

# Eternity

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## **The Sword**

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*"Then it came about as they were going along and talking, that behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them and Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven."* 2 Kings 2:11 Since my childhood, this has always been a fascinating story to me. The old prophet walking along with his protégé Elisha, when suddenly God separated them and took Elijah into heaven. James tell us that, *"Elijah was a man with a nature like ours"* Jas 5:17, yet miraculously, he did not die. From what is revealed, his soul did not go into Hades or Sheol, he will have no need to be resurrected, nor apparently will he face future judgment. His eternal destiny appears to have been sealed from the here-and-now when God took him from this life directly into heaven. By the way, this also happened to another godly individual — who was the other person?

Since Adam and Eve sinned and were banished from the Garden of Eden and the tree of life, mankind (indeed all life) has faced death. Yet God has the power to make exceptions to the curse of death with whomever and whenever He wants. However, throughout the recorded history of scripture we only know of two exceptions. We recognize that the mortal existence of mankind is a progression from birth to death. We are typically born as a loving gift of God to our parents, nurtured and reared in our families to adulthood, and then typically establish families of our own. As life progresses we face the ravages of time and eventually the certainty of death. But what happens next? Are we like other animals in that when we die our bodies simply decay and that is the end of us? The curse given to Adam could be viewed this way, *"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread,*

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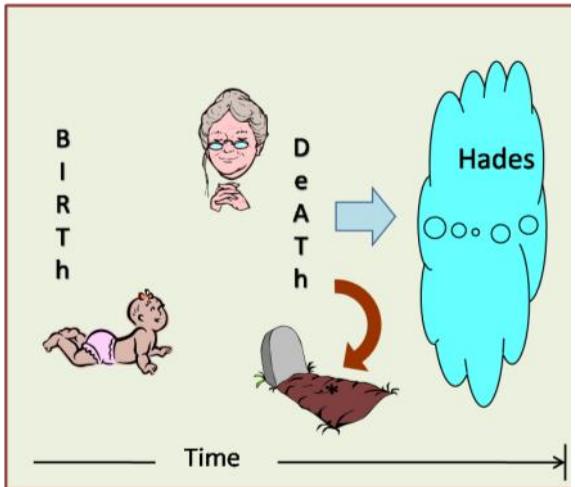
till you return to the ground, because from it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” Gen 3:19 That could be all there is – but God’s word assures us there is more, much more!

In the beginning God created mankind biologically similar to other animals, yet fundamentally different. In Genesis 1:26 he said, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness.” None of creation was said to have been given this unique “image of God” quality, except mankind. Through God’s awesome creative genius and power, He created us to be like Him. He apparently wanted our love, our devotion, our honor, respect and adoration, and a relationship with rational beings who would recognize Him as God and freely choose to worship Him. No other entity of His creation was given the power to choose, nor the rational capability to observe and weigh evidence and then exercise free will to acknowledge Him.

As we study God’s revelation, we come to understand that this unique attribute of mankind is bound up in our soul. And we learn that our souls are eternal, just like God! The breath of life sustains all life forms, but when withdrawn, all temporal bodies perish and return to dust from which they came. God wants us to understand that there is more to “us” than just our mortal bodies, more than this temporal sojourn (Mt 16:26). Solomon noted in Eccl 7:2, “It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, because that is the end of every man, and the living takes it to heart.” When we stop to think about eternal life beyond the grave, “when we take it to heart,” it will

ultimately impact how we chose to live our lives.

In this issue we will examine what God has revealed about life after death. Remember, Moses said, “The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever...” Deut 29:29 This is one of those subject areas where God has chosen to reveal some general information, but we’ll have to wait for many of the details. For instance, concerning the end of time, Jesus Himself said, “Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will not pass away. But of that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.” Mk 13:31-32 If the timing of that great day of the Lord has been withheld from Jesus, surely we should be content to wait.

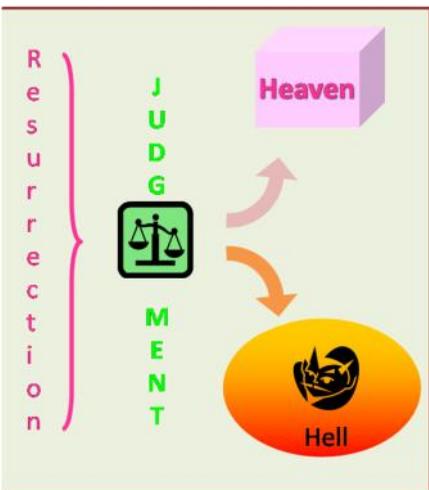


Perhaps this rudimentary diagram might be helpful to organize what God has re-

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vealed. Moving from left to right beginning with our birth, mankind generally progresses from childhood to old age, then faces a natural death. Death literally is the separation of body and soul. Our bodies go to the grave and return to the dust from which Adam's body was originally formed, while we (our eternal souls or spirits) go to a place of waiting called Hades. This is described in Luke 16 as a place with two distinct regions, one of comfort and one of torment. Hades (Hebrew - Sheol) is the place of waiting for departed souls, awaiting the end of time and the resurrection. When Jesus comes in the last day, the dead will be resurrected and those yet alive will be changed and all will then face judgment by the righteous judge. The good and faithful righteous will enter into eternal life, to the great white throne room of the

Father and the glorious light of His Son. However, many will unfortunately enter into eternal damnation, thrown into the lake of



fire established for the devil and his angels where there will be eternal weeping and gnashing of teeth.

## Jesus' Eternal Nature

Aaron Lumpkin

*“Do you not know? Have you not heard?”* Isaiah asked. *“Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundation of the earth?”* (Isa 40:21) The prophets of ancient Israel had so much to say about the ‘coming’ Messiah. From those inspired voices that spanned one thousand years we can read about almost every aspect of the nature of our Savior. Although His coming to this life was greatly anticipated, His present existence was always known and accepted by the prophets. Micah acknowledged that *“His goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity”* Mic 5:2 Isaiah also used the adjective **“eternal”** in describing Jesus, speaking of a child *yet* to be born (Isa 9:6). This child was to be miraculously conceived, but born a tiny infant, and would grow as every child to learn to *“refuse evil and choose good”* (Isa 7:14-16). Moses told of how the Lord would *“raise up a prophet”* like him to speak God’s words to Israel (Deut 18:18). Yet, sadly, King David sang of how his own heir would be rejected, humiliated, and even killed by this very people (Ps 22). But David also praised his Lord because he knew that this long-awaited savior would overcome death (Ps 16:10) and return to heaven to reclaim His seat at the right hand

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of the Father (Ps 8:5-6; 110:1). Zechariah understood that this would all happen in order to *“remove the iniquity of the land”*, to *“build the [true] temple of the Lord”*, and to unite the two offices of priest and king by the One who would *“be a priest on His throne”* (Zech 3:9; 6:12-13). Mindful that his own reign was limited to this life, David understood that Jesus’ tenure as priest would be *“forever”* (Ps 110:4) and that the reign of his descendant as king would be *“everlasting”* (2 Sam 23:5). Daniel saw in his visions that *“His dominion is an everlasting dominion, which will not pass away”* Dan 7:14 The sons of Korah, regarding the Son of God, sang, *“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever.”* Ps 45:6; Heb 1:8 and Ezekiel, hundreds of years after David’s death, foretold that *“David, My servant, will be their prince forever.”* Ez 37:25 These great messengers of our God have left us a powerful testimony of who Jesus would be and why he would come. As Zacharias eloquently put it, *“Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for He has visited us and accomplished redemption for His people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of David His servant, as He spoke by the mouths of the prophets from of old.”* Lk 1:68-70

The writer of the Hebrew epistle opens by saying, *“God, after He spoke long ago to the fathers in the prophets in many portions and in many ways, in these last days has spoken to us in His Son, whom He appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the world.”* Heb 1:1-2 If the testimony of the prophets are worthy of our consideration in determining the nature and purpose of the Son of God, then how much more so is the

testimony of Christ Jesus Himself?! Knowing that so much about Him would be so misunderstood by so many, Jesus has much to say on who He is and why He came to earth. Jesus obviously knew who He was: *“I am the Alpha and Omega, who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.”* Rev 1:8 Jesus is eternal -- while He may not have received the name by which we know Him until Joseph and Mary named Him, the One whom we know as Jesus predates time itself. *“Now, Father, glorify Me together with the glory which I had with You before the world was,”* Jesus prayed to the Father Jn 17:5 The idea of eternity, in and of itself, is a concept our finite minds can’t fully grasp, and trying to comprehend how He who is eternal came into a mortal body is just too difficult for many to accept. John, in his gospel account, records a fascinating discussion between believers (at least they were when the conversation started!) and our Lord Jesus that turns to this very subject in Jn 8:31-59. In His final attempt to convince them that he was eternal, Jesus declared *“Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.”* What a powerful statement! First of all, while John records this in Greek, Jesus almost certainly would have originally used the same term in the Hebrew language that God spoke to Moses when Moses asked His name: *“I AM WHO I AM”* Ex 3:14 This obvious claim to be Deity is evidenced by the reaction of these ‘believers’ in attempting to stone Him (Jn 8:59). But for the purpose our discussion on eternity, what Jesus was claiming is that before Abraham existed (past tense), Jesus exists (present tense). Even though He occu-

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ped flesh at the time He spoke these words, Christ Jesus was, is, and always will be timeless. And just as His existence is timeless, so too is His purpose (Eph 3:11). Just as sin began with one man, so too did it have to end with one man (Rom 5). As His sacrificial death approached, Jesus spoke *“What shall I say? Father save Me from this hour? But for this purpose I came to this hour”* Jn 12:27 This central moment in all of time, as the Son of God is lifted up on the cross, when He who is immortal became mortal and overcame mortality! *“Do not be afraid,”* Jesus told John in Rev 1:17-18. *“I am the first and the last, and the living one; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive **forevermore**, and I have the keys to death and Hades.”*

Jesus, the Lord’s anointed – eternal in nature, eternal in purpose. *“To Him who sits on the throne, and unto the Lamb, be blessing and glory and dominion **forever and ever!**”* Rev 5:13



## Mankind’s Mortality

Craig Sweet

When we read the Bible from the beginning, we learn that God created man in his own image (Gen 1:26). God sat up a basic rule, *“... from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat...”* (Gen 2:17). Before long, man falls and breaks the rule that God sat up by eating from the tree. So, the Lord puts man out of the garden where he will eventually die. (Gen 3:22-24)

So, why did the Lord create man to begin with? The Lord made the perfect living situation, set up a simple rule, and then man falls, causing his physical mortality. When man dies, his spirit is returned back to God (Eccl 12:7). Since there is an eternal portion that will return to God, it implies that God had it to begin with, put that eternal nature into man, and then it will return back to Him. So, what is the purpose of this physical shell we have while on this earth? Why is man here? What is the purpose of this life? God created us, but certainly doesn’t need us because He is God. So, why did He do it? These are questions that have challenged and plagued mankind for all generations.

The best source to obtain some of these answers comes from the Bible. If we go to Genesis 1:1, it states that *“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.”* After each stage of creation, God said what He saw was good (ex Gen 1:4, 1:9, 1:18, 1:25) However, on the sixth day, God created man and said it was *“very good”* (Gen 1:31). God trusted man and demonstrated this when He gave the rest of his creation to man to take care of and to manage. He trusted man with His creation. He gave man the power over all living things.

The logical conclusion of why we are here is because it pleases God. He created man and saw that it was *“very good.”* This logical reason also gives us direction for our existence. It gives us a foundation of what we should do every day we live. Pleasing God gives us a reason to be here and a goal

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to achieve. Would there be any hope for anything beyond this life if we did not have a basic goal? If we are here to please God, how do we do this? What is it that must be done to please God? Deut 10:12-13 provides the basic principles to please God:

*“Now, Israel, what does the Lord your God require from you, but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in all His ways and love Him, and to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and to keep the Lord's commandments and His statutes which I am commanding you today for your good.”*

We must *“fear the Lord your God.”* Not fear in the sense of being afraid, but a reverent fear; one deserving of the omnipotent God who created the heavens and the earth (Rev 14:7). Fear the God who created us with an eternal existence and has the power to judge us and send us to an eternal place of punishment. Fear Him.

This fear should help us want to *“walk in all His ways and love him”*. This is done by our daily desire to pursue righteousness or to do what is right no matter what the consequences may be (1 Pet 3:17). We may suffer for doing what is right, but we cannot please God unless we do what is right. Psalms 119:3 states that *“They also do no unrighteousness, they walk in his ways.”* Our basic desire should be to do what is right out of love. When Jesus was challenged as to the greatest commandment written in the law, the lawyer rightly replied in Luke 10:27, *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind...”* Our

desires should be to walk in his ways and love Him beyond any other measure.

This love should then drive us into a life of service to God. If we are to please God while we are on this earth, it is not just a single action, but a way of life of service. Our service is not because we have to serve, but because we want to serve. Our heart must be in our service in order for it to be pleasing to God. That is why the Lord commanded us to serve Him with our *“heart and our soul”*. This is every part of our being. It is not acceptable to serve Him by going through some sort of ritual or process. It is a service of our heart. We must serve God and Him alone. When Jesus was tempted the third time by Satan, He reminded Satan that *“You shall worship the Lord your God and serve Him only”* Matt 4:10 When we make decisions between what we want to do and what we are commanded to do by God, our heart will determine who we are serving; ourselves or our God. Let's always strive to serve our Lord.

Finally, in order to please God, we must keep his commandments:

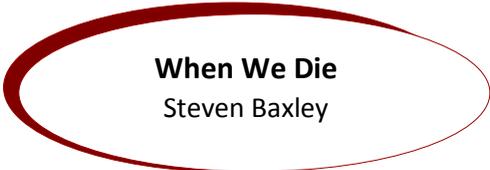
*“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”* Eccl 12:13-14

Just like our walk, our love and our service to God is to be from the heart, keeping His commandments are to be from the heart too. We should want to please God because

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it is He who has the power to determine our eternal future.

So, we are brought into this world because God wants us here, because it pleases Him. We walk all our days to please Him. How long are our days? Every day is a gift from God and we have an appointment with death that God has made and after that is the judgment (Heb 9:27). We could use Psalms 90:10 to state we will have 70 years, but that is a general statement. Therefore, let's make every day count in pleasing God for we never know when our last day will come and judgment will be ours.



## When We Die

Steven Baxley

Death is not usually considered to be a very pleasant topic. Yet, it is something that every human being will face, provided the Lord does not return during our lifetimes. Benjamin Franklin is quoted as having said: "Certainty? In this world nothing is certain but death and taxes."

The Bible defines death as the separation of the spirit and the body. In James 2:26 it is written that *"the body apart from the spirit is dead."* In 2 Peter 1:13-14, Peter makes the following statement: *"I think it right, as long as I am in this body, to stir you up by way of reminder, since I know that the putting off of my body will be soon, as our Lord Jesus Christ*

*made clear to me."* He refers to himself as being *"in this body"* and refers to death as *"the putting off of [his] body."* For Peter, death would come when his spirit (himself, the true "Peter") would leave his body.

The question thus becomes two-fold. When man dies, it is important to know what will happen to both his body and his spirit. The Bible answers both of these questions.

After the first two humans sinned in the Garden, God pronounced the curse that Adam's sin had brought. He told him that his body would eventually return to the dust from which it had been taken: *"By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return"* Gen. 3:19 In Ecclesiastes 12:7, in speaking of death, Solomon states: *"the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."* Given enough time, our physical bodies completely return to the elements (the dust) from which they were formed, whether they be buried, interred at sea, or otherwise destroyed. The physical part of man remains a part of the physical universe we inhabit.

In order to understand the Bible's answer concerning the destination of the spirit, it is important to consider two words that are used in the Scriptures. The first of these is the Hebrew word "Sheol." This word appears 65 times in the Old Testament, and in every case the English Standard Version transliterates the word into English as "Sheol." This word refers to the "under-

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world, abode of the dead” (*A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, W.L. Holiday). The second word is the Greek equivalent of Sheol, “Hades.” This word occurs 10 times in the New Testament, and with the unfortunate exception of Matthew 16:18 (where it is mistranslated “hell”) it is transliterated in the ESV as “Hades.” Hades is defined as “the realm of the dead” (*Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament*, Balz and Schneider). Sheol/Hades is not “Hell” in the sense of eternal punishment, but rather the place of departed spirits.

The New Testament paints a clearer picture than the Old Testament of what Hades is like. Luke 16 is probably the primary passage in all of the Bible for understanding the overall view of what happens to men (to their spirits) after they leave their bodies in death. Please read Luke 16:19-31. In this passage, Jesus tells the story of two men. One is not identified by name, but is described as being very wealthy. The other, named Lazarus, is said to have been a beggar. Both of these men die. Lazarus is carried by angels to “Abraham’s side” where he is comforted. The rich man finds himself also in Hades, but in “torment.” The main part of the story consists of a dialogue between Abraham and the rich man. From this passage, several things are clear:

1. Hades is a place of conscious existence (the dead communicate with each other and are aware of their surroundings).
2. There is no movement from one section of Hades to the other (a great chasm

separates the two).

3. Under normal circumstances, there is no departure from Hades.
4. Hades is already a place of reward and punishment.

Hades is neither Purgatory (a doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church), nor is it Hell (which will be discussed in a later article in this publication). Instead, it is the place where human spirits go after death.

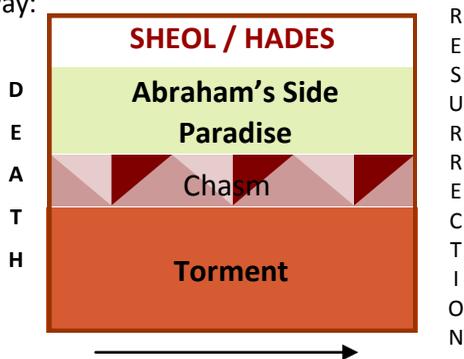
Interestingly, Hades was also the place where Jesus’ spirit went after His death on the cross. His body was placed in a tomb near Jerusalem, but according to Acts 2:27, His spirit went to Hades. Peter, quoting Psalm 16:10 (where the Hebrew word is Sheol), said concerning Jesus: “For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.” In commenting on this verse, Peter points out that Jesus’ spirit went temporarily to Hades, while His body was preserved from decay in the tomb: “*He [Jesus] was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption*” (Acts 2:31). In Luke’s record of the crucifixion, we can see how Jesus knew in advance where His spirit would be after death. In Luke 23:43, we can read Jesus’ reply to the criminal who was being crucified with Him and had pleaded for mercy: “*Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.*” Paradise here would be the equivalent of “Abraham’s side” in Luke 16.

Finally, it should be noted that Hades is temporary in nature. When the dead are all

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raised at the end of time, Hades will be emptied of its inhabitants. Using figurative language, Revelation 20:13-14 records: *“And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.”*

It might help to visualize Hades in this way:



Oh, how we love a spectacle! Something loud and light and colorful, something awe-inspiring and marvelous: the opening celebration of the Olympics in Beijing, Fourth of July bands and fireworks, Thanksgiving and Rose Parades. We look forward all year to those times of noisy, splashy excitement and pleasure. God’s Son will return to receive His own and mark the end of time in a more spectacular way than anyone can fathom,

even having seen the most exorbitant things man can dream up.

Let’s pretend for a moment it’s that great day. We are prepared for it, since Jesus Himself told us always to be ready because we don’t know when that anticipated event will come to pass *“But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, nor the Son, but the Father alone.”* Matthew 24:36

The only preparations we will need to make are achieved in our hearts and our day-to-day lives; no gathering rations and waiting on mountaintops required!

When Jesus returned to Heaven after his crucifixion and resurrection, He rose up into the sky as His apostles, along with two men in white clothing, stood watching. The men (angels) told them Jesus would return in the same way He left (Acts 1:9-11). We will be alerted to His returning presence by His shout. There is no way to imagine what the sound of Jesus’ shout (to signal His coming) will be like. It is enough to say that *all* dead and living, will hear that shout and know that the Lord has come again.

There will be others with Jesus when He comes to initiate Eternity. I Thessalonians 4:16 tells us the archangel will speak also. We know from Jude 9 the archangel is Michael who fought and argued with the devil concerning the body of Moses. The term arch means highest or chief, so Michael is the most important of God’s angelic servants. His presence means that what is about to happen will be momentous in the

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extreme. He was also described in John's visions as leading the angels in the great battle with the dragon after the seventh angel sounded (Revelation 12:7). The appearance of this great warrior/angel signals the destruction of physical earth because the angels with him are *"in flaming fire"* (2 Thes 1:7). The angels with their flames will deal out *"retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus."* 2 Thes 1:7-8

The Lord, the archangel, and the angels with the fire will be visible, but there is another manifestation of the Lord's presence on that day: the trumpet of God. Trumpets were important in Old Testament history. We remember how the Israelites reacted to hearing God's trumpet when they were waiting at the foot of Mt. Sinai in Exodus 19:16, *"So it came about on the third day, when it was morning, that there were thunder and lightning flashes and a thick cloud upon the mountain and a very loud trumpet sound, so that all the people who were in the camp trembled."*

In the verses following, we read that the people were so afraid of these sights and sounds that they begged Moses to talk to God for them, so they would not die from speaking with Him.

Of course we remember how God used trumpets in the taking of Jericho. Saul caused trumpets to sound all over the land when he defeated the Philistines and said, *"Let the Hebrews hear"* (1 Sam 13:3). Trumpets called for: attention, warning, or action. Likewise, we will be alerted by the trumpet to attend the arrival of our Lord. The trumpet calls to joy and celebration or to retribu-

tion. Because we will be ready for that day, we can wholeheartedly welcome the sound of the trumpet as beginning our eternal lives with God!

We will see our Lord coming through the sky with Michael and the angels with flaming fire. We will hear God's trumpet. When Jesus died on the cross, Matthew tells us that many of the saints who had already died rose from their tombs and lived again (Mat 27:51-53). That was certainly a marvelous thing, but now as Jesus Himself returns, *all* the faithful who have died will rise to meet Jesus in the air. The hope of the saints is realized as we see Him coming in the *"glory of His Father"* (Mat 16:27). What a thrill it will be when we who are living will also be caught up in the air with the faithful dead to meet Jesus in the clouds!

Something else will happen as we join our Lord in the clouds to begin our eternal fellowship with Him (2 Pet 3:10-12). *"But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, in which the heavens will pass away with a roar and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat, and the earth and its works will be burned up. Since all these things are to be destroyed in this way, what sort of people ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, on account of which the heavens will be destroyed by burning, and the elements will melt with intense heat!"*

Those who have not prepared their hearts and walked with God in obedience day-by-day will surely shrink away from the

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“intense heat” of the flames of retribution and the realization of eternal separation from God and the faithful. There is no joy for them in this day of judgment and destruction. The roar of the flames drown out the joyful noises from the air as the earth and everything in it is burned up – not just burned, but *burned up*. The destruction will be total and complete.

This second time God erases His creation will be for the same reason He ended the antediluvian world: there is evil in this world. God wants to be with His obedient children, but He does not co-exist with wickedness, so time with its dark possibilities must end. Man has shown his evil tendencies from Scripture’s beginning (Gen 6:5) when God destroyed all but eight people in the ark. You’ll recall that their evil hearts made Him sorry He had even made them. In the struggle depicted in the Revelation, the image reveals that evil still holds sway in the creation (Rev 6:10).

The sights and sounds pictured for us in scripture are those to which we can relate. They are couched in terms and scenes we are able to visualize and assimilate with our finite minds. The reality is surely much more than we can possibly imagine with our limited understanding. The picture of the initiation of eternity is meant to be a blessing for those who love and obey God. *“Therefore comfort one another with these words.”* 1 Thes 4:18

## The Resurrection

Phil Lumpkin

I can remember my dad preaching lessons about the three fundamental facts of the gospel based on Paul’s words in 1st Corinthians 15:1-4, *“Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures.”* Paul continues throughout chapter 15 to expand on Jesus’ resurrection and in turn, our own resurrection. He argues that our Lord’s resurrection from the dead is the central point of the gospel and will be the crucial transformation for us from this life to eternity.

In 15:14-17 Paul wrote, *“if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. Moreover we are even found to be false witnesses of God, because we witnessed against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins.”* We can see from these verses that the underlying

truth of the gospel rests squarely on the empty tomb of Jesus. The chief priests and the Pharisees who had orchestrated Jesus' crucifixion full well understood the implications of His resurrection. They said to Pilate, "Sir, we remember that when He was still alive that deceiver said, 'After three days I am to rise again.' Therefore, give orders for the grave to be made secure until the third day, lest the disciples come and steal Him away and say to the people, 'He has risen from the dead,' and the last deception will be worse than the first." Pilate said to them, "You have a guard; go, make it as secure as you know how." And they went and made the grave secure, and along with the guard they set a seal on the stone." Mt 27:62-66 Even today, Jesus' empty tomb is the most important evidence that He is who He said He was.

John wrote in 1 Jn 3:2, "Beloved, now we are children of God, and it has not appeared as yet what we shall be. We know that, when He appears, we shall be like Him, because we shall see Him just as He is." The Apostle tells us that we shall be like Jesus when He comes again. While he didn't understand "what we shall be," he tells us that we shall be like Him, shall be "just as He is." John establishes that when our Lord comes again we shall be changed, be transformed and made suitable for eternal life – just like our Lord Jesus. It appears that many early brethren had questions about the resurrection. Paul addressed this in his first letter to

the Thessalonians, "But we do not want you to be uninformed, brethren ... for if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive, and remain until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and thus we shall always be with the Lord." 1Th 4:13-18

Returning to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians chapter 15, Paul avers that, "Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep." 1Cor 15:20 Therefore we can have confidence in our own bodily resurrection because Jesus has been resurrected. While this blessed assurance is comforting, it

begs the question of what exactly is going to happen. And Paul addresses this important question beginning in verse 35, "But someone will say, "How are the dead raised? And with what kind of body do they come? You fool! That which you sow does not come to life unless it dies; and that which you sow, you do not sow the body which is to be, but a bare grain, perhaps of wheat or of something

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***We shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality***

else. But God gives it a body just as He wished, and to each of the seeds a body of its own. All flesh is not the same flesh, but there is one flesh of men, and another flesh of beasts, and another flesh of birds, and another of fish. **There are also heavenly bodies and earthly bodies,** but the glory of the heavenly is one, and the glory of the earthly is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for star differs from star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown a perishable body, it is raised an imperishable body; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body ... the spiritual is not first, but the natural; then the spiritual. The first man is from the earth, earthy; the second man is from heaven. As is the earthy, so also are those who are earthy; and as is the heavenly, so also are those who are heavenly. And just as we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." 1Co 15:35-49 (emphasis added) From our experience we understand that when we plant a corn seed a small seedling of corn normally springs forth from the ground. We understand that the green corn plant doesn't look like the yellow corn seed we planted, yet they are both "corn." The Spirit through Paul uses this example to help us understand the resurrection. Like the earthly corn seed, our eternal bodies will spring forth in vibrant heavenly form, wholly suitable for eternity. Our earthly bodies will have been the habitation of our souls for a

short time in this life, but our heavenly, spiritual bodies will house our souls throughout eternity. Just as the seed and the plant were both "corn," so too both of our bodies will be "us."

Paul concludes by saying, "Now I say this, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Behold, I tell 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 trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed. For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. "O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR VICTORY? O DEATH, WHERE IS YOUR STING?" 1Co 15:50-55 Paul states an immutable fact, our earthly bodies are not suitable for eternity in heaven. But take comfort, in the last day the dead from throughout the ages will be resurrected "imperishable" and those still alive will also be "changed," resurrected and transformed into immortal bodies which will be perfectly suited for eternity.



Is it not strange that when individuals

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realize they are standing in a place of judgment their perspective is altered in relation to the offense or offenses under consideration? If guilty, then leniency and mercy are sought, and if innocent or the offended party, justice and indemnification are desired; while the judgment seat (***If a righteous judge is presiding***) is simply attempting to reveal the truth and from that truth exercise fair and appropriate judgment. It is because of these very actions that mankind has developed a skewed view of God's final judgment because we think of it in terms of man's judgment.

### ***Righteous Judgment***

Throughout history man has successfully perverted judgment at all levels transcending socio economic groupings, ethnicity, age, and gender. The history of the Israelites was fraught with biased and unrighteous judgment. (Samuel's Sons I Sam. 8:1-3, Rulers of Judah & Israel Amos 5:4-7 & Micah 3:8-12 , Christ Matt 26:59-62 & Matt 27:11-26, and Paul Acts 25:6-12 & 26:30-32) Even today there is little faith that just recompense will be given because man as a whole does not comprehend both the goodness and severity of God. (Rom 11:17-24). What man forgets is that at the end of time righteous judgment will be had because of a righteous judge. Christ speaking of himself says "... as I hear, I judge, and my judgment is just..." Matt 5:30 In our haste to understand the concept of eternity and of the judgment to come we forget to take into account all the attributes of God and Christ who, being one, (John 17:20-26) will in turn provide ***Righteous, Holy, and Divine Judgment***. Christ again speaking to the apostles said, "...When the

*son of man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then will he sit on his glorious throne...and he will separate them one from another...then the King will say to those on his right, come you who are blessed of my Father inherit the kingdom prepared for you...The will he say to those on his left , depart from me accursed ones; into the eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels..."* Matt 25:31-46 Paul speaking to the Church in Rome commended this to them with regard to their improper use of judgment, "...you are storing up wrath for yourself in the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God." Rom 2:5 God is ***Holy, Faithful, and True*** and as such His promises and His judgment can be nothing else other than a manifestation of those attributes.

### ***Deeds of the Flesh***

If righteous judgment is to be given then what action or actions are we judged upon and by what standard? Does not one situation differ from another? Are our actions alone judged rather than the circumstances surrounding the course of action taken? Isn't it strange to consider that self justification is so close to the tip of our tongue? What choice did I have? What would you have me do? You would have done the same thing. and Who are you to judge me?

*"God is Light and in Him is no darkness,"* I John 1:5 God is Holy and as He is Holy so must we also be Holy, (I Pet. 1:16); consider then the goodness and severity of God. Heaven is a prepared place for a prepared

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people, those who have turned their faces to the Lord in righteous obedience not in self-righteous justification. Showing no partiality toward man (**Rom 2:10**) and holding true to the promise (**John 14:1-3**). *“All men must appear before the judgment seat of Christ in order that recompense may be given for the deeds done in the body whether they be evil or good”* (Matt 16:24-27 & II Cor. 5:10). *“For God will bring to light that which is hidden in darkness and disclose the motives of men’s hearts”* I Cor. 4:5 and *“to those who by perseverance in doing good seek for glory and honor shall receive eternal life, but to those who do not obey the truth but obey unrighteousness shall receive wrath and indignation.”* Rom.2:5-8

Man is so quick to justify himself and his actions that he fails to understand the true nature of God, His judgments today and of the final judgment to come. God knows those who belong to Him and in His name practice righteousness. But in accordance with His true nature all men will bow before the judgment seat, all men will acknowledge Jehovah God and Jesus Christ as Lord and Master, and all will come to understand the just recompense that is due for the deeds that have been done in the flesh.

### ***Justice or Mercy***

It’s at this time when we consider the judging of our deeds done in the body that we are no longer interested in justice rather we are more concerned about mercy. *“... for all have sinned and fallen short of the Glory of God...”* Rom 3:23 *“If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.”* I John 1:10 We begin to understand Paul’s teaching in his letter to the

church in Rome. *“...wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from this body of death?”* Rom 7:24 For if the truth be known, the just recompense for all men would be death. There is not any amount of good that one can do in one’s lifetime to compensate for the sin committed in the flesh.

Judgment will occur in the last day mete out by the righteous judge and justice will be served. But where there is justice there also will be found mercy mete out by the self same righteous judge. *“Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy, has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead to obtain an inheritance which is imperishable and undefiled and will not fade away, reserved in heaven for you”* I Pet. 1:3-4 Now is the dilemma set before me, will I find justice or will I obtain mercy? *“There is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus...”* Rom. 8:1

Returning to the judgment scene described in Matthew 25, the judgment results in only two possible outcomes, two possible destinies for all of mankind. Either we will be gathered on the righteous judge’s right hand with His sheep or on His left land with the goats. Those on His right will be blessed of the Father and inherit the kingdom prepared for them from foundation of the world. Those accursed ones on His left hand will be driven away from His righteous pres-

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ence into eternal fire which has been prepared for the devil and his angels.



In the opening verses of his epistle, Paul offered this prayer for the Ephesians, *“that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of Him. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints.”* Eph 1:17-18 Sometimes we also need this prayer for wisdom to open the window of our hearts and keep our aims, our aspirations on the hope of our calling. Perhaps if we only knew what our Lord is preparing for us, we’d be encouraged to persevere in the race that is set before us.

The word “heaven” is used at least three ways in Scripture. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word *“shamayim”* is generally translated “heaven” and refers to the sky, the firmament, the atmosphere. In the account of the great flood, *“the water prevailed more and more upon the earth, so that all the high mountains everywhere under the heavens were covered.”* Gen 7:19 This refers to the expanse from which dew and rain descend, thunder and lightning arise and manna fell.

*“Shamayin”* can also refer to the celestial realm, the vast expanse where moons, suns and solar systems exist. But the focus of this article is the Greek word *“ouranos.”* The exact meaning of this word must be consistent with the context in which it appears. For instance, in the sermon on the mount, Jesus said, *“... I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet...”* Mt 5:34-35a Its clear that heaven as used here refers to the place where God is.

In 1 Corinthians 12:2 Paul wrote, *“I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago ... such a man was caught up to the third heaven ... caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.”* Paul used the term “third heaven” to refer to the spiritual realm, where the throne of God is, where the angels are (Mt 18:10). The Jews would have been familiar with this usage. When Jesus ascended, the two men in white apparel said, *“Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven.”* Ac 1:11 The Greek word *“ouranos”* occurs three times in this verse and is translated both sky and heaven in the NASB. We understand that as Jesus ascended, the disciples actually watched Him rise into the sky. However, where He rose to, “heaven” is clearly where the throne of God is, because Steven subsequently *“gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of*

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God.” Ac 7:55

Shortly before His death, Jesus told His apostles, *“Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also.”* Jn 14:1-4 Returning to Ephesians, Paul wrote, *“In Him also we have obtained an inheritance, having been predestined according to His purpose who works all things after the counsel of His will, to the end that we who were the first to hope in Christ should be to the praise of His glory. In Him, you also, after listening to the message of truth, the gospel of your salvation, having also believed, you were sealed in Him with the Holy Spirit of promise, who is given as a pledge of our inheritance, with a view to the redemption of God’s own possession, to the praise of His glory.”* Eph 1:10-14 Jesus is preparing our eternal, heavenly dwelling place now. But Jesus didn’t just die for us; He died for everyone and all who respond to His call will receive His reward (Jn 3:16). The Holy Spirit is given to us as the pledge, the down payment, the earnest money, as it were, of our heavenly dwelling place.

Perhaps you’ve heard the joke about the rich man who asked “saint Peter at the pearly gates” if he could bring a bar of gold with him into heaven? Peter reportedly responded by asking, “why do you want to bring “pavement” into heaven?” In Revelation 21, John gives us insight into *“the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints.”* Before we discuss John’s vision of heaven,

let’s remember that The Revelation is a book of images and symbols. I believe chapter 21 is an effort to communicate to our finite minds the infinite greatness, grandeur and glory of what Jesus is preparing for those who love and obey Him. The Spirit inspired John in superlative and grand imagery to describe an eternal dwelling place that is beyond anything our imaginations can even conceive. Gold is rare, costly, so precious we’ll never have much of it. Yet heavenly streets are not only paved with gold, the whole city is pure gold (21:18). Precious stones are rare and costly, yet they’re said to merely adorn the foundation stones of heaven. Pearls are uniquely small and rare, yet each of heaven’s gates are said to be a single pearl. The Jews would have naturally thought in terms of the temple as the ultimate scene of worship and the Holy of Holies the most sacred place. Yet heaven will not have such a temple, for the Lord God and the Lamb are the temple. Darkness is foreboding; there’ll be no darkness in heaven for the glory of God illuminates it, and its lamp *is* the Lamb. Not only is heaven described in terms of majestic splendor, but also a place of bliss where personal sorrows and trials will be vanished. John says, *“God shall wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there shall no longer be any death; there shall no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away.”* (21:4

Heaven will be ultimate holiness, righteousness, love, worship and glory. *“Nothing unclean and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but*

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*only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.*" (21:27) Timeless eternity in the presence of God may be beyond our comprehension, but Jesus is making the final preparations for each of His children's dwelling places right now. Heaven is real, heaven is made especially for you and each of us who come to Him. *"Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life, and may enter by the gates into the city."* (22:14) There we'll be glorified with all His saints, serve Him, see His face and reign eternally around the great white throne. (22:1-5)



Hell is an uncomfortable topic in today's world. Although many people still believe in Hell, they tend to reserve it for those who they consider to be extraordinarily wicked. The Adolf Hitlers, Josef Stalins, and others of their sort will be there, but certainly not "normal" people who are just mildly sinful in their lives. Many people view an eternal Hell as being incompatible with God's loving nature and character.

In sharp contrast with the modern world, the Bible is very clear that Hell is a part of God's plan for eternity.

The word translated "Hell" in the Bible is the Greek word "Gehenna." This word itself is actually a word that passed into Greek from Hebrew. Gehenna appears in the Greek

New Testament 12 times. The English Standard Version consistently translates this word as "Hell." Gehenna comes from the Hebrew word "ge-hinnom" which referred to the Valley of Hinnom, located in the southern part of Jerusalem. Under Kings Ahaz and Manasseh, children were sacrificed in fire to the Ammonite god Molech (2 Kgs 16:3, 21:6). This sacrifice was carried out by placing the child into or on a hollow bronze statue with the body of a man, but the head of an ox. This statue was heated by a fire placed below it. Drums were beaten to drown out the screams of the child who was thus burned (sacrificed) to death. King Josiah put a stop to this practice and defiled the place so that it would not be used in this way (2 Kgs 23:10).

By the first century, this valley was being used as Jerusalem's garbage dump. Rubbish, dead animals, even dead criminals, were thrown into the valley to be consumed in the continuous, smoldering fires and by the maggots. Given the memory of how this place had been used in the past, and how it was being used at the time, this valley became a picture to the Jews of Jesus' day of what eternal punishment would look like. This explains the language that Jesus used in referring to Hell as a place where *"their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched."* Mk 9:48 This describes a punishment without end. In fact, this point is also emphasized in Mark 9:43, where Jesus calls the fire *"unquenchable."*

However, "Gehenna" is not the only de-

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scriptive word used of Hell in the New Testament. Hell is also referred to as the lake of fire. This image is found in Revelation 20. In verse 10, the Devil, the false prophet, and the beast will be thrown into the lake of fire and sulphur. Further on, in verses 14-15, it is clear that this punishment will also be for those who have not obeyed God: *“Then 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.”*

Hell is also described as a place of eternal fire in Matthew 25:41: *“Then he will say to those on his left, “Depart from me, you cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.”* Matthew 25:46 further emphasizes the eternal, ever-lasting nature of this punishment.

At the same time, the Scriptures refer to Hell as a place of complete darkness and great suffering. Notice Matthew 22:13, where at the conclusion of the Parable of the Wedding Feast, the king punishes the one who has entered the wedding feast unprepared: *“Then the king said to the attendants, “Bind him hand and foot and cast him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”* Jude spoke of the rebellious lost and said that *“the gloom of utter darkness has been reserved forever”* for them (Jude 13).

These are horrible descriptions of a horrible place. Yet, there is one more description of Hell that should give man even more reason to avoid it. In 2 Thessalonians 1:9,

Paul states that those who are sentenced to Hell will be cut off from the presence of God forever: *“They will suffer the punishment of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might.”* Everything in this life that is good, everything that is comforting, comes from God. Love, mercy, and compassion all ultimately have their roots in the character of God. All of these things will be completely and totally absent in Hell. No one there will have even the slightest bit of love, mercy, or compassion for all those who are suffering with them.

No wonder God makes such an effort to warn us away from the dangers of Hell. No wonder God tells us of fires, of worms, of burning sulphur, of darkness, of weeping, of gnashing of teeth. It is as if He has placed a large sign, illuminated with flashing lights so it can’t be missed, and on the sign is written in bold letters: **“turn back, come no farther!”**

Hell is a place reserved for people who have chosen to have nothing to do with God. In Revelation 21:8, those destined for Hell are listed: *“But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.”* God will force no one to go to Heaven against their will. However, the only alternative to an eternity in Heaven is an eternity in Hell. Man should think carefully about how he is preparing for eternity, so as to avoid such a place at all cost.

**Hell is a place reserved for people who have chosen to have nothing to do with God.**

## **ARE YOU HEAVEN BOUND?**

**By David J. Riggs**

**(Billy McDaniel's nephew)**

It matters not what else you do in life, if you miss heaven you have been a complete failure. You might gather about you great riches and fame and leave thousands of friends to mourn your departing, but if you are not ready for heaven you have been a miserable failure. On the other hand, you may die in a charity home for the poor and be buried in a potter's field without a single friend to mourn, but if you receive heaven, your life has been a marvelous success.

You can't afford to miss heaven for if you miss it, you miss all. It is the place of eternal rest (Heb. 4:9-11) where pain, sickness, and death will not be known (Rev. 21:4). It is an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that does not fade away (1 Pet. 1:4). It is that city built by the living God (Heb. 11:10).

You don't have to miss heaven. Humbly submit yourself to the will of God (Matt. 7:21). Let His Word guide you (2 Tim. 3:15) and let no one beguile you of your reward (Col. 2:18). Overcome temptations (James 1:12) and suffer for His cause with rejoicing (Matt. 5:11-12). If you do these things, heaven will be yours someday for the God of heaven who cannot lie has promised it.

**For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? Mt 16:26**