

2007 Spring Newsletter
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“Thus saith the Lord, Keep ye judgment and do justice: for my salvation is near to come, and my righteousness to be revealed.” Isaiah 56:1



Does God Care?

Recently in the news we read that a disgruntled ex-employee returns to his firm and kills a receptionist and wounds two others. A student goes on a rampage at Virginia Tech University and kills 32 before killing himself. A Kindergartener is killed at school by a falling flagpole in a wind storm. A young mother loses her battle with cancer and two small children are left behind. People all around the world are dying daily from starvation or disease or wars. Why doesn't God do something?

There are various ideas about what God is doing. His apparent disinterest has led some to think He doesn't exist or He is dead. Others try desperately to hold onto their faith, telling themselves that "God took them." Many are bitter and others are just confused and try not to think about it.

Is death a natural part of life? If it is, why do people

hold on to life so tenaciously? These questions have driven men to formulate many divergent theories about what happens when someone dies, but what does the Bible say?

In the first book of the Bible, we are given a brief account of how the earth was readied for man's use followed by the declaration, "God formed man of the dust of the earth and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." He was told that everything in his environment was for his use with one exception, the tree in the midst of the garden in which he lived. He might eat the fruit of any tree but this tree was forbidden to him. The penalty for disobeying this rule would be **death**.

No hint had previously been given that Adam's life had a term limit. So long as he obeyed God he would live in

the world God had prepared for him. His world was a wonderful place—tame animals, food in abundance, beauty everywhere, nothing to hurt him, peace, tranquility and a perfect partner to share it with. So what happened?

Man was as yet untested and there is no better way to test loyalty, than to allow temptation to arise. So God allowed Satan, a rebellious angel, to try to lure Adam and Eve into disobedience. In the form of a serpent, he enticed Eve to eat the fruit that was forbidden with the world's first lie—"you won't surely die." Adam was not fooled (1 Timothy 2:14), but perhaps fearing life without her, joined her in her sin. At that instant the dying process began in them, but God still wanted them to fill the earth with a human race, so he arranged their dying to take centuries of time. We are told by the Apostle Peter that a day with the Lord is as a thousand years. (2 Peter 3:8) So Adam did die in the very day he ate of the forbidden tree—God's reckoning of a day.

So does that mean that men will always die? No. God had a plan for man, and he gave our first parents a hint as to what it was. He said that the seed of the woman would bruise the serpent's head. A blow to the head of a serpent is fatal and so one day Satan would be destroyed for his rebellion against God.

Adam and Eve were cast out of their beautiful garden into a part of the earth in which they would have to labor for their food and upkeep. There they had two sons, and the elder, Cain, committed the first murder—the first death recorded in the scriptures. Surely the bitterness of the sentence of death was fully impressed upon Adam and Eve as they held the lifeless Abel. They must have begged God for the life of their son, but there was no turning back.

Centuries passed and man continued to die. In fact more than three millennia passed until the starry night when the angels announced the birth of Jesus, the seed that would free man from death. When he reached

adulthood, John the Baptist announced him to the people of Israel saying, "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world." Yes, it was the sin, singular, of the world, Adam's sin, that Jesus came to take away.

As Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15, 22, "As in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." "As by one man, sin entered the world and death by sin, and so

death passed upon all, for all have sinned." "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners Christ died for us." "Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life." (Romans 5:12, 8, 18)

Jesus demonstrated what God has in store for man when he raised Lazarus from the grave. (John 11) When he received word that he was sick, he did not rush to see him but waited until he died. He told his disciples, "Lazarus is asleep. I go to waken him out of sleep." When they didn't understand him, he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." Jesus described death as a sleep out of which he would awaken Lazarus.

