

Interview with Garner Ted Armstrong – Program 5

By: The John Ankerberg Show
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By: **Garner Ted Armstrong**; ©1983

Does hell go on for eternity? Will unbelievers who die get a second chance for salvation? Will sincere believers from other religions get credit for their faithfulness?

Is Hell Forever?

Introduction

Tonight on the John Ankerberg Show we will be interviewing Garner Ted Armstrong, son of Herbert W. Armstrong, the founder of the Worldwide Church of God. Garner Ted is best known as the popular radio and television speaker of the Worldwide Church of God's "The World Tomorrow" broadcast. Before his break with his father, Garner Ted was President of Ambassador College in Pasadena, California; Executive Vice President of The Worldwide Church of God, and Editor-in-Chief of *The Plain Truth* magazine which reached a circulation in 1982 of 5 million. In 1978 Garner Ted broke with his father and founded a new organization, the Church of God International in Tyler, Texas. He is now rebuilding his outreach. Tonight we will examine the teachings of Garner Ted Armstrong in light of the Bible. We will ask him if he still believes God is a family; does he still hold that every believer is a potential God; does he still believe that the Holy Spirit is not a person but a divine force and that the new birth occurs after believers have died and are recreated for eternal life. Join us for this discussion.

Program 5

Ankerberg: We are glad that you joined us tonight. Our guest is Garner Ted Armstrong. And Garner Ted, we have been talking about some of the things that you are teaching on the radio and the way the Christians out there usually read their Bible and we are trying to compare the two. And we would like to talk about some of your strong statements about the soul. I would take it from a biblical context, okay, and let's say, let's talk with Jesus. This is where he says, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul." [Luke 12:4] (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2012.4>)

Armstrong: Unable to kill the *psuche* or the psyche.

Ankerberg: Okay, "But rather fear him who is able to destroy..." [Luke 12:5] (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2012.5>)

Armstrong: Both.

Ankerberg: Yes, okay. But the thing is that you **do** have both, and it doesn't mean destroy in the sense of annihilation. The Greek word is punish.

Armstrong: Oh, I don't know about that.

Ankerberg: Kittel, you want me to quote Kittel?

Armstrong: You just read it says, "Fear him who has the power to destroy both *soma* and *psuche* in [Gehenna fire]." He will destroy it. It will not mean forever.

Ankerberg: That's what we are talking about is the evidence. Let's take Kittel here who is one of the prime authorities when you are using the tools to get at the words which you said we need to get at. He says, "This is not a simple extinction of existence, but an everlasting state of torment and death." And the word Gehenna,...

Armstrong: He's not an authority.

Ankerberg: ...now you've come through, and you said Gehenna. You don't believe there is any eternal punishment either, is that correct?

Armstrong: There is absolutely eternal **punishment**. Yes, there is no eternal **punishing**.

Ankerberg: Does it last forever?

Armstrong: Yes, it lasts forever. The punishment is death by fire.

Ankerberg: You are saying extinction?

Armstrong: The most horrible death that I could imagine occurring to anybody, and your heart goes out to people who die in flames, but that is the second death of which the Bible speaks. It says very clearly that the wicked will be ashes under the feet of the righteous, in the last chapter of Malachi. It very clearly talks about the extinction of the wicked and that they would be burnt completely up.

Ankerberg: Now you are going to hear Malachi 4:1 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal%204.1>), 3 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Malachi%204.3>) quite a few times from Garner Ted. Let's take a careful look at these. First of all the setting is "The day of the Lord." If this refers to the time when Jesus comes back, for 4:3 a solid explanation of the words, "they shall be ashes under the souls of your feet" could possibly mean one of two things. First, on the day of the Lord the Lord is going to come back and conquer His enemies. If there is a great war it is possible that this simply means there will be physical death, that they will be ashes under your feet. It does not mean that they will be eternally annihilated. Secondly, if we actually take a close look at the Hebrew, the Hebrew says this: the word "ashes" refers back to anything that is worthless, something that can be cast away." In other words, the wicked will be ignorable because they are worthless, they are of no threat to the righteous.

