

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WE DIE?

What Everyone Should Know
About Their Future Existence

Jesus:

*“For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the
Son and believes in him shall have eternal life,
and I will raise him up at the last day.”*

(John 6:40)

HANK OVEREEM

SELF-PUBLISHED BY: HANK OVEREEM
HAVELOCK NORTH - NEW ZEALAND

What Happens After We Die?

Copy right © 2009 by Hank Overeem
Self-published by: Hank Overeem
6 Chambers Street
Havelock North 4130
NEW ZEALAND

March, 2009

Although all rights are reserved, this booklet may be freely downloaded for personal use (or as a give-away) from my website: <http://www.hank.overeem.co.nz>. This booklet may NOT be offered for sale.

If you want to contact me personally, you can reach me at the following email address: hovereem@gmail.com

Edited by Jean Rees

All Scripture quotations (except those noted otherwise) are from THE HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION.
Copyright© 1973, 1979, 1984, by International Bible Society

DEDICATION

*I would like to dedicate this booklet to the memory of
Michelle Orchard.*

It was her funeral and subsequent request by her family for some further understanding on what happens after we die that caused me to put pen to paper. My initial intentions were to write something that would fit on 5-6 pages. However, being the long-winded person I am, it ended up being this larger booklet.



*Michelle Christina Orchard
8 May 1965 ~ 30 November 2008*

CONTENTS

| | |
|---|----|
| 1. GOD AND HIS CREATION | 1 |
| <i>Introduction</i> | 1 |
| <i>A Biblical Perspective</i> | 2 |
| <i>What the Bible Says About God</i> | 3 |
| <i>What the Bible Says About Humans</i> | 4 |
| <i>What Constitutes the Human Body?</i> | 6 |
| <i>What Constitutes the Human Soul?</i> | 6 |
| <i>What Constitutes the Human Spirit?</i> | 8 |
| <i>The Destructiveness of Sin</i> | 10 |
| <i>The Curse of Death</i> | 11 |
| 2. A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH | 13 |
| <i>New Bodies</i> | 16 |
| <i>We Will Recognise Each Other</i> | 19 |
| <i>The New Heaven and the New Earth</i> | 22 |
| <i>Life in Heaven – New Earth</i> | 25 |
| <i>John’s Vision of the New Jerusalem</i> | 28 |
| <i>The Dwelling Place of God Will be with Men</i> | 31 |
| <i>Major Changes Will Take Place</i> | 33 |
| <i>Signs of the End of the Age</i> | 35 |
| <i>The Day and Hour Unknown</i> | 36 |
| 3. A PLACE CALLED HELL | 38 |
| <i>Who Will Actually Go to Hell?</i> | 41 |
| <i>Judgement</i> | 42 |
| <i>Where Do We Go When We Die?</i> | 45 |

| | |
|--------------------------------------|----|
| 4. THE WAY TO HEAVEN | 46 |
| <i>Story of the Chinese Twins</i> | 51 |
| <i>The Parallel</i> | 54 |
| <i>Our Response</i> | 57 |
| 5. HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN? | 60 |
| <i>The Assurance: 1 John 5:10-12</i> | 62 |

INTRODUCTION

NO, not again! Once more, I left a church funeral service deeply desponded, even angry. I felt cheated.

An acquaintance had died and his funeral service had followed the pattern of a typical traditional Christian funeral service of prayers, a few hymns, a short sermon followed by several eulogies by friends and family. Eulogy after eulogy extolled the deceased's virtues but no one ever mentioned anything about his relationship with God.

It was when the minister, without the slightest hesitation, assured us (with many comforting words and Scripture verses) that the deceased person was now safe in the arms of Jesus and had entered his eternal rest that my blood pressure begun to rise. To my knowledge, the person had not shown the slightest interest in God nor attended church.

False comfort

The reason why I felt so disturbed was not only because of the minister's claim that the deceased had gone to heaven (even though he had never claimed to be a Christian), but because people were led to believe that there was no need to worry about their own spiritual state. They were given the false impression that all would pan out in the end regardless of how you live your life here on earth. It is this deception that disturbed me; for however much we would wish everyone to go to heaven, sadly, it will not be so!

True Gospel message

What a missed opportunity! Why weren't they told that *only* those who believe and follow Jesus Christ are assured of eternal life with God in heaven? Sadly, they missed hearing that faith in Christ would not only bring the necessary forgiveness of sin and the promise of a future life with Christ in heaven; it would also bring purpose, peace, joy and contentment while here on earth!

In this booklet, I have therefore stressed the Gospel message, which is the “good news” that Christ has opened the door to eternal life with God. However, as so often is the case in life, there are two sides to a coin. For as much as “heaven” is a real place, so also is “hell”. To write about hell as a real place of punishment is not very popular today and may make this booklet uncomfortable reading for some.

I have used many Scripture references to ensure that what I am writing is not just my opinion, but as close as possible a true representation of God's Word. The Apostle Paul said, “All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness [right living]...”¹

It is my prayer that God's Spirit may open your eyes and guide you to the truth; that you may find the courage to embrace the principles necessary to enter into what is promised. In addition, may God's joy and peace flood your soul with the hope of a future life that's far beyond what we can ever imagine.

Hank Overeem

¹ 2 Timothy 3:16 (NASB)

What Happens After We Die?

Chapter 1

GOD AND HIS CREATION

Introduction

There is no greater certainty in life than the fact that we are going to die. The moment we are born we begin our journey towards our ultimate fate — **death**. Death is no respecter of persons whether we are powerful presidents or powerless paupers, all will eventually die. Throughout the ages, rulers of the earth have tried everything possible to somehow beat death. Some were willing to pay a fortune to anyone who could extend life. The best physicians were employed to care for their bodies and the most distinguished priests engaged to intercede to the gods on their behalf. Others would try to ensure in the afterlife the continuation of privileges enjoyed on earth. The Egyptian pharaohs by having their bodies embalmed hoped to continue their lives that way. Some went as far as having their servants killed and buried with them, together with much of their wealth.

Today, large amounts of monies are being spent to extend our lifetime here on earth. The average life span over the last 400 years has increased amazingly. It is believed that a person living in the seventeenth century would only have lived for about 35

years. Even in the early years of the twentieth century the average life span in the Western World was only around 47 years. Some scientists, at that time, predicted that man's life expectancy couldn't possibly surpass 65 years. Today we can expect to live close to 80 years. Now, scientists are talking about a possible future maximum life span of about 120 years. However wonderful that may be, life on earth is relatively short. Measured against eternity, it is so miniscule that it hardly even registers on the scale of time. With that in mind it should awaken us to the fact that ultimately eternal life (life after death) is of far greater importance than the short period of time spent here on earth.

A Biblical Perspective

I am writing this from a Christian biblical position. There are many others who hold to other views, which may look impressive and attractive. We must not however forget that only the Christian view is based on a revelation from God as recorded in the Bible. All other views are merely speculative and have no sure foundation. I would rather put my trust in God's Word which has been tested for thousands of years and has been found to be true and reliable.

One of the great fallacies that we are hearing today is the notion that ultimately everyone will go to heaven. Although this is a very comforting thought, **it is not true.** The Bible is very clear that **only** those who have put their trust in Jesus Christ will enter into heaven. Jesus himself made this unmistakably clear when he said,

*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one comes to the Father but through me."*²

Simply put, there are no other ways to God, whatever others may say. The Christian faith is often accused of being extremely

² John 14:6

exclusive. That is true: its claims are indeed exclusive and it makes no apologies about that. For the Christian faith bases its claim of being the only true faith on the infallible Word of God — **the Bible**. So, in this paper my whole thinking is based on this exclusive truth as revealed by God and recorded in the Bible.

Before we endeavour to look at the question of the afterlife, we must first look at some of the fundamental beliefs of the Christian faith otherwise we cannot understand life after death.

What the Bible Says About God

God of course is at the centre when we begin to address and consider our future after-death existence. And so we must begin by tackling the question, “Who is God?” To find an answer we must go to the Bible — the Word of God. The first sentence in the Bible, written in the Book of Genesis, states a very important and foundational truth. It says, “*In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.*”³

This clearly points out that God existed **before** the earth was ever created. Moreover, God also reveals elsewhere in Scripture that he is eternal. He has always existed! He has no beginning and no end — “*...who is, and who was, and who is to come.*”⁴ This is simply beyond human understanding. God also tells us that there is only one God: “*I am the first and I am the last; apart from me there is no God.*”⁵ That makes the God of the Bible absolutely unique.

Some other religions believe that there are many gods. There is one other amazing mystery that needs to be stated here about the God of the Bible. Although there is only **one** God, God’s “make-up” is in the way of **three Persons**. We know God as Father, Son

³ Genesis 1:1

⁴ Revelation 1:4

⁵ Isaiah 44:6

(Jesus) and Holy Spirit. At first sight that may look somewhat confusing, but we simply need to accept that God is God, a living Being very unlike us humans. In fact, the more we learn about this Triune God (three Persons in one), the more we will be amazed at God's beauty and wisdom. As we will discover later, if God's composition was anything less than Father, Son and Holy Spirit it would not be possible for any of us to enter heaven!

