within my lifetime. The only possible conclusion is this: **Every person who strives to follow God is not given all of His truth. We are each given part of His truth, as He reveals it to us.**

Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived (1Kngs 3:12). Yet he realized that God’s working was beyond our comprehension:

He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end (Eccl 3:11).

Then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it (Eccl 8:17).

The Apostle Paul echoed a similar statement:

Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! (Rom 11:33.)

During the 1950’s, biologists talked about finding the “secret of life”—unlocking the mechanics of cells and learning to create life on our own. While these scientists have learned to alter life through genetics—the *hope* of actually unlocking the “secret of life” is now further away than it was in the 1950’s. The process of life has been found to be complex beyond belief.

Even if we forget about the complexity of life at the cellular level, we see incredible complexity in the world around us. God probably could have made our earth’s ecosystem work with only a few hundred kinds of plants and animals. But he made millions of different species. They are not all essential. Some become extinct and life goes on—diminished in some way—but it nevertheless goes on.

The section sub-titled *The Purpose of God*

on page 37 gives many scriptures showing that God tests and tries the heart of each person. God has placed people in a great diversity of geographical environments. He has placed them in a great diversity of economic environments. He has allowed them to develop a great diversity of cultural environments. **Is it possible that it is God's purpose to place people in a great diversity of spiritual environments?**

To some, He has given much truth in many areas. Others have some truth in some areas. Still others understand almost nothing about the true God. God is allowing man to write the history of human experience:

- as guided by God,
- with no knowledge of God,
- and with nearly every possible combination of partial knowledge.

In some ways, our world is like a **giant card game**, where no two people are dealt exactly the same hand, and nobody can see anyone else's hand. We can see our own hand, but we do not know what it will do against other hands until we play our cards. We only know what other people have as they play their cards.

By analogy, we all have different physical and spiritual abilities, we all grow up in different environments and we really don't know exactly how different we are from the next person. If we compare our achievements with another, we do not know who is working harder. We really don't know the fruit of what we do or how life will turn out until we are done. Someone else may appear to be living a model life, then suddenly commit suicide or fall into some other tragedy. Only God can judge, fairly and righteously, what each has done with the resources we have been given.

This does not mean that our life is just a game or a joke. God has set us in a real world, with real people that really suffer sometimes, and really enjoy life other times. We can really make a difference in other's lives and turn their sorrow into joy if we do the right things. The "giant card game" is only an analogy.

If we have the ability to grow in His grace and knowledge, we are responsible for doing it. If we have the ability to help someone who is suffering, or to teach His truth to someone who wants to know, we should do it. We will be judged for it. **But understanding the intentional diversity of spiritual belief that God allows means that we do not have to worry or panic**

**that so many people believe things differently than ourselves.** God knows how to teach those He wants taught, to choose those He needs for the first resurrection and how to best bring everyone to eternal life if possible. He also knows how to leave part of the work for us—to see what we will do.

Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Eccl 12:13-14).

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.' This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Matt 22:37-39).

Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter through the gates into the city. But outside are dogs and sorcerers and sexually immoral and murderers and idolaters, and whoever loves and practices a lie (Rev 22:14-15).

This basic message of loving God, doing good to others and being judged for what we do can be found throughout the Bible. The real question for each of us is "What will we do with the message?"

- Will we simply make sure that we join a group that has it in their doctrinal statement?
- Will we write it neatly, frame it and put it up on our walls?
- Will we talk about it for an hour or two each week at church?

**Or will we use the Bible to make each and every significant decision of our lives?** What did you do yesterday? What did you do today? You are taking time to study this paper—hoping to learn or to be encouraged in the ways of God. That is one important step. What will you do tomorrow? What will happen at your judgment?

Behold, I [Christ] am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done (Rev 11:12).

I [Christ] have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

## Scripture Index

This index gives the page number(s) of every scripture reference in this paper. It can be very helpful if you are studying the Bible and come upon a question related to eternal judgment. If the scripture is in this index, you can see what other scriptures are related and what we say about it. This index can also be used to help determine which books and chapters of the Bible are useful for studying eternal judgment. All the reader needs to do is find the books or chapters below with many references, look over them to find your area of interest, and begin your Bible study.

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