In Malachi 4:1 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Mal%204.1>), the words there where Garner Ted says, "the wicked will be burnt completely up," it does not say that. The New American Standard, correctly following the Hebrew translation says, "All the arrogant and every evil doer will be chaff and the day that is coming will set them ablaze." The word literally means "will be set on fire." They will be set ablaze. It does not say that they are going to be burnt up, that they are going to be annihilated, they are going to be extinct. Rather, as Jesus said in Matthew 10:28 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2010.28>), "Do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul: but rather fear him who is able to destroy [which is the word 'punish' both soul and body in hell."

Jesus said that hell is endless punishing. He said this in Matthew 25:41 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2025.41>) where He said: "Depart from me ye cursed into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels." In Revelation 20:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%2020.10>) we find that that place where the devil and his angels will go, it says about them: "And they shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." In Matthew 25:46 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2025.46>) finally we see Jesus saying: "And these shall go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." The same Greek word is used to describe the length of time that the righteous will be in heaven, and that the wicked will spend in hell.

Armstrong: It says very clearly that the wicked will be ashes under the feet of the righteous, in the last chapter of Malachi. It very clearly talks about the extinction of the wicked and that they would be burnt completely up. The works therein and the wicked will be burnt up.

Ankerberg: The problem there is the word "destroy" means, according to Vine, an authority on the Greek New Testament, he says, "It signifies to ruin utterly and it is not extinction, it is not annihilation but ruin, loss, not of being but of well-being." And the thing is if that is true then we have eternal punishment of living souls that are reunited with their. . .

Armstrong: **Punishment, but not punishing.**

Ankerberg: The Greek words would suggest that's exactly what it is.

Armstrong: Let me ask you a question, does it make sense to you that a little Chinese girl, age 3, sweet little innocent baby, is going to be dancing from brick to brick, beating at flames for all eternity because a missionary had a flat tire?

Ankerberg: Garner Ted is concerned about children three years of age in China. Jesus in Matthew 18:14 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Matt%2018.14>) commented on that. He said: "It is not the will of your Father which is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish." The word little one is *micron*. It applies to those that are up until the age of reading age or where they can discern between right and wrong. The word *thelema*, the will of your Father, has to do with the decision using the will. It is different from the word in 2 Peter 3:9 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Pet%203.9>) where we read: "The Lord is... not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." There the word "will" is the word *boulomai*, which has to do with desire toward

purpose. He desires that all men would not perish, but obviously some do by making a decision to go against the Lord. But *thelemo* in Matthew 18 says that the Lord has made a decision concerning the little ones that do not know the difference between right and wrong that they will not perish.

Ankerberg: What do you do with the book of Romans in the first two chapter there, where God says he gives them a conscience. [Rom 2:15 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom%202.15>)] He gives them that which no missionary can give them and that they are responsible to Him if they haven't heard, alright, [Rom. 1:18-21 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom.%201.18-21>)] and on that basis God can say, "I'll bring your works into judgment, I'll bring your life into judgment." [Eccl. 12:14 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Eccles.%2012.14>)]

Armstrong: No, it isn't saying that. You could open up the book of Romans and search in vain to find where you can find any contradiction of the fact that the isles or the coastlands will hear His name. It says in the last half of the 66th chapter of Isaiah that when Christ completes the second half of His seven year ministry which is going to happen after His return and actually before the beginning of the Millenium that Gog and Magog and it even mentions some of the other nations like Pul and Lud and Javan, etc., which we find in, I believe, southeast Asia, Japan, India and some of the other major nations of the world today that the majority of the Gentile races will eventually hear His name. Now I am beginning to get back to what you were saying earlier, John.

Ankerberg: I'm not disagreeing with prophecy, but I am talking about...

'Armstrong: There is no name given among men under heaven whereby we may be saved but one. [Acts 4:12 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%204.12>)] That is the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I don't care how long a person kneels and prays to O great Buddha, God is not going to save that individual until they have an opportunity to learn about Christ.

