

The Unity Series

One Hope

Vol. 1

*This book is dedicated to
every brother and sister
we've loved in
Colombia, the U.S.,
Oman, and El Salvador...*

*...especially those who seek first
the Kingdom of God.*

*Blessings, forgiveness,
love, and grace
be yours forever.*



*Tom and Angelica
January 2019
Antiguo Cuscatlán, El Salvador*

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• *One Hope* •

I. Hopeless: A Church in Denial

God has given his people an incomparable hope. He gave it to us to inspire us in the midst of troubles, temptations, and persecution. Hope is a grace from God—one that can bind us together. In fact, God intends to unite Christians in hope.

Most people just suppose that anyone who calls himself a *Christian* must truly *be* a Christian, but that's a very dangerous presumption. Let's not presume that someone is a brother or sister in Christ until we have administered the test of unity—do they hold firmly to the seven truths of the unity of the spirit?

One of the seven truths that make for spiritual unity is having the same hope. The one hope is an integral part of Christian unity. Do the people you know who call themselves *Christians* have the same hope you do—or not? A direct question deserves a direct answer, so why not ask them straight up: “What is your hope?”

Singing Wrongly

In 2002, Michael Smith popularized the song *Here I am to Worship*. If you've been around American Evangelicals for long, you have probably heard it. Mr. Smith strikes upon the theme of the song when he sings about the “hope of a life spent with you [God].” That sounds nice, but is our *hope* really to spend our lives with God?

Undoubtedly, it is a wonderful privilege for us to spend time with God in prayer and to worship him; but Mr. Smith's phrase “a life spent with you” proves that his hope (as nice as it sounds) is this life now. That kind of hope does not match the teaching of the apostles. Consider Paul, for example, who said that if we hope *in this life*, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19). You can see that the apostle Paul and Michael Smith have two entirely different concepts of what the Christian hope is.

Hope Ministries

What's at stake here is not just a song, but a fundamental doctrine. Across the board, Evangelical ministries have gotten things wrong. Perform a search on the Internet with the word *hope* and countless Evangelical ministries will pop up. They look like this: ministries to the poor, to orphans, and to drug addicts. Then there are Christian ministries to the homeless, the hungry, abandoned children, and victims of domestic violence.

For nine years (2005-2016), our family could only afford to buy second-hand clothing. A lot of it we would buy at a store called *Doors of Hope*. We also attended a church called *New Hope for Life*, which was dedicated to helping people bounce back from life's trials. They ran a thrift shop and food pantry for the poor.

The recently divorced, people recovering from alcoholism, and those suffering from terminal illnesses such as cancer, leukemia, or AIDS are also the focus of ministries of *hope*. One such ministry, *Living Hope*¹ is aimed at helping people overcome homosexual tendencies.

Still another hope-based ministry is led by Rick Warren.² Now, Mr. Warren has been the US's premier pastor from

¹ Retrieved from <http://livehope.org/> on November 30, 2017.

² Mr. Warren is a man whose 27-year old son Matthew committed suicide in April of 2013. This is a terrible tragedy which grieves all of us. It also reminds us of the requirement for a pastor to have children who are believers (1 Timothy 3:5; Titus 1:6), bringing up the question of whether Mr. Warren qualifies for the ministry. Since another requirement is that a pastor cling to sound doctrine (Titus 1:9)—there is a bigger issue at stake.

Nobody is here to condemn Rick Warren. We're just considering whether he qualifies to lead God's Church. A spiritually sensitive person will notice how all things work together: If Mr. Warren doesn't teach the hope of the Kingdom, then those who hear him won't have hope. His son Matthew ended his life hopeless. If he had foundations, he would have known the Kingdom hope, and would never have despaired to the point of suicide.

1995 to the time this book was written.³ He presents his ministry *Daily Hope* like this:

People are discouraged and everyone needs HOPE. We know that HOPE comes from the Scriptures. Discouragement is rampant... in the weak economic recovery and high rate of joblessness, the natural disasters, painful school shootings, gridlock among political leaders and much more. Society is coarsening and there is a clear loss of civility. People need to hear the Gospel and the HOPE in CHRIST more than ever.⁴

Sound convincing? Sure it does, but there's something terribly awry here, so look again. There's a subtle but gaping error you likely missed in Mr. Warren's statement. He contrasts hope with discouragement, particularly the discouragement that comes from a weak local/national economy, unemployment, natural disasters, school shootings, and political gridlock. Got that? Now, let's say that we overcome all that discouragement, and our country actually does become a place of *civility*, as Mr. Warren aspires to. Then what? Will our hope be fulfilled? No! No, no, and a thousand times NO—because as we quoted previously:

If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19; NASB).

Hear us out: People with diseases and crises need hope, and there is nothing wrong with the Church ministering to special needs—that's all good and fine; but to frame the concept of *hope* in the context of special needs is a terrible disservice to the cause of Christ. What *is* the cause of Christ? The Kingdom. We are to proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God!

... the crowds learned about it [where Jesus was] and followed him. He welcomed them and spoke to them about the Kingdom of God... (Luke 9:11)

³ The book was finished in January of 2019.

⁴ Retrieved from <http://pastorrick.com/about/daily-hope-radio> on November 30, 2017.

The Church must speak about the same things Christ spoke about. We have to have the same cause—or we cease being the Light of the World. Indeed, the Evangelical Church has already ceased to be *the pillar and foundation of the truth* (1 Timothy 3:15) as it rarely preaches the Kingdom anymore.

Having our marriages restored or our lost kids turn to the Lord is not the *hope* Jesus preached. Opening a food pantry for displaced people, the homeless, teen runaways, or battered women is wonderful work—and will be generously rewarded by God. (We don't doubt that). However, by participating in that kind of ministry, you are not necessarily instilling the Christian hope in anyone. You only instill the hope if you share this message with them: that the Kingdom of God is coming to Earth. Do you try to convince people of that?

How is the word *hope* used in the NT?

John Piper writes the following:

What's the difference between a Christian definition of hope and the way it is usually used?

The word "hope" in ordinary English vocabulary is generally distinguished from certainty. We would say, "I don't know what's going to happen, but I *hope* it happens."

When you read the word "hope" in the Bible (like in 1 Peter 1:13—"set your hope fully on the grace that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ"), hope is not wishful thinking. It's not "I don't know if it's going to happen, but I *hope* it happens." That's absolutely *not* what is meant by Christian hope.

Christian hope is when God has promised that something is going to happen and you put your trust in that promise. Christian hope is a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will come to pass.⁵

⁵ Retrieved from <https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/what-is-so-important>

... the most important feature of biblical *hope* is not present in any of these ordinary uses of the word *hope*. In fact the distinctive meaning of hope in Scripture is almost the opposite of our ordinary usage.⁶

Mr. Piper is a fervent and eloquent Evangelical teacher. I've met him face-to-face, and many times have enjoyed listening to him—but on this point he's mistaken. He's not speaking as Biblically as he thinks he is. Why do we quote him, then? Because he expresses very concisely the common Evangelical interpretation of the doctrine of *hope*. You will hear this selfsame definition from multiple other Evangelical sources. I still remember the day at seminary when I heard a professor⁷ express the exact same thought.

Now, to the Scriptures!

To the Law and to the Testimony! If they do not speak according to this Word, it is because they have no dawn (Isaiah 8:20; NASB).

Paul does not present the *one hope* of Ephesians 3 the way the world speaks of *hope*—Mr. Piper is right about that—but Paul didn't present hope the way the modern Evangelical Church does either. Paul presents it, as Mr. Piper says, as something “God has promised will come to pass”—yes. However, Paul (unlike Mr. Piper and most Evangelical pastors) is abundantly clear in his writing as to what is going to pass! Paul explicitly says what is coming: *the Kingdom*, the one that will begin when Christ returns to Earth.

Since he's so well-known and well-spoken, we highlight Mr. Piper's definition of *hope* as an example of the very common Evangelical error of vagueness and ambiguity. Mr. Piper is guilty of making things “as clear as mud.”

ant-about-christian-hope on December 1, 2017.

⁶ Retrieved from <https://www.desiringgod.org/messages/what-is-hope> on December 25, 2017.

⁷ God bless his heart, it was Dr. David Shackelford at NY Branch Mid-America Baptist Theological Seminary in the year 1996, and the class was called *Survey of the New Testament*.

You'll observe that Mr. Piper's definition of *hope* consists of two main points:

- The *hope* of the Bible is “absolutely not” wishful thinking.
- The *hope* of the Bible is “a confidence that something will come to pass because God has promised it will come to pass.”

John Piper presents himself as a pastor who actively confronts error in the Church—and we need more men like that—but he fails to confront the greatest error surrounding the hope which is the fact that it's not preached! Read his two statements very closely and you'll see that Mr. Piper tells us what hope is *not*, but he does not tell us what it *is*! Like many of his Evangelical colleagues, he does not reveal the truth, he only exposes a lie.

Again and again, Bible teachers such as John Piper miss golden opportunities to proclaim the Kingdom hope. He's been in the ministry since 1974, and is still going strong as of 2019, but even after innumerable sermons, books, blogs, and videos, he still has never gotten around to proclaiming the Kingdom. His story is all-too-familiar. He represents the most popular trend among Evangelicals. We refuse to be part of such a trend, which is nothing less than Apostasy.

Hope does mean wishful thinking

Now consider this: In spite of Mr. Piper's confident assertion, the Bible does indeed use the word *hope* in the sense of *wishful thinking*. And if the Bible uses *hope* to refer to “something not certain but desired,” why can't Christians use it that way? In fact, apostles used it that way quite often. As proof, we invite you to study the 21 NT passages in our Appendix 1. Each passage there demonstrates that the word *hope* can indeed mean *wishful thinking* in the NT.

So John Piper (and Evangelicals in general) are mistaken when they say that the biblical use of the word *hope* is exclusively the sure promise of God. However, this is not the main error with the Evangelical interpretation of *hope*. There's something much more dastardly—something much more disastrous!

What's wrong with the Evangelical *hope*

Again, if we use Mr. Piper's position as an example—a representative sliver of the Evangelical position—it shouldn't be hard for you to notice the gaping hole. What is it? What's the blatant gap in the Evangelical doctrine? Try this: Evangelical pastors make no mention of the Kingdom of God when they define the Biblical term *hope*—they make zero mention of the Kingdom!

For example, Mr. Piper vaguely states that the Christian hope is summed up like this: “God has promised that something is going to happen”? Well, here's a question for Mr. Piper: What is that *something*? Will he not do us the favor of *defining* the Christian hope?

We've already said it, and we'll repeat it again: The One Hope is the Kingdom of God, the World to Come, the Government of Christ on Earth. How is it that such an intelligent man could be incapable of stating this? How is it that Mr. Piper (and about 75% of Evangelical pastors with him) should come so short of saying outright what *the* Christian hope is?

The Kingdom is Still Preached

Although there are still plenty of Pentecostal and Baptist pastors who love the return of Christ,⁸ those pastors are not indispensable. God is not limited to using those pastors. Indeed, he testifies to the Kingdom through groups many Evangelicals would consider *cults*. Nonetheless, these groups, so rejected by Evangelicals, have been proclaiming

⁸ Some of those pastors as of 2019 would be David Jeremiah, Tim LaHaye, John Hagee, Hal Lindsey, Grant Jeffrey, Jack Van Impe, and—to a lesser degree—John MacArthur. In 2016, *Christianity Today* reported that 75% of Baptists and 84% of Pentecostals believe in Premillennialism.

Now, Premillennialism is an error, but at least Premillennialists recognize that there will be a Millennium! Only about 4% of Protestant pastors teach a Mid-Tribulation rapture, which is the true doctrine (Retrieved from <http://www.christianitytoday.com/news/2016/april/sorry-left-behind-pastors-end-times-rapture-antichrist.html> on January 17, 2017).

the Kingdom unwaveringly for decades, and in the midst of much opposition (some opposition even from Evangelicals)! Are these groups really as bad as Evangelicals make them out to be? Aren't most Evangelicals just as bad since they deny fundamental doctrines?⁹

Of particular note among the cults are the United Church of God¹⁰ and the Jehovah's Witnesses Watchtower Society.¹¹ Are these groups in error? Yes, they are—but what makes them worse than an apostate Evangelical? Aren't both heretical? We define *heresy* as the denial of a fundamental Christian doctrine. Well, the majority of Evangelicals deny the fundamental doctrines of One God, baptism for salvation, the laying on of hands, the Resurrection from the Dead, judgment according to our works, and the hope of the Kingdom.

So to their credit, the UCG and the JWs have served a special purpose: conserving at least one fundamental doctrine, the one hope—the message of the Kingdom. To the JW's credit, they have also conserved the doctrine of One God.

⁹ We suggest a better way of gauging heresy: Count how many of the fundamentals a church group denies. The group that denies more fundamentals is more heretical. For example, the typical Baptist church denies: 1. One God, 2. That Jesus came in the flesh, 3. the Hope, 4. the baptism of the Holy Spirit, and 5. the need for repentance for salvation. How many fundamentals do the Jehovah's Witnesses deny? They deny the Spirit, but not One God or the Hope!

¹⁰ The UCG is an offshoot of Grace Communion International/Worldwide Church of God, originally founded by Herbert Armstrong. They produce the finest pamphlets on the Kingdom, by far. Unfortunately, they do not use spiritual gifts, and they insist on practicing OT holidays—so they are legalists like the Pharisees. They are blind to the freedom we have in the New Covenant.

¹¹ The JWs, as they like to be called, actively disseminate pamphlets illustrating a world at peace—the Kingdom with all its abundant blessings. Although their understanding of the Kingdom is skewered [for example, they don't believe that we will actually reign with Christ, and ignore the Millennium], at least they announce Christ's global Kingdom with confidence, and are willing to suffer scorn and rejection for preaching it.

Concealing the Kingdom

Many Evangelical pastors are guilty of hiding the Kingdom and blinding people to it. These are pastors, so they can't just blatantly deny the Kingdom. Rather, the subtle way they blind people is by placing great importance on church growth. In most cases, they will make church growth ten times more important than the Kingdom. If you listen to a given Evangelical preacher on a typical Sunday morning and counted the number of times they mention the Kingdom, the ratio would easily be at least 1:10 (the Kingdom : church growth).

Why aren't these preachers busy preaching the return of Christ? Why do they not announce that Jesus will establish his rule on Earth? In great measure, it's because they're too busy building their own empires. Their dream is to be megachurches, not to inherit the Earth. They preach the Church, not the Kingdom. Some congregations have awoken to the reality that the megachurch trend is not from God—so what do they do? They preach missions. They are “getting warmer.” That is, they are closer to preaching the Kingdom than others [since the completion of world evangelism must precede the return of Christ]. However, even they fall short of the task Christ assigned us—to preach the Kingdom.

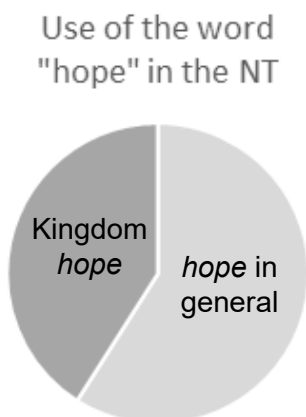
To wrap up this section, we want to remind you of something we touched on earlier: Evangelical pastors also conceal the Kingdom through psychology. Pastors play to the desperate family and social crises of their hearers. Because of their human-focused preaching, the term *hope* has lost its original NT meaning. Evangelicals will normally use the term *hope* only with desperate sinners who are reaching out to God for the first time. Pastors use the term *hope* in their pastoral counselling (with the divorced, drug addicts, and suicidals) and in their ministries to the disenfranchised (the unemployed, the homeless, and the poor). Unwittingly, pastors are robbing the word *hope* of its true meaning.



A. Denial of the Hope

Hope as God defines it

Now we have a task before us: Let's define *hope* Biblically. Let's not concern ourselves with Evangelical lies any more. Let's actually get God's definition of the *hope*. One sure-fire way to know what *hope* means is to look up all (yes, 100%!) of its uses in the NT. If we do that, we can understand exactly how the Holy Spirit intended the word to be used and understood. Are you up to the challenge? If you look up the word *hope* in a NT concordance, you'll find that it's used 83 times total.



Out of those 83 English Bible version occurrences, 6 come from translations which supply the word *hope* when the word is really not there. In other words, although you'll see them in the English versions, the word for *hope* is not in the original Greek. That's the case in the following passages: Luke 20:20; Acts 8:22; Acts 17:27; 1 Corinthians 9:15; 1 Corinthians 15:32; and 2 Timothy 2:25 for which we will not concern ourselves.¹²

That leaves us with 77 passages which contain the word *hope* in English. Among those, there's one occasion when *hope* is used where the Greek is really the word for *wish*.¹³

¹² In these passages, you might see the word *hope* used in your version of the Bible, but there is no Greek word for *hope* in the original Greek NT. The word *hope* is there just because translators thought that it would help people to get the idea of the passage better—and there's nothing wrong with what they've done. The only thing is that if we study these passages, it's not going to help us at all to understand what the God-inspired word for *hope* really means, so we won't study them.

So our final count is that there are a total of 76 Bible verses that use the Greek word for *hope*. Let's deal with those 76! The breakdown of the 76 Bible passages that use the Greek word *hope* is as follows:

- Some 45 have *hope* in them, but are not about the Kingdom hope. That's 59% of the times *hope* is used in the NT. Some 21 of those uses are the *wishful thinking* kind of hope, which you can study more closely in Appendix A. While Appendix B is for those of you who may want to examine the 24 other passages that use *hope* which make no reference to the Kingdom.
- Some 31 passages speak of the Kingdom hope in particular. Therefore, a full 41% of the NT passages that use the Greek word for *hope* refer to the One Hope of Ephesians 4:4—the Kingdom hope.

Think about these statistics, because we've just discovered a massive scandal: Evangelical churches are disregarding and consistently misinterpreting at least 31 Bible passages which address a fundamental doctrine! In other words, there are 31 Bible passages churches almost never expound upon—but these 31 passages are nothing less than the very substance of the Christian hope!

See if you can remember when you last heard one of the following passages taught or explained to you. The following 31 NT passages are not only what this book is about—they're what Christianity is about! These verses define the Christian hope better than any other writings anywhere—

¹³ The Greek word for *wish* is used once in the NT, and it is often translated to the English as *hope*:

I hope you will put up with me in a little foolishness (2 Corinthians 11:1)!

In this verse, the most common translation of the Greek word *ophelōn* is *I would to God... or I wish...* Only three Bible translations: the NIV, the NLT, and the Berean Study Bible translate it as *I hope*. It's a linguistic fact that *I hope* is a perfectly legitimate translation of *ophelōn* to English, so there is nothing wrong with these translations.

because they're completely inspired by the Holy Spirit. These are the God-breathed Holy Scriptures that most concisely demonstrate the meaning of the Christian *hope*. We'll briefly describe each of the 31 passages below to assist you in understanding what other teachers are not helping you to understand.

Trust hope

Let's start with the four NT passages with the Greek word *elpizó* (meaning *hope*, but often translated *trust*). This is the less common of the two Greek words translated *hope* in the NT. Its infrequent use makes it a special word. The fact that the Holy Spirit inspired the apostles to use it proves that our Kingdom hope is not only a wish, but also a *confidence*. Our hope not just something we wish will happen, it's something we *trust God* to do. So *elpizó* is the *trust* kind of hope.

1. The disciples of Jesus were confident that Jesus would redeem Israel—but from what? Religious and political oppression. The Pharisees oppressed the people *religiously*, and the Romans oppressed the people *politically*. Only God's Chosen One—the Messiah-King—could free the Jews from this dual oppression. Only God's Kingdom could overcome the oppression of the Pharisees and the Romans.

... but we had hoped [trusted]¹⁴ that he [Jesus] was the one who was going to redeem Israel (Luke 24:21).

2. We do not hope in Christ in this life only. In fact, we seek little from Christ in this life. Our primary hope is to get power in the next life. We will be disap-

¹⁴ What did these two disciples of Christ (the ones who were walking to Emmaus on the very day of Christ's resurrection, speaking to him unawares) hope that Jesus would do? They hoped that he would redeem Israel. The hope that Jesus will redeem Israel is the exact same confidence we have today that Jesus will deliver Israel from its enemies, reform it, and lead it to become the global superpower. These men trusted in the Kingdom—and Jesus won't let them down.

pointed by what we get for following Christ in *this* life—persecution, rejection, suffering, slander, even death! We will not be disappointed by what he gives us after the Resurrection—the Kingdom.

If we have hoped [trusted] in Christ in this life only,¹⁵ we are of all men most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19; NASB).

3. We have to place 100% of our hope in the blessings that we get when Jesus returns. The following is a supremely important Bible verse since it illustrates the fact that our confidence must be completely focused on the Kingdom—yes, the one that begins when Jesus comes back. What unmerited favor! What incomparable grace!

... put your hope [trust] completely in the grace¹⁶ that will be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ (1 Peter 1:13).

4. The following passage uses the *hope* that means *trust* [*elpizó*], but just once. The Greek word for *trust* is sandwiched between the two uses of the other Greek word for *hope* [*elpis*]. So, although in English this passage says *hope* three times, in the original Greek, it contains two different words.

¹⁵ It's abundantly clear that to hope in Christ in this life only would be a great disappointment, a letdown. Our hope in Christ needs to focus on the next life—the coming Kingdom. What does following Christ bring us in this life? Rejection, suffering, slander, betrayal, persecution, disappointment, and even death. This life is characterized by a cross, while the next is characterized by a crown.

¹⁶ Here's *grace*—that highly misconstrued term. What is *grace* but undeserved favor? Now, when will that favor be poured out upon us? When will we get what we could never deserve? We get God's grace in the Kingdom. We get that grace when we reign with Christ! God is here commanding us to put 100% of our hope in that particular grace—the one that will come upon us at the revelation of Jesus. In other words, our hope is *all* (yes—*all*) about trusting in the rewards that accompany Jesus when he returns in his Kingdom.

And now I am standing trial for the hope of the promise made by God to our fathers... This is the promise our twelve tribes are hoping [trusting] to see fulfilled as they earnestly serve God day and night... it is because of this hope that these Jews are accusing me. Why should any of you consider it incredible that God raises the Dead (Acts 26:6-8)?

How shall we interpret this passage? Well, Paul says twice that the Jews persecute him simply for the fact that he had put his hope in the promise given to the patriarchs. To be specific—he's talking about *the Resurrection*. To make his point even more clear, Paul points out that day and night the 12 tribes of Israel serve God, with the sole purpose of demonstrating their trust in God's promise of a Resurrection.

You shouldn't find it difficult to understand that the Resurrection is the hope which the apostles preached. Indeed, the Resurrection was the entire motivation behind Israel's service to God. Paul was shocked that anyone would find it difficult to believe that God resurrects people from the dead, but that's exactly what many of his Jewish counterparts struggled with. He showed them that they were in denial over the very reason why Israel was a nation.

Expectation kind of *hope*

The math here is $4 + 27 = 31$. We're looking at the 31 NT passages that define the Kingdom hope, and we just saw 4 of them. Four down and 27 to go. Now, please reflect upon the following 27 passages: All of them use the Greek word *elpis*—a word always translated to English as *hope*. So, if *elpizó* is the *trust* kind of hope, *elpis* is the *expectation (of getting something in the future)* kind of hope!

5. Jesus proclaimed that his fleshly body would live in hope, knowing that God would not abandon him during his 3-day stay in Hades. Why was his body



hope-
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God did
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of Nicodemus, the female disciples wrapped and embalmed Jesus’ body. Consequently, in just three days God resurrected Christ’s body.

God raised him [Jesus] up, having brought to an end the pains of death... David says with reference to him [Jesus], ‘I saw the Lord [Father God] before me continually... my flesh will live in hope, because you [God] will not abandon my [Jesus’] soul in Hades... [David] spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was he abandoned in Hades nor did his flesh experience decay. This Jesus God raised up, of which we all are witnesses (Acts 2:24-27, 31-32; LEB).

You’ll probably have to read this passage twice in order to digest it thoroughly. It says that Jesus hoped in God to resurrect him. Now, since Jesus died with such a hope, shouldn’t we live with the same hope? Jesus *hoped in God* because God is the one who resurrects those who trust in him. Didn’t he resurrect Jesus?

6. What’s so cool about the following verse is that it proves that Paul knew exactly why the Jews hated him so much—it was because of his message. Paul’s message revolved around the hope and the Resurrection of the Dead. These are two unique but similar

beliefs. Both of them motivated Paul's enemies to try to silence him.

[Paul]... shouted out in the Sanhedrin... 'I am being judged concerning the hope and¹⁷ the Resurrection of the Dead!' (Acts 23:6; LEB)

7. Paul confidently declared in a court of law that the hope of the Jews was the hope that there would be a Resurrection of the Dead. That was the hope Abraham and the patriarchs transmitted to their descendants. Paul defended himself in court hearings precisely by making it clear that the Resurrection is the very *hope in God* which distinguishes believers from unbelievers. He also made it clear that the Resurrection will be for all people, and its effect will be justice on Earth. Everyone will get what they deserve.

... I have the same hope in God as these men themselves have, that there will be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked (Acts 24:15).

8. As we've already seen, Paul was sure about what caused him to be persecuted: his proclamation of his nation's hope.

[Paul declared] 'It is because of the hope of Israel that I am bound with this chain' (Acts 28:20).

The prophets and Jewish history itself testify that the hope of Israel is the Kingdom of God. It's the hope that Israel will be the country God has always wanted it to be: the global leader in religion, education, and

¹⁷ The NIV mistakenly translates this passage as the hope *of* the resurrection of the Dead, when the conjunction and is undeniably in the original Greek [which literally says *elpis kai anastasis nekros*]. That's best translated 'the hope *and* the Resurrection of the Dead.'

So, why did Paul say he was being judged? What did he spend his life defending? Very precisely: the Kingdom hope. Now, the Resurrection is necessary for one to enter that Kingdom. That is, the Resurrection is the door to the Kingdom; but [as this passage clearly points out] it is not the exact same thing as the Kingdom!

law; as well as ground zero for pilgrimages from any direction. This hope also includes the expectation that the Kingdom of God will have as its capital city, Jerusalem.

9. Abraham believed *in hope*, say the Scriptures. That means that his faith was a *hopeful* kind of faith. It wasn't just a temporary passing faith like the kind you use when you're in a jam. It was a faith that went against all odds and endured the test of time. There was no reason for him to hope in his wife's sterile womb or in his almost-dead body—but he kept on believing anyways.

Against all hope, Abraham in hope [same word] believed and so became the father of many nations, just as it had been said to him, 'So shall your offspring be' (Romans 4:18).

Notice the expression *the father of many nations*. What does that mean? What was Abraham, the father of many nations, hoping in? He hoped that his descendants would become many different nations of believers—not just the nation of Israel. He actually believed that many ethnic groups would live by faith in the God who brings the dead back to life. When will Abraham see the fulfillment of that hope? When the Kingdom of God is established on Earth, when together we all serve Christ. Now, you should be able to understand that Abraham's hope was the Kingdom.

10. Have you ever boasted about the hope you have? Try it. People will think you're crazy, but tell them that your hope is to be resurrected, have a divine nature, and share in God's glory.

... we boast in the hope of the glory of God¹⁸ (Romans 5:2).

¹⁸ What is this hope? Do we actually get the glory of God? Indeed we do, in the resurrection we get glory and a divine nature. So our hope is the glory of God—not just to see it when we see God, but to possess it—as the Lord God sees fit to give it, in his great love, the same he had for Jesus when he gave him glory before the World began (John 17:24).

Many Evangelicals will tell you that you should just want to be with Jesus, and that's enough. Some might even tell you that such a desire is Satanic, and that you want exactly what the Devil wanted when he committed that first sin of overthrowing God. They might even say that your desire is the same on Eve had. They'd be wrong, of course. The basis of the Devil's temptation was not Eve's desire to be like God, but her sense of unfairness—the Devil was able to make her distrust God, feeling like God didn't want her to be like God. She believed the Devil's lie. The truth is that God does want us to be like him!

11. The main idea of the following passage is that we are saved from the power of sin in the hope of our resurrection—“in hope we are saved.” When we are resurrected, God calls that our *glorious freedom*—a freedom we haven't seen yet, which is what makes it a *hope*. It is only then that the creation (Earth, atmosphere, space, plants and animals) will also be set free from the *futility* they are now subject to.

For the creation has been subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of the One who subjected it [God], in hope that the creation itself also will be set free from its servility to decay, into the glorious freedom of the children of God. For we know that the whole creation groans together and suffers agony together until now.

Not only this, but we ourselves also, having the first fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves while we await eagerly our adoption, the redemption of our body. For in hope we were saved, but hope that is seen is not hope, for who hopes for what he sees? (Romans 8:20-24; LEB)

What is the creation's current *futility*? Precisely that animals and plants are part of a world that will come to an end. Animals won't be resurrected into the New World. They are subject to death currently, but those that inhabit the Kingdom will live forever. Nonethe-

less, both the creation and we ourselves groan from within, longing for the Kingdom to come, and that we be set free.

12. Our hope is in *the glory which lasts!* Moses' OT ministry of preaching the Law was a glorious ministry—so much that it made his face shine for a time. We have a NT ministry, and it's even greater because it's based on the hope that we'll have a permanent eternal glory—a *surpassing glory*. It will become ours at the resurrection when we are made to reign with Christ as kings on the Earth.

... what was glorious [Moses' ministry, one of death and condemnation] has no glory now in comparison with the surpassing glory. And if what was transitory came with glory, how much greater is the glory of that which lasts! Therefore, since we have such a hope,¹⁹ we are very bold (2 Corinthians 3:10-12).

13. We need to be *enlightened* through a *spirit of wisdom and revelation* that we might comprehend *the hope*. What hope? The hope of God's high *calling* upon us. What are we called to? Well, God has called us to inherit *the riches* of his glory in the Kingdom. Nobody is able to fathom the Kingdom *inheritance* without a special revelation from God. Has that inheritance been revealed to you yet?

... making mention in my prayers, that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you a spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him (the eyes of your hearts having been enlightened), so that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance among the saints... (Ephesians 1:16-18; LEB)

¹⁹ What is this hope, the one Paul calls *such* a hope? It's the hope of obtaining a glory which lasts. Do you see that? And what is the glory that lasts, but that of our resurrected bodies? In other words, the hope of this passage is that of getting a resurrected body.

14. Here we arrive at the verse that inspired the writing of our seven-books, the Unity Series. Please focus in on the phrase *the one hope of your calling*.

... one body, and one Spirit, just as also you were called with one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God... (Ephesians 4:4-6; LEB)

We have to use the LEB translation because it's closest to the original Greek. This same passage has been translated poorly by the NIV team to say:

There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called... (Ephesians 4:4; NIV)

Observe please that the NIV gives the wrong idea. It's not a matter of what happened *when* you were called. This has nothing to do with pinpointing an event that took place at a certain moment in your personal history. Rather, the idea is that there is a particular and unique hope—it's the hope *of* your calling (which in Greek is *heis elpis ho hymeis klēsis*). The idea is that the hope is part of something broader: our *calling*, our vocation!

So to interpret this vital passage correctly [and you must interpret it correctly if you will understand sound doctrine], you first have to understand what our *calling* is. What is our calling? Is it not to reign on the Earth and to rule with Christ? Of course it is. This is the high calling Paul strove to achieve with all his might. Notice how in the following passage he calls it *the upward call of God*:

... that I may know him [Jesus] and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, being conformed to his death; in order that I may attain to the Resurrection from the Dead.

Not that I have already obtained it [the resurrection] or have already become perfect, but I press on so that I may lay hold of that for which also I was laid hold of by Christ Jesus.

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it [the Resurrection] yet; but one thing I do: forgetting what lies behind and reaching forward to what lies ahead, I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus (Philippians 3:10-14; NASB).

This is also the *calling* of which Peter spoke (one that involves an entrance into the Kingdom). It's a calling that we must make more and more sure by constantly growing spiritually:

... brothers, be zealous even more to make your calling and election secure, because if you do these things, you will never ever stumble. For in this way [through spiritual growth] entrance into the eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be richly supplied for you (2 Peter 1:10-11; LEB).

And this is the same *calling* to which Paul referred when he said that we must be *worthy* of it:

... we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling (2 Thessalonians 1:11; NKJV).

This is not to say that anyone could ever deserve the calling, for it is only by grace that we will ever see it fulfilled; but it's still incumbent upon us to show ourselves worthy of the Kingdom! God called us there, now let's show him that we believe that he can make us suitable for it.

Most importantly, since our primary text is from Ephesians, it is incumbent upon us to study the way Paul uses the term *calling* in Ephesians in general. This calling is so great, that it's something we can't even comprehend without the assistance of God's revelation. It's so wonderful that we won't understand it unless God reveals it to us. That's what Paul is getting at when he refers to God's *calling* in the following passages:

... [I pray that]... the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of his calling, what are the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of his power toward us who believe, according to the working of his mighty power which he worked in Christ (Ephesians 1:18-20; NKJV).

[I]... implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called (Ephesians 4:1; NASB).

So, the calling has one hope. That hope is that there will be a Kingdom of God on Earth in which we will all dwell, thrive, and live forever. If you're convinced of that, you have the hope. If you're not yet convinced of it, then you have yet to be established in the foundations of the Christian faith.

15. In the Gospel, we hear about how in Heaven there is a *hope laid up for us*. What is that hope? The New Jerusalem, the glory with which Jesus will reward us, the coming Kingdom? Yes, all that! Each of those things are an integral part of the Gospel message. If your version of the Gospel does not include those things, it's not the True Gospel, but a cheap imitation.

We give thanks to God... because of the hope laid up for you in Heaven,²⁰ of which you previously heard in

²⁰ Many Bible verses talk about rewards laid up for us in Heaven. Because of that, we see that the *hope laid up for us in heaven* is synonymous with the rewards. There are many passages that say our reward will be crowns—crowns which are in Heaven now. Another one of those heavenly rewards is the New Jerusalem itself. These are all dimensions of the great Kingdom reward which awaits us. Reflect upon the following reward verses, if you would:

... great is your reward in Heaven... (Matthew 5:12)

[Jesus says] I am coming soon [from Heaven]! My reward is with me, and I will give to each person according to what they have done (Revelation 22:12).

