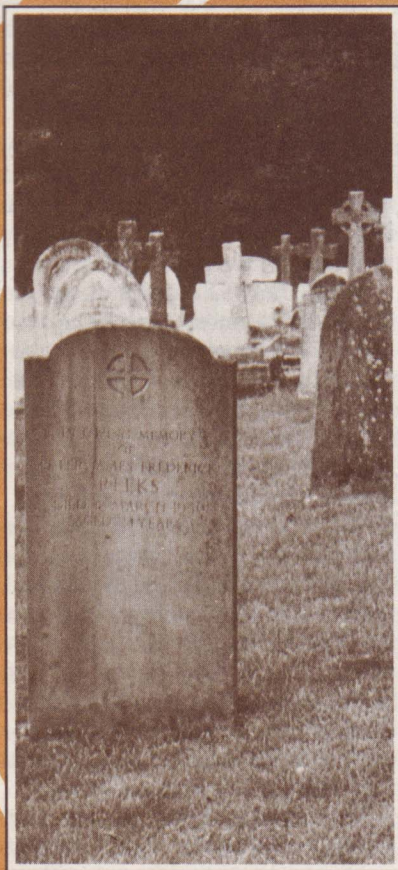


THE THREE RESURRECTIONS



AN ARTICLE REPRINT SERIES

THE RESURRECTION: THE HOPE OF MANKIND

by Raymond F. McNair

TODAY, Christianity is divided into literally hundreds of sects and denominations—with many interpretations about life, death, and the *hereafter*.

But why should there be so many different ideas regarding man's afterlife? Why should there be such a state of confusion regarding what the *reward* of the Christian really is?

Why do so many believe they are (or have) an immortal soul which survives death in heaven, limbo, paradise or hell?

The biblical teaching on this subject of man—what he is, his purpose in this life, his destiny—and how to reach that destiny—is crystal clear.

Isn't it high time that we cleared away the cobwebs of denominational and sectarian confusion and looked into the Word of God to see what it says about man's ultimate destiny—and how he is to attain that goal?

A Common Assumption. As a young boy I was taught by my parents, by churchmen, teachers and others, that we were born with *immortality*, and that every believer in Jesus Christ was destined for heaven—way up beyond the clouds. I fully believed this. I thought, like all others who accepted Christ, I would some day go to heaven and live there forever.

Concurrent with this idea that I was immortal, or that I had an immortal soul somewhere in me, I also heard a great deal about a *resurrection* of the dead. These two concepts seemed, even to my young mind, to be *contradictory*. If I were *immortal*, then why would I need to be resurrected?

I found that men had various ideas to attempt to reconcile this paradox. Some taught that at death the righteous go off immediately to their reward in limbo, paradise or heaven, but the wicked go instantly to hell, where these immortal souls would burn forever and ever.

Notice how firmly this same idea of an "immortal soul" was fixed in the mind of Benjamin Franklin. In his autobiography, Franklin tells that he once considered starting his own "sect," to be called "The Society of the Free and Easy." He said his "intended creed" for this new religion was to contain what he believed to be "the essentials of every known religion." Notice how his list of "essentials" included a belief in the immortality of the soul.

"That there is one God, who made all things. That he governs the world by his providence. . . . That the *soul is immortal*. And that God will certainly reward virtue and punish vice, either here or hereafter."

To the best of my memory, I was taught as a child that at death you go immediately to your *reward* (usually in heaven) or punishment (usually to hell fire) and remain there until the final Judgment Day. On this day the souls of the righteous in heaven and those in hell were supposed to be *reunited* with their resurrected bodies—where they would then share the joys (or pains) of eternity—depending upon whether they were saved or lost.

Let's face it. A lot of contradictory ideas regarding what happens after death have been promulgated. There is much confusion on this important question—and "God is not the author of confusion" (I Cor. 14:33).

Where did these unscriptural, confused ideas about what *man* is and his ultimate *destiny* really originate? When I began studying the Bible diligently, I found it did not contradict itself. Rather, I found the same consistent teaching regarding what man is—and what is his destiny—in both the Old and New Testaments.

Egyptian Belief in a Resurrection. Before we go to the Bible, let us briefly see what some of the *ancients* taught on this subject.

A few years ago, I visited the emp-

ty tombs of some of the ancient Egyptian Pharaohs in the Valley of the Kings, near Luxor, Egypt. I was surprised to see that Egyptian hieroglyphics on the walls of the Pharaohs' tombs depicted a *rising up* (or resurrection) to life after death.

But how could those ancient Egyptians, steeped in paganism and cut off from the truth of Almighty God, have known the truth about the resurrection? This puzzled me.

King Tut (Tutankhamen) was buried in a most elaborate tomb. His remains were later removed and placed in the Cairo Museum, along with many articles and artifacts (chairs, table, bed, etc.), where they have since been viewed by millions.

But why did these Pharaohs make such elaborate burial preparations, including having their dead bodies mummified? The simple answer is that they believed in an *afterlife*, when they would open their eyes in a "resurrection." Then they would be able to enjoy all of these material objects (including, in some instances, food) at the very instant of their "resurrection."

But where did the ancient, pagan Egyptians learn this truth? The Bible or history does not reveal this clearly. Noah knew about the resurrection. So did his sons Shem, Japheth and Ham—and the Egyptians descended from Mizraim, the son of Ham. So you can see why the Egyptians were not ignorant of this truth.

But we also must remember that the patriarchs Abraham (who believed in the resurrection—see Heb. 11:19, 35), Jacob, and Joseph (Pharaoh's Prime Minister), had spent many years in Egypt. Since the patriarchs understood that God would resurrect the dead, it is possible that even they may have communicated this truth to the Egyptians.

Immortality and the Greeks. Notice what the famous historian Ed-

ward Gibbon, in his *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, has to say about the development of the idea of man's immortal soul:

"The writings of Cicero represent in the most lively colours the ignorance, the errors, and the uncertainty of the ancient philosophers with regard to the *immortality of the soul* . . . the philosophers who trod in the footsteps of *Plato* deduced a very unjustifiable conclusion, since they asserted, not only the future immortality, but the past eternity of the human soul . . ." (The Modern Library Series, New York, Random House, I, 15, 2, pp. 398-399).

Then Gibbon shows how the belief in an immortal soul came to be looked upon as "truth." "The important truth of the immortality of the soul was inculcated with more diligence as well as success in India, in Assyria, in Egypt, and in Gaul . . . It is incumbent on us to adore the mysterious dispensations of Providence, when we discover that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul is omitted in the law of Moses . . ." (*ibid.*, pp. 400-401).

How did this belief affect the Jewish people? Gibbon says that the Sadducees "rejected the immortality of the soul as an opinion that received no countenance from the divine book" (*ibid.*, p. 402). He then adds that "the immortality of the soul became the prevailing sentiment of the synagogue under the reign of the Asmonaean princes and pontiffs.

"Their [the Jews'] zeal, however, added nothing to its evidence, or even probability; and it was still necessary that the doctrine of life and immortality, which had been dictated by nature, approved by reason, and received by superstition, should obtain the sanction of divine truth from the [so-called] authority and example of Christ" (*ibid.*).

But Christ, by teaching and example, never gave credence to the spurious doctrine of the immortality of the soul.

But what about the *Greeks*? They and other ancient peoples did *not* believe in a resurrection. They believed man had an immortal soul within him, and when he died this soul went off to some place of afterlife. It was this Hellenistic idea of an immortal soul which later influenced the be-

liefs of some of the Jewish people, and many professing Christians.

But, remember, this idea of man being immortal, or having an immortal soul, did not come from God or His Word. It came directly from the *pagans*. For proof of this, look up this subject in any good encyclopedia. For example, check the article "Eschatology" in any of the later editions of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Do Souls Die? What does the Bible teach about man? What happens to him at death? Is man an immortal soul? We are told, "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a *living soul*" (Gen. 2:7).