Ankerberg: Garner Ted says that Isaiah 66:19 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%2066.19>) shows that all those through the ages that have not heard the gospel will be resurrected and given another opportunity. He bases this on Isaiah 66:19 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Isa%2066.19>) which reads: "And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those that escape of them unto the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, that draw the bow, to Tubal and Javan, to the isles afar off, that have not heard my fame, neither have seen my glory; and they shall declare my glory among the Gentiles." Now what this is **not** saying is that all past descendants of these nations that are mentioned will be resurrected to live during the Millennium with those that are there. What this is simply saying is that during the Millennium there will be a missionary effort, and those living then will have an opportunity to hear the Gospel and to choose.

Ankerberg: Let me ask you what happens to a person then? Are you saying that they are going to get a second chance?

Armstrong: Sure. Well, second, no; of course, they never had a first chance.

Ankerberg: Okay, the first chance.

Armstrong: No, no, no. They've got a first chance.

Ankerberg: After they die then where do they get that chance?

Armstrong: Revelation 20:5 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%2020.5>): "The **rest** of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." Very clearly says that the Great White Throne Judgment, Revelation 19 the second half, I saw a great white throne and it talks about how the dead were raised and the people were judged. [Rev. 20:11-12 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev.%2020.11-12>)]

Ankerberg: But Garner Ted, I read in Revelation 20, and going back to your prophecies, the prophets said that in that day no one is going to have to tell somebody about the Lord. They are already going to know.

Armstrong: The living, of course, because the dead in Christ will be resurrected and the individuals who died not knowing, it says, are not going to come out of their graves. They won't know the difference because they will be unaware of the passage of time for 1,000 years.

Ankerberg: Well how about the verse, "first death and then the judgment?" [Heb. 9:27 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb.%209.27>)] It doesn't say they are going to hear more gospel.

Armstrong: Say that again.

Ankerberg: The Bible says that there is death and then the judgement.

Armstrong: Of course, in the resurrection, not while you are dead.

Ankerberg: Now Garner Ted says that Revelation 20:5 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%2020.5>) shows that those that are the unrighteous, those that are unbelieving will be resurrected and given an opportunity to hear the gospel. Let's read the verse: "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection." Now these cannot be those that are talked about in Revelation 20:6 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%2020.6>) because it says: "Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection, over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ."

Why is this not talking about those that are the wicked, those that have not heard? Because these people will reign with Christ for a thousand years. They were a part of that group, those that believed in Christ. They were brought forth, resurrected at the beginning of the thousand years and reigned with Christ through them. But in verse 6 it says of those that are the unrighteous that they are raised after the thousand year period of time. Now Garner Ted says that this is the White Throne Judgment period, and in verse 11 of the same chapter we find this to be true. But I don't find the apostle telling us that those that are resurrected to the Great White Throne have another opportunity or have an opportunity at all to hear the gospel and respond.

Rather, let's just read what the Bible says and you can decide. Revelation 20:11-15 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rev%2020.11-15>): "And I saw a great white throne and Him who sat upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away; and no place was found for them. And I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books according to their deeds. These deeds must have been those things that they had done while they were living.] And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hades gave up the dead which were in them; and they were judged everyone of them according to their deeds. It's very interesting, who are those that were in hades? And the death and hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death [the lake of fire]. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life he was thrown into the lake of fire."

Do you see the opportunity for men to respond to the gospel after they are resurrected at the judgment? Hebrews 9:27 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb%209.27>) says: "It is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment." Daniel 12:2 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Dan%2012.2>) says: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake; these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt."

Paul did not think there would be another chance after death. He said: "Now is the accepted time; behold now is the day of salvation" in 2 Corinthians 6:2 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Cor%206.2>). Jesus Christ Himself urged men to accept Him. He said: "For the Son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost" Luke 19:9-10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Luke%2019.9-10>). In 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Thess%201.7-10>) it says this: "The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, and in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God [it doesn't say that they will be given another chance], and obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power; when He shall come to be glorified in His saints, and to be admired in all them that believe." When Christ comes there will not be a time for people to make up their mind. He's coming with punishment. Finally, the Hebrew writer says, "How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" [Heb. 2:3 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb.%202.3>)]

After a break we will return to the most important part of this discussion.