[Moses]... regarded disgrace for the sake of Christ as of greater value than the treasures of Egypt, because he was looking ahead to his reward (Hebrews 11:26)

the Word of Truth, the Gospel (Colossians 1:3-5; NASB).

16. The Gospel has a hope. If we are firm in our faith, and we don't allow ourselves to be led away from that hope, we continue in our positive status with God—we continue to be reconciled to him.

... he [God] has now reconciled you [to himself]... if indeed you continue in the faith firmly established and steadfast, and not moved away from the hope of the Gospel... (Colossians 1:20-21, 23; NASB)

After reading the passage, do you know what *the hope* of the Good News of the Kingdom is? That we would inherit the Kingdom! Isn't that what anyone who hears about the Kingdom should hope for?

17. Our hope is glory! Of course we don't want to supplant God. Far be it from us to steal his glory like the Devil intended to do (Isaiah 14:13-14), but we *do* want to get glory. We want to get it legitimately as Jesus got it. Did he not obtain the glory of God (John 17:24) legitimately?

... God has chosen to make known among the Gentiles the glorious riches of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory²¹ (Colossians 1:27).

Now, if Jesus is in us [and by suffering in his name we get a stronger anointing of the Holy Spirit], our hope of glory becomes more and more firm. That's because the Spirit is the guarantee of our resurrection (Romans 8:11, 15-17; 2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5)! So more anointing means more certainty of glory. Halleluiah!

... they [ministers of the Gospel] will each be rewarded according to their own labor (1 Corinthians 3:8).

²¹ Another passages that proves that *glory* is our hope is:

...our momentary light affliction is producing in us an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure and proportion, because we are not looking at what is seen, but what is not seen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is not seen is eternal (2 Corinthians 4:17-18; LEB).

18. Paul, speaking of himself and his fellow missionary-apostles, declared to his Thessalonian disciples that his hope was to see them with Jesus at Jesus' return. In other words, his hope was to see that his labors in the Word would be completed in them, and that they'd make it to the Rapture without slipping back into sin.

For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? For you are our glory and joy (1 Thessalonians 2:19-20; NKJV)

Paul's hope was to see the people he evangelized and pastored enter the Kingdom. Furthermore, if they were to persevere until the return of Christ, Paul actually had the *hope* of a reward for his pastoral labor—a literal crown. How many missionaries and pastors would work much more effectively if they allowed themselves to be motivated by that same hope today?

19. The following passage paints a stark contrast between us [who have hope], and the rest of humankind [who do not]. What's the hope of those who have it? That we'll be with Jesus forever, from the moment of his return onwards. That hope is what Paul commanded the Thessalonian believers to speak about to one another.

... we do not want you to be uninformed about those who sleep in death, so that you do not grieve like the rest of mankind, who have no hope. For we believe that Jesus died and rose again, and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him...

For the Lord himself will come... and the Dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. Therefore encourage one another with these words (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14, 16-18).

How much time do we spend talking about the hope to one another? According to this passage, we should do it a lot. We'll encourage one another if we do.

20. A helmet protects your head. Your head is the seat of your thoughts. The hope of salvation is like a helmet in that it protects our thinking. Since our thoughts lead us to act, and we'll be judged by our actions, it's vital that hope—hope in the resurrection of our bodies—protect our every thought. We should be thinking about what is going to happen when we are resurrected. That will make us more serious, or (as the Bible says), *sober-minded*.

... let us be sober, putting on faith and love as a breastplate, and the hope of salvation as a helmet (1 Thessalonians 5:8).

Not only this one, but another passage (the famous 1 Corinthians 13:13), identifies faith, hope, and love as the three key virtues. The two passages demonstrate that as a breastplate and helmet protect a soldier's vital organs, so do these three virtues protect us in a vital way. We must use this verse to interpret Ephesians 6:17's *helmet of salvation* not as it normally is interpreted as the assurance we're *not* going to Hell,²² but the *hope* of going to the Kingdom. It does say, after all, that the helmet is the *hope* of salvation.

How does this helmet work? Well, since salvation is future (it will only be complete when we enter the Kingdom), we look forward to it, hoping and striving after it. Hoping for this salvation causes our actions to become righteous. Therefore, if our thoughts are protected by the hope of the Kingdom,²³ our

²² Most websites you visit will say that the *helmet of salvation* of Ephesians 6 is the assurance of salvation, commonly understood to mean "knowing that you're not going to Hell someday." Baptists are particularly fond of the concept of assurance. However, the 1 Thessalonians parallel passage dispels their misunderstanding. The *hope*, as Scriptures affirm repeatedly, is the hope of the Kingdom, with all its glorious rewards.

²³ Understand this flow: *Salvation = resurrection = Kingdom*, because we're only saved from sin when we're resurrected into a new body, and we're resurrected into the Kingdom.

actions will be good. We'll be living with a purpose: that of reaping the rewards of our good works.

21. Paul begins his epistle to Titus by identifying himself as a man who serves God *in the hope of eternal life*. Do you serve God that way? If Paul served God *in the hope*, then all of us should.

Paul... for the faith of the chosen of God and the knowledge of the truth... in the hope of eternal life which God... promised before eternal ages, but at the proper time has disclosed his message... (Titus 1:1-3; LEB).

Now, here's the question: What is the hope in which Paul served God? Paul says that it's a hope for the very life God *promised*—eternal life. This is the same eternal life which God currently reveals through his *message*, the Gospel. Do you know the details of that life? If it's eternal, it's going to last a long long time, so there must be many details about what it will be like. Do you know any of the details?

With this passage, Paul lays out his ideology and the thrust of his ministry. He makes known to us the centrality of the hope. In brief, that the one hope was promised by God, and is now revealed in the Gospel of the Kingdom, God's *message*.

22. The deep heart desire of a true Christian is the appearing of Christ, the *blessed hope*. Indeed, if we have it, this *hope* will be the inspiration behind self-controlled, righteous, and godly living. We will be preparing ourselves for our encounter with Jesus.

... the grace of God has appeared that offers salvation to all people. It teaches us to say "No" to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ (Titus 2:11-13).

23. An inheritance awaits us. God wants us to become heirs of the Earth and the heirs of his Kingdom! Such an inheritance is only possible through *the hope* of eternal life—it's not according to a wish, a dream, or our imagination.

... he [God] saved us... through the washing of regeneration and renewal by the Holy Spirit... so that, having been justified by his grace, we may become heirs according to the hope of eternal life (Titus 3:5-7; LEB).

This inheritance is for those whom God saves. In other words, it's only for those who have been saved from sin through water and Holy Spirit baptism. Only those who have discovered God's grace through baptism qualify as heirs of his Kingdom.

24. We *glory in* the hope. That is, the hope is our pride and joy. We're not afraid to announce it, to sing about it, or to teach it. Notice also, that we are God's Church only if we hold firmly to the hope. Anyone who is not firm in the hope will disavow church fellowship, and will break away from God's people.

But Christ is faithful as the Son over God's house. And we are his house, if indeed we hold firmly to our confidence and the hope in which we glory (Hebrews 3:6).

What is this hope in which we glory? In what exactly do we glory—that is, what do we boast about? There's only one hope, the hope of eternal life in the Kingdom.

25. What is the idea behind having a *full assurance* of hope? The concept of assurance is vague for many, but one translation gets the idea across well this way: 'We want each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, so that what you hope for may be fully realized' (NIV). We have to work to obtain the Kingdom we're hoping for.

... we desire that each one of you show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope until the end, so that you will not be sluggish, but imitators

of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises (Hebrews 6:11-12; NASB).

Here's the explanation of what this means: Our hope, the one hope of the Kingdom, has yet to be fulfilled. Therefore, in the meantime we have to be *diligent*. In other words, we have to work hard so that we actually *earn* what God has promised us: the Earth, a never-aging forever-healthy resurrection body, authority to govern people and lands, and eternal life, among many other things.

26. Read the following passage carefully and you'll discover that it is about the Kingdom hope—a hope that's based on the firm promises and even oath of God!

For when God made the promise to Abraham, since he could swear by no one greater, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and I will surely multiply you.' And so, having patiently waited, he obtained the promise.

For men swear by one greater than themselves, and with them an oath given as confirmation is an end of every dispute. In the same way God, desiring even more to show to the heirs of the promise the unchangeableness of his purpose, interposed with an oath, so that by two unchangeable things in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have taken refuge would have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us (Hebrews 6:13-18; NASB).

The point is that this hope is something we latch on to *because* God swore with an oath that his promise is firm and sure. With this double surety coming from the mouth of the One who cannot lie, what *more* reason do we need to believe in God's promise to Abraham—the promise of the Kingdom?

27. This next passage is beloved among Christians due to its famous metaphor for hope being an anchor of the soul, but the passage is much more than beau-

tiful poetry. The part about the veil is very practical. It shows us exactly *how* we obtain mercy from God. Sound important to you? Interpret the idea *entering within the veil* well, and you'll understand how we can be sure that God has forgiven our sins.

This hope²⁴ we have as an anchor of the soul, a hope both sure and steadfast and one [a hope] which enters within the Veil, where Jesus has entered as a forerunner for us, having become a High Priest forever... (Hebrews 6:19-20; NASB)

What does Hebrews mean when it says that our hope enters *within the veil*? The apostle paints a picture of a temple for us here, one that is similar to the First Jerusalem Temple, but one which is actually in Heaven. Within the Jerusalem Temple, the Holy of Holies was located behind a large veil. Only the High Priest could enter there, but now Jesus intercedes for us in the true Holy of Holies in Heaven. Because he does that, our Kingdom hope is guaranteed. That is, Jesus' intercession makes it certain that we'll obtain the mercy we need in order to get the rewards God has promised in the Kingdom! So our hope is guaranteed in Heaven (where it's secure), in that place of encounter with God, thanks to our Priest!

28. What does the Bible mean when it speaks of "the *confession* of our hope"? It is when we verbally enunciate what we hope in. It's necessary for us to express our hope in the Kingdom, and we must do it with our lips. We must make this public proclamation with absolute confidence.

Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who Promised [God] is faithful (Hebrews 10:23; NKJV).

²⁴ The word *hope* does not really appear in the Greek in v. 19 at all, but since it clearly refers to the one spoken of in v. 18, it is repeated for clarity in the NASB version.

Of course, our Kingdom hope sounds like craziness to unbelievers—and that’s exactly what makes it so hard to proclaim. The unbelief of those who hear can feel overwhelming, but our boldness is based on the fact that God has promised a Kingdom even to them, and God doesn’t lie.

29. We are born spiritually *to* a hope—which means that when we first believe, our belief is the doorway *to* a new life characterized by hope in the Kingdom. Our faith opens our hearts to believing in the World to come.

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 (1 Peter 1:3; NASB).

Our new birth is only made possible by Jesus resurrecting because what happened to him proves that the Kingdom is real. If there’s a real King, then his Kingdom must also be real. With Jesus resurrected, we know that the Kingdom promise will truly be fulfilled. It most certainly *will* come to Earth.

30. A relatively famous Bible verse, but little understood, is the next passage, which exhorts us to argue in favor of the hope. At this point, you know what the hope is—the Kingdom—but how should we speak of it? We should *make a defense* [Greek *pros apologia*]²⁵ to *anyone* who asks us about it.

... always ready to make a defense to anyone who asks you for an accounting concerning the hope that is in you (1 Peter 3:15; LEB).

Notice: We should *always* be ready to give this defense. You don’t have to rent a conference room and plan an event to discuss it. Rather, the Kingdom should be our #1 topic of conversation—at any time and with *anyone* who wants to know why we live in hope.

²⁵ The word *apologia* is where we get the English word *apologetics*, the science of arguing for the Christian faith.

31. What is our hope in Jesus, the one called *this* hope in the next verse? Specifically, it's the hope that we will be like Jesus—glorified through the Resurrection. It's the selfsame Kingdom hope because it's our desire to get a resurrected body, and to have a divine nature as Jesus has. Obtaining that nature is the only way for us to be suitable to rule in the Kingdom.

... what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is. All who have this hope in him [Jesus] purify themselves, just as he is pure (1 John 3:3).

What does the hope of seeing Christ do to us? It purifies us. Why? Because we prepare ourselves for that encounter by confessing sin, repenting of it, and sanctifying ourselves. A person preparing for the Kingdom will separate himself from the World. A person who has a meeting with Christ on his agenda, will cancel all his meetings with the Devil.

One hope

We just studied how the word *hope* can be grouped in its 76 appearances in the NT, now remember: The Scriptures say that Christian unity is based on just *one* hope—there are not two hopes, or three, or a hundred. So, what is that *one* hope that all Christians share? What is the one hope that binds us together? At this point you should have no doubt that it is the *Kingdom*.

Hope is future-focused faith. It's long-term faith, a faith that endures. Come what may, the true Christian's hope remains. With hope, we can resist the tides of change, overcome temptations, and avoid distractions—but *only* if that hope is the Kingdom. With it, we can overcome the coming Tribulation. If we can remember that there's nothing more certain in Eternity, nothing more enduring or permanent than the Kingdom, then nothing will cause us to stumble.

B. Denial of the Promises

The topic of the promises of God has drawn a large following among Evangelicals today. Savvy (especially prosperity-preaching) pastors are tapping into the idea that God has promised us many things. There are thousands of websites, a dozen ‘promises of God’ Bibles, numerous “promises of God” devotionals and books,²⁶ and ministries that teach people how to apply “promise” Bible verses to their lives. (They go overboard, calling innumerable passages *Bible promises* when most of those passages don’t contain anything akin to a promise).

The overwhelming focus of pastors who use these “promises” is showing people how to get forgiveness, financial blessings, or healings. Many of them also focus on how to get guidance, how to obtain blessings on the family or marriage, and how we can overcome fears, worries, or temptations. All of those are good things, but they have no relevance for the promises the Bible calls *promises*. God has given us the authentic Bible promises, the ones he calls “promises,” to aid us in persevering until we get into his Kingdom.

The NT speaks of God’s promises as his tool—a tool he uses to inspire us to feel confidence. Confidence in what? That we’ll get resurrected and that we’ll get rewarded in the Kingdom. Read the following and you’ll see:

...[God’s] divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness... by these he has granted to us his precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become partakers of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:3-4; NKJV).

... no matter how many promises God has made, they are ‘Yes’ in Christ... [God] put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come (2 Corinthians 1:20-22).

²⁶ Christian Book Distributors (CBD), the #1 Internet source for Christian books in the US, has 77 different options as of July 2018

How are God's promises tied to the hope of the Kingdom? Well, they're tied very tightly to it. Although the singular use *the Promise* (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4; 2:33, 39; Galatians 3:14; Ephesians 1:13)²⁷ refers specifically to the Holy Spirit—with 6 occurrences in the NT—the plural expression *God's promises* does not refer to the Spirit, but exclusively to the many ways God assures us of a coming Kingdom.

So important is the promise of the Kingdom, that one of the names of God is *the One who Promised*:

Let us hold fast to the confession of our hope without wavering, for the One Who Promised is faithful (Hebrews 10:23; LEB).²⁸

We just looked at three of them, now here are the other NT passages that use the word *promise*. There are 41 total. Each passage is accompanied by notes designed to help you understand what the emphasis is—you'll see that they're each about the promise of eternal life in the Kingdom.

4. God's promise to the ancestors of the Jews, the patriarchs was to be merciful to them and to help them.

... [God] has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, just as he promised our ancestors (Luke 1:55).

God promised that he would bless Abraham and all the Jews. How would he be merciful to them and bless them? By caring for them as his special chosen nation. That promise was given in Genesis 12:2, which reads:

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you.

²⁷ We'll cover what this means in the book *One Spirit*, God willing.

²⁸ A similar passage is Hebrews 11:11, which uses the same name for God, but in the context of his promise of a son to Sarah:

By faith also, with Sarah, he received the ability to procreate even past the normal age, because he regarded the One Who had Promised to be faithful (LEB).

5. A promise to make a descendant of David king over Israel.

... [David] knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne (Acts 2:30).

When God makes a promise under oath, it's a serious matter. Now, what promise did God make to King David? That one of David's descendant would sit on the throne of Israel. He promised that Jesus would become King of the Jews. That has not happened yet, but God's oath assures that it will happen.

6. The promise of an era, a coming historical period, for the restoration of all things.

Heaven must receive him [Jesus] until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets (Acts 3:21; NIV²⁹).

It's a good thing that God made a promise of "the times of the restoration of all things" [KJV, NASB, LEB], because we look around us and the world is a complete mess, isn't it? The economic systems are unfair, we've produced mass industrialization, polluted the air, rivers, ocean, and land; mankind has inspired injustice, oppression, war, and false religion.

7. The same promise God made to the patriarchs is the one God fulfilled by raising Jesus from the Dead. Notice that this promise is the selfsame Good News (Gospel)!

... we proclaim the Good News to you: that the promise that was made to the fathers, this promise God has fulfilled to our children by raising Jesus (Acts 13:32-33; LEB).

²⁹ The word *promised* does not appear in the original Greek. It was supplied by the NIV translators.

It's going to be difficult for you to make the connection between what God said to Abraham and what God did in Christ's resurrection, but it's completely compatible. It's actually one and the same. God basically promised Abraham that he would give him a seed (singular), through whom God would lift up an entire nation to inherit the land of Canaan. That's exactly what Jesus [*the Seed* according to Galatians 3:16] will accomplish when he resurrects his followers and we inherit the Earth... in the Kingdom.

8. The promise God made to the patriarchs: A Resurrection of the Dead... unto eternal life on Earth.

... I stand here on trial on the basis of hope in the promise made by God to our fathers (Acts 26:6; LEB).

This verse states that our hope is in the promise God made to the patriarchs that there would be a Resurrection of the Dead. That only has meaning inasmuch as we be resurrected for a reason. A resurrection is significant if you're resurrected unto something. That *something* is to inherit the Earth in God's Kingdom.

9. God promised the Good News about his Son long ago—where? In the Scriptures through the prophets.

Paul, a bond-servant of Christ Jesus, called as an apostle, set apart for the Gospel of God, which he promised beforehand through his prophets in the Holy Scriptures, concerning his Son, who was born of a descendant of David according to the flesh, who was declared the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the Dead (Romans 1:1-4; NASB).

Now, God *promised* us the Good News of a man who would be a descendant of David. What does that mean but that David's heir would sit on Israel's throne. Sounds like a Kingdom promise, doesn't it? It is. Furthermore, Jesus would be 'declared the Son of God.' That means the same thing, that Jesus' greatness as King of the Kingdom would be declared. Here's what we should deduce from

this passage: That God’s promise was the happy news of a Kingdom.

10. How did Abraham and his descendants get God’s promise of inheriting the World? The Bible tells us that it was through a certain *kind* of righteousness. What kind? That which comes by faith, not by the Law.

... the promise to Abraham or to his descendants that he would be heir of the World was not through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith (Romans 4:13; NASB).

This passage once again affirms that God’s promise to Abraham was that Abraham would be an “heir of the World.” What does that mean? It means that Abraham was going to get real estate! We also will inherit the World, literally all the land on Earth, with its seven continents. However, this will only occur when God’s Kingdom descends from Heaven to Earth—and it descends when the King of the Kingdom, Jesus descends. We don’t get to inherit the World until we overcome, and Jesus returns.

11. No child, no land, no descendants. Abraham had none of that when he was wandering through Canaan, but what he *did* have was God’s promises of these three things. To his credit, that was enough for Abraham. God’s promise was enough for him!

... [God] gave him [Abraham] no inheritance in it [the land of Canaan], not even a foot of ground, and yet, even when he [Abraham] had no child, he [God] promised that he would give it [the land] to him as a possession, and to his descendants after him (Acts 7:5; NASB).

This passage demonstrates that God’s promise was to give the land of Canaan to Abraham. That was the promise. Now, when God gives land, he means to say that he is giving a piece of property, a plot. Land is not a metaphor for something else—Abraham didn’t take it to be a metaphor, even though he didn’t own even one square

foot of personal property while he was alive. So what is God's promise about? Hint: It will be fulfilled in the Kingdom. When Abraham finally gets resurrected, he'll receive the land God promised.

12. After more than 400 years, the time of God's promise to Abraham was getting close to its fulfillment. To which promise do we refer? That of giving Abraham's descendants the land of Canaan.

... as the time of the promise that God had made to Abraham was drawing near, the people increased and multiplied in Egypt (Acts 7:17; LEB).

This lovely passage gives due importance to the promise that God had made to Abraham. What was that promise? That Abraham's descendants would inherit the land of Israel. Was it fulfilled when they finally entered the land? Not quite, because they did not defeat all of their enemies. Was it fulfilled during David's reign? They were closer, but not even in 1948 was it fulfilled. Neither was it fulfilled in 1967. During the times we just mentioned, Israel has still not reached its full size as a nation. The true borders as per God's promise must be from the Nile River (of modern day Egypt) to the Euphrates River (modern day Iraq). Anything less is not what God promised Abraham.

... the LORD made a covenant with Abram and said, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the Wadi of Egypt to the Great River, the Euphrates' (Genesis 15:18).

13. God's promise is for all of Abraham's seed—that means you and me, for we are children of Abraham by virtue of our having the same faith as him. As you read the passage below, note that our inheriting the Earth is *according to grace*, through *the righteousness of faith*. Why is it according to grace through faith? So that it might be guaranteed (*sure*) to everyone who has Abraham's faith.

For the promise that he would be the heir of the World was not to Abraham or to his seed through the Law, but through the righteousness of faith.

For if those who are of the Law are heirs, faith is made void and the promise made of no effect... Therefore it [the promise of inheriting the Earth] is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all the seed, not only to those who are of the Law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham (Romans 4:13-16; NKJV).

This passage clarifies exactly what God’s promise is: for us to inherit the Earth. God told Abraham that he would be “the heir of the World”—and *the World* means planet Earth. Isn’t that the same inheritance God gave to Adam when Adam lived in Eden? Isn’t it the same inheritance God later gave to Noah as he exited the ark? Isn’t that the inheritance Jesus wants to give us? Did Jesus not assure us that the meek would “inherit the Earth” (Matthew 5:5)?

14. Abraham’s faith in God’s promise is our example, our model. His is an example for us to follow. God calls us to have the same faith as Abraham.

... [Abraham] did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what he [God] had promised he was also able to perform. And therefore ‘it was accounted to him for righteousness.’

Now it was not written for his [Abraham’s] sake alone that it was imputed to him, but also for us. It shall be imputed to us who believe in Him who raised up Jesus our Lord from the Dead [God] (Romans 4:20-24; NKJV).

This passage explains that Abraham’s righteousness (an *active* righteousness, a *doing* of what is right) came through his faith in God’s promise—but which promise? It was the one that Abraham would have descendants as numerous as the sand of the sea and the stars of the sky. In other words, Abraham believed that God could raise up a Kingdom, a nation of believers from Abraham’s aged body. Remember, he was a 100-year-old man at the time, and his wife was almost as old, but sterile her whole life!

Believing that a nation can come from a dead, barren womb is faith in the Resurrection!

15. The honor God has granted to the Jews includes the honor of having received *the promises* from God. What are those promises?

... my people, those of my own race, the people of Israel. Theirs is the adoption to sonship; theirs the divine glory, the covenants, the receiving of the Law, the Temple worship and the promises. Theirs are the patriarchs, and from them is traced the human ancestry of the Messiah, who is God over all, forever praised! Amen (Romans 9:3-5)

This says that the Jews have eight special privileges, one of which is *the promises*. To what *promises* does the passage refer? Those of becoming a numerous people, inheriting the Earth, and being a nation-government—a Kingdom for God! Those are the promises God gave to the Jews through Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the prophets.

16. The promises made to the patriarchs can only be *confirmed* in Jesus Christ. There is no other way for those promises to be fulfilled because he is the key to unlocking them!

... Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed (Romans 15:8).

Here we see that Jesus' job was to *confirm* the promises made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In other words, the promises God gave those men about inheriting the Earth and becoming a great nation can only be realized in Christ. Why? Because Jesus is the Seed of Abraham, the Resurrection (John 11:25), and the chosen King of Israel. Only through Jesus will God accomplish what he has promised.

17. The reason why we separate ourselves from the World and its sin is because we have the Father's promises that he'll be our God, actually living and walking among us. Those promises inspire us to be holy.

As God has said: ‘I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people.’ Therefore, ‘Come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you...’

And, ‘I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty.’

Therefore, since we have these promises, dear friends, let us purify ourselves from everything that contaminates body and spirit... (2 Corinthians 6:16-18 to 7:1)

What’s the point here? There are promises that inspire us to sanctify ourselves—promises from God that promote spiritual purity. These include that God will live among us (only to occur after he comes in the New Jerusalem). He also will be a Father to us. Now, since these promises can only be fulfilled in the Kingdom, we must acknowledge that they are Kingdom promises.

18. The Seed of Abraham is Christ. God’s promises to Abraham will only be fulfilled through Christ, we will never see them fulfilled through the Law. One of God’s promises is the Kingdom, and the covenant God made through the Law does not undo his promise of a Kingdom.

The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed. Scripture does not say ‘and to seeds,’ meaning many people, but ‘and to your Seed,’ meaning one person, who is Christ. What I mean is this: The Law, introduced 430 years later, does not set aside the covenant previously established by God and thus do away with the promise. For if the inheritance depends on the Law, then it no longer depends on the promise; but God in his grace gave it [the inheritance of the land of Israel] to Abraham through a promise.

Why, then, was the Law given at all? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come...

Is the Law, therefore, opposed to the promises of God? Absolutely not! For if a law had been given that could impart life, then righteousness would certainly have come by the Law. But Scripture has locked up everything under the control of sin, so that what was promised, being given through faith in Jesus Christ, might be given to those who believe... If you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise (Galatians 3:16-22, 29).

This passage is quite complex, so let's break it down to make it more palatable:

- a. God made the promise of being a great nation and inheriting Canaan to Abraham but (many people miss this part of the interpretation) the promise was *also* given to one who would be born to him, Jesus.
- b. That promise became a valid covenant, a firm contract not only between God and Abraham, but also between God and Jesus!
- c. The Law (which God gave to Moses on Mount Sinai on two stone tablets) did not nullify God's previous promise. That promise remained valid and intact.
- d. The Law was given in the meantime, until Jesus would come. Since Israel was exceedingly sinful, God needed to give them firm laws to prevent them from self-destruction.
- e. Now, anyone who belongs to Christ (be they Jew or Gentile), is an heir of the Kingdom, which is the promise God gave to Abraham.

19. A person becomes a Christian by being born spiritually through God's promise of a Kingdom, the same way Isaac was born through a promise.

... the one [son of Abraham, Ishmael] by the female slave was born according to human descent [lit. the *flesh*], and the one by the free woman [Isaac, born of Sarah] through the promise... but you, brothers, are children of the promise, just as Isaac (Galatians 4:23, 28; LEB).

Anyone who is a Christian has actually been born again—born of the Spirit—through God's promise. We're speaking

specifically of the promise that the Kingdom will come—which is the same promise under which Isaac was born. You see, Abraham and Sarah both believed God’s promise to build a great nation, and although Sarah was old and sterile, Isaac was born from her barren womb! Isaac was the fulfillment of that couple’s faith in God’s promise since he is the father of the Jews, a great nation!

... if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new (2 Corinthians 5:17; NKJV).

The verse above demonstrates how each one of us who is in Christ is like Isaac. Currently, in Christ, God promises us a Kingdom. When you are baptized, you are expressing faith in that promise. What happens when you are baptized? You die to sin, and are born spiritually. You become a new spiritual creature through the Spirit. Where there was previously death and the infertility of sin, life is born!

20. God’s covenants are founded on the promise of a Kingdom.

... you were dead in your transgressions and sins, in which you used to live when you followed the ways of this world... at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise... (Ephesians 2:1-2, 12)

We used to be sinners, and back then, we were missing so much, including participation in the OT covenants [like the ones that came through Abraham, Moses, and David]. To put things into perspective, we ask: What are the covenants based upon? Since the Scriptures call them *the covenants of the promise*, they are each based on a promise.

To figure out to which promise the passage refers, we do well to remember that before the Law was ever established, long before Moses’ Ten Commandments, was Abraham—and he lived by faith in God’s promise. He was justified by faith long before anyone ever attempted to be justified by

the Law; and Abraham's faith was in God's promise of a Kingdom.

21. For hundreds of years, Gentiles were not participants in the promise. Now we are. This is something we're supposed to be excited about, but we'll only get excited if we understand what the promise is!

... the Gentiles are fellow heirs, and fellow members of the Body, and fellow sharers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the Gospel... (Ephesians 3:6-7; LEB)

Here we read about something called *the promise in Christ Jesus*. Two clues to interpreting what the promise is can be found in the context. The context states that we are *heirs* with the Jews, and *fellow members of the Body* with the Jews. So let's ask ourselves two questions:

- What are we the heirs of? the Earth
- What are we members of? Christ's Body, the Church

With those questions answered, we should finally be able to define what *the promise* is. If we obtain it *through the Gospel*, and the Gospel is the Good News of the Kingdom, then it must be the promise of the Kingdom. The Kingdom will be over all the Earth, which we will inherit, and it's only for those who are united with Christ in covenant, his Bride.

22. Here's another solid Bible promise: To live long lives on the Earth. *Living long* means living eternally, and we only get to live eternally if we're resurrected.

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. 'Honor your father and mother'—which is the first commandment with a promise—'so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the Earth' (Ephesians 6:1-3).

Paul directs his words of promise to children—so we're dealing with simple and basic doctrine here. Paul is showing kids how to have things go well for them, and how to have a long life on Earth. Those two rewards should be a strong enough motivation for children to honor their par-

ents. Nevertheless, the 5th commandment promises something more than a long life on Earth, it promises a long life in *the land* our God will give us: ‘...that you may live long in the land the Lord your God is giving you’ (Exodus 20:12). There is no contradiction here. The land God *is giving us* is his Kingdom, an empire which will fill the entire Earth.

23. When apostles open their epistles with a greeting, they often will introduce their principle concern. This is the case with Paul in Timothy. What is Paul’s principle concern there? It’s *the promise of life* which God has given us *in Christ Jesus*. Here’s the first verse of his epistle:

Paul, an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, in keeping with the promise of life that is in Christ Jesus... (2 Timothy 1:1)

Is it a wonder that Paul should start a letter to Timothy by mentioning *the promise of life*? Not at all, because God’s *promise* is the essence of the Gospel, the message of our Lord Jesus. We speak, act, and serve God *in accordance* with the *promise of life*—but what life, exactly? It’s the eternal life believers will receive in the Resurrection and will continue to enjoy in the Kingdom!

24. This next passage contains a special revelation: God made the promise at some point before *the ages of time!*³⁰

³⁰ The Greek literally says just this [*pro chronon aionion* = before eternal time, or, as Jamieson-Fausset-Brown translates it: *before the ages of time*]. So when was that? It seems to be the farthest back the human imagination can conceive. Is there another passage of Scripture that speaks of a time that goes further back? Yes, Micah 5:2, which you can read below.

When then, did God actually make the original promise of eternal life? He must have done it before the World was created. Since no human beings were there to receive the promise, God must have promised eternal life to the Angel of Yahweh, the Word, the Preincarnate Christ. This all must have happened sometime after God ‘brought him [the Word] forth,’ and sometime ‘before his [God’s] deeds of old’ (Proverbs 8:22). We’re talking about the time before the Beginning!

In the Beginning, the Scriptures say that “the Word was with God” (John 1:1-2), but God gave the promise *before* then, likely during the times when God—out of his great love for Jesus—gave Jesus glory (John 17:24).

Paul... an apostle of Jesus Christ for the faith of the chosen of God... in the hope of eternal life which God, who does not lie, promised before eternal³¹ ages... (Titus 1:1-2; LEB)

What do we learn from this passage? That God made the promise of eternal life—thereby establishing the hope of the Kingdom—so long ago, that it’s hard for us to imagine! This all means that his promise is firm. It’s something we have no reason to ever doubt because it’s never been uncertain. It’s been firm as far back as the imagination can go.

25. A promise of God (still pending in its fulfillment) is that we will enter his Rest.

... the promise of entering his [God’s] Rest still stands... (Hebrews 4:1).

Richard Baxter, as great a writer as he was, was wrong to think that after death we enter into the “saint’s everlasting rest.” The *Rest* [with a capital R] the Bible encourages us to enter is a 1000-year Sabbath. It is the true Seventh Day. We call it the *Millennium* because for God a day is like a thousand years. During those thousand years in the Kingdom, we’ll be free from temptation, hunger, thirst, cold, heat, sunburn, and death. God has promised that we’ll enter that Rest, but it’s up to us to make every effort for that promise to be fulfilled, and not to perish as the Jews who left Egypt did. Let’s not forget how the passage ends:

Let us... make every effort to enter that Rest, so that no one [of us] will perish (Hebrews 4:11)

We say that the promise must have been made to Jesus, since Jesus is the only one besides God whose ‘goings forth are from long ago, from the days of eternity’ (Micah 5:2; NASB). If a promise is spoken, it must be spoken in the hearing of someone, right? And who better for God to make that promise to, but to the One who would assure its fulfillment, Jesus?

³¹ Interestingly, in the Greek, the word *eternal* is used two times in the same verse. That means that Paul is making a contrast between eternal *life* (in the future), and *time* eternal (which occurred in the past)! Paul wants us to consider the two extremes of the spectrum—the two arrows on the timeline!

26. God promised to bless Abraham by giving him many descendants.

We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised.

When God made his promise to Abraham, since there was no one greater for him to swear by, he swore by himself, saying, 'I will surely bless you and give you many descendants.' And so after waiting patiently, Abraham received what was promised.

People swear by someone greater than themselves, and the oath confirms what is said and puts an end to all argument. Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath (Hebrews 6:12-17).

