

What is the Reward of the Saved?

by Herbert W. Armstrong
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What assurance have we that our departed loved ones have gone to heaven? By WHAT AUTHORITY have we believed that we shall go to heaven if we're saved?

THIS may be a little shocking -- but I want to ask you a candid question: Did you ever look into your Bible to see whether it really does say you will ever go to heaven, if you are saved? Did you ever look into your Bible to see what it reveals about what the saved shall inherit for eternity?

It's going to come as a surprise to most of you to realize that you never did. Of course, you've always heard that you'll go to heaven, if you're saved. You've just accepted it, probably. But did you ever stop to PROVE it? Did you ever try to find it promised in your Bible? If you do, you'll probably be even more surprised!

God Makes a Promise

I want you to notice a statement in your Bible, as little understood as any passage in this wonderful Book which Bruce Barton said is the Book nobody understands! It's Galatians 3:16 and 29. This was written primarily for the Gentile-born converts in Galatia:

“Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.”

The Christian is not yet a possessor of his reward -- he is an heir -- and what he shall inherit, if saved, is the PROMISE made to Abraham. Whatever shall be the reward of the saved, wherever we shall spend eternity if saved, is a definite, specific promise of God. That promise was made to Abraham, who is called, in this same book of Galatians which was written for Gentile converts, the FATHER of the faithful. If one is converted, whether Jew or Gentile -- regardless of race or color or sex -- if one is Christ's, then he becomes one of Abraham's children, and an HEIR of the PROMISE made to Abraham. What he is to inherit, is whatever was promised to Abraham.

If you'll look into your Bible to find out what God promised to Abraham; to find out what is the reward to those who are saved; to find out why we have to be ABRAHAM'S children to inherit this promise of salvation, when and how we shall inherit the promise -- you're in for a shocking surprise!

This matter concerns your eternity, and yet you probably never thought to really look into it, for yourself -- in your own Bible!

The statement we read from the book of Galatians actually sums up the whole of the Gospel -- it is a condensed statement of the very PURPOSE and PLAN of God for mankind! Your hope of life eternal -- of salvation -- depends altogether on what is stated in that greatly misunderstood passage!

Christ Confirmed the PROMISE

In order to understand this most important question in the world, notice what is written in Romans 15:8, “Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the circumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the Promises made unto the fathers.”

In bringing a new message -- the Gospel -- Jesus came to confirm the promises made to the FATHERS. But who were the fathers? And what are the promises made to them? Heaven? Purgatory? Your salvation depends on the answer! You read in Acts 3:13, in the inspired words of Peter: “The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus.” The fathers, then, were Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. If you are Christ’s -- if you are a Christian -- you are an heir to inherit -- not what men might devise in their imaginations -- you are an heir according to the promise! If you’re an HEIR, you are going to inherit something. If you’re an heir according to the promise, you are going to inherit whatever was promised -- and not something else.

That promise to Abraham is important! Whatever it is -- that is what YOU shall inherit -- if you are saved! You find the account of that promise made to Abraham in the book of Genesis.

It begins in the 12th chapter of Genesis, verse 1: “Now the Lord [Eternal] had said unto Abram, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father’s house, unto a land that I will shew thee.”

First, God called Abram, as his name was then, out of the land of Babylon where he lived -- surely symbolic of the spiritual Babylon in which we live, today -- just as, today, God calls you and me out of this world -- this Babylon! Abraham didn’t quibble or argue. The verse says: “So Abram departed.” He went to a certain land, where God led him -- the land we call Israel today! Abraham obeyed God. “So Abram departed,” it is written! That’s why he was made the FATHER of the precious promises on which your eternal salvation rests! He obeyed-immediately he departed! Yes, just as YOU must obey, if you, with Abraham, are to inherit that promise!

Men today have no conception of what is really in store for the one who is really saved. The inheritance that awaits you -- if you surrender to God; if you obey as Abraham obeyed; if you rely, not on your faith, but on the very faith of Christ; if you are really born again -- that very inheritance so surpasses anything you have ever conceived so far, that you haven’t the slightest conception of your true potential destiny!

As we read in I Corinthians 2:9, “... Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.” The inheritance which God has prepared for you cannot even be conceived by the natural mind of man -- but God does reveal it to us “by His Spirit” (I Cor. 2:10).

Now what did God promise Abraham?

The answer is found in Genesis 12:6-7: “And Abram passed through the land unto the place of Sichem, unto the plain of Moreh. And the Canaanite was then in the land. And the Eternal appeared unto Abram, and said, Unto thy seed will I give THIS LAND. SO the promise was the inheritance of the LAND OF ISRAEL.