Ankerberg: Let's take a look at what Paul says in Romans. He says: "Indeed when the Gentiles [the pagans that don't have revelation, who do not have the law], do by nature things required by the law, they are a law for themselves; even though they do not have the law since they show that the requirements of the law are written on their hearts. Their consciences also bearing witness and their thoughts now accusing, now even defending them." [Rom. 14-15 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom.%2014-15>)] This will take place on the day when God will judge men's secrets through Jesus Christ as my gospel declares.

Armstrong: Sure, I take a very great comfort in that Scripture because it shows me that an individual whether he be Chinese, Japanese, Vietnamese or from Chad or Dahomey can build character, and the human conscience is very, very important. But I cannot get away from the fact that my Savior says there is no name given under heaven among which you know we must be saved, but the name of Christ himself. [Acts 4:12 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%204.12>)]

Ankerberg: And we certainly agree with that, and that's why we have the missionary challenge to go and tell, and it is a serious problem.

Armstrong: Yes it is, a hundred percent, I agree. But you are still going to have to deal with the fact that almighty God allows more than 4½ billion of we human beings to run around this earth, and all of the hundreds of millions who have lived and died and who never heard the name of Christ never had a chance. And to me it's not just merely that I am saying, by the way, because my theology is backed upon by an awful lot of years of research including a masters and a doctors degree, but I am saying that it does not make sense, it isn't rational if you are dealing with common sense.

Ankerberg: What we are talking about...

Armstrong: That billions of human beings would be consigned to an eternal, ever-burning hell fire for being super religious in their own religion. I mean, I'm not talking about a bunch of "sinners." I'm talking about Dalai Lama monks who shave their head and did nothing but serve the altar for like 60 or 70 years till they died or will find Christ in their own religion.

Ankerberg: Yes, but you are getting away from Paul's whole argument in Romans 1 that they do have light and they have turned away from it. And those that turn...

Armstrong: No, I don't believe that for a minute. He couldn't be telling you that.

Ankerberg: Well, that's he is telling me that.

Armstrong: Who has light?

Ankerberg: Who does have light?

Armstrong: How are you going to believe for an instant that that is telling you that people all over this world, including the headhunters in Mindanao or the savages in Papua New Guinea Owen Stanley range, who have never seen the light of civilization and still hunt heads and drink blood, have had an opportunity for salvation?

Ankerberg: Well, I just take it that God knows what He is saying about that when He says that He will give them light, Jesus the Light that lights every man that cometh into the world. [John 1:9 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%201.9>)]

Armstrong: They get saved in their way, you get saved in yours. Is that what you are saying?

Ankerberg: No. There's a terrific book out, *Eternity in Their Heart*. It's written on Ecclesiastes by a missionary. Now I know you have been overseas and I have been overseas. And when I have been overseas in the jungles of New Guinea and when I have been in Africa and when I have been in South America, I have found people have **more** of a knowledge of God the Creator than some of our people in the big cities. As Romans says, they can look at the skies, they can see the heaven and the heavens declare the glory of God, and the Creator that He is there, that He is powerful. [Rom. 1:20 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom.%201.20>); Psa. 19 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps.%2019>)] And the fact that anybody that will say, "I want to know You," I believe that God can get that message to them, which this book describes of how God does this countless time and time again with people. But Paul's conclusion in the book of Romans is that it is not that God doesn't want to give them light, it's not that people are pushing themselves hand over fist to go and get that light, but that they are rejecting it hand over fist and they are turning away from it. [Rom. 1:21-23 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom.%201.21-23>)]

Armstrong: I can't see that at all. I can't see that people are rejecting "light" simply because you have animists and pagans who worship gods of sticks and stones. And Almighty God speaks out so blisteringly throughout the entire history of the old covenant, including killing Israelites for daring to break His Sabbath, including obliterating whole races and nations. He didn't say those people could get saved because they had a good conscience as long as they served Dagon and gave their little 17-year-old daughter on the altar in living sacrifice and did it to the best of their ability, He let them get saved their prophet instead of Moses. No way!