Man was created a "living soul" (Hebrew, *nephesh*), but it does *not* say that man was created an *immortal* soul. Rather, it goes on to show that man was *mortal*—that he would "die" (Gen. 2:17).

This word *nephesh* (translated as "soul") is also used throughout the Hebrew Scriptures to refer to the lower creatures God had created.

Can the soul die? "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

In many instances the Bible speaks of souls being killed, of them dying and perishing.

When the New Testament writers quoted the Old Testament passages where the word *nephesh* ("soul") was used, they used the Greek equivalent, *psuche*, meaning "a living being," identical in meaning to the Hebrew word *nephesh*.

Notice what Jesus said regarding the soul (*psuche*): "Fear him [God] which is able to destroy both *soul* and body in hell [Gehenna, the lake of fire]" (Matt. 10:28).

Mortal Man. Job, quoting Eliphaz, wrote: "Shall *mortal man* be more just than God?" (Job 4:17.) And in Deuteronomy we are told that it was possible for a man to "smite him [his neighbor] *mortally* that he die" (Deut. 19:11). "Mortal" means that which can die.

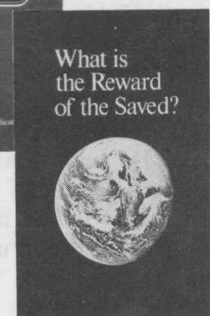
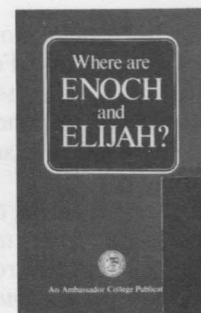
In the New Testament Paul taught that a Christian should not let sin rule in his "*mortal body*" (Rom. 6:12). He also spoke of a Christian's "mortal body" being quickened or made alive (Rom. 8:11).

100 YEARS FROM NOW

Where will you be?

Chances are that no one reading this is going to be a living, breathing human being 100 years from now. It's a bit unsettling, isn't it? Of course, we all know that human beings don't live forever. But thoughts of our own death, no matter how distant that event may seem, lead to thoughts about the "after life." Millions of people feel that for those who live a worthy life—for those who are "saved"—the afterlife is in heaven. Such beliefs are supposedly based on the Bible, but are, in fact, nonbiblical. The Bible does have a great deal to say about an afterlife, but it's surprisingly different from traditional beliefs. If you'd like to read more about the true biblical teaching on this subject, write for these free booklets: *What Is the Reward of the Saved?* and *Where Are Enoch and Elijah?* Send your request to

our office nearest to you.



At the resurrection “this *mortal* must put on *immortality*” (I Cor. 15:53, 54). Paul spoke of Christians’ bodies as “our *mortal* flesh” (II Cor. 4:11). But he added that the time is coming (in the future) when our “mortality” will be “swallowed up of [eternal] *life*” (II Cor. 5:4).

Paul was also inspired to pen a promise of immortality: “To them who by patient continuance in well doing *seek* for glory and honour and *immortality*, [they will be granted] eternal life” (Rom. 2:7).

Did you notice that man must *seek*, as a gift from God, *immortality*? Why? Only God has immortality to give: “Who only [referring to the King of kings—verse 15] hath *immortality*” (I Tim. 6:16). “Now unto the King eternal, *immortal*, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever” (I Tim. 1:17). Eternal life or future immortality was nowhere offered to ancient Israel or to the Gentile nations during the Old Testament period. But God’s grace, His free gift of *eternal*

life, “is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought *life* and *immortality* to light through the gospel” (II Tim. 1:10).

Is Man Conscious in Death? If man is mortal, not immortal, then what happens to him at death? Does his soul immediately waft off to heaven, hell or someplace where he is *conscious*; or does man go to the grave to “sleep” until the time of the resurrection?

David was inspired to write: “His [man’s] breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day *his thoughts perish*” (Ps. 146:4). This scripture reveals that man ceases to *think* at the time of his death.

Solomon revealed that “there is no *work*, nor *device*, nor *knowledge*, nor *wisdom*, in the grave [*sheol*], whither thou goest” (Eccl. 9:10).

This is the clear teaching of your Bible from Genesis to Revelation. *Man is mortal*. He will die. In death he is as one who is “asleep,” awaiting the resurrection. There is absolutely

no mental or physical activity in the grave! (Ps. 6:5; 115:17.)

Numerous resurrections (back to a *physical* life) are recorded in the Bible, but there is not one word about the dead having had any knowledge of what occurred during the interval when they were dead.

Lazarus had been dead “four days” (John 11:17), but was raised from the dead by Jesus Christ. And he had no knowledge of consciousness during that period of time—rather he was as one in a deep sleep—in a state of *unconsciousness*. Christ said: “Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth*; but I go, that I may awake him out of *sleep*” (verse 11).

Does *science* have the answers to explain what man is, what happens at death, what man’s ultimate destiny is to be, or how man can reach that destiny? No, for only God can reveal the answers to these vital questions; and He has made known this truth only in the Bible.

What is man’s hope? According to the Bible, the resurrection is man’s only hope. □

THE RESURRECTION IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

NOTICE now how many Old Testament prophets spoke of man’s resurrection back to life.

David wrote of the resurrection: “My flesh also shall rest in hope. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*sheol*, the grave]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One [Christ] to see corruption” (Ps. 16:9, 10).

The Apostle Peter, commenting on this very scripture, said: “Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both *dead and buried*. . . . He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption” (Acts 2:29, 31).

Christ’s “soul was not left in hell [Greek, *hades*—the grave],” and His

body did not decompose. It was buried in a rock-hewn tomb at a cool time of the year; and it was resurrected before decomposition set in, before it began to decay or putrefy.

Christ’s Resurrection—a Type. Christ’s resurrection was, in fact, a type of the resurrection which God promises to all those who faithfully obey Him.

The Apostle Paul was inspired to write: “But if the Spirit of him that *raised up* Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that *raised up* Christ from the dead shall also *quicken* [enliven] your *mortal* bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom. 8:11).

Resurrection Taught in Old Testament. We have already examined the scripture in Psalm 16:9, 10, which clearly shows that David be-

lieved in a coming resurrection for the Messiah and also for himself. David said: “My flesh also shall *rest* [in the grave] in *hope* [of the coming resurrection]. For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell. . . .”

But long before the time of David, God’s servant *Job* clearly revealed his faith in a coming resurrection. He asked: “If a man *die*, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my *change* come. Thou [God] shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands” (Job 14:14, 15).

Yes, Job knew the time was coming when his Creator would call him from the grave and clothe him with eternal life. “For I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and though

after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh [Hebrew, *without or apart from my flesh*] shall I see God" (Job 19:25, 26).

He knew he would some day be resurrected to see his Redeemer.

The Prophet *Isaiah* believed in the resurrection: "Thy *dead men* shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead" (Isa. 26:19).

Ezekiel also prophesied of a coming resurrection when the "whole house of Israel" will be restored to life. His vision of a "valley which was full of bones" is well known: "O ye dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus saith the Lord God unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek. 37:4-6).

Furthermore, God says through *Ezekiel*: "Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel" (verse 12).

The Prophet *Daniel* also foretold a coming resurrection when "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan. 12:2).

An angel appeared unto *Daniel* and told him: "But go thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest [in the grave], and stand [stand up in a resurrection] in thy lot at the end of the days" (verse 13).

The primary definition of the word "resurrect" itself is "to raise from the dead: restore to life."

In the *Arndt-Gingrich Greek Lexicon*, the Greek word translated "resurrection" is *anastasis*, which means to "rise" or to be "resurrected" from the dead. In Hebrews 11:35 it is translated, "Women received their dead raised to life again. . . ." This translation tends to clarify the meaning of the original Greek term. To be "raised to life again" after having once experienced death is to be resurrected. *Raised* has to do with being elevated out of the grave.