When he arrived at the tomb, the people told him he was too late. Lazarus was four days in the tomb and his body had begun to decompose. But Jesus had the power of God and called Lazarus to come forth from his grave, and he emerged still wrapped in the grave clothes. What rejoicing! And so it will be when all the millions of mankind are raised from their tombs to walk once again with their loved ones. It will be as though they have just wakened from a long, dreamless sleep. Jesus told us, "The day is coming when all in their graves will hear [my] voice and come forth." (John 6:28, 29)

What better authority can one have than the word of Jesus himself that death is like sleep. The apostles also referred to it in those terms. In 1 Corinthians 15:18, Paul says that if there is no resurrection, then those "which are asleep in Christ are perished." Yes, the resurrection of the dead is the only hope that is held out in the Bible to the poor dying human race. The prophets and patriarchs of old trusted that God would raise the dead. (See Job 14:13-15; Hebrews 11:17-19, 35) and Paul affirms that the resurrection of Jesus was a demonstration of God's intent to raise all mankind. "But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: And if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain." But since Christ has risen we are assured that "...since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." (1 Corinthians 15:21, 22)

But you might wonder, how can it be that **all** will be raised when not all the world believes in Jesus? Isn't it necessary to be a believer now or be lost? The Apostle John, in his first epistle (1 John 2:2) tells us that Christ

"is the propitiation (satisfaction) for our (the believers) sins: **and not for ours only**, but also for the sins of the **whole world.**" Paul told Timothy (1 Timothy 2:5, 6; 4:10) "For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for **all** to be testified in due time." "...therefore we both labor and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Savior of **all** men, especially of those that believe."

While salvation can only come through Christ (Acts 4:12), so much of the world has had no real opportunity to learn of Jesus or to appreciate his sacrifice for them. To most, he represents warring churches with conflicting creeds and nations of aggressors who sought to steal their lands and resources and enslave them. Then there are the millions who lived and died in the centuries before Christ. Would God forget them because of an accident of birth? No. The promise is to **all—all** the children of Adam.

If all the dead are to be raised, where will they go? Some will be in heaven. The hope of a heavenly reward is held out to those who willingly and faithfully serve the Lord and His cause now. It is to these "saints" that the promises of the New Testament are addressed. (See Ephesians 1:1, Philippians 1:1, 1 Corinthians 1:2, etc.)

*"It is good for me that I have been afflicted;
that I might learn thy statutes."
Psalm 119:71*

The vast majority of mankind, casual believers and unbelievers alike, will be raised on the earth. God made the earth to be inhabited and to last forever. This is the kingdom for which Jesus taught his disciples to pray—"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done **in earth**, even as it is done in heaven."

This kingdom is described by Peter in his great address on the day of Pentecost as "the times of refreshing," and "the times of restitution of all things." (Acts 3:19-21)

Restitution means the restoring of something that was lost. Adam lost his life and the perfect, peaceful and glorious garden planted by God for him. Hence, mankind will receive back what Adam lost—life and a perfect earth for their home.

Micah 4:1-4 describes this kingdom as a time when swords will be turned into pruning hooks and war will cease. Isaiah 35 tells us that there will be no more lame or deaf or blind there. The deserts shall blossom as the rose and the ransomed of the Lord will return with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.

Revelation 21:1-4 speaks of this kingdom as the New Jerusalem coming down to earth in which God will be with men. He will wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying nor any more pain, for all those things will have passed away.

It will be in this kingdom that the whole world will learn of God. 1 Timothy 2:4 tells us that it is God's will to "have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." Yes, during that time "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of God as the waters cover the sea." (Habakkuk 2:14) And in those days, the law of God will be written in their hearts and it will not be necessary for any to teach his neighbor "Know the Lord, for they all shall know me from the least to the greatest...and I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more." (Jeremiah 31:33, 34)

God did not make the human race to be robots, but free moral agents able to choose intelligently. He wants man's love and obedience from his own choice and his appreciation of righteousness. Therefore, God has given us time to fully comprehend the enormity of what it means to live with sin. It has been a bitter, cruel experience, but it has been permitted for our welfare and will not be forgotten. When mankind is brought out of death and restored to perfection, he will never again choose to oppose God, but will understand fully the "wages of sin" and will choose righteousness. Then the will of God will be done in earth, even as it is done in heaven!