Ankerberg: Apparently Garner Ted has never read about the primitive tribes who, following the light they did have of the one true God, never gave in to worshipping sticks and stones. In the book *Eternity in Their Hearts*, I would like you to learn of the primitive Karen peoples of Burma and the Kachin peoples near India who, although surrounded by Buddhism and idolatry, through the centuries continually rejected such practices as wrong. They did so simply because of their belief in the one true God. In Peru the great 15th century Incan King, Pachacuti called his people together and they decided to follow the one true God and stop worshipping nature. Here then are primitive people who, because of the revelation they had of God, and following their conscience, did not practice idolatry, and child sacrifice. In fact, they seemed to be living closer to God than the Israelites who had the written law and were following Moses.

In *Eternity in Their Hearts* example after example is given of both those who retained knowledge of the one true God and followed Him and those who consciously chose not to follow Him. If you are interested in the savage headhunters and cannibals of New Guinea who still hunt heads and drink blood, then, again, I recommend you read *Eternity in Their Hearts*. The author of this book, Don Richardson, worked in New Guinea with these fierce people and has much to tell about how God has dealt with them.

And finally, although we do not have a complete biblical answer on the question of how God had dealt with the heathen, I believe we can conclude the following six things from the Bible. First, the Bible is clear that there is no further opportunity for men to decide about God and salvation after this life. In the book of Hebrews we find, "It is appointed unto men once to die and then judgment." [Heb. 9:27 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb.%209.27>)] Nowhere does the Bible say that in judgment men will have an opportunity to hear the Gospel and respond.

Second, Garner Ted is correct in saying that Jesus is the only Savior. Jesus Himself said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." [John 14:6 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%2014.6>)] Men across the world must believe that God has sent the Savior, the God-man into the world to die for their sins.

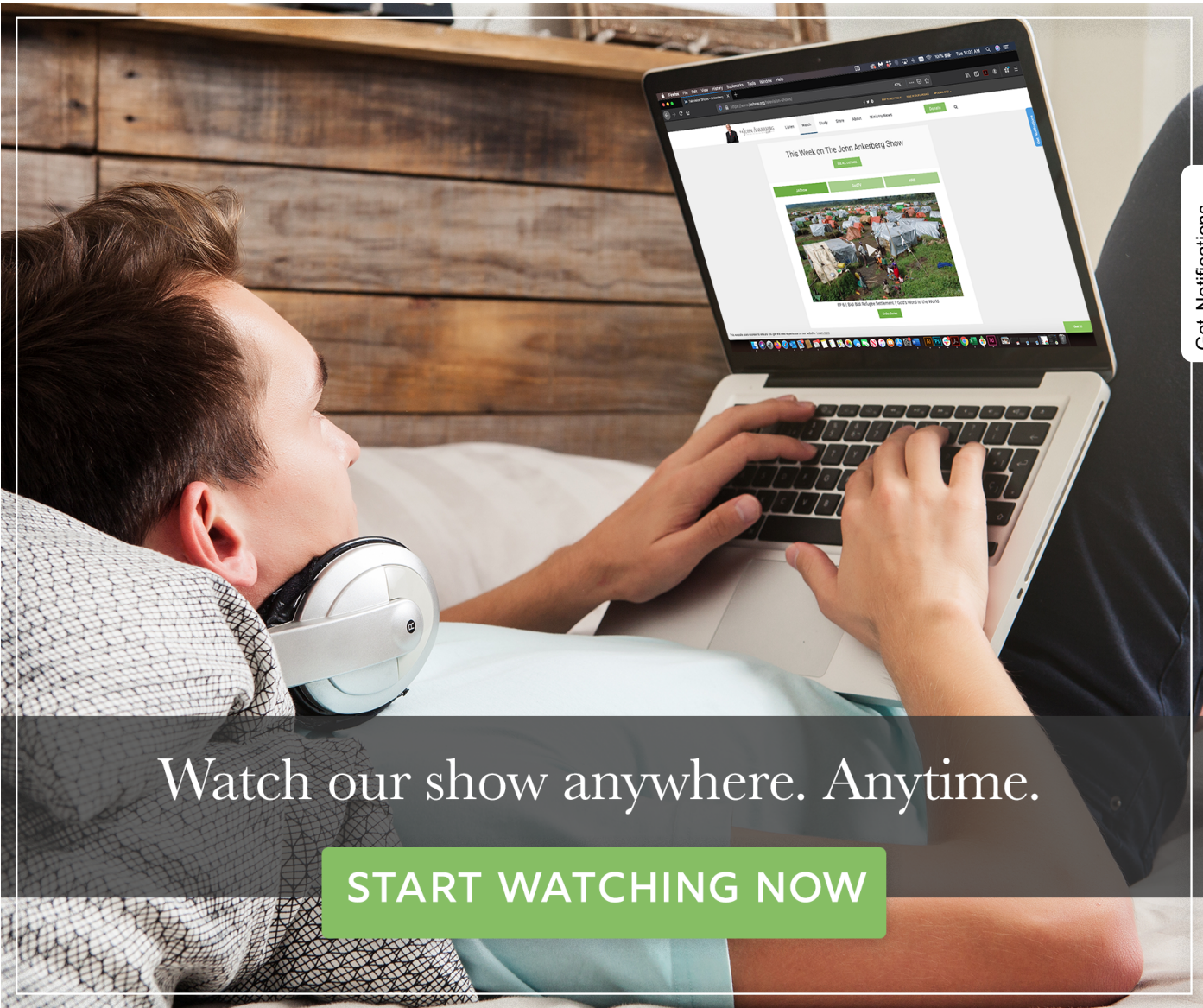
Third, God does not want any to perish. Second Peter 3:9 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/2%20Pet%203.9>) says, "The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

