

# ***DESTINATION HEAVEN, OR DESTINATION EARTH?***

“No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man” (John 3:13). Jesus did not promise eternal life in heaven. However, He promised eternal life on earth. Must we do something to attain immortality? Some days feel like an eternity. What will we do for eternity?

Most Christians believe they have an immortal soul. Upon their death, this soul will either ascend to heaven or descend to hell. This is false. The Bible does not contain the words “immortal soul.” Rather, Paul stated that only Jesus has attained immortality (I Timothy 6:16).

This doctrine of the immortality of the soul is not only false, but it is mean. Only people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior will attain eternal life. Their souls flit up to heaven, where they will do who-knows-what for eternity. What, then, happens to everyone else? What happens to the Iraqi child who dies of malnutrition or to the Algerian who grows up in an Islamic culture? They’ve never had the opportunity for salvation in their lifetimes. Does God punish them with eternal damnation? Does He consign them to Gehenna fire? Is God unfair? Of course not!

The Iraqi child and the deluded Algerian will be saved when they accept Jesus and everything that entails: repentance, baptism, receiving God’s Holy Spirit, obedience to His laws, etc. But God must first give them that chance for salvation.

## **An immortal soul? No. A human spirit? Yes.**

Right now, immortality belongs only to God (I Timothy 6:16) and to spirit beings (e.g. angels, demons). Our fate is the grave. God said to Adam, “By the sweat of your face you will eat bread, till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19). And it’s “appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

God did not give us an immortal soul. However, He gave us a spirit in man: “But it is a spirit in man, and the breath of the Almighty gives them understanding” (Job 32:8). This human spirit separates us from animals. It gives us the ability to reason and discern between right and wrong. It’s also instrumental in salvation: “For all who are being led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you have not received a spirit of slavery leading to fear again, but you have received a spirit of adoption as sons by which we cry out, ‘Abba! Father!’ The Spirit Himself testifies with *our spirit* that we are children of God, and if children, heirs also, heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him so that we may also be glorified with Him” (Romans 8:14-16).

God’s Spirit interacts with our spirit to create a new creature in Christ (II Corinthians 5:17). We are then begotten, or conceived, by God. This is analogous to human creation. When

our fathers' sperm united with our mothers' egg, we were conceived and born nine months later. Likewise, God's Spirit unites with our spirit to create a new spiritual creature in Christ. We are spiritually conceived but not yet born. The nine months we spend in our mothers' womb is analogous to the lifetime we spend nurturing this new creature in Christ. We feed it through Bible study, prayer, fasting, and obedience to God.

Although our temporal bodies decay daily, this new creature in Christ is renewed: "Therefore we do not lose heart, but though our outer man is decaying, yet our inner man is being renewed day by day. For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, while we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen; for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal" (II Corinthians 4:16-18).

Paul contrasts our fleshy bodies, which he calls "tabernacles" or "tents," with the spiritual new creature in Christ. "For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life" (II Corinthians 5:1-4). We "groan" in our temporal bodies, forever yearning for the day when our spiritual bodies will emerge. The difference between our physical and spiritual bodies is almost indescribable. "There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body" (I Corinthians 15:40-44).

We cannot inherit the Kingdom of God in our temporal bodies. But the new creature in Christ will: "I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. 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" (I Corinthians 15:50-52).

At the resurrection, this new creature in Christ is born. If we're living when Jesus returns, we'll be changed. If not, God will resurrect us, or rather, the new creature in Christ. We'll shed our temporal bodies and be clothed with immortality. This will occur in the "twinkling of an eye." At one moment, we're flesh; at another, we're spirit beings. Jesus described the spirit body to Nicodemus: "You should not be surprised at my saying, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:7-8).

### **What is it like to be dead?**

According to the Bible, the dead are *asleep*. “For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. Then those also who *have fallen asleep* in Christ have perished. If we have hope in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied” (I Corinthians 15:16-20). Also, Luke writes that Stephen “fell asleep” after his stoning (Acts 7:60).

We came from dust, and to dust we shall return. The dead know nothing: “For the living know they will die; but the dead do not know anything, nor have they any longer a reward, for their memory is forgotten. Indeed their love, their hate and their zeal have already perished, and they will no longer have a share in all that is done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6). Moreover, “For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity. All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust” (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20).

Within moments of our death, our bodies begin to decay. Yet all hope is not lost. God will resurrect, or give birth, to that new creature in Christ. Paul wrote, “But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren, about those who are asleep, so that you will not grieve as do the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the *dead in Christ will rise first*. Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words” (I Thessalonians 4:13-18).

How will the resurrected or changed saint look? “But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come?’ You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies, but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body” (I Corinthians 15:35-44). The resurrected or changed saints will be like the resurrected Jesus, with abilities beyond comprehension.