What the Bible Says About Humans

Now we have established that there is only one eternal God, this brings us to the next logical question: "Who are we humans?" Once again we must return to the first book in the Bible. In the first two chapters of Genesis we read about the order in which this present world was created by God. After creating light, he created the sky and separated the water from the dry land. This was followed by the creation of vegetation and the animal kingdom. God completes his creation with the separate creation of Adam and Eve — the first human beings. As you can see, the evolutionary theory (which supposes humans to be descended from animals) does not fit the biblical account. To make sure that we understand that humans are at a very different level from the animal kingdom the Bible says,

*"Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.'"*⁶

Having been created (not evolved) according to the image and likeness of God himself makes us very different from everything else that he has created. We are in a small way like God. For just

⁶ Genesis 1:26-27

as God exists in **three** Persons, so too human beings have been created with **three** distinct entities. A human being has a physical **body**, a **soul** and a **spirit**. Although we are not the same as God, yet you can clearly see something of God's image in us. Furthermore, we have been given the ability to think and reason and have been given a will with which to make decisions and choices. Besides, like God, we also have creative abilities. The evidence of that can be seen throughout the world. Mankind has been amazingly creative in such areas as the arts, technology, science etc. Also man's creative ability in food preparation is astonishing. From that fact alone we can see how different we are from those in the animal world.

Although we are made in the image and likeness of God (a small "chip off the old block") we must never lose sight of the fact that we are **created** whereas God is **uncreated**. Because he is the Creator, everything else is therefore inferior to him. There are several interesting accounts in the Bible where God is metaphorically portrayed as a potter and humans as clay.

God poses the question:

"Shall the potter be considered as equal with the clay, that what is made would say to its maker, 'He did not make me'; or what is formed say to him who formed it, 'He has no understanding?'"⁷

Or as Paul wrote,

"But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?' Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use."⁸

⁷ Isaiah 29:16

⁸ Romans 9:20-21

So, we need to make sure that we understand our proper place. We are made in his image but we are clearly not the same, let alone equal to God.

What Constitutes the Human Body?

We read in Genesis that God created us humans with a physical body. He used the elements of the earth: "*dust of the ground.*"⁹ Grant Jeffrey in his book *Journey into Eternity* writes, "It is fascinating to note that the NASA Ames Research Center in California analyzed the elements found in the human body, and to their surprise they discovered that the Genesis account of man's creation by God from the 'dust of the ground' is actually scientifically accurate ... the NASA scientists discovered that the soil actually contains every one of the elements found in the human body..."¹⁰

The physical human body is beautifully made and the original created body had the potential to last for all of eternity. It was never meant to die! So, what changed? We will look at this question a little later since now we want to look at the second part of the human make-up. For a body to have meaning and function it has to be inhabited by something more than just "dust of the ground." And so this brings us to the human soul.

What Constitutes the Human Soul?

Once again we must go back to the Book of Beginnings, Genesis. In the second chapter we read,

⁹ Genesis 2:7

¹⁰ Grant Jeffrey, *Journey into Eternity* (Toronto: Frontier Research Publications, Inc., 2000). 35,36

"Then the Lord God formed man from the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [or soul]."¹¹

After God imparted life into the lifeless dust-of-the-ground body, man became a living being. Man's body was now inhabited by a soul and spirit. Often when we talk about our soul we mean by that the real person — the real person living inside my body — **the real me**. The soul gives us consciousness and awareness of the fact that we are alive. When we analyse the human soul we learn that its God-given functions include such things as the mind, the will and the emotions. Once again this proves that we are made in the image and likeness of God for he too has the same attributes.

- **The mind:** The primary communication centre of the personality
- **The will:** The ability to make decisions and choices — right or wrong choices
- **The emotions:** Both positive and negative feelings, e.g.
 - Pleasant: love, joy, peace etc.
 - Unpleasant: hate, fear, grief etc. (Some could fit both categories i.e. anger, sorrow and even fear)

When we take an honest look at our human make-up, we cannot help but be amazed. King David, some three thousand years ago, expressed his amazement when he wrote,

"I praise you because I am wonderfully made; your works are wonderful and I know that full well."¹²

Our soul, the real **person** within that physical body, remains an astounding mystery. We all know that even though we can't touch

¹¹ Genesis 2:7 (NASB – New American Standard Bible)

¹² Psalm 139:14

it as we can our physical body, it is nevertheless a real part of us. But besides our soul, there is another aspect to our human make-up and that we know as our spirit.

What Constitutes the Human Spirit?

The human spirit is perhaps the least understood entity of a human being. Some theologians believe the spirit to be the same as or a part of the soul of man. Paul, however, makes a clear distinction between the soul and the spirit. In his letter to the Thessalonians he wrote,

"May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blame-less at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."¹³

The human spirit, like the human soul, is an unseen entity. However, like the soul it can be clearly described by its role and functions. One of these is to be a channel for God to relate to us and in turn for us to relate to God.

There are times when the mind is unable to receive certain spiritual direction and it is then that God communicates directly through our spirit. Here is a good example of this from the New Testament. Peter receives knowledge and understanding of something that could never have originated from within his own mind. Jesus asks his disciples this question, *"Who do you say I am?"* Peter then replies with incredible insight and says, *"You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."* When Peter spoke these words he undoubtedly received this understanding from the life-giving Holy Spirit. Jesus acknowledges this and in turn responds with the words,

¹³ 1 Thessalonians 5:23

*"Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by man, but my Father in heaven."*¹⁴

But just when you think that Peter must have been an extraordinary "spiritual" person, he moves — only moments later — from the area of his spirit into the area of his soul/mind knowledge. He speaks words not in accordance with the previous knowledge given him by the Holy Spirit through his spirit, but words in accordance with his own soulish interest, i.e. from his mind.

And so Jesus rebukes him immediately saying,

*"Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me; you do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men."*¹⁵

James instructs us to receive *"wisdom from above."*¹⁶ Once again we read here of a kind of wisdom/knowledge that does not naturally originate from our minds. Rather it is a wisdom/knowledge that is communicated by the Holy Spirit into our spirits. The Holy Spirit is omniscient (all knowing) and he has access to the mind of God.¹⁷ That's why Paul could say that the things which he taught were not of human origin but had come to his spirit by the Holy Spirit.

*"This is what we speak, not in words taught us by human wisdom but in words taught by the Spirit, expressing spiritual truths in spiritual words."*¹⁸

Another function of our spirit is our conscience, sometimes called our "heart." It is that "small voice" that tells us when we do

¹⁴ Matthew 16:15-17

¹⁵ Matthew 16:23

¹⁶ James 1:5; 3:17

¹⁷ 1 Corinthians 2:10-12

¹⁸ 1 Corinthians 2:13

something wrong and causes us to experience feelings of guilt. It is possible, however, for our conscience to become insensitive to sin. If we sin repeatedly, over an extended period of time, then our conscience is no longer able to convict us of our wrongdoings. That's why God in his wisdom has given us the Bible, which, together with the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, is able to overrule our sin-hardened conscience (heart) and still be able to bring conviction of sin, so that we can repent and change our ways.

There is another question that we must be look at. Since God has made everything so amazingly beautiful one wonders what has gone wrong. As we all know, this earth and its inhabitants are in a shocking mess. There is evil, there is sickness, there are hardships and suffering, there are wars, and above all there is the all-encompassing reality of the curse of death. According to the Book of Genesis, God said that everything he originally created "*was very good.*"¹⁹ It was so perfect that God would come and walk and talk with humankind. So what happened? What has caused this total reversal from good to evil? What is the cause of death? The answer to these questions is a small three letter word: **sin.**

The Destructiveness of Sin

Sin is the sole reason why the physical body became subjected to death. When Adam and Eve rebelled and sinned against God, it resulted in the whole of creation coming under the curse of sin and death.²⁰ Everything changed. This sin virus has been passed on to **every** human being. Paul writes, "*For all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God.*"²¹ The whole human make-up, (body, soul and spirit) has been affected by this curse of sin. Not only has sin affected his beautifully created world; even worse, it

¹⁹ Genesis 1:31

²⁰ Genesis 3

²¹ Romans 3:23

has affected our vital relationship with God our Creator, our Father. We have become like fatherless orphans. Sin has separated us from the source of all goodness and love.

The Curse of Death

Death is an inevitable fact of life on this present earth, even though originally it was never meant to be that way. For some, death will come at an old age, yet for others it may come during middle age, or even at a very early age. Whatever the case may be, death will always come uninvited and at an inappropriate time. Over the last twelve months my wife and I have experienced the loss of several friends and family. Two very close family members are presently faced with serious illnesses, one has been diagnosed with inoperable cancers and naturally speaking (unless God steps in) will not recover.

Death is inevitable. But is death the end of human existence? Is death the end of **me** as an individual human being? We know that when our body dies it returns to the earthly elements it was made of: “earth to earth, ashes to ashes”. But what about my soul and spirit — “the real me”? What happens to these entities? We have seen that they do not belong to the earth, for they are not made of earthly elements. From the Bible we learn that the soul and spirit are unseen entities, they are the life within the earth-made body. We read that at the creation of Adam, God “*breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*”²² — so life for man came from **outside** this world, for it was given him by God. This is very important to understand. Because if the soul/spirit part of our human make-up came from God then naturally at death the soul/spirit will return to God. The “real me”, unlike the body, simply cannot die. It was made to exist eternally — **forever!**

The question we must now ask is: “Where are we going to spend all of eternity?” According to the Bible there are only two

²² Genesis 2:7

possible options, either in the presence of God (heaven) or separated from the presence of God (hell).

Before we look at the reason why we end up in either heaven or hell let us first have a closer look at both these eternal destinies.

What Happens After We die?

Chapter 2

A NEW HEAVEN AND A NEW EARTH

What will heaven be like? As with every other issue we have looked at so far, we must get the information from Scripture. There are many, many different theories, but that's what they are: just theories.