Hosea also believed in the resur-

rection: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction. . ." (Hosea 13:14).

The eleventh chapter of Hebrews gives a long list of faithful servants of God who, during Old Testament times, obeyed God and often would not accept deliverance from a horrible death "that they might [through their martyrdom] obtain a better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35).

Abraham had such faith that he accounted "that God was able to raise him [his son, Isaac] up, even from the dead" (verse 19).

Abraham knew that God had promised the Holy Land to him and his children as an everlasting possession. The only way *Abraham* could receive the fulfillment of this promise was by a resurrection from the dead. "For he looked for a city [in which he and other faithful ones would dwell—after their resurrection] which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (verse 10). *Abraham* knew he would be raised from his grave and would someday dwell with God and with other glorified humans in New Jerusalem, in the new earth, where there would be no more sin, sorrow or death to mar eternal happiness.

Many have failed to realize that even *Moses* prophesied of the saints being glorified in a resurrection at the second coming of Christ when they will be united with Him. "The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints; from his right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall [in the future] receive of thy words" (Deut. 33:2, 3).

There were not "ten thousands of saints" with *Moses* at the time when God gave Israel the Ten Commandments at Sinai. Only *Joshua* and *Caleb* were permitted to enter the Promised Land. *Moses*, *Aaron* and *Miriam* were also saints, but the vast majority of the Israelites were carnal, faithless, and totally rebellious. They were anything but saints.

The afore-quoted prophecy refers to the time of the second coming of

Jesus Christ, when many thousands of saints will be resurrected from their graves (Israelites and Gentiles) and will be joined unto Christ, as His Bride. Then Christ will give them His law to teach all nations in the wonderful, utopian World Tomorrow, in the Kingdom of God (see I Thes. 4:13-18).

Man's Only Hope. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, commenting on Daniel 12:2, says: "It should be noted that it is not the immortality of the soul that is spoken of but the resurrection of the dead, who have remained dead ('sleep in the dust') until the end-time (when 'your people shall be delivered'). This remains the hope and expectation normative in Judaism and Christianity ("Eschatology," 14th edition, 1973, VIII, p. 696).

You will search the Bible in vain to find any other teaching. The Bible teaches the resurrection—not the immortality of the soul.

If you are interested in a further study of this subject, write for our free article titled "What Is Man?" □

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THE FIRST RESURRECTION

WHAT is the real hope of the true Christian? Will he spend eternity lounging in idleness and ease? Or will the resurrected, newborn Christian spend eternity in happy, but productive, activity—faithfully serving his Creator?

Most professing Christians have a rather foggy idea of what future life in the Kingdom of God will be like. They know very little about biblical teaching concerning the “resurrection of the dead”—yet this is one of the basic doctrines of the Bible (Heb. 6:2).

But do you realize you can know what it will be like in the next life?

The Prophet Isaiah wrote: “Since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him” (Isa. 64:4).

But the Apostle Paul explained that a Christian can comprehend what God has prepared for those that love Him. “But God hath revealed them unto us [true believers] by his Spirit: for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God” (I Cor. 2:9, 10). Many scriptures speak of this “mystery” (Rom. 16:25; Eph. 3:3, 5, 9; Rev. 10:7).

Satan has deceived the whole world on this all-important subject of the resurrection of the dead (Rev. 12:9). Many scriptures reveal that the whole world is in darkness, ignorance and superstition.

The plain Bible teaching on the subject of the resurrection(s) has been submerged in darkness for many centuries. There are no Bible commentaries or dictionaries to which you can go to get the truth on this subject. Invariably, you are given a noxious mixture of truth and error—light and darkness—and wind up *confused* if you believe what the so-called authorities tell you.

But it is high time for professing Christians to go directly to the Word of God to learn the real, unadulterated truth.

How deceived has the world be-

come on this vital subject of the resurrections?

A common *misbelief* is expressed in the 1972 edition of *The World Book Encyclopedia*: “Most Christians believe that on the *last day* of the world *all the dead* will come to life. They call the day, Judgment Day, because God will judge everyone” (“Resurrection,” XVI, p. 245).

Some believe that at death their “souls” go immediately to heaven, purgatory, limbo or hell.

“The Westminster Shorter Catechism (question xxxvii.) states the doctrine that the *bodies of the dead* rest in their *graves* till the *resurrection*, but that their *souls* do immediately pass into glory [heaven]. This was the view of the Reformers” (“Death,” *The New Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge*, 1911, p. 382).

According to this teaching the “body” must rest in the grave till the “soul” can be *reunited* with it at the resurrection.

If the righteous are already in heavenly bliss, is it logical to think that they would be made to return to this earth to be reunited with their earthly “bodies”?

(Editor’s note: For an in-depth look into these false concepts of heaven, hell and the immortal soul, write for these three free publications: *What Is the Reward of the Saved?*, *Is There a Real Hell Fire?* and “What Is Man?”)

It is time to strip off the scales of paganism from our eyes and look at the plain truth revealed in the Bible.

There are numerous references in the Old Testament to the resurrection, but only the Prophet Daniel begins to hint that there might be more than one resurrection.

Daniel wrote: “And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to *everlasting life*, and some to *shame* and *everlasting contempt* [or abhorrence]” (Dan. 12:2).

This verse does *not* say that those resurrected to “everlasting life” and

those resurrected to “shame” will both come up at the same time—in the same resurrection. That is what many have mistakenly assumed.

Jesus Christ said: “. . . The hour is coming, in the which *all that are in the graves* shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done *good*, unto the *resurrection of life* [eternal]; and they that have done *evil*, unto the *resurrection of damnation* [judgment]” (John 5:28, 29).

But note that Christ did not say that those who had done “good” would be resurrected at the same time with those who had done “evil.”

The Apostle Paul, when he was speaking before Felix, the governor of Judea, said that he had “hope toward God” of a resurrection, in which, affirmed Paul, the Jews also believed. He plainly told Felix “that there shall be a *resurrection* of the dead, both of the *just* and *unjust*” (Acts 24:15). As Paul “reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come,” the unjust Felix trembled (verse 25). Paul did not say the just and the unjust would rise up at the same time.

This same apostle wrote at length regarding the resurrection(s) in I Corinthians 15. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall *all* be made alive. But every man in his own *order*: Christ the firstfruits; afterward *they that are Christ’s* at his [second] coming. Then cometh *the end . . .*” (verses 22-24).

Now if one turns to the twentieth chapter of Revelation, he can see what is meant by “the end.” Paul was referring to the end of the one-thousand-year reign of Christ and the saints on this earth. It will not be until sometime *after* the thousand years are over that the *second resurrection* occurs (see Rev. 20:7-12).

Jesus Christ is depicted in Revelation 19:11-21 as coming on “a white horse” and then “he shall [in the future] rule them [the nations] with a rod of iron” (verse 15).

The resurrected saints (joined by the living saints) will be caught up to meet Christ in the air at His second

coming, and they as kings and priests will “reign on the earth” (Rev. 5:10).

To these saints Christ promises: “He that overcometh, and keepeth my works . . . to him will I give *power over the nations*: and he shall rule them [under Christ] with a rod of iron . . .” (Rev. 2:26, 27).

The Time Element. But when and how will these glorified, then-made-immortal saints rule with Christ? And for how long?

The Apostle John was inspired to give the answer: “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and *judgment* was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded . . . and they *lived* and reigned [ruled] with Christ *a thousand years*” (Rev. 20:4).

John, in vision, saw those who had been beheaded now *resurrected* (at Christ’s triumphal second coming) and given governing positions or “judgment.”

Paul gives more details of this glorious resurrection of the saints: “For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which *sleep in Jesus* will God bring with him. . . . For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the trump of God: and the *dead in Christ shall rise first*: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in *the clouds* to meet the Lord *in the air*: and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (I Thes. 4:14-17).