Where will Jesus and His resurrected and changed saints reside? Not in heaven, but on earth: “In that day His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives, which is in front of Jerusalem on the east; and the Mount of Olives will be split in its middle from east to west by a very large valley, so that half of the mountain will move toward the north and the other half toward the

south” (Zechariah 14:4). Jesus will return to earth and the “dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live” (John 5:25). Here, Jesus referred to the *first resurrection*.

## **Two Resurrections (and later, a third)**

“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” (Revelation 20:6). The *first resurrection* (described by Paul in I Corinthians 15) is of the just, the dead in Christ. Paul stated that “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in his own turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him” (I Corinthians 15:22-23). If we’ve accepted Jesus and if God’s Spirit has united with our spirit to create a new creature in Christ, then God will resurrect or change us upon Jesus’ return.

The converted Christians and saints of the Old Testament (Abraham, Moses, Ruth, etc.) will rise first: “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” (I Thessalonians 4:16). The rest of the dead (the majority of mankind) will rise a thousand years later, after the millennial rule of Jesus and His saints. “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.*” (Revelation 20:4-5).

The rest of the dead – who are they? Obviously, they include everyone who wasn’t part of the first resurrection. They include the Iraqi child and the deluded Algerian. They did not receive a chance for salvation in their lifetimes, and died before receiving Christ.

God isn’t calling everyone today. Jesus admitted that He’s opening the minds of a select few: “And the disciples came and said to Him, ‘Why do You speak to them in parables?’ Jesus answered them, ‘To you it has been granted to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been granted. For whoever has, to him more shall be given, and he will have an abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has shall be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables; because while seeing they do not see, and while hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand. In their case the prophecy of Isaiah is being fulfilled, which says, ‘You will keep on hearing, but will not understand; you will keep on seeing, but will not perceive; for the heart of this people has become dull, with their ears they scarcely hear, and they have closed their eyes, otherwise they would see with their eyes, hear with their ears, and understand with their heart and return, and I would heal them’” (Matthew 13:10-15). Moreover, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up on the last day” (John 6:44).

God will resurrect or change the converted saints upon Jesus’ return. They will reign with Christ for a thousand years. Then God will resurrect people who were not part of the first resurrection. They weren’t converted in their lifetimes. God will offer salvation to them. They

will learn the truth. They will get to know the real Jesus. Over a 100-year period (Isaiah 65:20), they will be given the same chance at salvation that we enjoy today.

“For it is time for judgment to begin with the household of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the outcome for those who do not obey the gospel of God?” (I Peter 4:17). God is judging people who have His Spirit. He judges us according to our works and the words written “in the books” (Revelation 20). Which books? The Greek word for ‘books’ is *biblios*, from which we derive the word “Bible.” God, then, is judging us according to the words and laws written in the Bible. Because God is consistent and fair, He will judge people resurrected in the second resurrection by the same measurement, that is, the Bible. Judgment is a process, not a sentence. Over our lifetime, God judges us according to our works and the words written in the Bible. Over a 100-year period, people resurrected in the second resurrection will be judged similarly. This 100-year period is known as the Great White Throne Judgment.

### **The Third Resurrection**

The *first resurrection* is reserved for the dead in Christ, and the *second resurrection* for people who weren’t resurrected one thousand years earlier. These people, like our Iraqi child or deluded Algerian, never received the opportunity for salvation in their lifetime. The *third resurrection*, however, is reserved for people who have consciously rejected Jesus and their chance for salvation.

“The wages of sin is death” (Romans 6:23) and not eternal torment in some fictional place called hell. People who have consciously rejected Christ and His offer of salvation will receive their wages in Gehenna Fire, which is commonly known as “hell fire.” However, Gehenna fire *destroys* its occupants. Malachi wrote, “For behold, the day is coming, burning like a furnace; and all the arrogant and every evildoer will be chaff; and the day that is coming will set them ablaze, says the LORD of hosts, so that it will leave them neither root nor branch. But for you who fear My name, the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings; and you will go forth and skip about like calves from the stall. You will tread down the wicked, for *they will be ashes* under the soles of your feet on the day which I am preparing,” says the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 4:1-3)

Our fate is not in heaven or in some place commonly referred to as “hell.” In popular imagination, “hell” is the location where people are tormented interminably. There is no such place. God is loving and caring, and would never stoop to torment someone forever and ever. Satan, however, is another story.

“When the thousand years are completed, Satan will be released from his prison, and will come out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together for the war; the number of them is like the sand of the seashore. And they came up on the broad plain of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city, and fire came down from heaven and devoured them. And the devil who deceived them was thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are also; and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:7-10). Divine fire will

devour these people, just as it devoured Sodom and Gomorrah, just as it devoured the beast and false prophet one thousand years earlier.