“Great Is Your Reward in Heaven”

WHAT DID Jesus mean when He told His disciples, “Be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven”? (Matt. 5:12.) And why- -only a few verses before -- did Christ say, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth”? (Verse 5.) Do some of the saved -- “the persecuted” (verses 11-12) -- go to heaven to collect their reward, while others -- “the meek” -- inherit the earth? Or did Jesus Christ contradict Himself in His very next breath?

The Apostle Peter was inspired to write, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you” (I Pet. 1:3-4). Notice it! The reward of the saved -- the inheritance of true Christian -- is reserved in heaven. That is where it is kept at this present time.

But do Christians go to heaven to receive their reward? Jesus Christ explained it in the Book of Revelation: “And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be” (Rev. 22:12). When Christ returns from heaven the second time He will bring the reward of the saved with Him! Though now temporarily reserved in heaven, Jesus will bring the reward of the saints (true Christians) to this earth!

Daniel wrote, “And the kingdom and dominion, and the greatness of the kingdom under the whole heaven, shall be given to the people of the saints of the most High, whose kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and all dominions shall serve and obey him” (Dan. 7:27).

Jesus did not say Christians will inherit their reward IN heaven. Rather, the reward -- authority, an office of power in the Kingdom of God -- is being temporarily reserved in heaven because that is where Jesus is. But it will be brought to the earth, where Jesus will reward His saints, in the Kingdom of God, with positions of rulership and authority over the nations.

The PROMISED Land

Let’s continue in Genesis 13:14-15: “And the Eternal said unto Abram ... Lift up now thine eyes, and look from the place where thou art northward, and southward, and eastward, and westward: for all the land which thou seest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed for ever.” The lands where Abram was, is the land of Canaan, called Israel today. That, then, is the Promised Land -- that’s why it’s called the Promised Land!

But for how long? Forever! The inheritance is to be an eternal inheritance, which of necessity involves and includes everlasting life!

If one inherits a piece of land, the deed must describe the exact boundaries of the property. Is such a description given in this deed of the land we may hope to inherit?

The answer is found in Genesis 15:18, "In the same day the Eternal made a covenant with Abram, saying, Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates." From the Nile River in Egypt, to the Euphrates in the Near East!

We've all seen enough maps to know where that is, and I'm sure we all know it isn't up in heaven somewhere, but right here on this earth. "And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise" (Gal. 3:29); and the promise -- the promise of eternal inheritance -- is the land of Israel, from the Nile clear to the Euphrates, here on this earth! God help us to put our trust in the sure Word of God, not in the fables of men!

Incidentally, other scriptures show that the territory of Christ's Kingdom is to expand and spread until ultimately it shall include the whole earth. See Romans 4:13.

Obedience Before Inheritance

In making this promise to Abram, God conditioned it on obedience. Abraham did obey! First, he left his native land, his friends and relatives, his old ways of life -- he forsook all, and followed where God led. Again God conditioned the promises on obedience. Abraham was commanded to sacrifice his only son, Isaac. And again he did not stop to reason it out, or make excuse, or rebel -- he obeyed! God didn't take the son; He merely wanted Abraham's willingness to obey, in faith.

But now notice, after Abraham had obeyed -- he been put to the test and found faithful -- were there any further conditions to the promise? Let's read Genesis 22:15-18: "And the angel of the Eternal called unto Abraham out of heaven the second time, and said, By myself have I sworn, saith the Lord, for because thou hast done this thing, and hast not withheld thy son, thine only son: that in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because thou hast obeyed my voice."

Now it was unconditional. Abraham already had performed his part of this covenant -- this agreement. And so today whosoever will from every nation may come and take of the waters of life freely, because God has kept His promise, and the promised Seed, Christ, has come.

Yes, the promise is now absolutely sure. Why? "Because," as we read further in Genesis 26:5, "because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws." Again let me say that sin is the transgression of the Law, the same fundamental, eternal, spiritual Law that Adam transgressed when he sinned, and the same laws and commandments Abraham obeyed and kept (long before the sacrifices and rituals of Moses), making possible all the blessings we have today, both material and spiritual!

Now you remember that Isaac and Jacob also were included in "the fathers." We find now that these same promises were made also to them.

Notice Genesis 26:2-5: “And the Eternal appeared unto him [Isaac], and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of: sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swore unto Abraham thy father; and I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed; because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments, my statutes, and my laws.”

And again the promise was made to JACOB, recorded in Genesis 35:9-12: “And God appeared unto Jacob ... and God said unto him, Thy name is Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name ... I am God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation [today the United States] and a company of nations [today the British Commonwealth] shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; and the LAND which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land.” (For proof that the English-speaking peoples of today are the descendants of ancient Israel, request our free book “The United States and British Commonwealth in Prophecy.”)