Some will say that at death we simply cease to exist. Many like to believe this because that would mean that there is no God, and therefore no judgement to worry about. It will get them “off the hook” so to say. If there is no God then we can live our lives in whatever way we like and do whatever we want without any fear of being called to account after death. It is an easy way out, but is it true? If we are wrong in believing that there is no God the consequences will be disastrous to say the least. The Psalmist, referring to those who held to such a belief, said it well when he wrote, *"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.' "*²³

²³ Psalm 14:1

Then there are some who believe that after death we will simply be reincarnated onto the earth. But the unanswered and worrying uncertainty with this belief is: who (or what) will we become in our next life? Well, I am told that depends on how we have lived our previous life on earth. If we have lived a good life we may go up the chain but, oh dear, if you have not lived a very good life you may end up as a cockroach. Then if I became a reincarnated cockroach, how do I become a good enough cockroach to once again get up the chain and return to the higher position of that of a human being? Reincarnation does not offer me a lot of comfort with regard to the afterlife. It's just an endless circle of life and death — never-ending misery! The chance of any of us finally becoming perfect enough to leave the incarnational circle and reach Nirvana does not look particularly good.

Only God's Word is absolute truth. Therefore, if we have any sense at all, we should take its message very seriously. After all, we are talking about **where we will spend eternity!** We would want to be absolutely sure of not being misled, for the consequences are too scary to even contemplate.

According to the Bible, death is not the end. It is rather the beginning of an ongoing existence in another place. The Bible uses all sorts of pictures and metaphors to describe this place. It uses terms such as, "*heaven... the third heaven... paradise... new earth... New Jerusalem... the house of the Lord*". What is important to accept here is that all these word pictures describe a **real place**. Moreover, those who qualify to enter this place will experience such beauty, a life so satisfying, so exciting that it is simply beyond our comprehension. The reason why the Bible writers use pictures and metaphors is because heaven cannot be described in human words. We simply don't have anything to compare it with here on this earth. The apostle Paul writes something very interesting, for — according to him — he either had a vision of or actually was physically in heaven. He found

himself present in Paradise, the third heaven. He writes, "... [I] was caught up to Paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell."²⁴ When I first read this I was surprised that Paul hadn't been allowed to talk about what he had experienced. I reasoned that, had he been permitted to share something about what life was like in heaven, this would have been very helpful. Soon I began to realise that even if he had been allowed, he simply would not have been able to put into human words what he had heard and seen.

Let me give you an example. Just imagine you were able to travel back in time, say one hundred and fifty years. Finding yourself in the year 1859, you meet up with your great-great grandfather. This great old man looks into your eyes and says kindly, "Well, well, well... fancy meeting my great-great grandchild." After having looked you up and down, and being somewhat puzzled by your unusual dress of a T-Shirt, sneakers and jeans, he becomes curious and wonders what it's like to live in the year 2009. He asks, "Tell me grandson, what is it like to live in your time? What have you been doing lately." As it happens, you have just returned from a holiday in Fiji, and so you answer, "Well, granddad, I have just arrived back from a holiday in Fiji." "Oh, is that so, my boy?" he replies. Then he enquires, "What kind of ship did you travel on?" Slightly amused you reply, "Ship? No, not a ship grandfather: I travelled by aeroplane." Now it's his turn to look mystified and he asks, "What do you mean aeroplane? What's an aeroplane?" It then begins to dawn on you that of course great-great grandfather would never have heard about, let alone seen an aeroplane. How can you describe or explain an aeroplane to him? And you haven't yet mentioned electricity, a telephone, computers...!

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 12:4

A person who lived a century and a half ago cannot comprehend our technological advancements nor does he have the vocabulary necessary to understand and communicate with a person living in the twenty-first century. Is it any wonder then that Paul was forbidden to tell us what he had seen and heard in heaven, the Paradise of God? *"No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him."*²⁵

Nevertheless, God in his wisdom has lifted the veil ever so slightly here and there. He has shown us just enough to make us curious, and to awaken an expectation and excitement about what he has in store for us. Let us look at some of the things that he has revealed in the Bible about our future destiny.

New Bodies

Although at death we will leave our physical earthly body behind that doesn't mean that we change into angelic beings as some would have us believe. We remain uniquely human. But we will be given a new human body — **a spiritual body**. This body will be somewhat different from the present one but it will still fully express our humanness.

It seems that in the early Church there was some confusion about how the old body would be resurrected, so Paul informs us that our old natural body will be raised as a spiritual body.

*"But someone may ask, 'How are the dead raised? With what kind of body will they come?'"*²⁶

"...it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body."

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 2:9

²⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:35

So it is written: 'The first man Adam became a living being' the last Adam [Jesus], a life-giving spirit. The spiritual did not come first, but the natural, and after that the spiritual.

The first man was of the dust of the earth, the second man from heaven. As was the earthly man, so are those who are of the earth; and as is the man from heaven, so also are those who are of heaven.

*And just as we have borne the likeness of the earthly man, so shall we bear the likeness of the man from heaven."*²⁷

Paul makes a reference here to Jesus' own changed physical body after his resurrection. Christ's resurrected body was the same body as before his death. We know that because after he rose from the dead, the tomb in which his body had lain was empty. The body itself was resurrected — the very same body, for the scars from his crucifixion could still be seen. His body was now in a glorified state — **a spiritual body**. His body was still fully human for Jesus ate real earthly food such as bread and fried fish. Yet, there was also an unmistakable difference. His earthly body had now taken on some spiritual qualities that were not there before. We read that Jesus could pass through solid walls.²⁸ He was able to just appear out of nowhere.²⁹ And Jesus ascended into heaven in bodily form.³⁰

Now the good news is that our own resurrected spiritual bodies will be just like Jesus' resurrected and glorified body. This is going to be something amazing! Paul explains it this way:

²⁷ 1 Corinthians 15:44-48

²⁸ John 20:19

²⁹ Luke 24:36

³⁰ Acts 19

"... The Lord Jesus Christ, who by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body."³¹

Our resurrected bodies will be genuine physical human bodies. They will be the same bodies we lived in while on this earth “reconstituted” and completely perfected. These bodies will be wholly suited for our future existence. Our present bodies simply are not good enough for the heavenly kingdom of God and so they must be changed. Paul explained that we will receive our permanent bodies at the return of Christ: both the living and the dead will have their bodies renewed and glorified when they are resurrected.

"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. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality..."³²

The link between Christ’s resurrection and the future resurrection of our bodies is one of the most important fundamental teachings of the Christian faith. It’s at the very centre of the Christian hope of eternal life. Not so long ago the doctrine of the resurrection of the body seemed to many too far-fetched to be believed. They would argue, “How can a body be resurrected when all that’s left of it is dust or ashes? Or what about those lost

³¹ Philippians 3:21

³² 1 Corinthians 15:50-54

at sea, of which no remains are left?" Of course today, we know that our whole human DNA can be found in a single hair. Jesus said, *"But the very hairs on your head are all numbered."*³³ It's not so far-fetched after all! If you want to read more about the resurrection then you must read all of chapter fifteen in the first letter to the Corinthians. Paul is "hot" on this topic. Let me give you just a couple of excerpts:

*"And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith."*³⁴

*"And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."*³⁵

*"If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die."*³⁶

Paul was so sure of what he believed that he laid down his life for it. Although this doesn't in itself prove that what he said was true, it should cause us to take his message seriously.

We Will Recognise Each Other

Another important aspect about our new spiritual bodies is the fact that in heavenly places we will recognise each other. The Bible is clear about this. In the New Testament Jesus talks about such prominent Old Testament icons as Abraham, Elijah and Moses as still **living**. About Abraham he said,

*"Your father Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day; he saw it and was glad."*³⁷

³³ Matthew 10:30

³⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:13-14

³⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:17-20

³⁶ 1 Corinthians 15:32

Jesus is referring back here to the moment just prior to his departure from heaven to earth. He says, "*Abraham rejoiced.*" Why? Well, in Genesis chapter twelve God made a covenant with Abraham that, through him and his descendants, all the families of the world would be blessed.³⁸ Through one of Abraham's descendants redemption from sin would come to the world. By way of that Person, humankind would be reconciled with God. Is it any wonder therefore that Abraham rejoiced when Jesus left heaven for earth on that mission? The Abraham that Jesus refers to here is a living person. Abraham is still Abraham. The same Abraham is in existence today!

There is another interesting account in the New Testament about two other Old Testament prophets. This time it involves Moses and Elijah. While on the way to Jerusalem to be crucified, Jesus, together with three of his disciples, goes up a mountain. We read that he was "transfigured," meaning that the glory of God came upon him. His face and garments shone like the sun. The three disciples, although never having met Moses and Elijah, nevertheless intuitively knew who they were and suggested building some shelter for them.³⁹ Moses and Elijah are still Moses and Elijah!

Lastly, Jesus was once confronted with a trick question about the life hereafter. The Sadducees were a sect of religious Jews who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. So, they posed a hypothetical question. They asked Jesus what would happen to a woman who married seven times and who was widowed seven times.

"At the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?" Jesus replied, 'Are you

³⁷ John 8:56

³⁸ Genesis 12:1-3

³⁹ Matthew 17:1-8

not in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God?’

"Now about the dead rising — have you not read in the book of Moses ... how God said to him, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the dead, but of the living. You are badly mistaken!"⁴⁰

Undoubtedly we can conclude from what Jesus said that there clearly is a resurrection from the dead and that we will recognise each other. I think that this promise alone should fill us with joyful anticipation. The thought of seeing my parents, my older brother and two younger sisters, my parents-in-law, grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins, nephews and friends who have died as believers in Jesus Christ, fills me with a real sense of joy. What else can I say, but, "Thank you, thank you Jesus for having made this possible!"