Note that it does not say the saints will go to “heaven” to meet Christ, but that He will come (probably billions of miles) from “heaven” to the atmosphere of this earth, and the saints will rise to meet Him “*in the air*.”

Now notice a prophecy back in Zechariah which shows *where* Christ and the saints will go—after this rendezvous in the air:

“And his feet [the Lord’s—verse 1] shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives . . .” (Zech. 14:4).

At this time will Christ be alone? “. . . And the Lord my God [wrote Zechariah] shall come, and *all the saints* with thee” (verse 5). But where will Christ go? Back to *heaven* with the saints? “And the Lord shall be king over all the *earth*: in that day

shall there be one Lord, and his name one” (verse 9).

It should not amaze us to find that Christ will return to stand on the Mount of Olives. Nearly two thousand years ago, His angels told the disciples that Christ would return to this earth just as He left it—and He had been standing talking with His disciples atop Mount Olivet just before this promise was given (Acts 1:4-12).

The Apostle Paul also spoke of Christ’s coming at the “last trump”—the time when He will gather His saints unto Himself. “Now thus I say, brethren, that *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God*; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be *changed*, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be *changed*. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and *this mortal must put on immortality*” (I Cor. 15:50-53).

These and other scriptures show that it is only the just, the righteous (dead), who are resurrected at Christ’s second coming.

John shows that those who had been martyred will be raised to life and to a position of rulership during the thousand-year rule of Christ. But the unjust dead will not be resurrected until the *end* of this period: “But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This [referring to those martyred—verse 4] is the *first resurrection*. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first resurrection*: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years” (Rev. 20:5, 6).

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Then, after the thousand years are expired, Satan goes out to stir up more trouble on this earth. And it is still some time later before the Great White Throne Judgment takes place—at which time the others who are still dead (years after the millennium has ended) are made to “*stand before God*” in the *second* resurrection—when they will have their *first chance*.

Your Guarantee. What is your guarantee that you will be resurrected when Christ returns to this earth? How can you make sure you will be in the first resurrection to immortality?

It is “they who are *Christ’s* at his coming” who will be in the first resurrection (I Cor. 15:23).

But who are “Christ’s”? Paul said: “Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his” (Rom. 8:9).

It is only those who are filled and led by the Spirit of God who will be in the first resurrection. “For as many as are *led* by the Spirit of God, they are the [begotten] *sons of God*” (verse 14).

God’s Spirit in us is like a *seed* that is developing into godly character.

Paul continues: “But *if the Spirit* of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also *quicken* [make alive] your *mortal* bodies by [the power of] his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (verse 11).

There it is! If we have the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit in us when we *die*, then we will be resurrected through the power of that same Spirit—at the second coming of Jesus Christ.

Paul then explains that we are earnestly waiting for that time when we shall be born as spiritual beings into the family of God. Remember, Christ said: “Ye must be born again” (John 3:7).

Paul explained this soon-coming new birth: “For the earnest expectation of the creature [man] waiteth for the *manifestation of the sons of God*” (Rom. 8:19). That is what the true Christian waits for—earnestly longing for the time when he will be *born* into the family of God—as a divine, glorified son of God.

He continues: “. . . Even we our-

selves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption [sonship], to wit [in other words], the *redemption of our body*" (verse 23).

What did he mean by "the redemption of our body"? Paul begins to explain in the book of Philippians. By way of background he mentions that he gave up *everything* in order to serve Christ and became willing to suffer "the loss of all things" (Phil. 3:7, 8). Why?

"That I may know him, and the *power of his resurrection* . . . If by any means I might attain unto the *resurrection of the dead*" (verses 10, 11).

He then went on to explain that "our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven . . ." (verse 20).

And it is from there—from heaven—that we "look for the Saviour." "Who [meaning Christ] shall *change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body*, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself" (verses, 20, 21).

This redemption of the body—this *change* from mortal flesh to a spiritual body—is the only hope held out to the Christian.

What Will We Be Like? What kind of bodies will we have in the resurrection? We will be divested of our "natural" bodies and will put on "spiritual" bodies. "It is sown a *natural body*; it is raised a *spiritual body*" (I Cor. 15:44).

But what will "a spiritual body" be like?

If we can know what kind of body Christ had after His resurrection, then we can also know what kind of a spiritual body we will have in the resurrection.

The Apostle John tells us: "Beloved, now are we the [begotten] *sons of God*, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, *we shall be like him*; for we shall see him as he is" (I John 3:2).

What kind of body did Jesus have after His resurrection?

He appeared repeatedly after He was risen. ". . . He shewed himself alive after his passion [suffering] by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days . . ." (Acts 1:3). He was seen by Peter, by the twelve, and by "above five hundred brethren at

once . . . After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles." He was seen by numerous women, and lastly by the Apostle Paul (I Cor. 15:5-8).

After His resurrection, Christ was, generally speaking, easily recognized. Christ met with the two Marys. "And they came and held him by the feet, and worshipped him" (Matt. 28:9).

Doubting Thomas even felt Christ's side and the nail prints in His hands to prove to himself that Jesus was real—and not an apparition (John 20:24-29).

On another occasion He appeared suddenly in the midst of the disciples: "But they were terrified and affrighted, and *supposed* that they had seen a *spirit*. And he said unto them. . . Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: *handle me*, and see; for a *spirit hath not flesh and bones*, as ye see me have" (Luke 24:37-39). Christ had a glorified, spiritual body, but He was not "a spirit."

Then the disciples gave Christ "a piece of broiled *fish*, and of an *honeycomb*. And he took it, and *did eat* before them" (verses 42, 43).

Notice also that Christ spoke of *drinking* in the soon-coming Kingdom of God: "I will not drink of the fruit of the vine, *until* the kingdom of God shall come" (Luke 22:18).

So Jesus Christ manifested Himself in a physical form after His resurrection. He could suddenly appear to the disciples when they were assembled behind closed doors (John 20:19). He could also just "vanish" out of their sight (Luke 24:31).

Furthermore, Christ could travel astronomical distances at lightning speeds—probably at the *speed of thought*. It was on the first day of the week that Jesus appeared to Mary Magdalene, but she was commanded: "*Touch me not*; for I am not yet ascended to my Father . . ." (John 20:17).

Later that same day, the two Marys did *touch* Him ("held him by the feet"—Matt. 28:9), thereby proving that He had travelled to heaven and back that same day.

If human beings were able to travel at the speed of light (186,000 miles per second), it would take them more than four years to travel to the nearest star. (And the Bible implies that

heaven is further away.) Yet Christ could flash to heaven and back—undoubtedly at the speed of thought—annihilating time and space!

How can spiritual beings travel through space at such fantastic speeds? We simply do not know. But they can, nonetheless.

Once the saints have been glorified by a resurrection from the dead, they will not have to eat for sustenance; but just as Christ ate after His resurrection, so will the saints. Why will they eat? Probably solely for pleasure.

Let us notice further what we will be like in the resurrection. The Sadducees "which deny that there is any resurrection" asked Christ a trick question: "Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven [brothers] had her to wife" (Luke 20:33).

Christ answered: ". . . They which shall be accounted worthy to obtain *that world*, and the *resurrection* from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage" (verse 35).

He didn't say that there would *not* be sex differences in the appearance of "men" and "women." But there will be no sexual function of reproduction in the resurrection.

Can those who are resurrected be killed? "*Neither can they die* any more: for they are *equal* unto the angels; and are the *children of God*, being the children of the resurrection" (verse 36).

Where did the Sadducees go wrong in their reasoning? Christ told them: "Ye do err, not knowing the *scriptures*, nor the *power of God*" (Matt. 22:29).

If people really understood the Word of God better, and if they understood how powerful God is, then they would realize that it is very easy for Him to resurrect "all that are in the graves."

In the resurrection we shall be "*as the angels of God in heaven*" (verse 30). Christ did not say we would *be* angels, but we will be like angels in that we will be *immortal* and will possess powers and glory now only shared by God and the holy angels.