The translators of this particular passage used the word “are” to describe the location of the beast (the dictator who leads the last empire to fight Christ at His return) and false prophet. However, it’s a mistranslation. It should be “were” cast into the lake of fire one thousand years earlier. As Malachi alluded to, the beast and false prophet, and all other wicked people, will be burnt to ashes in Gehenna Fire. Satan will be hurled into that same lake of fire.

Satan is spirit, not flesh; thus fire cannot destroy him. Although he and his demons will be hurled into Gehenna fire, they do not share the same fate as the incorrigibly wicked human, who will be destroyed. “These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots; raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; *wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever*” (Jude 12, 13). (The Bible employs stars as symbols of angels – Revelation 1:16, 20.)

Satan is the quintessential liar. He’s tricked us into believing that we have an immortal soul. He’s tricked us into believing that a harsh and unforgiving God will consign the wicked to eternal torment. God is merciful, even to those who reject Him. He will not torment the incorrigibly wicked. He will not prolong their agony in the lake of fire. Instead, shortly after the third resurrection, they will be cast into the lake of fire, where they will be burnt alive, their bodies and spirit destroyed (Matthew 10:28).

## Three resurrections succinctly summarized

The Bible depicts **three** resurrections:

- a) God will resurrect the dead in Christ at His return;
- b) One thousand years later, after the millennial reign of Christ, God will resurrect people who were not part of the first resurrection. The second resurrection precipitates the Great White Throne Judgment period, during which they will have 100 years to accept Jesus and salvation; and
- c) The third resurrection, which is reserved for the incorrigibly wicked who did not and will not repent. They will be cast into the lake of fire. The Bible refers to this as the second death.

These resurrections correspond to different categories of humans:

- a) People who now have or who have had a chance for, and accepted, salvation in their lifetimes;
- b) People who never had that chance for salvation; say, the Iraqi child or deluded Algerian; and
- c) People who have consciously rejected that chance for salvation. The author of Hebrews (probably Paul) describes them: “For in the case of those who have once been enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and have been made partakers of the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, it is impossible to renew them again to repentance, since they again crucify to themselves the Son of God and put Him to open shame” (Hebrews 6:4-6).

### *Destination Earth*

“Now it will come about that in the last days the mountain of the house of the LORD will be established as the chief of the mountains, and will be raised above the hills, and all the nations will stream to it. And many peoples will come and say, ‘Come, let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob, that He may teach us concerning His ways and that we may walk in His paths.’ For the law will go forth from Zion and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. And He will judge between the nations, and will render decisions for many peoples.

And they will hammer their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Nation will not lift up sword against nation, and never again will they learn war” (Isaiah 2:2-5).

It’s clear that Jesus will return to earth and establish a new world order. As a benign dictator, He will rule with a rod of iron. And we’ll help Him! We’ll become “kings and priests, and we shall *reign on the earth*” (Revelation 5:10). Jesus promised not only eternal life, but authority over the nations: “He who overcomes, and he who keeps My deeds until the end, to him *I will give authority over the nations*; and he shall rule them with a rod of iron, as the vessels of the potter are broken to pieces, as I also have received authority from My Father; and I will give him the morning star. He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches” (Revelation 2:26-29).

That’s our fate. Jesus said to His disciples, “Truly I say to you, that you who have followed Me, in the regeneration when the Son of Man will sit on His glorious throne, you also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel” (Matthew 19:28). Jesus’ original apostles will rule over the twelve tribes (nations) of Israel. We’ll rule other nations and cities.

Jesus Christ will inherit the throne of his ancestor David. “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the *throne of His father David*; and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end” (Luke 1:30-33). For a thousand years Jesus will rule on the earth, with the help of his resurrected or changed saints. Afterward, God will allow Satan to influence man, again. Unfortunately, people will fall prey to his influence. God will destroy them, and He’ll cast Satan and his demons into outer darkness from which there is no escape. He’ll then resurrect people who never received a chance for salvation (the second resurrection), and offer it to them in the 100-year Great White Throne Judgment period.

After the second resurrection and the Great White Throne Judgment, God will resurrect the incorrigibly wicked. This is the third resurrection. They are the people – personified by the rich man in the parable of Lazarus (Luke 16) - who have followed Satan by consciously rejecting salvation. Their fate will be Gehenna Fire. “And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades (the grave) were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the **second death**, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:13-15).

God refers to this as the second death. He will not torment them forever and ever. Rather, the wicked will die in the lake of fire. Satan and his demons, because they are spirit beings, will be tormented eternally in the “outer darkness” described by Jude.

“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, ‘Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among

them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them” (Revelation 21:1-3).  
“Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads” (Revelation 22:1-4).

After the millennial rule of Christ and His saints, after Satan and his demons have been forever banished into outer darkness, after the 100-year Great White Throne Judgment, God the Father will transfer His throne to a transformed earth. Earth will become His headquarters. From here He will launch the next phase of His plan. If we choose to obey God and accept salvation (and everything that entails), then we will help implement God’s next grand project.

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