

Summer 2022 Newsletter

Detroit Bible Students Ecclesia

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IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? Part 2

*“And the ransomed of the LORD shall return,
and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads:
they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Isaiah 35:10*

When a gunman targets black shoppers in a Buffalo grocery store, or when 18 children are killed in a Texas schoolroom all we can do is gasp in horror and deplore so many deaths of the innocent. At any moment devastating accidents and catastrophic diseases can touch any of us, but the deterioration and death of old age we have come to accept as inevitable. Everyone dies.

Non-Judeo-Christian religions have teachings that allow their believers to harbor hopes that death isn't really death, and that life goes on in another realm. The Judeo-Christian holy book, the Bible, is unique among the religions of the world in that it does **not** teach that life continues on in death. Instead, its offer of hope is the **Resurrection** of mankind **out** of death.

God created man to populate the earth. Adam and Eve had one restriction, obedience to God's command not to eat from one forbidden tree. They had been created with a perfect organism because they had been designed live forever. Although the pair were **mortal**, they were under no peril of death so long as they obeyed. Science tells us that over the course of seven years, all the cells of our bodies are completely renewed. What science cannot tell us is why the renewal process begins to break down.

God's pronouncement of death upon man was a penalty for disobedience. If Adam's life already had had a time limit, or if something in man was indestructible, God's words would have been an idle threat. God told Adam, "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." (Gen.3:19)

The sentence of death on Adam was not on his body alone, but upon Adam's whole being. Skeptics quibble over the words "in the day" (Gen.2:17) because Adam lived 930 years and didn't die in one day. However, the dying process God pronounced began immediately, Adam began with a perfect organism so it took over 900 years for his body to wear down to the point of death. God still intended that Adam's race would multiply and fill the earth. He had foreknown Adam's fall and had already planned for man's recovery from their heritage of death. (1 Pet.1:18-20) God had not abandoned his human creation.

The hope of recovery from death is found sprinkled throughout the Old Testament. Paul explains in Hebrews 11:17-19, that when God tested Abraham's faithfulness by telling him to sacrifice his son Isaac, he offered his son because he

reasoned that since God had said that Isaac was to be the seed of blessing, God would raise him from the dead.

Others also cherished the hope of a resurrection. It was in the heart of Job whose children were killed by a storm, his wealth was stolen by marauders, and his body was afflicted with painful boils. Amid his sorrows he looked for relief in death and mused, "There is hope for a tree, if it be cut down, that it will sprout again...But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he? ...he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep. Oh that you would hide me in *sheol*, [*Hebrew*, equally translated *grave* and *hell*] If a man dies, shall he live again? ...You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands." (Job 14:7-15 *English Standard Version*)



Not one of Adam's children has escaped the death sentence. Psalm 90:10 (*Good News Bible*) says, "Seventy years is all we have—eighty years, if we are strong; yet all they bring us is trouble and sorrow; life is soon over, and we are gone." Since we

are so far from the perfection of the original creation, we die in 70 or 80 years or perhaps a decade or so more. The advancements of modern medical science in this day of the increase of knowledge (Dan.12:1), have helped to prolong our lives, but inevitably, we die.

God gave Israel his Law to protect them from the idolatries of the heathen nations surrounding them, but the lure of conformity, caused them to fail again and again. Similarly, the prevalence of life in death theories promulgated in the heathen world for centuries insinuated themselves into Christianity after the Apostles fell asleep. Now the Scriptures are unconsciously read through non-Christian spectacles which see concepts in them that really are not found there. (Matt. 15:9)

"I am the resurrection and the life." (John 11:25)

The Bible's message is the unique and most wonderful hope of life **beyond** the grave. The Bible's promise is not that after death life will continue in another realm, but that mankind will be **restored** to life on earth in that glorious kingdom for which Jesus taught us to pray, **"Thy kingdom come, thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven."** (Matt. 6:10)

When families gather at the funerals of their loved ones, they all imagine that their dead family member will be reunited with parents or friends who died before. Heaven is generally described in earthlike settings in which the deceased can indulge in a favorite pastime. Few preaching over the casket ever suggest that the person died in sin. However, the scripture

says, "there are **none righteous for all have sinned** and come



short of the glory of God." (Rom. 3:23; 5:12) "Follow peace with all men, and **holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.**" (Heb 12:14, *King James Version*) Meanwhile, the creeds of Christendom teach that the **unholy** have their lot in hell, suffering tortures too gruesome to be

imagined, and certainly never mentioned to the mourning family. The Bible says, "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psa.146:4)

One of the best-known verses of the Bible is John 3:16, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." God has promised that all who sleep the "sleep of death" will be brought back from the grave. God gave hints to his purpose throughout the Old Testament. To Hosea God said, "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, where *are* your plagues; O Grave, where *is* your ruin!" (Hos. 13:14, *Modern KJV*) Isaiah penned many pictures of the restoration of mankind in the kingdom; "And the ransomed of the LORD shall return and come to Zion with singing; everlasting joy shall be upon their heads; they shall obtain gladness and joy, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." (Isa.35:1-10) (see also Num.21:5-9; John 3:14; 1Cor.10:2-11)