No, we will not be angels, but we will be the literal "children of God."

The Bible shows that angels are sons of God by creative fiat but they are not and can never become the actual be-

gotten and finally *born* sons of God. But we are to be *born* of God—born into His family. Then the resurrected, glorified, immortalized saints will live in eternal happiness for ever and ever: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain . . .” (verse 4).

These sons of God, then born into the very God family, will “*inherit all things*”; and I will be his God,

and he shall be *my son*” (verse 7).

Will they ever have to suffer any more evil trials? “And there shall be no more curse . . . and his servants shall *serve* him” (Rev. 22:3).

What will they do throughout eternity? Just sit back and bask in idleness, ease and luxury, and lapping up never-ending rivers of pleasures?

No, they will be *busy*. “. . . And they shall *reign* [rule or govern] for ever and ever” (verse 5). And remember, “his servants shall *serve*

him”—throughout all eternity (verse 3). Then will come to pass the inspired words of Hebrews 2:8: “Thou hast put *all* things under his [man’s] feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him.”

We should strive to be in the “first resurrection” (Rev. 20:6). It is spoken of as “a better resurrection” (Heb. 11:35). Those who rise in that resurrection will be wonderfully blessed of God! □

THE SECOND RESURRECTION

FORMER Prime Minister Winston Churchill once said before the American Congress: “He must indeed have a blind soul who cannot see that *some great purpose and design* is being worked out here below . . .”

What is that purpose which the Creator is working out on this earth among mere mortals?

We have seen in previous articles in this series that man’s only hope is the resurrection. Also, we saw biblical proof that man is mortal—and that he can only receive immortality as a gift from God by a resurrection from the dead.

Furthermore, we saw that the Bible clearly reveals there is to be more than one resurrection. There is an orderly plan whereby different ones are to be resurrected at different times. “But every man [will be resurrected] in his own *order* . . .” (I Cor. 15:23). There will be a proper “order” or *succession* of resurrections.

The true, faithful Christians will be the first raised to life, and they will be resurrected to immortality at the second coming of Christ (see I Cor. 15:49-53; I Thes. 4:14-17).

Resurrection of the Unjust. But what about all those who are *not* resurrected at the second coming of Jesus? Will they remain forever dead, or will God also resurrect them at a later date? And will they be raised back to life merely to be flung into the lake of fire? What about all the unsaved multitudes reared under

Communitistic atheism, who have no Bibles, and have never heard the name of Christ or understood the gospel?

Some say these multitudes will have a *second* chance. But have they really ever had a first chance to know Jesus Christ as Saviour?

Revelation 20:5 begins to give the answer. “But the *rest of the dead* lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.”

The expression “this is the first resurrection” refers back to those in verse four who are raised to immortality at Christ’s coming to become rulers with Him as kings and priests on the earth during the millennium.

Many have made the mistake of thinking there will be only *one* resurrection—when both wicked and righteous will rise in judgment to be either rewarded or punished. But Revelation 20:5 plainly brands this an error. As a matter of fact, *nowhere* does the Bible say that God will resurrect all the dead in the same resurrection.

True, the Apostle Paul affirmed “that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the *just* and *unjust*” (Acts 24:15).

And Jesus Christ said: “. . . For the hour is coming, in the which *all* that are in the *graves* shall hear his voice, and shall *come forth*; they that have done *good*, unto the resurrection of *life* [eternal]; and they that have done *evil*, unto the resurrection

of damnation [or, better translated, *judgment*]” (John 5:28, 29).

But let us not fall into the common error of assuming that Paul and Christ meant the “just” and the “unjust” would be resurrected at the same time.

We have seen that the Apostle John wrote of a “first resurrection” and a “second resurrection.” So where does that leave us?

Since all the “just” or righteous dead are resurrected at the second coming of Christ, leaving the “unjust” dead in their graves, are all these *unjust* dead eternally lost—without any *hope* of ever having an opportunity to live again and obtain immortality?

A Resurrection of Mortals. Are the unjust ones merely to be resurrected so God can fling them into the lake of fire to be burned up? What did Christ mean when He said that “they that have *done evil* [will be resurrected], unto the resurrection of *judgment*”? (John 5:29.)

Who are the “unjust” ones mentioned by Paul in Acts 24:15? Are those who died in sin really fully accountable for their actions in their “first life”? Have they ever had a chance for eternal salvation?

Astounding as it may seem to people who do not really know the scriptural teaching regarding the resurrections, countless billions are yet to be brought back to a *mortal life* to have their “first chance” to receive salvation.

Think for a moment. Could the untold billions who have lived and died possibly have received salvation? Have the vast majority ever had a chance to understand the Bible? Have they, then, really rejected salvation? No! Many individuals have lived their entire lifetimes without ever seeing a Bible or even hearing the name of Jesus Christ.

Are they forever doomed simply because they did not have the Word of God, and did not know that Christ is the Saviour of all mankind? What nonsense!

What Constitutes a "Chance"? Could countless billions of Hindus, Buddhists, Confucianists, Taoists, animists and others who have not known about Christ and salvation be held *guilty* or accountable to God for not having received that vital knowledge?

Or is it possible that they could receive salvation through some other person, or by a *different* way? The Apostle Peter emphatically answers: "*Neither is there salvation in any other: for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved*" (Acts 4:12).

Human beings can only be saved if and when they learn of Jesus Christ as their Saviour who died for them, and then accept that supreme sacrifice in payment for their personal sins.

Christ said: "I am the *door*: by me if any man enter in, he shall be *saved*, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10:9). He made it abundantly clear that anyone who "entereth not by the door [Christ] into the sheepfold, but climbeth up *some other way*, the same is a thief and a robber" (verse 1).

There is no other "door" by which we can enter the Kingdom of God.

Can You Have a Second Chance? Someone will ask: "Do you mean to say that God will resurrect men back to a mortal life, and give them a *second* chance?" No, this is not what the Bible teaches at all.

But the scriptures plainly reveal that the time is coming when God will raise the "unjust" dead—those who through no fault of their own were deceived and never understood the way of salvation—and will at that time reveal His plan of salvation to them.

Don't forget this basic truth: It is "impossible for God to lie" (Heb. 6:18). And "the scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35): therefore, whatever God promises in His Word, He will do.

God's Word plainly says: "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, *not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance*" (II Pet. 3:9).

It is not God's will that heathen animists, pagan idolators or other sincere people who may practice a false religion, should perish. A loving Creator wills that "all should come to repentance"—in *His* own time and way.

The Apostle Paul was also inspired to write that God our Saviour "will have *all men to be saved*, and to come unto the *knowledge of the truth*" (I Tim. 2:4). He then went on to show that "there is one God, and *one mediator* between God and men, the man Christ Jesus; who gave himself a ransom for *all*, to be testified *in due time*" (verses 5, 6).

It is God's responsibility to grant people the knowledge of the truth. The vast majority who have ever lived and died were, through no fault of their own, deprived of this knowledge which would have made salvation possible in their *first* life-time. It therefore becomes imperative that God give them their *first real chance* to hear, understand and follow God's way of salvation. But how? By raising them from the dead to renewed physical life in a second resurrection.

But millions of Christians erroneously believe that when one dies in sin he is lost forever. Many feel under a burden to see that Christ is preached to the heathen in Africa, Asia and other parts of the earth—because they think that if these pagans die in sin, they will miss out on salvation forever.

One scripture oft quoted to prove that a person who dies in sin is forever doomed is Ecclesiastes 11:3. "... If the tree fall toward the south, or toward the north, in the place where the tree falleth, there it shall be." This scripture, referring *in context* to certain instructions Solomon was giving with regard to the impor-

tance of making the most out of an uncertain and relatively short human lifetime, has *nothing* to do with any resurrection. Solomon does *not* say that if one, through no fault of his own, dies in sin, he will never have a chance to repent and receive salvation.