Here we see that God's promise to Abraham was to bless him with many descendants—as many as the stars of the sky and the sand of the sea. Think about it: That promise was in essence the promise of a *nation*, a complete Kingdom of people who—like Abraham—live by faith. That nation was promised even through the Psalms:

Posterity will serve him; future generations will be told about the Lord. They will proclaim his righteousness, declaring to a people yet unborn: He has done it! (Psalm 22:30-31)

27. What made Abraham great was that he had God's promises.

[Abraham is called] ... him who had the promises (Hebrews 7:6).

The context of this passage is why Melchizedek ever blessed Abraham, from whom Melchizedek collected a tithe. Melchizedek is the greater of the two—and we know that because he blessed Abraham. The greater blesses the lesser—that's understood; but why did Melchizedek do it? Because Abraham had God's promises! The Almighty

promised him a son, descendants, a nation, and the honor of being a blessing to all people. Now, what makes *you* great? If God has promised more to NT believers than he promised to OT believers—you have the potential to be greater than Abraham in eternity!

28. We have better promises than our forefathers, our progenitors who lived in OT times.

... the New Covenant is established on better promises (Hebrews 8:6).

The Old Covenant contains promises, but the New has even better ones! What are those *better* promises? How about ruling with Christ, and not just being Kingdom citizens? How about being priests, and not just participating in sacrifices? How about having crowns, flying horses, iron rods, thrones, angels to do our bidding, and the plethora of other promises we find in the NT?

29. Do you know *why* Jesus is our Mediator?

[Jesus]... is the Mediator of the New Covenant... that those who are called may receive the promise of the eternal inheritance (Hebrews 9:15).

Jesus guarantees that we will obtain an *eternal inheritance*. Here again, God reveals to us exactly what he means when he uses the term *promise*. He means all that will be ours in the Kingdom: the Earth, the rule, the power, the government, and the riches generated in a world governed by Jesus Christ.

30. We get what God has promised only when Jesus comes back. God is testing our faith. Do you have enough faith to bear your cross until the Kingdom comes?

... [Hebrew believers] put up with the seizure of your belongings with joy because you knew that you yourselves had a better and permanent possession. Therefore do not throw away your confidence, which has great reward. For you have need of endurance, in order that after you have done the will of God, you may receive what was promised. For yet 'a very, very little while, and the One who is

Coming [the Messiah] will come, and will not delay. But my righteous one will live by faith...' (Hebrews 10:34-38; LEB).

Here we read that losing our possessions due to persecution is nothing in the light of the fact that we will get a permanent possession, a *great reward*. What God has promised—the Kingdom—will come, in God's timing.

31. Inheriting the Promised Land was *the same promise* God gave to each of the patriarchs.

By faith he [Abraham] made his home in the Promised Land like a stranger in a foreign country; he lived in tents, as did Isaac and Jacob, who were heirs with him of the same promise. For he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:9-10).

God promised Abraham and his descendants that they would inherit the land of Canaan, and they believed in that promise. When will they see God's promise fulfilled? They'll see it when Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and all the Jews behold the New Jerusalem, the city designed and built by God! In other words, they will inherit the land when the Kingdom comes.

32. Let's define Sarah's faith in God.

... by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore (Hebrews 11:11-12).

Sarah believed in the promise that she and Abraham would parent a great nation. That was the basis of her faith in God. She believed in God, who she knew as *He Who had made the Promise*. It's incumbent upon us to recognize that God's promise that Sarah would have descendants is the same Gospel promise of a Kingdom we have in Christ. Why?

Because in the same way Sarah believed that a nation of people could come from her barren womb, we believe that God will raise up the Dead to inherit the Kingdom.

33. Living by faith is the exact same thing as living in the hope of obtaining what God has promised. When we speak of faith, this is what is truly meant!

All these people [Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob] were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on Earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own... they were longing for a better country—a Heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them (Hebrews 11:13-16).

What did God promise the patriarchs? A country of their own, a better country, a Heavenly country, a city prepared for them by God Himself—the New Jerusalem!

34. Abraham is called *the one who received the promises*. What does that title mean?

By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered Isaac, and the one who received the promises was ready to offer his one and only son (Hebrews 11:17; LEB).

Abraham's reputation everywhere is the man who got God's promises. If he had not received God's promises, would he have offered his only son? No. Although you've heard that Abraham offered Isaac out of simple obedience to God, Abraham offered Isaac with this motivation: the promises God gave him.

Since God promised Abraham that his descendants would be numerous and that they would be a blessing to the World, Abraham reasoned that for God to fulfill those promises, God would have to resurrect Isaac. That is, if God gave Abraham a command to kill Isaac [the one who would father a nation so great that it would bless all other

nations], then the only rational explanation of what God was doing, was that after Abraham killed him, God would resurrect Isaac.

35. The Bible examples of faith are people who did not get what God told them they'd get. They were not *go*-getters, they were *no*-getters! They were not controlled by ambition, but inspired by God's promises to such a degree that they were eventually approved by God.

And although they all were approved through their faith, they did not receive what was promised (Hebrews 11:39; LEB).

How interesting. Since when is admirable *not* to get what God tells you he'll give you? Well, that's exactly what characterizes the lives of OT believers. The heroes of the faith did *not* receive what God promised them during their lives—but they still believed. That's exactly what qualifies them as being worthy of the Kingdom. Their hope is what makes them great, and they have a God who will make sure that they eventually get exactly what he promised them!

36. One of the promises that makes the New Covenant greater than the Old is that God now promises believers the crown of life. Never did he make such a promise in the OT.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).

Here's an award worth fighting for: a crown in the Kingdom. Crowns are only for kings and queens, princes and princesses. Jesus will give crowns to those who are worthy of ruling with him. Who, then, might be worthy to rule with Christ? The text clearly says that a crown is only for those who persevere under trials. We have to *stand the test* in this World, and prove to the Lord Jesus that we love him. If we do not stand the test, then there's no crown. No crown means no rule and no Kingdom authority.

37. The Kingdom is a promise—and a big one at that!

Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the Kingdom he promised those who love him (James 2:5)?

If there were any doubt in your mind that the Kingdom is a promise, right now that doubt must die, for we read here that God has promised the Kingdom to those who love him. The Kingdom is not just a nice idea, an inspiring thought, or a figment of our imagination. It's actually a promise of God—but he only promises it to those who love him. Who are those who love him? Those who obey him and do what he says.

If you love me, keep my commands... Whoever has my commands and keeps them is the one who loves me... You are my friends if you do what I command (John 14:15, 21; 15:14)

38. The Return of Christ is a *promise* of Christ.

They [the critics of our faith, who deny the Flood] will say, “Where is this ‘coming’ he promised?” (2 Peter 3:4)

Our detractors are no experts in the Bible, but one thing they do know: We hope in the promise of Christ's return. When they observe how much time has passed since Christ's first coming, they try to discourage us from hoping in his second coming, criticizing Jesus for being tardy. They try to make him out to be a liar—but we know that the reason for Christ's delay is God's mercy. God is giving people extra time for repentance—something we'll see in the next passage.

39. Jesus is no promise-breaker. He's no procrastinator. He is a promise-keeper, and he'll come back in God's perfect timing. Critics will accuse Jesus of being a slowpoke, but they're wrong.

The Lord is not slow in keeping his promise, as some understand slowness. Instead, he is patient with you, not wanting anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance (2 Peter 3:9).

Again, Peter is highlighting Jesus' promise that he will return. How many of us are focused on that promise, and long for its fulfillment? How many of us pray the Biblical prayers: 'Come quickly Lord Jesus' (Revelation 22:20), and 'may your Kingdom come' (Matthew 6:10)? If he promised it, it's because it's going to happen. It's only a matter of *when*.

Jesus' promise is plain and simple:

I will come back... (John 14:3)

40. One of God's great promises is the restoration of the atmosphere and space (the *heavens*), and a renewed Earth.

... according to his [God's] promise, we are waiting for new heavens³² and a new Earth in which righteousness resides (2 Peter 3:13; LEB).

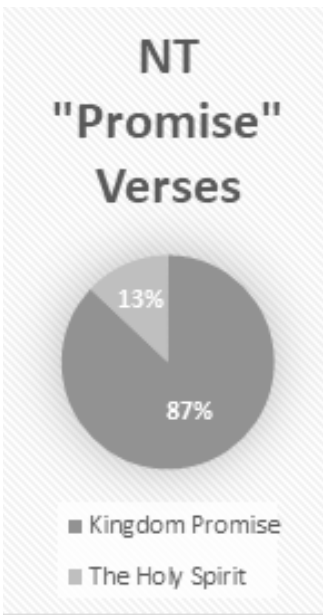
Once again, an apostle reveals the terms of *God's promise* to us: We'll get a new atmosphere, space, and land. Righteousness will fill that new World. The current World will be purged of its lies, its demons, sinners, evil, and even its pollution. God will renew everything.

41. The emphatic promise of God is... eternal life!

And this is the promise which he himself promised us: eternal life (1 John 2:25; LEB).

Why would John be inspired to say something as redundant as this? It's like saying 'This is the *walk* that we're going to *walk* together,' or 'Let's *pray* the *prayer* now.' Is John bad at grammar, or is John inspired by the Holy Spirit? It's the latter. John writes this way in order to emphasize the promise. He wants to get the idea across loud and clear: Eternal life is not just *a* promise, it's *the* promise. Let's extrapolate now: If *eternal life* is the promise, then believers should know where that life is to be lived. The answer is: the Kingdom!

³² Be careful of translations like the NIV that make this word singular. In the original Greek, it's *plural*, meaning the *atmosphere and space*.



We just reviewed the 41 passages about the promises of God in the NT, add to those the 6 which are about the Promise of the Holy Spirit, and you calculate that there are 47 NT verses about promises. Conclusion: A whopping 87% of all authentic *promise verses* in the NT are about eternal life in the Kingdom. Not one of them (0%) is the kind of promise you hear about in today's watered-down Gospel—what we call 'Christianity Lite.' We hope that these 41 passages have energized you, encouraged you, and enlightened you.



The big question now is: Why don't pastors teach these promises? Why do they spend so much time and energy encouraging God's people to aim for worldly pursuits, ambitions, dreams, and temporary blessings? Have today's pastors forgotten the Gospel altogether? It seems like they have. Or maybe it's worse—maybe they're intentionally *concealing* the Gospel. Be it voluntary or involuntary, one thing is for sure—preachers have replaced the Gospel with another message.



C. Denial of the Gospel

When Christian congregations deny the hope of the Kingdom, and deny God’s promises *related* to the Kingdom, they are in essence denying the Gospel itself. That’s scary, but true. The Gospel is the Good News³³ of the Kingdom. There is no other Gospel! The only true Gospel is the Good News of the Kingdom.

Most Evangelicals, when they hear the word *Gospel*, think of this message: “Jesus died for us”—and that’s what they call *salvation*. For them, salvation means not going to Hell, and they say that salvation from Hell is possible because Jesus died for us. Unfortunately for them, nobody will find that definition of *salvation* in the Bible. How sad—their words betray their gaping deficiency. What are they missing in their supposed “Gospel” message? The Kingdom.

Now, did you know that these fake Bible teachers think they’ve discovered the Gospel’s lowest common denom-

³³ The term *Gospel* (which we get from the Greek word *euangelion*, ευαγγέλιον) literally means *good news*—so *Good News* and *Gospel* are perfectly synonymous terms. We do well to capitalize these words since they signify the message proper of Jesus Christ. According to the rules of grammar, we should capitalize the *Five Pillars of Islam* (because they are the fundamental principles of Mohammed), and we should capitalize the *Four Noble Truths* (because they are the basic tenets of Buddhism). Why then is *Gospel* not capitalized in many versions of the Bible?

Furthermore, the expression *Kingdom of God* deserves to be capitalized. Again, according to the rules of English grammar, any government or state deserves to be capitalized. Remember: That’s precisely what the Kingdom of God is: a government and a state! Would we dare write *united states of america* in lower case letters? Of course not. It’s offensive to Americans to see their country’s name written that way.

So why do 95% of Bible translations use a lower-case *k* whenever they print the words *kingdom* of God? It offends the citizens of a country when one does not show respect for their country. Even an imaginary science fiction government like the *Galactic Republic* (from Star Wars) must be capitalized according to the rules of grammar—how much more deserving is God’s Eternal Kingdom (the kingdom that will overthrow all other governments), of capitalization?

inator?³⁴ Their goal was to simplify the Gospel—but they have *over-simplified* it. Indeed, they’ve committed a great fault. They’ve stripped the Gospel bare, and have *distorted* it. What have they left of the original apostolic Gospel? A cheap imitation.

The fundamental problem with today’s fraudulent “gospel” is that Jesus and the apostles never preached it. They preached the Gospel of the Kingdom, not a cheap message of *Not Going to Hell*. There is indeed one [and only one] Bible verse that refers to the Gospel as *the Gospel of your Salvation* (Ephesians 1:13), but even so—we know that *salvation* (as per the Biblical definition) is salvation from sin.³⁵ There’s no way pastors can justify preaching a message based on people not going to Hell.

If indeed your faith in the Good News of the Kingdom saves you from the power of sin—and only the news of the Kingdom can do that—then it does also become the Good News of Salvation from Hell. Sure it does—and that’s fine! However, the logic the Scriptures lay out for us has this order: If we are saved from sin, God won’t condemn us. Do you believe in that kind of salvation? It’s the true salvation.

Now, let’s take a good hard look at how the Bible defines the Gospel. We’ll do that by looking at the use of the term *gospel* in the NT. What are the stats behind the word *gospel* in the NT? How frequently is it used, and in what context?

³⁴ Lowest common denominators of the Christian faith actually exist. They are the *Seven Fundamentals* (Hebrews 6:1-2) and the *Seven Essential Realities* (Ephesians 4:3-6).

³⁵ Don’t forget this vital verse—the one in which the angel Gabriel declares to Joseph the name which Joseph would have to give to Mary’s son:

... you are to give him the name Jesus [literally, Yahweh is salvation], because he will save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:21).

Statistics for the word *Gospel* in the NT

The word *Gospel* (Greek *euangelion*) appears some 116 times in the NT.³⁶ Here's the breakdown of how it is used:

- Some 72 times it stands alone with no adjective, simply as *the Gospel*.³⁷ That means two things:
 - That 62% of the times you see *Gospel* in the Bible, you can only determine its meaning from the context.
 - That the meaning of the word *Gospel* was so obvious to the Early Church that the apostles didn't feel the need to define it.
- Another 5 times the word *gospel* refers to a fraudulent message—for example, one which Paul calls *another gospel* (2 Corinthians 11:4; Galatians 1:6)—not the Gospel Jesus preached. That's about 4% of the times the word *gospel* is used in the NT. Some other expressions Paul uses to refer to the *false gospel* are:
 - *no gospel at all* (Galatians 1:7)
 - *a gospel other than the one we preached to you* (Galatians 1:8)
 - *a gospel other than what you accepted* (Galatians 1:9).
- Exactly 9 times³⁸ the word *Gospel* appears, it is presented to us as the *Gospel of the Kingdom*. So, some 8% of the times

³⁶ This number is approximate since some translations come from different original source texts, and others use the word *Gospel* to aid in the understanding of a verse, "supplying" it. Our data is based on the English Bible versions that are most faithful to the original texts—the versions which tend to supply words least.

³⁷ These include the 8 times it is not translated as the *Gospel*, but as the *Good News* (Luke 1:19; 2:10; Acts 10:36; 11:20; 13:32; Romans 10:15; 10:16; Hebrews 4:2).

³⁸ Statistics do not tell the whole story. We have to give much greater weight than 7% to these 8 passages. Think about it: In terms of their importance among the Gospel Bible verses, none are more significant. Why? Because they actually summarize Christ's activities—from start to finish. These passages provide an overview of the primary activities of Jesus and the apostles.

These passages prove that the Kingdom is the very message—the news—God sent Jesus to preach. Observe that when Jesus started his public ministry, the first words out of his mouth were about the Kingdom. Subsequently, everywhere they went, this is what Jesus and his apostles preached: the Gospel of the Kingdom!

you see the word *Gospel* used, you get a precise definition of the Gospel—the Gospel is about the Kingdom. Let’s look at those verses, but while we do, it’s of vital importance to notice that each of the 9 times the word *Gospel* is associated with the Kingdom, it does so in a cardinal (that is, a central) Bible passage. Notice that the passages below are central:

- ... Jesus began to preach [it was the very start of his ministry] and to say, ‘Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand...’ And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom (Matthew 4:17, 23; NKJV).
- Then Jesus went about all the cities and villages, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing every sickness and every disease among the people (Matthew 9:35; NKJV).
- And this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).
- ... Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom of God and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the Kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the Gospel’ (Mark 1:14-15; NKJV).
- ... people were looking for him [Jesus] and... they tried to keep him from leaving them. But he said, ‘I must proclaim the Good News of the Kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.’ And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea (Luke 4:42-44)

Use of Term "Gospel" in NT



- no definition
- Fake "gospel"
- Gospel of Kingdom
- Gospel with Qualifier

- Jesus traveled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the Good News of the Kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him... (Luke 8:1)
- When Jesus had called the Twelve together, he gave them power and authority to drive out all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the Kingdom of God and to heal the sick... So they set out and went from village to village, proclaiming the Good News and healing people everywhere (Luke 9:1-2, 6).
- The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until John; since that time the Gospel of the Kingdom of God has been preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it (Luke 16:16; NASB).
- ... when they [the Samaritans] believed Philip preaching the Good News about the Kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were being baptized, men and women alike... So, when they [Peter and John] had solemnly testified and spoken the Word of the Lord, they started back to Jerusalem, and were preaching the Gospel to many villages of the Samaritans... But Philip found himself at Azotus, and as he passed through he kept preaching the Gospel to all the cities (Acts 8: 12, 25, 40).
- Finally, some 30 times you see the word *Gospel* in the NT, it will appear with some sort of qualifier³⁹—so we get a good idea of what *Gospel* means through the qualifiers attached to it. This occurs some 26% of the time the word *Gospel* appears.

In these cases, we see that the Gospel is qualified by who has ownership of it:

- the Gospel *of God* (Romans 1:1; 15:16; 2 Corinthians 11:7; 1 Thessalonians 2:2; 2:8; 2:9; 1 Peter 4:17)
- the Gospel *of his* [God's] *Son* (Romans 1:9)
- the Gospel *of Jesus* (Mark 1:1)

³⁹ *Qualifier* is a grammatical term meaning “a word (such as an adjective) or word group that limits or modifies the meaning of another word (such as a noun) or word group” (Retrieved from <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/qualifier> on May 5, 2018).

- the Gospel of our Lord Jesus (2 Thessalonians 1:8)
- the Gospel *of Christ* (Romans 15:19; 1 Corinthians 9:12; 2 Corinthians 2:12; 2 Corinthians 9:13; 2 Corinthians 10:14; Philippians 1:27; 1 Thessalonians 3:2)
- *my* [Paul's] Gospel (Romans 2:16; 16:25; Galatians 1:11; Galatians 2:2; 2 Timothy 2:8)
- *our* [Paul and his missionary team's] Gospel (2 Corinthians 4:3; 1 Thessalonians 1:5; 2 Thessalonians 2:14)

Secondly, we see that the Gospel is defined by what it's about: It's about our salvation, it's based on the grace of God, and it produces peace between God and man:

- the Gospel *of your salvation* (Ephesians 1:13)
- the Gospel *of the grace of God* (Acts 20:24)
- the Gospel *of peace* (Romans 10:15; Ephesians 6:15)

Lastly, the Gospel is *eternal*. That means it has no expiration date. It is a message that will be appreciated and treasured forever—even after it has been fulfilled in the Kingdom.

- the *eternal* Gospel (Revelation 14:6).

Under Orders to Preach the Gospel

Jesus made it abundantly clear that our primary task as his Church is to preach the Good News to everyone on Earth.

Jesus appeared to the Eleven... He said to them, 'Go into all the World and preach the Gospel to all Creation... (Mark 16:14-15).

Paul took that command seriously.

I am a servant of Christ Jesus to the Gentiles, serv-
ing⁴⁰ the Gospel of God as a priest, in order that the offering of the Gentiles may become acceptable... by the power of signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit, so that from Jerusalem and traveling around as far as Illyricum I have fully proclaimed the Gospel of Christ. And so, having as my ambition to proclaim the

⁴⁰ We actually minister (*serve*) the Gospel to others. How? By proclaiming it in the power of the Holy Spirit, with healings, signs, wonders, deliverance, and other miracles.

Gospel where Christ has not been named, in order that I will not build on the foundation⁴¹ belonging to someone else (Romans 15:16, 19-20; LEB).

Peter also took Christ's command seriously.

... Peter got up and addressed them [the apostles and the elders]: 'Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the Gospel and believe (Acts 15:7).

Proclaiming the Good News was the fundamental mission of Jesus.

[Jesus declared] The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to proclaim Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to set the oppressed free (Luke 4:18).

Jesus challenged his would-be followers to either preach the Kingdom, or to be disqualified for it!

And he said to another, 'Follow me!' But he said, 'Lord, first allow me to go and bury my father.' But he said to him, 'Leave the dead to bury their own dead! But you go and proclaim the Kingdom of God.'

And another person also said, 'I will follow you, Lord, but first allow me to say farewell to those in my house.' But Jesus said, 'No one who puts his hand on the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God!' (Luke 9:59-62; LEB)

⁴¹ The Gospel is a *foundation*—it is a basis for building upon. We build lives, ministries, and churches upon it. Now, if a preacher has established another gospel in a certain place, how can someone who preaches the true Gospel build upon that? He cannot build upon it and be successful. If he tries, he's wasting his time. It would be like building the second floor on a one-story building that already has broken foundations. Why add to something that eventually will fall? (The "other" gospel of which we speak is the cheap, man-made, and apostate version of God's message).

The Gospel is Deep

Most Evangelicals these days like to summarize the Gospel saying nothing more than “Jesus died for our sins.” They want to simplify it, but their oversimplification causes the Gospel to appear shallow. If it were so simple, then why did Paul have to receive his understanding of it through a special revelation from Jesus? If it’s not profound, then why did Paul say that it’s only received through a revelation?

I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that the Gospel I preached is not of human origin. I did not receive it from any man, nor was I taught it; rather, I received it by revelation from Jesus Christ (Galatians 1: 11-12).

The Gospel is a revelation of the mystery about the unsearchable riches of Christ. In the following passage, the Spirit uses the word *fathomless* to describe the Gospel. What does that mean but that the Gospel is extremely deep? You need to reflect and meditate upon it if you will understand it.

Paul’s job was to enlighten everyone about *the administration of the mystery hidden from the ages*, so that God’s *purpose of the ages*, seen in his *multi-faceted wisdom*, might be made known to mankind. Does that sound simple? Of course not.

... the Gospel, of which I became a servant, according to the gift of God’s grace given to me, according to the working of his power.

To me, the least of all the saints, was given this grace: to proclaim the Good News of the fathomless riches of Christ to the Gentiles, and to enlighten everyone as to what is the administration of the mystery hidden from the ages by God, who created all things, in order that the many-sided wisdom of God might be made known now to the rulers and the authorities in the heavenly places through the Church, according to the purpose of the ages which he carried out in Christ Jesus our Lord (Ephesians 3:6-11; LEB).

Furthermore, if the Gospel were so simple, then why did Paul need from morning to evening (12 hours) to share it with a group of Jews?

They arranged to meet Paul on a certain day, and came in even larger numbers to the place where he was staying. He witnessed to them from morning till evening, explaining about the Kingdom of God... (Acts 28:23)

On another occasion, it took Paul three days to speak to a group of Jews about the Gospel.

... they came to Thessalonica, where there was a Jewish synagogue. As was his custom, Paul went into the synagogue, and on three Sabbath days he reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and proving that the Messiah had to suffer and rise from the Dead. 'This Jesus I am proclaiming to you is the Messiah,' he said (Acts 17:1-3).

If the Gospel is so simple, why did it take Paul three months in order to discuss the Kingdom of God with listeners in Ephesus?

Paul entered the synagogue [in Ephesus] and spoke boldly there for three months, arguing persuasively about the Kingdom of God (Acts 19:7-9)

Why also did our Lord Jesus require 40 days to explain the Kingdom to his disciples?

He [Jesus] appeared to them [the apostles] over a period of forty days and spoke about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3).

Paul could easily invest two complete years in the preaching of the Kingdom of God and teaching about the Lord Jesus Christ.

For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him. He proclaimed the Kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ—with all boldness and without hindrance (Acts 28:30-31).

The essence of Paul's ministry was to testify to the Gospel. He went around preaching the Kingdom of God to them. It was Paul's custom to continually preach the Gospel.

... nor do I count my life dear to myself, so that I may finish my race with joy, and the ministry which I received from the Lord Jesus, to testify to the Gospel of the grace of God. And indeed, now I know that you all, among whom I have gone preaching the Kingdom of God, will see my face no more (Acts 20:24-25; NKJV).

We have just proven that the Gospel shouldn't be oversimplified. Some would have us believe that you can express it in just a few words, but the Gospel has been corrupted, distorted, and reduced to nothing. Many today are preaching a different gospel—one that's not the same as Christ's.

I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the One who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the Gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from Heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse (Galatians 1:6-8).

It would take many books to describe the Kingdom of God. The term *kingdom* appears 164 times⁴² in the NT alone—and even if we closely examined each of those 164 usages, they still wouldn't give us a complete picture of God's Kingdom. Why not? Well, how many passages that don't even mention the word *kingdom* still describe what it will be like? There must be many hundreds, perhaps thousands. Take Revelation 20:4 for example.

⁴² It appears 247 times in the OT, but many of the kingdoms described there are other nations that surrounded Israel. Still, God describes the Kingdom repeatedly in the OT, so the Kingdom is presented to us much more than 247 times in the Bible. God gave man the Kingdom promise as early as Exodus 19:5-6, which says:

... if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations... you will be for me a Kingdom of Priests and a holy nation.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge...

Doesn't *that* passage describe the Kingdom of God? Of course it does—without using the word *kingdom*. In fact, the word *kingdom* is not used in the entire chapter, yet Revelation 20 describes the Kingdom of Christ more lucidly than almost any other chapter of the Bible!

Again, 164 uses of the word *kingdom* is not little. However, those 164 uses are still just a fraction of the total number of Bible passages about the Kingdom. To comprehend the breadth and width of the topic of God's Kingdom, you'll have to read the whole Bible.



Parables: The mystery of the Kingdom concealed

Jesus' parables have an overriding emphasis on the Kingdom—Jesus said so himself. He also said that if we can't interpret a parable as simple as the *Sower and Seed*—that is, if we can't understand what the parable teaches about the Kingdom—then we won't understand *any* of the parables at all. [Reason being because the rest of the parables also must be interpreted in the light of the Kingdom promise, and are relatively straightforward compared to this one].

But when he was alone, those around him with the Twelve asked him about the parable. And he said to them, “To you it has been given to know the mystery of the Kingdom of God; but to those who are outside, all things come in parables, so that ‘Seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand; lest they should turn, and their sins be forgiven them.’”

And he said to them, “Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?” (Mark 4:10-13; NASB)

A very important teaching of Christ here is that if you don't get the idea behind the parables, it's because you're *an outsider*. You're not inspired by the Holy Spirit yet—you haven't understood *the mystery of the Kingdom*—a revelation from God. Each of us must ask God to reveal this mystery to us. If any of us haven't gotten the revelation yet, then we've got to seek it with all our heart! You're reading the Bible incorrectly until you get that particular revelation.

Jesus also pointed out that we need to be *trained* in the parables. That is, we need to mature in our comprehension of the parables. After teaching a string of seven parables, our Lord asked his disciples a penetrating question:

'Have you understood all these things?' They said to Him, 'Yes, Lord.'

Then he said to them, 'Therefore every scribe instructed concerning the Kingdom of Heaven⁴³ is like a householder who brings out of his treasure things new and old' (Matthew 13:51-52; NKJV).

Whom was Jesus talking about when he referred to *every scribe*? Well, the *scribes* were the teachers of the Law of

⁴³ Jesus is saying that his parables reveal the secrets of the Kingdom. He's saying that his parables express truths of the Kingdom that outsiders simply can't understand. Are you an insider? Do you have the revelation of what the Kingdom is, or do you still not get it?

Jesus was saying here that his parables are all revelations of the Kingdom! Now, if he said nothing to his hearers without using a parable, what does that say about how important it was for Jesus to teach the Kingdom?

The disciples came to him [Jesus] and asked, 'Why do you speak to the people in parables?' He replied, 'Because the knowledge of the secrets of the Kingdom of Heaven has been given to you, but not to them... Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable (Matthew 13:10-11, 34).

He [Jesus] told them [the Twelve], 'The secret of the Kingdom of God has been given to you. But to those on the outside everything is said in parables so that, 'they may be ever seeing but never perceiving, and ever hearing but never understanding...' (Mark 4:11-12)

Moses in the times of Christ. They were the lawyers of Jesus' day—the most highly trained and skillful interpreters of the Bible, which only consisted of the Law and the prophets at that time.

The scribes were the close companions of the priests⁴⁴ and they were divided into two groups: The ones who took the Bible literally (called the *Pharisees*), and the ones who liked to make the Bible metaphorical (called the *Sadducees*).⁴⁵ However, Jesus wasn't talking about either of these two groups when he said "...every scribe instructed concerning the Kingdom of Heaven is..." Rather, Jesus was making up a new group! He wasn't favoring the right or the left, the conservatives or the liberals, the Pharisees or the Sadducees. Rather, he was making up a center party—the Christians.

⁴⁴ The priests and scribes are mentioned together at least 23 times in the gospels! This proves that they were a ministry team.

⁴⁵ The following passage demonstrates how the Sanhedrin consisted of these two groups. It also describes the theological distinctions between the two groups.

Paul, knowing that some of them were Sadducees and the others Pharisees, called out in the Sanhedrin, "My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees. I stand on trial because of the hope of the Resurrection of the Dead." When he said this, a dispute broke out between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, and the assembly was divided.

The Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, and that there are neither angels nor spirits, but the Pharisees believe all these things. There was a great uproar, and some of the teachers of the Law who were Pharisees stood up and argued vigorously. 'We find nothing wrong with this man,' they said. 'What if a spirit or an angel has spoken to him?' (Acts 23:6-9)

Today's parallel to the Pharisee/Sadducee conflict are the Church's conservatives (who take the Bible literally), and liberals (who make it a metaphorical book). This is the battle between Evangelicals and Mainline Protestants. However, notice that in the midst of their conflict, we have the *Pentecostals* (people like us), who want the Church to return to its original doctrines and ways, the doctrines and ways established at Pentecost. Pentecostals identify themselves as Evangelicals, not liberal-leaning Protestants. Compare the modern situation to how Paul (who used spiritual gifts as Pentecostals do) remained a Pharisee his whole life long, but never identified with the Sadducees.

This is the only Scripture passage where Jesus refers to his apostles as *scribes*. It's here that Jesus put his apostles on the same level of teaching authority as the Pharisees and the Sadducees. When he did, the question arose: Did the apostles have what it would take to vie with the Pharisees and Sadducees? Jesus thought they did—and for one fundamental reason: Because the apostles were trained in Kingdom principles!

Consider this: The scribes were academics, while the apostles were blue-collar fishermen. The scribes were trained in the science of hermeneutics. The apostles were not. What the apostles had going for them was that they were trained by Jesus. They had spent quality time with Jesus. The scribes wouldn't give Jesus the time of day.

When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus (Acts 4:13).

The apostles' experience with Jesus made them into great men. Indeed, they would become *fishers of men*—they would become scribes in their own right. The apostles were Jesus' hand-picked new generation of scribes. They constituted the new school of Bible interpretation—the alternative to the hyper-conservative Pharisees and the liberal-leaning Sadducees.

[Jesus said to the future apostles when they were still fishermen] 'Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men' (Matthew 4:19; NKJV).

The apostles would become scribes, but not just everyday scribes. They would obtain the perfect balance of new and old. They would be called *Christians*, and what a mark they would leave on the World! Judaism would never be the same. How different the apostles were from the Pharisees and the Sadducees—and what made them so different was simply this: The apostles were equipped with a full revelation. They had the Holy Spirit-inspired interpretation the Old and the New Covenants!

Did you know that there was a time when many Jewish leaders converted to Christianity? There was an exodus from Phariseeism to faith, when a large group of priests started following Jesus:

And the Word of God kept spreading, and the number of disciples in Jerusalem was increasing greatly, and a large number of priests began obeying the faith (Acts 6:7).

It was an amazing phenomenon when Pharisee scribes believed the Gospel! Men such as Paul, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea were among them. There were other Pharisees also, and interestingly enough, they continued in the party of the Pharisees.

... some of the believers... belonged to the party of the Pharisees... (Acts 15:5)

Does it surprise you that these men remained Pharisees? It's the equivalent of a Pentecostal believer today remaining a conservative Evangelical (see last footnote for explanation). Even Paul proudly declared himself a Pharisee long after he was converted:

... [Paul] called out in the Sanhedrin, 'My brothers, I am a Pharisee, descended from Pharisees' (Acts 23:6).

Parable Stats

There are a total of 35 distinct parables⁴⁶ in the NT, and 24 of them (70%)⁴⁷ are about the Kingdom. Of those 24, there are 20 which deal with the Kingdom *explicitly*, while another 4 deal with it *implicitly*). An example of what we mean by *explicit* is what you'll notice as you read the first 12 parables below, each of them beginning with the phrase

⁴⁶ There are at least eleven other teachings of Christ which Bible teachers sometimes include among the parables. That's why you may hear from others that there are up to 46 parables (like they say on the website swapmeettave.com/Bible/Parables/index.htm). We insist that these eleven don't qualify. Our explanation is in Appendix D.

⁴⁷ To be precise, that's 69%.

“the Kingdom of Heaven is like...” That phrase is as *explicit* as it gets!

Now, there are only 11 parables⁴⁸ that do not address the Kingdom—that’s 31% of all the parables. We won’t present them here. What we *will* do in this section is explain the parables in which Jesus demonstrates that the Kingdom is the theme:

1. **The Wheat and the Tares** (Matthew 13:24-30, 37-43; NKJV). This is Jesus’ most complex parable. It has many components, but in essence, it explains why God has allowed the Devil to place unbelievers right alongside believers in the World. It teaches that we shouldn’t stress about the evil people coexisting with us. We should be at peace with the fact that God is withholding judgment until the time is ripe.