In the Book of Hebrews it is written:

"Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God."⁴¹

That fact alone should propel me to follow the way that leads to eternal life with Christ Jesus! Christ paid a very costly price to make these future reunions possible.

The New Heaven and the New Earth

As we have already seen, different names and metaphors are used to describe "heaven". The word "heaven" is used most (582 times in 550 different verses to be exact). But in some of the prophetic

⁴⁰ Mark 12:18-27

⁴¹ Hebrews 12:2

books of the Old Testament and also in some books of the New Testament, especially the Book of Revelation, we also read about the “new earth.” What does that mean? Are there two different places? No, not really.

Because our bodies will be resurrected, our understanding of the “new earth” as part of “heaven” takes on purpose and meaning. As this present earth was made for earthlings, so the new earth will be equally fitted out for us. Because we remain fully human, our new place of residence will therefore be in a newly and fully restored earth. So, does that mean that we don’t go to heaven? No, it doesn’t mean that. The separation which presently exists between heaven and earth will no longer exist in the same way. God has promised the creation of a new heaven, a new earth and a new city of Jerusalem. To understand this we need to go to the Book of Revelation where he has revealed a little more about this great mystery.

In Revelation chapter three, Jesus tells us about the New Jerusalem which will come down from heaven to the new earth.⁴² Furthermore in chapter twenty-one, John also tells us about being shown the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven upon the new earth.⁴³ What we see here is the blending together of the new heaven and the new earth into one glorious Kingdom with Jesus Christ as King. The new earth will have at its centre the New Jerusalem. The new heaven will have at its centre the throne of God. Our eyes will be opened to a whole new realm.

I once had an insight about what it means to “have your eyes opened”. It happened while visiting Queenstown, that beautiful town in the South Island of New Zealand. My wife Hilda and I, with an international mission outreach team we were leading,

⁴² Revelation 3:12

⁴³ Revelation 21:10

arrived in Queenstown late at night. It was dark. We couldn't see anything of the beautiful scenery that attracts so many tourists from all over the world to this far-away part of the earth. Because I had been there before, I was making a real effort to describe to the team, the beautiful lake called Wakatipu. I explained that Lake Wakatipu was surrounded by mountains and especially by the spectacular and magnificent sheer rock mountain range called the Remarkables (used prominently in the movie version of the trilogy, *The Lord of the Rings*). No matter how much I tried to explain, the pictures I attempted to paint seemed too good to be true. But... you should have heard the shouts of utter amazement the next morning, when the bright sunlight revealed a beauty that far outshone the picture I had tried to paint the night before. Of course, it had been there just as much the night before, except it could not be seen because of the darkness. Even though the team tried hard to visualise what it might possibly look like, it just wasn't anywhere near as good as **actually seeing** the real thing.

I wonder whether we will experience something similar about the existence of the new heaven and the new earth. Now we cannot even imagine what it will look like, although we may have certain pictures in our mind; yet, one day we will actually see it and it will far exceed even our most imaginative dreams. "*Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully...*"⁴⁴ We will stand in amazement! We will stand in awe, wonder and admiration!

Even now we know that God's heaven is somewhere "above" us, somewhere "up there." Of course it is not literally above us, but that's the way we seem to imagine it. Often we look upwards when we think about heaven. Of course we cannot look into heaven for there is a very definite separation between the sinless

⁴⁴ 1 Corinthians 13:12

heaven where God dwells and the sinful world we live in. Besides, we all know that the darkness of space separates the heaven of God and our universe. Yet, according to the Bible, God's residence — heaven — is a real place. It was Jesus who told his disciples something very interesting about this future realm and what was going to take place. He said that “at the Day of the Lord” (the end of this present world), he would come in all of his glory,

“For as lightning that comes from the east is visible, even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man... the sun will be darkened and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.

*At that time the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn. They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory.”*⁴⁵

Let me give you a short definition of the word “glory.” It means something like “a visible manifestation of the splendour, the power, the majesty and radiance of God.” When Christ appears, he appears in his **glory**, a glory that will outshine the sun! John tells us that the glory of Christ will be so bright that the new earth and the New Jerusalem will have no need for a sun and moon; his glory will be more than sufficient to illuminate it.⁴⁶

Then, as Christ returns in glory and splendour and radiating light, a loud shout will be heard commanding the dead in Christ to rise; afterwards those who are still alive and on the earth will also rise to be with him in the clouds,

⁴⁵ Matthew 24:27-30

⁴⁶ Revelation 21:23-25

"...a loud command, with the voice of an archangel and with the trumpet call of God and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever"⁴⁷

Now let's go back once more to the Queenstown story. It was the darkness which kept us from seeing the beautiful lake and surrounding mountains. Could it be that at the "Day of the Lord", when Christ returns in all of his glory, that the darkness which presently exists between heaven and earth will suddenly disappear? Will his glory, as it were, "turn on the light"? Will our eyes be opened to see that which actually has been there all along? Could it be perhaps that we will discover that heaven is actually all around us and that the whole universe moves about **within** the heaven of God?

Whatever the case may be, one fact is absolutely sure: those who belong to Christ will be in heaven with him and will enjoy life to the full on a completely restored earth. Jesus promised, *"I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."*⁴⁸

Life in Heaven – New Earth

Let's now look at some more Scripture passages regarding our future life. In the Book of Isaiah there is a beautiful promise of a future world where everything is once again restored to what it was like in the beginning — the Garden of Eden, Paradise. In this next section we will look at a series of Bible promises and revelations about the life hereafter. Come for a journey to this amazing world yet to come:

"And the wolf will live with the lamb, the leopard will lie down with the young goat, the calf and the lion

⁴⁷ 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

⁴⁸ John 10:10

*and the yearling together;... The cow will feed with the bear, their young will lie down together, and the lion will eat straw like the ox. The infant will play near the hole of the cobra, and the young child put his hand into the viper's nest. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain, for the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."*⁴⁹

This denotes that all of creation will return to being in complete harmony with itself. The cruelties that we see in the animal kingdom today will no longer exist in our new world. Just try to imagine that fact alone! Paul also made mention of that when he wrote that not only are we humans yearning and groaning to be set free from our sinful natures, but, that **all** of creation is longing for its redemption. He says that creation waits in eager expectation for itself — and for humankind — to return to its original state of harmony.⁵⁰

Isaiah prophesied,

*"Behold, I will create new heavens and a new earth. The former things will not be remembered, nor will they come to mind. But be glad and rejoice forever in what I will create, for I will create Jerusalem to be a delight and its people a joy."*⁵¹

He then continues to prophesy further details about what we can expect in the new heaven and earth. He says:

- The sound of weeping and crying will not be heard there
- Never again will an infant live for only a few days
- People will build houses and live in them
- They will plant vineyards and eat their fruit

⁴⁹ Isaiah 11:6-9

⁵⁰ Romans 8:18-25

⁵¹ Isaiah 65:17-18

- They will actually **enjoy** the work of their hands
- Before they even call the Lord will answer

People will actually enjoy working just as they did in the first Garden of Eden. Adam did not work to provide for their daily needs, for God was their provider! He and Eve worked because they enjoyed using their creative abilities. It was only after the curse of sin came into the world that humankind had to work to survive.⁵² Just imagine having all of eternity to be able to exercise and enjoy the gifts and talents that God has placed within us.

We have no idea what God had in mind for us when he created us, when he breathed upon us the gift of life while we were still in our mother's womb. Our life span on this earth is far too short to even discover a fraction of our God-given creative gifts. The majority of people on this earth are employed in occupations which they don't really enjoy. They have no other option because they have to provide food, clothing and shelter for themselves and their families. The idea that we are promised never ending life only makes sense if we have the ability to actually enjoy that endless existence. Of course, we are talking here of time as we know it now on earth. Whether we will be subject to time to the same degree is something we do not know. But whatever the case may be, our eternal existence in heavenly places will be completely and wholly fulfilling in every way. It has to be!

John's Vision of the New Jerusalem

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne

⁵² Genesis 3:17-19

saying, 'Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.'

He who was seated on the throne said, 'I am making everything new!' Then he said, 'Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true.

He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life He who overcomes will inherit all this, and I will be his God and he will be my son.' ⁵³

Let's highlight the main points of what John saw:

- There will be a new heaven and a new earth
- There will no longer be any sea
- There will be the Holy City, the new Jerusalem
- God will live among his people
- We will be his people
- He will wipe every tear from our eyes
- There will be no more death, mourning, crying or pain
- He will make everything new
- He will freely quench our thirst with living water
- Condition to enter: "*He who overcomes will inherit all this*"
- Promise: "And I will be his God and he will be my son [daughter]"

Although we don't have a full description of what the new earth will look like, yet I think we can take from what is told us that in many respects it will not be unlike this present earth (although

⁵³ Revelation 21:1-7

without sin and death). The new city of Jerusalem will be there, which has a rather familiar look to it. John, in the Book of Revelation, describes the Holy City as having streets, walls and gates. He mentions gold and all kinds of precious stones, a high mountain, water, a river, and the tree of life producing twelve kinds of fruit. To make it even more earthly, the city will be populated with real people — **humans**.⁵⁴

But there is also something very unique about this city. Firstly, we read that it will come down as a complete city out of heaven.⁵⁵ Can you visualise that? John uses the illustration of a city being "*prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband.*"⁵⁶ This description indicates that the city will be of incredible beauty. We read that its streets are of gold and each of the twelve gates of pearl, its walls of shining jasper and the foundations of the city are decorated with every kind of precious stone. A crystal clear river runs through the city, flowing out from the throne of God and of Christ. We are told that on each side of the river are the trees of life which bear twelve kinds of fruit.⁵⁷

The size of the city alone is incomprehensible. Read this!