What Is Judgment? In John 5:29, Jesus Christ spoke of "the resurrection of *damnation*." Nearly all modern translations correctly render this last word as "judgment" rather than "damnation."

But what does it mean to be resurrected to *judgment*? Most Christians woefully misunderstand. They think of "judgment" as only a time when a *sentence* is passed—rewarding the righteous or condemning the guilty. But that is a false concept.

Notice what the Apostle Peter wrote: "For the time [beginning nearly 2,000 years ago] is come that *judgment* must begin at the house of God . . ." (I Pet. 4:17). What did he mean? He did not just mean *condemnation* had begun at God's house, the Church.

Rather he referred to the fact that *God is now judging* Christians. We are now having our chance, and we will never have another. "How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation . . . ?" (Heb. 2:3.) See also Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:26-29. God holds every Christian strictly accountable for his actions. He is *now* judging every believer according to His Word. But the vast majority of mankind, to this very day, do not understand or believe the truth of God. They have been deceived by the devil (Rev. 12:9). And it is God's responsibility to someday see that these deceived billions become *undeceived* and are given their chance for salvation—for He is not willing that any perish!

When Christ said some would come forth in a resurrection to "judgment," he meant they would be raised up from their graves to a time when they would learn the truth and have their opportunity to walk in it. Then God will render a decision—a verdict—for each, on the basis of how they do.

Judgment of Unjust Sodom. Some are amazed to learn that Jesus made a number of statements in which he said that the peoples of Sodom, Go-

morrah, Tyre, Sidon, Nineveh and those living in Christ's day will all *rise up* in the judgment together. Mercy will be shown to all, but the Gentile cities will find their judgment period more bearable than those who personally heard the teachings of Jesus Christ and yet rejected Him and His gospel.

Christ solemnly affirmed: "Verily I say unto you, it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the *day of judgment*, than for that city [which rejected His teachings]" (Matt. 10:15).

To those cities who saw His miracles, Christ said: "But I say unto you [people of Bethsaida and Chorazin], It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon at the *day of judgment*, than for you" (Matt. 11:21, 22).

Then Jesus warned Capernaum that if the mighty works done by Him in that city had been done in *Sodom*, Sodom would have existed to that very day. "But I say unto you, That it shall be more tolerable for the land of *Sodom*, in the *day of judgment*, than for thee" (verse 24).

Furthermore, Christ made a similar pronouncement regarding Nineveh: "The men of Nineveh shall *rise in judgment with this generation*, and shall condemn it: because they repented at the preaching of Jonas; and, behold, a greater than Jonas is here" (Matt. 12:41).

Jesus then explained that "The queen of the south [Queen of Sheba] shall *rise up in the judgment with this generation*, and shall condemn it; for she came from the uttermost parts of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, a greater than Solomon is here" (verse 42).

What did Jesus mean? Just this: The Queen of Sheba, the peoples of Nineveh, Tyre, Sidon, Sodom and Gomorrah will find repentance easier in their "day of judgment" than will those who rejected Christ and His gospel message.

Resurrected Israel's Judgment. Jesus Christ was not preaching a "new doctrine" when He spoke of the resurrection of the peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah. It was clearly indicated, if the people only had eyes to see, in the 16th chapter of the book of Ezekiel.

Much of the chapter relates to the

people of Jerusalem (verse 2). It details their abominations, calling *Samaria* the "elder sister" of Jerusalem, and Sodom her "younger sister" (verse 46). Then God points out that the sins of the people of Jerusalem had committed were more abominable than those of her sisters—Sodom and Samaria.

Finally, Ezekiel prophesies of the time when the Sodomites, Samaritans and the people of Jerusalem will all be brought up out of their *captivity in death* and will finally receive salvation.

"When I shall bring again their *captivity*, the captivity of *Sodom* and her daughters, and the captivity of *Samaria* and her daughters, then will I bring again the captivity of thy captives in the midst of them" (verse 53). The peoples of Sodom and Gomorrah have been held captive in the grave for nearly four thousand years. But through Christ's death and resurrection all of those held captive in the grave will be released.

"... When he [Christ] ascended up on high [at His resurrection], he led *captivity [death] captive*..." (Eph. 4:8). Christ was held captive in the grave for three days and nights, but at His resurrection He "led captivity captive." He will do the same for all mankind in due time by resurrecting "all that are in the graves."

When God *resurrects* the peoples of ancient Sodom, Samaria and Jerusalem, they will "return to their *former estate*"—meaning that God will place them in the land where they once lived (Ezek. 16:55).

Ezekiel also prophesied elsewhere of a coming resurrection of all the dead Israelites of past centuries.

The prophet first sees them as long dead in a "valley of dry bones" (Ezek. 37:1-10). "Then he [God] said unto me, Son of man, these bones are the *whole house of Israel*.... Behold, O my people, I will *open your graves*, and cause you to come up out of your *graves*, and bring you into the *land of Israel*. And ye shall know that I am the Lord, when I have *opened your graves*, O my people, and brought you out of your *graves*" (verses 11-13).

Then God promises He will put His Spirit in them (giving them the prerequisite for salvation) and will

place them in their "own land" (verse 14).

Mercy Upon All. Even the Apostle Paul prophesied of a coming resurrection for carnal Israel.

Paul wrote: "God hath *not* cast away his people [Israel] which he foreknew" (Rom. 11:2).

Paul explains that the majority of Israel are spiritually blinded (verse 7). And who is responsible? "... God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear..." (verse 8). Why?

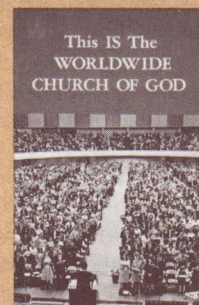
"For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world"—it makes possible the salvation of the *Gentiles!*—"what shall the receiving of them be, but *life from the dead?*" (Verse 15.) Yes, they are to be raised from the dead and given life by the

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God who loves them and all humanity.

Paul calls this a “mystery”—“that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved . . .” (verses 25, 26).

What Paul is saying is simply this: God has determined to call and choose only a limited number from *Israel* in this age. He is not trying to save *all Israel* now! He therefore calls those Israelites whom He wills, but allows the rest to remain blinded so that He can call a number of *Gentiles* to fulfill His purpose.

“For as ye [Gentiles] in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their [Israel’s] unbelief: Even so have these [unbelieving Israelites] also now *not* believed, that *through your mercy they also may obtain mercy*. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have *mercy upon all*” (verses 30-32).

When the Apostle Paul understood the mystery of God’s great master plan, he was filled with praise: “O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable

are his *judgments*, and his ways past finding out!” (Verse 33.)

God is not trying to save the whole world now! Rather, He has allowed Satan to deceive the world with his false teaching (Rev. 12:9). He must prove to Satan and to man that Satan’s way produces bad results!

Great White Throne Judgment. Just what is the Great White Throne Judgment? “The resurrection of the righteous will take place at the coming of Christ (I Thes. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:53), [the resurrection] of the unsaved at the Great White Throne Judgment after the Kingdom Age (Rev. 20:11-15).” (*Unger’s Bible Dictionary*, 1966 ed., article, “Resurrection.”)

God is great, merciful, loving, not willing that *any* should perish. He wills that all come to the knowledge of the truth and to true repentance. But He knows it is better that most people come to this knowledge of the truth in a better world than ours. That is why these people will be raised up in the *second resurrection*—a resurrection to a mortal, fleshly, earthly existence.

Here is how it is depicted in the

20th chapter of Revelation. “And I saw a *great white throne*, and him that sat on it. . . . And I saw the *dead*, small and great, *stand* before God . . .” (Rev. 20:11, 12).