Fourth, in the end God will judge fairly. The very nature of God prevents Him from being unfair. Genesis 18:25 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen%2018.25>) asks, "Shall not the judge of all the earth do right?"

Fifth, men are not in total spiritual darkness. Romans 1:20-21 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom%201.20-21>) says, "For since the creation of the world, His attributes, His eternal power and divine nature have been clearly seen; being understood through what has been made so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." Also, John 1:9 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/John%201.9>) says, "Jesus was the true Light, which coming into the world enlightens every man." If men will follow the lesser light it will lead them to the greater Light." Paul in Romans 2 clearly teaches that the heathen without the law have a God-given conscience which sets the standard of right and wrong that they know. [Rom. 2:14 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Rom.%202.14>)] It will be their conscience which will accuse them or defend them in the day of judgment. The heathen in New Guinea as well as men in America and Europe will not be punished by God because they did not hear the gospel, rather, they will be punished for the wrong deeds they willfully and knowingly committed. God's judgment will be fair.

Sixth, the Bible is very clear that anyone who wishes to establish a relationship with God will receive the necessary information on which to make a decision. First Chronicles 28:9 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/1%20Chron%2028.9>) states: "For the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever." Psalm 9:10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%209.10>) says: "For thou, O Lord, hast not forsaken those who seek thee." Psalm 145:17-19 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Ps%20145.17-19>) says: "The Lord is righteous in all His ways and kind in all His deeds. The Lord is near to all who call upon Him in truth. He will fulfill the desire of those who fear Him. He will also hear their cry and will save them." Jeremiah 29:13 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jer%2029.13>) says: "And you will seek me and find me when you search for me with all your heart."

What chance do the heathen have? Paul answers this in Acts 17:27 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Acts%2017.27>), when he says God made them so "that they would seek for Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him." Examples of this are found in the Bible are: In Abraham's time we are introduced to Melchizedek a king who lives in the midst of the heathen Canaanite society, where temple prostitution, child sacrifice, and idolatry were common practices. This man Melchizedek also was a priest of *El-Elyon*, the Canaanite name for "God Most High." The writer of Genesis calls him a righteous man. [Gen. 14:18 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Gen.%2014.18>)] Hebrews says the Messiah will be a priest of the order of Melchizedek. [Heb. 5:6 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Heb.%205.6>)] Jonah is commanded by God to go and preach to the pagan city of Nineveh and they repent. [Jonah 1:2 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah%201.2>); 3:5-10 (<https://biblia.com/bible/niv/Jonah%203.5-10>)] Philip is swept away supernaturally from a city-wide meeting to go and talk to just one man, a searching African eunuch who wanted to know God. [Acts 8] And finally there is Cornelius, a man that God heard and sent the apostle Peter to in order that he might know full message of salvation. [Acts 10]