The details of this parable reveal that the time will be *very* ripe when God sends his judgment—he’ll wait until the end of the Millennium.

Note that this is one of only two parables in which Jesus gives his own interpretation of the parable. Shockingly, even with an explanation given in black and white, there’s hardly anyone today who can explain this parable.

Another parable he put forth to them, saying: “The Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field;⁴⁹ but while men slept,⁵⁰ his ene-

⁴⁸ Please see Appendix C for a list of the 11 parables that do not deal directly with the Kingdom of God, including a brief description of each parable.

⁴⁹ If you’re going to correctly interpret the Kingdom aspect of this parable, you have to get this point: “The field is the World.” Jesus has sown and will continue to sow the sons of the Kingdom [the good seed] in *the World*. But get this: He’ll sow them even throughout the Millennium. Jesus will not stop placing the sons of the Kingdom in the World until his Millennial rule is over.

⁵⁰ Remember the 10 Virgins who all fell asleep? Well, the time in *while men sleep* is the current time, the final phase of the Time of the Gentiles (Luke 21:24), the current Apostasy. It is a time in which the Devil has been very busy sowing evil people—his children—in the World. Sadly, Christians (who should

my came and sowed tares among the wheat and went his way.

But when the grain had sprouted and produced a crop, then the tares also appeared. So the servants of the owner came and said to him, ‘Sir, did you not sow good seed in your field? How then does it have tares?’

He said to them, ‘An enemy has done this.’ The servants⁵¹ said to him, ‘Do you want us then to go and gather them up?’ But he said, ‘No, lest while you gather up the tares you also uproot the wheat with them. Let both grow together until the harvest, and at the time of harvest I will say to the reapers, ‘First gather together the tares and bind them in bundles to burn them, but gather the wheat into my barn’” (Matthew 13:24-30; NKJV).

be alert and aware) are oblivious to the Devil’s wicked work. That’s why Jesus says that people are *asleep*.

As you read the parable, compare the time when everybody is *asleep* with time when everybody is *awake*. When will everybody be awake spiritually? During the Millennial Kingdom.

We know that the Devil will not be allowed to do any evil during the Millennium because he will be locked away in the Abyss—that’s why the passage says that after the enemy came and sowed tares among the wheat... [he] *went his way*. Satan “goes his way” when an angel throws him into the Abyss and locks him there for 1000 years (Revelation 20:1-3).

⁵¹ The *servants* are distinct from the *reapers*. Since Jesus explains that the reapers are angels, we know that the servants are *not* angels—but who are the servants then? They are zealous resurrected Christians, and they want to purge the World of evil. Right now, you’ll be hard pressed to find Christians who are pushing for the kind of Inquisition the servants want in the parable. So be clear about this: The servants [who discover the tares when they awake] are not modern-day Christians, they are Millennium rulers—they are resurrected Christians.

Their job during the Millennium will be to govern the citizens of the Earth. They will be charged by God with the solemn duty of punishing evildoers, so they feel that purging the World of evil is their task.

However, God doesn’t agree with their plan to purge the World from evil. Although there’s nothing wrong with purging the World from evil, it’s simply not their job. It’ll be the job of angels, and God has his own special time for it—at the end of the Millennium.

The interpretation:⁵²

He who sows the good seed is the Son of Man. The field is the World, the good seeds are the sons of the Kingdom, but the tares are the sons of the Wicked One. The enemy who sowed them is the Devil, the harvest is the End of the Age,⁵³ and the reapers are the angels.

⁵² Is it too demanding of Jesus to expect us to discern the ages and the epochs of history? We are tempted to think that he would never involve topics such as the Millennium in his parables since (supposedly) only very advanced Bible students would ever understand such things. That's wrong. His apostles were 100% convinced that they were following a man who would be the King of Israel, and even of the World. They had no doubts that the Kingdom of God would become manifest—how about you? Do you believe, as they did, that we will judge those who dwell in the Kingdom?

The truths expressed in this parable coincide perfectly with the very realistic expectations of Jesus' followers. Paul also considered believers to be well informed about *times and epochs* (1 Thessalonians 5:1-2; NKJV). According to his assessment, they understood these things perfectly well, to such a degree that they didn't need anyone to explain it to them.

... concerning the times and the seasons, brethren, you have no need that I should write to you. For you yourselves know perfectly that the Day of the Lord so comes as a thief in the night...

⁵³ The age that we're currently experiencing started approximately 6,000 years ago at the Creation (a.k.a. the Beginning). For the 7-day cycle of the current age to finish, we have to complete a 7,000-year timeframe, which will be at the end of the Millennium. So the *End of the Age* takes place at the conclusion of the Millennium. Subsequently, the next great age will be the *Eternal Kingdom* of the Father.

The great age that preceded our current one, which we call "Eternity Past" [it was Pre-Creation], is cryptically described in the following passages:

- Proverbs 8:22-27 (which tells us how the Word was "brought forth" before Creation)
- Micah 5:2b (a tip of the hat to Jesus' existence back then)
- John 17:24 (informs us about God's relationship to Jesus in the previous age, he loved him)
- Hebrews 9:11 (speaks of a Pre-Creation Temple)

So, the Bible clearly lays out for us three great ages in the history of the Universe:

- Pre-Creation or "Eternity Past"
- the Current 7-Day Age (which includes the Millennium), what the Bible calls "this Creation" (Hebrews 9:11)
- "the Kingdom of our Father" (Matthew 13:43; 26:29)

The Bible gives us no hints of any other ages before or after. Of course, God is free to create other ages after his Kingdom—but mysteries like that don't correspond to our finite minds, at least not for now.

Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the End of this Age. The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom⁵⁴ all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the Furnace of Fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ This phrase *gather out of his Kingdom* requires interpretation. Aren't the wheat and tares in the World? How is it possible for the tares to actually be taken out of the Kingdom if they are in the World? This happens because, at that moment in history will have already passed when

The kingdom of the World... [will have] become the Kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah (Revelation 11:15).

After the good mortals who enter the Kingdom give birth to new generations, and successive generations are born, the seed of sin, the human nature will cause those generations to rebel against Jesus. They eventually will join Gog and Magog and resist Jesus' rule, attempting to overthrow him and us.

⁵⁵ This expression is repeated in other teachings of Christ, and if we carefully study the context in which it is used, it will help us to understand quite a bit:

... many will come from east and west and be seated at the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. But the sons of the Kingdom will be thrown out into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth! (Matthew 8:11-12; LEB)

... at the End of the Age. The angels will go out and separate the evil from among the righteous and throw them into the Fiery Furnace. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth! (Matthew 13:49-50; LEB)

... the king said to the servants, 'Tie him up hand and foot and throw him into the outer darkness. In that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth!' (Matthew 22:13)

If you study these verses carefully, you'll see that the precise historical event associated with the weeping and gnashing of teeth is the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the Kingdom of Heaven. Do not confuse this banquet with the *Marriage Feast of the Lamb* (to take place in Heaven after the Rapture)—for no one raptured will soon afterward be cast out of Heaven. Rather, the banquet with Abraham is a special feast to be held on Earth during the Millennium.

When Jesus says that the banquet with Abraham will take place at *the End of the Age*, when angels go out and separate the evil from among the righteous, he means to say that it will happen at the end of the Millennium. Angels will not snatch evil people out of the World until then. Think about it—angels certainly

Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the Kingdom of their Father.⁵⁶ He who has ears to hear, let him hear! (Matthew 13:37-43; NKJV)

As we said before, our Lord's main message here is 'what the Kingdom of Heaven is like.' He compares it to a man who sows good seed in his field—and the field is the World. How can the field be the World and the Kingdom at the same time? That's a key question for those who aim at interpreting the parable well. We know that the World and the Kingdom are polar opposites. We know that the system of this World is contrary to the system of the Kingdom, so what is our Lord expressing here?

The field is the World—but Jesus does not mean to say the *dominion* of the World. It's not the spiritual sphere where Satan reigns, because in the parable, the sons of the Kingdom are in the field. No son of the Kingdom is immersed in worldliness or subject to Satan. Rather, the *World* means *Planet Earth*. The planet will be the same one in the Millennial Kingdom as it is now. What will change is its government. That is, Satan is the ruler of this World now (John 14:30; 16:11; Ephesians 2:2), while Jesus will be the ruler of the World when he comes (Luke 1:31-33; Revelation 2:27; 12:5; 19:15).

Why then does Jesus start his parable saying that 'the Kingdom of Heaven is like a man who sowed good seed in his field'? Common sense tells us that he doesn't mean

won't snatch people out of the World for condemnation during the Rapture! They'll be too busy rapturing believers up to the clouds.

Angels will hurl evil people into the Lake of Fire after the Millennium has concluded. That's the only moment in history when sinners will be separated from among the righteous. The *Fierce Furnace* and the outer darkness of which Christ speaks are *not* located in Hell (that is, in Sheol). Rather, they are located in the Lake of Fire.

⁵⁶ To further argue in favor of a correct interpretation: This term can only refer to the time when God the Father comes in the New Jerusalem—when he appears after Christ has ruled for 1000 years. God's rule will not begin until the 1000 years are up.

that the Kingdom is like the *man*, or that it's like the *field*. With those two eliminated, we might deduce that Christ means that the Kingdom is *the seed*. However, he goes on to say “the good seeds are the sons of the Kingdom.” A *son of the Kingdom* is a Kingdom citizen, not the Kingdom itself.

Undeniably, there is Kingdom potency in the *good seed*. That is, there's *latent* Kingdom potential (like fire in hot metal) inside the *seed*. Since we have Kingdom citizenship (even though we live in this World) right now, you could say (in this limited sense) that the Kingdom is “in us.” However, the concept of the Kingdom being “in us” has been used by false teachers to such an extreme that we do well to avoid imitating their teachings.

Jesus meant that the Kingdom is the combination of the man, the good seed, and the field. Together, these three bring about an effect, which is the Kingdom.

This parable is very similar to the other parables in which Jesus uses the illustration of a *seed*. In those others, the *seed* signifies the Word of God (the Gospel message), but here the seed represents *the sons of the Kingdom*. That may sound different, but it's actually quite similar because children of God believe in the Word of God. God's Word lives in us, and through our faith in the Word, the Kingdom hope will become a reality.

When did Jesus first sow a Word-believing human in the World? On the sixth day of Creation he “sowed” Adam. Subsequently, God “sowed” Abel, and he has “sown” many others since then: Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Moses, David, Elijah, Daniel—even Jesus was “sown” by God, and one of his titles is “Abraham's Seed”!⁵⁷

This “seed” continues even today—indeed, *we* are the spiritual children of Jesus, the patriarchs, the prophets, and the apostles (through our faith in the Gospel).

⁵⁷ The promises were spoken to Abraham and to his Seed. Scripture does not say “and to seeds,” meaning many people, but “and to your Seed,” meaning one person, who is Christ (Galatians 3:16).

One last reminder: The field is *the World*. The field is not the Church. Contrary to popular opinion, this parable is not about hypocrites in the Church. Perhaps you have heard the *Tares among the Wheat* applied to the Church at some point. That's all too common. However, Jesus was not talking about the Church in this parable. He was speaking of something greater: the Coming Kingdom. Do you understand what it will be like?

2. **The Harvest** (Mark 4:26-29; NKJV). There is only one way to interpret this passage, and it's not about personal spiritual development. The Kingdom is not *the seed* in this parable, but the harvest! The Gospel of the Kingdom is the seed. It was sown by Jesus in this World, and he has fulfilled his role by preaching and dying for us. Now, he just has to wait for the time to be ripe, and his labors will produce fruit. When the Lord returns, he will harvest his fruit. Meanwhile, "this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole World as a testimony to all nations" (Matthew 24:14); that is, until "the grain ripens."

And he [Jesus] said, 'The Kingdom of God is as if a man should scatter seed on the ground, and should sleep by night and rise by day, and the seed should sprout and grow, he himself does not know how. For the Earth yields crops by itself: first the blade, then the head, after that the full grain in the head. But when the grain ripens, immediately he puts in the sickle, because the harvest has come.'

3. **The Mustard Seed** (Matthew 13:31-32). Jesus describes the Kingdom⁵⁸ as being seemingly insignificant—at this point, it is just one small message among many. However, since it is a promise of God, a sure hope, it will become a reality on Earth. Indeed, it will become a large government, like a tree is to the birds, it will become a refuge to many (also in Mark 4:30-32, Luke 13:18-19).

⁵⁸ For our Lord Jesus, the message of the Kingdom, our hope, is synonymous with the Kingdom itself. That's simply because God always fulfills his Word. God is true, and he always speaks the truth. If he says that something is real, then it's real. If he says it's coming, then it's as good as here!

He told them another parable: ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is like a mustard seed, which a man took and planted in his field. Though it is the smallest of all seeds, yet when it grows, it is the largest of garden plants and becomes a tree, so that the birds come and perch in its branches’.

4. **The Yeast** (Matthew 13:33; LEB). This is the shortest parable; it’s just 19 words in Greek (25 in English). Very concisely, it presents a fundamental principle: The Kingdom will transform the World. Although among the many messages that exist in the World now, the Gospel of the Kingdom by and large goes unseen, it will eventually fill the World. It goes unnoticed for now, but when the time comes, it will affect absolutely everything.

He told them another parable: ‘The Kingdom of Heaven is like yeast that a woman took and put into three measures of wheat flour until the whole batch was leavened.’

The *wheat flour* is the World, the *woman* is the Church, and the *yeast* is the Gospel of the Kingdom. As we pointed out earlier, God’s *message* of the Kingdom is the same thing as the Kingdom itself because what God says is true and real. His Kingdom will transform the World, and make it into something wonderful (just as dough will make you sick, but leavened bread tastes delicious to your palate).

5. **The Hidden Treasure** (Matthew 13:44). Another very short teaching, this parable demonstrates three things: 1. That the Kingdom is hard to find. 2. That it becomes very precious to the person who finds it. 3. That to obtain it, we must sacrifice all we have.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

Here Christ makes it clear that we first discover the Kingdom promise (the Gospel), and then we aim at making the Kingdom ours. The Kingdom is first a hope, then a reality. The parable also points out that we must obtain our claim to the Kingdom legitimately. We have to be willing to give up everything to get it.

6. **The Valuable Pearl** (Matthew 13:45-46). Jesus continues to develop the same theme as his prior parable, painting a picture of a person who understands the true value of things. He demonstrates that the Kingdom of Heaven is valuable above all else.

Again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it.

7. **The Fishing Net** (Matthew 13:47-50). With this parable, Jesus describes the judgment of the righteous and the wicked, one that will take place at the end of the Millennium.

Once again, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a net that was let down into the lake and caught all kinds of fish. When it was full, the fishermen pulled it up on the shore. Then they sat down and collected the good fish in baskets, but threw the bad away. This is how it will be at the End of the Age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the blazing furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

You'll notice that all of these folks are in a *net* our Lord calls "the Kingdom of Heaven." The *End of the Age* is the same we already identified in the parable of the Wheat and the Tares—it's the judgment that will take place at the conclusion of this current 7000-year age. Only at that time will the angels whisk up the unrighteous and separate them from the righteous. The *blazing furnace* is the Lake of Fire—not Hell, but the place where Hell will ultimately be cast into (Revelation 20:14).

8. **The Unmerciful Servant** (Matthew 18:23-34). The Judgment of the wicked takes place only after the Millennium—that is, after Kingdom of Heaven has been manifested on Earth. In this parable, the master (God) hands over one of his servants to the torturers when the master settles accounts with his servants. The fact that this man was a servant of God means that he actually

made it into the Millennial Reign. Unfortunately, he didn't treat others with the same mercy with which God treated him, so God condemns him. This scene does not depict the separation of sheep and goats (Christ's Judgment of the Nations), but the Final Judgment, which is why Jesus calls it *the Kingdom of Heaven*. It's a judgment of those who lived in the Kingdom!

Therefore, the Kingdom of Heaven is like a king who wanted to settle accounts with his servants. As he began the settlement, a man who owed him ten thousand bags of gold was brought to him. Since he was not able to pay, the master ordered that he and his wife and his children and all that he had be sold to repay the debt.

At this the servant fell on his knees before him. 'Be patient with me,' he begged, 'and I will pay back everything.' The servant's master took pity on him, canceled the debt and let him go. But when that servant went out, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a hundred silver coins. He grabbed him and began to choke him. 'Pay back what you owe me!' he demanded.

His fellow servant fell to his knees and begged him, 'Be patient with me, and I will pay it back.' But he refused. Instead, he went off and had the man thrown into prison until he could pay the debt.

When the other servants saw what had happened, they were outraged and went and told their master everything that had happened. Then the master called the servant in. 'You wicked servant,' he said, 'I canceled all that debt of yours because you begged me to. Shouldn't you have had mercy on your fellow servant just as I had on you?' In anger his master handed him over to the jailers to be tortured, until he should pay back all he owed.

9. **The Workers in the Vineyard** (Matthew 20:1-16). Read this parable and you should easily notice that Jesus made 'the first will be last, and the last will be first' his overarching theme. What does he mean? With those words, Jesus establishes a principle, one which determines and defines the order of things in the World

to Come. Who are ‘the last’ in the world now? Figure it out, and then you’ll know who will be ‘the first’ on the day when God pays each one according to his generosity.

For the Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire workers for his vineyard. He agreed to pay them a denarius for the day and sent them into his vineyard.

About nine in the morning he went out and saw others standing in the marketplace doing nothing. He told them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard, and I will pay you whatever is right.’ So they went.

He went out again about noon and about three in the afternoon and did the same thing. About five in the afternoon he went out and found still others standing around. He asked them, ‘Why have you been standing here all day long doing nothing?’

‘Because no one has hired us,’ they answered.

He said to them, ‘You also go and work in my vineyard.’

When evening came, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, ‘Call the workers and pay them their wages, beginning with the last ones hired and going on to the first.’

The workers who were hired about five in the afternoon came and each received a denarius. So when those came who were hired first, they expected to receive more. But each one of them also received a denarius. When they received it, they began to grumble against the landowner. ‘These who were hired last worked only one hour,’ they said, ‘and you have made them equal to us who have borne the burden of the work and the heat of the day.’

But he answered one of them, ‘I am not being unfair to you, friend. Didn’t you agree to work for a denarius? Take your pay and go. I want to give the one who was hired last the same as I gave you. Don’t I have the right to do what I want with my own money? Or are you envious because I am generous?’

So the last will be first, and the first will be last.

Only during the Millennium will God's new order will finally be established. That is, when Jesus comes back, the ones he has chosen to lead in his Kingdom will have precedence. That's why Jesus started the parable with the words "the Kingdom of Heaven is like..."

10. **The Invitees and the Wedding** (Matthew 22:2-14; NKJV). Jesus makes no bones about it—his point here is a hard one: "Many are called but few are chosen." He teaches us that we must prioritize God's call to the Kingdom by overcoming worldly distractions. In addition, he also teaches that it's not enough to answer his call *to* the Kingdom—we must be chosen *for* the Kingdom. That is, we have to pass through two levels of testing: 1) We have to get into the Millennium, and 2) when we are in the Millennium, we have to earn God's approval.

The Kingdom of Heaven is like a certain king who arranged a marriage for his son, and sent out his servants to call those who were invited to the wedding; and they were not willing to come. Again, he sent out other servants, saying, "Tell those who are invited, 'See, I have prepared my dinner; my oxen and fatted cattle are killed, and all things are ready. Come to the wedding.'" But they made light of it and went their ways, one to his own farm, another to his business. And the rest seized his servants, treated them spitefully, and killed them.

But when the king heard about it, he was furious. And he sent out his armies, destroyed those murderers, and burned up their city. Then he said to his servants, 'The wedding is ready, but those who were invited were not worthy. Therefore go into the highways, and as many as you find, invite to the wedding.' So those servants went out into the highways and gathered together all whom they found, both bad and good. And the wedding hall was filled with guests.

But when the king came in to see the guests, he saw a man there who did not have on a wedding garment. So he said to him, 'Friend, how did you come in here without

a wedding garment?’ And he was speechless. Then the king said to the servants, ‘Bind him hand and foot, take him away, and cast him into outer darkness; there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’

For many are called, but few are chosen.

As we’ve already seen, the expression describing when ‘there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth’ refers exclusively to the judgment that comes immediately subsequent to the Millennium. It’s the same moment when God casts people into the Lake of Fire (see Revelation 20:14-15). Because of that, it’s a mistake to say that the *marriage feast* of the parable is the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (Revelation 19:7-9). Common sense tells us that Jesus will not kick any of the participants in his Wedding Feast out of it. Rather, the marriage feast of the parable represents the event Jesus calls the “Feast in the Kingdom of God” (Matthew 8:11 and Luke 13:28-29 and 14:14).

As to how a person who is actually in the Kingdom can be kicked out, we have already explained it in the parable #1, the Tares and the Wheat. If it will help, please reread the footnotes from the section of that parable which says:

The Son of Man will send out his angels, and they will gather out of his Kingdom all things that offend, and those who practice lawlessness, and will cast them into the Furnace of Fire. There will be wailing and gnashing of teeth.

- 11. The Ten Virgins** (Matthew 25:1-13). With the words “keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour,” Jesus makes it clear that Christian churches must be on the alert for his return. However, few churches heed this advice. Most are not watchful. In fact, only certain congregations will enter the Kingdom—those which have a particular anointing of the Holy Spirit: the anointing of enlightenment (symbolized in the parable by the *oil* which gives *light*).

At that time, the Kingdom of Heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish and five were wise. The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. The wise ones, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. The bridegroom was a long time in coming, and they all became drowsy and fell asleep.

At midnight the cry rang out: ‘Here’s the bridegroom! Come out to meet him!’ Then all the virgins woke up and trimmed their lamps. The foolish ones said to the wise, ‘Give us some of your oil; our lamps are going out.’

‘No,’ they replied, ‘there may not be enough for both us and you. Instead, go to those who sell oil and buy some for yourselves.’ But while they were on their way to buy the oil, the bridegroom arrived. The virgins who were ready went in with him to the wedding banquet. And the door was shut.

Later the others also came. ‘Lord, Lord,’ they said, ‘open the door for us!’ But he replied, ‘Truly I tell you, I don’t know you.’ Therefore keep watch, because you do not know the day or the hour.

This parable clearly demonstrates what the condition of the Church will be just before the return of Christ—it will be sleepy. That is, spiritual sleepiness will prevail among professing Christians, and they will not be alert to the coming of Christ. Hope in the Kingdom will be at an all-time low. Precisely, that’s what we see among churches now!

12. **The Minas** (Luke 19:12-27; LEB, below) and its parallel passage, the **Parable of the Talents** (Matthew 25:14-30, not show here). Both passages address the Kingdom explicitly. The Minas parable speaks of a nobleman who receiving a *Kingdom*, returns for it. The Parable of the Talents begins with the words “For the Kingdom of Heaven⁵⁹ is like a man traveling to a far country...” (NKJV).

⁵⁹ The NKJV supplies these words, taking its cue from Matthew 25:1, which says ‘the Kingdom of Heaven will be like...’

So why do both passages address the Kingdom so explicitly? Well, Jesus taught the parable in response to public interest in the Kingdom. It says that ‘the people thought that the Kingdom of God was going to appear at once’ (Luke 19:11). The people were wrong, of course. The Kingdom wouldn’t appear at once, so Jesus demonstrated that first we must pass through a time of testing—a time in which we prove ourselves worthy of God’s rewards. That time of testing is the current age.

Now, the current age will last all the way through to the end of the Millennium. Precisely, Jesus is talking about the end of the Millennium here. How do we know that? Well, the punishment of being cast into the outer darkness only comes at the conclusion of the Millennium, and the Matthew version of the passage ends with these words:

... throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 19:30).

With that as our introduction, let’s read Luke’s version of the parable:

Therefore he [Jesus] said, “A certain nobleman traveled to a distant country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return. And summoning ten of his own slaves, he gave them ten minas and said to them, ‘Do business until I come back.’ But his citizens hated him, and sent a delegation after him, saying, ‘We do not want this man to be king over us!’

And it happened that when he returned after receiving the kingdom, he ordered these slaves to whom he had given the money to be summoned to him, so that he could know what they had gained by trading. So the first arrived, saying, ‘Sir, your mina has made ten minas more!’ And he said to him, ‘Well done, good slave! Because you have been faithful in a very small thing, have authority over ten cities.’ And the second came, saying, ‘Sir, your mina has made five minas.’ So he said to this one also, ‘And you be over five cities.’

And another came, saying, ‘Sir, behold your mina, which I had put away for safekeeping in a piece of cloth. For I was afraid of you, because you are a severe man—you withdraw what you did not deposit, and you reap what you did not sow!’ He said to him, ‘By your own words I will judge you, wicked slave! You knew that I am a severe man, withdrawing what I did not deposit and reaping what I did not sow. And why did you not give my money to the bank, and I, when I returned, would have collected it with interest?’

And to the bystanders he said, ‘Take away from him the mina and give it to the one who has the ten minas!’ And they said to him, ‘Sir, he has ten minas.’ ‘I tell you that to everyone who has, more will be given. But from the one who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. But these enemies of mine who did not want me to be king over them—bring them here and slaughter them in my presence!’”

- 13. The Signs of the Future from a Fig Tree** (Matthew 24:3, 32-35). Jesus presents a sign that will indicate the nearness of his coming. (The parallel passages are Mark 13:28-29 and Luke 21:29-31). In v. 33, when Jesus says “when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door,” he is referring to his Return in the Kingdom. We know that he’s talking about the Kingdom because his Return is the topic of the conversation.

As Jesus was sitting on the Mount of Olives, the disciples came to him privately. “Tell us... what will be the sign of your coming and of the End of the Age?”

... Now learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door. Truly I tell you, this generation will certainly not pass away until all these things have happened. Heaven and Earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away.

The generation to which Jesus is referring is the current generation of Jews in Israel.⁶⁰ Its twigs are tender and its leaves came out in 1948 when Israel, the metaphorical *fig tree*, became a nation again. The generation that was alive in 1948 will not pass away until the seal and trumpet events (which Jesus describes in Matthew 24) have taken place.

- 14. The Invitees and Participants in the Great Banquet** (Luke 14:15-24). This parable was borne as Christ's response to a disciple's comment 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the Kingdom of God.' Not coincidentally, our Lord ends it by commenting on who will be invited to a feast.

The feast to which Jesus refers is the same one he mentioned verses earlier in Luke 13:28-29 which will include "all the prophets," otherwise known as "the banquet with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob" (Matthew 8:11; LEB)? Do not confuse it with the Wedding Feast of the Lamb (event #22 in our chronology) which will take place in Heaven. Rather, this one is much later. It's event #187 in our chronology, and it's properly called "The Feast in the Kingdom of God."

When one of those at the table with him heard this [Jesus' comment about how we'll be repaid at the Resurrection of the Righteous (v. 14)], he said to Jesus, 'Blessed is the one who will eat at the Feast in the Kingdom of God.'

Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.'

⁶⁰ Matthew 21:18-19 demonstrates that for Jesus, Jerusalem was like a fig tree. That's why he cursed the fig tree—he wanted to demonstrate his displeasure with the fruitlessness of Jerusalem. The very day after his triumphal entry and his cleansing of the Temple from merchants, our Lord returned to Jerusalem:

Early in the morning, as Jesus was on his way back to the city, he was hungry. Seeing a fig tree by the road, he went up to it but found nothing on it except leaves. Then he said to it, 'May you never bear fruit again!' Immediately the tree withered.

But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'

The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.'

Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"

15. **The Unjust Steward** (Luke 16:1-9; NASB). We must manage our worldly possessions for eternal gain. In other words, we should use material wealth to obtain an advantage in the Kingdom. One such advantage would be stronger friendships. A day will come when money will be of no use. At that time, we'll want other inhabitants of the Kingdom to welcome us into their homes. We build those relationships now.

Now he [Jesus] was also saying to the disciples, "There was a rich man who had a manager, and this manager was reported to him as squandering his possessions. And he called him and said to him, 'What is this I hear about you? Give an accounting of your management, for you can no longer be manager.'

The manager said to himself, 'What shall I do, since my master is taking the management away from me? I am not strong enough to dig; I am ashamed to beg. I know what I shall do, so that when I am removed from the management, people will welcome me into their homes.'

And he summoned each one of his master's debtors, and he began saying to the first, 'How much do you

owe my master?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of oil.’ And he said to him, ‘Take your bill, and sit down quickly and write fifty.’ Then he said to another, ‘And how much do you owe?’ And he said, ‘A hundred measures of wheat.’ He said to him, ‘Take your bill, and write eighty.’

And his master praised the unrighteous manager because he had acted shrewdly; for the sons of this age are more shrewd in relation to their own kind than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by means of the wealth of unrighteousness, so that when it fails, they will receive you into the eternal dwellings.”

16. **The Sower** (Matthew 13:3-8, 18-23). Jesus spoke this parable to compare the way different people receive the message of the Kingdom (Matthew 13:19)—most people bear no fruit, but some bear much (see also Mark 4:3-8, 14-20 and Luke 8:5-8). This is one of the only two parables that Jesus actually interpreted for us, so understanding it should not be difficult.

A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path, and the birds came and ate it up. Some fell on rocky places, where it did not have much soil. It sprang up quickly, because the soil was shallow. But when the sun came up, the plants were scorched, and they withered because they had no root. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil, where it produced a crop—a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown...

The interpretation:

Listen then to what the parable of the sower means: When anyone hears the message [lit., the *Word*] about the Kingdom and does not understand it, the Evil One comes and snatches away what was sown in their heart. This is the seed sown along the path.

The seed falling on rocky ground refers to someone who hears the Word and at once receives it with

joy. But since they have no root, they last only a short time. When trouble or persecution comes because of the Word, they quickly fall away.

The seed falling among the thorns refers to someone who hears the Word, but the worries of this life and the deceitfulness of wealth choke the word, making it unfruitful.

But the seed falling on good soil refers to someone who hears the Word and understands it. This is the one who produces a crop, yielding a hundred, sixty or thirty times what was sown.

Here's the summary: Some people hear about the Kingdom, but it makes no sense to them. Others respond to the Gospel of the Kingdom emotionally, but do not persevere. Still others [who have worldly worries like wealth] get the idea, but the Kingdom loses its grip on their hearts. Their other concerns quench override it, and it gives no fruit.

- 17. The House Built on the Rock** (Matthew 7:21, 24-27). A parable concerning the importance of doing the will of the Father. Jesus points out that the only way to enter the Kingdom is by hearing God's Word, and doing his will. Those who do not do God's will, even though they hear his Word, face devastation and destruction.

Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, but only the one who does the will of my Father who is in Heaven... everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house; yet it did not fall, because it had its foundation on the rock.

But everyone who hears these words of mine and does not put them into practice is like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain came down, the streams rose, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell with a great crash.

18. **The Rich Fool** (Luke 12:16-21, 30-32). The moral of this parable is that instead of being concerned about material things, we should seek to become spiritually rich. We should try to obtain the eternal rewards God will give us in his Kingdom. Now is the time to start doing that.

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

Then he said, “This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.””

But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God... the pagan world runs after all such things, and your Father knows that you need them. But seek his Kingdom, and these things will be given to you as well. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has been pleased to give you the Kingdom.”

19. **The Wicked Tenants** (Matthew 21:33-44). A parable concerning the Jews’ responsibility of administrating the Kingdom—a responsibility God took away from them. (The parallel passages are in Mark 12:1-11; and Luke 20:9-18). Of particular importance is v. 43 where it says ‘the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit.’ Since the vineyard was taken away from the tenants in the parable, it represents the Kingdom.

Listen to another parable: There was a landowner who planted a vineyard. He put a wall around it, dug a winepress in it, and built a watchtower. Then he rented the vineyard to some farmers and moved to another place. When the harvest time approached, he sent his servants to the tenants to collect his fruit.

The tenants seized his servants; they beat one, killed another, and stoned a third. Then he sent other servants to them, more than the first time, and the tenants treated them the same way. Last of all, he sent his son to them. ‘They will respect my son,’ he said.

But when the tenants saw the son, they said to each other, ‘This is the heir. Come, let’s kill him and take his inheritance.’ So they took him and threw him out of the vineyard and killed him.

Therefore, when the owner of the vineyard comes, what will he do to those tenants? ‘He will bring those wretches to a wretched end,’ they replied, ‘and he will rent the vineyard to other tenants, who will give him his share of the crop at harvest time...’

Therefore [because the Jews rejected Jesus, the *son* of the parable] I tell you that the Kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit...

In the vineyard, which represents the Kingdom in the parable, there are three *w*’s: a wall, a winepress, and a watchtower.⁶¹ The job of the farmer-tenants was to bear fruit for the owner, whose servants and son (rightly) laid claim to the fruit on the owner’s behalf. Those farmer-tenants were the Jews, who did not administer the Kingdom as God ordered. Because of their disobedience, God has now “rented” the Kingdom out to the Gentiles. In this current age, the Time of the Gentiles,

⁶¹ The Kingdom is essentially for the future—it’s our hope, and we’re waiting for it to come. However, the Kingdom is also among us now in one narrow sense—the sense Jesus teaches us in parable. Notice that Jesus defines the Kingdom as a *winepress*. Now, winepresses are places where grapes are brought and wine is produced.

A winepress, Christ’s metaphor for the *Kingdom now* is perfect because the fruit of a ministry demonstrates the Kingdom. That’s exactly what the parallel passage “... the Kingdom of God is... righteousness, peace, and joy in the Holy Spirit” means (Romans 14:17). Where there is spiritual fruit, there you find the Kingdom; and the fruit of the Spirit is “love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22-23).

we administer the Kingdom! How do we do it? By teaching Word of God, granting forgiveness, explaining God's promises, handling the covenant, and ministering the anointing.

20. The Two Sons (Matthew 21:28-32). Many sinners first reject God's call to serve him, but then repent and do what he wants. On the other hand, there are religious hypocrites who always say *yes* to God, but never actually serve him. Who is doing better in life? In other words, who will be the first to enter the Kingdom of God? Jesus answers this question for us. Is it an important question for you?