*"The angel who talked with me had a measuring rod of gold to measure the city, its gates and its walls. The city was laid out like a square, as long as it was wide. He measured the city with the rod and found it to be 12,000 stadia in length, and as wide and high as it is long. He measured its wall and it was 144 cubits thick, by man's measurement, which the angel was using."*⁵⁸

⁵⁴ Revelation 22-22

⁵⁵ Revelation 3:12; 21:3

⁵⁶ Revelation 21:3

⁵⁷ Revelation 22:2

⁵⁸ Revelation 21:15-17

To put that in our measurements: Its length, width and height each measure 2400 kilometres! (2400 x 2400 x 2400). So the city is perfectly symmetrical, a massive cube. A height of 2400 kilometres is in reality difficult to envision. On our existing earth, a height of 2400 kilometres would extend well above our earth's atmosphere (which is only about 160 kilometres deep). But remember that earth and heaven will be merged and so the atmosphere that we know at present will cease to be an issue. In any case, according to these measurements, the New Jerusalem will cover a surface of 3.6 million square kilometres. If we compare this with the city of London which is only about 994 square kilometres, we begin to get an idea of its immense size. Based on the size of London, the population of the New Jerusalem could easily be 11 billion people.⁵⁹ Scripture talks about "*the multitudes of heaven which no one can count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb.*"⁶⁰ There is room for everyone.

And we have not even taken into account the height of the city! Some scholars believe that its height will be divided by multiple levels. Only time will tell!

Human words are simply unable to describe what it will be like. Of course this should not surprise us, for Jesus, through whom this whole present heaven and earth was created,⁶¹ is fully involved in "preparing" this new city of Jerusalem.

At the Last Supper in the Upper Room on the eve of his crucifixion, Jesus told his disciples not to be troubled. He encouraged them to trust in God and also in him. But besides this exhortation, he also referred to the future life. Earlier that same night, he had told them, "*Where I am going, you cannot follow now, but you will follow later.*"⁶² Afterwards, knowing the

⁵⁹ John F. MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 1996), 107

⁶⁰ Revelation 7:9

⁶¹ John 1:3; Colossians 1:16

⁶² John 13:36

disciples were concerned at the thought of his leaving them, he expanded this:

*"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go to prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am."*⁶³

The Dwelling Place of God Will be with Men

He is personally preparing a place for us! In his Father's house! What could possibly be better than that? There will be no temple in the New Jerusalem, for God himself and Jesus Christ the Lamb will be our temple.⁶⁴ That promises us the most intimate relationship imaginable with the living God. Fellowship of a kind that was impossible in the earthly realm (since sin would not allow such fellowship). Did God not say, "*You cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live?*"⁶⁵ But in heaven **we will see** the One who has been inaccessible to mortal man face to face.

Jesus said that not only will we see God but that we will also live in his very house! As Christians our highest fulfilment will come when we actually see our God and his Son Jesus Christ, and when we stand before them in perfect righteousness (washed clean by the blood of the Lamb). Heaven will grant us that privilege.

We will be in the presence of God, embraced by perfect goodness, holiness and love. In essence this is the sole reason why we will enjoy every other aspect of life in the new heaven and earth so much. Life is going to be so fantastically fulfilling because we will be in the presence of God himself. We will see him face to face and be overwhelmed by his holiness and lovingkindness. His glory will permeate every part of our being.

⁶³ John 14:2

⁶⁴ Revelation 21:22

⁶⁵ Exodus 33:20

In our present state we simply cannot experience such holiness. The one who came closest to experiencing a fraction of God's holiness and glory was Moses while on Mount Sinai. He was told to hide himself in the crevice of a rock lest he die. The whole mountain trembled and shook. There was fire and smoke together with the piercing high sound of a trumpet. Earth-shattering thunder and flashing lightning added further to the awesome spectacle as God's glory passed in front of Moses.⁶⁶ The sight was so terrifying that Moses trembled with fear.⁶⁷

The reflection of God's glory was so evident in Moses' face that when he came down from the mountain other people were terrified and they fled from his presence. They knew that just by looking at Moses they would die. And so Moses had to cover his face for a period of time.⁶⁸ Yet, when **we** are in heavenly places with Christ we will be dwelling in the Father's house, experiencing Jesus' glory and the Father's glory and we will not be afraid. We will stand in absolute wonder and awe as we behold his glorious presence. Spontaneously we will want to join the choirs of angels and shout and sing together,

"...Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty, who was, and is, and is to come." ⁶⁹

"You are worthy, our Lord and Go, to receive glory and honour and power, for you have created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being." ⁷⁰

"...To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and honour and glory and power, for ever and ever!"⁷¹

⁶⁶ Exodus 19:10-25; 20:18-21

⁶⁷ Hebrews 12:21

⁶⁸ Exodus 33:21; 34:29-35

⁶⁹ Revelation 4:8

⁷⁰ Revelation 4:11

⁷¹ Revelation 5:13

Another amazing sight will be Jesus Christ. For there in heaven he will take his rightful place as King of kings and Lord of lords. He will also be known and worshipped as the Lamb (for like a lamb he was sacrificed for our sins). *"Worthy is the Lamb who was slain..."*⁷² But what will also be amazing is that he, like us, will still have a human body (even though he is fully God)! He will be seated on his throne at the right hand of the Father; and he has promised that he will invite us to sit with him! *"To him who overcomes, I will give the right to sit with me on my throne, just as I overcame and sat down with my Father on his throne."*⁷³

The more we read all these promises, the more we begin to see that the future life is truly wonderful beyond measure. Why do we hold on so tightly to this present life here on earth as if this is the best we will ever have? The best is still to come!

Major Changes Will Take Place

The apostle John, in a vision, saw a glimpse of the newly-made heaven and earth and writes about what he saw,

*"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away and there was no longer any sea."*⁷⁴

Two things we need to highlight here. Firstly, John describes some physical changes that will occur on the earth. He says for instance that there won't be any sea.⁷⁵ Well that's a significant difference from the present earth which is covered predominantly with water. (One wonders if there may be a whole planet somewhere with nothing but the best beaches and surf imaginable!) Some Bible scholars believe that the "no seas"

⁷² Revelation 5:12

⁷³ Revelation 3:21

⁷⁴ Revelation 21:1

⁷⁵ Revelation 21:1

stresses the erasure of national boundaries. Others point out that because people in the Ancient World had an inbuilt fear of the seas that the absence of any oceans implies the absence of fear.

Secondly, John writes here that the "*first heaven and the first earth had passed away*". This means that the whole universe as we know it today will be dissolved. And that's indeed what must happen in the future, for the new cannot come until the old is done away with. John was not the only one who wrote about this. Even the Old Testament prophets, many years before, had foretold that this was going to happen. The apostle Peter also has a lot to say about what would take place before God created a new heaven and a new earth. This is what he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit:

*"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare."*⁷⁶

So, when is all this going to happen? Peter explains that it will take people by surprise, for the Lord Jesus' return (the Day of the Lord) will come at a time when you least expect it. He says in the last days there will be many unbelievers who will say, "*Where is the day of his coming?*"⁷⁷

If you want to be informed about what must take place before Jesus' return and the end of this present world, then read what Jesus told his disciples. Let's look at some excerpts from Matthew chapter 24.

⁷⁶ 2 Peter 3:10

⁷⁷ 2 Peter 3:3

Signs of the End of the Age

"As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. 'Tell us,' they said, 'when will this happen, and what will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?'"

Jesus answered: 'Watch out that no one deceives you. For many will come in my name, claiming, "I am the Christ," and will deceive many.

You will hear of wars and rumors of wars, but see to it that you are not alarmed. Such things must happen, but the end is still to come. Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom. There will be famines and earthquakes in various places. All these are the beginning of birth pains.

Then you will be handed over to be persecuted and put to death, and you will be hated by all nations because of me. At that time many will turn away from the faith and will betray and hate each other, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.

And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.' ⁷⁸

"Immediately after the distress of those days" 'the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from the sky, and the heavenly bodies will be shaken.'

"At that time the sign of the Son of Man will appear in the sky, and all the nations of the earth will mourn.

⁷⁸ Matthew 24:3-14

They will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of the sky, with power and great glory. And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other."⁷⁹

The Day and Hour Unknown

"No one knows about that day or hour, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son but only the Father. As it was in the days of Noah, so it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. For in the days before the flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the flood came and took them all away.

That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.

*"Therefore keep watch, because you do not know on what day your Lord will come. But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what time of night the thief was coming, he would have kept watch and would not have let his house be broken into. So you also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him."*⁸⁰

The reason why I incorporated such a large portion of Jesus' own words about what must happen before he returns, is so that we may take heed of his warnings and be ready for his coming.

⁷⁹ Matthew 24:29-31

⁸⁰ Matthew 24:36-44

Although reading about the end times with all its tribulations may bring fear and despair, Jesus wants us to know that for those who belong to him this should not be so. His words to his followers are clear: "...*but see to it that you are not alarmed.*"⁸¹ We are not to be frightened for Jesus has promised that whatever we go through in this present life, he will never leave nor forsake us.⁸² Two things are sure: either Jesus returns while we are still on earth or we will die before that time and will meet him in heaven. Either way, we must be ready.