“The books [Greek, *biblos*—books or Bible] were opened” (verse 12). This means that those raised up at that time will have the books of the Bible opened to their knowledge and understanding. And also the “book of life” will be open so their names can be written in it when each repents of his sins, accepts Christ as personal Saviour, and receives God’s Holy Spirit. Then they will be judged “according to their works” (verse 12).

Thus we see the “rest of the dead” raised to life, *standing* before God to be *judged*—but not to be *condemned*, as so many falsely assume. God will then judge those “unjust” dead, who are at that time raised to life, just as He now judges His own house—His Church (I Pet. 4:17). The book of life will be opened so they can all receive eternal life, if they will!

How thrilling to understand God’s master plan which He is working out here below among mortal men. □

THE THIRD RESURRECTION

HOW MANY professing Christians really know what the Bible says about the resurrections?

Most Christians who profess to believe in the resurrection think the “just” and the “unjust” will all be raised to life at the same time—either to be rewarded or punished.

Some, however, believe the Bible teaches there will be two resurrections.

But how many Christians know that according to God’s master plan there will actually be *three* resurrections—not just one or two?

In previous articles in this series, we have seen that the first resurrection will take place at the second coming of Jesus Christ and will include only the “just,” who will be raised to life and clothed with im-

mortality at that time (I Thes. 4:13-18; I Cor. 15:53).

We also saw clear biblical proof that after Christ’s one-thousand-year rule God will resurrect those who in past ages died in sin and ignorance, but who (through no fault of their own) never had a *chance for salvation*—in many cases never heard of Jesus Christ or saw a Bible in their entire lives. Or if they did hear of Christ or see a Bible, they were spiritually blinded (see Rom. 11:7).

These deceived billions did not ask to be born into a world of ignorance and superstition; and since “God is not willing that any should perish,” it is His responsibility to see that they are *raised up* and given a knowledge of the truth (II Pet. 3:9; I Tim. 2:4-6).

Three Resurrections. The twentieth chapter of Revelation clearly speaks of *three* resurrections.

After mentioning the second coming of Christ (Rev. 19:11-12), the apostle John writes that a mighty angel will bind the devil and cast him into an abyss, where he will be unable to deceive the nations for one thousand years (Rev. 20:1-3).

But what happens immediately after this? The saints who have been caught up to meet Christ at His return (I Thes. 4:13-17) will then be given charge of this earth—ruling with Christ for one thousand years. “And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and *judgment* was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were *beheaded* . . . and they lived [again] and reigned with Christ a thousand years” (Rev. 20:4).

Those who take part in this resurrection are greatly blessed by being privileged to take part in the "first resurrection" (verse 5).

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the *first resurrection*: on such the *second death* hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years" (verse 6).

When do the remainder of the dead rise? "But *the rest of the dead* lived *not* again until the thousand years were finished" (verse 5).

This verse plainly shows that others are to be resurrected one thousand years later.

Verses 11-12 (of Revelation 20) describe a coming resurrection and judgment of that portion of the "rest of the dead" who never had their chance for salvation. Verse 12 reads: "And I saw the *dead*, small and great, *stand* before God; and the books [Greek: *biblos*, perhaps referring to the books of the Bible] were opened: and another book was opened, which is the *book of life* . . ."

When these billions are resurrected, God will open up the Bible to their understanding. They will be given their first real chance to repent, accept Christ as their Saviour and receive His precious Holy Spirit. Their names will then be written in the book of life.

Now consider verse 13: "And the *sea* gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [Greek: *hades*, grave] delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were *judged* every man according to their *works*."

Here is pictured another resurrection period. Who are these dead? What resurrection is this?

Notice that there is no statement that the "book of life" is opened up to them. Why is the "book of life" not "opened" in connection with those who rise up in this final resurrection? Simply because they must have *already had their chance* for salvation—and rejected it!

God is not willing that any perish, yet it is not His will to *force* the truth on anyone. He will not force salvation down anyone's throat.

God offers salvation freely to all those who will receive it (Acts 2:21). And He has made every man a free

moral agent—with the power of volition, the power to *choose*. Those who do not voluntarily accept God's offer and follow that *way of life* necessary to receive life eternal will not receive it.

Those who will come up in this *third* resurrection are the incorrigibly wicked. They are the last human beings to be resurrected from their graves—from "the sea" (where they may have perished in their first life), from death (without burial in their first life), or from "hell" (a hole or grave in the ground).

These miserable beings will be *sentenced* by God—and *executed*: "And death and hell were cast into the *lake of fire*. This is the *second death*. And whosoever was not found written in the *book of life* was cast into the lake of fire" (verses 14, 15). Lamentably, none who will be resurrected in this resurrection will have their names in the Lamb's book of life. Therefore they will all perish!

This resurrection (which will result in the second death) is vividly described in Luke's Gospel. A certain heartless "rich man" is resurrected to a horrible fate. "And in *hell* [Greek: *hades*, grave] he *lift up* his eyes, being in *torments* . . . [And he said,] I am tormented in this *flame*" (Luke 16:23-24).

The wicked will all be cremated when God burns up the earth, turning it into the final Gehenna (see II Peter 3:10).

But what is the truth of this parable? The rich man is raised up out of his *grave* at the very end of the plan of God for humanity on earth. He has had *no knowledge* of the passing of time—"the dead know not anything" (Eccl. 9:5). The "rich man" thought that his brothers were still alive (Luke 16:27, 28—but other scriptures reveal they, too, had died).

He now realized that he had missed the boat; he had missed out on receiving salvation. There is now "a great gulf *fixed*" (verse 26) between him and those who are with Abraham in the Kingdom of God. It is *now* impossible for anyone to pass either way through this great gulf: impossible for those who are immortal to become mortal; impossible for the mortal ones to receive immortality.

Jesus said: "Strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto

you, will seek to enter in [the Kingdom of God], and *shall not be able*" (Luke 13:24). Continuing with the context, Jesus then goes on to picture Himself as One who refuses to answer the knock of *incorrigible* sinners who have previously rejected salvation (as shown by other scriptures). In verse 28 He says: "There shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when ye shall see Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets, in the kingdom of God, and you yourselves [incorrigible sinners] *thrust out* [not able to enter the Kingdom]."

When the time for the third resurrection arrives, everyone will have had his *chance*. Everyone's ultimate destiny will have been "fixed" eternally. It will be forever too late for anyone who—after receiving his chance for salvation—sinned *willfully*, thereby rejecting eternal life. Those who rejected God and His way must then reap the consequences of that decision—the *second death*, from which there will be no resurrection. How awful! How tragic!

God Is Just and Merciful. God is NOT in any sense a sadist. He is "not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Pet. 3:9; cf., I Tim. 2:4). But to those who refuse His mercy, He is a God of justice and judgment (Heb. 10:29-31). He wants those who leave Him with no alternative but to put them to death for eternity to know what He earnestly desired and wished them to achieve.

So God is going to compel the incorrigibly wicked to see Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and all the prophets in the Kingdom of God *before* they are eternally put to death (see Luke 13:28; 16:23).

Since God made man a free moral agent with the power of volition, *man must choose*. God will insist that each human choose either His way or the devil's way, either *life* or *death* (Deut. 30:19). But God will not force any man to receive eternal life, nor will he arbitrarily consign anyone to death. All must choose, and reap the consequences of that choice.

What will happen if a person chooses the way of sin and suffering? "For the *wages* [reward] of *sin is death*; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23).

But the Bible speaks of two deaths: first and second. "... It is appointed unto men *once to die*, but after this the *judgment*" (Heb. 9:27).

From the time of righteous Abel till this very day, even righteous humans have had to suffer the *first death*. But it is the *second death* that is *final*—not the first (Rev. 20:14, 15).

Notice how the apostle Peter wrote that the wicked will perish in the lake of fire—which will occur at the time when the earth is burned up and then made into a *new earth*, where the righteous will dwell forevermore:

"But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men" (II Pet. 3:7).