Even the Gentile-born, through Christ, become not only Abraham’s seed, but spiritually adopted Israelites as well.

The promises were made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and their children. Their children are Israelites, not Gentiles. There is a mistaken idea, today, that Christianity is a Gentile religion. But Jesus said plainly, “Salvation is of the Jews.” Or, as the Apostle Paul wrote: “To the Jew first, and also to the Gentile” (Rom. 2:10). The Scepter promise, through which Christ and salvation were promised, went to the House of Judah, whose people were called Jews. The Bible reveals that the covenants and the promises pertained only to Israel. We read it in Romans 9:4: “Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises.”

Then how are all nations to be blessed through these promises?

Christians Are Heirs to the Promise

To the Gentile-born Galatians Paul said, “If ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed [children], and heirs according to the promise.” Now let me ask you, what hope has any Gentile without becoming, by spiritual adoption through Christ, an Israelite? Absolutely none!

To the Gentile-born Ephesians Paul wrote, as recorded in Ephesians 2:11-12: “Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh ...” Doesn’t that plainly say they are no longer considered Gentiles? Paul continues: “Ye being in time past Gentiles ... that at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise ...”

This doesn’t sound like Christianity is a Gentile religion. This doesn’t sound like the New Covenant is a Gentile covenant! While these Ephesians were Gentiles -- before they became Israelites through Christ -- they were strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world!

But notice the 13th verse: “But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes [formerly] were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.” And now verse 19: “Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God.” Oh, what a glorious, matchless privilege to be taken into the very household of God -- to be able to call the Eternal Creator our Father! For the unconverted, Adam is the human father, and Satan the spiritual father. But, through Christ, Abraham becomes our fleshly father -- and God becomes our spiritual Father.

For we read in Galatians 3:7, “Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.” That’s why Abraham is called the “father of the faithful” -- whether Jew or Gentile!

Again, in Romans 8:14, all who “are led by the Spirit of God are the sons of God.” Yes, begotten sons, now -- to become actual born sons at the time of the resurrection, when we shall inherit the Kingdom of God! The Kingdom of God is the Family of God -- the God Family! It’s a glorious family relationship! This glorified inheritance surpasses anything you have ever conceived!

NO Man Has Ascended to Heaven -- Except Christ

Jesus Christ did not say we should go up to heaven, to be with Him there. Instead, He said in John 3:13: “No MAN hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down FROM heaven, even the Son of man” -- that is, Himself! He went again to heaven, from where He had come. But He said, “Whither [where] I go, ye cannot come.” That’s in your Bible in John 8:22 and John 13:33!

Also He said, “I go” (to heaven) and “I will come again” (John 14:2-3). Yes, come again back to earth. And when He comes -- when He is again here -- He will, as He said, “receive you unto myself; that where I am [here on earth], there ye may be also.”

And in Matthew 25, beginning verse 31, we read that when Jesus will have returned to this earth, as King of kings, Ruler of all nations on earth, then He will say to the saved: “... Come, ye blessed ... inherit the kingdom prepared for you ...” (verse 34). The Kingdom of God is the very divine Family of God. It will rule all nations, here on earth! To enter into -- to inherit -- the divine Kingdom of God is a destiny of such terrible glory that your mind cannot possibly grasp it, now! And our inheritance, as divine members of the very God Family, shall be this earth, for an ever lasting possession.

What’s wrong with this earth? Absolutely nothing but sin -- rebellion against God and His eternal spiritual laws that govern peace and happiness and joy! Happiness and joy -- a glorified condition such as you may inherit -- is not a matter of geographical location! It is a spiritual condition! There will be no sin in that happy World Tomorrow! No liars, no murderers, no thieves nor robbers. Think of it -- there’ll be no Satan, no locks on doors, no jails, no hospitals, no poorhouses! No strife, no war, no sickness nor disease, no poverty, nor hunger, nor want!

When Do We Inherit the Promises?

Now let me ask, WHEN shall we inherit these promises? How shall we inherit them? Has Abraham, himself, already gone to his reward? Has Abraham already inherited the promises?

First, notice the inspired words of the first Christian martyr, Stephen, full of faith and the Holy Spirit -- Stephen, who paid with his life for these inspired words of Scripture. You'll read them in Acts 7:2-5:

“And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; the God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran, and I said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall show thee. Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and ... removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell [Israel of today]. And he gave him NONE INHERITANCE it, no, not so much as to set his foot on”

God gave Abraham none inheritance in that land -- “yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him when as yet he had no child.”