⁸¹ Matthew 24:6

⁸² Hebrews 13:5b

What Happens After We Die?

Chapter 3

A PLACE CALLED HELL

So far we have highlighted eternal life in heavenly places with Christ. But sadly not all will enter into that beautiful realm. The Bible also has much to say about those who will not enter the Paradise of God, but will spend eternity separated from Christ and from all that is good and lovely. Just as the Bible uses several names and metaphors to describe heaven so it describes that other place, the place we prefer not to talk about — **Hell**.

Like heaven, hell is a real place. It is a place prepared for those who deny and reject Christ's offer of salvation (salvation from hell). It is true that some people in ages past have painted some very unbiblical pictures about what hell is all about (just as they have invented some weird ideas about heaven, e.g. people becoming winged angels wearing halos and drifting aimlessly on clouds in the sky!) Some paintings, especially during the Middle Ages, revelled in things of this kind. Artists painted in gruesome detail devils catching the wicked by their heels, while demons

stoked the fires of hell. The unfortunate, while hanging by hooks through their tongues, were tortured with indescribable cruelty before being thrown into the fires of hell. When we look at Scripture, however, we will find a far more sober and restrained description. But the Bible clearly describes hell as a place of great suffering and eternal torment — the total opposite to the eternal joy experienced in heaven. In other words, hell is a serious matter.

Even though I would much rather talk about heavenly places, we need to know something about what the Bible teaches regarding this ghastly place. Many people, including Christians, do not believe in hell today. Why is that? Some will say that it doesn't equate with the biblical teaching of God being love. They will say, "How could a loving God **send** anyone to hell?" Of course this is a wrong way of reasoning, for God doesn't send anyone to hell. Rather, by rejecting Jesus' offer of salvation, people themselves have made a deliberate choice to be excluded from eternal life with Christ. The Bible is very clear about the serious consequences of rejecting Christ. God, by sending his Son, has done everything possible for each and everyone to be saved:

*"He is patient with you, **not wanting anyone to perish**, but everyone come to repentance."*⁸³

*"...God our Saviour, who **desires all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth.**"*⁸⁴

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*⁸⁵

Others prefer not to believe in hell because they don't want to acknowledge the existence of such a place. Obviously, if there is

⁸³ 2 Peter 3:9b

⁸⁴ 1 Timothy 2:3-4 (NASB)

⁸⁵ John 3:16

such a place, there is also the prospect of spending all of eternity there. That proposition is too frightening to contemplate and so denial is the best way out. But whether or not we deny its existence makes no iota of difference to the fact that the Bible unmistakably teaches that there is such a place. So, we had better take a very serious look at what Scripture has to say about it. I for one would rather listen to and obey God's Word, than the words of someone who **thinks** he knows better than God does! We are dealing with a matter of such importance that we can't afford to ignore it let alone reject it! Either spending never-ending life with Christ, his angels and departed believers in heavenly places, or never-ending life with Satan and his demons and departed unbelievers, including the most evil people who ever lived on this earth.

Aside from the terrors of hell itself, one of the most horrific things to bear by those in hell will be the knowledge that they have freely chosen to refuse Christ's offer of forgiveness and his free offer of salvation.

Jesus once told a story about a rich man who lived a life of selfish luxury. After his death, he is in hell, experiencing terrible torment. The rich man then asks if someone could go and warn his family, so they would not suffer the same fate. Jesus concludes his story with the sobering words that his family had already been given the Scriptures (Moses and the Prophets) and that even if someone rose from the dead to speak to them they would still not be convinced enough to change their ways.⁸⁶

There is a warning here for us all. We need to seek the Lord and not put off making decisions; otherwise we might one day find ourselves, like the rich man, experiencing irreversible regret.

⁸⁶ Luke 16:19-31

As the writer of the letter to the Hebrews wrote: *"Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts."*⁸⁷

Let us look at what the Scriptures teach us about what hell is like:

- Hell is described as “a place of everlasting punishment”: *"Then they will go away to eternal punishment."*⁸⁸ *"... [They] will be in danger of the fire of hell."*⁸⁹
- Hell is spoken of as a “fiery furnace”: *"They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*⁹⁰
- Hell is also “a place of darkness”: *"... [They] will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."*⁹¹
- Hell is also “a place of judgement”: *"...and those that who have done evil will rise to be condemned [judged]."*

Who Will Actually Go to Hell?

- **The wicked** – They will suffer everlasting destruction: *"They will be punished with everlasting destruction, and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power..."*⁹²

⁸⁷ Hebrews 4:7

⁸⁸ Matthew 25:41,46

⁸⁹ Matthew 5:22; 2 Peter 2:4

⁹⁰ Matthew 13:42

⁹¹ Matthew 8:12

⁹² 2 Thessalonians 1:9

- **Evildoers** – They will hear: *"I never knew you. Away from me you evildoers."*⁹³
- **Unbelievers** – They will be in the same place as the devil and his fallen angels: *"Then he will say... depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels."*⁹⁴
- **Every unrepentant sinner** – This refers to those who harden their hearts against God: *"But because of your stubbornness and your unrepentant heart, you are storing up wrath against yourself...when his righteous judgement will be revealed."* (Of course we have all sinned and so stand condemned; but if we repent *"...he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins..."*⁹⁵)

To sum it all up there are basically four things that we need to know about those in hell:

1. They will be separated from God (separated from all that is good and lovely)
2. They will be in darkness (separated from Christ who is the Light of the World)
3. They will join the devil and his fallen angels/demons
4. They will be in place of fire and torment

Judgement

There is just one other thing that we need to mention here — **Judgement Day**. Both the believer and the unbeliever in Jesus Christ will stand before the judgement seat of Christ.

⁹³ Matthew 7:23

⁹⁴ Matthew 25:41

⁹⁵ 1 John 1:9

There will be two different kinds of judgement. One will be for those who have responded to Jesus Christ, accepted his offer of salvation and followed him; another for those who have rejected Jesus Christ, his offer of salvation and followed their own ways.

1. Believers' judgement: The judgement of believers will take place in heaven before Jesus Christ. They will be judged based on what they have done in this life.

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each may receive what is due to him for the things done in the body, whether good or bad."⁹⁶

This judgment is not about whether they will go to heaven or hell (for that has already been settled when they responded positively to the invitation to follow Christ.) Paul wrote:

"If any man builds on this foundation [Jesus Christ] using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss; he himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."⁹⁷

The prophet Zechariah saw a glimpse of what will take place when a believer stands before the Lord.

"Then he showed me Joshua the high priest standing before the angel of the LORD, and Satan standing at his right side to accuse him. The LORD said to Satan, 'The LORD rebuke you, Satan! The LORD, who has

⁹⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:10

⁹⁷ 1 Corinthians 3:12-15

chosen Jerusalem, rebuke you! Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?

Now Joshua was dressed in filthy clothes as he stood before the angel. The angel said to those who were standing before him, 'Take off his filthy clothes.' Then he said to Joshua, 'See, I have taken away your sin, and I will put rich garments on you.' ⁹⁸

From Zechariah's vision we can deduce that Joshua the high priest was not without sin when he stood before God (Joshua's filthy clothing infers sinfulness). The same will be true when a believer stands before the judgement seat of Christ. As with Joshua, Satan's accusations against the believer will be overruled with the words, "*The LORD rebuke you, Satan! ...Is not this man a burning stick snatched from the fire?*" The believer has been redeemed through Christ's sacrifice on the cross and so is as a "*stick snatched from the fire.*" Once we belong to Jesus Christ, Satan no longer has any power over us!

Here is another comforting and reassuring example from the Bible. This time it is John, who has a vision and looks into the heavenly realm. There he hears Jesus Christ speak. Jesus says that his followers will be dressed in white (just like Joshua the high priest). Moreover, he says that God will never erase their names from the Book of Life. He himself will pronounce their names before his Father and before the angels. Once named, their names can never be retracted!

"He who overcomes will, like them, be dressed in white. I will never blot out his name from the book of life, but will acknowledge his name before my Father and his angels." ⁹⁹

⁹⁸ Zechariah 3:1-4

⁹⁹ Revelation 3:5

Where Do We go When We Die?

When the Christian dies, he/she passes immediately into the presence of Christ, there to enjoy conscious fellowship with the Lord Jesus until the day of the resurrection. It is then that the transformation of the body will take place. Those saved will then dwell in fellowship with God forever.

2. *Unbelievers' judgement:* Those who reject Christ and his offer of salvation in this life will find themselves standing before the throne of God's judgement in the next life. If their names are not found in the Book of Life they will be judged accordingly, declared guilty and sentenced.

Revelation 20:12 describes that awful final moment when unrepentant sinners will stand before God without any further excuse nor any way of evading their coming judgment.

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened... The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books... and each person was judged according to what he had done... If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire."¹⁰⁰

Now that we have established that there are two possible destinies after death, the next question we should ask is “**What** or **who** determines our eternal destiny?” We want to know for sure whether we will be with Christ, his angels and all those who have died believing in him; or be separated from Christ to be in the company of Satan, his fallen angels and all those who have rejected Christ and his offer of salvation.

¹⁰⁰ Revelation 20:11-14

What Happens After We Die?

Chapter 4

THE WAY TO HEAVEN

As was mentioned earlier, there are some who believe that ultimately everyone will go to heaven. While we may all hope that to be so, it is simply not true and moreover impossible.