God has decreed that He will not let this earth be destroyed *until* His great master plan for mankind on this earth is finished.

This time of the destruction of the wicked is explained more fully by Peter: "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the *earth* also and the *works* that are therein shall be *burned up*" (verse 10).

Furthermore, "all these things shall be *dissolved*" (verse 11) at the time of the perdition (annihilation) of the ungodly—during the time of "the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with *fervent heat*" (verse 12).

What then? After the perdition (second death) of the wicked, God will make "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth [only] righteousness" (verse 13).

The Apostle John, after describing the destruction of the wicked (Rev. 20:13-15), immediately mentions "a new heaven and a new earth" (Rev. 21:1). He then gives a glowing account of the peace, happiness, beauty and glory that will characterize this new earth.

John was taken in vision to a "great and high mountain," where he was able to view "that great city, the holy Jerusalem, *descending out of heaven* from God, having the glory of God..." (verse 10).

Notice that this indescribably beautiful city is not up in heaven, but is to be located right here on this earth. Again, the Apostle John speaks of the "new Jerusalem, which *cometh down out of heaven* from my God..." (Rev. 3:12).

Nowhere in the Bible is there a

promise that man will, at death, waft off to heaven. Rather, the Scriptures plainly teach that the new Jerusalem will come down *from* heaven to this earth. Man will not go up to heaven to dwell with God; but God will come to this earth to dwell with men: "... Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Rev. 21:3).

The Bible is consistent. Jesus Christ plainly taught that man would eternally dwell here on this earth when He said: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall *inherit the earth*" (Matt. 5:5).

And David wrote: "But the meek shall inherit the *earth*; and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace" (Ps. 37:9, 11).

But will man only inherit this earth during the millennium, and then go to heaven? "The righteous shall inherit the *land*, and *dwell therein for ever*" (verse 29).

What will happen to the wicked? Will they, as some say, spend a while in hell (or in some other place) suffering for their sins, and then be taken to heaven to live forever?

Long ago, the prophet Daniel spoke of the wicked who would "awake" in a resurrection "to shame and *everlasting contempt* [or abhorrence]" (Dan. 12:2).

Malachi also spoke of the end of these wretched beings who spurned eternal life: "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh *shall burn them up*, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch" (Mal. 4:1).

What about the righteous? Where will they be?

Daniel said the righteous would "awake... to everlasting life" (Dan. 12:2). They will then become glorified sons of God—living, serving their Creator eternally: "And they that be *wise* shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as *the stars* for ever and ever" (verse 3).

The *righteous* will then be made immortal. But in the third and final resurrection, the *wicked* will be made to see that they have scoffed at God's

If You'd Like to Know More

Many hundreds have written asking if we have representatives in their local areas to counsel with them personally and to answer their questions.

The answer is yes, we do.

The Worldwide Church of God stations personal representatives (most are ordained ministers) in the United States and British Commonwealth and many other areas of the world. These local ministers will visit you, if invited, directly in your own home.

So if you have spiritual matters to discuss or questions to ask about biblical topics such as repentance, baptism, etc., please feel free to write us and request a private appointment. Worldwide mailing addresses and phone numbers are as follows:

- United States: P.O. Box 111, Pasadena, California 91123 (or simply dial this toll-free number in the continental

U.S.: 1-800-423-4444. In California, Alaska and Hawaii call 213-577-5225 collect).

- United Kingdom, Eire, Europe and Middle East: P.O. Box 111, St. Albans, Herts., England AL2 2EG (or dial this number in U.K.: Radlett [092 76] 2670).
- New Zealand and Pacific Isles: P.O. Box 2709, Auckland 1, New Zealand (or dial Auckland 686-114—reverse the charges).
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- Canada: P.O. Box 44, Station A, Vancouver, B.C. V6C 2M2
- South Africa: P.O. Box 1060, Johannesburg 2000 (or dial this number: 011-216406).

priceless offer for salvation. As a punishment, and as an eternal example, they will be annihilated in the "second death."

The prophet Malachi wrote of this triumph of the righteous over the wicked: "And ye [the righteous] shall tread down the *wicked*; for they shall be *ashes* under the soles of your feet . . ." (Mal. 4:3).

Those Who Sin Willfully. Man's destiny is so great and glorious that few Christians have ever really grasped it. God, through His Word, repeatedly speaks of humans becoming sons in the very family of God.

Even God's angels are servants of these heirs of divine sonship: "Are they [angels] not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?" (Heb. 1:14.)

Realizing the "high calling" which God has given us, the Apostle Paul wrote that Christians should "give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip" (Heb. 2:1).

He then asked: "How shall we escape, if we *neglect* so great salvation . . . ?" (verse 3.)

The book of Hebrews is filled with warnings to the believer not to get careless and lose out on eternal salvation.

Paul warns Christians not to let a "root of bitterness" trouble and/or defile them (Heb. 12:15).

But the sternest warning in the entire Bible is in the tenth chapter of Hebrews: "For *if we sin wilfully* [with deliberate intent] after that we have received the *knowledge of the truth*, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful looking for of *judgment* and *fiery indignation*, which shall devour the adversaries" (Heb. 10:26, 27).

The Apostle Paul then speaks of the severe ("sorer") punishment which will befall that wicked person "who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he

was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done *despite* unto the *Spirit of grace*" (verse 29).

Truly, "It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God" (verse 31).

(A word of qualification is necessary at this particular juncture. *Willful sin* is NOT to be equated with sin by force of habit or under heavy temptation. "Slipping," making mistakes, or occasionally falling down spiritually do *not* constitute willful sin. A thorough exposition of this principle may be obtained by writing for our free booklets *What Do You Mean—the Unpardonable Sin?* and *Just What Do You Mean . . . Conversion?*)

But can a *true* believer draw back and be eternally destroyed? "Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man *draw back*, my soul shall have no pleasure in him. But we are not of them who draw back unto *perdition* [destruction]; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul" (verses 38, 39).

We have seen that God is "not willing that any should perish." Furthermore, God has ordained that there will be three resurrections: the *first*, to immortality at the second coming of Jesus—immediately before the millennium begins.

The *second* is to take place shortly after the thousand-year rule of Christ. Those who rise in the second resurrection comprise all the deceived multitudes who died without a saving knowledge of the truth.

The *third resurrection* occurs at the very end of God's plan for mortal man on this earth. Those who rise up in the third and final resurrection are those who had their chance for salvation and deliberately turned it down. God will be forced to extinguish the lives of those who have obstinately chosen the way of death! Remember, God will not force eternal life down anyone's throat.

Now you should be better able to understand what the apostle Paul

meant by an "order" of resurrections (I Cor. 15:23). He simply meant that there would be a succession of resurrections, various ones rising at different times for different judgments.

Let us remember that our Creator is a benevolent, loving God who wants to do everything possible for mankind. "The Lord is *merciful* and *gracious*, slow to anger, and plentiful in mercy . . . Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him" (Ps. 103:8, 13).

Those who know the truth should strive with all their might to be in the *first resurrection*, the resurrection to eternal life, the "better resurrection" (Heb. 11:35).

But those who are not predestined by God to receive the saving knowledge of the truth now, will rise up in the second resurrection. They will then be given their *first* real chance to be saved.

But those who reject that knowledge and that way of eternal life—regardless of the age in which they were given the knowledge of the truth—will rise in the *third* and final *resurrection*, which will culminate in the "second death" in the *lake of fire*.

But the believer has a wonderful, eternal future ahead of him. "He that *overcometh* shall *inherit all things*; and I will be his God, and he shall be *my son*. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the *lake which burneth with fire* and brimstone: which is the *second death*" (Rev. 21:7, 8).

Your eternal destiny—your future—is up to you! You can choose the way of God and eternal life, or you can choose Satan's way of lust, greed, strife and sin—which will lead to total perdition—to the "second death" in a lake of fire.

Let each one of us make sure that we make the *right choice*. □