Abraham never received the promised inheritance -- though God's promise was made unconditional because Abraham had obeyed God! But let's go further. Notice, now, Hebrews 11:8-10, 13:

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country.” Notice carefully: Abraham merely sojourned in the land -- which he was AFTER to receive for an INHERITANCE -- dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: for he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off”

Abraham, Isaac and Jacob -- the fathers to whom the promises were made -- all DIED, in faith, NOT having received the promises! My friends, do you grasp what that inspired scripture of God says? In plain language it says they died, but did not receive their reward -- the very fathers to whom the promises were made did not “go to their reward at death.” Thus saith the Lord!

Now further, the Scriptures tell us that Abraham is dead. When the New Testament was written, many hundreds of years after his death, Abraham was still dead, as recorded in John 8:52-53. There you read plain words: “Abraham is dead” Abraham has not received the promised inheritance, even to this day !

All through the New Testament you read that Christians who become Abraham's children through Christ are not now, in this age, inheritors -- they are now heirs. An heir is one who has not yet come into his inheritance.

Now why has Abraham, even to this day, as yet not inherited the promise? Why? Listen! Since “eternal inheritance” of the earth constitutes the better promises of the New Testament, and since the message which Christ delivered in confirming these promises was the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, it follows that the land of this earth the land of the promise Jesus came to confirm -- is the territory occupied and governed by the Kingdom of God!

WHEN We Inherit the Kingdom

But that Kingdom, Jesus said, is not of this world -- this age! In His great prophecy of world news today -- of world wars, and 20th- century world upheaval now -- Jesus Christ said, in Luke 21:31:

“When ye see these things come to pass, know ye that the kingdom of God is nigh at hand.” The Kingdom of God is to rule the world. It is not yet established -- but today it is nigh at hand -- and it’s later than you think! In Luke 19 Jesus gave the parable of the “pounds,” because they thought the Kingdom of God should immediately appear. He represented Himself as the young nobleman going to the far country -- heaven -- to receive the right to rule the kingdom, showing it would be set up and take over the rule over all nations, at the second coming of Christ!

But there’s still another reason -- yes, another reason why we can be only heirs at this present time. Notice I Corinthians 15:50, “Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot INHERIT the kingdom of God.” No, human can inherit the Kingdom. The Kingdom of God is not a human kingdom. There are no humans in it! It is a Divine Kingdom -- the God Kingdom!

Jesus explained it to Nicodemus in John 3:3-8: “Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” Nicodemus couldn’t understand that. Not many today can understand it! Jesus continued that except a man be born of the SPIRIT, he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. “That which is born of the flesh,” continued Jesus, “is flesh.” Yes, we were all born of the flesh, therefore Jesus said we are flesh -- yes, flesh and blood. And flesh and blood cannot inherit -- cannot enter into the Kingdom of God. “That which is born of the Spirit,” said Jesus, “is spirit.” When we are born of the Spirit, then we shall BE spirit- -so said Jesus. Did Jesus know what He was talking about -- or do some of us think we know better, today?

Why Did Paul Want to Depart and Be With Christ?

Why did Paul tell the Philippians “For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you”? (Phil. 1: 23, 24.)

Since Paul would go to the grave at death, why did he say he would be with Christ?

Notice that Paul did not say where he would go or when he would be with Christ. There is not one word mentioning heaven here, nor is there one word saying that he would be with Christ immediately. Then why the hurry for departure?

To understand what is meant here, turn to another scripture where Paul was ready to depart. In II Timothy 4:6-8 Paul wrote: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day. and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

In these verses Paul explains what he meant by being with Christ. He does not receive his reward immediately at death. But there is laid up a

crown of righteousness which the Lord shall give him at that day. What day? At Christ's appearing -- His second coming! In Isaiah 40:10 we notice this same day mentioned: "Behold, the Lord God will come ... behold, his reward is with him ..." Check Revelation 22:12 also.

Paul wrote to the Thessalonians: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (I Thess. 4:16, 17).

This is when the dead "that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake" (Dan. 12:2). The dead have not been with the Lord these thousands of years; but they are awaiting the time when they will in the future awaken from the dust of the earth to meet the Lord in the air! This is the time when, according to I Corinthians 15:52, the dead shall be raised incorruptible by the power of the Spirit of God. This is the first resurrection.

Now Paul's enigmatic statement in Philippians is clear. He was willing to remain alive for the sake of the Philippians who needed him as a teacher and apostle, even though he sometimes desired personally to be delivered from troubles by death to await the resurrection and be with Christ. To die is gain! There is no knowledge of passing time (Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10; Ps. 146:4). The next moment is the resurrection!

Further information about the resurrection is available in our free reprint "Is This the Only Day of Salvation?"

Now to Paul's statement again in I Corinthians 15:50-53:

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither death corruption [flesh is corruptible, subject to aging and decay] inherit incorruption [spirit things and spirit beings are immortal, never changing, never aging, always and eternally new]. Behold, I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed" -- now notice carefully: "we shall all be CHANGED." The word converted means "changed" -- changed from one substance to another- -from one composition to another.

"In a moment," Paul continues, "in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead [not the living in heaven, but the dead] shall be raised [not come down from heaven, but raised] incorruptible, and we [the generation then living] shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality."

Resurrection From the Dead

Now we begin to see why Abraham, and his children through Christ, have not, as yet, come into the promised reward!

But to go further. We cannot come into this eternal inheritance until we have come into eternal life. And what is our only hope of inheriting eternal life? The resurrection! Perhaps this will prove a surprise.

Notice I Corinthians 15:12-18: "Now if Christ be preached that he ROSE from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? ... For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then [unless there is to be a resurrection from the dead] they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." Strong scripture, that!

The dead in Christ are perished, not alive enjoying the promised inheritance already somewhere, but perished -- utterly perished -- unless there is to be a resurrection from the dead! How different from the modern fables to which a deceived people have been turned today!

So, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are dead. And, unless there is to be a resurrection -- a rising up from the grave -- they are perished. Abraham knew of Christ, and Jesus said Abraham rejoiced to see His day, and Abraham saw it, and was glad. And speaking of Abraham and the resurrection, Jesus said, recorded in Matthew 22:31-32: "But as touching the resurrection [notice, Jesus is using this illustration to prove the resurrection - - He is speaking of the resurrection from the dead -- as touching the resurrection] of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

This text is often twisted around and perverted to try to prove that Abraham is not dead, has already gone to and come into his promised reward, and will never be resurrected, just the diametrical opposite of what Jesus used it to prove. "As touching the resurrection ...," the resurrection of the DEAD, Jesus said, "God is the God of the living." Abraham died. But he will live through a resurrection.

We Receive the Reward When Jesus Returns

When will Abraham and his children through Christ come into the promised reward? When will be the resurrection? The answer is found in I Corinthians 15:50-53 -- that inheriting the promises occurs at the same time the living Christians are to be changed from mortality to immortality. And Paul said it would be at the last trump -- remember?

All right, let's turn now to I Thessalonians 4:16-17: "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ [not out of Christ] shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." And so the resurrection shall occur at the second coming of Christ -- when He comes as the King of kings and the Lord of lords to reign and to rule all nations of the earth for the first time. When He comes to set up His Kingdom, then Abraham and his children in Christ who have died shall be resurrected to immortality, to inherit the kingdom, a world ruling government headed and ruled by Christ, occupying the very land promised to Abraham -- the land of Israel, and from the Nile to the Euphrates river. And this Kingdom composed of immortals, which flesh and blood cannot, enter, shall rule over all the other nations of the earth the other nations made up of flesh-and-blood mortals!

Now this text does not say, as so many suppose, that, Christ is coming part way from heaven to meet the saints as the saints are starting off for heaven. No, Jesus said in John 14:3, "If I go ... I WILL COME AGAIN."

What a glorious promise! Jesus promised He would COME AGAIN to earth. And He promised further, when He has returned to earth, that He would, as He said, "receive you unto myself." Where? Why, of course, right here on this earth! The saints, both dead and alive, resurrected and changed to immortality, shall rise to meet Him, as He is returning to this earth. They meet in the clouds. (Airplanes fly higher than that every day.) And, Zechariah 14:4 states that Christ's feet shall rest on the Mount of Olives, in Israel, the Promised Land -- and those who meet Him as He comes will ever be with Him, where He is. Yes, that's different from the fables of this day, but that's the plain truth of God's Word!

Paul in Heaven?

When II Corinthians 12:1-7 is thoroughly examined, it is obvious that the person who was taken up in a vision to the "third heaven" was the Apostle Paul himself!

In the eleventh chapter of II Corinthians, Paul explains his physical sufferings and persecutions. In chapter 12, however, he begins to relate some of his spiritual experiences. Notice that in the first seven verses the pronoun "I" is mentioned fourteen times! In the very first verse, Paul says, "... I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord." This is clear from II Corinthians 12:7 where Paul said, "Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh."

Paul begins to tell about his vision in verse 2 by saying, "I know [know is the correct translation, not "knew," which can be verified by checking the original Greek] a man in Christ about fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven."

Paul is speaking about himself! He was "caught up to the third heaven" -- in vision. This "third heaven" is where God's throne is. The vision was so vivid and realistic that he was unable -- at the time -- to tell whether he was taken bodily to heaven, or whether he was merely seeing it in his mind's eye. But God's Word provides the answer! "And NO MAN hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven" (John 3:13).

But why speak of seeing the third heaven by using the roundabout "I know a man"? Paul gives the answer in II Corinthians 12:6, "For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth: but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me." Paul simply didn't want others to think of

him as some great, exalted personage! By speaking indirectly (“I know a man”) he emphasized this point.

The Reward Is NOT Heaven

And Jesus said: “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit THE EARTH” (Matt. 5:5). That’s part of the Sermon on the Mount -- and certainly every Christian must believe the Sermon on the Mount! Then we must believe, if we are Christians, that what the saved inherit is the earth -- and not heaven! Jesus plainly said, “NO man has ascended up to heaven” (John 3:13).

David was a man after God’s own heart. David has the promise of being in the Kingdom of God, ruling over Israel under Christ, when Christ will rule all nations. But on that day of Pentecost when the New Testament Church began, the inspired Peter said: “David is not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34).

The wisest man who ever lived was inspired to write, as part of the divine Word of God, “The righteous shall never be removed: but the wicked shall not inhabit the earth” (Prov. 10:30).

I think most of you have read those scriptures. That’s the “Thus saith the Lord” on the question. There is absolutely no scripture in all the Holy Bible that promises heaven as the reward the saved shall inherit. And yet, have not most people just sort of blinded their minds to these positive, plain statements from God Almighty, and carelessly taken for granted, without question, the idea of going to heaven?

Notice when the Kingdom shall be inherited -- when the heirs of the promises to Abraham shall come finally into their reward, and receive the actual inheritance. It is recorded in Matthew 25:31, 34:

“When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world.” Yes, the Kingdom of God is the place prepared. Jesus said He went to prepare a place for us. He also said He went to get for Himself a kingdom, and to return. And when He returns, as King of kings, and that Kingdom is established (we find it is the place prepared), then it is that the joyful call goes out, “Come! ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you.”

Part Two

What is the PLACE that Jesus is Preparing?

Here is a thorough, revealing explanation of a greatly misunderstood text. Did Jesus say Christians go to heaven?

MANY today believe Jesus told His disciples that Christians will spend eternity in “mansions” in heaven. They quote His words in John 14:1-4.

Did Jesus really say that our reward is a mansion in heaven? Let’s see.

What Is the Father’s House?

In His Father’s house, Jesus said plainly, there were many “mansions.” If it had not been true, He said, He would have told us. The Greek word “mone” translated “mansion” means in more modern English, “a room, a place of staying, an abode, a chamber.” So in the Father’s house there are a number of rooms or chambers.

But what is the Father’s house? What does the Bible declare the Father’s house to be?

When in the Temple, Jesus said to the Jews who were selling doves and cattle therein: “Make not my Father’s house an house of merchandise” (John 2:16).

Here is a simple Bible definition of the Father’s house.

The Temple at Jerusalem was an earthly type (Heb. 8:5) of the Father’s house in heaven. Luke 19:46 and Isaiah 56:7 also quote the Lord as saying of the Temple: “My house is a house of prayer” So the Temple at Jerusalem in Christ’s day was a type of the Father’s house in heaven.

But did the Temple have many “mansions” or rooms and chambers in it?

Certainly!

In turning to Jeremiah 35:2, we read this: “Speak unto them, and bring them into the house of the Lord into one of the chambers.” In the fourth verse of the same chapter, we notice that different chambers were for persons of different rank. Hanan, a man of God, had his chamber or room “by the chamber of the princes, which was above the chamber of ... the keeper of the door.”

The various chambers or “mansions” corresponded to the ranks of the persons residing in them. Each room of the Temple -- a type of the Father’s hasn’t only designated the residence of each official, but also indicated or his position or office, whether he was a doorkeeper or prince.

It Is NOT Heaven

Nowhere does the Bible call “heaven” the Father’s house. The Father’s house is being built IN heaven, but it is not heaven! Heaven is never said to have “mansions.”

The ancient tabernacle built under Moses had two compartments, the inner, called the Holy of Holies, being an exact picture of the throne of God -- of heaven itself. It had no mansions. Read Hebrews 8:5 and 9:1-7 to see exactly what the pattern of heaven is like.

No, Jesus was not referring to heaven. He is referring to a place being prepared in heaven.

What Is the Place Prepared?

Now consider the remainder of Jesus’ conversation with the disciples.

Jesus said: "I go to prepare a place for you." We learn from other scriptures that Jesus did go to heaven, to the right hand of the Father, where He now acts as our "High Priest" (Heb. 9:11).

Do you grasp the significance?

A part of the function of the office of High Priest is the preparation of a place for each of us as Jesus promised the disciples. But notice this very carefully: the preparation of each place is occurring in heaven, but Jesus did not say that the places were a part of heaven. (A wife may prepare her meals in the kitchen, but the meals are not a part of the kitchen.)

Does the Bible give any texts telling us what is being prepared? Yes, it does.

There are two texts in the Bible which tell us what is being prepared.

The first is in Matthew 25:34. Here Christ said: "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." The other text is in Revelation 21:2 "And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God OUT OF HEAVEN, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband."

The Temple of Jerusalem standing in Jesus' day was a type of the Kingdom of God and the city New Jerusalem.

The Bible says the only places that are prepared are the Kingdom of God and the New Jerusalem. Since it is the Kingdom and the Holy City that are finally prepared for us all, then what Jesus is preparing for each of us must be individual positions in the Kingdom and in the new city, Jerusalem.

Now it's plain why Christ alluded to the Temple as an example of the Kingdom of God and of the New Jerusalem. The Temple had rooms which served as offices for the various residents holding different ranks. In the same way, each of us will have his own personal place or office in the Holy City, in accordance with how well we use the talents God has given us in this life. The more we overcome in this life, the more honorable will be our places in the New Jerusalem and the greater will be our offices of responsibility in the kingdom.

The Father's House Comes to Earth!

Revelation 21:2 plainly proves that the Holy City -- the Father's house or home, since He will make it His place of future residence (Rev. 21:3 and 22:3) -- is one of the two things that Jesus is preparing now in heaven. Both God the Father and His Son have been fashioning it, since whatever the Father does, the Son does likewise (John 5:19). Since the city comes down out of heaven fully prepared, then it must have been prepared in heaven, just as Jesus said He would do.

Notice, too, that the city comes out of heaven. It does not say that we go to heaven.

Now let's understand what the Bible says about the Kingdom which is in preparation in heaven, and which will come to earth. Jesus returned to heaven to receive the Kingdom (Luke 19:12). He must be preparing it while acting in the office of High Priest. Since the kingdom is prepared for all of us to inherit, then the particular place Christ is preparing for each of us must be our own position or office in that Kingdom. "Place" means "position," "office," "rank," as well as geographical location. Our places or positions in the government of God will depend on the office we hold. Christ has first

place, as He is King of kings. We shall all have secondary places, lesser positions under Him.

The Kingdom of God is the government of God, the members which are to be born of God. Being born of God makes the entire Kingdom, then, the family of God. "Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). That is why Jesus used the ancient Temple as a physical type of the spiritual family or Kingdom of God.

Now it is becoming obvious why our places or positions in God's Government had to be prepared in heaven by Jesus. We could not receive the Holy Spirit, the only means by which we can enter the Kingdom, until Christ ascended (John 16:7). Christ prepares our places or positions in the Kingdom by being our High Priest, interceding for us and by giving us the Spirit of God. The places or positions -- the responsibilities of office -- are being prepared by training us to fill those offices. Jesus, as our High Priest, has been calling, justifying and perfecting each of us for His Kingdom so that when the Kingdom of God comes to this earth (Matt. 6:10), each position or place in it will be fully prepared by having one of us fill that particular office. If Christ were not High Priest in heaven, the Kingdom would not be prepared. It would have none to fill its offices.

"I Will Come Again"

Although Christ had to go to heaven, He said: "If I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). Here is Jesus' own promise that He is coming again! Notice, it does not say anywhere in this verse that we go to heaven.

It says just the opposite. Jesus will come to earth!

Jesus will return from heaven in clouds. We are going to meet Him in the air (I Thes. 4:15-17). From there He will descend with us (Jude 14) upon the Mount of Olives to save Jerusalem and establish His Kingdom (Zech. 14:1-11). At that time Jesus will give us our places or positions in the Kingdom, according to how well we have done with what we have been given (Dan. 7:27).

There is no Bible indication that Jesus will then return to heaven. He is coming to set up the Kingdom on the earth! Since we inherit the Kingdom, we, too, will be on this earth, not heaven.

So Christians are not going to heaven after all. We are to be with Jesus here on this earth "that where I am, there ye may be also." We shall be ruling with Christ on earth over the nations for a thousand years (Rev. 5:10; 20:4). And after that, the New Jerusalem comes down out of heaven to the new earth. Even the Father Himself will dwell among us here on the new earth where we shall live and reign forever (Rev. 22:3-5).

No wonder Jesus said the meek shall inherit the earth (Matt. 5:5).

Part Three

Did the “Thief on the Cross” Enter Paradise Immediately?

Jesus said He would be in the grave three days and three nights after His crucifixion. Then could the thief have been with Christ in Paradise that very day?

NOTICE Luke 23:43 carefully. Jesus said that the crucified malefactor would be with Him in Paradise. If we can prove where Jesus went when He died, then we can prove if the malefactor really went to Paradise that day.