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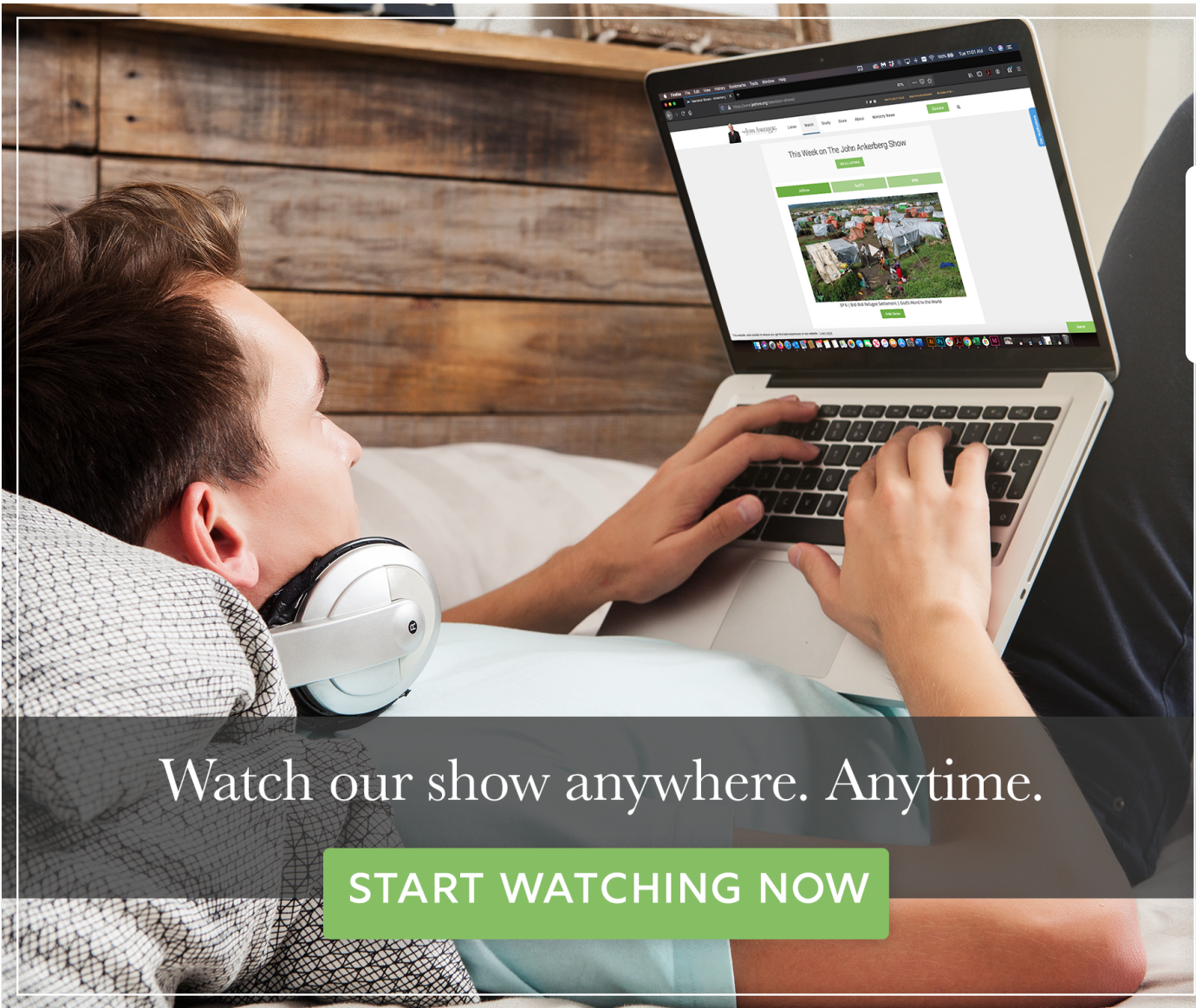
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