"... There was a man who had two sons. He went to the first and said, 'Son, go and work today in the vineyard.' 'I will not,' he answered, but later he changed his mind and went.

Then the father went to the other son and said the same thing. He answered, 'I will, sir,' but he did not go. Which of the two did what his father wanted?" "The first," they answered.

Jesus said to them, "Truly I tell you, the tax collectors and the prostitutes are entering the Kingdom of God ahead of you. For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness, and you did not believe him, but the tax collectors and the prostitutes did. And even after you saw this, you did not repent and believe him."

Kingdom-implicit Parables

Next are the four Kingdom-implicit parables. By *implicit*, we meant that in these parables Jesus does not name the Kingdom *per se*. However, since our Lord focuses on his Return, the Resurrection, and the Judgment—key events related to the Kingdom—he is certainly referring to the Kingdom indirectly. Here are these parables:

1. Watchful Servants / Watchful Homeowner (Luke 12:35-40; see also Mark 13:35-37). In this parable,

Jesus warns us to be ready for his coming. He demonstrates how well he'll deal with those who are watching for his coming. Indeed, he'll even switch roles with us, and serve us!

Be dressed ready for service and keep your lamps burning, like servants waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him.

It will be good for those servants whose master finds them watching when he comes. Truly I tell you, he will dress himself to serve, will have them recline at the table and will come and wait on them. It will be good for those servants whose master finds them ready, even if he comes in the middle of the night or toward daybreak.

But understand this: If the owner of the house had known at what hour the thief was coming, he would not have let his house be broken into. You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him.

Did you notice that last part? Our Lord also included the parallel illustration of the owner of a house being on the alert for a burglar. Christ's teaching ends with 'the Son of Man will come...'—and those words are exactly what qualifies this passage as a *Kingdom* parable.

2. **The Manager in Charge of the Servants** (Luke 12:42-48; see also Matthew 24:45-51). This parable contains the famous expression "to whom much is given, much is expected." It's basically about how if pastors are faithful to nurture believers through God's Word, they'll get a great reward; but if they refuse to minister the Word of God to the Church, they'll be severely punished.

Who then is the faithful and wise manager, whom the master puts in charge of his servants to give them their

food allowance at the proper time? It will be good for that servant whom the master finds doing so when he returns. Truly I tell you, he will put him in charge of all his possessions.

But suppose the servant says to himself, 'My master is taking a long time in coming,' and he then begins to beat the other servants, both men and women, and to eat and drink and get drunk. The master of that servant will come on a day when he does not expect him and at an hour he is not aware of. He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the unbelievers.

The servant who knows the master's will and does not get ready or does not do what the master wants will be beaten with many blows. But the one who does not know and does things deserving punishment will be beaten with few blows.

From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded; and from the one who has been entrusted with much, much more will be asked.

Here's the big takeaway from this parable: The key to behaving in a way worthy of a Kingdom reward is being prepared for our Lord's return. On the contrary, a pastor will foster sin in his heart if he imagines that Jesus will delay. A faithful pastor will be on the alert for the return of Christ, and will act accordingly by preparing people for the Kingdom. Does your pastor make Christ's return a priority?

- 3. The Last Seat and Organizing a Banquet** (Luke 14:7-14). In this double parable, Jesus explains firstly that we won't get glory by grabbing it; and secondly, how to obtain eternal rewards. The key is humbling ourselves and not seeking any repayment for our good works in the here and now. Jesus also highlights another beautiful truth: Not seeking immediate repayment for good works will make us happy. So this parable contains one of the keys to happiness!

When he [Jesus] noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: “When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, ‘Give this person your seat.’ Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place.

But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, ‘Friend, move up to a better place.’ Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.”

Then Jesus said to his host, “When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the Resurrection of the Righteous.”

What makes these two teachings *Kingdom* parables is that they both emphasize how we should be preparing for the Resurrection. They teach us about how to “seek first the Kingdom of God” and to free ourselves from the mindset of this World.

- 4. The Persistent Widow and the Corrupt Judge** (Luke 18:2-8). Here’s a parable specifically about the Last Times, the times that occur right before Christ’s return. In teaching it, Jesus challenges us to remain faithful and to persevere in prayer to the very end. We’ll need more perseverance in our prayers as persecution against us increases. That’s why Jesus encourages us by saying that ‘God will bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night.’

In a certain town, there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared what people thought. And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, ‘Grant me justice against my adversary.’

For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, ‘Even though I don’t fear God or care what people think, yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won’t eventually come and attack me!’

And the Lord said, ‘Listen to what the unjust judge says. And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly. However, when the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the Earth?’



D. Denial of our Salvation

Let’s investigate how the word *salvation* is used in the NT. In particular, we’d like to know how many times the word *salvation* refers to the Kingdom. Even a cursory study of the word *salvation* will reveal to you that salvation is fundamentally a future experience.⁶²

62 Yes, it’s our salvation. What we are studying is not each person’s experience in particular, but our “common salvation” (Jude 1:3; NKJV), one which is shared among all Christians around the world. Avoid treating salvation like a subjective personal experience. That’s the humanistic trend in churches now, but God sent Jesus “to give to his people the knowledge of salvation by the forgiveness of their sins (Luke 1:77). That means that we discover the meaning of salvation when God forgives us.

Let’s follow the logic here: Forgiveness is the basis for Peter’s words “baptism now saves you” (1 Peter 3:21; LEB). God forgives us our sins in baptism. We know that because Peter said in another passage: “Repent and be baptized... for the forgiveness of your sins” (Acts 2:38; LEB). Along these same lines, Paul refers to baptism when he says that God “saved us through the washing of regeneration” (Titus 3:5). He means that we were forgiven our sins in baptism, and therefore saved!

will come when the Kingdom comes. Of the 37 passages that contain the noun *salvation* (Greek *soteria*) in the NT, they refer to a future salvation 13 times! That's 35% of the uses of the word *salvation* in the NT. We'll look at those passages shortly.

The word *salvation* is obviously a noun, but what of the verb *to save*? In the NT, it appears 108 times.⁶³ Of those 108, there are only 4 times it says we were *saved*, using the past tense (Luke 7:47-50; Romans 8:24; 2 Timothy 1:9; Titus 3:5).⁶⁴ You may think that this is proof that salvation is a past experience, but those passages do not refer to salvation as completed. They refer to the forgiveness of sins—the first step in the way of salvation, not the complete fulfillment of it.⁶⁵

The conclusion now should not be "I've been baptized, forgiven, and now I'm saved forever." No. Rather, let's keep in mind that we will not escape "if we neglect so great a salvation" (Hebrews 2:3). In other words, if we are careless with salvation, then our punishment will be severe. You will not escape God's judgment if you are not diligently "working out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

⁶³ This information is from Strong's Concordance, word 4982, *sózó*: *to save* (Greek σοζω). Keep in mind that many of the occurrences of the verb to save refer to being saved from sickness, like Mark 5:34 and Matthew 9:22.

⁶⁴ Two very well-known but misinterpreted passages are Ephesians 2:5 and 8, which talk about how we are saved, but notice that neither of the verses say that we were saved. That is, neither use the past tense.

... he made us alive together with Christ (by grace you are saved)... For by grace you are saved through faith... (LEB)

⁶⁵ If we take Luke 7:47-50 as an example, Jesus tells a woman that her faith had saved her, but his meaning from the context is not that she would never go to Hell. Rather, it's that she was forgiven of her many sins:

'... her sins—which were many—have been forgiven...' And he said to her, 'Your sins are forgiven.' And those who were reclining at the table with him began to say among themselves, 'Who is this who even forgives sins?' And he said to the woman, 'Your faith has saved you. Go in peace.'

The number of verses that use the verb in a future sense (*will be saved* or *are going to be saved*) is 41.⁶⁶ These indicate that salvation is not a done deal, but why? Simply

⁶⁶ Among the 108, there are many that speak of being save from the circumstances of sickness or shipwrecks. If you read the following 8 verses, you'll get a sense of the futuristic nature of being saved. We hope that you'll imitate the Bible pattern and also speak about being saved as a future event:

... he who endures to the end will be saved (Mat. 10:22; 24:13; NKJV).

Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved (Mark 16:16).

Since we have now been justified by his blood, how much more shall we be saved from God's wrath through him! For if, while we were God's enemies, we were reconciled to him through the death of his Son, how much more, having been reconciled, shall we be saved through his life (Romans 5:9-10) !

... if you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised him from the dead, you will be saved (Romans 10:9; NKJV)

If anyone's work is burned, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved... (1 Corinthians 3:15; NKJV)

... deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the Day of the Lord Jesus (1 Corinthians 5:5; NKJV).

The others are: Matthew 1:21; 16:25; 18:11; 19:25; 24:22; Mark 8:35; 10:26; 13:13, 20; Luke 8:12; 9:24; 13:23; 18:26, John 3:17; 5:34; 10:9; 12:47; Acts 2:21; 4:12; Romans 9:27; 10:13; 11:26; 1 Corinthians 1:18; 10:33; 1 Timothy 2:15; Hebrews 7:25; James 1:2; 2:14; 4:12.

The bottom line is that you are saved *conditionally*. That is, you need to remain in Christ, or your condition of being saved will be undone, and you will be condemned in the end!

By this Gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you (1 Corinthians 15:2).

In addition, your salvation depends largely upon the diligence of your pastor. Did you know that?

[Paul said to Timothy:] Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers (1 Timothy 4:16).

Finally, your salvation mostly depends on you. It will be a hard task for you to be saved, even if you're a good person.

If it is hard for the righteous to be saved, what will become of the ungodly and the sinner? (1 Peter 4:18)

because our salvation will not be complete until we are resurrected. This is the Biblical perspective, but unfortunately it's not the current Evangelical perspective which teaches people to think that they are "saved" when they pray the so-called "prayer of faith"⁶⁷ to invite Jesus into their hearts.

Evangelical pastors don't teach salvation as it appears in the Bible, as a future event. Instead, they have made salvation out to be a past event. Contradicting God's Word, they would have you think that your salvation is guaranteed—that you "were saved" already. This misconception has given the majority of Evangelicals a false sense of security, but true saints still sense in their hearts that they have to strive to obtain salvation.

In spite of the current confusion, if we're ever going to acquire salvation, we have to understand it Biblically and recognize that it is future! In other words, we must live by what the Scriptures call *the hope of salvation*. That hope should be like a helmet on our heads.

... since we are of the day, let us be sober, having put on the breastplate of faith and love, and as a helmet, the hope of salvation. For God has not destined us for wrath, but for obtaining salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Thessalonians 5:8-9; NASB).

Sample NT Passages

The following passages are a sampler of how the NT speaks of salvation. Read them thoughtfully and purge yourself of the common modern apostate teachings on salvation. If you know the truth, the truth will set you free (John 8:32)!

1. Firstly, salvation is a goal. It's not here yet—it's just nearer now than it was yesterday.

⁶⁷ The Bible does speak of a *prayer of faith*, but not like pastors teach it today. The true prayer of faith [as per the Word of God] is one that is effective not only for both healing a sick brother or sister but for the forgiveness of their sins (James 5:5).

... do this [love others], understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. The night is nearly over; the day is almost here... (Romans 13:11-12).

2. Secondly, we have to *work out* our salvation. Working it out means that we have to give close attention to making sure it is fulfilled. We have to be diligent to see it carried out to completion.

... continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and to act in order to fulfill his good purpose (Philippians 2:11-13).

Pay close attention to yourself and to your teaching; persevere in these things, for as you do this you will ensure salvation both for yourself and for those who hear you (1 Timothy 4:16).

3. God chose us *for* salvation, which we *obtain* through two means: the sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit, and believing in the truth. When we're saved, we'll obtain the glory of Christ. that's the goal—glory!

... God from the beginning chose you for salvation through sanctification by the Spirit and belief in the truth, to which he called you by our Gospel, for the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Thessalonians 2:13-14; NKJV).

Therefore I endure everything for the sake of the elect, that they too may obtain the salvation that is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory (2 Timothy 2:10).

4. The Scriptures make us *wise* unto salvation. What does that mean? It means that the Bible guides us towards salvation, showing us the way to it. We learn from the Scriptures about how to obtain salvation because they show us how to live in holiness, faith, and love.

... from infancy you have known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus (2 Timothy 3:15).

5. Now, here's yet another concept we should wrap our heads around: We *inherit* salvation. That once again indicates that salvation comes in the future.

... all angels [are] ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation [that's us] (Hebrews 1:14).

6. For whom does Jesus become the source of salvation? Only for those who obey him. We must be obedient to Jesus if we will be saved from sin.

[Jesus is] ... the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him (Hebrews 5:9).

7. When Jesus appears in his second coming, that's when he'll bring salvation to us.

Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him (Hebrews 9:28).

8. Our salvation will be revealed in the Last Time. In the meantime, we'll be shielded by God's power until it comes! What is this salvation but our *inheritance*! That is, inheriting the Earth (the Kingdom of God) is our salvation. Notice how *salvation* and *inheritance* are used synonymously in the following passage:

... he [God] has given us new birth into a living hope... and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in Heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the Last Time... (1 Peter 1:3-5)

9. As we live by faith, our final accomplishment and goal will be the salvation of our souls.

... trials... have come so that the proven genuineness of your faith... may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed... you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls. Concerning this salvation, the prophets... spoke of the grace that was to come to you... (1 Peter 1:6-10).

10. We are *growing up to salvation*.⁶⁸ This maturing process progresses every time we receive the Word of God.

... like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the Word, so that by it you may grow up to salvation (1 Peter 2:2; NASB).

11. The next passage speaks of a time that will occur in the future: the Great Tribulation. The Devil will have a *short time* after God has cast him out of Heaven (v. 12), just 3½ years. That's the final short period of time before all is completed, so the Scriptures state with the Tribulation, the Kingdom of God and his salvation will come. In other words, everything will be almost completed. Notice how *the authority* of Jesus on Earth, which is the Kingdom, is called *the salvation of God!*

The Great Dragon was hurled down... Satan... was hurled to the Earth, and his angels with him. Then I heard a loud voice in Heaven say: 'Now have come the salvation and the power and the Kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah (Revelation 12:9-10).

Personal Reflection

Are you striving for the future salvation the NT offers us?
Are you seeking the Kingdom of God? If you're not, then you should ask yourself whether you're really in 'the true grace of God' (1 Peter 5:12), the one Jesus and the apostles preached. There's a cheap grace that's preached these days—be warned. It's permissive, it's false, and it's uncharacteristic of God. Cheap grace is not from God. To make sure you're in the *true grace* of God, ask yourself:

- Am I following a doctrine which is based on an incomparable and undeserved reward?
- Is this gift so great that it has profoundly transformed my heart, desires, thoughts, feelings, behaviors and actions?
- Do I feel challenged to live a life worthy of God's great reward?



⁶⁸ This is the most literal translation of the original Greek *auxanō eis sōtēria*.

II. Looking Back: Jesus' Death, Burial, and Resurrection

An effective way to overcome our blindness to the One Hope is to focus on Jesus. He has already done what we need to do. He has already walked where our footsteps are leading. He died, was buried, and was resurrected.

1. A key element of the Gospel

There are priorities in preaching. There are truths that come first, and those truths are the ones that must be established before we teach more challenging subjects.⁶⁹ One basic truth is the doctrine of Christ's death. Now, complementary to Christ's death is Christ's burial. Sadly, his burial receives little to no attention in today's Evangelical church. However, Christ's burial is considered by the apostle Paul to be one of the three core elements of the Gospel:

For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance:

- ... that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures,
- that he was buried,
- that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:3-4).

When asked about their faith, most any professing Christian will promptly rattle off: "Jesus died for our sins." They may also recite: "Jesus rose from the Dead." Those are two very important truths, but they never mention his *burial*. Isn't that strange? Why was Jesus' *burial* important? Ask around to see if anyone knows why. You'll be hard pressed to get an answer, even though Jesus' burial is the second of the three core elements of the Gospel.

What if we told you that if you teach the burial of Jesus the

⁶⁹ Some of the more challenging subjects include how to calculate the year, month, or week of Christ's return; how to argue with an evolutionist; how to argue for a young Earth; how to interpret the OT dietary laws; whether women should be allowed to teach in churches; or how gifts (such as prophecy or tongues) should be put to use in the Church.

right way, people will be moved to put their faith in God? What if we told you that it's one of the most exciting and interesting aspects of his saving us?

Pastors often use the 1 Corinthians 15 passage above to summarize the Gospel—but do they just give it lip service? The passage has just three parts. Each part should carry about ⅓ of the weight of the message; but have you ever heard a preacher include the second part, Jesus' burial, in their proclamation of the Gospel? No, his burial is not being treated as a valuable truth. It's not being used in evangelism, and it's not being preached.

What is the reason for such neglect—the neglect of such an important doctrine? Maybe there doesn't seem to be anything special about Jesus' burial, but there must be. God's Word says there is!

Most people will think of Christ's burial as something that happened on the surface—in the garden where Jesus was buried. Maybe they'll think of the myrrh or the aloes—but they should rather ask God to reveal to them what happened *under* the surface: in the depths of the Earth! Biblically, the *tomb* or *the grave* has long signified the doorway to the Dead—the gateway to the World Below. Observe how the following verses make the *Pit* synonymous with *Sheol* [ie., *Hades* in Greek], and contrasted with the *Land of the Living*.

... [those] whose graves are set in the remotest parts of the Pit and her company is round about her grave...
Elam is there and all her hordes around her grave; all of them slain, fallen by the sword, who went down uncircumcised to the Lower Parts of the Earth, who instilled their terror in the Land of the Living and bore their disgrace with those who went down to the Pit (Ezekiel 32:23-24).

All throughout the Bible, *grave* means the same thing as *Hades*. But what is Hades—and where is it? Well, Hades is the *Realm of the Dead*, an actual region located within the Earth's crust. In the following passage, it's also called the *Earth Below*.

This is what the Sovereign LORD says: On the day it [a tree representing Egypt] was brought down to the Realm of the Dead [lit., Sheol], I covered the deep springs with mourning for it... when I brought it down to the Realm of the Dead to be with those who go down to the Pit. Then all the trees of Eden, the choicest and best of Lebanon, the well-watered trees, were consoled in the Earth Below. They too, like the great cedar, had gone down to the Realm of the Dead, to those killed by the sword (Ezekiel 31:15-17).

b. Among the dead multitudes

Lots of people are going to think that Jesus' burial is simply the evidence that he was truly dead. Indeed, his burial does prove that he died; but his heartrate had already flat-lined. When the soldiers pierced his side with their lance, they proved that his heartbeat had already stopped. Jesus' death was already confirmed. Therefore, the fact that our Lord's body lay in the tomb is the apostles way of certifying his death, no. Rather, the apostles preached Jesus burial to certify that our Lord was *among* the Dead. That is, Jesus' burial proves that he was not with the Living for three days.⁷⁰ Since it's a fact that he wasn't, we are compelled to ask ourselves: "Where was Jesus' soul and spirit?" The answer is amazing: Jesus in soul and spirit was among the Dead!

⁷⁰ Let's not forget that the key to understanding why the Gospel is true is because all that happened was 'according to the Scriptures' (1 Corinthians 15:4). In other words, God said that it would happen—and God is not a liar—so it had to happen. So, where do we see Jesus' 3 days among the dead prophesied in the Old Testament? Where did God predict it?

We know that Jonah's 3 days in the belly of the great fish was one prophecy that typified the burial of Jesus. As Jonah was in the depths of the ocean for 3 days, protected in a special way by God, so was Jesus in the depths of the Earth for 3 days.

Jesus himself gave the interpretation of Jonah's experience, calling his death 'the sign of Jonah' and saying that he would spend 3 days and three nights 'in the Heart of the Earth' (Matthew 12:39-40). Another OT prophecy of Jesus' 3 days in Hades is Hosea 6:2, which says

'... on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence.'

If being among the Dead doesn't sound particularly exciting to you—maybe you should go see a zombie movie! Or perhaps you don't understand how many people a visit to the Dead would involve. The fact that Jesus was in Sheol becomes fascinating when we consider sheer number of dead that were down there: There were *great multitudes!* The dead people that our Lord visited numbered in the millions! Just pause, breathe, and think about that for a moment—Jesus visited many millions of people!

Let's do some hard data and figure out how many people were dead at the time that our Lord descended to visit them. Obviously, we don't have exact numbers, but proportionally it would have been more than 99.99% of all of people that had lived on Earth *up to* the moment of the crucifixion.

Now, the other less than 0.01% of the people who had ever lived were inhabiting planet Earth on the day that our Lord was killed. That small percentage would have included Pontius Pilate, Judas, the other apostles, and those who lived in other places around the world on the day of the crucifixion.⁷¹ Some anthropologists say that the Amerindians may crossed the Bering Strait at that time!

There are billions more souls in Hades today, including the less than 0.01% who were alive at the time that Jesus was crucified and every human being who has died since then!

⁷¹ There are 24 people who don't fit into our equation of who was on Earth and who was in Hades at the time of Christ's crucifixion—the 24 elders who have been raptured to Heaven. Now, since only Jesus is the first-fruits of the resurrection, these men do not have resurrection bodies yet. God indeed raptured them to Heaven in their bodies, but they must have immediately been transformed to spirit beings when they got to Heaven—we get a picture of what they're like in the Transfiguration—that's when Elijah and Moses appeared in spirit-bodies to consult with our Lord Jesus.

Now, Paul mentioned that his own experience of being taken up to Paradise might have been *in* the body or *out* of the body (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)—he didn't know, but his statement means that there must be such a thing as a bodily experience in the Third Heaven! Wow. Nonetheless, nobody up there except the Lord Jesus is actually resurrected already. God uses people like Enoch and Elijah to demonstrate that the Rapture is a tangible hope. Because they were raptured, we are confident that we will be raptured too.

About 2000 years have passed since our Lord entered Hades; therefore, billions of people more, those who lived their lives and who have passed away since Jesus' crucifixion, are populating Hades today.⁷²

The point is we're talking about Jesus visiting a considerably large group of people! Now, if the numbers don't impress you, then this should: Jesus had an important ministry in Hades. The souls there needed to be ministered to. They needed comfort just as much as you and I need comfort today, but even more because they were dead. Those great multitudes of souls needed hope and encouragement from the Scriptures. Our Lord went to the souls in Hades to give them the message that you and I have already believed: The Good News of the Kingdom of God!

2. Why 3 days among the Dead?⁷³

Jesus' burial should not have been a surprise to the apostles. Jesus had given them clear warnings that he would spend some

⁷² Billions because we'll remind you that 4000 years had passed from the Creation to the Crucifixion, a time period of which we have no idea how populated the world was. What we do know is that the current world population [as of 2019] is about 7.7 billion, having grown exponentially from a mere 190 million in 200 AD. That means that more than 7.5 billion people have been added to the world population in just 2000 years.

⁷³ Jesus' descent to Hades was a vital part of Church doctrine from the time of the apostles throughout the early centuries of the Church. It is expressed in the Apostle's Creed (written before 390 AD) which states that Jesus "was crucified, dead, and buried: He descended into Hell; the third day he rose again from the dead" (from the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer at http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Apostle_s%27_Creed; March 31, 2013).

Since all people need a resurrection, Christians are under obligation to teach the Resurrection from the Dead. If false preachers continue to teach that people go to Heaven after they die, they not only lie, but they quench people's natural curiosity to know about the Resurrection. To say that we go to Heaven after we die is tantamount to saying that there are *no steps* to get to God—a lie!

Mankind's innate desire for eternal life—which you can observe in practically every religion, a desire written on the heart of man—could be satisfied if Christians teach about it. At any rate, when we preach the Resurrection from the Dead, we're simply doing what we ought. It's fundamental Christian teaching since it's one of the 7 foundational doctrines of Christ (Hebrews 6:1-2).

time among the Dead. He added to those warnings that he would have to be resurrected. They didn't quite 'get it' until it happened. Apparently, they didn't understand why a resurrection from the Dead would be necessary—doesn't that sound a lot like Evangelicals these days? The difference is that the disciples finally caught on. Evangelicals today still haven't understood why a resurrection from the Dead is necessary.

Jesus gave them orders not to tell anyone what they had seen until the Son of Man had risen from the Dead. They kept the matter to themselves, discussing what 'rising from the Dead' meant (Mark 9:9-10).

After he was raised from the Dead, his disciples recalled what he had said. Then they believed the Scripture and the words that Jesus had spoken (John 2:22).

The important question today is: Do *we* understand why Jesus had to be buried? A serious student of the Bible will ask: "Why did Jesus have to spend three days in Sheol?" It's the same as asking why Jesus had to be buried. Two biblical answers we'll look at are:

- To prove that obeying God is not too difficult.
- To save us from sin.

a. Not too difficult to obey God

Our Lord's descent to Hades was the fulfillment of numerous prophecies, and one is found in Deuteronomy 30. There we find a teaching from Moses demonstrating that God's commandments are not too difficult for us.

Right after the Jews heard God's commandments at Mount Sinai, they were tempted to react negatively. Just like Cain, who refused God's encouragement to obey, the Jews imagined that God's orders were too difficult. They doubted their ability to fulfill God's Word. Moses warned them against such doubting. He told them rather to believe in their potential to keep God's Word—a teaching that was very close to them. Not wanting them to treat God's commands as impossible, he told them the following:

Now what I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you or beyond your reach. It is not up in Heaven, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will ascend into Heaven to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ Nor is it beyond the sea, so that you have to ask, ‘Who will cross the sea to get it and proclaim it to us so we may obey it?’ No, the Word is very near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart so you may obey it (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

Even today, you’ll often hear Evangelicals expressing the same worry as the Jews. Many act like it’s just *too difficult* to obey God, so they say “We’re all sinners,” and “Nobody’s perfect.” What they mean by these sayings is that nobody anywhere could really obey God. Evangelicals treat obedience to God like an extreme task, but to do so, to treat obedience as if it were impossible, is to ignore Jesus.

Jesus has fulfilled the Deuteronomy prophecy. He’s the one who has both descended from Heaven and ascended from Hell. He is the one who has done it all, and who demonstrates that it’s not impossible to obey God. That’s why it says in the NT:

But the righteousness that is by faith says: “Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into Heaven?’” (that is, to bring Christ down) “or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’” (that is, to bring Christ up from the Dead).

But what does it say? “The Word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart,” that is, the message concerning faith that we proclaim:

If you declare with your mouth, “Jesus is Lord,” and believe in your heart that God raised him from the Dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you profess your faith and are saved (Romans 10:6-10).

Jesus descended from Heaven and ascended from Hell to bring us a trustworthy message—the Good News of the Kingdom. Because he was with God in Heaven, and because he was with the Dead in Sheol, he knows everything. Are

you amazed that he has descended to Hades? We know he did, because if he later *ascended* from the Dead, it's because he first had to have *descended* there!

What does 'he [Jesus] ascended' mean except that he also descended to the Lower Earthly regions? (Ephesians 4:9).

So, who do we have in Christ? We have a Teacher who, by personal experience, has “seen it all.” Our Teacher has “been there, done that.” We have someone who is able to eliminate the common gripe, the ancient complaint that obeying God is too hard. He has been to every extreme *so that* we might trust 100% in his message. Who will show us how to live, and how to overcome temptation? Who will give us the example to follow? Who will give us the right words to believe? We don't have to climb to meet a guru in the Himalayas. We don't have to dive to find the wisdom of Atlantis. Jesus is our man!

Jesus had his own spirit

Jesus was more like you and me than we think. You see him in the NT, and he looks like us on the outside, but he was also like us on the *inside*. Jesus wasn't only like us physically, he was like us *spiritually*. What do we mean? Well, Jesus had his own spirit—indeed, he still does. To prove this fact, we offer the following verses:

... Jesus knew in his spirit that this was what they were thinking in their hearts... (Mark 2:8)

[Jesus] had to be made like his brethren [us] in all things (Hebrews 2:17; NASB).

Why is Christ's spirit so important? It makes his death all the more real. Indeed, his death is just as real as any person's death. Do you know what happened to Jesus' spirit after he died? As his body waned and he took his last breath, he entrusted his spirit to God. In other words, Jesus trusted God to do what God saw most fit, so Jesus committed his spirit into the hands of the Father.

Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, ‘Into thy hands I commit my spirit.⁷⁴ And having said this, he breathed his last (Luke 23:46).

Our Lord’s words, “I commit my spirit into your hands” beg the question: “What then, did God *do* with Jesus’ spirit?” We hope that you’re interested in the answer. Peter gives it to us when he writes that Jesus was “put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit” (1 Peter 3:18).

Now, if we are able to interpret correctly what Peter is saying, then we will understand what happened spiritually the instant Jesus died on the cross. And what was it? The visible event was that Jesus was “put to death in the flesh.” That is, his body became dead. Yet, at the same instant, an invisible event occurred: God made Jesus alive in Jesus’ spirit. That is, in the words of Peter, our Lord’s spirit was *made alive*.

Scriptures interpret Scriptures

We must avoid placing our own interpretation on what it means to be “made alive in the spirit” lest we be accused of teaching a personal opinions. Fortunately for us, the definition of what being “made alive in the spirit” is given to us by the same apostle in this same epistle, just a few verses later. There, Peter states that the Gospel gives life to a dead person’s spirit through the hope it brings.

For this is the reason the Gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might be judged according to human standards in regard to the body, but live according to God in regard to the spirit (1 Peter 4:6).

Now, here’s the interpretation: Believers in God’s promise of a Kingdom [the Gospel], who suffer and die as outcasts in this world [like Jesus did]—Christians who are ‘judged

⁷⁴ Strengthened by faith in God up to the very last moment of his life, Jesus “the Word” was true to his namesake, holding fast to the Word of God, quoting Psalm 31:5 by heart. He did this in the hope that God would be true to his promise of resurrecting him. He longed for God to do according to the promises found in his sacred Word—do you long for the same thing?

in the flesh as men’ [i.e., human beings condemn them in this life, punishing our bodies with imprisonments or even death]—will have their spirits quickened to life when they die.

This life comes to them through the power of God, that’s why it says that they will live “according to God.” How does that power get activated in us? Through our faith in the Gospel. That is, the hope of the Kingdom gives life to a man’s *spirit*, even when his *body* is dead. Christians, due to their believing in the promise of the Kingdom during their life, will ‘live according to God’ in their spirit after death.

a. Become alive in the spirit

So we just discovered an amazing truth: The hope of the glory of the Kingdom brings life to our spirit! But, it gets even better: You don’t have to die for God to quicken your spirit. God can do it while you’re in the body now! Here’s how it works: When God sends his Holy Spirit to you in baptism, you get the grace to be righteous. In other words, with God’s Spirit, you can actually *do* good. Freed from your sinful nature, you can finally live right! You can do what is spiritual.

This is going to sound offensive to many of a Baptist or “salvation by faith alone” background, but because of your newfound righteousness, your spirit becomes alive. It’s sin that kills the human spirit, but it’s righteousness that quickens it. As it says in the Book of Romans:

... if Christ is in you... the spirit is alive because of righteousness (Romans 8:10; NASB).

In no way are we denying grace when we affirm that our righteousness gives us life. Indeed, God provides believers with abundant grace *through* the gift of righteousness—they work hand-in-hand. With his grace through this gift, we actually behave the way we should.

... those who receive God’s abundant provision of grace and of the gift of righteousness [will] reign in life through the one man, Jesus Christ! (Romans 5:17)

Read this part slowly, and understand that righteousness and grace go together: It's only when God's grace governs our lives through righteousness that we obtain the desired result, eternal life.

... just as sin reigned in death, so also grace might reign through righteousness to bring eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord (Romans 5:21).

b. What happens after you die?

It's surprising how little attention Christians pay to what Jesus said about what happens after death. He taught enough through the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man to inform us fully about it, but people still ignore it. It is the *story* of Lazarus and the Rich Man—it is not a *parable*, mind you. Rather, as the only one of Christ's illustrations in which he uses a personal name, it is a real story. Jesus presents Lazarus to us as a *real person*, and Lazarus' experience should encourage us today. Beware of false teachers' method of deactivating the power of God's Word by turning it into symbolism and allegory where it's *not*.

Jesus teaches us that when a person dies, angels take that person to the Nether World. They go either to a blessed realm called *Paradise*, or a cursed realm Jesus called *Hades*.⁷⁵ Je-

⁷⁵ *Hades* (a Greek term) is the equivalent of the Hebrew *Sheol* and the English expression *Nether World*. This same place is often referred to in world literature as: the *Underworld*, the *Nether Regions*, or the *Lower World*. The NIV translates it as the *Realm of the Dead* (Acts 2:27) and we see it in Ezekiel referred to as the *Earth Beneath* (31:14,18; NASB), the *Pit* (31:14,16; 32:18,25), the *Nether World* (32:18), the *Lower Parts of the Earth* (32:24); or simply, the *Grave* (32:23,24,26).

The graves of some unfortunate people "are set in the remotest parts of the Pit," indicating that Hades is a vast realm that spreads so far that parts of it are remote (32:23).

Jesus referred to Hades as *the Heart of the Earth* (Matthew 12:40). That means that it goes to the center of the Earth (in spite of what geologists tell us about the Earth's "inner core" being a solid ball a little smaller than the Moon and composed of an iron-nickel alloy). Obviously, theirs is just a theory because the deepest man-made hole goes down 7.5 miles while the continental crust goes down 25 miles. That is, humans have never even gotten 1/3 of the

sus demonstrated that although people can verbally communicate from one side to another, they are far apart and separated by a great chasm that cannot be crossed.

The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony.

And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us' (Luke 16:22-26).

Our Lord Jesus spent his Friday evening, all day Saturday, and early Sunday morning⁷⁶ in the Nether World, the very place that he described in the story of Lazarus and the rich man. It is a fact that Jesus went there—the early Church affirmed it. Not only do you hear it in the Apostle's Creed,⁷⁷ but Jesus' descent to Hades was a key theme of Peter's Pentecost preaching:

God raised him [Jesus] up, having brought to an end the pains of death, because it was not possible for him

way to penetrating the Earth's crust, so how could we know what's underneath it?