Let me show you **two reasons** why not everyone can go to heaven:

1. It is Impossible for Imperfection [sin and sinful people] to Exist in Heaven.

Firstly, **God is holy**. Consequently, sinful humans could never live in and endure the presence of a holy God. In fact, it would be more “comfortable” in hell for an unredeemed, unforgiven person than to be in the presence of a holy God. Light and darkness cannot co-exist. Just as darkness disappears when I turn on the light in a darkened room, so it is with sin and holiness. It’s either one or the other. The two cannot be in tandem.

Imagine for a moment that sinful, unredeemed humans were able to enter heaven: would heaven not become the same as earth is today? If Adolph Hitler or Joseph Stalin or some other mass murderers were going to share this afterlife with us, then it certainly isn't going to be any better than this present world! Even if the "Hitlers" of this world weren't allowed to enter, but ordinary imperfect people like you and me were, then there still would be evil in heaven.

Moreover, if sinful people were permitted to enter heaven we would be faced with an even worse problem than we have on this present earth. Because there's no death in the life hereafter this means that sin, like cancer, would multiply and grow unhindered. In this present world evil people don't live forever; sooner or later they die and so their evil deeds are cut short. This in turn (at least for a while) gives us some respite until the next evil person arises. But, if unredeemed people were given the gift of eternal life then we would be seeing an accumulation of evil of a magnitude and scale never seen before, not even upon this present earth!

The primary reason for the Great Flood during the time of Noah, was the evil and lawlessness that had become so terrible. God had no choice but to wipe out humankind (except Noah and his family) from the face of the earth.¹⁰¹

2. If Sin could have been Excused, then, Jesus' Coming to Earth would have been utterly Meaningless.

The second reason why we, as sinful people, can't be expected to just enter heaven is the "Jesus factor." For if it was possible for everyone to just enter heaven, we have to ask the question: "Why did the Father send his Son Jesus to earth?" Why did the

¹⁰¹ Genesis chapters 6 and 7

Son take upon himself the sin of the world (including all my sins)? Why was he condemned to death and suffered one of the most cruel punishments possible? Do you really think that he would have gone through all the agony of the crucifixion if he could just have simply wiped away everyone's sin?

Look at what happened in the Garden of Gethsemane, just before Jesus' crucifixion. Three times Jesus prayed to God the Father,

*"My father, if it is possible may this cup [cup of suffering] be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."*¹⁰²

From that account alone we can see that it was **not possible!** Do you think the Father would allow his Son to suffer, if there had been another way? Of course not! Now this raises yet another question, "Why was there no other way for God to deal with sin?" Let's think of our own justice system here in New Zealand.

Just imagine a judge who is such a "loving" judge that every guilty criminal (from petty thieves to murderers and rapists) who stands trial before him is let off with just a warning. Even though he warns the offenders that if they ever commit another crime there will be severe consequences, when they do re-offend, he still lets them off the hook again and again. As matter of fact, he never actually punishes anyone. He is such a "loving" judge, he simply forgives them.

It's not too hard to imagine what the response of the victims — and the general populace of New Zealand — would be. One of absolute outrage! There would be an outcry against the so-called "loving" actions of the judge. And their anger would be wholly

¹⁰² Matthew 26:39

justified because no justice has been done. Moreover, the lack of punishment in accordance with the crime committed would surely result in the criminals re-offending. There would be no constraints in place to keep a tight rein on crime in society. Any society that would tolerate such unjust judges would eventually become utterly lawless and ultimately disintegrate into absolute chaos; people would no longer respect the judiciary and the law of the land. To satisfy the need for justice people themselves, some for right and others for wrong reasons, would take the law into their own hands. The social order would basically fall into total anarchy.

A just society needs just laws, and non-discriminatory judges who will obey the laws of the land. A judge ought to be loving and kind but this should never be at the expense of handing out unbiased justice. Love equals justice. You can't have one at the expense of the other.

The principle is much the same when it comes to God's position on sin. God warned Adam and Eve that if they were disobedient (sinned) there would be severe consequences — not only for them personally since their sin would also affect the entire human race. And that's exactly what happened. Time and time again in the Bible, God is portrayed as being both completely loving and completely just. When humankind sinned God could not, without violating his justice, just forgive their sin. He could not “sweep sin under the carpet.” He had set in place laws which if violated, would result in severe consequences.

When Adam and Eve sinned (and subsequently every one of their descendants¹⁰³) and so broke his laws, what was God to do? He couldn't “let them off the hook” however much he loved them. Would he, like the so-called “loving judge,” just forgive them?

¹⁰³ Romans 3:23

No, for in doing so he would violate his own holy laws. A righteous and just God could never do that.

Even before he created “free-willed” humankind, God in his wisdom put a very costly safeguard in place. We read in the Bible that even before the foundations of the earth were laid, God had formed a plan to deal with just such a situation.¹⁰⁴ The plan would involve his only Son. He would send his Son into this sin-infected world, a world which not only dishonoured him and failed to worship him as Creator, but even fiercely hated him. A world which denigrated his holy name by using it as a swear word, a world which violated each and every one of his holy laws, every day, all day.

How then was he going to save the world? This is how he would do it. Instead of punishing the world (us), Jesus, the sinless Son of God, volunteered to be punished on our behalf. He would take our place and stand accused of the sins of the entire world.

That’s why Jesus was incarnated — born into this world. He, the Son of God, humbled himself by becoming a human being. When John the Baptist saw Jesus he cried out, “*Look! The Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!*”¹⁰⁵

Paul explained it in a beautiful way:

“[Jesus] Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross!

¹⁰⁴ 1 Peter 1:17-21; Revelation 13:8

¹⁰⁵ John 1:29

*Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.”*¹⁰⁶

Jesus explained God’s plan by saying,

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him will not perish but have eternal life.

*He did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.”*¹⁰⁷

The Son offered himself as a substitute, a scapegoat for our sins. By doing so, both God’s love and justice would be satisfied. Now God made a way for humankind to be forgiven, justified, redeemed and thus reconciled to the Father. Only a loving and just God could have possibly come up with such an extraordinary plan. Only a loving and utterly obedient Son would do his Father’s will, whatever the cost might be.

*Story of the Chinese Twins*¹⁰⁸

In a small town in China lived a pastor and his wife. To the joy of both she became pregnant and to their surprise a set of identical

¹⁰⁶ Philippians 2:5-11

¹⁰⁷ John 3:16-18

¹⁰⁸ I have no idea where I once read this story and probably it may not altogether agree with the original story, which I believe to have been a true story. Therefore, you should read this version as fiction.

twin brothers was born. The boys loved each other and were brought up in a loving home, where they were taught about Christ. Both boys were keen to help their father who was a pastor in the small village church. However, as the boys grew older, one of them became friendly with some of the bad boys in the village. It wasn't long before he began to drift away from his own loving family and the church fellowship. His twin brother was deeply saddened and tried everything to bring him back from his wayward life, but to no avail.

One day, the gang with whom he now lived, decided to rob a store. Until now they had committed only petty crimes, but this was going to be their first big robbery. One evening they lay in wait for the shopkeeper. The pastor's son at first had been hesitant, but after being challenged about his loyalty to the gang had reluctantly agreed to take part in the robbery. To prove his loyalty he was given a knife with which to threaten the shopkeeper. No one had expected the shopkeeper, who was only little man, to put up such a fight. Instead of being intimidated by the gang he fought back furiously. It all happened so fast. Minutes later the shopkeeper lay bleeding and dying on the ground. The gang had snatched his money bag and fled. The only one left at the scene was the pastor's son — dazed, covered in blood and with the knife still in his hand.

The cries of the dying shopkeeper had alerted neighbouring shopkeepers who came from everywhere to see what was going on. The young man fled the scene, but not before being recognised. Someone shouted, "It's the pastor's son! It's the pastor's son!" He outran his pursuers and ran towards his family home. There was the chapel. "I will be safe there, at least for a little while," he thought. He rushed inside and locked the door. An anxious voice came from the front of the chapel, "My brother, my brother, are you alright? ...What's happened? Have you hurt yourself?" "Please help me... I have killed someone and they are

after me,” he shrieked with fear. The brother rushed from the front of the chapel whispering urgently but calmly, “Take off your clothes quickly. Take mine, and go!” Within minutes he had put on his twin brother’s clean clothes and as the shouts of his pursuers neared the chapel, the guilty brother escaped by way of the chapel’s back door. Then his twin brother took the bloodstained clothes, put them on, and waited.

“That’s him! That’s the one I saw! I recognise him. And look... look at the blood still on his clothes!” The pursuers grabbed him, dragged him out of the chapel, through the town and delivered him to the police station. The trial lasted only a short time for the evidence of his guilt was overwhelming. The next day he was executed.

It was some months later that the escaped robber met a fellow traveller who happened to have just come from his home town. Casually he asked, “Tell me good man, what news may you have about my old home town? I have some family living there. Is all well?” “I sure have some news about that place,” the traveller replied. “A shopkeeper was robbed and killed a few months ago. Luckily the robber, the son of the local pastor, was caught. The trial only lasted a few hours for he had been positively identified. As a matter of fact he was still wearing his blood-stained clothes. No buts about it, ‘twas a clear case and he was executed the same day and...”

Without excusing himself the brother walked away, tears streaming down his face. As he fell to the ground the only sound from his lips was the repeated groan, “O my God, what have I done?” Early the following morning he began the journey home. The chapel stood there unchanged. As always the door was open. He knelt at the altar rail. His pent-up feelings of guilt, remorse and deep sadness flowed like a river in flood. He did not even look up when a hand gently touched his shoulder and an equally tear-

drenched face pressed against his. No words were spoken, just sobbing and the mingling of tears, as father and son grieved together.