Turn to I Corinthians 15:3-4. Paul reiterates: “For I delivered to you” -- speaking to Christians -- “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.”

Notice that Jesus was buried -- it does not say the body was buried, and that the soul went to Paradise. It reads that He -- Jesus, Himself -- was buried. He was dead for three days. He died for our sins. Then He came to life. He arose!

Jesus Was in Hell!

John gives us further proof of where Jesus was. “Now in the place where he was crucified there was a garden; and in the garden a new sepulchre, wherein was never man yet laid. There” -- in the tomb -- the grave -- “laid they Jesus” (John 19:41-42). It was Jesus who was laid in the tomb, not merely the body of Jesus. Jesus was dead!

To make this even plainer, turn to Acts 2:31. Speaking of Christ, Peter quotes the prophet David as follows: “He [David] seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.”

This verse, translated in the King James Version, proves that Jesus was not in Paradise, but in hell. The word “hell” ought to be rendered “grave.” The original inspired Greek word used by Peter was hades, meaning the “grave.” It does not mean a fiery, burning hell. The Bible uses another word for that.

Hell or the grave is not Paradise. Since Jesus did not enter Paradise that day -- the day of the crucifixion then neither did the malefactor enter it. Christ has “preeminence” in all things, we read in Colossians 1:18. Therefore the malefactor who repented could not have preceded Christ to Paradise.

Whenever the repentant malefactor enters Paradise, Christ will be there too! He said so: “With me shalt thou be in paradise.”

When Did Jesus Preach to the Spirits in Prison?

Some have seized upon I Peter 3:19-20 as supposed proof that Jesus was alive when He was dead -- that He preached to spirits in prison during the three days and three nights in which He was in the grave asleep in death!

But notice what these verses in Peter’s letter really say. Wicked angels who followed Satan are in chains of darkness, imprisoned for their own folly (Jude 6). When did Jesus

preach to the imprisoned spirits? Read it: “When once the long suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing”

That’s when Jesus preached to the spirits or wicked angels -- in the days of Noah, not during the time He was dead and buried in the grave!

Since we know where Jesus was when He died, we now need to locate Paradise.

Notice II Corinthians 12:1-5. Paul speaks of one whom He knew who had marvelous visions and revelations from the Lord. In a vision he was “caught up to the third heaven” -- God’s throne! “He was caught up into PARADISE, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.” Then Paradise is located in the presence of God’s throne.

What Is Paradise Like?

Let’s continue with the Bible description of Paradise. Turn to Revelation 2:7. “To him that overcometh, to him will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God” (American Standard Version). Observe that the tree of life is in the Paradise of God.

Next, turn to Revelation 22:1-2. These two verses are referring to “the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God” (Rev. 21:2, ASV). In this city, which is also a type of the Church, we find “a river of water of life, bright as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb, in the midst of the street thereof. And on this side of the river and on that was the tree of life ...” (ASV). The new Jerusalem contains the tree of life. In the new Jerusalem is the Paradise of God.

Jesus said the repentant malefactor would be with Him in this Paradise. The new Jerusalem is not yet finished. Jesus is still preparing a place for us in it (John 14:2). Not until after the millennium will it be fully ready (Rev. 20:1-5). Not until then will it descend to earth -- not until then will the repentant malefactor enter Paradise!

Then what did Jesus mean by saying, “Today shalt thou be with me in paradise”?

You probably have assumed that Jesus promised the thief that he would be with Him in paradise that very day.

Nothing could be further from the truth!

Remember the thief had asked earlier, “Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (Luke 23:42). The plain fact is that Jesus has not yet come into His Kingdom (Luke 11:2; 19:11; I Cor. 11:26; I Thes. 4:13-17; I Cor. 15:23, 49-52).

What Jesus Really Said!

Additionally, proper punctuation helps explain Luke 23:43. Most translations are improperly punctuated in order to make it appear that Jesus would be in Paradise that day. But the Bible proves Jesus was not in Paradise that day. A comma placed before the word “today” is incorrect. The comma should follow it -- “Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Open your Bible to this controversial verse. Notice the punctuation. Remember that punctuation was not used in the inspired Greek which Luke wrote. It was added into the Greek and English centuries later. The punctuation in this verse was added by men.

Here is exactly, word for word, the order in the inspired original Greek, which you can verify at any public library: “Verily I say to thee today, ‘With me shalt thou be in the Paradise.’”

By using the word “today,” Jesus was stressing the time of His promise -- not the time He would be in Paradise.

The repentant malefactor crucified with Jesus is still dead and buried. Jesus alone is the firstborn from the dead (Rom. 8:29; Acts 26:23; I Cor. 15:23). But the time is coming when this man shall be resurrected also and eventually shall enter the Paradise of God promised to come to this earth.

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