According to the story of Lazarus, this vast realm of Sheol is divided in two parts: One side is where the faithful (people like Abraham) dwell, it's called *Paradise*. The other side is called *Hell*. Those God considers to be worthy of punishment are placed on the hot side; while the righteous rest peacefully in Paradise, waiting patiently for their resurrection.

⁷⁶ Notice that those are three distinct days.

⁷⁷ The Roman Catholic version says: "I believe in Jesus Christ, his [God's] only Son, our Lord... He was crucified, died, and was buried. He descended to the Dead. On the third day he rose again."

[Jesus] to be held by it [death]. For David says with reference to him [Jesus]:

‘I [Jesus] saw the Lord [God] before me continually, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken. For this reason my heart was glad and my tongue rejoiced greatly, furthermore also my flesh will live in hope, because you [God] will not abandon my soul in Hades, nor will you permit your Holy One [Jesus] to experience decay’ (Acts 2:24-27; LEB).

As you can perceive from the passage above, our Lord Jesus was in Hades, and while he was there he had absolute confidence that God would take him out. Again, as we said earlier, such an attitude of hope is what the Bible calls being ‘alive in the spirit.’ Jesus lived in the hope that God would fulfill his promise of a resurrection, and so must we.⁷⁸ Jesus, although dead in the body, lived in the hope of having his body resurrected. Being alive in his spirit through hope, he then was able to take the hope of the resurrection to others.

Since it is God’s Word which brings life to those who believe in the promise of the resurrection, God should get the supreme glory for the resurrection. The Bible demonstrates that in the following verses:

... we have put our hope in the Living God, who is the Savior of all people, and especially of those who believe (1 Timothy 4:10).

[4 x the Father is called] God our Savior (1 Timothy 1:1; 2:3; Titus 1:3; 3:4).

... to the Only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen (Jude 25)

So the hope of the Kingdom gave life to those who heard Jesus proclaim it. Because they believed, they were made alive in the spirit also. Imagine how strong their faith became

⁷⁸ In fact, when our Lord was on the Cross, he was able to bear the pain and the suffering because he had the hope of eternal life. It says:

For the joy set before him he endured the cross (Hebrews 12:2).

when they actually saw Jesus freed from Hades! Jesus left it, being resurrected before their very eyes—the first person in history to do so permanently!⁷⁹ The effect of what the believers in Hades witnessed was that they were affirmed in their hope. Therefore, they began to really “live according to God,” even as spirit-beings.

For this is the reason the Gospel was preached even to those who are now dead, so that they might... live according to God in regard to the spirit (1 Peter 4:6).

How OT believers lived

You may not have known this but all believers, patriarchs, and prophets from the beginning of time have lived in the hope of the Resurrection. Notice how many demonstrated their hope of a resurrection through their burials. For example, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah were all careful to be buried in a cave in Hebron named *Machpelah*, in the Promised Land.

His sons Isaac and Ishmael buried him [Abraham] in the cave of Machpelah (Genesis 25:9).

... Abraham buried his wife Sarah in the cave in the field of Machpelah near Mamre (which is at Hebron) in the land of Canaan (Genesis 23:19).

Bury me [Jacob] with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite, the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite. There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah (Genesis 49:29-31).

⁷⁹ Numerous others were resurrected before Jesus: The two widow's sons whom Elijah and Elisha resurrected, the one who fell upon Elisha's bones, the daughter of Jarius, the son of the widow of Nain, Lazarus the friend of Jesus, and those who came out of the tombs on the evening that Jesus was crucified. These all left Hades for a time, but since their bodies were not resurrected as immortal spiritual bodies, they died again and returned to Hades.

Jacob's sons did as he [Jacob] had commanded them: They carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave in the field of Machpelah (Genesis 50:12-13).

Joseph and his brothers were careful to be buried in the Promised Land also; in property which Jacob paid a fair price for in Shechem.

[Joseph told his brothers in Egypt] ... you must carry my bones up from this place (Genesis 50:25).

Joseph's bones, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at Shechem in the tract of land that Jacob bought for a hundred pieces of silver from the sons of Hamor, the father of Shechem. This became the inheritance of Joseph's descendants (Joshua 24:32).

Then Joseph said to his brothers, 'I am about to die, but God will surely visit you and bring you up from this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob' (Genesis 50:24-25).

Jacob went down to Egypt, where he and our ancestors [the patriarchs] died. Their [the sons of Jacob, the twelve patriarchs'] bodies were brought back to Shechem [in Canaan] and placed in the tomb that Abraham had bought from the sons of Hamor at Shechem... (Acts 7:15-16)

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear a solemn oath when he said, 'God will surely attend to you, and you shall carry my bones with you from this place' (Exodus 13:19).

The list goes on and on. For example, Joshua's burial was also in the Promised Land, in the property that was part of his inheritance.

... they buried him [Joshua] in the land of his inheritance, at Timnath Serah in the hill country of Ephraim, north of Mount Gaash (Joshua 24:30).

So we see that OT believers were committed to resurrect in the land of their inheritance. Since each of us will rise in the same location where we were buried—what’s wrong about planning the place of your burial? Nothing, of course. Believers who know that their eternal inheritance is in Canaan have every right to be buried there, making sure that they get the land God has promised them.

All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on Earth... By faith Joseph, when his end was near... gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones (Hebrews 11:13, 22).

Job did not receive the promise of inheriting the Earth, but he expressed the assurance that he would see Jesus face to face on the Earth.

As for me, I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will take his stand on the Earth. Even after my skin is destroyed, yet from my flesh I shall see God; Whom I myself shall behold, and whom my eyes will see and not another (Job 19:25-27).

So whether you are a Jew or a Gentile, you must live in the hope of a resurrection. The way you are buried demonstrates how much hope you have in the Resurrection.

a. They wait down there

The OT believers we just mentioned are *still* living in hope to this day. Along with our NT brothers and sisters in Christ who have *fallen asleep* in Christ, OT believers do not doubt their resurrection. Any doubt was taken away when Jesus was resurrected into an eternal body. He has already proven that the resurrection is real. He is the *first fruits* of the resurrection.

Christ has indeed been raised from the Dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep (1 Corinthians 15:20).

Here's an important question to ask yourself: Why didn't God resurrect the OT saints together with Christ on the day of Christ's resurrection? The surprising answer as to *why* OT and NT saints have been waiting in Hades even to this day is that they're waiting for you and me! They are waiting in Hades until our number is complete. It's necessary that we join them in the Resurrection. If we can't join them, then they cannot inherit the Kingdom! The Bible says that "only together with us" could those believers be made perfect.

These were all commended for their faith, yet none [not even Enoch or Elijah] of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only [exclusively] together with us would they be made perfect (Hebrews 11:39-40).

... the souls of those who had been slain because of the Word of God and the testimony they had maintained... called out in a loud voice, 'How long, Sovereign Lord...?' Then... they were told to wait a little longer, until the full number of their fellow servants, their brothers and sisters [that's us], were killed just as they had been (Revelation 6:9-11).

Due to the fact that we have received something greater than OT believers have received (the Gospel of the Kingdom),⁸⁰

⁸⁰ "We receive a Kingdom that cannot be shaken" (Hebrews 12:28). Our Kingdom will be worldwide. We will "inherit the Earth" (Matthew 5:5), but the OT saints have the (lesser) promise of inheriting Canaan. Furthermore, we will rule, but they will be counted as subjects of the Kingdom. We will sit on thrones, but they have not been promised any thrones. They will get glory, but we who have suffered with Christ will have greater glory. Such glory is only possible because we have come to know Christ, the Son of God. Knowing him and sharing in his sufferings has a direct effect on our resurrection!

I want to know Christ—yes, to know the power of his resurrection and participation in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, attaining to the Resurrection from the Dead (Philippians 3:10-12).

Those who lived before the Lord Jesus came will enter the Kingdom having hoped in a Christ they only met in Hades; a Christ who, during their sojourn on Earth, they knew only through prophecy. We have had the benefit of knowing Jesus while we were still in the flesh. We have known him and he has given

it's not fair for them to get glorified before we do. That would be like having a wedding without inviting the bride. We, the NT Church, are the bride of Christ!

God has planned a feast for all believers—the *Wedding Feast of the Lamb*. Now, prior to any wedding ceremony, the bride is expected to appear. Likewise, the believers in Paradise are currently waiting, and eagerly expecting the number of God's chosen people, the Church to be made manifest. Indeed, not

us his Spirit. So, the bottom line is that we have 'a better covenant, which has been enacted on better promises' (Hebrews 8:6; NASB) and we have the potential to obtain 'a better resurrection' (Hebrews 11:35). A duly-rewarded more glorious resurrection is possible only if we suffer for righteousness, bearing our cross, by following in the footsteps of our Lord Jesus Christ.

It's clear that Abraham's holiness didn't reach the level of holiness of us who are Christians. Abraham committed adultery with Hagar, did he not? Neither Jacob, David, nor Solomon would have qualified to be a Christian pastor if they lived under the NT. They each had more than one wife and their children were not obedient to the faith (see 1 Timothy 3:2-5 and Titus 1:6). Moses' anger made him unworthy to enter into the Promised Land, while we have our anger under control. Self-control is a fruit of the Holy Spirit.

We will wear crowns and will wield iron rods. We can fulfill God's New Covenant requirement of a clear conscience because we have come to know Christ! They never got to know him as we do.

As citizens of the Kingdom, we are even greater than John the Baptist! As great as he was, he was never born of the Spirit—and he stated publically that he needed the baptism of the Spirit. If it wasn't a secret for him, why should it be a secret to us?

I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me comes one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit... John tried to deter him [Jesus], saying, 'I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?' (Matthew 3:11, 14).

John never experienced the baptism Jesus sent to his apostles at Pentecost. It's that baptism which makes you a citizen of the Kingdom of Heaven. It allows you to have the seal of the Holy Spirit on your life. John didn't have the seal of the Holy Spirit, and he was uncertain of whether Jesus was the Messiah up until the day he died. That's why Jesus said:

Truly I tell you, among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist; yet whoever is least in the Kingdom of Heaven is greater than he (Matthew 11:11).

only the inhabitants of Paradise, but all of Creation⁸¹ is longing to see who will finally get resurrected. Even we pray in the Spirit with *groanings too deep for words* (Romans 8:26; LEB).

For the Creation waits in eager expectation for the children of God to be revealed... We know that the whole Creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies (Romans 8:19, 22-23).

Know this: When the number of the redeemed is complete, a new epoch of human history will be ushered in. All of Creation will recognize the true children of God, and will rejoice in them! It'll be just like the joy the angels felt when God resurrected Jesus.

So much is on hold for our sake. Just think of it: The grace OT believers received from God when they were still alive—things such as their revelations, miracles, and prophecies, were actually for us—not for themselves. God gave them his Holy Spirit anointings for our benefit!

It was revealed to them that they [the OT prophets and patriarchs] were not serving themselves, but you [NT believers], in these things which now have been announced to you through those who preached the Gospel to you... (1 Peter 1:12; NASB)

c. On a mission for God

Although Jesus longed to leave Hades in order to be in Heaven with his Father, it was still necessary for him to be in Hades. He had to be there in order to accomplish a double mission. Jesus double mission was to: (a) announce his vic-

⁸¹ "All of Creation" includes the angels, the heavenly creatures, the animals of Earth including the fish and birds, and even the insects, plants, and trees. All of these groan deep inside. They may not think, but they all feel, and they feel the need for renewal and restoration. They all suffer under the current curse, so their deep desire is God's righteous Kingdom.

torious resurrection to the damned, and (b) bring the hope of salvation to dead believers. The following passage describes our Lord's work among those who were condemned:⁸²

... he went and made proclamation to the imprisoned spirits—to those who were disobedient long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built (1 Peter 3:19-20).

Now, down there in Hades Jesus wasn't just among the Dead, but among the Living. Although we just referred to them as *dead believers*, the souls in the Paradise-side of Hades are more accurately referred to as *the Living*. Why? Because by faith in God we live even if we have physically died. We're in good company when we say so, for Jesus taught about Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob insisting that they were *the Living*, not the Dead.

That same day the Sadducees, who say there is no Resurrection, came to him with a question. 'Teacher,' they said, 'Moses told us that if a man dies without having children, his brother must marry the widow and raise up offspring for him. Now there were seven brothers among us. The first one married and died, and since he had no children, he left his wife to his brother. The same thing happened to the second and third brother, right on down to the seventh. Finally, the woman died. Now then, at the Resurrection, whose wife will she be of the seven, since all of them were married to her?'

Jesus replied, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. At the Resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in Heaven. But about the Resurrection of the Dead—have you not read what God said to you, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?' He is not the God of the Dead, but of the Living" (Matthew 22:23-32).

⁸² An excellent question would be: "Did Jesus only minister to those who lived in the times of Noah? Why doesn't the Bible tell us about his preaching to the people who lived before Noah (like Cain) or those who lived afterwards (like Nimrod and the inhabitants of Sodom)?" Why is only this demographic group named?

d. Asleep in Christ

The *Living* to which Jesus referred in Matthew 22 (above) may also be called:

- those who have fallen asleep in Christ (1 Corinthians 15:18).
- those who are asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:13)
- those who have fallen asleep in Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:14; NASB)
- those who have fallen asleep (1 Thessalonians 4:15; LEB)

In other words, these Christians are dead *only* for a time—and *only* physically. Spiritually, they are alive. When Christ comes back, these “sleeping” believers will wake up. They will be resurrected to live forever. Those who have *fallen asleep* are actually living souls. Only their bodies are dead.

Let’s remember that our Lord Jesus himself was—for three days—one who had fallen asleep. Indeed, he is actually called in the Bible “the first fruits of those who are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). Because he is the vanguard of the Resurrection, God has determined that *only* when our Lord Jesus comes back “the dead in Christ shall rise” (1 Thessalonians 4:16)—and not one moment before that!

Even if you don’t understand all of the details regarding the time frame of the distinct resurrections, the important thing is to be clear that the Resurrection will be *from the Dead*. The Resurrection, one of the seven fundamental doctrines of Christianity, is inextricably related to what it means to be dead. In other words, until we are able to mentally process what it means to be dead, we will not comprehend the Resurrection.

... let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of... the Resurrection of the Dead... (Hebrews 6:1-2)

e. Jesus wanted out

Hades was quite a populated place by the time Jesus went through its gates. Every human being who had died from Adam to Jesus, including John the Baptist, would have been there—minus 24 men.⁸³ Can you imagine how happy the righteous in Hades felt when they saw our Lord? They were overjoyed. However, although the Hades Paradise⁸⁴ is a nice

⁸³ The 24 exceptions to the rule include: Enoch and Elijah (who were raptured up to Heaven physically), Moses (whose body was taken by the Archangel Michael), and the other 21 holy men who constituted the 24 elders seated around the Throne of God (Revelation 4:4). It appears likely that Melchizedek is among these 24 elders, for it says that he had “neither beginning of days nor end of life, but made like the Son of God, he abides a priest perpetually” (Hebrews 7:3).

Other candidates for the 24 include Noah, Job, and Daniel—but the Scriptures do not reveal whether they’re there or not. We’re only sure that they are highly esteemed by God (Ezekiel 14:14).

Abel is beloved of God (see Genesis 4:10; Matthew 23:35; Luke 11:50-51; and Hebrews 12:24) but never became an elder, so he was not raptured up to Heaven. Rather, he was alone in Hades—being its very first inhabitant. We’re certain that Abraham is not among the 24, for Jesus stated that Abraham is in Hades (Luke 16:22-31).

⁸⁴ We clarify here which *paradise* because there are two other paradises mentioned in the Bible; the second is the ‘Paradise of God,’ which is in Heaven now and which will be in the New Jerusalem when it descends to Earth (Revelation 22:2, 14, 19).

The one who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To the one who conquers, I will grant to him to eat from the Tree of Life which is in the Paradise of God (Revelation 2:7).

We shouldn’t confuse the Paradise of *Hades* with the Paradise of *God*. The following verses describe the latter as a place which Paul visited in an out-of or in-body experience. Observe that Paul’s body was not dead when he went to the Paradise of God—and that’s exactly why it couldn’t have been Hades. Only the Dead go to Hades.

I know a man in Christ [Paul is talking about himself] who fourteen years ago was caught up to the Third Heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows—was caught up to Paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell (2 Corinthians 12:2-4).

place, it's still not the Kingdom of God, and the Kingdom was where Jesus belonged.

Jesus wouldn't stay with those beloved souls for long because his goal was to be with God. He hadn't yet finished his job of reconciling mankind to God—because of that, love compelled him to leave Hades. Jesus still had to present his blood before God in the Heavenly Temple. Upon presenting it to God, Jesus would begin his ministry of intercession on our behalf. With that, he would become our Eternal High Priest, standing in the presence of God.

And no one takes this honor [of becoming a High Priest] on himself, but he receives it when called by God, just as Aaron was. In the same way, Christ did not take on himself the glory of becoming a High Priest. But God said to him, 'You are my Son; today I have become your Father.' And he says in another place, 'You are a Priest forever, in the order of Melchizedek' (Hebrews 5:4-6).

Now, although the Scriptures say that Jesus was in *agony* while he was there (Acts 2:24; NIV), it was only agony in the sense that Jesus longed to be where he belonged—in Heaven with God. The *agony* was not due to any Hellish torture like burning. Jesus was never punished in Hades. On the contrary, God heard Jesus' cry for help and resurrected Jesus on the third day. Our Lord Jesus waited for the third day to come, believing in the promises of the Scriptures. Jesus trusted that God wouldn't leave him in Hades, and you can tell this by the tone of his prayer:

[Jesus said] 'I saw the Lord [God] always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest in hope, because you [God] will not abandon me to the Realm of the Dead, you will not let your Holy One see decay. You [God] have made known

The third paradise is never actually called a *paradise* in the Bible, but it was the original earthly paradise, the Garden of Eden. Certain passages refer to it as the *Garden of God* (Ezekiel 28:13) or the *Garden of Yahweh* (Isaiah 51:3). Although it was lost in the Flood, and its trees have descended to Hades (Ezekiel 31:18), it serves to illustrate what the Kingdom of God will be like.

to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

... he was not abandoned to the Realm of the Dead, nor did his body see decay. God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it (Acts 2:25-28, 31).

5. Jesus’ visit to Hades: Part of the Gospel

Coming back to our main point, our Lord’s burial is a central and not a peripheral element of the Gospel. The Gospel the apostles preached included the burial of Jesus. Making his burial an essential part of their preaching guaranteed that two truths would be understood: 1. that Jesus was really dead; and 2. that he was really *among* the Dead, a great multitude of souls waiting to be resurrected. The Church is responsible for preaching the same message today.

Now, brothers and sisters, I want to remind you of the Gospel I preached to you, which you received and on which you have taken your stand. By this Gospel you are saved, if you hold firmly to the word I preached to you. Otherwise, you have believed in vain. For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures (1 Corinthians 15:1-4).

So why are Jesus’ three days among the Dead so important? Why do they deserve such a significant place in the message we preach? The key is understanding what Jesus accomplished during those three days. What did he get out of his experience down there? Try this: He obtained the keys to Hades! God made sure that Jesus got them, which is supposed to be fantastic news for all of us.

I hold the keys of Death and Hades (Revelation 1:18).

The fact that Jesus can open the looming and impenetrable Gates of Hades should be a tremendous joy for any mortal. When we say that his descent to Hades is part of the Gospel, we mean to say that his descent is really *good news!* Jesus’ possession of the keys of Hades assures us that we’ll never

get stuck there. Jesus will open the Gates of Hades and will free anyone who is his. The Christian hope is *not* to meet Peter at the Gates of Heaven [a cursed lie!], but to meet Jesus at the Gates of Hades. Never before in history has any human being been able to hear such a wonderful promise, and to have in Christ someone worthy to free us from Death.

... he turned to his disciples and said privately, ‘Blessed are the eyes that see what you see. For I tell you that many prophets and kings wanted to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it’ (Luke 10:23-24).

a. Total victory over death

Our Lord has promised that the Church will not be overcome by the Devil, who wields the power of death. For about 6000 years, death has held sway over the entire human race. Imagine how many people are in Hades right now—billions!

What a breath of fresh air it was for the patriarchs and other OT believers—from Adam to John the Baptist—to see Jesus arrive in Hades with keys in hand—the keys to their freedom! And what peace it is for those Christians who are there now to see Jesus when he visits. What will they think if they see him visit today? Just this: “He has been our shoes. He was also dead, but now he lives!”

... the Gates of Hades will not overcome [my Church] (Matthew 16:18).

I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore (Revelation 1:18; NASB).

Now that Jesus has overcome Death through his resurrection, the people in Hades have Jesus as their Lord just as much as we have Jesus as ours! That’s actually *why* he descended to Hades, to be the Lord as much of the Dead as he is of the Living. When we say that he is the Lord of *all*, we mean everybody everywhere—even those who are under the Earth! The Scriptures affirm that people who are in Hades count for God.

... to this end Christ died and lived again, that he might be Lord both of the Dead and of the Living (Romans 14:9).

... [God] bestowed upon him [Jesus] the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in Heaven, and on Earth, and under the Earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:9-11).

... no one in Heaven, or on Earth, or under the Earth was able to open the scroll ... (Revelation 5:3; LEB).

I heard every creature that is in Heaven and on the Earth and under the Earth and in the sea and everything in them saying, ‘To the One who is seated on the Throne and to the Lamb be praise and honor and glory and power forever and ever’ (Revelation 5:13; LEB).

The day will come when Death will lose its grip on all who have ever believed. That day is the great Day of the Resurrection. But know this: At no time *before* our resurrection will our victory over Death be complete. Only at the Resurrection will we sing “Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?”

The billions of souls in Hades will have to wait for that day before they rejoice. To understand the chronology of events, please pay close attention to how the word *then* is used in the following passage. You’ll see that the chronology is: Seventh Trumpet → Resurrection → Victory over Death.

Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the Last Trumpet.⁸⁵ For the trumpet will sound, the Dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the

⁸⁵ That is, the 7th Trumpet, *after* the seal judgments and the first 6 trumpets have sounded, but immediately *before* the bowls of wrath are poured out on the Earth. The 7th Trumpet is the Rapture of the Church.

imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then [i.e., only when that time comes] the saying that is written will come true: ‘Death has been swallowed up in victory. Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting?’ (1 Corinthians 15:51-55)

b. Millennial rulers from Hades

When Jesus returns, we return with him. He will give us authority to reign over the Earth with him. We get thrones, and we get to sit on them.

I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge... (Revelation 20:4).

Those judges are us—the ones on the thrones, if we are worthy of receiving authority in the Kingdom. But are we the only ones who will reign with Jesus? Is there anybody else? Yes, there is. Consider John’s vision right after he saw the thrones:

And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the Word of God. They had not worshiped the Beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands.

They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years... they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:4-6).

If the Bible speaks of *souls* which come to life, then those souls must come from Hades. *Souls* are bodiless dead people. You’ll only find the Dead in Hades. Those who descend from Heaven have bodies. They will have already been resurrected (some 3½ years previously). But the people who “come to life” to reign with Jesus are resurrected from Hades, the place of the Dead. Through a resurrection, these men and women who suffered during the Great Tribulation will join us ruling in the Kingdom!

c. We don't go to Heaven after we die

There is much confusion on the issue of what happens after we die, but the truth is that believers go to Hades when they die. There is a common notion that Christians go to Heaven when they die, but it is simply not true. Let's look at some of the misinterpretations that have led people to believe that we go to Heaven when we die.

i. We see believers in Heaven

The only texts in the entire Bible which might give anyone a shadow of a reason to think that we die and go to Heaven are the three that follow, so let's address them. They indeed describe believers in Heaven, but read the passages closely and interpret them rightly. If you do, you'll see that these are believers who have been transformed and raptured.

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands... he [an elder] said, 'These are they who have come out of the Great Tribulation...' (Revelation 7:9, 14).

What's the problem with deducing from this passage that believers go to Heaven after they die? Quite simply because these Gentile believers, after tremendous suffering, don't die, but are raptured. God whisks them up, taking them out of the Great Tribulation in the midst of the heat, sunburn, hunger, and thirst (Revelation 7:16) that afflicts them. We know that they have transformed bodies because they are holding something in their hands. Remember that Jesus took fish in his hands to prove that he was not just a soul:

'Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost [spirit-being, or soul] does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.'

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, 'Do you have

anything here to eat?' They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence (Luke 24:39-43).

The following passage also describes believers in Heaven, 144 thousand of them. Could this passage indicate that we die and go to Heaven? Read it carefully, and you'll see that it does not.

Then I looked, and there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zion, and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard... harpists playing their harps. And they sang a new song... No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the Earth.

These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (Revelation 14:1-5).

As in the previous passage, the believers described here are rescued from the Great Tribulation. These are not Gentiles, but Jews. They are also virgin men, who never lie, and are blameless. There are only 144 thousand of them and their testimony causes practically everyone on Earth to hate them strongly.

If you understand the timing of the salvation of the Jews, you know that it will happen after the Rapture. After the Rapture, the Great Tribulation begins. The passage above tells us about a large group of Jewish men in Heaven, men who missed the Rapture, but men who are not yet enjoying the Kingdom on Earth. So they are in a time after the Rapture but before the Kingdom has come. We have pinpointed the time to the 3 ½ year Great Tribulation period. Therefore, the above passage with the 144,000 [so misconstrued by the Jehovah's Witnesses] can be interpreted. The only explanation for these men's presence in Heaven is that they have been whisked up by angels and taken there individually. They get personal raptures the same as Enoch and Elijah.

Finally, in the third passage, others appear in Heaven. It's yet another group raptured out of the Great Tribulation. How do we know that? Simply because they were victorious over the Beast, the image of the Beast, and the number 666. The Beast only lifts up its image and enforces its number during the Great Tribulation.

And I saw what looked like a sea of glass glowing with fire and, standing beside the sea, those who had been victorious over the Beast and its image and over the number of its name. They held harps given them by God and sang... After this I looked, and I saw in Heaven the Temple... (Revelation 15:2-3, 5)

Again, to demonstrate that they have bodies, and that they are not just souls, notice that these saints are holding harps. Spirits don't hold harps—they are like ghosts. The people in this passage have transformed bodies and are found in Heaven for one reason: They have been raptured.

In conclusion, preachers who proclaim that we die and go to Heaven are dead wrong. Very rarely will any of them use the Bible to sustain their teachings. They normally just prey on the ignorance of others. However, if they ever do go to the Bible to attempt to back up their lies, they will have to refer to one of these three passages, the only three in the Bible that show believers in Heaven.

Don't be fooled! The rule is to read every Bible passage in context and to hold firmly to the foundational truth of a Resurrection of the Dead. Jesus himself was only freed from the grave and Hades after he had been resurrected—is anyone greater than him? Is there any human being who is exempt from the need to be resurrected?

ii. Flesh and blood cannot inherit

Who can enter into Heaven? Nobody who is still in their flesh and blood—nobody!

... flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:50).

You have to be resurrected [or transformed in the Rapture] to enter the Kingdom. Not even Jesus entered Heaven in his flesh. Even Jesus had to be resurrected first. Are we greater than Jesus?

But when Christ came as High Priest of the good things that are now already here, he went through the greater and more perfect Tabernacle that is not made with human hands, that is to say, is not a part of this Creation. He did not enter by means of the blood of goats and calves; but he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood, thus obtaining eternal redemption...

[Christ] through the eternal Spirit offered himself unblemished to God... For Christ did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands that was only a copy of the true one; he entered Heaven itself, now to appear for us in God's presence (Hebrews 9:11-12, 14b, 24).

iii. He ascended alone

It's completely wrong to say that Jesus took souls to Heaven with him when he left Hades, but that's what many pastors will tell you. We'll examine the false teaching more closely in Appendix F. For now, we'll study what is true. Here's one example: The disciples actually saw Jesus being *taken up* to Heaven in his body up to the clouds. Their testimony confirms that Jesus was alone during his ascent. Two angels who were also present confirmed it as well.

After he said this, he [that's the *singular* 3rd person subject pronoun, not the plural *they*] was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight. They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going... suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee... Jesus... has been taken from you into Heaven...' (Acts 1:9-11)

No report of anyone accompanying Jesus to Heaven exists. If believers from Hades had gone up with him, our Lord would have first opened the Gates of Hades, taken them out, and *en masse* they would have ascended with him. Of course, if such a thing ever had happened, the Scriptures would testify to it—but they don't.

iv. Die and be with Christ

Another passage we need to address as we deal with misinterpretations is Philippians 1:23-24. Remember: We are dispelling the confusion about what happens after we die. The truth is that believers go to Hades when they die, but the 20th Century’s “leading evangelist” Billy Graham denies that,⁸⁶ along with the majority of Evangelical pastors, who say we go to Heaven. Most of them are only able to base their argument on this passage from Philippians:

I desire to depart [from the context, *depart* means to *die*] and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body.

This passage teaches that Christians are present with Christ after they die—and that’s true. However, it’s *not* true to de-

⁸⁶ See how Mr. Graham answers the question of what happens to us after we die at <https://billygraham.org>. Interestingly, he quotes the passage we’re looking at here, and (just as many false teachers do) he uses it to undo the doctrine of the Resurrection from the Dead. Answering the question “Do you think we go to heaven the instant we die?” he wrote:

Yes, Christians can sometimes sincerely disagree on minor matters—although you should never forget that all Christians agree on those things that are really important, such as the divinity of Christ, His death on the cross for our salvation, His resurrection from the dead, and our hope of heaven. From my own study of the Bible, I’m convinced that when we die, we immediately enter the presence of the Lord.

Three observations on Mr. Graham’s response:

- It is not a teacher’s place to base his doctrine on “his own” study of the Bible. Personal opinions are not acceptable for Christian doctrine as per 2 Peter 1:20, which says “... recognizing this above all, that every prophecy of Scripture does not come about from one’s own interpretation.”
- Who is Mr. Graham to classify the issue of what happens after we die as a “minor matter”? On the contrary, what affects each of us in a more major way? We are mortals, after all, and we will all die. For him, what happens to us after we die is not “really important”?
- He manifests a doctrinal disconnect between the resurrection of Christ, and our own. He doesn’t seem to understand that our resurrection is intricately linked to Christ’s—but it is! As Jesus was, so shall we be. He had to be resurrected from the Dead, and so must we (if we will ever live).

duce that Christians go to Heaven after they die. When we say that, someone will ask: “But isn’t Jesus in Heaven?” Precisely, that question drives us to the heart of the matter, so let’s deal with it.

Those that think that this passage implies that we go to Heaven after we die will have to deal with five issues:

- 1) The passage paints a very distinct contrast between “departing to be with Christ” and “remaining in the body.” That is, Paul is stating that these two activities are opposites—and indeed they are. Paul wants us to understand that departing to be with Christ equals *not* remaining in the body. In other words, he’s saying that “departing to be with Christ” is becoming *bodiless*—a spirit-being, a ghost, a soul with no physical qualities.

Again, the truth expressed in this contrast is that dying means *losing* a physical body. Since only believers with resurrected bodies will enter the Kingdom of Heaven, Paul could not be speaking about himself after his resurrection. He knew, as well as everyone who listened to him, that someone who dies becomes a spirit-being. Nor could Paul possibly be speaking about life in Heaven. In another passage, he’s clear that nobody enters the Kingdom of Heaven unless God has first given them a resurrection body:

There are also heavenly bodies and there are earthly bodies; but the splendor of the heavenly bodies is one kind, and the splendor of the earthly bodies is another. The sun has one kind of splendor, the moon another and the stars another; and star differs from star in splendor.

So will it be with the Resurrection of the Dead. The body that is sown [a believer’s corpse] is perishable, it is raised imperishable; 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. So it is written: “The first man Adam became a living being;’ the last Adam, a life-giving spirit... And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man, so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man...

... flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God... We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the Last Trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the Dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed (1 Corinthians 15:40-45, 49-52).

- 2) God has given all authority in Heaven *and on Earth* to Jesus (Matthew 28:18). That means that Jesus has no limitations *on Earth*. Our Lord is not restricted in movement. He can go up to Heaven, go to the Earth, and—yes—he can even go *under* the Earth. In fact, he was there when he was dead. How much easier would it be for him to be there now that he’s alive?

To Jesus it was granted to sit at the Father’s side, but that doesn’t mean that he’s not free to get up and move about. He’s not locked into the Throne as you’d lock someone into an electric chair—he’s a King! Kings come and go as they please. Our Lord Jesus told the apostles that he went to Heaven “to prepare a place for you” (John 14:2). That implies that he’s busy up there right now. Indeed, he’s getting our dwelling places ready as we speak.

We come from a couch-potato culture, but don’t you dare imagine Jesus as sedentary. Stephen saw our Lord standing on his feet (when Stephen got his vision of God and Jesus in Heaven).

... I see Heaven open and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God (Acts 7:56).

The fact is that Jesus can move about freely wherever he wants. He can ascend to Heaven and he can descend to Hades.

Do not say in your heart, ‘Who will ascend into Heaven?’ (that is, to bring Christ down) or ‘Who will descend into the deep?’ (that is, to bring Christ up from the Dead) (Romans 10:6-7).

Jesus does after all have the keys to Hades—and what does that mean but that Jesus can get in and out of Hades at will? You don’t think that God restricts the movements of the One to whom he has given all authority in Heaven and on Earth, do you?

All authority in Heaven and on Earth has been given to me (Matthew 28:18).

Finally, remember that when Jesus spoke to Saul on the Damascus Road, Ananias’ interpretation of the event is that Jesus appeared to Paul. That’s proof that Paul actually saw Jesus on Earth. Although the light itself was the glory of Christ from Heaven, Jesus himself appeared on Earth!

... the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here... (Acts 9:17)

... [Jesus said to Paul] I have appeared to you to appoint you as a servant and as a witness of what you have seen and will see of me (Acts 26:17).

Jesus moves as he pleases—we hope that’s all right with you. It’s all right with God. If God deems him worthy of entering the Temple in Heaven, and will share his Throne with him, what place would be off limits to our Lord of lords? Absolutely none.

- 3) There’s a notable difference between ‘being with Christ,’ as we’re looking at in Philippians 1, and ‘being with the Lord [Jesus] forever.’ Think of it: A specific moment in time will arrive when we will actually begin our eternity with Jesus. That moment does not occur after we die.