“But sir, **please** listen... it was **me** who killed the shopkeeper. My twin brother took the blame, but it was me, me, meeeee!” It didn’t matter how much he pleaded. The judge repeated again and again, “This case is closed; justice has been done, and the crime has been paid for with the execution of your brother. There is nothing more that can or needs to be done. You are free to go.”

"But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners Christ died for us. Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him!"¹⁰⁹

The Parallel

Although only a story, it does illustrate the truth of what Jesus Christ has done for us. In the same way as the twin brother, Jesus became as our substitute. He took our place. He endured the crucifixion for us. Crucifixion is one of the most cruel and painful deaths imaginable. Yet the most awful part of his suffering was not the physical torture Jesus endured nor the excruciatingly painful crucifixion, but rather the spiritual torment of being separated from his Father — for you and me — as he took upon himself our sins. Momentarily sin brought about a separation between the Son and Father — like clouds appearing before the sun. For a moment in time the Father turned away his face from his Son. Nothing like that had ever occurred within the eternally-existing perfect holy and loving union of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Is it any wonder that for that reason Christ let out a heart-piercing cry? *"Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"* — which means, *"My God, my God why have you forsaken me?"*¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Romans 5:8-9

¹¹⁰ Mark 15:34

But Jesus did not stop with this cry, for with absolute trust in his loving Father, he uttered the words, *"Father, into your hands I commit my spirit"*¹¹¹, followed by the victorious shout, *"It is finished!"*¹¹² The curtain in the temple was torn in two from top to bottom, the earth shook, rocks were split, tombs broke open and bodies of holy people came back to life. The Roman centurion exclaimed in awe, *"Truly this man was the Son of God."*¹¹³

Three days later Jesus Christ rose from the dead! Death was conquered once and for all! As a result, death no longer has power over those who believe! Paul wrote,

"Death has been swallowed up in victory." "Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

¹¹⁴

Christ through his substitutionary death on the cross opened the door for sinful humankind to be reconciled to God.¹¹⁵

"But," you may ask, "if Jesus has already paid the price for the sins of the whole world by dying on the cross, should not everyone therefore go to heaven? What disqualifies someone from going to heaven?" Although Jesus has done it all and there is nothing we can add to what he's done, nor in any way save ourselves, yet there is **something we must do** to see his work on the cross become effective in our lives. What then does he ask of us?

Let's go back to what Jesus revealed about the Father's plans of salvation. We looked at these verses earlier.

¹¹¹ Luke 23:46

¹¹² John 19:30

¹¹³ Matthew 27:51-54; Mark 15:39

¹¹⁴ 1 Corinthians 15:54-55 (quoting from Old Testament prophets)

¹¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:19

*"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that **whoever believes** in him shall not perish but have eternal life."*

And now in full the following verse:

*"For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. **"Whoever believes** in him is not condemned, but **whoever does not believe** stands condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son."*

There it is! Here is the answer to what he asks of us. Where we will spend our eternal destiny depends on whether or not we **believe** that Jesus has taken the punishment we deserve; thus all we have to do is to humbly accept this undeserved gift of grace. Christ has paid the full penalty for our sins; it's now up to us to acknowledge that we have sinned, that we stand condemned and that without his free gift of grace our destiny is hell. We need to acknowledge that our position is hopeless for we cannot save ourselves. We desperately need a Saviour.

While preaching his first sermon Peter explains that in fact, every member of the human race is guilty of having nailed Jesus to the cross (since Jesus was crucified in our place).¹¹⁶ When the people listening to Peter realised **why** Jesus had died, and **who** were responsible they became very anxious,

*"...they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, 'Brethren what shall we do?'
Peter replied, **'Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the***

¹¹⁶ Acts 2:22-36

forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ¹¹⁷

Three thousand people responded to Peter's gospel [good news] message. They accepted that Jesus Christ was indeed their Saviour. That he had died in their place. Once they realised that, they responded to what Peter told them. Result: Three thousand people experienced forgiveness of their sins and entered into what God had promised,

"For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day." ¹¹⁸

Our Response

So, where do we go from here? How do we respond to all that we have read? There is a challenge for each and every one of us. For some it will be the need to acknowledge faith in Jesus Christ. Not only will that bring assurance of eternal life with Christ, but it will also bring a complete change in your life on this earth as well. No longer will you have to fend for yourself, for now God will be right there beside you. No longer will you be alone. Only he can fill your deepest needs and heal your pain. Only he gives purpose to life in a way that no one else can, or nothing will ever do.

When Christ enters our lives he cleanses us from all sin. The Bible says that we are "a new creature" and that all the old things have gone and new things have come in their place.¹¹⁹ We can make a new start. Yes, we will still sin at times. (Perfection will only come when we are in heaven). But Christ who has paid for all my sins (past, present and future) in his wisdom has given us a way to deal with our daily wrongdoings. The Bible says,

¹¹⁷ Acts 2:37-38

¹¹⁸ John 6:40

¹¹⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:17

*"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."*¹²⁰

Every day we can start with a clean slate! It is this that causes such freedom, happiness and joy in the life of every believer in Christ. It has sustained me personally throughout the last forty years. It has given my life purpose, meaning and contentment. It has put this earthly life in perspective. For this present life is only a moment in time, whereas the life to come is everlasting — **a life without end!** Millions, billions, trillions and more years of contentment and happiness! A life wholly centred in the love of God and Jesus Christ. A life to be lived in an environment of pure love and goodness, together with all our loved-ones who have died in Christ.

John Newton, who had been a slave trader but came to faith in Jesus Christ, wrote this very well-known hymn. He knew that not only were his sins forgiven and he was saved by grace, but also that he had become a partaker (however undeserved) of the promise of eternal life.

***Amazing grace! How sweet the sound,
that saved a wretch like me!
I once was lost but now am found,
was blind but now I see.***

***'Twas grace that taught my heart to fear,
and grace my fears relieved;
how precious did that grace appear
the hour I first believed!***

***The Lord has promised good to me,
his word my hope secures;
he will my shield and portion be***

¹²⁰ 1 John 1:9

*as long as life endures.
Through many dangers, toils, and snares,
I have already come;
'tis grace hath brought me safe thus far,
and grace will lead me home.*

*Yea, when this flesh and heart shall fail,
And mortal life shall cease,
I shall possess, within the veil,
A life of joy and peace.*

*The world shall soon dissolve like snow,
The sun refuse to shine;
But God, who called me here below,
Shall be forever mine.*

*When we've been there ten thousand years,
bright shining as the sun,
we've no less days to sing God's praise
than when we'd first begun.¹²¹*

¹²¹ Written by John Newton (1725-1807)

What Happens After We Die?

Chapter 5

HOW DO I BECOME A CHRISTIAN?

That's the same question that people put to Peter after he preached his first sermon and the answer to that question remains exactly the same today. In a nutshell this is what the Bible teaches what is required of us:

1. Acknowledge that you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God.
2. Confess aloud that you want Jesus to be your Lord and Saviour.
3. Acknowledge that Jesus died on the cross for your sins and was raised from the dead three days later.
4. Confess your sins to Jesus and ask him to forgive you.
5. Repent of (be willing to turn away from) your sins and be baptised in the name of Jesus.

If you don't know how to put it in your own words, you may want to pray the following prayer:

Dear God, I recognise that I have not lived my life for you up until now.

I have been living for myself and realise that was wrong.

I have done many wrongful things for which I am truly sorry.

I deeply desire you in my life.

I acknowledge that your Son Jesus Christ gave his life for me on the cross and in doing so he died in my place.

I repent – turn away from sin.

I long to receive the forgiveness you have made freely available to me through Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

I pray, grant me your gift of grace and come into my life now, Lord.

Take up residence in my heart and be my King, my Lord, and my Saviour.

From this day forward, I will no longer be controlled by sin, or the desire to please myself; but I will, with your help, follow you all the days of my life.

My life is in your hands.

I ask this in Jesus' precious and holy name.

Amen.

If you have prayed this from your heart, then according God's Word you have become a member of God's family. For the Bible says,

▪ **Acts 16:30**

"Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved."

- **1 John 1:9**
"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness."

- **John 1:12**
"Yet to all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God,"

- **Romans 10:9-10**
"If you confess with your mouth 'Jesus is Lord,' and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead. You will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved."

The Assurance: 1 John 5:10-12

"Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart... And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life."

Some of you reading this already know Jesus but you may have become so involved in this present life that you have lost sight of the important fact that Jesus should at all times have first place in everything.¹²² Being a Christian means relationship with Jesus Christ and fellowship with other believers. (You cannot survive

¹²² 1 Colossians 1:18

by yourself. The reason we need fellowship with other believers is so that we may encourage one another.)

If this is you, then perhaps today is a good time to take stock and rectify your situation, to make a re-commitment to Jesus by giving him supreme rule in your life. This will put you back on the road of an intimate relationship with him. Only **then** will your life take on new meaning again. Only **then** will you receive all that is necessary for a fulfilled life (in the present) and a renewed hope of eternal life (in the future) with Christ.

“What Happens After We Die?” We have only touched the surface of this all-important issue. (You should find some good books on this subject in any Christian bookshop.)

It’s my prayer that you may come to know Jesus Christ as Saviour, friend and Lord, enter into a relationship with God the Father and enjoy the daily fellowship of the Holy Spirit as much as I have over these last forty years.