God's standard of justice is expressed as "life for life, eye for eye..." (Deut.19:21) Thus, the release of the human race from the curse of death required a ransom for Adam. Jesus came to be Adam's ransom since no one from Adam's fallen human race could do it. "As it is written: There is none righteous, no not one." (Rom 3:10) Hence, "A man [from Adam's race] cannot at all redeem a brother, nor give to God a ransom for him." (Psa. 49:7) Jesus, born by the power of God, a perfect man in the womb of Mary (Gal.4:4) was the only one able to balance the scales of justice and provide a ransom for the perfect [as originally created] man Adam. (Rom.5:12,19,21; 1 Tim. 2:5,6; Matt. 20:28)



Jesus' own resurrection was the proof that God had accepted him as the purchaser of Adam's race. That he had been raised was attested by his apostles, the women who followed him, as well as by more than 500 others of the Lord's disciples. Lastly, the apostle Paul saw Jesus in his glorified spiritual form on the road to Damascus. (1 Cor. 15:3-8; Acts 9:1-9; 26:8,13-19) For Paul, the kernel of the gospel message was that "God had appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained **whereof**

he hath given assurance unto all men in that he had raised him from the dead." (Acts 17:31) Therefore, it is not surprising that Paul devoted an entire chapter to the doctrine of the resurrection.

The 15th chapter of 1 Corinthians is the definitive "Resurrection" chapter. Paul refers to this as his gospel, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures." (vss. 3,4) Paul then lists the eyewitnesses to Jesus' resurrection and asks (vss. 12-17), "Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? 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...ye are yet in your sins." ... "Then they also who have fallen asleep in Christ are **perished** [Greek, *apollumi*, to destroy fully] (vs. 18)

Paul's statement is clearly that unless there is a **resurrection**, even believers in Christ would be lost, perished, fully destroyed. This would be an untrue statement if something immortal in man were living on in another sphere. Paul, however, is clear. We would be left the most pitiable of all people (vs. 19) because the heathen have hopes of living on in some other form, but we would have nothing. Although their hopes are imagined, they cling to them, as when a young man straps explosives to his body as a suicide bomber expecting that heaven and forty virgins are awaiting him?



But the fact is, the apostle continues, "**Christ has been raised from the dead the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep.**" (vs.20) Jesus' resurrection is the guarantee of humanity's resurrection. Paul explains "for as by a man (Adam) came death, by a man (Jesus) has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam **all die so also in Christ shall all be made alive.** But each in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ." (vs.23)

A point that is usually missed here is the all-inclusiveness of the resurrection. Jesus said, (John 5:28,29) "**Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice**" —"**the voice of the son of God**" (vs 25)—"**and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life** (1 Thes.4:13-16; Rev. 2:10; 3:21), **and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.**" (Strong's 2920, *krisis a tribunal, an opinion for or against.*) Both the good and the evil of mankind are brought back from death. The "good" of whom Jesus spoke

includes all the faithful patriarchs and prophets of the Old Testament (Heb. 11:39,40) along with the faithful believers of the Gospel Age.

"Christ the firstfruits" is just as correctly be translated, "the Anointed firstfruits." The Greek word *christos*, [Strong's 5547], means "anointed," and the faithful followers of Jesus of this age are also called "firstfruits" (see 2 Thess. 2:13; James 1:18; Rev. 14:4). Galatians 3:28 says that those who are "children by faith in Christ Jesus," are "all one in Christ Jesus." Jesus' followers are called members of his body (Gal 3:27-29; Rom. 6:4,5; 1 Cor. 12:12-27) and, therefore, those who "**belong to Christ**" at his coming are not his own body, but those he purchased—the whole world of mankind, which he **bought** by his death on Calvary—"**those who have done evil,**" in John 5.

"Someone will ask, How are the dead raised? With what kind of body do they come?...**God gives it a body** as he has chosen, and to each kind of seed its own body. ...There are heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,." (vss.35-43)

Paul reveals that God has planned for two salvations—an earthly and a heavenly. Emphasis is placed on the heavenly now because at this time Christ is calling out a "people for his name." (Acts 15:14-17) The Apostle says, "Behold! I tell you a mystery. We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. (Rev.11:15-18) For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and **this mortal body must put on immortality.**" (vss.50-53) It is not ours yet!

The Resurrection of the dead is the one hope held out for humanity in the Bible. It was considered the essence of the gospel by the Apostles. However, the traditional creeds teach that at death an immortal soul within the person is already consigned to live in heaven or hell or purgatory. So rather than the glorious hope of restoration from the grave, (Acts 3:19-21), and despite Jesus' declaration, (John 11:2) resurrection is hardly mentioned, and although it must be given lip-service, its function is reduced to having mankind come out of their graves only to return to whatever state of bliss or torment they had already been in.

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