...it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment (Hebrews 9:27; NASB).

So after we die, there's a mini-judgment. Now, in that mini-judgment, guess who does the judging? Not the Father, but the Son.

Moreover, the Father judges no one, but has entrusted all judgment to the Son (John 5:22).

So, in Philippians 1 Paul is not teaching us that we begin our eternity with Jesus after we die. He's saying that a believer dies, gets judged by Christ in Hades, and (if that person passes the Judgment), gets to be with Christ. That's when we will be consoled in Christ's presence. It will be exactly like what happened during the three days after the crucifixion, when our Lord consoled believers then. He did it once, and he's done it innumerable times since then. Indeed, one of Jesus' jobs is to console his followers as we wait for the Resurrection.

Note this: The moment when we will be joined with Jesus *forever* will be at the Rapture. Only from that point onward will we be inseparable. To see that, you must pay close attention to the way the word *so* is used in the following passage:

According to the Lord's word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from Heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first.

After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so [i.e., in that manner] we will be with the Lord forever (1 Thessalonians 4:15-17).

- 4) Jesus' only God-given restriction is that he is not to return to Earth *in power and glory* until God gives him the order. Nowhere do the Scriptures say that Jesus does not have access to Hades while

he waits for that command. In fact, no passage of Scripture places any limitations on him at all, it's just that he doesn't know when God is going to send him back in glory.

At that time people will see the Son of Man coming in clouds with great power and glory... But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mark 13:26, 32).

- 5) The most important thing to observe about the Philippians 1 passage at hand is that it is the best evidence that Paul is *not* talking about going to Heaven. If he were, his discourse would have sounded like his experience in the Third Heaven.⁸⁷ It would have sounded like the description of the other men of God who got visions of the Third Heaven—do you know what they do when they share those visions? They make God's Throne the focus of their revelation.⁸⁸ Indeed, the reason why Paul mentions nothing about God is because God is not in the Paradise of Hades. God is in *the Paradise of God* (Revelation 2:7). Yahweh God does not make it his custom to descend to Hades—but Jesus does!

⁸⁷ Observe a passage in which Paul describes his experience in the Third Heaven—it was so great that he wasn't even allowed to talk about it:

I know a man in Christ [v. 7 shows he's talking about himself] who fourteen years ago was caught up to the Third Heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know—God knows. And I know that this man [Paul himself]... was caught up to Paradise and heard inexpressible things, things that no one is permitted to tell... (2 Corinthians 12:2-4)

⁸⁸ Read Ezequiel 1 to understand Ezequiel's vision of Heaven, Daniel 10 for Daniel's vision, and Revelation 4 for John's vision of Heaven. In all these passages, the culmination is a vision of the Throne of God, with the One God and Father seated there. The glory of the Third Heaven is God's majestic glory! It's not just a place where we go to be with Jesus.

It's fair to presume that the same consolation Jesus once gave to the repentant rebel is the consolation Jesus offers us today: 'You will be with me in Paradise' (Luke 23:43). We are, after all, in the Eternal Covenant established through the blood of Jesus Christ, the one in which many generations of believers longed to participate. The rebel didn't have the precious things we have now. Will we be treated any less than he?

Jesus' Resurrection

Remember what we've looked at so far: We've proven that the Church is in denial, it denies the hope. We also proved that we need to overcome that denial. Another way to overcome it is to look to Christ's Resurrection. If you study Jesus' resurrection, you'll see that it was based upon God's ancient promise. In other words, his hope in God's promise is what made his resurrection possible.

How old is God's promise of a resurrection? Well, Abraham believed it, so it's at least 4,000 years old. Abraham demonstrated faith in God's resurrection promise when he offered up Isaac.

God tested Abraham. And he said to him, 'Abraham!' And he said, 'Here I am.' And he said, 'Take your son, your only child, Isaac, whom you love, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains where I will tell you.'

And Abraham rose up early in the morning and saddled his donkey. And he took two of his servants with him, and Isaac his son. And he chopped wood for a burnt offering. And he got up and went to the place which God had told him. On the third day Abraham lifted up his eyes, and he saw the place at a distance. And Abraham said to his servants, 'You stay here with the donkey, and I and the boy will go up there. We will worship, then we will return to you.'

And Abraham took the wood of the burnt offering and placed it on Isaac his son. And he took the fire in his

hand and the knife, and the two of them went together (Genesis 22:1-6; LEB).

By faith Abraham, when God tested him, offered Isaac as a sacrifice... Abraham reasoned that God could even raise the Dead, and so in a manner of speaking he did receive Isaac back from death (Hebrews 11:17-19).

a. The Ancient Promise

Let's not be of the opinion that the hope of the resurrection is a NT hope. It didn't arrive with the ministry of Jesus. The following 12 OT passages demonstrate that the Resurrection is an ancient promise of God. Consider, for example, the words of Job:

If only you would hide me in the grave [lit., Sheol] and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! If someone dies, will they live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal [or *release*] **to come.** You will call and I will answer you; you will long for the creature your hands have made (Job 14:13-15).

Those are the words of Job. Now, what did David say?

[God said to David] 'Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever' (2 Samuel 7:16).

... the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. Seeing what was to come, he spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah... (Acts 2:29-31)

Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, because you will not abandon me to the Realm of the Dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay (Psalm 16:9-10).

All the rich of the earth will feast and worship; all who go down to the dust will kneel before him—those who cannot keep themselves alive (Psalm 22:29).

As for me, I will be vindicated and will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness (Psalm 17:15).

But God will redeem me from the Realm of the Dead; he will surely take me to himself (Psalm 49:15).

Isaiah spoke of the Resurrection too:

But your Dead will live, Lord; their bodies will rise—let those who dwell in the dust wake up and shout for joy—your dew is like the dew of the morning; the Earth will give birth to her Dead (Isaiah 26:19).

Ezekiel made no bones about it—there will be a Resurrection!

... as I was prophesying, there was a noise, a rattling sound, and the bones came together, bone to bone. I looked, and tendons and flesh appeared on them and skin covered them, but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, “Prophesy to the breath [Heb. *Spirit*]; prophesy, son of man, and say to it, “This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Come, breath [Spirit], from the four winds and breathe into these slain, that they may live.” So I prophesied as he commanded me, and breath [spirit] entered them; they came to life and stood up on their feet—a vast army... ‘My people, I am going to open your graves and bring you up from them (Ezekiel 37:7-10, 12).

Daniel boldly proclaimed that multitudes would rise from the Dead.

Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the Earth will awake; some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt... As for you [Daniel], go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance (Daniel 12:2, 13).

Finally, Hosea expressed his conviction of a resurrection.

After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence (Hosea 6:2).

I will deliver this people from the power of the Grave;
 I will redeem them from Death. Where, O Death, are
 your plagues? Where, O Grave, is your destruction?
 (Hosea 13:14)

The Earliest Solution to Sin

For the record, the earliest event in history demonstrating that the Resurrection is the solution to man's sin is when God hindered Adam from eating from the Tree of Life in Eden. You'll see that if you read the following passage carefully, paying close attention to the words *live forever* and *to guard the way*.

And Yahweh God said, 'The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever.'

So Yahweh God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the Tree of Life (Genesis 3:22-24).

God impeded Adam and Eve's access to the Tree of Life for their own good. If they had eaten it in their sin, they would have remained eternally separated from God because they would have lived forever in sin. From this passage, we deduce that the first part of the solution to a person's guilt is that they must die. Only by dying is it possible for us to get a new body free from sin.⁸⁹ Eternal life only comes after we die to this body. That's why God prohibited Adam and Eve from eating of the Tree of Life —so that they wouldn't be trapped in sinful bodies forever! They felt the way Paul did when he said:

Who will deliver me from this body of death? (Romans 7:24; NKJV)

⁸⁹ With the one exception of those who are raptured. They will be transformed in the blink of an eye.

Adam and Eve discovered that it's better to die in the body than to live in sin. Have you discovered this yet? That's exactly what Peter is talking about in the following verses when he commands us to “arm ourselves” with an attitude of accepting death, the same attitude Jesus had when he walked the Earth!

Christ also suffered once for sins, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body (1 Peter 3:18)

Therefore, since Christ suffered in his body, arm yourselves also with the same attitude, because whoever suffers in the body is done with sin (1 Peter 4:1)

Final Points

You Don't Die and Go to Heaven

As we've seen, the Dead are in Hades, a place well below the surface of the Earth. In spite of the fundamental reality that people who die go underground—most Christians blindly believe that when a believer dies, they go to Heaven. This widely-accepted belief causes huge problems, the worst of which is that it quenches any hope Christians might otherwise have in the Resurrection! Be warned about thinking wrongly about death. If you do, your misconception will deactivate your hope by killing your sense of need for a resurrection. The resurrection is precisely this: God taking you out of Hades.

Very truly I tell you, a time is coming and has now come when the Dead will hear the voice of the Son of God and those who hear will live... Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice (John 5:25, 28).

Martha answered, 'I know he [Lazarus] will rise again in the Resurrection at the Last Day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die' (John 11:24-25).

Although as we've already proven, we'll be with Jesus temporarily in Hades, we will not be with Christ *in glory* until after the Resurrection.

When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory (Colossians 3:4).

Free from Fear, not from Death

The Bible says that at present we are freed from *the fear* of death, not from Death itself. Our freedom from Death [the place and condition] will come on the day of the Resurrection. False teachers often make believers feel like we will not have to die, but the truth is that we don't have to *fear* dying. Those are two very different things.

... by his [Jesus'] death he might break the power of him who holds the power of death—that is, the Devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death (Hebrews 2:14-15).

Being Resurrected vs. Being Raised

The following passage draws a contrast between a person being *raised* and a person being *resurrected*. OT saints were raised from the Dead, but not *resurrected* as Jesus was. Like Lazarus, they would die again. These same people you read of here, are currently awaiting their resurrection.

... the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life. They came out of the tombs after Jesus' resurrection and went into the holy city and appeared to many people (Matthew 27:52-53).

Next, you'll recall that Peter performed a great miracle with Dorcas (Tabitha). Observe closely that Tabitha is said to have gotten up on her feet, and Luke is careful not to use the term *resurrected*. Therefore, she was *raised*.

He [Peter] took her [Tabitha] by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive (Acts 9:41).

It's the same with Lazarus, who was not *resurrected*, just *raised*. He would eventually die again, and awaits his resurrection to this today.

... a large crowd of Jews found out that Jesus was there and came... to see Lazarus, whom he had raised⁹⁰ from the Dead (John 12:9).

Jesus Only Ascended to Heaven Once

Jesus did not ascend to Heaven more than once.

After his suffering, he presented himself to them and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive. He appeared to them over a period of forty days... He said to them: '... you will be my witnesses ... to the ends of the Earth.' After he said this, he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly two men dressed in white stood beside them. 'Men of Galilee,' they said, 'why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into Heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into Heaven (Acts 1:3,7-11).

Jesus entered the Holy Place in Heaven *once for all*, which means that it happened on one occasion, not twice:

... he entered the Most Holy Place once for all by his own blood... (Hebrews 9:12).

A proper burial

Cremation, burial at sea, mummification, flaming funeral pyres, caskets, and wakes. It's important what you do with your body after you die. Remember how Joseph had his bones sent back to the Promised Land from Egypt?

Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the Israelites swear an oath. He had

⁹⁰ This is not the Greek word for *resurrected* here, but *egeiró*, the word for to *raise up* or to *wake up* (εγείρω).

said, 'God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place' (Exodus 13:19).

Joseph gave clear orders that this be done because he lived and died by faith. What does it mean to die *by faith*? It means through belief in the resurrection, to treat your death like a door to eternity.

By faith Joseph, when his end was near, spoke about the Exodus of the Israelites from Egypt and gave instructions concerning the burial of his bones (Hebrews 11:22).

One's burial is important. How you are buried is your strongest statement about what you believe about eternity. Notice that Jesus' burial was handled with the utmost care. The reason? God wanted him to be resurrected with no difficulties, completely preserved.

Now there was a man named Joseph... from the Judean town of Arimathea, and he himself was waiting for the Kingdom of God. Going to Pilate, he asked for Jesus' body. Then he took it down, wrapped it in linen cloth and placed it in a tomb cut in the rock, one in which no one had yet been laid (Luke 23:50-53).

The Christian idea is after death to preserve the body as well as we can. No to corpses floating down the Ganges River, bloated and wasting away in stench and disease. No to mass graves in the jungles of Colombia, Cambodia, and Rwanda. No to donating your body to medical science. No to relics—bones, fingers, and even heads in Catholic cathedrals. No to freezing a corpse in the hopes of resuscitation—cryonic preservation. *Yes* to a proper burial!

A man may have a hundred children and live many years; yet no matter how long he lives, if he cannot enjoy his prosperity and does not receive proper burial, I say that a stillborn child is better off than he (Ecclesiastes 6:3).

Jesus got a *proper burial*. It was out of his control, of course. He couldn't influence what happened to his body after death,

but God made sure that the right people were there (Jesus' female followers, Nicodemus, and Joseph of Arimathea) to assure a dignified burial for our Lord.

It's all Greek to me

Countless volumes of books are available on the worldview of Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, and their disciples—but from a Biblical vantage point, very little needs to be said. The Greek philosophers were all wrong. How wrong were they? Well, at the time of the apostles, the primary intellectual reason for unbelief in the Resurrection was Greek philosophy. That's because the most renowned Greek philosophers taught that the body was essentially evil. For them, only man's spirit was good. Only man's spirit was pure and valuable—their body was useless.

The philosophers taught a body-spirit dichotomy. Indeed, the two main branches of Greek philosophy at the time of the apostles tended towards either:

- a) doing whatever your body wanted (not because pleasure produces true happiness, but because the body will perish anyways, so what we do with it doesn't matter)—those were the *Epicureans*; or
- b) being very strict with your body and natural desires. Those were the *Stoics*, philosophers who stressed that people must allow the inner spirit to thrive by subjecting the body to rigorous treatment.

Both of these schools of philosophy were in pursuit of wisdom and 'the good life'—that is, *happiness*, but they never obtained Christian equilibrium. Jesus' example is that we must obey our spirit through our bodies. His perfectly balanced worldview is that the body is the temple of the spirit, and that they are *eternally* bound together.

The philosophers couldn't fathom the Resurrection; but without it, there's no basis for saying that our bodies are important. The fact is that every human body will be resurrected, making everything we do relevant for eternity. Does that sound important? It is.

There are eternal consequences for our actions and Jesus' resurrection is the proof of that. What do we learn from him? That we'll enjoy the Kingdom of God in our bodies forever. That's why God blesses the food, drink, prosperity, family, and marriages we enjoy now—as long as we can with gratitude receive them from him with a clear conscience.

Greek philosophy developed its arguments against the Resurrection through lines of thought that followed the following order:

Socrates → Plato → the Stoics → the Gnostics

The NT addresses Gnosticism repeatedly. It was necessary since the Gnostics infiltrated the primitive Christian church. Indeed, along with the Judaizers and Nicolaitans, they were one of the first three deviant sects; but the Gnostics were the strongest of the three. They were the equivalent of what today we call a *cult*.⁹¹

Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called *knowledge*,⁹² which some have professed and in so doing have departed from the faith (1 Timothy 6:20-21).

The Gnostics taught that Jesus didn't have the human nature—that he had no tendency towards sin as we do. On the contrary, true believers affirm with Romans 8:3 that Jesus came in “the likeness of sinful flesh.” The Gnostics denied Christ's struggle against temptation, but what's the effect of their doctrine, still popular today? It excuses us from waging a battle against temptation. If Jesus didn't have our nature, it's impossible to follow his example of holiness, so (anybody who believes as the Gnostics did will say) “Why even try?”

⁹¹ The most famous cult groups I've run across in my ministry in New York, Colombia, Oman, and El Salvador are: the Jehovah's Witnesses, the Mormons, Scientology, the United Pentecostal Church (Jesus Only), *Creciendo en Gracia*, and the International Churches of Christ (Boston Movement). In your ministry, you may have run across others.

⁹² This is the word *gnosis*, from which we get the term *Gnosticism*. Gnosis means *knowledge* in Greek.

... many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God (1 John 4:1-2).

... many deceivers, who do not acknowledge Jesus Christ as coming in the flesh, have gone out into the world. Any such person is the deceiver and the anti-christ (2 John 7).

At the same time, since the Gnostics taught that Jesus came as a spirit (not in the flesh), they promoted the false doctrine that the only way to obtain holiness and eternal life was to be free from our bodies. We, on the other hand, believe that we can be holy in our bodies—particularly when our body is resurrected, and we are “free from the body of this death” (Romans 7:24; NASB).

We view the Resurrection as our deliverance from the sinful nature (the flesh) and also as a reconnection to our bodies! They are our bodies and we’ll be the same people we are now (Tom, Ellen, Armando, Michelle, etc.) Our bodies are made by God, and he doesn’t create evil things. He designed our bodies to be eternal, but Adam’s sin brought death to all of us. If we’re freed from sin and death, our bodies can last forever—eternal bodies are God’s original design after all.

So, our body is not inherently evil. Our flesh is evil, yes, but the solution to our sin is not to be bodiless spirits. Rather, the solution to sin is that our bodies might be resurrected with a new nature—the *divine* nature. This is what Peter means when he says that we will be “partakers of the divine nature” (2 Peter 1:4). Plan on experiencing freedom, deliverance, and salvation in you body, if you’re a believer.

The Gnostics also rejected the idea of an upcoming bodily resurrection.

Avoid godless chatter... Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the Resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

Do you know how the Gnostics got around the (obvious) fact that we're not resurrected yet? They did it by making the Resurrection a "spiritual" event. That is, they taught that Jesus was resurrected *spiritually*, not bodily. Today, the Jehovah's Witnesses say the same thing—carrying on this heresy.⁹³ However, Jesus was resurrected in the same body he had when he was alive. The only difference is that his body was transformed and eternal.

So, when early Christians heard from the Gnostics that there was a spiritual resurrection, not one that happened in the body—some early Christians became convinced that it had already occurred. They began to fret, thinking that they had missed the Resurrection! Paul corrected their error.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our gathering together to him, that you not be quickly shaken from your composure or be disturbed either by a spirit or a message or a letter as if from us, to the effect that the Day of the Lord has come. Let no one in any way deceive you... (2 Thessalonians 2:1-3; NASB).

Paul confronted the Gnostic false teachers on one occasion by dedicating most of 1 Corinthians 15 to rebutting them. How did he rebut them? By insisting that both Christ was raised *and* likewise the Dead will be raised. Do you get it? Our resurrection is inextricably linked to Christ's. Any misunderstanding about Jesus' resurrection will automatically lead us to errors about our resurrection. Here are some sample verses from this magnificent chapter:

... how can some of you [in the Church] say that there is no Resurrection of the Dead? ... if the Dead are not raised, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile...

⁹³ Their erroneous explanation can be seen at [https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/jesus-body/#?insight\[search_id\]=fe3fda7a-f2e6-4d20-a590-68bbc660cfe6&insight\[search_result_index\]=7](https://www.jw.org/en/bible-teachings/questions/jesus-body/#?insight[search_id]=fe3fda7a-f2e6-4d20-a590-68bbc660cfe6&insight[search_result_index]=7), retrieved on December 5, 2018.

Now if there is no Resurrection... If the Dead are not raised at all, why are people baptized for them [the Dead]? ... If the Dead are not raised, ‘Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die’ (1 Corinthians 15:12, 16-17, 29-30, 32).

Denying Death

To avoid the reality of death, most people enter a state of denial. They don’t want to deal with the suffering involved in death, so they make themselves spiritually blind. Of course, death is a very unpleasant thing to reflect upon, and it’s understandable why people avoid it—the only problem with closing our eyes to it won’t make it go away. Ignoring it doesn’t make death disappear any more than closing your eyes doesn’t make people in front of your disappear.

Spiritual blindness is bad, but here’s an even bigger problem with denying death: Nobody will comprehend the glory of the Resurrection who does not first face the darkness of death. Is that clear to you? The Realm of the Dead certainly does exist, and [unless we are raptured] everybody goes there when they die. A visit to Sheol is only a heartbeat away from any one of us! It’s straight down. You just have to fall through the wrong pit, and there you are.

... the ground under them split apart and the Earth opened its mouth and swallowed them and their households, and all those associated with Korah, together with their possessions. They went down alive into the Realm of the Dead, with everything they owned. The Earth closed over them, and they perished and were gone from the community (Numbers 16:31-33).

Korah became an instant believer in Sheol—how about you? Do you believe it’s a real place directly below us, or are you letting your old college geology class notes convince you otherwise?



III. Looking Forward: Jesus' Second Coming

Kingdom Highlights

How will we know when the Kingdom is chronologically close? Many teachers deny this fact, but Jesus told us that certain signs will reveal that the end is nigh.

... learn this lesson from the fig tree: As soon as its twigs get tender and its leaves come out, you know that summer is near. Even so, when you see these things happening, you know that it [*the end*, according to v. 7] is near, right at the door... But about that day or hour no one knows, not even the angels in Heaven, nor the Son, but only the Father (Mark 13:28-29; 32-33).

... when you see these things⁹⁴ happening, you know

⁹⁴ Some "things" Jesus referred to include those he listed in Luke 21:8-27, things that clearly indicate the start of the Great Tribulation such as:

- Jerusalem will be run over by Gentiles
- Jerusalem will be surrounded by armies
- there will be great distress in Judea and wrath against the Jews
- the Jews will fall by the sword and will be taken as prisoners to other nations

However, before those times of Great Tribulation Jesus warned that current believers (that's us) would undergo Tribulation. The 3½-year period known as the Tribulation will be characterized by us:

- being seized and persecuted
- being handed over to synagogues
- being put into prison
- being brought before kings and governors on account of Jesus' cause
- being betrayed by parents, brothers and sisters, relatives and friends, and some of us being put to death
- being hated by everyone because of Jesus

Read the passage carefully and you'll notice that before we are persecuted, many of the seal judgments of Revelation will occur:

- many false prophets will come in Jesus' name, claiming to be Jesus, and saying that 'the time is near'—while it is not near, since it's more than 3½ years away (Jesus only calls the Kingdom near when it's less than 3½ years away)
- we will hear of wars and uprisings
- nation will rise against nation, and government against government
- there will be great earthquakes, famines, and pestilences

that the Kingdom of God is near (Luke 21:31).

What do these two passages mean? They mean that if we are observant and understand the signs, we can discern the times and know approximately when Jesus will come back. If the Lord Jesus himself encourages and commands us (he said “*learn* the lesson”) to interpret the events that anticipate his second coming, shouldn’t we take note of them?

The only thing he said we will *not* know is the day and hour of his return. Those two bits of information (the day and hour) the Father is keeping to himself. He hasn’t even revealed the day or hour of Jesus’ coming to Jesus or the angels! It’s a very big secret.

So why do supposed Bible students not study this topic more thoroughly? Why is there so much laziness in researching this very significant event, the one that will turn history upside down? Well, just as the times of the Flood, everyone has been warned. Noah warned the inhabitants of the Earth through his preaching, but nobody expected so much water to pour down so suddenly. Blinded by the worries of this World, people today can’t imagine that all of a sudden it could rain fire—but it will.

... about that day or hour no one knows... in the days before the Flood, people were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, up to the day Noah entered the ark; and they knew nothing about what would happen until the Flood came and took them all away. That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:36-39).

-
- there will be fearful events, and great signs in the sky (up in space)

Are these things happening now? No, they are not. Therefore, the time is not yet close; but please be ready for when these things do happen, so that you’ll understand what they mean. Otherwise, you’ll be blindsided!

Signs of the Times

The Scriptures give us clear indications of the times we live in, so Jesus expects you to understand them. If you can't tell what the times are, then Jesus rebukes you! If you can't interpret the signs, then he calls you a hypocrite!

When evening comes, you say, 'It will be fair weather, for the sky is red,' and in the morning, 'Today it will be stormy, for the sky is red and overcast.' You know how to interpret the appearance of the sky, but you cannot interpret the signs of the times (Matthew 16:2-3)?

He said to the crowd: "When you see a cloud rising in the west, immediately you say, 'It's going to rain,' and it does. And when the south wind blows, you say, 'It's going to be hot,' and it is. Hypocrites! You know how to interpret the appearance of the Earth and the sky. How is it that you don't know how to interpret this present time? (Luke 12:54-56)

God expects us to have wisdom and to be people who understand the times. He lauds people as wise who have that understanding.

... from Issachar, men who understood the times... (1 Chronicles 12:32)

Paul expected his converts to remember his many lessons regarding the return of Christ.

Now we request you, brethren, with regard to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ... Let no one in any way deceive you... Do you not remember that while I was still with you, I was telling you these things? (2 Thessalonians 2:1, 3, 5; NASB)

The Thessalonians knew so much about the “times and dates” related to Christ’s return that they didn’t even need anybody to write to them. They were not in the darkness, and Jesus would *not* be like a thief in the night for them. The Scriptures mention this and affirm that only those who live in darkness will be surprised at Christ’s return. We believers will not be surprised by his return!

Now, brothers and sisters, about times and dates we do not need to write to you, for you know very well that the day of the Lord will come like a thief in the night. While people are saying, ‘Peace and safety,’ destruction will come on them suddenly, as labor pains on a pregnant woman, and they will not escape.

But you, brothers and sisters, are not in darkness so that this day should surprise you like a thief. You are all children of the light... (1 Thessalonians 5:1-5)

The Order Events Unfold

As we look at the sequence of events and how they unfold, please be aware that this is an advanced study. It’s not spiritual milk—it’s *meat*. It’s not for babes in Christ, but for mature believers. So why do we include it in this book? Well, due to the nearness of these events—the Tribulation should start around 2027-2028. It’s necessary for each of us to understand how events will unfold, otherwise we won’t be prepared for them.

So here it goes, 217 distinct events which indicate that the Kingdom is near, in chronological order. These events that will take place during a 3½-year period, the final 3½ years before the glorious coming of our Lord Jesus!

The Last Trumpet will Sound

1. An angel will blow the Seventh Trumpet. At that instant, the Kingdom of the World will become God’s. Authority over the World will be transferred from Satan to God.

The seventh angel sounded his trumpet, and there were loud voices in Heaven, which said: ‘The Kingdom of the World has become the Kingdom of our Lord [God] and of his Messiah, and he [God, according to v. 17]⁹⁵ will reign for ever and ever’ (Revelation 11:15).

⁹⁵ In verse 17, the 24 elders worship the One God and say to him ‘You have taken your great power and have begun to reign.’ But how does God actually “begin to reign” during the Great Tribulation? That’s a good question since he’ll still be in Heaven while the World plunges into chaos. He’ll begin to reign by sending his judgments to Earth. A judge has authority, and as Judge, God will manifest his authority over humanity through the seven cups of wrath! People everywhere will finally fear him as they ought, when his judgments are manifest.

... at the Last Trumpet. For the trumpet will sound... (1 Corinthians 15:52)

... with the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16; LEB).

The Greatest Sign: Christ Descends from Heaven on a Cloud

2. Jesus will descend as he yells a command—and the booming voice of an archangel will chime in.

... the Lord himself [Jesus] will descend from Heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16; LEB).

3. Jesus will come in the clouds, seated on one in particular, with great glory.

... a white cloud, and seated on the cloud was one like a son of man... another angel... called... to him who was sitting on the cloud... So he who was seated on the cloud [Jesus] swung his sickle... (Revelation 14:14-16).

4. When the Jews see Jesus, they will experience heartfelt repentance. They'll turn from their unbelief and will be converted—all of them!

Look, he is coming with the clouds... every eye will see him, even those who pierced him... (Revelation 1:7).

I will pour out on the House of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son (Zachariah 12:10).

... blindness in part has happened to Israel until the Full-

ness of the Gentiles⁹⁶ has come in. And so⁹⁷ all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and he will turn away ungodliness from Jacob... (Romans 11:25-26; NKJV)

5. The Gentiles will also see Jesus on his cloud. They too will weep as they realize how unbelieving they have been.

‘...every eye will see him...’ all peoples on Earth ‘will mourn because of him’ (Revelation 1:7).

The Rapture

6. Jesus will raise up believers from the Dead—but this is not yet the *Resurrection*,⁹⁸ it’s the *Rapture*.

⁹⁶ This *Fullness of the Gentiles* is mentioned in other parts of the Bible. For example, Jesus mentioned it when he said:

Jerusalem will be trampled on by the Gentiles until the Times of the Gentiles are fulfilled (Luke 21:24).

So what is the *Fullness* of the Gentiles? Well, the *Times* of the Gentiles are taking place right now. During this era of history, anybody who is not a Jew can enter into covenant with God. We can enter this covenant without the need to participate in Jewish religious ceremonies or holidays—we don’t have to become Jews to be part of God’s people.

When the time comes when all non-Jews have had a legitimate opportunity to respond to the message of the Gospel, then the *Fullness* of the Gentiles will have been completed. Jesus spoke of the conclusion of these times when he said:

... this Gospel of the Kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations [Gentiles], and then the end will come (Matthew 24:14).

... go and make disciples of all nations [Gentiles], baptizing them... and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you (Matthew 28:19-20).

⁹⁷ This word combination *and so* is the best translation from the original Greek—and we can’t afford to miss its meaning. These two words allow us to pinpoint the salvation of the Jews on a historical timeline. The time Paul calls the *Fullness of the Gentiles* must precede the salvation of all Israel. That is, world evangelization of every ethnic group must be completed first, then the Jews are brought to repentance.

⁹⁸ Now, the Resurrection is so important that it is one of the seven fundamental truths of the Christian religion. See how Paul refers to it here:

And this is the will of him who sent me: that I shall lose none of all those he has given me, but raise them up at the Last Day. For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise them up at the Last Day... and I will raise them up at the Last Day... (John 6:39-40, 44).

7. Within seconds of the raising of believers from the Dead,⁹⁹ those of us who are still alive will be snatched

... how can some of you say that there is no Resurrection of the Dead? If there is no Resurrection of the Dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith... (1 Corinthians 15:12-14)

What Paul wants to say in 1 Corinthians 15 is that our Resurrection (a future event) is the foundation upon which the resurrection of Jesus (a past event) is based. Correspondingly, without a resurrection of Christ, we will not be resurrected from the Dead.

Paul also states that the resurrection of Christ gives meaning to the preaching of the apostles—it gives meaning to the Good News of the Kingdom. Why? Because we are resurrected unto eternal life. We are not resurrected unto just any eternal life. We'll be resurrected unto the eternal life which we will live out in the Kingdom!

Paul also stated:

If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied (1 Corinthians 15:19).

That means that our hope in Christ is fundamentally futuristic—it's not for our current life. This mortal life is just a testing ground to see if we will be worthy of eternal life.

⁹⁹ This is not the Resurrection *per se*; rather, it's part of the Rapture. Those who participate in the Rapture will indeed be resurrected from the Dead, but the Rapture is never called *the Resurrection* in the NT. There are two Resurrections proper: The *First Resurrection* occurs right before the Millennium, and it's called the *Resurrection of the Righteous* (Luke 14:14). If God resurrects you on that opportunity, you're assured eternal life—you're blessed!

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 and will reign with him for a thousand years (Revelation 20:6; NASB).

However, there will be another resurrection involving the righteous and the unrighteous. That *Second* Resurrection will take place after the Millenni-

up to the clouds with them—like a harvest of souls.

... God will bring those who have fallen asleep through Jesus together with him. For this we say to you by the Word of the Lord, that we who are alive, who remain until the Lord's coming, will not possibly precede those who have fallen asleep.

For the Lord himself will descend... and the Dead in Christ will rise¹⁰⁰ first. Then we who are alive, who remain, will be

um. It's the one where sinners will finally confess that Jesus is Lord and bend their knees before him.

... there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous (Acts 24:15; LEB).

I saw the Dead, great and small, standing before the Throne, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. The Dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books (Revelation 20:12).

Before me every knee will bow, by me every tongue will swear (Isaiah 45:23).

'As surely as I live,' says the Lord, 'every knee will bow before me; every tongue will acknowledge God.' (Romans 14:11).

... at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those in Heaven and of those on Earth and of those under the Earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father (Philippians 2:10-11; LEB).

So there will be two official resurrections. Only the righteous will participate in the first, and ultimately everyone will be resurrected, the just and the unjust, in the second.

... All that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation (John 5:28-29; NKJV).

¹⁰⁰ For the Rapture, the Bible only uses the term *rise*, it does not use the term *resurrect*. Jesus raises those who are Dead in him. This *raising* certainly is technically a resurrection, but since the resurrection which takes place at the end of the Tribulation (3½ years later) is referred to as the *First Resurrection*, so we should not call the Rapture a *resurrection* proper.

They [souls of those who were martyred during the Great Tribulation] came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the Dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the First Resurrection (Revelation 20:4-5).

snatched away¹⁰¹ at the same time together with them... (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; LEB)

... seated on the cloud was one like a son of man with a crown of gold on his head and a sharp sickle in his hand. Then another angel came out of the Temple and called in a loud voice to him who was sitting on the cloud, ‘Take your sickle and reap, because the time to reap has come, for the harvest of the Earth is ripe.’ So he who was seated on the cloud [Jesus] swung his sickle over the Earth, and the Earth was harvested (Revelation 14:14-16).

8. The instant we are raptured is the same instant in which God will give us our glorified bodies. From then on, we’ll be immortal!

We will not all sleep [die and go to Hades], but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye... (1 Corinthians 15:51)

... the Dead will be raised imperishable, and¹⁰² we [the believers who are alive] will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:52b-53).

9. Only when Jesus returns will dead believers be raised. Since Jesus was resurrected first, he is *the firstfruits*. There will be no resurrection of believers until he returns—only false teachers say otherwise.

But Christ has indeed been raised from the Dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since death came through a man, the Resurrection of the Dead comes also through a man. For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive. But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him... (1 Corinthians 15:20-23)

¹⁰¹ The translators didn’t use it in this English version, but the original Greek verb here (ἁρπαγησόμεθα) is actually *raptured*. It’s from the base form *harpazó*, meaning “to seize, catch up, snatch away.” From it, we get the Biblical term *the Rapture*.

¹⁰² This conjunction *and* indicates that we will be changed right after dead believers are raised. It signals the order of the events surrounding the Rapture.

Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the Resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith¹⁰³ of some (2 Timothy 2:16-18).

10. Jesus will bring us to himself, no matter where we are. He does this by commanding angels through a loud trumpet call to gather us up.¹⁰⁴

And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other... Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it¹⁰⁵ is near, right at the door (Matthew 24:31, 33).

And then they will see the Son of Man arriving in the clouds with great power and glory. And then he will send out the angels, and will gather the elect together from the four winds, from the end of the Earth to the end of heaven (Mark 13:25-27).

I tell you, on that night two people will be in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding grain together; one will be taken and the other left (Luke 17:34-36).

11. Details about the transformation our bodies will undergo in the Rapture:

a. We will get spiritual bodies—bodies that are immortal, glorious, and powerful.

So will it be with the Resurrection of the Dead. The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a

¹⁰³ Without a future hope of a resurrection, a person's faith is not just damaged—it's destroyed!

¹⁰⁴ This means that we won't fly upwards individually as some artists depict the Rapture. Rather, we'll be *picked up* and taken upwards by angels.

¹⁰⁵ What is the *it* that Jesus says will be so near? The Day of the Coming of Christ, the spiritual "summer" of the context, the *Kingdom of God!*

natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

b. Our new bodies will be sinless—they will be like new clothing on our souls, souls were previously shamed by the sinful human nature.

... we know that if the earthly tent we live in [our current body] is destroyed, we have a building [a resurrection body] from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling [eternal body], because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked [no sin will be exposed as it was when we were in the flesh] (2 Corinthians 5:1-3).

c. We will be like Jesus. We'll bear his image, and have glorious heavenly bodies.

Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when Christ appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is (1 John 3:2).

... those God foreknew, he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son (Romans 9:29).

... our citizenship is in Heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body (Philippians 3:20-21).

... when the Christ—our life—may be manifested, then also we with him shall be manifested in glory (Colossians 3:4; YLT).

And just as we have borne the image of the earthly man [Adam], so shall we bear the image of the heavenly man [Jesus] (1 Corinthians 15:49).

d. We will have the divine nature! That means that we'll be gods—perfect.

The Jews answered him, “For a good work we do not stone you, but for blasphemy; and because you, being a man, make

yourself out to be God.” Jesus answered them, “Has it not been written in your Law, ‘I said, you are gods’? If he called them gods, to whom the Word of God came (and the Scripture cannot be broken), do you say of him whom the Father sanctified and sent into the world, ‘You are blaspheming,’ because I said, ‘I am the Son of God?’” (John 10:33-36).

... his precious and very great promises... through these you may become sharers of the divine nature ... (2 Peter 1:3-4; LEB)

e. We’ll be able to touch others physically, to eat, and to drink.

He said to them, ‘Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost¹⁰⁶ does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have.’

When he had said this, he showed them his hands and feet. And while they still did not believe it because of joy and amazement, he asked them, ‘Do you have anything here to eat?’ They gave him a piece of broiled fish, and he took it and ate it in their presence (Luke 24:38-43).

He was... seen by... witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the Dead (Acts 10:41).

12. All believers, male and female, will be clothed in white robes,¹⁰⁷ the Kingdom uniform.

... a few people in [the church at Sardis]... have not soiled

¹⁰⁶ Jesus was no disembodied spirit, but had a real body, a spiritual body—and so will we.

¹⁰⁷ Notice that white robes are also given to those who are awaiting their resurrection in Hades. These were killed for the faith.

[These are the souls of believers in the Paradise of Hades as they wait at the time of the fifth seal, early in the first (not Great) Tribulation] ... to each one of them a white robe was given, and it was said to them that they should rest yet a short time, until the number of their fellow slaves and their brothers who were about to be killed as they had been were completed also (Revelation 6:11; LEB).

their clothes... The one who is victorious will, like them, be dressed in white... (Revelation 3:4-5)

Around the Throne [of God] were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting, clothed in white robes (Revelation 4:4).

... there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes (Revelation 7:9).

... one of the elders asked me, “These in white robes—who are they, and where did they come from?” ... These are they who have come out of the Great Tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white¹⁰⁸ in the blood of the Lamb (Revelation 7:13-14).

The Judgment Seat of Christ

13. All believers will appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, and Jesus will pay each of us with punishments or rewards, according to our actions.

... we must all appear before the Judgment Seat of Christ, so that each of us may receive what is due us for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad (2 Corinthians 5:9-10).

... [Jesus says to churches] I am the one who searches minds and hearts, and I will give to each one of you according to your deeds (Revelation 2:23).

a. This will not be a sentimental time of embraces, but a serious time of assessment. Jesus will judge Christians with fire!

... each man's work will become evident; for the Day will show it because it [each person's work] is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work.

If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned

¹⁰⁸ This last passage explains *how* the robes have become so white. It's because they've been washed in Christ's blood!

up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire (1 Corinthians 3:13-15; NASB).

14. Certain Christians will receive certain crowns. Now, Jesus grants these crowns to those whom he considers to be worthy of ruling in his Kingdom. If you get a crown, you get to rule. You are Kingdom royalty—kings, queens, princes, and princesses.

a. The crown of glory is for men who serve well as pastors in the Church.

Be shepherds of God's flock... And when the Chief Shepherd appears, you will receive the crown of glory that will never fade away (1 Peter 5:2-4).

b. The crown of righteousness is for all who keep the faith, and who strongly desire the appearing of Jesus.

[Paul said] I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that Day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing (2 Timothy 4:7-8).

c. The crown of life goes to those who have persevered when tested in their love of Jesus. It is also for believers who are faithful to Jesus unto death.

Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him (James 1:12).

Be faithful until death, and I [Jesus] will give you the crown of life (Revelation 2:10; NASB).

d. Believers must be firm because our spiritual enemies will tempt us, trying to cause us to lose our reward. That's why we have to hold onto truth, holiness, faith, and love.

I am coming quickly; hold fast what you have, so that no one will take your crown (Revelation 3:11; NASB).

Entrance in the Kingdom

15. We will enter into the Kingdom!¹⁰⁹

... in this way [by maturing and growing in Christ] the entrance into the Eternal Kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ will be¹¹⁰ abundantly supplied to you (2 Peter 1:11; NASB).

... a man came up to Jesus and asked, ‘Teacher, what good thing must I do to get¹¹¹ eternal life?’

[Jesus responded] ‘... it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God’ (Matthew 19:16, 24).

... [Jesus spoke to his disciples saying] unless you are converted and become like children, you will not¹¹² enter the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 18:3; NASB).

... unless one is born of water and the Spirit he cannot enter into the Kingdom of God (John 3:5; NASB).

... whoever does not receive the Kingdom of God like a child will not enter it at all (Luke 18:17).¹¹³

‘How hard it is for the rich to enter the Kingdom of God!’

¹⁰⁹ To realize what a great privilege this is, consider the millions upon millions of people who have lived a life full of health, fun, family, and even prosperity—but who will never make it into the Kingdom. We should also note here that some will enter the Kingdom at the end of the Tribulation, and others at the end of the Millennium. What we see here is the first opportunity a human will ever have of entering the Kingdom.

¹¹⁰ This is the future tense, meaning that we do not enter into the Kingdom now, but only after we have grown.

¹¹¹ Notice how Jesus equates getting eternal life (a future goal) with entering the Kingdom. He does that because they are one and the same. Eternal life and entering the Kingdom are a single accomplishment.

¹¹² Again, a future verb. Jesus showed his apostles that entering the Kingdom was something to strive after.

¹¹³ Jesus describes two experiences here: receiving the Kingdom, and entering it. First, we have to receive it—that is, we have to believe that it is a reality, only then will we have the right to enter.

The disciples were amazed at his words. But Jesus said again, “Children, how hard it is to enter the Kingdom of God! It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for someone who is rich to enter the Kingdom of God (Mark 10:23-25).

Intimate Encounters with Christ

16. Jesus will give those of us who overcome temptation some special heavenly bread to eat.

To him who overcomes, to him I will give some of the hidden manna... (Revelation 2:17; NASB)

17. Jesus will give each believer a little white stone. On that stone, a name will be engraved—a new secret name which only that person and Jesus will know.

To him who overcomes, to him I will give... a white stone, and a new name written on the stone which no one knows but he who receives it (Revelation 2:17; NASB).

18. Those who are worthy to do so will take a stroll with Jesus.

... a few people in [the church at Sardis]... have not soiled their clothes. They will walk with me, dressed in white, for they are worthy (Revelation 3:4).

19. If we do what Jesus wants to the very end, we will receive *the morning star*—a prize for those who are victorious against temptation.

To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give... that one the morning star (Revelation 2:26-28).

God’s Sabbath Rest

20. Those who have made a diligent effort¹¹⁴ will enter God’s Rest—getting a well-deserved break.

... Christ was faithful as a son over his house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.

¹¹⁴ That diligent effort consists of a struggle against sin—a battle we can only win by clinging to the hope of the Kingdom.

Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says, “Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as... in the wilderness, where your fathers tried me... and saw my works for forty years. Therefore I was angry with this generation, and... I swore in my wrath, “They shall not enter my Rest.”

Take care, brethren... for we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.... for who provoked him when they had heard? Indeed, did not all those who came out of Egypt led by Moses?... And to whom did he swear that they would not enter his Rest? ...they were not able to enter because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:6-19; NASB).

... let us fear if, while a promise remains of entering his Rest, any one of you¹¹⁵ may seem to have come short of it. For indeed we have had the Good News¹¹⁶ preached to us, just as they also; but the Word they heard did not profit them, because it was not united by faith in those who heard.

For we who have believed enter that Rest, just as he has said, ‘As I swore in my wrath, they shall not enter my Rest,’ (although his works were finished from the foundation of the world). For he has said somewhere concerning the seventh day: ‘And God rested on the seventh day from all his works’; and again in this passage, ‘They shall not enter my Rest.’

Therefore, since it remains for some to enter it, and those who formerly had the Good News preached to them failed to enter because of disobedience, he again fixes a certain day, ‘Today,’ saying through David after so long a time just as has been said before, ‘Today if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts.’ For if Joshua had given them rest [bringing the Jews into the Promised Land], he [God] would not have spoken of another day after that.

¹¹⁵ Yes, he’s speaking to Christians here! The Bible never affirms the “once saved, always saved” doctrine many Evangelical pastors preach.

¹¹⁶ This is the word *Gospel*.

So¹¹⁷ there remains a Sabbath Rest for the people of God. For the one who has entered his Rest has himself also rested from his works, as God did from his. Therefore let us be diligent to enter that Rest...¹¹⁸ (Hebrews 4:1-11)

Paradise Rest

21. Those who die in the Lord during the Great Tribulation rest in Hades.

... I heard a voice from Heaven say, ‘Write this: Blessed are the Dead who die in the Lord from now on [from the time of the Antichrist’s rule, from the first bowl of wrath].’ ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them’ (Revelation 14:13).¹¹⁹

¹¹⁷ This is the conclusion of the argument. If you have followed it, pay attention to the “So... for...” in the conclusion.

¹¹⁸ If we have to be *diligent* to enter the rest, it’s because we need to make a concerted effort. Are you making that effort?

¹¹⁹ The *rest* here is different from the *rest* which corresponds to those of us who will be in Heaven during the Great Tribulation. The context clearly demonstrates that this is the repose believers enjoy in the Paradise of Hades—a repose which also takes place during the Great Tribulation. One rest is up in Heaven, the other is down in Hades’ Paradise—but why are some believers in Heaven and others in Hades during this 3½-year period? Great question.

The believers in Heaven are resurrected moments before the Great Tribulation begins, and the ones in Hades get converted after it begins, and then they die during the 3½-year Great Tribulation, having trusted in Christ too late to participate in the Rapture.

What all these believers have in common is that they each eventually rule on the Earth. Although their physical transformation to resurrection bodies are up to 3½ years apart, both groups get to participate in the Millennium. By contrast, Millennium mortals who are in Christ and die during the Millennium will have to wait until the Second Resurrection (Revelation 20:11-14) to get their resurrection bodies!

Since those who pass through the Great Tribulation are likely to suffer more (they’ll be on Earth during the worst 3½ years of the history of mankind), their rewards very well could be *greater* than the rewards the rest of us get—but that’s for Jesus to decide.

And I saw the [disembodied] souls¹²⁰ of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the Word of God. They had not worshiped the Beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands (Revelation 20:4).

The Wedding Feast of the Lamb¹²¹

22. We will sit at a table in the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

Jesus will be there to serve us, and we will join the patriarchs, the prophets, and all believers from times past!

‘Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the Wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself

¹²⁰ A very important point here is since John saw disembodied souls—not resurrected bodies—we know that these believers are physically dead. Why is that so important? Because we know that there will be 144,000 Jewish evangelists and a great multitude of Gentiles in Heaven (Revelation 7:2-4, 9, 11, 14-15, 17; 14:1-3) at the same time these folks are in Hades. Those Jews and Gentiles obtain resurrection-body glory—why not these?

Why does God rapture a multitude of Jews and Gentiles, and allow others to die? That’s an important question—and one which has just one possible answer: God raptures whom he will. God raptures certain people during the Great Tribulation, but he also chooses others to glorify him through martyrdom. Do you remember what Jesus said to Peter?

Jesus said [to Peter]... ‘when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go.’ Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, ‘Follow me!’

Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved [John] was following them... When Peter saw him, he asked, ‘Lord, what about him?’ Jesus answered, ‘If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me’ (John 21:17-22).

When God raptures believers like the Two Witnesses, Enoch, or Elijah, or even you and me—he does it with a purpose. What is that purpose? To issue a strong testimony to those who are left behind. With that in mind, understand that when God raptures his chosen ones during the Great Tribulation, he is rapturing them strategically. His strategy is to inspire repentance in the hearts of the unbelievers who observe the rapture of Christ’s servants. It’s but another way in which God nudges people towards repentance.

¹²¹ Please do not confuse this event with two other Kingdom banquets: #139 (a Feast for All Peoples) and #186 (the Feast in the Kingdom).

ready... Blessed are those who are invited to the Wedding Supper of the Lamb!' (Revelation 19:7-9)

23. Jesus, our Master, will serve us as we sit at the table!

Be like men who are waiting for their master when he returns from the wedding feast, so that they may immediately open the door to him when he comes and knocks. Blessed are those slaves whom the master will find on the alert when he comes; truly I say to you, that he will gird himself to serve, and have them recline at the table, and will come up and wait on them (Luke 12:36-37; NASB).

24. We will enjoy a Passover meal with Jesus; one that includes the best wine, music, and dancing.

When the hour came, Jesus and his apostles reclined at the table. And he said to them, 'I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you, I will not eat it again until it finds fulfillment in the Kingdom of God.'

After taking the cup, he gave thanks and said, 'Take this and divide it among you. For I tell you I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until the Kingdom of God comes'¹²² (Luke 22:14-18).

... he took a cup, and when he had given thanks, he gave it to them, and they all drank from it. 'This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many,' he said to them. 'Truly I tell you, I will not drink again from the fruit of the vine until that day when I drink it new in the Kingdom of God' (Mark 14:23-25).

... the master of the banquet tasted the water that had been turned into wine. He did not realize where it had come from, though the servants who had drawn the water knew. Then he called the bridegroom aside and said, 'Everyone brings out the choice wine first and then the cheaper wine after the guests have had too much to drink; but you have saved the best till now' (John 2:9-10).

¹²² Jesus is fasting wine until he returns in the Kingdom—but why? Because he desires so much to be with us that he doesn't want to enjoy alcoholic drinks until we're together again.

... the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate (Luke 15:22-25).

25. We will spend some time in Heaven in the dwelling places that Jesus is preparing for us in his Father's Mansion, which must be a Palace like no other.

My Father's house has many rooms; if that were not so, would I have told you that I am going there to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am (John 14:2-3).

Great Tribulation believers get raptured and join us in Heaven

26. Out of the Great Tribulation,¹²³ 144,000 Jews¹²⁴ enter Heaven. When they get there, they sing among the cacophony of worship.

... there before me was the Lamb, standing on Mount Zi-

¹²³ These men get sealed before the Great Tribulation ever begins:

... I saw another angel coming up from the east, having the seal of the Living God. He called out in a loud voice to the four angels who had been given power to harm the land and the sea: 'Do not harm the land or the sea or the trees until we put a seal on the foreheads of the servants of our God.' Then I heard the number of those who were sealed: 144,000 from all the tribes of Israel [12,000 from each tribe] (Revelation 7:2-4).

¹²⁴ We are told that these Jewish men are virgins, blameless, completely honest, and that they are willing to follow Jesus anywhere. So they are our tithe, holy firstfruits, the very best the human race can offer.

These are those who did not defile themselves with women, for they remained virgins. They follow the Lamb wherever he goes. They were purchased from among mankind and offered as firstfruits to God and the Lamb. No lie was found in their mouths; they are blameless (Revelation 14:4-5).

on,¹²⁵ and with him 144,000 who had his name and his Father's name written on their foreheads. And I heard a sound from Heaven like the roar of rushing waters and like a loud peal of thunder. The sound I heard was like that of harpists playing their harps.

And they sang a new song before the Throne and before the four living creatures and the elders. No one could learn the song except the 144,000 who had been redeemed from the Earth¹²⁶ (Revelation 14:1-3).

27. A multitude of Gentile believers are raptured.

... there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the Throne and before the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands...

All the angels were standing around the Throne and around the elders and the four living creatures. They fell down on their faces before the Throne and worshiped God... [the people wearing white robes] are they who have come out of the Great Tribulation...

... they are before the Throne of God¹²⁷ and serve him day and night in his Temple; and He who sits on the Throne will shelter them with his presence... the Lamb at the Center of the Throne will be their Shepherd; he [Jesus] will lead them to springs of living water. And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes' (Revelation 7:9, 11, 14-15, 17).

¹²⁵ That's the Heavenly Mount Zion.

¹²⁶ This expression being *redeemed from the Earth* is another way of saying that they are going to be raptured. When will this occur? It may very well be right before the Antichrist and his henchmen are able to kill them. Everyone who sides with the Antichrist will attempt to silence their testimony. God could also resurrect them as we know he'll do with the Two Witnesses. We're not sure about how these Jews get to Heaven. Every individual case will have different variables at work.

¹²⁷ Because they are before the Throne, they are in Heaven. That means that they did not die during the Great Tribulation, but were raptured while they were still alive, serving Christ.

Three Deceiving Demons

- 28. The Cups of Wrath have been poured out on the Earth. The sixth is that three demons (from the mouth of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet) will perform supernatural signs, inspiring all unbelievers on Earth to conspire against Christ's return.**

And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs coming out of the mouth of the Dragon, out of the mouth of the Beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. For they are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the Earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that Great Day of God Almighty... (Revelation 16:13-14; NKJV)

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the Earth rise up and the rulers band together against Yahweh and against his Anointed [Jesus], saying, 'Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles.' The One enthroned in Heaven [God] laughs; Yahweh scoffs at them (Psalm 2:1-4; LEB).

The Day of Christ's Return: Our Descent

- 29. Jesus will be visible to everyone on Earth when he comes on the clouds.**

... as lightning that comes from the east is visible even in the west, so will be the coming of the Son of Man (Matthew 24:27).

At that time they will see the Son of Man coming in a cloud with power and great glory (Luke 21:27).

... the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the Earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory (Matthew 24:30; LEB).

'I am [the Messiah],' said Jesus. 'And you [the High Priest] will see the Son of Man... coming on the clouds of heaven' (Mark 14:62).

... and then all the tribes of the Earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man arriving on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory... (Matthew 24:30).

And then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven [the sky]... (Matthew 24:30).

30. Jesus will ride down from Heaven on a flying white horse!¹²⁸

I saw Heaven standing open and there before me was a white horse, whose rider is called ‘Faithful and True.’ With justice he judges and wages war... his name is ‘the Word of God’ (Revelation 19:11, 13).

31. We also will fly down on white horses, as we follow Jesus.

The armies of Heaven were following him [the Rider of the white horse], riding on white [flying] horses and dressed in fine linen, white and clean (Revelation 19:13-14).

Then Yahweh my God¹²⁹ will come, and all the holy ones¹³⁰ with him (Zechariah 14:5).

Enoch, the seventh from Adam, prophesied about them: ‘See, the Lord is coming with thousands upon thousands of his holy ones¹³¹ to judge everyone... (Jude 14).

32. Jesus will shoot a lightning-bolt arrow, will blow a trumpet, and will ride down to Earth on southern storm winds.

Yahweh will appear over them,¹³² and his arrow will go forth like lightning; and my Lord Yahweh will blow the trumpet, and he shall go out in the storm winds of the south (Zechariah 9:14; LEB).

¹²⁸ Will it have wings like the mythological horse Pegasus? We don’t know. Will it be riding on a cloud? Apparently, yes. A verse we’ll look at shortly (Zechariah 9:14) says that he’ll be riding on the storm winds of the south.

¹²⁹ This refers to Jesus. Don’t forget that God shares his name with his Son. In Exodus 23:21 God says “... my name is in him.”

¹³⁰ The *holy ones* will accompany Jesus. This term is not used to refer to angels, but to us!

¹³¹ These *holy ones* are going to judge the world, which is not a job for angels, but for us. Indeed, the Bible is very clear that angels are not the judges in the Kingdom, but that God has specifically assigned this task of judging to *us* (1 Corinthians 6:2-3).

¹³² In the context, *them* refers to the Greeks, who were enemies of the Jews at the time. For our purposes, it refers to the intellectual descendants of Greek humanism, the followers of the Antichrist.

33. Angels will descend with Christ and us. In fact, every one¹³³ of the angels will be with Jesus.

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him... (Matthew 25:31)

Bring down your warriors, Lord!¹³⁴ (Joel 3:11)

34. That will be a special day—one which has neither sunlight during the day nor moonlight at night. Meteors will fall and a Divine glow will lighten the night.

With all the events scheduled for that day, we can see why God would make it longer than a standard 24-hour day.¹³⁵

The sun and moon will be darkened, and the stars no longer shine (Joel 3:15).

... immediately after the Tribulation of those days,¹³⁶ ‘the sun

¹³³ Why do so many angels have to be there? Mostly because they are tasked by God with picking all mortal people up and flying them to the Judgment in the Valley of Decision.

¹³⁴ Those *warriors* are not us. We are the *kings and priests*. Since no other Bible passage calls us *warriors*, it's safe to conclude that these are angels.

¹³⁵ It will be a day like Joshua's victory at Gibeon (Joshua 10:11–13)—a day which God extended beyond 24 hours in order to fulfill his will. What are some major things Jesus will accomplish on that very special day?

- Fly down from Heaven with an army of people and innumerable angels.
- Defeat the armies of the Antichrist at Armageddon.
- Fly to Jerusalem with his entourage.
- Split the Mount of Olives in two, forming a large new valley and two giant mountains.
- Make Zion the highest mountain in the world.
- Enter Jerusalem victoriously, taking his Throne.
- Declare peace on Earth.
- Resurrect believers who died during the Great Tribulation.
- Go out to the Valley of Decision.
- Separate the sheep from the goats.
- Execute judgment on all Gentile survivors of the Great Tribulation.

¹³⁶ The Tribulation to which Jesus refers is the *Great* Tribulation (not the First Tribulation, the *birth pangs*). We know this because v. 21 says “at that time there will be Great Tribulation, such as has not happened from the Begin-

will be darkened and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of heaven [space, where the stars are] will be shaken...' (Matthew 24:29)¹³⁷

ning of the World until now, nor ever will happen." Both tribulations will last 3 ½ years, but the Great Tribulation takes place in the final 3 ½ years prior to the return of Christ.

¹³⁷ It's important to note that this event is similar to the 6th seal, but it is not the 6th seal. It's also similar to the 4th Trumpet, but it's not the 4th Trumpet. Try not to confuse this event with others. You'll have to study the Bible carefully and prayerfully to distinguish between certain Last Times events. Here's what the Bible says about the 6th seal in Revelation 6:12-14:

... he opened the sixth seal, and a great earthquake took place, and the sun became black like sackcloth made of hair, and the whole moon became like blood, and the stars of heaven fell to the earth like a fig tree throws down its unripe figs when shaken by a great wind. And the sky was split apart like a scroll that is rolled up, and every mountain and island were moved from their place.

Now, here's what the Bible says about the 4th Trumpet:

The fourth angel sounded his trumpet, and a third of the sun was struck, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars, so that a third of them turned dark. A third of the day was without light, and also a third of the night (Revelation 8:12).

Did you notice that the 6th Seal has the moon turning blood red while the Matthew 24:29 passage says that the moon had no light at all? Did you notice that the 4th Trumpet has a third of the sun and moonlight still shining? These things make the 6th Seal and the 4th Trumpet different events from Matthew 24:29, which is 100% darkness.

Remarkably, Luke 21:25-26 sums up the phenomena of the 6th Seal and the 4th Trumpet:

... there will be signs in the sun and moon and stars, and on the Earth distress of nations in perplexity from the noise of the sea and its surging, people fainting from fear and expectation of what is coming on the inhabited earth, for the powers of the heavens will be shaken.

As it says here, the 6th Seal and the 4th Trumpet are all about God shaking up the cosmic order so that people might realize that the Kingdom is close, and repent of their sins. If you look at them in the light of Matthew 24:29 (and its parallel passage Mark 13:24-26), you'll see that the three passages constitute "telescopic" prophecies (that is, two are closer in time than the other, although they are in line with each other. They occur at different moments on a timeline, although they are similar events).

It shall come to pass in that day [the day of Christ's return] that there will be no light; the lights will diminish. It shall be one day which is known to Yahweh—neither day nor night. But at evening time it shall happen that it will be light¹³⁸ (Zechariah 14:6-7; NKJV).

Armageddon

35. The Antichrist will assemble his military forces to resist our return. Armies from around the world will unite on the Plain of Armageddon.

And they [the three demons who proceed from the mouths of Satan, the Antichrist, and the False Prophet] gathered them [the armies of the world] together to the place called in Hebrew, Armageddon.

Then the seventh angel poured out his bowl [the last Bowl of Wrath] into the air, and a loud voice came out of the Temple of Heaven, from the Throne, saying, 'It is done!' (Revelation 16:16-17; NKJV)

Of vital importance as you interpret the last times in the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, and Luke) is the fact that Luke describes a different event than the one Matthew and Mark describe. Matthew and Mark (in 13:14-23) speak of the Great Tribulation; but Luke, although he utilizes similar wording, describes a different event—the 70 AD destruction of Jerusalem by the Roman General Titus.

... those in Judea must flee to the mountains! The one who is on his housetop must not come down to take things out of his house, and the one who is in the field must not turn back to pick up his cloak. And woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! But pray that your flight may not happen in winter or on a Sabbath (Matthew 24:16-20, LEB).

... those in Judea must flee to the mountains, and those inside it must depart, and those in the fields must not enter into it, because these are days of vengeance, so that all the things that are written can be fulfilled. Woe to those who are pregnant and to those who are nursing their babies in those days! For there will be great distress on the Earth and wrath against this people (Luke 21:21-23; LEB).

Do not interpret these passages as referring to the same event. Surprisingly, they are *not* parallel passages. Try as you might, you *cannot* harmonize them.

¹³⁸ This *evening light* is not starlight or moonlight. It's going to be God's glow, the same one we read about in Genesis 1:1.

Proclaim this among the nations: Prepare for war! Rouse the warriors! Let all the fighting men draw near and attack. Beat your plowshares into swords¹³⁹ and your pruning hooks into spears. Let the weakling say, ‘I am strong!’

Come quickly, all you nations from every side, and assemble there [at the Valley of Jehoshaphat]...¹⁴⁰ Let the nations be roused; let them advance into the Valley of Jehoshaphat... (Joel 3:9-11)

36. We will be safe, since God will defend us.

Yahweh of Hosts will defend them [the armies which are with Jesus]... (Zechariah 9:15; LEB)

37. The enemy will shoot missiles¹⁴¹ at us, but we will easily overcome the missiles.

... they [Jesus’ people, like a flock, v. 16] will devour and subdue the slingstones (Zechariah 9:15; LEB).

38. The soldiers who have come to fight against Jesus will feel their bodies rotting right there on the spot, causing them to panic and attack one another. Their animals will be struck with the same plague.

¹³⁹ This phrase denotes that these fighters do the contrary of what Jesus does. When our Lord initiates his Kingdom rule on the Earth, he’ll have all people ‘beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks’ (Isaiah 2:4 and Micah 4:3).

¹⁴⁰ The location of this valley is never specifically described for us in the Bible. Numerous commentators (based on Jewish traditions) say that it’s the Kidron Valley, right next to Jerusalem. However, it couldn’t be the Kidron Valley that exists today. It would be impossible for the nations to march into today’s tiny Kidron Valley—unless, of course, it’s transformed into a giant valley! But isn’t that exactly what is going to happen when the highest mountain on Earth becomes the one on which Jerusalem is built?

¹⁴¹ The *Pulpit Commentary* says of this verse: “... it may signify simply and without metaphor that they [the armies] shall despise the enemies’ missiles, which shall fall harmless among them” and the *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Commentary* states that the meaning is to “contemptuously trample on the hostile missiles which shall fall harmless under their [the armies’] feet.”

This is the plague with which the Lord will strike all the nations that fought against Jerusalem: Their flesh will rot while they are still standing on their feet, their eyes will rot in their sockets, and their tongues will rot in their mouths.

On that day people will be stricken by the Lord with great panic. They will seize each other by the hand and attack one another...

A similar plague will strike the horses and mules, the camels and donkeys, and all the animals in those camps... (Zachariah 14:12-13, 15)

39. A lofty angel (standing in view of the sun) will shout loudly, summoning birds flying around that they might eat the corpses of those who have assembled to fight against Jesus and his Kingdom.

... I saw an angel standing in the sun, who cried in a loud voice to all the birds flying in midair, ‘Come, gather together for the Great Supper of God, so that you may eat the flesh of kings, generals, and the mighty, of horses and their riders...’ (Revelation 19:17-18).

40. We will witness the capture of the Antichrist and Jesus’ defeat of enemy armies at the Battle of Armageddon—as Jesus wields his sword.

These [ten kings who support the Antichrist] will wage war against the Lamb, and the Lamb will overcome them,¹⁴² because he is Lord of Lords and King of Kings, and those who are with him are the called, and chosen, and faithful¹⁴³ (Revelation 17:14).

Then I saw the Beast [the Antichrist] and the kings of the Earth and their armies gathered together to wage war against the Rider on the horse [Jesus] and his army [the angels]. But the Beast was captured, and... The rest were killed with the sword coming out of the mouth of the Rider on the horse... (Revelation 19:19-21).

¹⁴² To be sure, Jesus is the one who wins this battle. No passage in Scripture indicates that we participate in any sort of fighting.

¹⁴³ Although angels are there, the ones who are with Jesus, the ones called the *called and chosen and faithful*—are us!

I will gather all the nations against Jerusalem to battle... Then Yahweh¹⁴⁴ will go forth and fight against those nations, like when he fights on a day of battle (Zechariah 14:2-3; LEB).

41. The Antichrist and the False Prophet will be cast alive into the Lake of Fire¹⁴⁵—the place where they will be tormented forever.

... the Beast was captured, and... thrown alive into the Fiery Lake of burning sulfur (Revelation 19:19-21).

... the Lake of Burning Sulfur, where the Beast and the False Prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever (Revelation 20:9-10).

¹⁴⁴ That is, Jesus (who, as you know, is often referred to as *Yahweh* in the Bible).

¹⁴⁵ This is the first time this lake is mentioned in the Bible. It's much worse than the burning heat and fire of Hades, which in Luke 16:23-24 is described as *agony* and *torment*:

... In Hades, where he [the rich man] was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to tip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.'

The Lake of Fire couldn't be *inside* the Earth, because that's where Hades is, and Hades ultimately will be cast into the Lake of Fire (Revelation 20:14-15). So where will it be? To figure out the answer to that question, we first need to understand what goes on there.

The Lake of Fire is a place of *eternal torment* (Revelation 20:9)—the people who go there will suffer burn pains produced by hot sulfur, and will have to endure its wretched stench forever. They won't lose consciousness—but will feel the pain. They'll continue breathing, feeling, and grieving. They will have resurrection bodies—bodies with each of the five senses, bodies that hunger and thirst, bodies that do not age, and (although they certainly will wish it)—their bodies will never die.

The Lake of Fire is likely located on a planet in some distant corner of the universe—a place that must have enough oxygen in the air for people to breathe—yes, resurrected people breathe! It would have to have lots of sulfur and heat too because this lake is called *the Fiery Lake* and it is said to consist of burning sulfur. Furthermore, it is a place with day and night, so it's a place that rotates around a sun, getting sunlight as well as darkness. If someone can be thrown there, it's because it has gravity, which is another reason why it's likely a planet.

42. Scavenging birds will descend on the dead bodies of those who came to battle against Christ.

... and all the birds gorged themselves on their flesh (Revelation 19:21).

Satan Bound

43. A powerful angel will descend from Heaven, will capture the Devil, bind him with a chain, and hurl him into the Abyss. He will then lock the Devil in for 1000 years.¹⁴⁶

And I saw an angel coming down out of Heaven, having the key to the Abyss and holding in his hand a great chain. He seized the Dragon, that Ancient Serpent, who is the Devil, or Satan, and bound him for a thousand years.

He threw him into the Abyss, and locked and sealed it over him, to keep him from deceiving the nations anymore until the thousand years were ended (Revelation 20:1-3).



¹⁴⁶ This has to happen after the Antichrist is cast into the Lake of Fire—why? Because Satan indwells the Antichrist until the Antichrist is finished. He actually possesses the Antichrist. Once the body of the Antichrist is dead, Satan is free to seek another person to corrupt, but he can't find anyone greater in the world than the Antichrist. That's why Satan will quickly be captured by this angel.

His imprisonment in the Abyss marks the beginning of 1000 years of freedom for us. Satan's deceiving influence will cease on Earth. We will be able to minister to people freely, without Satan's controlling the World and influencing human thought.

Notes: