

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption,  
and this mortal must put on immortality."

-1 Corinthians 15:53



# immortal

THE TRUTH ABOUT HEAVEN, HELL, AND THE RESURRECTION

LEX B. MEYER

# MEYER

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## Dedication

This book is dedicated to those who will be part of the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Messiah, and shall reign with Him a thousand years.



# CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	VII
PREFACE.....	IX
<b><i>LIFE.....</i></b>	<b>3</b>
LIVING SOUL.....	3
SPIRIT OF LIFE.....	11
LIFE BLOOD.....	19
GREEK INFLUENCE.....	23
<b><i>DEATH.....</i></b>	<b>31</b>
COMMON ENEMY.....	31
I'M MORTAL.....	35
THE GRAVE.....	41
HELL CONFUSION.....	47
ONLY SLEEPING.....	57
IN HEAVEN.....	63
COMFORT IN MOURNING.....	71
FEAR OF DEATH.....	73
<b><i>RESURRECTION.....</i></b>	<b>81</b>
A FOUNDATIONAL BELIEF.....	83
BAPTISM.....	87
THE GOD OF THE LIVING.....	97
THE GATES OF SHEOL.....	101
DISTINCTIVE DOCTRINE.....	105
BORN AGAIN.....	109
FIRST FRUITS.....	115
THE HARVEST.....	119
IMMORTAL.....	125
THE GOSPEL.....	131
<b><i>THE KINGDOM.....</i></b>	<b>139</b>
A HOLY NATION.....	141
GREAT FAITH.....	145
PARABLES.....	149

## MEYER

LEAST AND GREATEST.....	153
THY KINGDOM COME.....	157
ENTER THE KINGDOM.....	163
CONSTITUTION OF THE KINGDOM.....	169
MILLENNIAL KINGDOM.....	173
THE REBELLION.....	179
GREAT WHITE THRONE.....	183
THE WORLD TO COME.....	191
<b>QUESTIONS.....</b>	<b>197</b>
ELIJAH IN HEAVEN.....	199
THE TRANSFIGURATION.....	207
ABRAHAM'S BOSOM.....	213
THIEF ON THE CROSS.....	219
ENOCH.....	223
ABSENT FROM THE BODY.....	229
ETERNAL FIRE.....	233
RESURRECTED SAINTS.....	235
UNDER THE ALTAR.....	239
THE RAPTURE.....	243
PURGATORY.....	253
WITCH OF ENDOR.....	257
NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES.....	267
FINAL WORDS.....	271

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To my Uncle Randy and Papa Ron, you were instrumental in my study on this topic. I miss you, and look forward to seeing you both at the resurrection.

To my Dad, Michael E. Meyer, I love you and miss you, and I look forward to seeing you again when Messiah returns.





## Preface

There have been many books written on the subject of life after death, most of which take a subjective approach, speaking about things such as out-of-body and near-death experiences. In a number of these books, the author(s) even claim to have personally visited heaven or hell (or both) and returned to tell about it. This is not one of those books.

This book is a Theological dissertation on the subject of eternal life, and its purpose is to highlight the Biblical perspectives about heaven, hell, and the resurrection. I cite several historical sources in addition to an abundance of Scriptural references which all support my thesis. I will also show that believers in the first century did not share the popular beliefs we see today concerning life after death.

My greatest desire in writing this book is to reveal the truth about what the Bible teaches concerning eternal life and the resurrection of the dead. It is my pleasure to share with you the power of the resurrection, and I hope it transforms your life as it has my own.

In this book, I will be referring to Jesus by His Hebrew name, Yeshua, except in places where I am quoting other sources.

This second edition has been edited and reformatted for easier readability, and has been expanded upon, revised, and updated for more depth and clarity. We hope you will enjoy this second edition of Immortal even more than the first.

MEYER

"And the LORD God formed man of  
the dust of the ground, and breathed  
into his nostrils the breath of life; and  
**man became a living soul."**

(Genesis 2:7 KJV)

MEYER

*Section 1*

# LIFE

## Living Soul

Popular ideas about life after death center around the concept that a person's identity, consciousness, or soul continues to exist after the death of their body. This idea has been very popular throughout history, especially among Egyptian theology and Greek philosophy. Most religious and philosophical views about the afterlife suggest that it takes place in a spiritual realm, not a physical one. But what does the Bible have to say about life after death?

To get a correct biblical understanding about life and death, we need to start in the beginning. I am convinced that our understanding of the events in Genesis shape our understanding about everything else that follows. If we neglect the foundation of Genesis, then we will have difficulty understanding everything else.

Genesis means "beginning", and it was given to us as a foundation for our faith. The first few chapters of Genesis explain the origin of life, the cause of death, and the need

for salvation.

We need to know how life began, so we can better understand how life ends. Look at how the Bible describes the creation of man:

“And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being [nephesh].” - Genesis 2:7

The Hebrew word “nephesh” translated above as “*living being*” can also be translated as “soul”, which is how the King James Version translates it.

*The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words* defines nephesh as “*a breathing creature*”, and it goes on to describe it as any appetite, beast, body, creature, desire, life, lust, man, mind, mortality, person, pleasure, or self. The basic idea is that a nephesh is a body with the breath of life, but it also refers to the natural desires of that body.

We are familiar with this usage of the word soul in phrases like, “*there was not a soul in the place*”, indicating that not a single person was there. Another familiar phrase is, “*I won't tell a soul*”, indicating that you won't tell anyone. We also use phrases like, “*I am bearing my soul to you*”, indicating that you are sharing your deepest desires and innermost thoughts to someone.

The previously mentioned verse in Genesis describes the creation of Adam, and it was universally agreed upon by the early Church Fathers that the soul of Adam was directly created by God. However, there have been some disagreements about the origin of souls that were born after Adam. There are three main theories about the origin of the

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<sup>i</sup> Strong, J. (1996). *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

# Immortal

soul: creationism, Traducianism, and pre-existence.

Creationism teaches that God creates a soul for each body at conception. This means that every time an embryo is formed in a womb, God actively creates a soul and breathes life into the person. Creationism seems to have been the predominant belief in Eastern Christianity, while Traducianism was more dominant in the West.

Traducianism teaches that a person's soul is derived from the souls of his or her parents. This teaching is based on the idea that Adam's soul was created directly by God, then Eve's soul was brought forth out from Adam, and when Adam and Eve conceived Cain and Abel, their souls were derived from the combination of Adam and Eve. This theory seems to help explain the transmission of original sin.

Both creationism and Traducianism explain that the individual human soul comes into existence at conception. However, the pre-existence theory teaches that every individual soul existed before conception, and enters the body sometime before birth. Some adherents to this theory believe the soul is also eternal.

It is important to note that Greek Philosophy, Hinduism, and Mormonism all affirm the pre-existence of the soul, while it has been commonly denied in both Christianity and Judaism throughout history.

Hindus and Mormons also believe in the immortality of the soul, not just pre-existence but the eternal existence of the soul. According to this theory, every person has always existed eternally with God or as a god. (I bring this up to show the difference between the Bible and other religions.)

According to Hinduism, Krishna said, *"Never was there a time when I did not exist, nor you, nor all these kings; nor in*

## MEYER

*the future shall any of us cease to be.”<sup>i</sup>*

The idea that we have an immortal soul plays well into the Hindu belief in reincarnation. They believe that every person continues on an endless cycle of death and rebirth until they reach the final point of liberation. They desire to end the cycle, and cease to exist. To them, salvation is the end of life, but for those who believe the Bible, salvation is the gift of eternal life.

Similar to Hinduism, the Mormon Doctrine and Covenants states, *“Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.”<sup>ii</sup>*

Mormons believe that we are co-eternal with God, and that our soul has always existed with God. If we are immortal beings that have always existed eternally, then we were not created. When you say that humans have an immortal soul, you are essentially saying that we are gods. This doctrine is completely unbiblical, and has no place in Christian thought. The Bible plainly tells us that only God is immortal.

“...He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords, **who alone has immortality**, dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.” - 1 Timothy 6:15, 16

This is why it is so important for us to understand the Biblical account of creation. The Bible tells us that man was created and that he *“became a living soul”*. We did not exist eternally in an incorporeal state before putting on flesh, to

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<sup>i</sup> Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada, A. (2001). Bhagavad-gita As It Is, Deluxe. Los Angeles, CA: Bhaktivedanta Book Trust.

<sup>ii</sup> The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. (2013). The Book of Mormon, Doctrine and Covenants, and Pearl of Great Price. Salt Lake City, UT: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.



# Immortal

live a short earthly existence and later return to life without a body. The Bible tells us that we were created with a body and we did not exist before the formation of our flesh.

By saying we have an immortal soul, we are robbing Yeshua of his glory and exalting ourselves as equals with Christ! He is the only pre-existent soul to put on flesh, we were created in flesh, but He descended from heaven and put on flesh and dwelt among us. This is one of the glorious mysteries about the nature of the Messiah, and by claiming that we share in his pre-existence, we diminish Him. Listen to what Paul said about the nature of the Messiah.

“...who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation, taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that 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 that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.” - Philippians 2:6-11

Mormons have no problem with the idea of an immortal soul because they consider themselves to be co-eternal with Christ. Their theology leads them to believe that they can be gods too someday. However, if we take seriously the Biblical account of creation, then we cannot conclude that we are anything more than created beings.

It is also important to note that humans are not the only creation the Bible calls “nephesh”. Several verses in Genesis refer to the creation of other creatures and specifically use the word nephesh to describe them.

## MEYER

“Then God said, ‘Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures [nephesh], and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens’ So God created great sea creatures and every living thing [nephesh] that moves, with which the waters abounded, according to their kind, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good”  
- Genesis 1:20-21

“Then God said, ‘Let the earth bring forth the living creature [nephesh] according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind” - Genesis 1:24

“Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life [nephesh], I have given every green herb for food.”  
- Genesis 1:30

“Out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the air, and brought them to Adam to see what he would call them. And whatever Adam called each living creature [nephesh], that was its name.” - Genesis 2:19

Many people mistakenly teach that only humans have a soul and that animals do not, but according to the Bible everything that has the breath of life is a living soul. Simply put, a soul is a living creature. This stands in contrast with inanimate objects such as rocks or plants that were not given the breath of life. In fact, according to Genesis, even reptiles and insects are living souls. This not only helps us to better understand what a soul is but also what it is not. Specifically, that a soul is not unique to human beings.

Some people find it difficult to grasp the idea that every living thing is a soul because their current understanding of the word “soul” prevents them from seeing it.

## immortal

We all have a specific lens of interpretation that we use when reading the Scriptures. It could be a denominational bias or a particular philosophy we hold that distorts our understanding of certain Biblical truths. Whatever it might be each person needs to learn for themselves how to remove these blinders and read the Bible with fresh eyes, letting the Bible interpret and explain itself.

MEYER

## Spirit of Life

Now, we need to look at the difference between soul and spirit. God created Adam by forming a body and breathing the breath of life into him, and he became a living soul.

Similarly, in the account of the great flood, the Bible says, “*the breath of the spirit of life*” (Genesis 7:22) was in all living creatures. This presents the idea that the *spirit of life* is a wind or a breath from God, and all living creatures have this same *spirit of life* within them.

The Hebrew word “ruach” is typically translated “spirit” or “ghost” and is connected to both “wind” and “breath”. So when it mentions *the breath of the spirit*, it is giving us a better grasp of what God did when He gave us life. The spirit of life is what gives us breath.

The Bible directly equates the spirit of God with breath when it says:

“All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils.” - Job 27:3 (KJV)

To put it another way, the spirit (or breath) is what sustains life. Thus, when the spirit is gone, we cease to live. That is actually what the phrase “*give up the ghost*” means. It means we no longer have the spirit or breath of life in us.

Breathing is absolutely the most vital process in all living organisms. After just a minute or two without oxygen most people will lose consciousness, and after about three or four minutes brain cells begin to die, after ten minutes the person is likely to develop serious and irreversible brain damage, and after fifteen minutes it is nearly impossible to survive.

## MEYER

“The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.” - Job 33:4

Some people incorrectly conclude that life begins at birth because that is when a baby takes its first breath. However, even an unborn baby exchanges oxygen with its mother through the placenta and umbilical cord. That is how the spirit of life is passed on to us through our parents. This happens during conception as the baby is formed in its mother's womb.

The umbilical cord acts as a life transfer to the child. As the baby grows and develops, it receives oxygen, nutrition, and life from its mother.

Adam was the only person to receive the spirit of life directly from God, and Eve received the spirit from him when God formed her out of his side. The prophet Malachi explains she received a remnant of the spirit from Adam.

"But did He not make them one, having a remnant of the Spirit? And why one? He seeks godly offspring..."  
- Malachi 2:15

Later, when Eve conceived, she passed the spirit along to her children, and they passed it along to their children. This means the same spirit of life that was breathed into Adam has been passed down to each person ever since.

There is often confusion about the difference between soul and spirit, but the Bible provides us with a clear distinction. We are a soul, but we have a spirit. The spirit is the unseen power that gives us life, which is why the Bible equates the spirit with wind and breath.

We can also see a distinction being made between soul and spirit when we look at the Biblical account of Yeshua's

death.

“So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, ‘it is finished!’ And bowing His head, **He gave up His spirit.**”  
- John 19:30

The phrase, “*He gave up His spirit*” is the same as saying His life energy left Him, or the breath of life departed. Man became a living being when his body received the breath of life, but when a man dies the opposite takes place. Our breath returns to God and our body returns to the dust.

“Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.” - Ecclesiastes 12:7

This is the exact opposite and undoing of what happened at creation. The same thing happens to everyone at death. There is no special preference for believers. An atheist experiences the same fate as a believer, his body returns to dust and his spirit returns to God.

In fact, that phrase is given as a warning for us to “remember your Creator” (Ecclesiastes 12:6) because “*the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.*” (Ecclesiastes 12:7) Remember your creator because you will be disassembled and undone. Life is the bringing of spirit and body together, and death is their separation.

Some people cite the phrase, “*the spirit will return to God who gave it*” as a reference to us ascending into heaven in spiritual form when we die. However, that would mean everyone goes to heaven at death (not just believers).

If we take an honest look at the context of this verse, it becomes clear that the spirit, which returns to God, is a reference to the *breath of life* leaving the body. Compare the

## MEYER

creation of man in Genesis with the death of man in Ecclesiastes, and notice how they mirror one another.

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being." - Genesis 2:7

"Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it." - Ecclesiastes 12:7

This is not describing a spirit being that escapes the body and ascends to heaven; it is portraying the undoing of life. Notice the dust returns to the earth "*as it was*" and the spirit returns to God "*who gave it*". The spirit is a gift from God that does not belong to us, we are simply borrowing it.

This is also what John described when he wrote that Yeshua "*gave up His spirit*". His spirit returned to God, but He did not ascend to heaven at that moment. The phrase "*He gave up His spirit*" is an intransitive idiomatic expression that is used figuratively about the act of dying, and is equal to saying, "*he drew his last breath*". Other similar phrases include, "*he bit the dust*", "*he cashed in his chips*", "*he kicked the bucket*", "*he checked out*", "*he met his maker*", and "*he reached the end of the road*". These idiomatic phrases are not meant to be taken literally but are used figuratively to convey the idea that a person has died.

We know the phrase; "*he kicked the bucket*" does not mean he literally kicked a physical bucket because we understand that idiom as a reference to death. However, someone who is not familiar with the expression might be very confused at such a phrase. Likewise, the Hebrew and Greek languages have similar idioms that might be difficult for us to understand if we are not familiar with their language, culture, and context.



## Immortal

In the phrase “*He gave up His spirit*”, the Greek word “pneuma” used here is equivalent to the Hebrew word “ruach”. Sometimes it refers to the breath of life that God gives everyone, and other times it is used in reference to the Holy Spirit. However, in this particular case, “pneuma” is referring to the breath of life.

Some have tried to argue that when He gave up His spirit, He was at that moment ascending to heaven in spiritual form. However, we know that Yeshua did not ascend to heaven at that time, because after His resurrection He told Mary that He had not yet ascended.

**"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'"** - John 20:17

Three days after giving up His spirit, He confessed that He had not yet gone to heaven, therefore, we cannot conclude that the spirit which returned to God was in any way Yeshua ascending to heaven.

To say that Yeshua went to heaven the day He died negates the purpose of His death and devalues the importance of His resurrection. In fact, many important doctrines and creeds contain the confession that He died and was in the grave for three days before He resurrected.

It is important to understand that when Yeshua died, He was completely dead and remained in the grave for three days. If He was alive outside of His body, then there was no need for a resurrection. The same is true for us; if we could live without a body there would be no need for a resurrection. Likewise, there would also be no need for us to have a physical body at all if we could simply live as disembodied souls or spirits.

## MEYER

The thing that is so unique and amazing about Yeshua's death is that He resurrected! He conquered death by living again. His resurrection is why we confess that we serve a risen savior who has an endless life. His death would have been for nothing had He not risen from the dead.

Many people hold to a false Gnostic belief that *eternal life* begins at death when our soul (or spirit) goes to heaven. If that were the case, there would be no reason for Yeshua to have a bodily resurrection. If physical death is the liberation of our spirit unto eternal life, then resurrection has no purpose or meaning whatsoever. Yet, when we understand the Biblical definition of life, we realize that without the resurrection there is no such thing as "*life after death*".

There is a similar story in the book of Acts about Stephen giving up his spirit when he was being stoned to death and he said, "*Lord Jesus receive my spirit*" (Acts 7:59) right before he died. Stephen did not believe he was about to take spiritual form and ascend into heaven, he simply knew that his life was about to end. Notice that he did not say, "*Lord Jesus receive me into heaven*" because he was simply releasing his spirit back to God who gave it.

As I previously stated, the spirit is the unseen power that animates a body, and a soul is a living creature that has been energized by that spirit. The three (body, soul, and spirit) are nearly inseparable in life, and only find true distinction at death. A body without a spirit is not a soul, because it has no life. That is why a dead body is referred to as a corpse.

"And the king of Ai he hanged on a tree until evening. And as soon as the sun was down, Joshua commanded that they should take his corpse [nebelah] down from the tree, cast it at the entrance of the gate of the city, and raise

# immortal

over it a great heap of stones that remains to this day."  
- Joshua 8:29

The Hebrew word “nebelah” means a carcass or corpse, and refers to a dead body. It is the word used for a body that does not contain the spirit of life. This is an obvious contrast to the word “nephesh”, which means a living soul.

Without a proper understanding of life and death, we will have difficulty understanding the gift of eternal life that God gives us through Yeshua our Messiah. We are mortals, we live and we die, and this life is all we have unless we are given the gift of eternal life through the resurrection of the dead.

MEYER

## Life Blood

As we have already discussed, a soul is a person, being, or creature that has the breath of life. The Bible also tells us that the *life or soul of a creature is in the blood*, and for this reason, we are commanded not to eat the blood of any animal.

"And whatever man of the house of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who eats any blood, I will set My face against that person who eats blood, and will cut him off from among his people. **For the life of the flesh is in the blood**, and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls; for **it is the blood that makes atonement for the soul**. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'No one among you shall eat blood, nor shall any stranger who dwells among you eat blood.' Whatever man of the children of Israel, or of the strangers who dwell among you, who hunts and catches any animal or bird that may be eaten, he shall pour out its blood and cover it with dust; for it is the life of all flesh. Its blood sustains its life. Therefore I said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not eat the blood of any flesh, for the life of all flesh is its blood. Whoever eats it shall be cut off.'" - Leviticus 17:10-14

It is the blood that makes atonement for the soul, which is why Yeshua shed His blood for us. The Bible says, "*we have redemption through His blood*." (Ephesians 1:7) The blood of our Messiah is a "precious" (1 Peter 1:19) thing, and we must never forget how important it is for our atonement, because "*without shedding of blood there is no remission*." (Hebrews 9:22)

Unfortunately, some preachers refuse to talk about the blood, fearing that it might offend people. Others do not think the blood is essential, and even claim that His death is

## MEYER

not what saves us. In doing this, they are trivializing one of the most important events in human history, and the Bible says they have *“trampled the Son of God underfoot”*.

"Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, **counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing**, and insulted the Spirit of grace?" - Hebrews 10:29

Most believers are aware of the fact that His blood was shed for our sins, and that by His death we are able to have redemption, but many do not understand why this is so significant. As with many doctrines, these things have become a regular part of the language we use to speak about our faith, but often they are said without fully realizing their significance.

The Bible commands us not to eat the blood of any animal because it contains the life of that animal. Yet, our Messiah said, *“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”* (John 6:45) He went on to say, *“unless you eat the flesh of the Son of Man and drink His blood, you have no life in you.”* (John 6:53) Obviously, He was not expecting us to become cannibals, but He was saying that we need to have His life inside of us.

So, how can we eat His flesh and drink His blood? If we look at the last supper, we find that not only does He tell us what He meant, but He also explained its significance.

"And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to the disciples and said, 'Take, eat; **this is My body**.' Then He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, 'Drink from it, all of you. For **this is My blood** of the new covenant, which is shed for many for the remission of sins.'" - Matthew 26:26-28

# immortal

He was explaining that His blood must be poured out for us to have life, and when He said that we must eat His flesh and drink His blood, He was alluding to the Passover covenant meal He ate with His disciples just before He died. We are likewise instructed to participate in this covenant meal, receiving the body and blood of our Messiah, and proclaiming that He died for our sins.

"For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes."  
- 1 Corinthians 11:26

The most Christian thing we can do is celebrate Passover! Every time we eat the unleavened bread and drink the wine, we are reminded of the blood He shed for our sins. This is why Paul encourages us to "*keep the feast*".

"Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. **For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast**, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." - 1 Corinthians 5:7-8

I want to encourage you to keep the Feast of Passover in remembrance of the sacrifice of Yeshua, the Lamb of God. However, more than that, I want to encourage you to feed on Yeshua, letting Him be your life-sustaining food source. We must be people who hunger and thirst for righteousness, seeking to be fed by the only one who can give us life.

"And Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.'" - John 6:35

MEYER



## Greek Influence

If the Bible never mentions an immortal soul or life outside the body, then where do these ideas come from and why are they so popular in Christian thought? It might surprise you to learn that the Greek philosopher, Plato, had more influence on this line of thinking than anyone else.

“For we are influenced always more or less by the Greek, Platonic idea, that the body dies, yet the soul is immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness, and is nowhere found in the Old Testament.”<sup>i</sup>

For the Greeks, bodily life was a temporary delay on their road to disembodied bliss. The only thing they valued about this life was knowledge, which they saw as the goal and purpose of life.

The Greeks believed the body hindered the soul, and they looked forward to the time when the soul would be freed from its shackles. They believed the soul was immortal but trapped in a mortal body, and they looked forward to the day when their soul would be set free from its earthly body.

This idea is quite different from the Hebrew understanding about life being a gift from God. The creation is not something to escape, it is a blessing that we should delight in. We should not be seeking to escape, but rather, rejoicing in the life we have been given.

Sadly, the Biblical understanding of these things has been forgotten and replaced with Greek philosophy.

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<sup>i</sup> Orr, J., Nuelsen, J. L., & Mullins, E. Y. (1960). The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

## MEYER

“Unlike the Greeks, who largely understood a person as a soul entrapped in a body, the ancient Hebrews depicted the person as a psychosomatic (body-soul) unity. When this body-soul union failed in death, the Hebrews did not visualize the escape of the soul from the body, but the actual death of the self.”<sup>i</sup>

Greek philosophy has led believers away from Biblical truth, and I believe this type of Platonic thinking has also led people to devalue life on earth. Many people have the attitude that they are just passing time, waiting for the moment they get to go to heaven. They see this life as a hindrance to their “real life” they imagine will take place when their body releases their soul to heaven.

Traditional teachings about the afterlife are based on the belief that everyone has an immortal soul, and that soul must go somewhere when its body dies. This concept of an incorporeal and immortal soul is an ancient belief embraced by many Pagan religions and is not at all Biblical.

“The belief in a continuous life of the soul, which underlies primitive Ancestor Worship and the rites of necromancy, practiced also in ancient Israel, was discouraged and suppressed by prophet and lawgiver as antagonistic to the belief in Yhwh, the God of life... As a matter of fact, eternal life was ascribed exclusively to God and to celestial beings who “eat of the tree of life and live forever”, whereas man by being driven out of the Garden of Eden was deprived of the opportunity of eating the food of immortality”<sup>ii</sup>

The idea that we have an immortal soul goes against the very foundations of the Bible. The Book of Genesis says that we were denied immortality because of sin, and the curse of sin is death. But the enemy continues to deceive

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, T. C. (1991). *Holman Bible Dictionary*. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Singer, I., & Adler, C. (1901). *The Jewish Encyclopedia*. New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls.

## Immortal

people, by telling them, “*You will not surely die... you will be like God.*” (Genesis 3:4,5)

“The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith, and is accordingly nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture.”<sup>i</sup>

The belief that we have an immortal soul was not taught by the first-century apostles and was brought into Christian thought at a much later date.

This “*immortal soul*” concept is harmful to proper Biblical understanding and has given rise to a number of heresies over the centuries. One particular heresy, known as Gnosticism, placed tremendous weight in the immortality of the soul.

Probably the most well known Gnostic in Church History was the heretic, Marcion. He believed in a dualism between body and soul, and that humans were bound to their evil physical bodies and could only escape by gaining knowledge.

Gnostic dualism led him to conclude that there are two coexisting gods. He thought the God of Creation to be an evil being, and the created world an evil place we must escape. Marcion taught that Yeshua was the good God who came to earth to redeem mankind from the evil physical creation of the God of the Old Testament.

In other words, Marcion believed Yeshua came to ransom human souls from the evil created world of matter.

Marcion’s influence was significant enough that his teachings were opposed in the writings of many church

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<sup>i</sup> Singer, I., & Adler, C. (1901). The Jewish Encyclopedia. New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls.

## MEYER

fathers including Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Clement of Alexandria, Tertullian and others. Despite this opposition, Marcionite churches spread throughout the Roman empire and persevered until the fourth century. Unfortunately, some of Marcion's teachings have survived even unto present-day.

One third-century theologian named Origen believed that each human soul was created prior to conception, and he theorized that human souls were pre-existent in heaven before the creation of the world (similar to Mormon beliefs).

The thirteenth-century Catholic theologian, Thomas Aquinas, taught that human souls are immortal. He postulated that the soul does not rely on bodily organs and therefore could exist without a body. Since he believed a soul is a form that does not consist of matter, he concluded that it cannot be destroyed by any natural process, and is independent of the body.

“But the human soul always remains a substance capable of subsisting of itself apart from the body, although the operations of its lower faculties would then necessarily be suspended. Because of its intrinsic substantial union with the material of the organism, the two principles result in one substantial being. But since it is a spiritual being retaining spiritual activities, intrinsically independent of the body, it is, as St. Thomas says, *non totaliter immersa*, not entirely submerged in matter, as are the actuating forms of the animal and the plant.”<sup>i</sup>

The Roman Catholic church has long held to the belief in the immortal soul, and they claim the idea of having a mortal soul is heresy. They are denying the word of God which says, “*the soul who sins shall die.*” (Ezekiel 18:20) They are actually in agreement with the serpent who said, “*you will*

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<sup>i</sup> Herbermann, C. G. (1912). The Catholic Encyclopedia. New York, NY: The Encyclopedia Press.

# Immortal

*not surely die.*” (Genesis 3:4)

This was one of the points of contention between the Catholic church and the Protestant reformers. Among the reformation leaders who taught against the immortality of the soul, John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, and Martin Luther are most notable. They opposed the Catholic doctrines of the immortal soul, purgatory, and saint worship, teaching that at death the soul sleeps until the resurrection.

Luther described the pope’s declaration about the immortal soul as being among the “*endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill.*”<sup>i</sup> Which demonstrates his disgust at such a belief among Christians.

The belief in our own mortality is foundational in the Bible and vital to our understanding of the power and significance of the gospel message. We are mortal and will all face death, but thanks to our Messiah, we have the hope of eternal life.

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<sup>i</sup> Martin Luther, Assertio Omnium Articulorum M. Lutheri per Bullam Leonis X. Novissimam Damnatorum (Assertion of all the articles of M. Luther condemned by the latest Bull of Leo X)

MEYER

“What man can live and not see death?  
Can he deliver his life from the power  
of the grave? Selah”  
(Psalm 89:48)

MEYER



*Section 2*

# DEATH

## Common Enemy

Death is an event that touches every living creature because we all die eventually. It can be a difficult subject to deal with, especially when we have experienced the death of a loved one. No one expects to live forever, because we are all aware of our own mortality.

“For **the living know that they will die**; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten.” - Ecclesiastes 9:5

There are many enemies that we might encounter in our lives, including, but not limited to famine, sickness, poverty, abuse, or various handicaps. While the possibility exists that we might face any of those events, it is very unlikely that one person will experience all of those tragedies personally. Sickness will affect most people, yet we do not all experience the same type of sickness. Poverty affects a large number of people, yet many will never know what it is to be poor. The only enemy that affects every single person

## MEYER

is death because “*it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment.*” (Hebrews 9:27)

Death does not discriminate or show favoritism, and it does not care who it hurts. Death is never convenient, and although we all know it is coming, we are almost never prepared for it. There is no way to escape death.

“In fact, because of the Hebrews' love of life and conviction that Yahweh was the Author of life, death and Sheol always represented either a potential or actual threat.”<sup>i</sup>

The Bible tells us that death will be the last enemy to be destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26). This is our great hope, that death will be defeated, and this hope is central to the gospel message. When we realize that death is an enemy, the gospel is much more significant to our lives.

Some people hold to the misguided belief that our soul (or spirit) continues to live after our body dies, however, death is defined as the end of life, not the continuation of it. There is a popular phrase that states, “*death is only the beginning*”, but this is a very irrational and untrue statement since death is by definition the end of life.

To say that life begins (or continues) at death is a denial that death is an enemy. To those who hold this belief, death might even be seen as a friend who brings comfort and relief from this bodily life. However, this idea is completely contrary to what the Bible teaches.

People have often searched for ways to cheat death and live forever, but only one person has ever truly defeated death, and only through Him are we able to escape this great enemy. Yeshua triumphed victoriously over death in

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, T. C. (1991). Holman Bible Dictionary. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

## immortal

the resurrection, showing that He truly has power over both life and death.

Paul explains that it *“has now been revealed by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.”* (2 Timothy 1:10) Conquering death is part of the gospel since we cannot have eternal life until death is destroyed.

Talking about death can be disheartening, so I want to reassure you that we have hope for eternal life. We have been promised that death will be defeated, and we will have the opportunity to live again. So, keep that in mind as we dive into the realm of death.

MEYER

## I'm mortal

Have you ever wondered why we grow old, why we get sick, and why we die? Ancient mythology is filled with stories about man's quest for the fountain of youth. Humans are constantly trying to extend our lifespan. The medical field is constantly improving and finding ways to save lives and heal sickness, yet death remains inevitable.

In our generation, cancer seems to be the number one killer, and people are constantly looking for ways to cure and prevent it. However, even if we find a cure for all cancer, we'll just die of something else. I know that sounds tragic and pessimistic, but I'm simply stating the fact that we are all going to die.

The Bible says, "*it is appointed for men to die once*" (Hebrews 9:27). Which means we are mortal. We don't live forever. This fact should naturally cause us to ask the question, why must we die? Why didn't God give us immortality from the beginning? Religion and Philosophy have tried for centuries to answer this question. Why do we die?

According to the Bible, God gave us the opportunity to have immortality, but man chose death instead of life. God placed Adam and Eve in the garden with two trees, the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. If they had eaten from the tree of life, they would have had immortality, but they didn't eat from that tree, therefore none of us have been given eternal life yet. It was Adam's sin that caused us to be mortal.

"The Old Testament recognized the theological meaning of death as well as its physical meaning. The account of

## MEYER

Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden clearly points to sin as the reason humans must experience death.”<sup>i</sup>

After God created Adam and Eve, He gave them some very clear instructions about what they were allowed to eat. These instructions came with a warning about what would happen if they disobeyed. They were presented with life or death, blessing or curses.

“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

- Genesis 2:16-17

Some argue that Adam and Eve should have died on the day they ate from the tree, because God said, “*in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” However, that is not the meaning of the text. You will “*surely die*” means it is determined that you will die. Up until that point, it was uncertain if they would eat from the tree of life and live forever, or if they would eat from the forbidden tree and seal their death.

Once they ate the forbidden fruit, death was certain. This has nothing to do with when they would die, but it determined the fact that they would certainly die. “*You shall surely die*” was the verdict given in response to man’s sin.

They were given the opportunity to choose life, yet they chose death instead. It is easy for us to criticize them and ask why they would choose to disobey knowing the result would be death. Yet we continue to make the same choice to sin and disobey God in our own lives. The Bible gives the same warning to us about disobedience. The reward for obedience is life and the punishment for disobedience is

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, T. C. (1991). Holman Bible Dictionary. Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers.

death.

"See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil, in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the Lord your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess... I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live"  
- Deuteronomy 30:15,16,19

We have all sinned, so it is hypocritical for us to think we might have done any better than Adam. Every time we sin, we are choosing death rather than life. Each time we sin, we eat from the wrong tree. We are just like Adam, and because of Adam's sin, we are all mortals.

"Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned." - Romans 5:12

Not only were we born into sin through Adam, but we have "*all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God*" (Romans 3:23). None of Adam's descendants have ever been able to live a life without sin. We have all sinned, therefore, we all deserve death, because "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23). We are sinful and fallen people, and because of that sin, we have been barred access to the tree of life.

However, we should thank God that He hid the tree of life from us because if we were to eat of the tree of life in our current sinful state, we would become eternally sinful. It was God's love and grace that would not allow us to eat from the tree of life in a sinful state.

## MEYER

“Then the Lord God said, ‘Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’ - therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden to till the ground from which he was taken. So He drove out the man; and He placed cherubim at the east of the garden of Eden, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.” - Genesis 3:22-24

We are not immortal because we have not yet eaten from the tree of life. This is why the gospel message is so important! While it is true that “*the wages of sin is death*”, the gospel teaches us that we have hope in conquering death through the resurrection of Yeshua, because “*the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord*” (Romans 6:23). I’m mortal, but the gospel promises that I can become immortal.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." - John 3:16

The Bible explains that we bear the image of Adam, that we inherit our sinful nature from him, and that we die because sin entered the world through him. However, the good news is that we can be changed through the work of Yeshua. This is why Paul describes Yeshua as the “*last Adam*” because He came to save us from our sinful nature and transform us into His likeness.

“And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit... The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also



# Immortal

bear the image of the heavenly Man.”

- 1 Corinthians 15:45,47-49

We are mortal because of sin. This is described as the “*law of sin and death*” (Romans 8:2). That is what God told Adam when He said, “*for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.*” The consequence of sin is death. This means we are mortal.

If we currently possessed immortality, we would have no need for a savior. To claim that we have an immortal soul renders the gospel meaningless. Therefore, it should be unthinkable for anyone who claims to follow the Bible to believe in the natural immortality of the soul. The soul is not naturally immortal, that is what makes the work of Yeshua so significant because He gives mortals the opportunity to become immortal.

In Christian theology, this view is commonly referred to as “conditional immortality” or “Conditionalism” because our immortality is based on certain conditions that must be met. This stands in direct opposition to the more popular belief in the “immortal soul.” Conditionalism emphasizes our dependence upon God for life and realizes that eternal life is a gift from God that only the elect will receive.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Romans 6:23

Contrary to the Bible, the Fifth Council of the Lateran, in the sixteenth century, the Roman Catholic Church reaffirmed its belief in the immortality of the soul, and condemned Conditionalism as “erroneous assertions.”

## MEYER

“we condemn and reject all those who insist that the intellectual soul is mortal... For the soul not only truly exists of itself... but it is also immortal”<sup>i</sup>

They proclaim that the soul “*exists of itself*”. This is blasphemy because any being that exists of itself is a god. A being that exists of itself is one that exists by its own nature, without cause from another. To claim that we are self-existent beings is to claim that we were not created by God and that we have always existed on our own. Yet, the Bible tells us that we were created by God, and that He is the one who “*gives life to all things*” (1 Timothy 6:13), and that Yeshua “*alone has immortality*” (1 Timothy 6:16).

I acknowledge and accept the fact that right now I’m mortal, however, I also believe the promise that we have been given in the Word of God that through Yeshua I can become immortal. I refuse to believe the lie that has been endorsed by the Catholic church that I already possess immortality naturally of myself. We are not self-existent beings, we exist only because God allows us to exist. We will all die, and unless we are given the gift of eternal life, we will not live eternally.

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<sup>i</sup> Fifth Lateran Council 1512-17 A.D.

## The Grave

People often wonder what happens when we die. Many of the questions asked about death are based on false assumptions about the nature of our soul. The question, “*where do we go when we die?*” is based on the presumption that our soul is naturally immortal and can exist outside of the body, which leads to the assumption that the soul leaves the body at death and continues to live elsewhere. However, that idea comes from Greek philosophy and not the Bible. The Bible never says anything about our soul living apart from our bodies. However, it does have some interesting things to say about what happens to those who have died.

I do not think it is a coincidence that the book of Genesis begins with the giving of life, and ends with the deaths of both Jacob and Joseph. Genesis is meant to be a foundational book, providing the basic definitions and concepts that are used throughout the rest of the Bible.

The Greek word “Genesis” means “origin, birth, or beginning”, and is derived from it’s Hebrew counterpart, “Bereshit”, which is also the first word of the Bible. Bereshit is translated into English with the phrase “*In the beginning*”, and it refers to the origin of God’s creation.

In Biblical interpretation, there is a rule known as “the Law of First Mention”, which states that the first use of a word or concept in the Scripture is the most complete and accurate meaning of the word. It serves as a key to help better understand how particular words and phrases are used elsewhere in the Bible.

In a way, the Bible works as a sort of dictionary, defining certain Biblical terms, allowing the Bible to interpret itself.

## MEYER

Because the Law of First Mention applies to the very first time a word or phrase is used, then most of the definitions will be found in the book of Genesis. That is why I believe our understanding of Genesis shapes how we understand everything else that follows.

As I previously mentioned, the book of Genesis ends with the deaths of both Jacob and Joseph. In this account, there is a very interesting request that Jacob makes concerning his burial. His request might help us better understand what the ancient Hebrews thought about death.

“Then he charged them and said to them: ‘I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of Heth.’ And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.” - Genesis 49:29-33

Jacob made the statement, “*I am to be gathered to my people*”, then requested that he be buried in the same place that Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were buried. This same phrase was used when Abraham died (Genesis 25:8), when Ishmael died (Genesis 25:17), and when Isaac died (Genesis 35:29).

At first glance, one might assume that this phrase is simply referring to the fact that they were buried near their relatives, especially since he also said, “*bury me with my fathers*”.

## Immortal

The family tomb was a central concept in the ancient Hebrew mindset. We cannot overlook the literal understanding of being gathered to a family grave, and if this was the only way the phrase was ever used, we could conclude this is all it meant. However, the phrase “*gathered to his people*” is not always used in reference to a common family burial site. This phrase was first mentioned in connection with the death of Abraham.

"Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people." - Genesis 25:8

Abraham left his homeland of Ur to venture out into the land of Canaan. His ancestors were buried in Ur, but Abraham and Sarah were buried in a cave that he bought from the Hittites. He was not buried with his ancestors, yet the Bible says he was “*gathered to his people*”. Since his wife, Sarah, was the only other person buried there at that time, it is unlikely that this was a reference to a family grave.

It is also important to note that the same phrase was also used in connection with the deaths of Aaron (Numbers 20:24) and Moses (Deuteronomy 32:50), yet neither of them were buried with their relatives. In fact, both Aaron and Moses died on the top of mountains and were buried in the wilderness. This means the idea of being gathered to one’s ancestors cannot be solely related to the geographic location of the grave.

Although the phrase “*gathered to his people*” is often connected to the traditional family grave, it actually has more to do with the idea that the dead are gathered together in Sheol. There are a number of Biblical commentators, both Jewish and Christian, who agree that the ancient Israelites believed in a common grave for all humans, and they understood that everyone dies and goes

to Sheol.

The Hebrew word “Sheol” is often translated as "grave", "pit", or "abode of the dead", and refers to the common destination of the dead. It is a place where the dead are cut off from the living, left in darkness and silence to rest.

“Sheol was regarded as the abode of all the dead, both righteous and wicked. It was, in fact, regarded as a consolation that none escaped death.”<sup>i</sup>

The ancient Israelites were comforted with the idea that they would rest in the grave with their ancestors. They were not going to be alone in the ground, because they would be in good company. If we are gathered to our ancestors, then death is not a lonely journey. This idea would bring comfort to those who are passing away.

The first mention of Sheol is when Jacob was told that Joseph had been devoured by wild beasts, and when he found out, he mourned the death of his beloved son.

“And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, ‘For I shall go down into the grave [Sheol] to my son in mourning.’ Thus his father wept for him.”

- Genesis 37:35

Notice that Sheol is translated “grave” in this particular verse, which is the core definition of the word. “Sheol” refers to a place under the earth and is spoken of as a place of “*silence*” (Psalm 115:17), and in many instances, Sheol appears to be used as a metaphor for oblivion, conveying the idea that the dead have no thoughts or memories whatsoever.

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Sheol'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

# Immortal

“the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward,  
For the memory of them is forgotten.” - Ecclesiastes 9:5

Although some people teach that in Sheol the dead souls continue to live in an incorporeal state, the Bible never makes such claims. In fact, the Bible tells us that the dead do not even remember God or give Him praise.

"For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks?" - Psalm 6:5

In the New Testament as well as the Septuagint<sup>i</sup>, the Greek word “Hades” is used in place of, and in the same manner as its Hebrew counterpart, “Sheol”. The two words are used in exactly the same way throughout the Scriptures, and without a hint of Greek mythology in its usage. Yet, many people lean toward the Greek concept of Hades when speaking about the place of the dead, rather than trying to understand the Biblical concepts of Sheol.

According to ancient Greek mythology, Hades was both the god of the underworld and the name for the underworld. The pagans believed that Hades is a place of torment, and there are varying levels of suffering the deeper you go, similar to Dante’s Inferno. It is unfortunate that people have confused the Biblical descriptions of Hades with those from Pagan mythology.

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<sup>i</sup> The Septuagint is a translation of the Hebrew Bible into Koine Greek and is also known as the Greek Old Testament.





## Hell Confusion

Many people claim that Hell is the absence of God, but this cannot be true because the Bible tells us, *"If I make my bed in hell [Sheol], behold, You are there."* (Psalm 139:8) King David wrote this psalm, so it should cause us to wonder why he would be speaking about making his bed in hell. It should also make us wonder why God would be there with him. This verse alone is reason enough to re-evaluate our beliefs about Hell.

The word translated "*hell*" in this verse is the word "Sheol". David had no problem with the idea that he would make his bed in Sheol because he understood that everyone eventually dies, and they rest in Sheol until the resurrection. We know this because David also wrote, *"For You will not leave my soul in Sheol, Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."* (Psalm 16:10) He knew he would go to Sheol, but he also knew that his soul would not be left there because he understood the resurrection.

If you looked up the word Sheol in many Bible translations, you would find that it is often rendered as the English word "hell", however, the modern concept of "hell" does not line up with the Biblical descriptions of Sheol.

"The word Sheol occurs sixty-five times in the Hebrew Bible. The King James Version translates thirty-one of the occurrences as 'hell'; another thirty-one occurrences as 'grave'; and three occurrences as 'pit'".<sup>i</sup>

Why would Bible translators use two seemingly different concepts to translate the same word? By choosing to translate "Sheol" with two different words they have caused a lot of confusion about death. If every instance of the word

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Hell'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

## MEYER

Sheol were translated “Hell”, then we would conclude that both Joseph and Jacob went to hell.

“Then Jacob tore his clothes, put sackcloth on his waist, and mourned for his son many days. And all his sons and all his daughters arose to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted, and he said, ‘For I shall go down into *Hell* to my son in mourning.’ Thus his father wept for him.”  
- Genesis 37:34-35

Many people do not realize it, but the Bible explains that all people go to Sheol when they die, which means if Sheol is Hell, then everyone goes to hell when they die.

“What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his life from the power of the *grave* [Sheol]? Selah”  
- Psalm 89:48

The word “hell” is used approximately fifty-four times in most Bibles, and is translated from several different words including "Sheol", "Hades", "Gehenna", and "Tartarus". All of these words have different meanings and usage in the Scriptures, and their collective translation as "hell" has caused major confusion about death.

The word Hell was derived from the Old English "helle", and is related to the Old Norse goddess named "Hel" or "Hela". In its original use and etymology, the word Hell means "*to cover, or conceal*", and may have simply referred to the ground covering over the dead person. However, in many pagan cultures, it was believed that Hell (or Hades) was the underworld, and was ruled by the god of the dead.

The more popular modern version of this concept refers to a place of fiery torment and is understood by many to be the home of Satan and his demons. It is believed that the unrighteous dead go immediately to hell to be tortured in flames for eternity. Many people also believe that Satan and

## Immortal

his demons are in charge of actively torturing those damned souls. However, in spite of the fact that none of these ideas can be traced back to the Bible, they remain the popular mainstream view of hell today.

The Bible never says that Satan is in charge of Hell or even that he is currently living there, in fact, the Bible says that Satan will be cast into the lake of fire after the thousand-year reign of the Messiah.

“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever.” - Revelation 20:10

The idea that Satan oversees Hell is rooted in the Greek belief in Hades as the god of the underworld. When people say that Satan is in charge of Hell, they are rehearsing pagan mythology, and confessing Satan to be the god of the underworld. In doing this, they are participating in a modern “Christianized” version of the pantheon.

The Bible says that Satan will be bound in the bottomless pit during the thousand-year reign of the Messiah (Revelation 20:1-3) and that he will be released for a short time to deceive the nations (Revelation 20:7-8) before being cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:10). The Bible also speaks about fallen angels who were imprisoned in Tartarus to be held for judgment.

"For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to *hell* [Tartarus] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment"  
- 2 Peter 2:4

This is the only place in the entire Bible that the word Tartarus is used, and it refers exclusively to the prison for

## MEYER

fallen angels. The word “Tartarus” is also found in Greek mythology, and it means an abyss or a bottomless pit. Although it is not mentioned by name, it is most likely the same “*bottomless pit*” (Revelation 20:3) where Satan will be imprisoned for a thousand years, as well as the “*abyss*” (Luke 8:31) into which the legion of demons begged Yeshua not to send them.

In Greek mythology, Tartarus is a deep abyss that was used as a dungeon of torment and served as a prison for the Titans. Plato said that Tartarus was the place where souls were judged and punished after death, which might be where we get the idea that humans could end up there. However, the Bible never says that humans will go there, and it is presumptuous to jump to such a conclusion without any Scriptural warrant.

It is obvious that not all fallen angels were sent to Tartarus because during Yeshua’s ministry, He encountered many demons and unclean spirits who were not imprisoned, and the “*Legion*” even begged Him not to send them into “*the abyss*” (Luke 8:31).

The context of what Peter said indicates that he was referring to the fallen angels who sinned at the time of Noah. He was most likely referring to what the Bible calls “*the sons of God*” who took human wives and produced half-human offspring.

"the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose... There were giants on the earth in those days, and also afterward, when the sons of God came in to the daughters of men and they bore children to them. Those were the mighty men who were of old, men of renown."  
- Genesis 6:2,4

## Immortal

The Genesis record mentions both giants and mighty “*men of renown*”, which sounds similar to Greek mythology about giants known as Titans, and the demigods who were said to be the half-human offspring of gods mating with humans.

The Greeks believed the Titans were cast into Tartarus, and Paul explains that the “gods” of the pagans are demons (1 Cor. 10:20-21), which are actually fallen angels. So, in this particular case, there seems to be some connection between the Greek and Biblical concepts of Tartarus as a prison for fallen angels. However, this does not mean we should look to pagan mythology for understanding, because they have twisted the story so much that it no longer resembles the truth. We must always let the Scriptures guide our understanding, and not allow ourselves to be influenced by pagan myth, even when it resembles the Biblical record. Therefore, when Peter speaks about the fallen angels imprisoned in Tartarus, we must not confuse the events in the Bible with pagan myths.

These fallen angels are imprisoned in Tartarus, awaiting the judgment, which means demons are not being tortured in the lake of fire yet, but are simply being held captive until the time of judgment.

As I mentioned earlier, the abyss, spoken of in Revelation, is most likely a reference to Tartarus, since it is a prison for Satan during the thousand-year reign of the Messiah.

“Then I saw an angel coming down from heaven, having the key to the bottomless pit [abyss] and a great chain in his hand. He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years; and he cast him into the bottomless pit [abyss], and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were

## MEYER

finished. But after these things he must be released for a little while.” - Revelation 20:1-3

We see that Satan will be bound in the abyss for a thousand years while Messiah is reigning on earth. This also gives us a better understanding of why the legion of demons begged to be cast into the swine and not the abyss. They knew the abyss was a prison and Yeshua had the power to send them there, so they begged Him for mercy.

“Jesus asked him, saying, ‘What is your name?’ And he said, ‘Legion,’ because many demons had entered him. And they begged Him that He would not command them to go out into the abyss. Now a herd of many swine was feeding there on the mountain. So they begged Him that He would permit them to enter them. And He permitted them. Then the demons went out of the man and entered the swine, and the herd ran violently down the steep place into the lake and drowned.” - Luke 8:30-33

It is obvious that legion was terrified of the abyss, and yet the Bible simply describes it as a temporary prison, not a place of fiery torment or judgment. If the demons were terrified of the temporary prison, what does that say about the punishment they will receive in the lake of fire?

Satan will be bound for a thousand years in the abyss when Messiah returns, but where does he live currently? According to popular theology, Satan is the ruler of Hell, yet the Bible never mentions him having such authority.

The Bible describes Satan as *“going to and fro on the earth, and from walking back and forth on it.”* (Job 1:7) He is currently dwelling on the earth, tempting people to transgress the commandments of the Almighty. He is also described as *“the god of this age”* (2 Cor. 4:4). The Bible never describes Satan as the ruler of Hell or the underworld.

The idea that Satan is the god of the underworld comes from various pagan religions including Ancient Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, Persian, Roman, Germanic, and Celtic mythology, and is completely unbiblical.

In Egyptian mythology, Osiris was the god of the underworld, and Anubis was the guardian of the dead. In Greek mythology, Hades was not only king of the underworld but also its namesake. In Norse mythology, it was Hel, the daughter of Loki, who presided over the dead. It is no coincidence that the underworld was also called Hel, a cognate for the English term “Hell”, which is derived from the Proto-Germanic *haljō*, which means “*a concealed place*.”<sup>i</sup>

“The term hell is cognate to ‘hole’ (cavern) and ‘hollow’. It is a substantive formed from the Anglo-Saxon *helan* or *behelian*, ‘to hide’... Thus by derivation hell denotes a dark and hidden place. In ancient Norse mythology Hel is the ill-favored goddess of the underworld. Only those who fall in battle can enter Valhalla; the rest go down to Hel in the underworld, not all, however, to the place of punishment of criminals.”<sup>ii</sup>

One of the biggest problems with using the word “Hell” is that it has become associated with the lake of fire. This is quite problematic because the Bible tells us that Hell (hades) will be “*cast into the lake of fire*.” (Revelation 20:14) If Hell is the lake of fire, then how can it be cast into the lake of fire? It is illogical to say that Hell is cast into Hell. So, either Hell is not the lake of fire or the word “Hades” should not have been translated with the word “Hell”. Either Hell and Hades are synonymous, or Hell and the lake of fire are, but it is impossible for Hell, Hades, and the lake of fire to all

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<sup>i</sup> Harper, Douglas. (2001). Entry for hell. Online Etymology Dictionary  
<http://www.etymonline.com/index.php?term=hell>

<sup>ii</sup> Obstat, Nihil. Lafort, Remy, Censor. Entry for 'Hell'. The Catholic Encyclopedia. Robert Appleton Company. New York. 1914.

## MEYER

be synonymous. Are you starting to see the confusion this is causing?

If the subject of Hell is not already confusing enough, we must also consider who goes there and why. If sinners go directly into hellfire punishment at death, this negates the whole purpose of the great white throne judgment that will take place at the end of the age (Revelation 20:11-15).

If the unrighteous begin their punishment at death, then they are being punished unjustly, since they have not received a fair trial for their actions. This line of thought leads us to an unjust god who condemns and punishes people before they are found guilty. Therefore, it is not only a logical fallacy to claim that Hell is the lake of fire, but it is also an attack against the justice and righteousness of God, claiming He condemns people before they are judged.

The Bible teaches that God is a just God who makes righteous judgments (Psalm 19:9, Revelation 16:7). That is why it is so important for us to have an accurate understanding of death and Hell because we do not want to believe lies about the Almighty.

He is a righteous and just Judge, but the confusion about Hell has inadvertently soiled His good name by turning Him into one who acts unjustly. This should cause us to carefully examine our beliefs, making certain that we are not bringing further shame upon His glorious reputation by our ill-placed faith in unbiblical doctrines.

Because there is so much confusion about this subject, I tend to avoid using the word “Hell” when speaking about the places and events associated with death and judgment. When I refer to the place of the dead, I typically use the word “Sheol” instead of “Hell” or “Hades”, because those terms have become so entwined with fiery punishment that



it is difficult for people to separate them.

For example, if I were to explain that everyone goes to “Hell” when they die, people would immediately reject what I was saying based on their preconceived ideas about what Hell is. Likewise, when I refer to the *“lake of fire”*, I tend to avoid using the word “Hell” because I do not want to feed into the popular bias that Hell is a place of fiery torment, therefore I prefer to use the word “Gehenna” or I simply call it the *“lake of fire”*.

Gehenna is the name Yeshua used for the place of fire and punishment. However, like “Sheol” and “Hades”, it is usually translated “Hell” in most English Bibles, which is why there is so much confusion on this subject. The Greek word “Gehenna”, was a reference to the valley of Hinnom outside of Jerusalem.

“Gehenna is the Greek form of two Hebrew words *ge hinnom* meaning ‘valley of Hinnom.’ The term originally referred to a ravine on the south side of Jerusalem where pagan deities were worshiped. It became a garbage dump and a place of abomination where fire burned continuously. Gehenna became synonymous with ‘a place of burning.’”<sup>i</sup>

The Bible mentions the valley of Hinnom several times, and explains that people burned their incense to the pagan gods, Molech and Baal, and even burned their own children in the fire as they worshipped there (2 Kings 23:10, 2 Chronicles 28:3, Jeremiah 7:31,32:35). However, Jeremiah prophesied that the valley of Hinnom will be turned into a burial place for those who do wickedness.

"And they have built the high places of Tophet, which is in the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, to burn their sons and

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Hell'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

## MEYER

their daughters in the fire, which I did not command, nor did it come into My heart. 'Therefore behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'when it will no more be called Tophet, or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the Valley of Slaughter; for they will bury in Tophet until there is no room. The corpses of this people will be food for the birds of the heaven and for the beasts of the earth. And no one will frighten them away.'"

- Jeremiah 7:31-33

This is no doubt why Yeshua refers to the fire of Gehenna as a place of punishment for the wicked. He made reference to it a few times in phrases like, "*whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of hell [Gehenna] fire*" (Matthew 5:22), and "*If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [Gehenna].*" (Matthew 5:29)

Notice that Yeshua said, "*your whole body to be cast into Gehenna*", indicating that it is a bodily destruction, not simply a spiritual event as some have mistakenly concluded. Likewise, He indicates in another place that both the body and the soul will be destroyed in the fire of Gehenna.

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna]." - Matthew 10:28

This is significant because it shows that the soul is not kept alive in an eternal state of torture separate from the body (as many people teach), but the soul is actually destroyed by the fire along with the body. This is why the lake of fire is referred to as the "*second death*" (Revelation 2:11, 20:6, 20:14, 21:8) because the Scriptures teach us that "*the soul who sins shall die*" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

## Only Sleeping

King David used the phrase, *"make my bed in Sheol"* (Psalm 139:8), which seems to indicate that the intermediate state of the dead is similar to being asleep. The idea that the dead are only sleeping is a theme we find throughout the Bible in both the Old and New Testaments.

David wrote, *"enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death."* (Psalm 13:3) Likewise, Peter describes the death of David, saying, *"after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell asleep, was buried with his fathers, and saw corruption."* (Acts 13:36)

Daniel made a similar reference when he spoke about *"those who sleep in the dust of the earth"* (Daniel 12:2), and he also prophesied about their resurrection saying they *"shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt"* (Daniel 12:2). Even the book of Job, which is thought to be the oldest book in the Bible, compares death with sleep.

"But man dies and is laid away; Indeed he breathes his last  
And where is he? As water disappears from the sea,  
And a river becomes parched and dries up, So man lies  
down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more,  
They will not awake Nor be roused from their sleep."  
- Job 14:10-12

We find this same comparison is made in the Gospels when Yeshua went to heal a young girl and found out that she was dead. When he arrived at the house, everyone was weeping because she was dead, but Yeshua said, *"Do not weep; she is not dead, but sleeping."* (Luke 8:52)

Now, the argument could be made that she had only been dead for a short while, and simply had a "near-death

## MEYER

experience”, and was revived. I might be tempted to agree if this were the only example given in the Bible, but we have a number of similar references comparing death to sleep.

One of the most notable examples of this is when Yeshua described Lazarus as being asleep and said that He was going to go wake him up. This puzzled the disciples, so He spoke more frankly with them, explaining that Lazarus was dead.

He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead." - John 11:11-14

Yeshua intentionally referred to him as sleeping, even though He knew that Lazarus had already been placed in a tomb. It is very clear that Lazarus was not having a near-death experience because he was dead for four days, and his body was starting to stink when Yeshua raised him back to life.

The Biblical writers use the sleep metaphor to convey the impermanence of death, showing that the dead are not gone forever. This is often called the “intermediate state”, referring to the interim between death and resurrection.

The Bible speaks of two deaths, the first temporary, and the second absolute. When we die the first death, we have an opportunity to live again, but not so with the second.

I have heard a phrase once that I think explains it pretty well. *“If you are born twice, you will only die once, but if you are only born once, you will die twice.”* Meaning if you are *born again*, you will not have to face the second death, but if

## Immortal

you have not been born again, you will have to die a second time.

Yeshua alludes to these two deaths when He said, *"do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in Gehenna."* (Matthew 10:28) The first death is bodily only, but the second involves both body and soul. The soul is not destroyed during the first death, it simply rests in the grave until the resurrection.

Paul indicates that our soul is preserved when he prays that *"your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."* (1 Thess. 5:23) Notice also that Paul's prayer is not that we will go to heaven, but that we will be *"preserved"* until Yeshua returns.

Paul also used the sleep metaphor when he spoke about those who witnessed the risen Messiah, saying that many *"remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep."* (1 Cor. 15:6) He also argued that if there is no resurrection of the dead, then *"those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished."* (1 Cor. 15:18)

In another place he spoke about comforting those who mourn, saying, *"I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope."* (1 Thess. 4:13)

Paul explained that *"we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep."* (1 Thess. 4:15) This means when our Messiah returns, the living will not be given preference ahead of those who have died, we will all meet the Lord together.

"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the

## MEYER

trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”  
- 1 Thessalonians 4:16-17

This also indicates that the dead have not gone to meet Yeshua without us. They are sleeping in their graves, awaiting His return.

The same concept is echoed in the book of Hebrews when it speaks about the faithful believers who have gone before us. Specifically naming Abraham, Moses, and David, saying that they have not received the promise ahead of us.

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” - Hebrews 11:39-40

They will “*not be made perfect apart from us*”, because “*We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed.*” (1 Cor. 15:51) When Yeshua returns, those who are alive will be transformed together with those who have been resurrected.

This belief that the dead are “*sleeping*” in their graves was “*the prevalent opinion until as late as the 5th century.*”<sup>i</sup> This means for the first four hundred years Christians believed the dead are waiting in their graves for the resurrection.

This understanding changed when the Catholic church began teaching their doctrines of purgatory and the immortality of the soul. However, the protestant reformation reintroduced the Biblical concepts of death and conditional immortality. In fact, the doctrine of Purgatory was the

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<sup>i</sup> Walker, D.P., The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment, 1964, p. 35

primary reason for Martin Luther's emphasis on the resurrection and his use of the sleep metaphor.

“Luther, with a greater emphasis on the resurrection, preferred to concentrate on the scriptural metaphor of sleep. For just as one who falls asleep and reaches morning unexpectedly when he awakes, without knowing what has happened to him "we shall suddenly rise on the last day without knowing how we have come into death and through death. "We shall sleep, until He comes and knocks on the little grave and says, "Doctor Martin, get up! Then I shall rise in a moment, and be with him forever.”<sup>i</sup>

In a commentary on Ecclesiastes, Luther indicates that King Solomon argued that the dead sleep until the resurrection.

“Salomon judgeth that the dead are a sleepe, and feelee nothing at all. For the dead lye there accompting neyther dayes nor yeares, but when they are awoken, they shall seeme to have slept scarce one minute.”<sup>ii</sup>

John Wycliffe and William Tyndale also taught that the soul sleeps in the grave, and opposed the Catholic doctrine of purgatory. Tyndale argued with Sir Thomas More on this very subject, claiming the Catholic assumptions about heaven, hell, and purgatory conflict with the Biblical arguments for the resurrection.

“And ye, in putting them [the departed souls] in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection... And then what cause is there of the resurrection?... The true faith putteth [setteth forth] the resurrection, which we be warned to

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<sup>i</sup> Kantonen, T.A., *The Christian Hope*, 1854 Muhlenberg Press, p.37

<sup>ii</sup> Luther, Martin, *An Exposition of Salomon's Booke, called Ecclesiastes or the Preacher* (translation 1573)

## MEYER

look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put [set forth] that the souls did ever live.”<sup>i</sup>

In this argument, he points out that it defeats the purpose of the resurrection to believe the dead are in heaven, hell, or purgatory. Notice also that he indicates that the immortal soul concept originated from “*heathen philosophers*.”

Several reformation leaders tried to restore the Biblical concepts of death and resurrection, but unfortunately the majority today teach a modified form of Catholic doctrine, removing the idea of purgatory, but maintaining that souls are immortal and they either go to heaven or hell at death.

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<sup>i</sup> Tyndale, William (1530), An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue



## In Heaven

The belief that we go to heaven at death is quite popular among both protestants and Catholics alike. According to a study done by the Barna Group in 2003, 81% of Americans said they believe in some sort of afterlife, 79% said they believe in an immortal soul that will live forever, 76% said they believe in heaven, and 71% said they believe in hell.<sup>i</sup>

There have been many very popular books and movies written on this subject over the years, which contain stories of people who supposedly died and went to heaven and returned to tell about it.

It is important to remember that just because something is popular does not mean it is right or true. Yeshua warned us that the road which leads to destruction is wide and popular and many follow it.

“enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it.” - Matthew 7:13-14

Have you ever wondered why everybody wants to go to heaven? Take a moment to consider how many books, movies, and songs have been made about heaven. It is quite a popular topic even among those who do not claim to be Christians. Likewise, most popular Christian teachings about the afterlife promise that we will spend eternity in heaven, however, the Bible never makes such promises.

Let me say that again, the Bible never says we will go to

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<sup>i</sup> The Barna Group (2003, October 21). Americans Describe Their Views About Life After Death. <https://www.barna.org/barna-update/article/5-barna-update/128-americans-describe-their-views-about-life-after-death>

## MEYER

heaven when we die. You can search the entire Bible, but you will not find a single verse that ever promises that we will ever go to heaven. We are never once promised heaven, but we are promised eternal life.

Most Christians are familiar with the words of John 3:16.

“For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.” - John 3:16

This verse is memorized in Sunday School, taught from the pulpit, and preached on the street corners. It is quite possibly the most well-known verse in the entire Bible, which is why I find it interesting that so few are familiar with what verse 13 says.

“**No one has ascended to heaven** but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.”  
- John 3:13

Yeshua was speaking to Nicodemus about being born again, and He explained that no one has gone to heaven except the one who came down from heaven. Yeshua is the only one who has ever gone to heaven, and this was prophesied about in the book of Proverbs.

“**Who has ascended into heaven, or descended?** Who has gathered the wind in His fists? Who has bound the waters in a garment? Who has established all the ends of the earth? **What is His name, and what is His Son's name,** If you know?” - Proverbs 30:4

According to His own testimony, Yeshua is the only one who has ever ascended into heaven. This fact alone tears down the Catholic tradition of praying to dead saints. They are not in heaven, they are sleeping in their graves waiting for the resurrection. Yeshua is the only one who is able to

## Immortal

intercede for us because He is the only one who has entered the heavenly tabernacle.

Many Catholics also believe in what they call “*the Assumption of Mary*”, claiming she never died, but that she ascended into heaven bodily.

“The belief in the corporeal assumption of Mary is founded on the apocryphal treatise *De Obitu S. Dominae*, bearing the name of St. John, which belongs however to the fourth or fifth century. It is also found in the book *De Transitu Virginis*, falsely ascribed to St. Melito of Sardis, and in a spurious letter attributed to St. Denis the Areopagite... Today, the belief in the corporeal assumption of Mary is universal in the East and in the West; according to Benedict XIV (*De Festis B.V.M.*, I, viii, 18) it is a probable opinion, which to deny were impious and blasphemous.”<sup>i</sup>

This un-Biblical belief that Mary has ascended into heaven is the main reason why Catholics pray to her, and why they think she can intercede for them. However, the Bible tells us that Yeshua is the one who has ascended into heaven and He is the only one who can intercede for us.

“But He, because He continues forever, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them.” - Hebrews 7:24-25

It is blasphemy to say that Mary or the saints can make intercession for us in heaven. They are humans, they are not God, therefore it is blasphemy to pray to them or worship them. In addition to that, Mary and the saints are dead, and praying to them is nothing short of necromancy.

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<sup>i</sup> Obstat, Nihil. Lafort, Remy, Censor. Entry for 'The Feast of the Assumption'. The Catholic Encyclopedia. Robert Appleton Company. New York. 1914.

## MEYER

We pray to Yeshua because He is alive. He was raised from the dead and lives eternally. When we pray to Yeshua, we are not speaking to the dead, but to the living savior who is seated at the right hand of the Father in Heaven.

Yeshua is our Great High Priest and serves in the heavenly tabernacle making intercession for us. There is only one High Priest, and only He can enter the most holy place.

“Now this is the main point of the things we are saying: We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens, a Minister of the sanctuary and of the true tabernacle which the Lord erected, and not man. For every high priest is appointed to offer both gifts and sacrifices. Therefore it is necessary that this One also have something to offer. For if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law; who serve the copy and shadow of the heavenly things, as Moses was divinely instructed when he was about to make the tabernacle. For He said, ‘See that you make all things according to the pattern shown you on the mountain.’” - Hebrews 8:1-5

At the time Hebrews was written, the earthly Temple was still standing, because it says, *“if He were on earth, He would not be a priest, since there are priests who offer the gifts according to the law”*. However, the Temple was destroyed in 70AD and has never been rebuilt. This means that Yeshua is the only High Priest who has been able to intercede for the past 2000 years. Therefore, without Yeshua, we have no other means of atonement.

Some people erroneously teach that the priesthood and sacrifices were put to an end, but the Bible says that the priesthood simply changed hands. It is no longer an Earthly Levitical priesthood, now it is a Heavenly priesthood.

## Immortal

“Therefore, if perfection were through the Levitical priesthood (for under it the people received the law), what further need was there that another priest should rise according to the order of Melchizedek, and not be called according to the order of Aaron? **For the priesthood being changed**, of necessity there is also a change of the law. For He of whom these things are spoken belongs to another tribe, from which no man has officiated at the altar. For it is evident that our Lord arose from Judah, of which tribe Moses spoke nothing concerning priesthood. And it is yet far more evident if, in the likeness of Melchizedek, there arises another priest who has come, not according to the law of a fleshly commandment, but according to the power of an endless life. For He testifies: ‘You are a priest forever According to the order of Melchizedek.’” - Hebrews 7:11-17

The Levitical priesthood was weak because it was based on physical lineage through Aaron (“*a fleshly commandment*”), but Yeshua is a “*priest forever*” because He has an “*endless life*”. The book of Hebrews says the law was changed and the priesthood is no longer through Aaron, but it now belongs to Yeshua forever.

“Also there were many priests, because they were prevented by death from continuing. But He, **because He continues forever**, has an unchangeable priesthood. Therefore He is also able to save to the uttermost those who come to God through Him, **since He always lives to make intercession for them**. For such a High Priest was fitting for us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and has become higher than the heavens; who does not need daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifices, first for His own sins and then for the people's, for this He did once for all when He offered up Himself. For the law appoints as high priests men who have weakness, but the word of the oath, which came after the

## MEYER

law, appoints the Son who has been perfected forever.”

- Hebrews 7:23-28

Not only is Yeshua immortal, but He is “*higher than the heavens*”, and does not need to offer sacrifices for Himself, as the earthly priests did. It would be a mistake to say the priesthood has been abolished because it is being upheld in the heavens by an immortal High Priest who is without sin. We have a “*better priesthood*” because our High Priest is immortal, and serves in the heavenly tabernacle.

“But into the second part the high priest went alone once a year, not without blood, which he offered for himself and for the people's sins committed in ignorance; the Holy Spirit indicating this, that the way into the Holiest of All was not yet made manifest while the first tabernacle was still standing... But Christ came as High Priest of the good things to come, with the greater and more perfect tabernacle not made with hands, that is, not of this creation. Not with the blood of goats and calves, but with His own blood He entered the Most Holy Place once for all, having obtained eternal redemption.”

- Hebrews 9:7-12

Only the High Priest is allowed access to the Most Holy Place, which is why Yeshua is the only person who has ascended into heaven. He is our Great High Priest who serves in the heavenly Tabernacle, and no one else is allowed access to the Most Holy Place.

When we claim that Mary, the Saints, or dead relatives have gone to heaven, we are exalting them to a level equal with Yeshua, and are claiming that they have already attained eternal life, which the Bible says has not yet happened.

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided

# Immortal

something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” - Hebrews 11:39-40

They have not yet been made perfect, and they will “*not be made perfect apart from us*”. They have not been raised back to life, nor have they gone to heaven, because they are still waiting in their graves for the promise to be fulfilled.

If people go directly to heaven or hell at death, that means the judgment takes place instantly at death. However, the Bible tells us that judgment will not take place until after Yeshua returns. In fact, He will reign on earth for a thousand years before the judgment takes place.

Of all the people in the Bible, King David is one of the most likely candidates to ascend into heaven, because he was a *man after God’s own heart*” (Acts 13:22). Yet, the Bible says he did not ascend into heaven and is still in his grave.

“Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day... For David did not ascend into the heavens...” - Acts 2:29,34

If King David has not ascended into heaven, why would we think our dead relatives have? The Bible says that Yeshua is the only one who has “*ascended into heaven*” (John 3:13), therefore believing otherwise is contrary to sound doctrine.

MEYER



## Comfort in Mourning

It is popular to believe that we have continued life after death because it makes death seem less frightening. People often try to comfort one another by saying the deceased is “*in a better place*”, claiming they are “*looking down on us from above*”, but those beliefs have no Scriptural foundation. There is not one verse in the entire Bible that says the dead go to heaven, or that they are watching over us.

I have been to many funerals in my life, and I have frequently heard similar things about the deceased being in Heaven, walking the streets of gold, and looking down on us from above. I actually believed those things myself for many years until I started trying to find references to it in the Bible.

I quickly realized that my beliefs about heaven were not based on the Scriptures, and I knew that it was time for me to learn the Biblical truth about life after death.

When a person has held a certain belief their entire life, it can be difficult to change it, unless we are committed to “*worship the Father in spirit and truth*” (John 4:23), because “*the truth shall make you free.*” (John 8:32)

The fact that so many have found comfort in a lie should make us all very uncomfortable. The Bible specifically tells us to comfort those who mourn with the hope of the resurrection. Therefore, if we preach anything else, we are propagating a misplaced hope that is not founded in truth.

"But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, **lest you sorrow as others who have no hope**. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him

## MEYER

those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And **the dead in Christ will rise first**. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. **Therefore comfort one another with these words.**" - 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18

We are instructed to tell others about the resurrected Messiah who is coming back to give His people eternal life. There is no need to lie about heaven when we have a true hope for eternal life through the resurrection.

## Fear of Death

It is natural for humans to fear death, or at least have some anxiety about it when they think about it. Death is scary because it is unknown. We have never experienced death, so we don't know what to expect.

We have many different questions about death. Will it hurt? What is beyond this life? Will we ever live again? Is there any conscious awareness in death?

The idea of death seems cold and lonely, because that is what we observe about a corpse, and that can be scary as well.

It is uncomfortable to think about death, whether it be the death of a loved one, or our own mortality, and for this reason we don't like to think or talk about it very often.

People are constantly looking for ways to extend their lives. Some pursue healthy eating and exercise to extend their lives, while others look into medical procedures and treatments that might lengthen their days. This is especially true when someone has a heart attack, or learns that they have cancer or some other life-threatening condition.

This is why the gospel message is so important. We don't need to fear death, because Yeshua has conquered death and has given us the way of eternal life. Therefore, we have no reason to fear death.

The Bible actually describes the fear of death a type of bondage that we need to be set free from.

"...He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death,

## MEYER

that is, the devil, **and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.**"

- Hebrews 2:14-15

It is important for us to escape this bondage so that we can serve God completely and without fear of men, because when we fear persecution and death, we will turn away from Yeshua if our life is at stake. But if we fear God and not death, we will serve God with both our life and our death. This is why Yeshua said not to fear men, but God.

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." - Matthew 10:28

The apostles had no fear of death, and nearly all of them died as martyrs for their faith. In fact, Christians have been martyred throughout history. They were beaten, stoned, crucified, burned, drown, hung, beheaded, shot, and starved to death, yet they refused to deny their faith because they did not fear death. The Bible says this has been the case for godly people since the beginning.

"Still others had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment. They were stoned, they were sawn in two, were tempted, were slain with the sword. They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented - of whom the world was not worthy..." - Hebrews 11:36-38

Paul is a great example for us of how to serve God without fear of death. He was fully aware of the fact that he would be persecuted and possibly die for his faith, yet he had no fear in proclaiming the Gospel. In fact, before he went to prison, a prophet came to him and told him that he was about to be captured and imprisoned, yet Paul declared that he is ready to die for his faith.

## Immortal

"...a certain prophet named Agabus came down from Judea. When he had come to us, he took Paul's belt, bound his own hands and feet, and said, 'Thus says the Holy Spirit, 'So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man who owns this belt, and deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.' " Now when we heard these things, both we and those from that place pleaded with him not to go up to Jerusalem. Then Paul answered, "What do you mean by weeping and breaking my heart? For **I am ready not only to be bound, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.**" - Acts 21:10-13

Understanding the resurrection will help us conquer our fear of death, because we understand that eternity is possible for those who put their faith in Yeshua. This is why the apostles and godly men throughout history were willing to face death for their faith.

When Yeshua warned us not to fear those who can only kill the body, He also spoke about what would happen if we deny Him in the face of death.

"And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Are not two sparrows sold for a copper coin? And not one of them falls to the ground apart from your Father's will. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. "Therefore whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven." - Matthew 10:28-33

If we deny Yeshua to save our life, He will deny us entrance into His kingdom. If we are unwilling to die for our faith, then we do not have the faith to enter the kingdom of God.

## MEYER

Yeshua said if we want to be His disciples, we must be willing to follow Him even unto death.

"Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" - Matthew 16:24-26

This is what we need to understand if we want to be prepared for tribulation. End-time preppers talk about storing up food and water, guns and ammo, and taking shelter from tribulation in the last days, but these things are typically motivated by a fear of death.

While I agree that there is wisdom in having certain supplies set aside for difficult times, we need to be careful that our motives are not based in fear.

The Bible warns us that things will be very difficult in the last days. It speaks about famine, pestilence, financial crisis, natural disasters, wars, and religious persecution. Yeshua said these things will happen, and only those who endure to the end will be saved.

"And you will be hated by all for My name's sake. But he who endures to the end will be saved." - Matthew 10:22

If you let the fear of death cause you to deny Yeshua, then you are trading your eternal life in an attempt to save your mortal life. When you think about it that way it seems quite absurd doesn't it? Yet, there will be people who do exactly that, and they will suffer the fate of a traitor when they stand before the King of Kings.

The book of Revelation speaks about how the saints will

# immortal

overcome the enemy in the face of death.

"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, and they did not love their lives to the death." - Revelation 12:11

They did not love their lives to the death. They were willing to trade their own life for their testimony concerning the blood of the Lamb. They overcame the fear of death because they believed in the blood of the Lamb. Their faith was founded in the hope of the Gospel. They trusted in the death and resurrection of Yeshua, and they believed the Word of God, which says He will give them eternal life.

MEYER



Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection  
and the life. He who believes in Me,  
though he may die, he shall live.”  
(John 11:25)

MEYER

*Section 3*

## RESURRECTION

I am convinced that the single most important event that has ever taken place in all of history is the resurrection of Yeshua! Without His resurrection, there is no Gospel, and no hope for eternal life. I don't think it is possible to overstate the importance of His resurrection.

Paul does a great job of articulating its importance when he explains that without the resurrection, we have no hope and we are all dead in sin.

"Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And **if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty...** For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And **if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!** Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable."  
- 1 Corinthians 15:12-19

## MEYER

In his first letter to the Cor., Paul was addressing Christians who did not believe in the resurrection of the dead, saying, *“how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?”*

Paul was a Pharisee, and was raised believing in the resurrection, but not everyone in his day believed in it. There were various sects of Jews during the First Century, but the two most prominent were the Pharisees and Sadducees. They disagreed about many things, but the main disagreement mentioned in the New Testament concerned the resurrection of the dead. The Bible explains that the Pharisees believed in the resurrection, while the Sadducees did not.

“But when Paul perceived that one part were Sadducees and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, “Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee; concerning the hope and resurrection of the dead I am being judged!” And when he had said this, a dissension arose between the Pharisees and the Sadducees; and the assembly was divided. **For Sadducees say there is no resurrection and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both.**” - Acts 23:6-8

Likewise, there are many people today who do not believe in, or understand the resurrection of the dead. Some were never taught about it, while others were taught incorrect or incomplete information about it. I hope this book will bring to light the truth and importance of the resurrection.

## A Foundational Belief

According to the book of Hebrews, the resurrection of the dead was listed as one of the “*elementary principles of Christ*” (Hebrews 6:1-2), and was a foundational doctrine among First Century believers.

"Therefore, leaving the discussion of **the elementary principles of Christ**, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, **of resurrection of the dead**, and of eternal judgment. And this we will do if God permits."

- Hebrews 6:1-3

The writer of Hebrews seems to indicate that these things are so basic and fundamental that he did not see the need in “*laying again the foundation*”. Unfortunately, it seems that the doctrine of “*the resurrection of the dead*” is no longer a fundamental teaching among believers. Popular teachings today center around heaven, rather than the hope we have in the resurrection.

Nearly all Christians are aware of the resurrection of Yeshua, but they have little or no knowledge about their own resurrection. The fact is, many preachers and teachers do not understand the resurrection of the dead, which is why they are not teaching their congregations about this *elementary principle of Christ*.

The more I study the resurrection, the more I am convinced of its importance to the Gospel. In fact, I firmly believe that without the resurrection we have no Gospel at all.

## MEYER

"For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins!" - 1 Corinthians 15:16-17

Anyone who preaches the Gospel without speaking of the resurrection of the dead is preaching an empty gospel, and according to Paul, their *"faith is futile"*.

The resurrection should be one of the very first things we learn when we begin following Yeshua, that is why the Bible calls it an *"elementary principle"*. By definition, elementary principles pertain to first things, these are the simple things that you learn first before moving on to more difficult subjects. It is the starting point and foundation for building your understanding of other subjects.

It was considered a fundamental doctrine among the Jewish people, who had understood it for centuries prior. A fact that can easily be extrapolated from the dialogue between Yeshua and Martha concerning the death of Lazarus, when she makes a matter-of-fact statement about it.

"Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha said to Him, **'I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.'**" - John 11:23

Martha had no idea that Yeshua was about to raise her brother from the dead, and it seems that she simply thought He was trying to comfort her, by reminding her of the resurrection at the end of the age. However, she was in for a surprise when Yeshua called Lazarus up from the grave, and she witnessed the power He has over death.

We know from other passages in the Bible that there were mixed views about the resurrection. The Pharisees, who represented the orthodox view, believed in the resurrection of the dead, while the Sadducees opposed it.

# Immortal

"For Sadducees say that there is no resurrection--and no angel or spirit; but the Pharisees confess both."

- Acts 23:8

The controversy between Pharisees and Sadducees over the resurrection of the dead is a topic that repeats several times throughout the Gospels and Acts, and it is one of the things we know for sure that Yeshua and His disciples agreed with the Pharisees about.

Second century writers such as Irenaeus and Justin Martyr wrote a number of arguments in favor of the resurrection of the body. Here is one example from Justin in which he frankly states that anyone who denies the resurrection of the body is seeking to rob us of the promise of eternal life.

"They who maintain the wrong opinion say that there is no resurrection of the flesh... And there are some who maintain that even Jesus Himself appeared only as spiritual, and not in flesh, but presented merely the appearance of flesh: these persons seek to rob the flesh of the promise."<sup>i</sup>

We also know from studying the writings of the early church that the resurrection of the dead was still a foundational doctrine among believers even in the fourth and fifth centuries. In fact, the "Apostles Creed" includes a statement about the bodily resurrection as well.

"I believe in the Holy Spirit, the holy catholic Church, the communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, **the resurrection of the body**, and the life everlasting."<sup>ii</sup>

The Apostles Creed is a statement of belief that was compiled around the fourth century, and is still in use today.

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<sup>i</sup> Martyr, Justin, translated by the Rev. M. DODS, M.A. "Fragments of the Lost Work of Justin on the Resurrection", OrthodoxEbooks

<sup>ii</sup> The Apostles' Creed

## MEYER

Likewise, the "Nicene Creed", which was adopted during the Second Ecumenical Council at Constantinople in 381 AD, contains a similar statement about the resurrection.

"...we acknowledge One Baptism for the forgiveness of sins, **the resurrection of the dead** and of the age to come."<sup>i</sup>

These early creeds were considered to be a token of identification for believers. They contained what was considered to be the most important doctrines of their faith, and as such were recited every week during the liturgy, as many still do today.

This shows that not only was the resurrection a confession of the early church, but it has endured as a common creed until today. Yet, for some reason, this has not prevented people from teaching contrary beliefs about the state of the dead and the afterlife.

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<sup>i</sup> Nicene Creed of 381 AD



## Baptism

Baptism is listed as one of the “*elementary principles of Christ*” (Hebrews 6:1-2) along with repentance, faith, resurrection, laying on hands, and eternal judgment. It must be important if it is listed as one of the “*elementary principles*”, especially when we consider how important the others are.

We know repentance is important because the Bible says, “*unless you **repent** you will all likewise perish*” (Luke 13:3), and faith is important because “*without **faith** it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11:6). We are also told “*Do not **lay hands** on anyone hastily*” (1 Tim. 5:22), and the Bible explains how vital the resurrection is, saying, “*if the dead do not **rise**, then... your faith is futile*” (1 Cor. 15:16-17). Likewise, the judgment is vital because, “*we must all appear before the **judgment** seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad*” (2 Cor. 5:10).

Baptism is listed as one of those foundational doctrines, and we should give it a significant place in our life and faith. Sadly, there are some who place little value on baptism, and treat it as if it is an optional token, rather than a vital step in our faith.

Many people teach that baptism is only symbolic, and that it has no other purpose. However, if baptism is only symbolic, then why did Yeshua command that all new believers become baptized?

“And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, ‘All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth. Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, **baptizing** them in the name of the Father and of the Son

## MEYER

and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you..." - Matthew 28:18-20

Why would our Messiah place so much emphasis on baptism if it was only symbolic? He placed it on equal ground with making disciples and teaching them to obey all of His commandments.

When did baptism originate, and what is its purpose? We know that John was baptizing people in the Jordan for repentance of sins, but was he the first to introduce baptism?

If we do a little research, we find a connection between baptism and the practice of ablution, the act of washing oneself in water as prescribed by God in the Torah.

There are three kinds of Ablution recognized in Biblical and rabbinical law: (1) Washing of the hands, (2) washing of the hands and feet, and (3) immersion of the whole body in water.<sup>i</sup>

These ablutions are often referred to as "ritual washings", and the two most common are that of hand washing and full body immersion. These washings are not simply for physical cleanliness, but they also serve for spiritual cleansing.

The Bible provides a number of scenarios for when we should wash ourselves in water. It serves to decontaminate from sickness and disease, to purify from touching unclean things, to sanitize from emissions and menstruations, and to sanctify before entering the temple.

John Wesley popularized the phrase, "*Cleanliness is indeed next to godliness*", and although that phrase is not found in the Scriptures, the concept can be inferred from the sheer

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<sup>i</sup> Singer, Isidore, Ph.D, Projector and Managing Editor. Entry for 'Ablution'. 1901 The Jewish Encyclopedia.

number of times the Bible instructs us to wash.

Aside from ritual cleansing, immersion was also used in the conversion process for Gentile proselytes to become part of the Jewish people. This is actually where the baptism for conversion originated. Being “*baptized into Christ Jesus*” is the starting point for those who wish to enter the covenant.

“The Baptism of the proselyte has for its purpose his cleansing from the impurity of idolatry, and the restoration to the purity of a new-born man... The bathing in the water is to constitute a rebirth, wherefore ‘the ger is like a child just born’ and he must bathe ‘in the name of God’ — ‘leshem shamayim’ — that is, assume the yoke of God's kingdom imposed upon him by the one who leads him to Baptism, or else he is not admitted into Judaism. For this very reason the Israelites before the acceptance of the Law had, according to Philo on the Decalogue, as well as according to rabbinical tradition, to undergo the rite of baptismal purification...”<sup>i</sup>

This is very similar to what Paul wrote about those who passed through the red sea after leaving Egypt.

“Moreover, brethren, I do not want you to be unaware that all our fathers were under the cloud, all passed through the sea, all were **baptized into Moses** in the cloud and in the sea” - 1 Corinthians 10:1-2

The phrase “*baptized into Moses*” is a reference to Moses being the one who led them in their baptism, and it was under Moses that they assumed “*the yoke of God's kingdom*”. This would mean that if we are baptized in Yeshua, then we assume the yoke of the covenant through Him, because He is the one who leads us into the kingdom.

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<sup>i</sup> Singer, Isidore, Ph.D, Projector and Managing Editor. Entry for 'Baptism'. 1901 The Jewish Encyclopedia.

## MEYER

There are a number of types and shadows of baptism in the Scriptures such as Noah and the flood, Moses in the Nile, the Israelites crossing the Red Sea, and Jonah in the belly of the whale. Not only do these events represent baptism, but also point prophetically to the resurrection. Each of these accounts show how people were redeemed from death through water.

Peter made a direct correlation between baptism and the resurrection. He also used the flood as an example of baptism, explaining how Noah and his family were saved through water.

“...when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. There is also an antitype which now saves us - **baptism** (not the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), **through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.**” - 1 Peter 3:20-21

Just as the flood purified the earth by removing the wicked, so also baptism purifies the soul from sin and idolatry.

Peter said baptism is an “*antitype*” of the flood. The Greek word he used here is “*antitypon*” which means typical of, representing by type or pattern, corresponding to, a thing resembling another, or its counterpart.<sup>i</sup> It refers to another thing that is similar to the first.

Therefore, baptism is a type or pattern of the flood which saved Noah and his family. The flood cleansed the world of evil, and allowed Noah and his family to start over fresh. The whole earth was baptized in water, which is symbolic of resurrection, because new life came forth from the ark.

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<sup>i</sup> Strong, J. (1996). *The New Strong's Complete Dictionary of Bible Words*. Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers

## Immortal

Peter also says we are baptized “*through the resurrection of Jesus Christ.*” Therefore, our baptism is connected to the resurrection of Yeshua. Likewise, Paul made a similar analogy between baptism and the resurrection of Yeshua.

“Or do you not know that as many of us as **were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death?** Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection” - Romans 6:3-5

According to Paul, baptism is an identification with the death and resurrection of our Messiah. As we go down into the water we are receiving His death and burial, and as we come out of the water we are proclaiming His resurrection and new life. In this way, baptism becomes an expression of faith in the resurrection of the dead.

Peter compelled the people to be baptized during his sermon, teaching that baptism is for the remission of sins.

“Then Peter said to them, ‘Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.’” - Acts 2:38

If baptism is “*for the remission of sins*”, that alone is a very compelling reason to be baptized. It is no wonder that we see the Apostles placing such emphasis on baptism among new believers. Here are a few examples from the book of Acts that show how important baptism was to the First Century believers.

## MEYER

"Then those who gladly received his word were **baptized**; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them." - Acts 2:41

"But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were **baptized**." - Acts 8:12

"Now as they went down the road, they came to some water. And the eunuch said, 'See, here is water. What hinders me from being **baptized**?' " - Acts 8:36

"Immediately there fell from his eyes something like scales, and he received his sight at once; and he [Paul] arose and was **baptized**." - Acts 9:18

"Can anyone forbid water, that these [Gentiles] should not be **baptized** who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" And he commanded them to be **baptized** in the name of the Lord..." - Acts 10:47-48

"Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all who were in his house. And he took them the same hour of the night and washed their stripes. And immediately he and all his family were **baptized**." - Acts 16:32-33

"Then Crispus, the ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his household. And many of the Corinthians, hearing, believed and were **baptized**."  
- Acts 18:8

"And now why are you waiting? Arise and be **baptized**, and wash away your sins, calling on the name of the Lord." - Acts 22:16

Notice that baptism was done immediately after coming to faith. They didn't have an "altar call" or take a new members class, they believed and were baptized. There was a sense

## Immortal

of urgency connected to each of these baptism accounts, because they understood baptism to be a vital part of their salvation.

This urgency comes from a desire to wash away the sins of their past. Paul explained that we are baptized into the death of Christ so that our sinful self can be put to death, and we can live as a new man who walks according to the Spirit, not the flesh.

"What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin that grace may abound? Certainly not! How shall we who died to sin live any longer in it? Or do you not know that as many of us as **were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into His death? Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death**, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we also shall be in the likeness of His resurrection, knowing this, that **our old man was crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be done away with**, that we should no longer be slaves of sin. For he who has died has been freed from sin. Now if we died with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with Him, knowing that Christ, having been raised from the dead, dies no more. Death no longer has dominion over Him."  
- Romans 6:1-9

Paul makes the argument that our old sinful self is crucified through the act of baptism. Through baptism, we put away our former self. When we enter the water, we *die to sin*, and when we come out of the water, we embrace the new life that has been made available to us.

Paul commends us to "*reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin*" (Romans 6:11), because after we are baptized we must live as though we have been "*crucified with Christ*".

## MEYER

"I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me." - Galatians 2:20

When we die to sin, we crucify our own sinful desires, and allow the Holy Spirit to reign in our life. We are no longer ruled by sin when we live in obedience to the Father.

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but **present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead**, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." - Romans 6:12-13

Baptism is identified with death and resurrection, because we put our sinful flesh to death, and rise out of the water in newness of life by the Spirit. When we walk according to the Spirit, we no longer set our mind on the things of the flesh.

"There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit." - Romans 8:1

If we are baptized in Christ, then we have died to sin, and if we have died to sin, we no longer walk according to the flesh. However, if we continue in sin we will die, because we are not walking in the Spirit of holiness.

"For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live." - Romans 8:13

If we do not destroy our sin, our sin will destroy us. Death is the destination for those who walk in sin, however, those who walk in holiness will be given eternal life through the resurrection. If we want to find eternal life in Messiah, then



## Immortal

we must kill our sinful flesh, because those who walk according to the flesh cannot please God.

"For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. For to be carnally minded is death, but to be spiritually minded is life and peace. **Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God, nor indeed can be.** So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. And if Christ is in you, the body is dead because of sin, but the Spirit is life because of righteousness. But if the Spirit of Him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, He who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through His Spirit who dwells in you."

- Romans 8:5-11

He has "*given us the Spirit in our hearts as a guarantee*" (2 Cor. 1:22), because the Spirit is the one who "*will also give life to your mortal bodies*" (Romans 8:11). The Holy Spirit is given as a deposit for the resurrection, marking those who belong to Yeshua.

Baptism marks the death of our sinful ways, giving us a newness of life through the Spirit, because, "*unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God.*" (John 3:5) If we want to have eternal life, then we must put our sinful flesh to death, and live our life according to the Spirit, walking in obedience to the Word of God.

"Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." - Acts 2:38

MEYER

## The God of the living

The Gospels record an incident when the Sadducees challenged Yeshua with what they thought would be a very difficult question. They were hoping to trap Him when they asked about marriage during the time of the resurrection.

"The same day the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Him and asked Him, saying: 'Teacher, Moses said that if a man dies, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife and raise up offspring for his brother. Now there were with us seven brothers. The first died after he had married, and having no offspring, left his wife to his brother. Likewise the second also, and the third, even to the seventh. Last of all the woman died also. Therefore, in the resurrection, whose wife of the seven will she be? For they all had her.'" - Matthew 22:23-28

As usual, Yeshua's response silenced the opposition, causing them to leave without the satisfaction they had hoped for.

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven. But **concerning the resurrection of the dead**, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? **God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.**' And when the multitudes heard this, they were astonished at His teaching." - Matthew 22:29-33

People often claim that the phrase "*God is not the God of the dead, but of the living*" (Matthew 22:32) is a reference to people being alive in heaven. However, the context of this

statement has absolutely nothing to do with heaven, and everything to do with the resurrection.

Not only is the framework of this conversation exclusively about what will happen in the resurrection, but Yeshua even says, “*concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read...*” Thus we cannot conclude that the phrase “*God of the living*” has anything to do with the souls of the deceased living in heaven. He contrasts the “*god of the dead*” with the “God of the living”, showing that the God of Abraham is unique among other gods.

When we study ancient pagan cultures such as the Egyptians, Babylonians, and Greeks, we find out that they all believed in a “*god of the dead*” who ruled over the underworld. Death deities were some of the most important gods to early pagan societies, because they glorified death and looked forward to the afterlife as their reward. Even certain monotheistic religions believe their god rules over the underworld.

However, Yeshua claims that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the god of the dead. This is significant because it provides one more reason to reject the idea that the souls of the dead continue living in a disembodied state.

The most well known death deities are those of the Egyptians. Death and the afterlife were so important to the Egyptians that they had elaborate burial procedures, incantations, and protocol in place to insure the dead were received into the afterlife. These funerary protocols are detailed in what is known today as “The Egyptian Book of the Dead”, which consists of a number of magic spells that were believed to assist the dead through the underworld and into the afterlife.

Among these death gods, Anubis was the most important,

and was believed to be the guardian of the dead. Anubis was also known as the patron god of embalming and mummification. However, his most important role was the “*Guardian of the Scales*”<sup>i</sup> which were used to weigh the hearts of the deceased to determine if they would be allowed into heaven. Later, when Egypt became Hellenistic, Anubis was amalgamated with the Greek god Hermes, because they were both thought to guide dead souls into the afterlife.

Nearly all pagan religions have a god of death, and while they have different names, they each represent the same idea that when we die, our soul goes to be with that god.

This stands in obvious contrast to what Yeshua was saying about the God of Abraham. The souls of the dead do not go to heaven to be with God, because God is not the *god of the dead*. The dead rest in their graves until the *God of the living* brings them back to life.

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<sup>i</sup> Faulkner, Raymond O.; Andrews, Carol; Wasserman, James (2008), *The Egyptian Book of the Dead: The Book of Going Forth by Day*, Chronicle Books



## The Gates of Sheol

When Yeshua asked His disciples, “*who do you say that I am?*” (Matthew 16:15), Peter gave the profound response, “*You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.*” After explaining that this was a revelation from God, Yeshua made an interesting statement about the resurrection.

“Jesus answered and said to him, ‘Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven. And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it.’” - Matthew 16:17-18

This statement is the very first reference in the New Testament where we find the English word “church”. The Greek word used here is “ekklesia”, which means a gathering of citizens who are called out to an assembly.

You may also notice that the word ekklesia sounds very similar to Ecclesiastes. This is because they are related words. We get the name for the book of Ecclesiastes from the Septuagint (the Greek translation of the Old Testament). The word ekklesia is used over one hundred times in the Septuagint in reference to the assembly of Israel.

Concerning His ekklesia, Yeshua makes an interesting claim that “*the gates of hades will not prevail against it*”. As we mentioned in previous chapters, the Greek word “hades” is synonymous with the Hebrew word “Sheol”, and if we search the Old Testament for the phrase “*gates of Sheol*”, we find that it is used in several places in reference to death, and is sometimes even translated “the gates of death”.

## MEYER

"Will they go down to the gates of Sheol? Shall we have rest together in the dust?" - Job 17:16

"Have the gates of death been revealed to you? Or have you seen the doors of the shadow of death?" - Job 38:17

"In the prime of my life I shall go to the gates of Sheol; I am deprived of the remainder of my years." - Isaiah 38:10

"Have mercy on me, O Lord! Consider my trouble from those who hate me, You who lift me up from the gates of death, that I may tell of all Your praise In the gates of the daughter of Zion. I will rejoice in Your salvation."  
- Psalm 9:13-14

"Their soul abhorred all manner of food, And they drew near to the gates of death." - Psalm 107:18

All of these verses referencing the *gates of Sheol* are speaking about people dying, or being raised back to life. The usage of the word "gates" indicates an entrance or exit that allows for passage. Gates can be used to keep people in (like a prison) or to keep them out (like a gated community). In any case, gates represent restricted access. So, when Messiah said the gates of hades will not prevail against it, what exactly was He talking about?

The word ekklesia is translated "church", but if we replace the translation with the definition of that word ("assembly of called out ones"), we get a slightly different understanding.

"and on this rock I will build My *assembly of called out ones*, and the gates of Hades shall not prevail against it."  
- Matthew 16:18

The gates of hades are unable to prevail against the assembly of called out ones, because death cannot conquer the kingdom that Yeshua is building. The gates of Sheol will



## Immortal

not prevent us from being part of His assembly, and when He comes to call us out, we will fling wide the doors of death and rise from the dust of the earth to stand in the assembly of Messiah.

Keep in mind that the rock upon which the assembly is built is the testimony that Yeshua is “*the Son of the living God*”. Which is a statement about the resurrection, because “*God is not the god of the dead, but of the living.*”

The resurrection is intimately tied to the nature and character of both the Father and the Son. Therefore, to say we believe in the living God, is to say we believe in the resurrection of the dead. This revelation that Yeshua is “*the Son of the living God*” is vital to our understanding of the gospel message.



## Distinctive Doctrine

The resurrection of the dead is one of the most unique doctrines in the Bible, and one of the primary points which has set our faith apart from all other religious systems and philosophies throughout history.

The Bible provides us with a great example of how unique the resurrection message truly is. When Paul spoke to the Greek philosophers about the resurrection, they claimed he was teaching strange doctrine they had never heard before.

“Then certain Epicurean and Stoic philosophers encountered him. And some said, ‘What does this babblers want to say?’ Others said, ‘He seems to be a proclaimer of foreign gods,’ because he preached to them Jesus and the resurrection.” - Acts 17:18

Epicureanism is a system of philosophy that is based on the teachings of Epicurus. He was a materialistic hedonist who believed that pleasure is the “greatest good”. Epicureans pursued knowledge and tranquility, while trying to avoid pain and fear. Epicureans rejected immortality altogether, believing that once you die there is nothing more, no punishment, no reward, and no more life whatsoever.

“And this present life is the only one. With one consent Epicureanism preaches that the death of the body is the end of everything for man, and hence the other world has lost all its terrors as well as all its hopes.”<sup>i</sup>

They did not fear the gods or the afterlife, because of their belief in the finality of death. Like many humanists and atheists today, they found comfort in their belief that nothing is beyond this life.

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<sup>i</sup> Chisholm, Hugh, General Editor. Entry for 'Epicurus'. 1911 Encyclopedia Britannica.

## MEYER

According to the Epicureans, our soul does not exist before birth, and likewise, it will not exist after death. They also believed the soul was material and mortal, thus they concluded that when the body dies the soul dies with it. For them, death was absolute with no hope of return or reward.

During the first century, Epicureanism was considered to be the main opponent to Stoicism, which is why Paul encountered both groups, most likely involved in some sort of debate.

Stoicism, on the other hand, is a school of philosophy which opposed emotions in favor of moral and intellectual perfection. They believed the goal of life is happiness, which comes as the result of virtue.

Stoics were also pantheistic in their worldview, believing that the universe itself is a divine and collective soul. They did not believe in god as an individual being, but they thought the universe itself was god, which made it difficult for them to have a consistent belief about the afterlife.

The Stoics believed the soul was spiritual and part of the divine, concluding that it was pre-existent before birth, and continues on after death. Their pantheistic worldview led to their conviction that each individual soul is merged with the collective universal soul at death.

"Philosophical systems abounded in the first century A.D. Among the most notable were Stoicism, Epicureanism, Platonism, Cynicism, Philonism, and Skepticism. The writers of the New Testament mention philosophy only twice. In Colossians 2:8, Paul warned his readers to beware of philosophy... In Acts 17:18, Luke mentioned that Epicurean and Stoic philosophers engaged Paul in debate. Their motives were clearly a desire for

# immortal

speculation rather than an active pursuit of the truth of the gospel."<sup>i</sup>

Aside from Epicureanism and Stoicism, which were the most prominent views in the first century, another noteworthy philosophy was Platonism, which had a profound influence on western thought and Gnostic beliefs.

Platonists argued that this physical life is a shadow of reality, and at death our souls are able to return to what they called the “true form” of existence in the spiritual realm. This is where the immortal soul theory comes from. It’s also where we get the idea that our soul goes immediately to heaven or hell at death.

The Epicureans and Stoics would have been very familiar with Plato’s theory of forms, and would not have thought it a “*new doctrine*” if Paul had been preaching about dead souls going to heaven. However, when Paul addressed the philosophers with the message of the resurrection, they were caught off guard by the strange doctrine he was teaching. All of their training in philosophy and religion was unable to prepare them for the unique message of the resurrection.

They thought Paul was crazy for speaking about dead people coming back to life, which is why they called him a “babbler”. Bodily resurrection was a Hebrew concept with which these Greek thinkers were unfamiliar. Yet, because of their desire for knowledge and debate, they were curious about what Paul had to say.

And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, "May we know what this new doctrine is of which you speak? For you are bringing some strange things to

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Philosophy in the New Testament'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

## MEYER

our ears. Therefore we want to know what these things mean." - Acts 17:19-20

Once he got their attention with the resurrection, Paul began a sermon that was very antagonistic to their philosophical beliefs. He argued against the Stoics when He spoke about a God that does not dwell in idols, who created the world and everything in it, and who gives life to all mortals. Then, he opposed the Epicureans when he proclaimed the need for repentance and the future day of judgment that all men will face. He concluded his speech with the hope of the resurrection, and presented the risen Messiah as evidence for this hope.

In response to his teaching, some laughed, and others seemed interested in hearing more, but a few actually became believers that day.

“And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked, while others said, ‘We will hear you again on this matter.’ So Paul departed from among them. However, some men joined him and believed, among them Dionysius the Areopagite, a woman named Damaris, and others with them.” - Acts 17:32-34

When the resurrection is taught today, we are likely to find those same three groups present among the crowd. There will be some who will laugh and mock the idea of a resurrection, and there will be some who will be interested in hearing more about it, but the group that really matters are the ones who believe and allow it to transform their lives.

## Born Again

Believers often talk about being “*born again*”. It is one of the most common phrases used in modern Christianity. We hear people claim to be “born again believers”, but do we truly understand what that means? For the most part, it has become a catchphrase that is used to identify believers, a synonym for “Christian”, but is that really what Yeshua meant when He said, “*you must be born again*” (John 3:7)?

Yeshua was speaking to a Pharisee named Nicodemus when He said, “*unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God*” (John 3:3). He then chastised the man for not understanding what He was talking about, saying, “*Are you the teacher of Israel, and do not know these things?*” (John 3:10) There is an implied expectation that this Pharisee should have understood what it meant to be “*born again*”. Which means it was something this “*teacher of Israel*” should have already known.

It is ridiculous to think that Yeshua expected Nicodemus to understand that he must convert to a new religion called “Christianity” before he can enter the kingdom of God. Therefore, we cannot conclude that being *born again* means converting to a new religion.

Jesus answered and said to him, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." - John 3:3

According to Yeshua, we must be born again before we can see the kingdom of God. At first glance, this might seem like a strange phrase, but when we dig a little deeper, we find that Paul made a similar statement that helps bring better understanding to what Yeshua is talking about.

## MEYER

“Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” - 1 Corinthians 15:50

When we examine the context of what Paul is writing, we see that he is contrasting our earthly body to the spiritual body we will receive at the resurrection. He starts out by explaining that our current body is flesh, and comes from Adam, but the future body we will receive is spiritual, and comes from Yeshua.

“So also is **the resurrection of the dead**. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 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**. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being.’ The last Adam became a life-giving spirit. However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man**. Now this I say, brethren, that **flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God**; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.” - 1 Corinthians 15:42-50

Paul was responding to the questions, "*How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?*" (1 Cor. 15:35) He answers these questions by explaining that a seed must die first and be buried before it can grow into the plant it will become, saying, "*you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain - perhaps wheat or some other grain*" (1 Cor. 15:37). Then he explains that the body we sow in death is not the same body we will receive at the resurrection.



## Immortal

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 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. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." - 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Paul explains that the natural body is of the earth, and comes through Adam, but the spiritual body is from heaven, and comes through Yeshua. He is making a profound statement about the resurrection, linking our resurrected body with a spiritual rebirth. This is what it means to be *born again*, because *flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom*, so we must be given a "*spiritual body*".

This is exactly what Yeshua was explaining to Nicodemus when He spoke about being born again.

Jesus answered, "Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God. **That which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.** Do not marvel that I said to you, 'You must be born again.' The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear the sound of it, but cannot tell where it comes from and where it goes. So is everyone who is born of the Spirit."  
- John 3:5-8

We are all "*born of the flesh*" through our mother's womb, because "*the flesh gives birth to flesh*", however, we are also told that we must be born of the spirit because, "*that which is born of the Spirit is spirit.*" Paul said we get our spiritual body from Yeshua who "*became a life-giving spirit*" (1 Cor. 15:55).

The phrase "*born again*" can also be translated "*born from above*" or "*born from heaven*". This goes along with what Paul said about Yeshua being a "*life-giving spirit*" who is the

## MEYER

*“Lord from heaven”*. He said, *“as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly”* (1 Cor. 15:48), explaining that *“we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man”* (1 Cor. 15:49) when we are given our *“spiritual body”* (1 Cor. 15:44) at the resurrection.

Some argue that we are already *born of the spirit* when we receive the Holy Spirit dwelling in us, but Paul describes the spiritual birth as an event that will take place in the future.

“as we have borne the image of the man of dust, **we shall**  
also bear the image of the heavenly Man”  
- 1 Corinthians 15:49

This is spoken about in a future tense. *“We shall”* bear the image of Yeshua in the future. He is making his case for the resurrection, when we will be given a spiritual body. In fact, he began his argument with the phrase, *“So also is the resurrection of the dead.”* Therefore, we cannot claim we are currently *born again*, because this event will take place at the resurrection.

So, what is the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and what is its purpose in the life of a believer? Paul explains that the Spirit was given as a *“guarantee”* of the heavenly body we will receive.

"For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall not be found naked. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but further clothed, that mortality may be swallowed up by life. Now He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who also has **given us the Spirit as a guarantee.**" - 2 Corinthians 5:1-5

## Immortal

The Holy Spirit is given to believers as a guarantee that we will be born of the Spirit, when we are “*clothed*” with the spiritual body that is “*from heaven*”. Right now, we have the Spirit dwelling in us, but at the resurrection, we will be *born of the spirit*.

There is an interesting connection that can be made between the indwelling Spirit and the conception of a child. The egg is fertilized in the mother’s womb with a seed, and it develops over time, but it is not born until it comes out of the womb. Likewise, the Holy Spirit has been planted in us, to conceive children of God.

"For the earnest expectation of the creation eagerly waits for **the revealing of the sons of God**... For we know that the whole creation **groans and labors with birth pangs** together until now. Not only that, but we also who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, **eagerly waiting** for the adoption, the redemption of our body." - Romans 8:19-23

We will be revealed as the “*sons of God*” at the “*redemption of our body*”. We have not yet been revealed, because we are still in the womb, but the creation is groaning in birth pangs, and our spiritual bodies will emerge at the resurrection.

Yeshua was actually the first person to be *born again*, according to Paul, who described Yeshua as “*the firstborn from the dead*” (Colossians 1:18). He was the “*firstborn*” so that “*in all things He may have the preeminence*” (Colossians 1:18). Paul also explains in Romans that we are “*predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the **firstborn** among many brethren*” (Romans 8:29).

MEYER

## FirstFruits

When speaking about Yeshua's resurrection, Paul explained that He is the "*firstfruits*" of the resurrection. His intentional use of this phrase makes significant implications about the timing and purpose of His resurrection.

"But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming." - 1 Corinthians 15:20-23

Paul made some significant prophetic connections between the Messiah and the Feasts of the LORD. He explained that the Feasts and Sabbaths "*are a shadow of things to come*" (Colossians 2:17), and that Yeshua is "*our Passover*" (1 Cor. 5:7). We know from the Gospels that Yeshua died on the day of Passover. Therefore, Paul's claim that Yeshua is "*our Passover*" was a reference to both the purpose and timing of His death. He died as the Lamb of God on the day of Passover.

Likewise, when Paul refers to Yeshua as the "*firstfruits*" of the resurrection, he is making a statement about the purpose and timing of His resurrection. The day of firstfruits is a commanded celebration which follows Passover.

And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When you come into the land which I give to you, and reap its harvest, then you shall bring a sheaf of the **firstfruits** of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the Lord, to be accepted on your behalf; **on the day after the Sabbath** the priest shall wave it.'" - Leviticus 23:9-11

## MEYER

This Sabbath referred to here is the Sabbath that follows Passover. Therefore, on the day after the Sabbath, Yeshua fulfilled this prophetic Feast as the firstfruits of the resurrection. He was the single sheaf that was raised up on firstfruits.

God has provided us with a calendar, and He placed a number of events on it for us to observe. These special appointments are typically translated as “Feasts” in English, but that doesn’t quite capture the full meaning of the word used to describe these events. In Hebrew, the word is “moed”, and although it is typically translated “feast” or “festival”, it actually means an appointed time, or meeting. These are special appointments that God has placed on the calendar. They are times when God wants to meet with His people.

The Feasts are prophetic about the Messiah, and they teach us about the Gospel. Yeshua died on Passover, was buried on Unleavened bread, resurrected on FirstFruits, and poured out the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Remember that the book of Hebrews tells us the gospel was preached to those who left Egypt.

“For indeed the gospel was preached to us as well as to them; but the word which they heard did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in those who heard it.”  
- Hebrews 4:2

Not only was it preached to them, but it was also experienced by them. They took a lamb, killed it, and painted it’s blood on the doorposts of their homes the night of the final plague. They watched as the Lord passed over their homes, while the firstborn sons of Egypt were killed. They left Egypt in haste, eating unleavened bread, because they did not have time to let the bread rise. The Israelites were saved by grace and the blood of the lamb. They did

nothing to deserve this salvation. However, this gospel did not profit them because it was not mixed with faith.

“because all these men who have seen My glory and the signs which I did in Egypt and in the wilderness, and have put Me to the test now these ten times, and have not heeded My voice, they certainly shall not see the land of which I swore to their fathers, nor shall any of those who rejected Me see it. But My servant Caleb, because he has a different spirit in him and has followed Me fully, I will bring into the land where he went, and his descendants shall inherit it.” - Numbers 14:22-24

They saw the wonders and power of God as He sent plagues on Egypt, and they experienced the salvation of God at Passover. They walked through the Red Sea, and followed the pillar of smoke by day and pillar of fire by night, yet they turned away from the promised land because they were afraid of the giants.

This story is written for our benefit. Why do you think that Yeshua said, “...*when the Son of Man comes, will He really find faith on the earth?*” (Luke 18:8) Is it really possible that those who are saved by grace and the blood of the lamb might not have faith when the Messiah returns for the harvest?

MEYER



## The Harvest

The fall Feasts begin with the Day of Trumpets on the first day of the seventh month, followed by the Day of Atonement on the tenth day, and end with the Feast of Tabernacles from the fifteenth day to the twenty-first day.

The Bible says, *"In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a memorial of blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation"* (Leviticus 23:24). The word translated "trumpets" here is the Hebrew word "teruah", which means "a shout, a blast of war, alarm, or joy, blowing trumpets, or making noise".

"The trumpet, like the shofar, was not so much an instrument of music as one of "teruah" (noise), that is, of alarm and for signaling. Its primary use was to give signals to the people and their chiefs to assemble and to break camp, also generally to announce an important event and to aid in the joyous shouting of the people on festive occasions. But its chief use, at least in later times, was religious and it was therefore almost exclusively a priestly instrument. It was sounded on New Moons at the daily offerings and during the pauses in the singing of the Psalms, when the people fell down and worshiped. Altogether from twenty-one to forty-eight trumpet-blasts are said to have been sounded daily in the Temple. The sound of the trumpet also accompanied the joyous ceremony of water-drawing on the Feast of Tabernacles and a blast of trumpets announced the beginning and close of the Sabbath."<sup>i</sup>

The Bible gives a very interesting and puzzling explanation as to why we are commanded to celebrate this day.

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<sup>i</sup> Singer, Isidore, Ph.D, Projector and Managing Editor. Entry for 'Trumpet'. 1901 The Jewish Encyclopedia.

## MEYER

"Speak to the children of Israel, saying: 'In the seventh month, on the first day of the month, you shall have a sabbath-rest, a **memorial of blowing of trumpets**, a holy convocation.'" - Leviticus 23:24

The Bible says it is a "*memorial of blowing of trumpets*", yet we are never told what to remember. The word translated "memorial" is the Hebrew word "zīk-rō-wn" which means "a reminder, a memorial, a record, or a sign". This is why it is also known as "Yom ha-Zikaron" (the day of remembrance). But what are we supposed to remember?

In the commandment to observe Passover, we are told it is a "memorial" (Exodus 12:14), and we are expected to remember the events of the Exodus. Likewise, when Yeshua ate the last supper with His disciples, He said we are to eat the bread and drink the wine in "remembrance" of Him, identifying himself with Passover and the deliverance that day represents.

Likewise, we were instructed to "*remember the Sabbath day*" (Exodus 20:8), because "*in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day*" (Exodus 20:11). By keeping the Sabbath, we are identifying ourselves with the God of Creation.

Why does the Bible neglect to tell us what to remember on the day of Trumpets? Perhaps the trumpets are not meant for us to remember something. What if the trumpets are a reminder for God?

When Noah was on the ark, "*God remembered Noah... and the waters subsided*" (Genesis 8:1). When the Israelites were suffering in Egypt, "*God remembered His covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob*" (Exodus 2:24), and He sent Moses to deliver them. When He destroyed Sodom

## Immortal

and Gomorrah, “*God remembered Abraham, and sent Lot out of the midst of the overthrow*” (Genesis 19:29).

What if the day of Trumpets is a reminder to God that His people are waiting for His final deliverance?

The Bible says that when the Israelites went to war, they were to blow trumpets so that God will remember them and save them from their enemies.

“When you go to war in your land against the enemy who oppresses you, then you shall sound an alarm with the trumpets, and you will be **remembered** before the Lord your God, and you will be saved from your enemies.”

- Numbers 10:9

The Bible tells us that “*in the last days perilous times will come*” (2 Timothy 3:1), and we know that God has promised to deliver His people from those things when we turn to Him and obey. Could it be that our obedience in sounding the trumpets might be reason for God to remember His people?

“When you are in distress, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, when you turn to the Lord your God and obey His voice (for the Lord your God is a merciful God), He will not forsake you nor destroy you, nor forget the covenant of your fathers which He swore to them.” - Deuteronomy 4:30-31

On more than one occasion, the New Testament mentions trumpets in connection with the return of Messiah and the resurrection of the dead.

“Then 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 coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a **great sound of a trumpet**, and they will gather

## MEYER

together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” - Matthew 24:30-31

Paul explains the return of Messiah and the resurrection of the dead are corresponding events that are announced with the sound of trumpets.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the **trumpet** of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.”  
- 1 Thessalonians 4:16

The “shout” and the “trumpet” are both words that are connected to “Teruah”. Paul explains that when the trumpet is sounded and the resurrection takes place, we will all be given immortal bodies.

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the **last trumpet**. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed." - 1 Corinthians 15:51-52

Paul understands that trumpets will announce the return of the Messiah, because he understands the prophetic significance of the “*Feasts of the Lord*”.

The day of Trumpets is exactly ten days before the day of Atonement. The day of Atonement (*Yom Kippur*) is the national day of salvation for God’s people. Passover brings personal salvation, but Yom Kippur brings national salvation. On that day the High Priest makes atonement for the sins of all the people of Israel. It is also when the year of Jubilee is announced.

"Then you shall cause the trumpet of the Jubilee to sound on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the Day of

## Immortal

Atonement you shall make the trumpet to sound throughout all your land." - Leviticus 25:9

When Yeshua returns, it will be a year of Jubilee, because the captives will be set free, debts will be forgiven, and we shall *"proclaim liberty throughout the land"* (Leviticus 25:10).

The last Feast on the Biblical calendar is the Feast of Tabernacles, also referred to as the feast of the ingathering. It represents the harvest of the land, and the gathering of God's people.

"And you shall observe the Feast of Weeks, of the firstfruits of wheat harvest, and **the Feast of Ingathering at the year's end**. Three times in the year all your men shall appear before the Lord, the Lord God of Israel. For I will cast out the nations before you and enlarge your borders; neither will any man covet your land when you go up to appear before the Lord your God three times in the year." - Exodus 34:22-24

The Feast of Tabernacles is connected to the time when God dwelt among the people in the Tabernacle in the wilderness. The Israelites lived in tents and followed the Lord through the wilderness to the promised land, and Hosea prophesied that this will happen again, saying, *"I will again make you dwell in tents, as in the days of the appointed feast"* (Hosea 12:9).

The ingathering of the harvest is prophetically connected to the return of Yeshua. In fact, Zechariah prophesied that when Messiah is King, all of the nations *"shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles"* (Zechariah 14:16).

Yeshua told a parable about the harvest, and said tares were sown among the good seed. He instructed that the tares be left until the harvest, so that the wheat might not be

## MEYER

uprooted with them. Then He explained that the harvest is the end of the age, when He will gather His people and cast out those who are evil.

"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**, and the reapers are the angels. Therefore as the tares are gathered and burned in the fire, so it will be at the end of this age." - Matthew 13:37-40

The Feast of the Ingathering is prophetically connected to the return of Yeshua, when He will gather His people together at the end of the age. The spring Feasts were prophetic of His first coming, and the fall Feasts are prophetic of His return. These things were given so that we might understand God's plan for salvation through Yeshua.

## Immortal

When Yeshua returns, we will be resurrected and given eternal life, but what does it mean to be immortal, and what will our resurrected bodies be like?

"Beloved, now we are children of God; and **it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him**, for we shall see Him as He is." - 1 John 3:2

We do not know for certain what our resurrected bodies will be like, but the Bible gives us some clues about it. Paul talks about this very topic, and makes it clear that our immortal bodies will be different from our earthly bodies.

"But someone will say, 'How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?' Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, **you do not sow that body that shall be...** So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 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.** There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body... And so it is written, "The first man Adam became a living being." The last Adam became a life-giving spirit... The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and **as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.** And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, **we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.**" - 1 Corinthians 15:35-36,42-45,47-49

Paul is arguing that our spiritual bodies will be like the body that Yeshua had after His resurrection. So, if we want to

## MEYER

know about our resurrected bodies, we can look at His.

The Bible does not give us a lot of information about His resurrected body, but the Gospels do provide us with a few details. Right after His resurrection, we see is that He was able to change His physical appearance in order to disguise Himself.

"...He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons. She went and told those who had been with Him, as they mourned and wept. And when they heard that He was alive and had been seen by her, they did not believe. After that, **He appeared in another form** to two of them as they walked and went into the country." - Mark 16:9-12

Luke expounds on this story a little bit more, but he explains that their eyes were prevented from recognizing Him.

"Now behold, two of them were traveling that same day to a village called Emmaus, which was seven miles from Jerusalem. And they talked together of all these things which had happened. So it was, while they conversed and reasoned, that Jesus Himself drew near and went with them. But their eyes were restrained, so that they did not know Him." - Luke 24:13-16

To say that their eyes were restrained could be another way of saying that He concealed His appearance, but it could also mean that He somehow caused their eyes not to recognize Him. Either way, it was amazing that He could be right in front of them and they not know it until the moment He chose to reveal Himself.

The Gospel of John tells another story about how He was able to appear in a different form.



## Immortal

"Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' She, **supposing Him to be the gardener**, said to Him, 'Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher)."

- John 20:14-16

Mary did not recognize Yeshua at first, and confused Him with a gardener until He revealed Himself to her. I find it interesting that He appeared to her as a gardener after the resurrection, because we see in Genesis that God planted a garden in Eden. Could this be symbolic of Yeshua being the one who planted the garden?

Not only could He change His physical appearance, but He could also vanish suddenly.

"Now it came to pass, as He sat at the table with them, that He took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they knew Him; **and He vanished from their sight.**" - Luke 24:30-31

His ability to vanish shows us that His body was very different from our own. He was apparently made of matter, but had the ability to dematerialize in an instant. If we read a little further, we find out that He could also re-materialize whenever and wherever He wanted.

"Now as they said these things, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and said to them, 'Peace to you.' But they were terrified and frightened, and supposed they had seen a spirit. And He said to them, 'Why are you troubled? And why do doubts arise in your hearts? Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit

## MEYER

does not have flesh and bones as you see I have."  
- Luke 24:36-39

"when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in the midst, and said to them, 'Peace be with you'... And after eight days His disciples were again inside, and Thomas with them. Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, 'Peace to you!' Then He said to Thomas, 'Reach your finger here, and look at My hands; and reach your hand here, and put it into My side'..." - John 20:26

He was either able to appear suddenly, or He was able to walk through the wall, in either case, we see that His body was very unique, and was able to interact with the created world in very different ways than a typical human body. However, the Gospels also make it clear that He was not some sort of apparition, because He had a physical body that could be seen and touched. This is made evident when Thomas touched His hands and side.

The Bible provides even more proof of a physical body when He eats some fish with the disciples.

"But while they still did not believe for joy, and marveled, He said to them, 'Have you any food here?' So they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish and some honeycomb. And **He took it and ate in their presence.**" - Luke 24:41-43

Then, shortly after showing them that He had a physical body, He once again proved that His body is very different from our own by physically ascending into heaven.

"And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. Now it came to pass, while He blessed them, that He was parted from them and carried up into heaven." - Luke 24:50-51

## Immortal

"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight." - Acts 1:9

This also gives us a little more clarity about what will happen when He returns. He ascended up into the clouds, and when He returns, we will ascend into the clouds.

"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord."  
- 1 Thessalonians 4:17

This is referring to a prophecy that will be fulfilled by Messiah when He returns. It is one of the most significant Messianic prophecies in the Bible, because He will gather all of the tribes of Israel back to the promised land.

Moses, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel and many others spoke about a time when God will gather His people from among the nations (Deut. 30:3,4, Jer. 29:14, Ezek. 36:24). That is why we will be caught up into the air to be with Yeshua at His return, because He will take us with Him into the promised land.

Since we will be caught up together in the clouds, I wonder if we will be able to fly. Yeshua did say we will be like the angels in heaven.

"Jesus answered and said to them, 'You are mistaken, not knowing the Scriptures nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are **like angels of God in heaven.**'"  
- Matthew 22:29-30

No one knows for sure what our new bodies will be like, but we can be certain that they will be wonderful.

MEYER

## The Gospel

The gospel has been preached around the world, but do we truly understand its significance? Most people focus on the death of Yeshua, but there is so much more to the gospel than that. The Bible contains four books called *the Gospels*, and they provide extensive details about the teachings of Yeshua. It is interesting to note that He spoke about the gospel, but He only alludes to His death a few times. The main focus of His teachings center around the kingdom of God and the need for repentance, two subjects that are seldom mentioned in most gospel sermons.

The etymology of the English word “*gospel*” comes from the Old English “*godspell*”, meaning “*good story*” or “*good news*”. It is a translation of the Greek “*evangelion*”, which means a message from a king, or a good report about something.

I have heard a number of gospel presentations over the years, one of which was called the ABC’s of Salvation. In it they explained that “*the gospel is as easy as **ABC**.*”

**A** - admit you are a sinner

**B** - believe Jesus died for your sins

**C** - call upon the Lord to save you

This type of formulaic salvation is quite popular in Bible tracts and street evangelism because it is so simple to present, but is this message Biblical? Is it possible that we are doing harm to the gospel by teaching such things?

In First Corinthians, Paul gives a very detailed description of the gospel, and it sounds quite different from many of the popular sermon formulas of today.

## MEYER

"Moreover, brethren, I declare to you the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received and in which you stand, by which also you are saved, if you hold fast that word which I preached to you - unless you believed in vain. For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that **Christ died for our sins** according to the Scriptures, and that **He was buried**, and that **He rose again the third day** according to the Scriptures, and that **He was seen** by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep." - 1 Corinthians 15:1-6

If you asked most believers what the gospel is, they would no doubt tell you that "*Jesus died for our sins*", but this is often where many end their message, neglecting to mention His burial and resurrection, or the witnesses who verify it.

A number of years ago, I saw a debate between a Muslim and a Christian about Jesus. When the Muslim was given the microphone, he attacked the death and resurrection of Yeshua, claiming those events did not really occur. This is no surprise, because Islam claims that Yeshua did not really die, and therefore He could not have been raised from the dead. In fact, the Quran states "*they killed him not*."

"That they said (in boast), 'We killed Christ Jesus the son of Mary...' but they killed him not, nor crucified him, but so it was made to appear to them, and those who differ therein are full of doubts, with no (certain) knowledge, but only conjecture to follow, for of a surety they killed him not"<sup>i</sup>

However, when the Christian apologist gave his rebuttal, I fully expected him to offer up evidence to support the resurrection, since the heart of the gospel was being attacked. Sadly, he never made a single argument in

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<sup>i</sup> Qur'an, sura 4 (An-Nisa) ayat 157-158

defense of the death or resurrection of Yeshua. Instead, He tried to discredit Muhammad, dispute the validity of the Quran, and disparage a few of their doctrines. I was very frustrated at the outcome of the debate, because the Christian failed to defend the gospel.

If we have the opportunity to present the gospel, and we do not teach about the resurrection, then we have failed. If you think I am being dramatic, then listen to what Paul has to say about it.

**"And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty... For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable." - 1 Corinthians 15:14-19**

There can be no doubt that Paul believed the resurrection was of the utmost importance. He claims that without the resurrection our faith is futile and we are still in our sins. Therefore, salvation is impossible without the resurrection of Yeshua, and anyone who preaches a gospel deprived of this fact is teaching a worthless gospel.

Some people mistakenly argue that the death of Yeshua is the most important part of the gospel, however, if Yeshua did not rise from the dead, then we have no gospel. It is not good news that our Messiah died. The good news is that Yeshua conquered death! If He did not rise from the dead, then He was nothing more than a martyr. The resurrection changes everything!

Not only did He come back to life, but He will never die again, which is why He is able to serve as our eternal King and High Priest. The gospel is about His death and

resurrection, but it is also about the promise of eternal life.

Eternal life results from the resurrection of the dead, not disembodied souls going to heaven. We not only learn this from the Bible, but also from early Christian writers such as Justin Martyr, who believed in a bodily resurrection, and condemned as blasphemy the idea that souls go to heaven at death.

"For if you have conversed with some that are indeed called Christians, and do not maintain these opinions, but even dare to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, and **say that there is no resurrection of the dead, but that the souls as soon as they leave the body are received up into heaven, take care that you do not look upon these as Christians...** But I and all those Christians who are really orthodox in every respect, do know that there will be a resurrection of the body"<sup>i</sup>

The resurrection was so important to the identity of the early Church that anyone who denied the resurrection was cast out as a heretic. Likewise, the idea that our soul goes to heaven was condemned as a false doctrine for several hundred years.

Early Christians were persecuted and martyred because of their confession about the resurrection of the dead. They were beaten, imprisoned, and even killed because of this belief. Likewise, Paul indicates that he was on trial because he was teaching the resurrection of the dead.

“unless it is for this one statement which I cried out, standing among them, ‘Concerning the resurrection of the dead I am being judged by you this day.’” - Acts 24:21

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<sup>i</sup> Brown, Henry (1745). Justin Martyr's Dialogue with Trypho the Jew: Translated from the Greek Into English, with Notes, Chiefly for the Advantage of English Readers, a Preliminary Dissertation, and a Short Analysis.



## Immortal

In another place, Paul said, "*I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ, for it is the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes...*" (Romans 1:16) The gospel is the power of God to salvation because it shows God's power to save us from death itself.

The Bible says, "*all have all sinned*" (Romans 3:23), and the "*wages of sin is death,*" (Romans 6:23) therefore we need a Savior to set us free from both "*sin and death*" (Romans 8:2). We all die because of sin, but the gospel gives us hope that we can be resurrected to eternal life through Yeshua. That is what makes the gospel message so powerful.

"For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive."

- 1 Corinthians 15:21-22

The vast majority of world religions teach that heaven awaits their adherents when they die, and it saddens me to hear Christians teaching this pagan concept, because they have lost sight of the most significant doctrine in the Bible.

Paul gave a stern warning about those who preach "*a different gospel*" (Galatians 1:6), and "*pervert the gospel of Christ*" (Galatians 1:7). The gospel is a call to repentance and reconciliation through the death and resurrection of Yeshua, so that we can receive the gift of everlasting life in the kingdom of God.

The Bible says Yeshua was preaching the good news of the kingdom (Matthew 4:23). He came to proclaim God's wonderful plan for salvation in the kingdom of God.

It is a message of hope for the whole world. The gospel is good news to all people, because God "*preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand, saying, 'In you all the*

## MEYER

*nations shall be blessed'" (Galatians 3:8).*

The gospel is the good news about how Yeshua will bring God's plan of salvation and His kingdom to fruition. This plan includes the death and resurrection of Yeshua, but goes beyond this to the climactic fulfillment of the kingdom of God, and eternal life for all who repent and believe.

“Therefore every scribe instructed  
concerning the kingdom of heaven is  
like a householder who brings out of his  
treasure things new and old.”  
(Matthew 13:52)

MEYER

Section 4

## THE KINGDOM

Yeshua's return and the kingdom of God on earth is the culmination of Bible prophecy. It is literally the crowning moment in time when we will witness the coronation of the King of the Universe, and *"every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth"* (Philippians 2:10 NLT). This event is the moment we have all been waiting for.

"But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever" - Daniel 7:18

The kingdom of God is one of the key topics of the New Testament and the primary message of Yeshua. He began His ministry saying, *"repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand"* (Matthew 4:17), and over the course of His ministry He taught about the kingdom using a number of parables and sermons.

Even after His death and resurrection He continued *"speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God"* (Acts 1:3). The message of the kingdom is so important that Yeshua said it was the purpose for His coming.

## MEYER

"I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent."

- Luke 4:43

The Bible describes it as the "*good news of the kingdom*" (Matthew 4:23 NIV), and our world today is in desperate need of good news. In fact, many of the events that we hear about in the news sound very similar to the precursors of the kingdom that Yeshua said would occur. He spoke of wars, earthquakes, famine, pestilence, and signs in the sun moon and stars. He also spoke about persecution, and events concerning Jerusalem, explaining that these things are signs that the kingdom is near.

"So you also, when you see these things happening, know that the kingdom of God is near." - Luke 21:31

Is it possible that those who are alive today might see our Messiah return to setup His kingdom? We look forward to our Lord's return, but we must remember that the gospel of the kingdom must be preached around the world first.

"And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come." - Matthew 24:14

His desire is that the gospel of the kingdom would be preached all over the world. We are His ambassadors who have been sent ahead to announce His coming. Our mission is to prepare the world to receive His kingdom, teaching them to *repent for the kingdom of Heaven is at hand*.

## A Holy Nation

Everything written in the Scriptures is given to prepare us for the kingdom of God. The kingdom was prepared at the foundation of the world, and has always been God's ultimate plan for His people.

"Then the King will say to those on His right hand,  
'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom  
prepared for you from the foundation of the world'"  
- Matthew 25:34

When God led the children of Israel out of Egypt, He laid out His plan for them to be a "*kingdom of priests and a holy nation*." His plan was for them to be a people who obeyed Him and lived according to His covenant.

"Now therefore, if you will indeed obey My voice and  
keep My covenant, then you shall be a special treasure to  
Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine. And you  
shall be to Me **a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.**"  
- Exodus 19:5-6

Notice that He said, "*if*" we obey, "*then*" we shall be. This indicates it is a conditional covenant, dependent upon us keeping our end of the bargain.

To be holy people requires us to be faithful to the covenant, like a wife who is faithful to her husband. Marriage is set forth as an example of this type of covenant, and is thus referred to as "*holy matrimony*". In fact, the Bible often refers to our relationship with God using marriage language.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the

## MEYER

hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, **though I was a husband** to them, says the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." - Jeremiah 31:31-33

The covenant relationship we have with God is like a marriage, which is why idolatry is likened to adultery.

"So it came to pass, through her casual harlotry, that she defiled the land and **committed adultery** with stones and trees." - Jeremiah 3:9

In the end, we see that God wants His people to be a holy bride, and He will dwell with us here on earth.

"Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared **as a bride adorned for her husband**. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.'" - Revelation 21:2-3

The problem we have faced over the centuries is that people do not want God to be their King, because they prefer to have men rule over them. This is evident in the Scriptures when the people asked Samuel for a king. They rejected God, and sought after an earthly king.

"Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, '...Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.' But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, '**Give us a king to judge us.**' So Samuel prayed to the Lord. And the Lord said to Samuel, 'Heed the voice of the people in all that



## Immortal

they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but **they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.**"

- 1 Samuel 8:4-7

When they left Egypt, God said that He would bring them to the promised land and make them a kingdom of priests, but after entering the land, they asked for an earthly king to rule over them. God wanted to give them a Theocracy, but they wanted a Monarchy.

However, Peter tells us that God still plans for His people to become a *royal priesthood* and a *holy nation*.

"Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to those who are disobedient, 'The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,' and 'A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.' They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed. But **you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people**, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy."

- 1 Peter 2:7-10

Belief and obedience are connected in the same way that disbelief and disobedience are connected. If we believe, then we will obey, and conversely, if we do not believe, then we will not obey. In this manner, faith requires obedience.

That is what James was talking about when he said, "*I will show you my faith by my works*" (James 2:18), and explains that "*faith without works is dead*" (James 2:20). He was indicating that faith must produce evidence, and referenced his works as evidence. He was essentially saying that if you believe something, then you will live according to that belief.

## MEYER

The Bible tells us that when God told the Israelites to go in and possess the promised land, they doubted and did not obey, but only Joshua and Caleb had faith to obey.

"Likewise, when the Lord sent you from Kadesh Barnea, saying, 'Go up and possess the land which I have given you,' then you rebelled against the commandment of the Lord your God, and **you did not believe Him nor obey His voice.**" - Deuteronomy 9:23

"Surely none of the men who came up from Egypt, from twenty years old and above, shall see the land of which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, because they have not wholly followed Me, except Caleb the son of Jephunneh, the Kenizzite, and Joshua the son of Nun, **for they have wholly followed the Lord.**"  
- Numbers 32:11-12

The disobedience of Israel was condemned as rebellion against the Lord, but Joshua and Caleb were rewarded because they "*wholly followed the Lord*". They saw the same giants in the land, but they believed God, and their faith caused them to respond in obedience.

Paul explained that, "*the carnal mind is enmity against God; for it is not subject to the law of God*" (Romans 8:7). Disobeying a command of the King is rebellion, and is punishable by death. That is why the Bible says, "*the wages of sin is death*" (Romans 6:23), because sin is an act of treason against our King.

Our Lord wants a kingdom of priests and a holy nation, and we know that the unrighteous will "*not inherit the kingdom of God*" (1 Corinthians 6:9). That is why we must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness.

## Great Faith

The Bible records an interesting encounter with a centurion, which caused Yeshua to marvel at his “great faith”.

"Now when Jesus had entered Capernaum, a centurion came to Him, pleading with Him, saying, 'Lord, my servant is lying at home paralyzed, dreadfully tormented.' And Jesus said to him, 'I will come and heal him.' The centurion answered and said, 'Lord, I am not worthy that You should come under my roof. But only speak a word, and my servant will be healed. For I also am a man under authority, having soldiers under me. And I say to this one, '*Go,*' and he goes; and to another, '*Come,*' and he comes; and to my servant, '*Do this,*' and he does it.' **When Jesus heard it, He marveled**, and said to those who followed, 'Assuredly, I say to you, **I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel!** And I say to you that many will come from east and west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven. But the sons of the kingdom will be cast out into outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.' Then Jesus said to the centurion, 'Go your way; and as you have believed, so let it be done for you.' And his servant was healed that same hour." - Matthew 8:5-13

There is a profound connection between faith and authority. The centurion spoke about obedience to authority, and Yeshua responded, "*I have not found such great faith, not even in Israel*" (Matthew 8:10). The centurion's understanding of authority caused Yeshua to marvel at his faith, because faith requires us to submit to the King.

Faith is the proper response to authority! The centurion acknowledged Yeshua's authority by calling Him "*Lord.*" Then he showed humility by saying, "*I am not worthy that You should come under my roof.*" Likewise, the Bible says we must "*confess with our mouth that Yeshua is Lord*"

## MEYER

(Romans 10:9), and it also tells us that God “*gives grace to the humble*” (1 Peter 5:5, James 4:6).

This man was a high ranking centurion soldier in the Roman infantry, which meant he was in charge of anywhere from 200 to 1,000 men, so he had a very good understanding of authority. Yet he humbled himself before Yeshua and called Him Lord.

The Bible tells us that Yeshua is the “*King of Kings and Lord of Lords*” (1 Timothy 6:15, Revelation 19:16), and that at His name “*every knee should bow*” (Philippians 2:10) and “*every tongue should confess*” (Philippians 2:11) that He is Lord. He is Lord and King over all, and He deserves such honor and respect.

The centurion understood authority, which is why he had the faith to say, “*only speak a word, and my servant will be healed*” (Matthew 8:8). He knew that when a King gives a command, it must be followed. This is illustrated when he says, “*I say to this one, 'Go,' and he goes; and to another, 'Come,' and he comes; and to my servant, 'Do this,' and he does it*” (Matthew 8:9).

The centurion’s faith was based on his understanding of the authority that Yeshua has as King. He believed that Yeshua was the rightful King of the universe, thus Yeshua only needed to *speak a word* and the servant would be healed.

It is not enough to believe that Yeshua died and rose again, we also need to have faith in His authority as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. When we have faith in Him as our King, we obey His commandments. When we have faith in His authority, we have no fear of persecution. When we believe in His power to resurrect the dead, we have no fear of death.

Yeshua spoke of His own authority when He commissioned His disciples to go into all the world.

"When they saw Him, they worshiped Him; but some doubted. And Jesus came and spoke to them, saying, '**All authority has been given to Me in heaven and on earth.** Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, even to the end of the age.' Amen."

- Matthew 28:17-20

Some of the disciples *doubted*, but Yeshua explained that He has *authority* over heaven and earth. In fact, the command to make disciples of “all nations” is a proclamation of His authority over all the earth. He is not just the “*king of the Jews*”, He is the *King of Kings*, and when He returns all of the kingdoms of the world will belong to Him.

"The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!" - Revelation 11:15

Faith is not merely believing in His existence, because “*demons believe and tremble*” (James 2:19). Faith requires obedience to His authority as Lord. When we have faith in the authority of Yeshua, we will live in submission to Him, because “*without faith it is impossible to please Him*” (Hebrews 11:6).

MEYER

## Parables

The Kingdom of God was the subject of a large number of Yeshua's teachings, and many of his parables. It was the central message of nearly everything He taught.

"Jesus made the kingdom of God central in His preaching. More than a hundred references to the kingdom appear in the Gospels, many in Jesus' parables."<sup>i</sup>

Yeshua was almost always teaching His disciples about the kingdom, but while addressing the crowds He would speak in parables to obscure the message. These parables functioned like riddles, giving clues about the kingdom in an obscured fashion.

**"All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; and without a parable He did not speak to them,** that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: 'I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.'"  
- Matthew 13:34-35

A parable is a short story that teaches a lesson through comparisons. It is a type of allegory which conveys one central message, unlike most allegories which contain multiple levels of meaning. Parables use earthly illustrations and metaphors to convey heavenly ideas, moving from the concrete to the abstract.

"Stories, especially those of Jesus, told to provide a vision of life, especially life in God's kingdom. Parable means a putting alongside for purposes of comparison and new understanding. Parables utilize pictures such as metaphors

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Kingdom of God'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

## MEYER

or similes and frequently extend them into a brief story to make a point or disclosure."<sup>i</sup>

Some people mistakenly think that Yeshua used parables to make His teachings easier to understand. However, the Bible says He spoke in parables to hide "*the mysteries of the kingdom*" from the crowds.

**"And the disciples came and said to Him, 'Why do You speak to them in parables?' He answered and said to them, 'Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For whoever has, to him more will be given, and he will have abundance; but whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken away from him. Therefore I speak to them in parables, because seeing they do not see, and hearing they do not hear, nor do they understand.'"** - Matthew 13:10-13

Everyone wanted to know the significance of His parables, but He only offered explanations to His disciples. Some of the interpretations He gave are recorded in the Bible, while others are not. However, the Bible tells us that "*He explained all things to His disciples*" (Mark 4:34).

With parables, it can be difficult to know which details are significant and which ones are meaningless. The central features of a parable are used to illustrate the scope of the message, while insignificant details provide superfluous ornamentation which helps to move the story along. Therefore, we should not endeavor to assign meaning to every detail of the story, but rather seek to understand its predominant message and intended purpose.

Yeshua's Parables were not given to teach ethics or values, so we should not seek to derive ethical standards from

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Parables'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991



them. In fact, many of the parables contain elements that are considered objectionable morality. For example, the shrewd manager cheats his master by causing all of the debtors to lie and steal from him.

Likewise, His parables were not given for the purpose of doctrine, therefore we must be careful not to base our theology on something contained in one of these stories. They illustrate certain truths, but they were not meant to build a belief system. For example, many people try to form doctrines about hell based on the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. However, that parable is about wealth and charity, and is not meant to provide information about the afterlife.

"A characteristic example of this uncertainty is the story of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. The problem is of a serious nature, as those who regard this as actual history are compelled to interpret each and every statement, including too the close proximity of heaven and hell and the possibility of speaking from one place to the other, while those who regard it as a parable can restrict their interpretation to the features that constitute the substance of the story."<sup>i</sup>

Certain parables share similar themes, and are even paired up in the Scriptures. For example, the parables of *the Hidden Treasure* and *the Pearl of Great Value* are listed consecutively in the Bible, and share a common theme that the kingdom of God is of greater value than anything else.

A number of parables are introduced with the phrase, "*The kingdom of heaven is like...*" These parables compare the kingdom to a sower, a mustard seed, leaven, hidden treasure, a pearl, a dragnet, a landowner, a king, and a man traveling to a far country. The meaning of these stories vary,

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<sup>i</sup> Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. Entry for 'Parable'. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. 1915

## MEYER

but include themes of value, growth, authority, and service.

The parable of the sower is found in all three of the Synoptic Gospels. In this story, a man goes out to sow seed, and the seed is scattered across four different types of soil. The seed represents the word, and the soil represents people hearing the word. When the disciples asked for the interpretation, Yeshua indicated that they would not be able to understand any of the parables, if they did not understand this one.

"Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?" - Mark 4:13

Yeshua spoke in parables to conceal the mysteries of the kingdom, and the Bible says, "*It is the glory of God to conceal a matter, But the glory of kings is to search out a matter*" (Proverbs 25:2). Understanding the parable of the sower helps us comprehend the other parables, because God has hidden mysteries in the Scriptures as a way to test the soil of our hearts. When we understand the word, and produce fruit for the kingdom, we prove that we are the good soil.

## Least and Greatest

In His famous *sermon on the mount*, Yeshua spoke about the kingdom of God a number of times, explaining who will be part of it. He explained that the kingdom belongs to the humble, the merciful, the peacemakers, the pure, and the righteous.

"Blessed are the poor in spirit, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek, For they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful, For they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, For they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers, For they shall be called sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven."  
- Matthew 5:3-10

The kingdom does not belong to great and mighty warriors, or rich and successful leaders, nor does it give priority to the popular or the beautiful. The hierarchy of the kingdom is backward from that of the world, and things that seem important to the world have no value in the kingdom. The way to become great in God's kingdom is to be "*last of all and servant of all*" (Mark 9:35).

"But Jesus called them to Himself and said, 'You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave - just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.'"  
- Matthew 20:25-28

## MEYER

The values of the kingdom are not like the values of this world, therefore we should not concern ourselves with “*the cares of this world*” (Matthew 13:22), because we should be striving to “*find out what pleases the Lord*” (Ephesians 5:10).

The world exalts the wealthy and uses financial gain as the measure of success, but Yeshua said, “*it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven*” (Matthew 19:23). Worldly wealth is not important to God, but a person of *noble character* is worth more than rubies (Proverbs 31:10), a *good name* is better than great riches (Proverbs 22:1), and *wisdom* is better than gold (Proverbs 16:16). People are consumed with things like houses, cars, clothes, technology, entertainment, and financial gain, but those things will all pass away. The riches of this world are meaningless objects that have absolutely no value in the kingdom of God.

"Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also." - Matthew 6:19-21

Idols are not just statues of gold and silver, they can take the form of whatever things our heart desires. Therefore, we must place value in the things of God, and not on earthly things. Our God is a jealous God (Exodus 20:5) who wants His people to abstain from all forms of idolatry.

Our Heavenly Father knows that we need food, clothing, and shelter, but Yeshua said we should “*seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you*” (Matthew 6:33). This is a statement about priorities. Without food and water, we will die after a short time, but Yeshua said to seek **first** the kingdom of

## Immortal

*God and His righteousness.* This means that God's kingdom should have higher priority in our life than food and water.

Yeshua also taught about the righteousness of the kingdom, saying, "*unless your righteousness exceeds that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom*" (Matthew 5:20). He connected this righteousness with those who practice and teach all of God's commandments.

"Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but **whoever does and teaches them**, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven."  
- Matthew 5:19

Practicing and teaching God's commandments is standard behavior for those who seek first the kingdom, because their desire is to please the Lord. Those who are hungry for righteousness do not take pleasure in sin. The Bible tells us that obeying God's Law is what makes us righteous.

"Then it will be righteousness for us, if we are careful to observe all these commandments before the Lord our God, as He has commanded us." - Deuteronomy 6:25

Righteousness is not a state of mind, but a state of being and doing. We do not become righteous by mental assent, we become righteous by doing what is right. We must practice righteousness, if we want to be righteous.

"Little children, let no one deceive you. **He who practices righteousness is righteous**, just as He is righteous. He who sins is of the devil, for the devil has sinned from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. Whoever has been born of God does not sin, for His seed remains in him; and he cannot sin, because he

## MEYER

has been born of God. In this the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest: **Whoever does not practice righteousness is not of God**, nor is he who does not love his brother. For this is the message that you heard from the beginning, that we should love one another, not as Cain who was of the wicked one and murdered his brother. And why did he murder him? Because his works were evil and his brother's righteous." - 1 John 3:7-12

There is a clear distinction between the children of God and the children of Satan, and our actions determine which side we are on. We show that we are children of God if we live according to His instructions and practice righteousness, but if we continue practicing sin, we have proven that our father is the devil. This is how *"the children of God and the children of the devil are manifest."*

"Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God." - Romans 6:12-13

We indulge the lust of our flesh when we fail to *seek first the kingdom of God!* When we place our desire for anything else first, then sin has opportunity to take hold of us, because *"each one is tempted when he is drawn away by his own desires and enticed"* (James 1:14).

When we make *the kingdom of God and His righteousness* our first priority in life, then sin is no longer our master. Living a righteous life is vital, because *"the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God"* (1 Corinthians 6:9).

## Thy Kingdom Come

Yeshua is the King of Kings, and He told us to pray for the kingdom to come upon the earth. As His disciples, our prayer life should reflect the desire for the sovereign reign of God to be manifest in the earth.

"In this manner, therefore, pray: Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven... For Yours is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever. Amen."  
- Matthew 6:9-13

If we want to see God's kingdom come, then we must also seek for God's will to be done. The two are inseparable. The advent of God's kingdom demands submission to His will. When God reigns, His will must be done, because if His will is not done, then He has no reign.

"Here the disciples are instructed to pray that the kingdom of God may come, but this is equivalent to the petition that the will of God may be done on earth; Jesus is, however, aware of a region in the universe where the will of God is at present being perfectly and universally done, and, for reasons not difficult to surmise, He elevates thither the minds and hearts of those who pray. The kingdom of heaven would thus be so entitled because it is already realized there, and is, through prayer and effort, to be transferred thence to this earth."<sup>i</sup>

We pray that God's kingdom will come and put an end to war, poverty, conspiracies, and crime. We look forward to the end of tyrannical governments, idolatry, and greed. There are many reasons we might look forward to His return, but the most important reason for us to pray and

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<sup>i</sup> Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. Entry for 'Kingdom of God (of Heaven), the'. International Standard Bible Encyclopedia. 1915.

seek His kingdom is that He would be glorified and exalted. We yearn for the day when "*The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!*" (Revelation 11:15)

"Reign or sovereignty of God as contrasted with the kingdom of the worldly powers. The hope that God will be King over all the earth, when all idolatry will be banished, is expressed in prophecy and song, and with special emphasis in the later Psalms."<sup>i</sup>

The Bible is filled with themes of hope for the coming kingdom of God. Daniel prophesied about it, saying that it will destroy all other kingdoms, and the people of the earth will serve the King who has an everlasting kingdom.

"And in the days of these kings the God of heaven will set up a kingdom which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people; it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever." - Daniel 2:44

"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed... But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever."  
- Daniel 7:13-14,18

Yeshua often referred to Himself as the "*Son of Man*", identifying Himself with this very prophecy in Daniel. Notice

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<sup>i</sup> Singer, Isidore, Ph.D, Projector and Managing Editor. Entry for 'Kingdom of God'. 1901 The Jewish Encyclopedia. 1901.



## Immortal

that the King comes “*with the clouds of heaven*”, and the saints are given the kingdom as a possession forever. That is exactly how Yeshua describes the events that will happen at His return, when He will establish His kingdom on earth and gather His people into it.

"Then 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 coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." - Matthew 24:30-31

The fact that His kingdom will be on earth should come as no surprise, because it was prophesied long ago through the prophet Daniel. This same prophecy is reinforced when the Angel spoke to Mary, saying that Yeshua would become King and rule over David's throne forever.

"And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end." - Luke 1:31-33

When Yeshua returns to setup His kingdom, it will be the fulfillment of God's promise to David, that He would establish the kingdom forever through his seed (2 Samuel 7:12). This is why Yeshua is called the “*son of David*.”

"The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham" - Matthew 1:1

Yeshua was also called the “*son of Abraham*”, fulfilling the promise God made to Abraham that in his “*seed all the nations of the earth shall be blessed*” (Genesis 26:4).

## MEYER

"Now to Abraham and his Seed were the promises made. He does not say, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'And to your Seed,' who is Christ." - Galatians 3:16

When Yeshua is King over all the earth, all the nations will be blessed, because at that time the promise to Abraham will be fulfilled and the children of Abraham will receive their inheritance, to dwell in the promised land forever with their King.

However, the children of Abraham do not come because of genealogy, but through of faith. The Pharisees claimed to be children of Abraham by blood lineage, but they were told that *"God is able to raise up children to Abraham from these stones"* (Luke 3:8). Indicating that blood lineage is not what God uses to determine who the children of Abraham are.

Paul further explained this saying, *"only those who are of faith are sons of Abraham"* (Galatians 3:7), and all nations will be blessed through the seed of Abraham, because *"the Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel to Abraham beforehand"* (Galatians 3:8). This is why there is no longer distinction between Jews and Greeks, because when we come by faith through Yeshua we are all children of Abraham.

"For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise." - Galatians 3:26-29

As heirs of Abraham, we can look forward to the kingdom with eagerness, knowing that we will receive the inheritance that was promised long ago. The kingdom of God has been anticipated throughout the ages by men and women of faith

## Immortal

who have all prayed and longed for its coming. Therefore, we pray, *Our Father in heaven, Hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done On earth as it is in heaven.*

MEYER

## Enter the Kingdom

When Yeshua said, *"it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 19:23), His disciples responded saying, *"Who then can be saved?"* (Matthew 19:25) They were struggling to understand this challenging subject, which caused them to realize how difficult the way of eternal life truly is. In fact, they conclude that it is an impossible task. However, Yeshua answered them by saying, *"With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible"* (Matthew 19:26).

Peter was apparently still confused about this subject, because he said, *"we have left all and followed You. Therefore what shall we have?"* (Matthew 19:27) The Kings of this world have wealth, land, houses, and servants, but Yeshua said to *"sell what you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven"* (Matthew 19:21). This seems backward and illogical, and who could blame Peter for being a little confused about it. However, Yeshua explained that those who do this will receive their reward in the kingdom.

"Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or lands, for My name's sake, shall receive a hundredfold, and inherit eternal life." - Matthew 19:28-29

We will receive our reward when we enter the kingdom. We don't need to store up treasures on earth, because our focus should be on storing up treasures for the kingdom that cannot be stolen or destroyed (Matthew 6:19-20).

## MEYER

The way to life is difficult and few go that way, because it is not easy to forsake the pleasures and treasures of this life.

"Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, and there are few who find it." - Matthew 7:13-14

Yeshua never said it would be easy to be His disciples. The narrow path is difficult and dangerous, but it is the only way to find eternal life.

"He who loves his life will lose it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life."  
- John 12:25

As disciples of Yeshua, we will no doubt face persecution, tribulation, temptation and even death, but we have faith in the one who can raise the dead, so we have no reason to fear.

"In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world." - John 16:33

The Bible describes two ways that we can enter the kingdom. The first way is to die and be part of the first resurrection, and the second is to remain alive when Messiah returns. In either case, we will be transformed and given new spiritual bodies, because we cannot enter the kingdom unless we receive this new body.

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised incorruptible,**

## Immortal

**and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.** So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'"

- 1 Corinthians 15:50-55

We will physically enter the kingdom when Yeshua returns, but we gain access to the kingdom by the way we live our life in the meantime, as we wait for His return. We pass through the narrow gate one at a time. We enter personally and individually now, but when Yeshua returns we will be gathered to Him as a nation.

"Return, O backsliding children," says the Lord; "for I am married to you. I will take you, one from a city and two from a family, and I will bring you to Zion."

- Jeremiah 3:14

We find in the Scriptures that the kingdom of God is both now and not yet. It is within us individually now as we submit to His authority, but it has not yet found fulfillment over the nations of the world.

"Now when He was asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God would come, He answered them and said, 'The kingdom of God does not come with observation; nor will they say, 'See here!' or 'See there!' For indeed, the kingdom of God is within you.'" "

- Luke 17:20-21

The kingdom does not come with observation, because it begins inside of us individually when we submit to the reign of God in our lives. The kingdom is first established within us as we take on the yolk of His authority. However, when our Lord returns, His kingdom will be established upon the

## MEYER

earth, and it will be apparent to everyone.

"I was watching in the night visions, And behold, One like the Son of Man, Coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, And they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given dominion and glory and a kingdom, That all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an everlasting dominion, Which shall not pass away, And His kingdom the one Which shall not be destroyed."  
- Daniel 7:13-14

"Then 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 coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." - Matthew 24:30-31

At His return, we who have submitted to His authority will be collectively gathered unto Him, and we will receive the kingdom as an everlasting inheritance, thus fulfilling the promises to both Abraham and David simultaneously. David will have an eternal King on the throne, and Abraham's descendants will live eternally in the promised land.

"But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever." - Daniel 7:18

God promised Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the sky (Genesis 15:5), and that they would live in the promised land forever (Genesis 13:15, 17:8). However, Abraham and his descendants "*all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them*" (Hebrews 11:13).



## Immortal

The Israelites dwelt in the land for a number of years, but they did not keep it as an “*everlasting possession*” (Genesis 17:8). The land has changed possession and borders numerous times, and Israel has been in exile more years than they lived in the land. It is obvious that Abraham and his descendants have not yet received the promise.

Likewise, God made a promise to David saying, “*your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever*” (2 Samuel 7:16). However, this promise has not yet been fulfilled either. Immediately after King Solomon died, the kingdom was split in two, and eventually dissolved completely. There has not been a king on the throne of David since Solomon died, because the kingdom of David was divided at that point. This means the throne of David has been empty for almost 3,000 years. Yet, the Scriptures tell us that God will establish David’s kingdom forever through the Messiah.

“For unto us a Child is born, Unto us a Son is given; And the government will be upon His shoulder. And His name will be called Wonderful, Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of His government and peace There will be no end, **Upon the throne of David and over His kingdom, To order it and establish it with judgment and justice From that time forward, even forever.** The zeal of the Lord of hosts will perform this.” - Isaiah 9:6-7

At His return, Yeshua will establish the throne forever, and fulfill God’s promise to David. Therefore, we see that the promises to both Abraham and David work together in parallel prophecies about the kingdom of God. The kingdom establishes the promised land, the promised King, and the everlasting inheritance for the children of Abraham.

For us to enter the kingdom, we must be *heirs according to*

## MEYER

*the promise* (Galatians 3:29), and this inheritance is not based on physical lineage, *but through the righteousness of faith* (Romans 4:13). Abraham is *the father of all those who believe* (Romans 4:11), and it is by faith that we receive the promise of eternal life.

This parallels the account of the Exodus, in which those who had faith (Joshua and Caleb) were allowed to enter the promised land. However, those who do not obey were not allowed to enter, because they did not believe.

“Now with whom was He angry forty years? Was it not with those who sinned, whose corpses fell in the wilderness? And to whom did He swear that they would not enter His rest, but to **those who did not obey**? So we see that **they could not enter in because of unbelief.**”

- Hebrews 3:17-19

Faith produces the righteousness required to enter the kingdom, because if we believe our King, we will obey Him. Remember that "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven*" (Matthew 7:21). It takes more than calling Him "Lord", it requires us to live like He is our Lord.

## Constitution of the Kingdom

Yeshua explained that those who belong to the kingdom of God live according to the commandments of God.

"Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but to fulfill. For assuredly, I say to you, till heaven and earth pass away, one jot or one tittle will by no means pass from the law till all is fulfilled. **Whoever therefore breaks one of the least of these commandments, and teaches men so, shall be called least in the kingdom of heaven; but whoever does and teaches them, he shall be called great in the kingdom of heaven.** For I say to you, that unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven." - Matthew 5:17-20

The law of God is the constitution of the kingdom, and those who belong to the kingdom live according to its rules. Yeshua is the anointed King, and He did not come to overturn the laws that govern His kingdom. He made this clear when He said, "*Do not think that I came to destroy the Law*". He also explained that if you want to be great in the kingdom, then you will teach and obey all of its laws.

A good citizen is one who abides by the laws of their country, and conversely, if a person refuses to live by the laws of their government, that person is considered an enemy of the state. This is exactly what Paul was referring to when he spoke about those who are carnally minded.

"Because the carnal mind is enmity against God; **for it is not subject to the law of God**, nor indeed can be."  
- Romans 8:7

If we are not subject to the laws of the King, then we are an

enemy of His kingdom. However, according to King Yeshua, if we want to be *“great in the kingdom”*, we will do and teach all of the laws of the kingdom, not breaking even the *“least”* of them. *“For whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all”* (James 2:10).

This is why we are told to *“repent for the kingdom of heaven is at hand”* (Matthew 4:17), because sin is the violation of God’s Law, and if we want to be good citizens of the kingdom, then we cannot be lawbreakers, because *“Whoever commits sin also commits lawlessness, and sin is lawlessness”* (1 John 3:4).

To repent means to change your mind and turn away from sin. If we repent of a sin, that means we stop doing it. It is more than simply apologizing for sin, repentance requires a change of mind so that we no longer sin. If you repent of theft, then you will no longer steal, and if you repent of lying, you will always be truthful. However, if you continue to practice that sin, then you have not truly repented.

Yeshua taught, *“if you want to enter into life, keep the commandments”* (Matthew 19:17). This message is consistent throughout the Bible. In Genesis we are told that Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden because of their sin, and they were not allowed to eat from the tree of life (Genesis 3:17-24). The book of Revelation tells us that those who keep the commandments will be allowed to eat from the tree of life and enter into the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:14). The Bible consistently tells us if we want to enter the kingdom and have eternal life, then we must keep God’s commandments.

When God led Israel out of Egypt, He gave them His laws, and said to them, *“you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation”* (Exodus 19:6), indicating His desire for people to live according to His Laws. He even explained

## Immortal

that by keeping His commandments, we would be set apart from all other nations, causing them to see how great a nation can be when it lives by God's laws.

"Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' **For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the Lord our God is to us**, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day?" - Deuteronomy 4:6-8

God's laws are righteous and just, and they provide freedom and safety for all who live by them. In God's kingdom, debts are forgiven, justice is upheld, the widow and orphan are cared for, and the poor have provisions. When everyone lives according to the laws of the kingdom there is no murder, no theft, no adultery, and no crime of any kind.

When Yeshua returns to setup His kingdom, the whole earth will live according to God's law. There will be no more war, nor poverty, nor debt, nor hate, in other words there will be no more sin. There will finally be peace on earth and goodwill toward men, because no one will live contrary to God's law.

Jeremiah prophesied that in the New Covenant, people will no longer break God's law, because it will be written in our hearts and minds.

"Behold, the days are coming, says the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah - not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant

## MEYER

which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the Lord. But **this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the Lord: I will put My law in their minds, and write it on their hearts;** and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." - Jeremiah 31:31-33

He is our God and we are His people when His law is written in our hearts and minds. As long as we are still breaking His covenant, we are being lawless rebels, but when we submit to His authority and live by His commandments, then we will be His people.

We know that the previous covenant was dedicated with the blood of animals, but the new covenant has been dedicated with the blood of Messiah. Therefore, if we continue to sin and transgress the commandments of God, we are acting disgracefully toward the one who redeemed us.

"For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries. Anyone who has rejected Moses' law dies without mercy on the testimony of two or three witnesses. **Of how much worse punishment, do you suppose, will he be thought worthy who has trampled the Son of God underfoot, counted the blood of the covenant by which he was sanctified a common thing, and insulted the Spirit of grace?"** - Hebrews 10:26-29

Yeshua died so that we could have life. He gave His life to save us from our sins, so that we would no longer be slaves of sin. He died for us, but He asks us to live for Him, no longer obeying the lusts of the flesh, but walking in obedience to the commandments of our King. If Yeshua is our Lord, then we will obey His commandments.

## Millennial Kingdom

The reign of Yeshua is a set apart time in which Satan will be bound for a thousand years so that he can no longer deceive the nations. This will result in a time of peace and holiness on the earth.

"He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and **bound him for a thousand years**; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive the nations no more till the thousand years were finished... Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. **And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** But the rest of the dead did not live again **until the thousand years were finished.** This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall **reign with Him a thousand years.** Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea." - Revelation 20:2-8

The Scriptures provide some interesting patterns dealing with time. God created the world in six days and rested on the seventh, setting that day apart as holy. This day was given so that everyone could rest and be refreshed.

"Six days you shall labor and do all your work, **but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the Lord your God.** In it you shall do no work: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant,

## MEYER

nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the Lord blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it." - Exodus 20:9-11

The Bible also speaks about a Sabbath of the land, in which we are to work the land for six years, then let the land rest on the seventh year.

"When you come into the land which I give you, then **the land shall keep a sabbath to the Lord**. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard, and gather its fruit; but **in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land**, a sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard." - Leviticus 25:2-4

This Sabbath rest for the land not only allowed the earth to rest from the tilling and working of the ground, but it was also given as a means to provide for the poor.

"but the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, that the poor of your people may eat" - Exodus 23:11

God also established the release of slaves on the seventh year, saying, "*If you buy a Hebrew servant, he shall serve six years; and in the seventh he shall go out free and pay nothing*" (Exodus 21:2). This results in righteous treatment of God's people, so that even if they got into a situation of servitude, they have hope for a day of freedom.

We even find the number seven being significant in the "*Feasts of the Lord*" (Leviticus 23:2). For example, the *Feast of Unleavened bread* (Leviticus 23:6-8) and the *Feast of Tabernacles* (Leviticus 23:34-43) both last seven days. The feast of weeks is determined by counting *seven Sabbaths* (Leviticus 23:16) beginning with the day of firstfruits, and all



of the fall feasts (Trumpets, Atonement, and Tabernacles) take place in the seventh month (Leviticus 23:24-41).

The number seven is used over and over throughout the Scriptures, and is always seen as a time of rest, healing, release, peace, and completion. It seems that this pattern of seven is very significant in God's timing of events.

“Thus seven came to symbolize completeness and perfection. God's work of creation was both complete and perfect—and it was completed in seven days. All of mankind's existence was related to God's creative activity. The seven-day week reflected God's first creative activity. The sabbath was that day of rest following the work week, reflective of God's rest. Israelites were to remember the land also and give it a sabbath, permitting it to lie fallow in the seventh year. Seven was also important in cultic matters beyond the sabbath: major festivals such as Passover and Tabernacles lasted seven days as did wedding festivals. In Pharaoh's dream, the seven good years followed by seven years of famine represented a complete cycle of plenty and famine. Jacob worked a complete cycle of years for Rachel; then, when he was given Leah instead, he worked an additional cycle of seven.”<sup>i</sup>

The Lord tells us the Sabbath “*is a sign between Me and the children of Israel forever*” (Exodus 31:17). The word “*sign*” is translated from the Hebrew word “owth”, which means a pledge, a witness, or something wondrous. A sign is “*that which points to something else; an object, occurrence, or person through which one recognizes, remembers, or validates something.*”<sup>ii</sup> Signs are often used to illustrate something that occurs prophetically, which is why prophets would often give “signs” to confirm their message.

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Number Systems and Number Symbolism'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

<sup>ii</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Sign'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

## MEYER

The Sabbath functions as a sign between God and His people forever. The word “forever” indicates the eternal promises of God. Therefore, the Sabbath is linked to the prophetic fulfillment of the eternal kingdom.

We are expected to “remember” the Sabbath, because *"in six days the Lord made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day"* (Exodus 20:11).

Likewise, the prophet Isaiah also tells us to “remember” the former things so that we can understand the end, explaining that God declares *“the end from the beginning.”* There are things spoken of in the beginning that God has not yet done, but He will bring them to pass at the appointed time.

"Remember the former things of old, For I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, Declaring the end from the beginning, And from ancient times things that are not yet done, Saying, 'My counsel shall stand, And I will do all My pleasure... Indeed I have spoken it; I will also bring it to pass. I have purposed it; I will also do it.' - Isaiah 46:9-11

Not only are we told to “*remember the Sabbath*”, but we are also shown patterns of the Sabbath in a number of different ways. There is a Sabbath every seven days, a Sabbath year every seven years, and each of the Feasts contain a set apart Sabbath day of rest. When we take into consideration all of the Sabbaths that are mentioned in the Bible, it is important to note that the Bible tells us that *"A Sabbath rest remains, therefore, for God's people"* (Hebrews 4:9 HCSB). There is one Sabbath that has not happened yet, the Sabbath millennium.

According to Biblical and historical records and genealogies, the earth is nearing the end of 6,000 years (not

billions of years as the evolutionists try to say).

The Bible tells us "*do not forget this one thing, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day*" (2 Peter 3:8). This means the earth is nearing the end of the sixth day, and is about to begin its Sabbath.

This millennial Sabbath was understood by early Christian writers, and they clearly articulated this fact in their writings. Listen to what one third century theologian had to say on this topic.

"And 6,000 years must needs be accomplished, in order that the Sabbath may come, the rest, the holy day "on which God rested from all His works." For the Sabbath is the type and emblem of the future kingdom of the saints, when they "shall reign with Christ," when He comes from heaven, as John says in his Apocalypse: for "a day with the Lord is as a thousand years." Since, then, in six days God made all things, it follows that 6, 000 years must be fulfilled."<sup>i</sup>

Not only do early Christian writings contain information about the millennial Sabbath, but there are also a number of Jewish texts which explain the expectation of a Sabbath for the earth. The following quotations are from a midrash on this topic and an excerpt from the Talmud.

"Six eons for going in and coming out, for war and peace. The seventh eon is entirely Shabbat and rest for life everlasting."<sup>ii</sup>

"Six thousand years shall the world exist, and one [thousand, the seventh], it shall be desolate, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day...

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<sup>i</sup> Hippolytus. On the Hexaëmeron, Or Six Days' Work. From Fragments from Commentaries on Various Books of Scripture

<sup>ii</sup> Pirke De Rabbi Eliezer, Gerald Friedlander, Sepher-Hermon Press, New York, 1981

## MEYER

Just as the seventh year is one year of release in seven, so is the world: one thousand years out of seven shall be fallow, as it is written, And the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day,' and it is further said, A Psalm and song for the Sabbath day, meaning the day that is altogether Sabbath - and it is also said, For a thousand years in thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past."<sup>i</sup>

There has long been an expectation that the seventh millennium would be a Sabbath for the earth. This thousand year Sabbath is the Messianic kingdom, in which Yeshua will reign on the earth. Yeshua is the *Lord of the Sabbath* (Luke 6:5), and during His reign Satan will be bound so that the Sabbath will be kept holy.

The Sabbath is a sign between God and His people, to set us apart and show that we serve the One who created the earth in six days and rested on the seventh.

"Moreover I also gave them My Sabbaths, to be a sign between them and Me, that they might know that I am the Lord who sanctifies them." - Ezekiel 20:12

The Sabbath is "*a shadow of things to come*" (Colossians 2:17), because it gives us a glimpse of the millennial reign of Yeshua. Each week as we keep the Sabbath, we are participating in the reign of our King, so that when He returns we will be able to enter His rest.

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<sup>i</sup> Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sanhedrin, Folio 97a

## The Rebellion

After the thousand year reign, the Bible tells us that Satan will be released for a short time to tempt the nations in a rebellion. However, this mutiny will be put to a swift end with fire from heaven.

"Now when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from his prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in the four corners of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand of the sea. They went up on the breadth of the earth and surrounded the camp of the saints and the beloved city. And fire came down from God out of heaven and devoured them." - Revelation 20:7-9

Notice that Satan tempts the nations to rise against the kingdom. Those who were part of the first resurrection are in Jerusalem with the King. They have already been given immortal bodies, and they will not face the second death. However, outside the city remain people from among the nations who did not take the mark of the beast. Those people have not been given eternal life, but they were allowed to live on the earth during the Messianic kingdom.

Yeshua warned that those who do not enter through the narrow gate will be cast out, and that *"there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, and yourselves thrust out"* (Luke 13:28). He was not speaking to the godless heathen when He gave this warning. He was addressing the religious people who thought they would be part of the kingdom. That is why they are weeping outside the city.

There will be a great number of people who refuse to take

## MEYER

the mark of the beast, and they will be allowed to live on the earth during the millennial reign, but they will be outside the kingdom because of their lawlessness. The Bible warns that many will call Him "*Lord*", but will not enter the kingdom.

"Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, you who practice lawlessness!'"  
- Matthew 7:21-23

They want to be in the kingdom, but they will not have enough oil in their lamps when Messiah returns. Yeshua told the following parable to illustrate how some, who are waiting for His return, will not be prepared to enter the kingdom with him.

"Then the kingdom of heaven shall be likened to ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. Now five of them were wise, and five were foolish. Those who were foolish took their lamps and took no oil with them, but the wise took oil in their vessels with their lamps. But while the bridegroom was delayed, they all slumbered and slept. And at midnight a cry was heard: 'Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!' Then all those virgins arose and trimmed their lamps. And the foolish said to the wise, 'Give us some of your oil, for our lamps are going out.' But the wise answered, saying, 'No, lest there should not be enough for us and you; but go rather to those who sell, and buy for yourselves.' And while they went to buy, the bridegroom came, and those who were ready went in with him to the wedding; and the door was shut. Afterward the other virgins came also, saying, 'Lord, Lord, open to us!' But he

# Immortal

answered and said, 'Assuredly, I say to you, I do not know you.'" - Matthew 25:1-12

The foolish virgins were not ready when the bridegroom returned, so they were shut outside of the city. They had not made preparations and were caught by surprise at His return. They were kept out of the city, but notice that they were not cast into the fire.

Those who live outside of the city will live under the reign of the King, and He will be King over all the earth. In fact, the nations will go up to Jerusalem to learn God's laws.

"Many nations shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, To the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, And we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion the law shall go forth, And the word of the Lord from Jerusalem." - Micah 4:2

The Bible also tells us that the nations outside of Jerusalem will be required to go to Jerusalem every year to worship the King during the Feast of Tabernacles.

"And it shall come to pass that everyone who is left of all the nations which came against Jerusalem shall go up from year to year to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, and to keep the Feast of Tabernacles." - Zechariah 14:16

This will be a time when all the people on the earth will learn the ways of the Lord. They will hear the law proclaimed from Zion, and they will rejoice before the King during the Feasts. Holiness will reign and the earth will be glad.

"Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; And let them say among the nations, 'The Lord reigns.'" - 1 Chronicles 16:31

These people who are outside the city will have a thousand

## MEYER

years to consider their ways. Some will repent and make the most of this time, but others will allow their regret to fester into rebellion when Satan is released. They will have spent the past thousand years outside the kingdom *gnashing their teeth*, and when Satan offers them opportunity for revenge, some will join him. Their end will be swift, and every trace of rebellion will be eradicated from the earth. Satan will finally be cast into the lake of fire, and the Lord will judge the dead.



## Great White Throne

After the millennial reign, there will be a final resurrection in which all of the remaining dead will stand before the throne of judgment. This is often referred to as the "Great White throne judgment."

"Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire." - Revelation 20:11-15

Those who were part of the first resurrection will not face judgment, because they have already been given eternal life, and *"over such the second death has no power"* (Revelation 20:6).

"Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, **and shall not come into judgment**, but has passed from death into life." - John 5:24

However, the rest of the dead who were not part of the first resurrection will be raised up at the end of the thousand years for the *resurrection of condemnation*, in which they will be judged according to everything they have done.

## MEYER

“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth -those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to **the resurrection of condemnation.**” - John 5:28-29

Those who have their name written in the book of life will be allowed to live, but anyone whose name is not in the book of life will be “*cast into the lake of fire*”.

God is a just judge who renders righteous judgment. Those who are part of the *resurrection of condemnation* will be judged according to their works, their secret thoughts, and the things they said.

“But I say to you that for every idle word men may speak, they will give account of it in the day of judgment.”  
- Matthew 12:36

The wicked will be judged for the evil things they did. They will not be given everlasting life, because the Kingdom of God does not belong to sinners and lawless people.

"Do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived. Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor homosexuals, nor sodomites, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners will inherit the kingdom of God." - 1 Corinthians 6:9-10

I find it interesting when sinners are offended at hearing they will not enter the Kingdom of God. Why should they care about entering the Kingdom when they love the world so much?

"Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the

## Immortal

lust of the eyes, and the pride of life - is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever." - 1 John 2:15-17

If they had desired to be part of God's Kingdom, they would have followed His laws, but they chose to live according to the desires of their flesh, obeying their own will rather than the will of God.

"Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like; of which I tell you beforehand, just as I also told you in time past, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God." - Galatians 5:19-21

Should we be surprised that the unrighteous have no place in the kingdom of God? Yeshua said, *"unless your righteousness exceeds the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees, you will by no means enter the kingdom of heaven"* (Matthew 5:20).

The Bible says, *"Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to the tree of life"* (Revelation 22:14), but it also says, *"The soul who sins shall die"* (Ezekiel 18:20). This is why *"he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death"* (James 5:20). We must repent, and turn away from sin if we want to have everlasting life.

Yeshua made an interesting statement about death, saying, *"do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna]"* (Matthew 10:28). He is making a distinction between the first and second death. We all die

## MEYER

the first death, but if we are counted worthy, we will not have to face the second death.

“And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” - Hebrews 9:27

Death is the result of sin. Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating the fruit of which God said, “*the day that you eat of it you shall surely die*” (Genesis 2:17). God could not allow sinful humans to have eternal life, so He removed access to the tree of life.

"Then the Lord God said, 'Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever', therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden..." - Genesis 3:22-23

God's grace prevents sinners from eating from the tree of life so they will not become immortal sinners. Many people have falsely taught that sinners will be eternally tormented in the lake of fire, but the Bible says that sinners will die.

“For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.” - Romans 6:23

Yeshua said that God will “*destroy both body and soul*” in Gehenna. The Bible never says that sinners will be kept alive eternally in a state of torment. It says, “*the soul who sins shall die*”, and it calls this event “*the second death*”.

The prophet Malachi explained that the wicked will be burnt up like stubble in the fire, and the righteous will trample their ashes under foot.

”For behold, the day is coming, Burning like an oven,  
And all the proud, yes, **all who do wickedly will be stubble**. And the day which is coming **shall burn them**

## Immortal

**up,**’ Says the Lord of hosts, ‘That will leave them neither root nor branch. But to you who fear My name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise With healing in His wings; And you shall go out And grow fat like stall-fed calves. You shall trample the wicked, For **they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet** On the day that I do this,’ Says the Lord of hosts.” - Malachi 4:1-3

There is a difference between “eternal punishment” and being “tormented eternally”. When a person is destroyed, his punishment is eternal, and he will never live again. However, that is very different from saying he is tortured alive in the fire for eternity. The former is a final destruction that produces eternal results, the latter is never finalized, because it is an active ongoing torment. Thus, eternal torment is a work that is never finished, yet the Bible says, “*It is done! I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End*” (Revelation 21:6).

After the wicked are cast into the fire, the Bible says there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor pain, because *the former things have passed away* (Revelation 21:4). How can God say, “*there shall be no more pain*”, if the wicked are being tormented eternally? Likewise, if the wicked are alive in torment, how can He say, “*the former things have passed away*”?

Eternal life in torture, as terrible as that would be, is still eternal life. Yet, the Bible consistently tells us that sinners will perish in the second death. *The wages of sin is death*, not eternal life in hell.

The second death will be everlasting, because no one will return from it. The fire will destroy both body and soul, and nothing of them will endure. The punishment is eternal, because the *second death* is complete.

## MEYER

Consider how even our own judicial system reserves the death penalty for the most severe crimes, when a criminal has been judged unworthy to ever enter back into society.

Prisons serve to keep criminals alive for the purpose of reform, so that after their sentence is over they can enter back into society, but death is given to those whose offense is beyond reform. Likewise, there is no reason for God to keep sinners alive if there is no hope for reform.

The Bible says that God takes "*no pleasure in the death of the wicked*" (Ezekiel 33:11), and that He is "*not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). We are His creation, and He wants to give us everlasting life, but He will not allow sinners to live forever. God is merciful and desires that all would repent, but His great mercy also allows the wicked to perish, rather than suffer in eternal sin.

We must not confuse torture with punishment. Torture is an act of cruelty, while punishment is an act of justice. We serve a loving and merciful Creator who does not take pleasure in the punishment of the wicked. The Son of God came to earth to die for the sins of the world, giving us every opportunity to repent and be saved.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life." - John 3:16

How horrible it would be for the righteous to watch their loved ones suffer for eternity. How could the living rejoice and have peace, knowing their loved ones were actively being tortured for all eternity? That would amount to a living hell for the righteous.

I praise God, knowing that the wicked will be destroyed,

## immortal

and the righteous will find comfort when death is no more. Once sinners are destroyed, God will wipe away our tears, and we will rejoice in the kingdom of our God.

"And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away." - Revelation 21:4

Our sorrow will end when death has completed its work.





## The World To Come

The day of judgment puts an end to wickedness, but marks a new beginning for those who have been given eternal life. The purpose of the Messianic Kingdom is to bring all rule, authority, and power under the reign of the Messiah, and then He will hand the kingdom over to His Father.

"Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy that will be destroyed is death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under Him," it is evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."  
- 1 Corinthians 15:24-28

I find it interesting that after Yeshua has put an end to all enemies and rulers, He will hand everything back to His Father, even submitting Himself to the reign of His Father.

"Now when all things are made subject to Him, **then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him** who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all."  
- 1 Corinthians 15:28

Remember that Yeshua said, "*I do not seek My own will but the will of the Father who sent Me*" (John 5:30). He did not come to establish His own kingdom, He came to bring all people under the authority of His Father.

Satan tempted Yeshua with all of the kingdoms of the world, saying, "*All these things I will give You if You will fall down and worship me*" (Matthew 4:9). But Yeshua was not

## MEYER

interested in ruling the world except in service to the Father. Thus, He responded saying, "*You shall worship the Lord your God, and Him only you shall serve*" (Matthew 4:10).

Yeshua came to serve the Father by humbling himself and submitting to the will of the Father. His only agenda was to serve and glorify His Father.

"...He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross. Therefore God also has highly exalted Him and given Him the name which is above every name, that 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 that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father." - Philippians 2:8-11

He is exalted because He was completely submitted to the will of the Father. Even His exaltation brings glory to the Father, because every tongue will confess that Yeshua is Lord, "*to the glory of God the Father.*"

The Bible tells us that Yeshua is the *mediator between God and men* (1 Timothy 2:5), and that *He lives to make intercession* (Hebrews 7:25) for us. He is also *the mediator of a better covenant* (Hebrews 8:6), and the only way to the Father.

"Jesus said to him, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me.'"  
- John 14:6

Everyone who comes to the Father must go through Yeshua, because He will bring everyone under His authority before He hands the kingdom over to the Father. He was sent by the Father, and did not come of Himself, but He came to bring everything under submission to the Father.

## Immortal

"Jesus said to them, 'If God were your Father, you would love Me, for I proceeded forth and came from God; nor have I come of Myself, but He sent Me.'" - John 8:42

During the Last Supper, Yeshua gave a very interesting example to His disciples, which shows how we are to submit to His authority, and how He was submitted to His Father.

"Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He had come from God and was going to God, rose from supper and laid aside His garments, took a towel and girded Himself. After that, He poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which He was girded... So when He had washed their feet, taken His garments, and sat down again, He said to them, "Do you know what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you say well, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you should do as I have done to you. Most assuredly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master; nor is he who is sent greater than he who sent him."

- John 13:3-5, 12-16

Yeshua knew the Father had given all things into His hands and that He was sent by God, so He washed the disciples feet and lectured them about being a servant, explaining that a servant is not greater than the one who sent him. We see two lessons in this act. The first is that Yeshua is not greater than His Father who sent Him. The second is that we are to be servants, just as our master was.

Everything Yeshua does is to serve His Father, including the thousand years He reigns over the earth. He is not establishing a kingdom for Himself, He serves as King to bring the earth under submission to the Father. After He

## MEYER

defeats every enemy, then God will make a new creation in which He can dwell among men.

"Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away. Also there was no more sea. Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God." - Revelation 21:1-3

This is the restoration of all things. Before the fall, God walked in the garden with Adam and Eve, but when sin entered the world, Adam and Eve were banished from paradise and separated from God. However, we see in the new creation, that heaven comes down to earth and God makes His dwelling among men.

"Then He who sat on the throne said, 'Behold, I make all things new.'" - Revelation 21:5

We do not know what this new creation will be like, but we can be certain that it will be paradise to dwell eternally with our God in a world without sin.

“No one has ascended to heaven but He  
who came down from heaven, that is,  
the Son of Man who is in heaven.”  
(John 3:13)



*Section 5*

## QUESTIONS

In this section, I will do my best to answer some of the most common questions and misconceptions that people have concerning the topics of heaven, hell, and the resurrection.

Some of these questions are very simple to explain, while others are actually quite difficult to answer. My hope is that I will be able provide adequate answers to the more common questions people have on the subject of life after death.

I will do my best to answer these questions by letting the Bible interpret itself. However, there are a few questions in this section that are not explicitly mentioned in the Bible, and therefore cannot be answered without a certain amount of speculation.

MEYER



## Elijah in heaven

This first question is probably the most common objection I get from people concerning heaven. They say, “Elijah was taken to heaven in a chariot of fire”, or “Elijah went to heaven and didn’t die.” Nearly everyone is familiar with the story of Elijah being carried up into heaven, so the first question they have after hearing John 3:13 is, “what about Elijah?” Did Yeshua forget about Elijah when He said, “*No one has ascended into heaven*” (John 3:13)?

No, Yeshua was not mistaken, and He did not forget about Elijah. The Bible does not contradict itself, so if we find something that seems like a contradiction, we need to investigate it further.

The first thing we need to determine is why Elijah was taken. Since this is not a common event, there must be a reason why it happened. After we figure out why he was taken, then we need to see if the Bible gives us any more information about where he was taken. When we let the Bible interpret itself, we will find that there are no contradictions.

There are a few interesting things that take place before Elijah is taken up. Three times Elijah told Elisha, “*Stay here, please, for the Lord has sent me*” (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6), and likewise, three times Elisha responded saying, “*As the Lord lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you!*” (2 Kings 2:2, 4, 6) This shows us that Elisha was unwilling to leave Elijah as long as he was alive. He refused to let Elijah simply leave, and he continued to follow him around everywhere he went. The sons of the prophets also warned Elisha saying, “*Do you know that the Lord will take away your master from over you today?*” (2 Kings 2:3, 5) This is the context for why Elijah was taken.

## MEYER

The reason God was taking Elijah is because his time as prophet was drawing to a close, and Elisha was going to replace him, but this could not happen if Elisha would not leave his master. He made it very clear that he would not leave Elijah as long as he was alive. Since Elisha was unwilling to leave Elijah, God caused them to be separated.

The first six verses of this chapter are focused on the fact that God was going to take Elijah away from Elisha, because Elisha was unwilling to let Elijah leave on his own. Everyone mentioned in this text knows that Elijah is being taken away from Elisha.

Elijah knew it was time for him to leave Elisha, so he said, "*Ask! What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?*" (2 Kings 2:9) We know at this point that Elisha requested a "*double portion*" of Elijah's spirit, and what happened next is where many people have gotten confused.

"Then it happened, as they continued on and talked, that suddenly a chariot of fire appeared with horses of fire, and separated the two of them; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven." - 2 Kings 2:11

I have heard many people say that Elijah was taken into heaven by a chariot of fire, but that is not what the Bible says. It says the chariot of fire separated the two men, but a whirlwind took Elijah into heaven. This was also explained in the very first verse, which says, "*...when the Lord was about to take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind...*" (2 Kings 2:1) This is significant because misunderstanding this verse has led many to misinterpret what happened to Elijah.

If a supernatural chariot of fire took Elijah into heaven, it would be easy to conclude that he was taken out of this world in a supernatural way. However, the Bible says he

## Immortal

was taken away by a “*whirlwind*” (probably something like a tornado), which is why the sons of the prophets did not conclude that Elijah was taken out of the earth. They concluded that he was dropped off on some other mountain somewhere and wanted to go look for him.

“Look now, there are fifty strong men with your servants. Please let them go and search for your master, lest perhaps the Spirit of the Lord has taken him up and cast him upon some mountain or into some valley”  
- 2 Kings 2:16

They did not conclude that Elijah was taken out of this world, but that he was simply taken away to a different location. Tornadoes do not carry things out of the earth’s atmosphere, so we can understand why they did not think Elijah was taken out of the earth.

So, why does the Bible say Elijah was taken up “*into heaven*”? We can better understand this phrase when we figure out which heaven he was taken into. The Bible actually refers to more than one thing as “*heaven*.” There appears to be different levels of heaven. We see references to “*the heavens*” as well as “*the highest heaven*” throughout Scripture.

“Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it.”  
- Deuteronomy 10:14

In Genesis, we see that “*God called the firmament Heaven*” (Genesis 1:8), and He placed “*lights in the firmament of the heavens to divide the day from the night*” (Genesis 1:14). Likewise, God told Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as “*the stars of heaven*” (Genesis 26:4). This level of heaven contains the sun, moon, and stars.

## MEYER

The Hebrew word for heaven is “shamayim”, and it is typically translated as “heaven”, “sky”, or “air”. Interestingly, the root word for heaven is “mayim”, which means “water”, and heaven is often connected with water in the Bible. In fact, we are introduced to heaven on day two when God created the firmament of heaven and separated the waters above from the waters below.

“Then God said, ‘Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide the waters from the waters.’ Thus God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters which were above the firmament; and it was so. And God called the firmament Heaven. So the evening and the morning were the second day.” - Genesis 1:6-8

We also see this water connection when God sent the flood during the days of Noah, it says “*the windows of heaven were opened*” (Genesis 7:11) so that rain fell to the earth. Likewise, when the rain ceased it says, “*the rain from heaven was restrained*” (Genesis 8:2).

The part of God's creation above the earth and the waters including “air” and “space” and serving as home for God and His heavenly creatures. The Hebrew word shamayim is plural in form and was easily related by the common people to the word mayim , “waters”... Heaven could be described as a partition God made to separate the rain-producing heavenly waters from the rivers, seas, and oceans below... Hebrew does not employ a term for “air” or “space” between heaven and earth. This is all part of heaven. Thus the Bible speaks of “birds of the heavens,” though English translations often use “air” or “sky”... The heaven is the source for rain (Deuteronomy 11:11; Psalm 148:4), dew (Genesis 27:28), frost (Job 38:29), snow (Isaiah 55:10), fiery lightning (Genesis 19:24), dust (Deuteronomy 28:24), and hail (Joshua 10:11).<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Heaven'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

# Immortal

We understand that when the Bible says the birds fly in the “heavens” it refers to the sky above. The Bible is not telling us that birds are flying around in the throne of God.

Then God said, "Let the waters abound with an abundance of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the face of the firmament of the heavens."  
- Genesis 1:20

The word “firmament”, used here to describe the sky, can also be translated “expanse”, “surface”, or “base support”. This is particularly fascinating when we consider that earth is the footstool of God’s throne in heaven.

“Thus says the Lord: ‘Heaven is My throne, And earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest?’” - Isaiah 66:1

So, it seems that the firmament might be the base support, or beginning level of heaven. We find hints about this in the story of the tower of Babel, when the people tried to build a tower that would reach into heaven.

“And they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower whose top is in the heavens; let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.’” - Genesis 11:4

It is impossible for us to build a tower that is tall enough to reach the throne of God. We have skyscrapers today that would rival the tower of Babel, yet no one has been able to reach God’s throne with such buildings. Not only that, but we have airplanes and space shuttles that have taken people high into the sky, and some have even left the earth’s atmosphere, yet no one has been able to reach the throne of God by traveling to such heights.

In fact, outer space is the second level of heaven the Bible

## MEYER

speaks about. It is the realm of heaven which contains the sun moon and stars, and even refers to them as the “*host of heaven*”.

“And take heed, lest you lift your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun, the moon, and the stars, all the host of heaven, you feel driven to worship them and serve them, which the Lord your God has given to all the peoples under the whole heaven as a heritage.”

- Deuteronomy 4:19

The word “*heaven*” seems to refer to anything that is above the ground. This is further illustrated in the flood record which explains that everything under heaven was covered in water.

“And the waters prevailed exceedingly on the earth, and all the high hills under the whole heaven were covered.”

- Genesis 7:19

Ancient mythology from various cultures indicate a belief that their gods lived in the sky. The mythology surrounding Zeus is one in particular that stands out, because he was said to control the weather. The Greeks even believed that when he was angry he would strike with lightning bolts.

However, the Bible does not tell us that God lives in the clouds. Our God is greater than those of pagan mythology. The Bible explains that the heavens cannot contain God.

“But who is able to build Him a temple, since heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain Him? Who am I then, that I should build Him a temple, except to burn sacrifice before Him?” - 2 Chronicles 2:6

The phrase “*heaven of heavens*” (1 Kings 8:27, Nehemiah 9:6, Psalm 68:33) is used a few other places in indicating that there is more than one heaven, and one in particular is

## Immortal

superior to the others. The book of Job explains that God is in the “*height of heaven*” (Job 22:12), which the Bible also calls the “*highest heavens*”.

“Indeed heaven and the highest heavens belong to the Lord your God, also the earth with all that is in it.”  
- Deuteronomy 10:14

We know there are at least three heavens, because Paul mentions “*the third heaven*” (2 Cor. 12:2). So, to which heaven was Elijah taken? Was he taken into the lower level of heaven where the birds fly and the rain falls from the clouds? Did he leave earth’s atmosphere and ascend into the second heaven, where the sun, moon, and stars are? Or did he transcend the known universe and enter the highest heaven, the dwelling place of the Almighty?

Nothing in the Bible indicates that he left the atmosphere. In fact, there is some pretty solid evidence to suggest that he was still on earth a number of years later, because he wrote a letter to king Jehoram, who was not king at the time he was taken away from Elisha.

“And a letter came to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus says the Lord God of your father David: Because you have not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat your father, or in the ways of Asa king of Judah...”  
- 2 Chronicles 21:12

We know this letter was written long after the whirlwind took Elijah, because Jehoshaphat was king at that time, and it was a number of years before his son Jehoram became king. This fact is evident in the text, because after Elijah was taken, Elisha spoke with king Jehoshaphat.

“But Jehoshaphat said, ‘Is there no prophet of the Lord here, that we may inquire of the Lord by him?’ So one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said,

## MEYER

"Elisha the son of Shaphat is here, who poured water on the hands of Elijah." - 2 Kings 3:11

The Bible explains that Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, did not begin his reign as king until after the death of his father.

"And Jehoshaphat rested with his fathers, and was buried with his fathers in the City of David. Then Jehoram his son reigned in his place." - 2 Chronicles 21:1

"Now in the fifth year of Joram the son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat having been king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat began to reign as king of Judah. He was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem." - 2 Kings 8:16-17

If Elisha spoke with king Jehoshaphat after Elijah was taken, and Jehoram did not begin his reign until after Jehoshaphat died, then how could Elijah write a letter to king Jehoram unless he was alive when Jehoram became king?

The only logical conclusion is that Elijah was taken up into the sky (not the highest heaven), and transported to another location on the earth. He was able to write a letter to king Jehoram because he was still living on the earth during the reign of king Jehoram.

The Bible does not contradict itself. No one other than Yeshua has ascended into heaven, not even Elijah.



## The Transfiguration

Often, in connection with their belief that Elijah is in heaven, people reference the transfiguration when Elijah and Moses appeared to be speaking with Yeshua. They claim that this event proves that Elijah and Moses are both in heaven. Let's examine the verses in question, and see what the Bible actually says.

Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. And behold, Moses and Elijah **appeared to them**, talking with Him. Then Peter answered and said to Jesus, "Lord, it is good for us to be here; if You wish, let us make here three tabernacles: one for You, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." While he was still speaking, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them; and suddenly a voice came out of the cloud, saying, "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!" And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their faces and were greatly afraid. But Jesus came and touched them and said, "Arise, and do not be afraid." When they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus only. Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, "Tell **the vision** to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead." - Matthew 17:1-9

How should we understand this event? Should we conclude that two men who had been dead for hundreds of years were now talking to Yeshua?

The Bible clearly explains that, "*Moses and Elijah appeared to them*" in a "*vision*". They did not resurrect, or descend from heaven, nor were they called up from their graves. They appeared in a vision to the disciples.

## MEYER

Now as they came down from the mountain, Jesus commanded them, saying, *"Tell the vision to no one until the Son of Man is risen from the dead."* - Matthew 17:9

The Greek word translated "vision" here is "ophthe", which means to see or experience, but often with metaphorical implication, "to see with the mind" or "perceive without eyes".

According to Webster's dictionary, a vision is:

"that which is seen otherwise than by the ordinary sight, or the rational eye; a supernatural, prophetic, or imaginary sight; an apparition; a phantom; a specter; as, the visions of Isaiah. Hence, something unreal or imaginary; a creation of fancy."<sup>i</sup>

There are many examples of visions in the Bible as one of the primary ways by which God revealed things to His prophets. When someone has a vision, they are seeing something with their mind or their spirit, not their eyes. The things they perceive are not physically present, and might be comparable to a dream.

When we examine Peter's vision of the animals on a sheet, we do not conclude that a blanket full of wild animals was floating in the sky above Peter's house. It is obvious that Peter was seeing those things with his mind. So, when Yeshua explains the transfiguration was a vision, we should not conclude that Moses and Elijah were physically present with them.

Visions are given by God to reveal something to His people, and they are often metaphorical in nature. A vision is a real spiritual experience from God, and not simply a figment of one's own imagination. However, visions must also be

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<sup>i</sup> Webster, Noah. Entry for 'Vision'. Noah Webster's American Dictionary. 1828.

distinguished from actual events, since they take place in the mind of the person receiving the vision.

"An experience in the life of a person, whereby a special revelation from God was received. The revelation from God had two purposes. First, a vision was given for immediate direction, as with Abram in Genesis 12:1-3; Lot, Genesis 19:15; Balaam, Numbers 22:22-40; and Peter, Acts 12:7. Second, a vision was given to develop the kingdom of God by revealing the moral and spiritual deficiencies of the people of God in light of God's requirements for maintaining a proper relationship with Him. The vision of prophets such as Isaiah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and John are representative of this aspect of revelation."<sup>i</sup>

In the vision of transfiguration, Moses and Elijah were standing with Yeshua as a voice from heaven says, "*This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Hear Him!*" This was given to reveal something to the disciples who were present. The transfiguration was for the benefit of the disciples, it was not for Yeshua's benefit.

The transfiguration took place six days after Peter's confession that Yeshua is, "*the Christ, the Son of the living God*" (Matthew 16:16). This vision of transfiguration was given to confirm Peter's confession, so there would be no doubt who Yeshua really is. Yeshua is *the Son of God*, and both the Law and Prophets confirm it! This is why Moses and Elijah appeared in the vision, because they represent the Law and Prophets which point to Yeshua as the Messiah.

There are a number of places in the New Testament which indicate the law and prophets speak about Yeshua. For example, Philip told Nathanael, "*We have found Him of*

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Vision'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

## MEYER

*whom Moses in the law, and also the prophets, wrote - Jesus of Nazareth, the son of Joseph" (John 1:45). Likewise, after telling the parable of Lazarus and the rich man, Yeshua said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31). Even after His resurrection, the Bible tells us that "beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself" (Luke 24:27). The law and prophets have always testified about Yeshua being the Messiah and Son of God, and this is illustrated visually in the transfiguration.*

Transfigured in Greek is *metamorphoó* and means "transformed or changed". This is where we get the word "metamorphosis". Think about a caterpillar turning into a butterfly, this is a metamorphosis. It refers to "a change of the form or nature of a thing or person into a completely different one, by natural or supernatural means".

The word "transfigured" is made of two words, "trans" means to change, and "figure" refers to outward appearance or form of something. So, transfigured means to change the outward form or appearance, and the text indicates that Yeshua's outward appearance changed in their presence.

"and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light."  
- Matthew 17:2

The Bible tells us it was a vision, and we do not need to add our own assumptions or speculations to the text.

Now, listen to Peter's perspective on the transfiguration.

"For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when **we made known to you the power and coming of our**

**Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty.** For He received from God the Father honor and glory when such a voice came to Him from the Excellent Glory: *‘This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.’* And we heard this voice which came from heaven when we were with Him on the holy mountain.”  
- 2 Peter 1:16-18

Peter is talking about the transfiguration, and He calls it “*the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.*” Remember what Yeshua said at the end of Matthew 16, right before the transfiguration in Matthew 17.

“Assuredly, I say to you, there are some standing here who shall not taste death till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom.” - Matthew 16:28

“Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; and He was transfigured before them.” - Matthew 17:1

The chapter breaks were not originally in the text, but were added much later by translators. So, when we look at these verses together as a connected idea, we see that the transfiguration is the fulfillment of what Yeshua said about some of His disciples not tasting death before they see Him come in His kingdom.

This is why Peter said He was an eyewitness of this in 2 Peter 1:16, because Peter, James, and John were the ones who saw the transfiguration. They saw Yeshua shining like the sun. They saw Him glorified. The transfiguration gave them a glimpse into the future when Yeshua will be glorified in His Kingdom.

MEYER

## Abraham's Bosom

People often use the parable of the rich man and Lazarus as a proof text to say that people go immediately to heaven or hell when they die, but is that really what Yeshua was trying to teach with this story?

Some people claim that the story of Lazarus in Abraham's bosom is a true story about Lazarus' death. However, Yeshua was not in the habit of telling true life stories. If the story of Lazarus was a real event, then it is the only one He ever told. In fact, the Bible tells us specifically that He always spoke in parables to the crowds.

“All these things Jesus spoke to the multitude in parables; **and without a parable He did not speak to them**, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying: ‘I will open My mouth in parables; I will utter things kept secret from the foundation of the world.’”  
- Matthew 13:34-35

He used parables to conceal the understanding so that it would not be available to everyone. He spoke in parables when He was in public so that He could teach things to the people who had “*ears to hear*”, while concealing the understanding from those who did not.

Now, if we look at the context in which this story was told, we find out that He was addressing a multitude of people at a meal that was hosted by the Pharisees. Furthermore, He tells a series of parables leading up to the story of the rich man and Lazarus, which all appear to have a common theme. The catalyst for this series of parables, has to do with Him healing a man with dropsy on the Sabbath.

## MEYER

"Now it happened, as He went into the house of one of the rulers of the Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath, that they watched Him closely. And behold, there was a certain man before Him who had dropsy. And Jesus, answering, spoke to the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, 'Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?'" - Luke 14:1-3

After healing the man, Yeshua told the parable of a wedding feast, explaining that a guest should choose to sit in a lowly position and not a high place of honor. Next, He said when you have a feast, invite the poor and lowly because they cannot pay you back. He continued the series of parables with the story of a man who threw a banquet, but none of the invited guests would join him, so he sent his servants to gather up anyone who would be willing to come. After this, He explained that one must count the cost if they are to become His disciples.

Then the Bible says that *"all of the tax-collectors and sinners drew near to Him"* (Luke 15:1), which upset the Pharisees and scribes. So, Yeshua told the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the prodigal son. Then He continued in chapter sixteen with the parable of the unfaithful steward, which offended the Pharisees because they loved money, and finally, He told the story about a rich man who was in torment, while a poor man found comfort.

All of the events and parables that are described in Luke chapters fourteen through sixteen are about wealth and poverty, health and sickness, lost and found, and in each of these parables, the weak, the sick, and the poor find favor and help. The man who takes the lowly seat is exalted, the poor man is invited to the feast, the one who was lost is found. Likewise, the one who sat at the seat of honor is dishonored, the invited guest missed the feast, the unfaithful steward was removed from his position. Each of these parables was pointed at the sins of the Pharisees.



## Immortal

"Now the Pharisees, who were lovers of money, also heard all these things, and they derided Him."

- Luke 16:14

This leads us to the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The story begins by describing a rich man who ate well every day, in contrast with a poor man who begged for crumbs. Both men died, and the rich man was punished, while the poor man finds comfort.

That is the most basic and simplified explanation of this story, and it is consistent with the other parables that had been told previously. This series of parables was given in opposition to the prosperity message of the Pharisees, who equated wealth and health with God's favor.

Why was the beggar named Lazarus? Many people have argued that because a specific name was given, then Yeshua must have been speaking about a real event.

Perhaps the name "Lazarus" was not given to identify a specific person, but a quality of that person. The Greek name "Lazarus" comes from the Hebrew name "Eleazar", and means "God has helped". Obviously, the poor man did find help and favor from God, so the name is fitting.

Another possible reason for giving the name Lazarus is the obvious connection between Eleazar and Abraham. Eleazar was the servant of Abraham, and would have received all of Abraham's inheritance if Isaac had not been born.

"But Abram said, 'Lord God, what will You give me, seeing I go childless, and the heir of my house is Eliezer of Damascus?' Then Abram said, 'Look, You have given me no offspring; indeed one born in my house is my heir!' And behold, the word of the Lord came to him, saying, 'This one shall not be your heir, but one who will

## MEYER

come from your own body shall be your heir.”

- Genesis 15:2-4

The Pharisees were constantly boasting about Abraham being their father, yet in this story the poor and lowly servant, who was not a son of Abraham, was welcomed by Abraham into his bosom.

This is the only reference to *Abraham's bosom* in the Bible, and some people think it is the name of a location, perhaps a compartment in Sheol, or a reference to paradise, or even heaven itself. However, all of those opinions are merely speculation, and cannot be found anywhere in the Bible.

To claim that *Abraham's bosom* is a compartment in Sheol is no different than saying *Abraham's bosom* is a crater on the moon, because neither of those opinions can be found in the Bible. The idea that Abraham's bosom is a compartment in Sheol lines up more with *Dante's Inferno* than it does the Bible. That is why we must be careful not to follow after man's opinions and theories.

Abraham's bosom is not a reference to heaven, because we will not be watching our family and friends being tortured in hell. It is a sadistic misrepresentation of this story to say that Lazarus was really in heaven watching someone else being tortured, and hearing him crying out for help. Most people would not be able to tolerate watching someone they hate suffer such a fate, so how would they be able to handle seeing someone they love face that type of torture?

The Bible says, “*the dead know nothing*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5), and “*go down into silence*” (Psalm 115:17), so how are they able to carry on a conversation with each other? Also, if they are disembodied souls, that means they have no tongue, no mouth, no vocal chords, no eyes, and no brain, so how are they able to look at each other and carry on a

conversation? There is nothing real about this story. It is the most comical and unrealistic parable that Yeshua ever told, and is in no way meant to be understood as real or true.

The Hebrews believed when a person died, he was gathered to his ancestors. This was a comforting thought to the Jewish people, and the Pharisees often boasted about having Abraham as their father. So, when Yeshua spoke about Lazarus being gathered into *Abraham's bosom*, it would have been understood that Lazarus was *gathered to his people*. However, the rich man was not gathered to his people, but found himself in torment and regret for the way he lived his life.

Yeshua was not trying to teach anything about death, He was making a very bold statement about rich people who refuse to help those in need. This parable was an extreme exaggeration used to illustrate His point about wealth. It was not given to build a doctrine about death.

The message of this parable is that beggars will receive mercy, while the selfish receive judgment. The righteous are not literally in Abraham's bosom, but they are figuratively waiting with him for the resurrection.

At the end of the parable, Yeshua makes the statement, "*If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead*" (Luke 16:31). He knew that even His resurrection would not be enough to convince certain people to believe Him.

MEYER

## Thief on the Cross

The Bible tells us about a brief encounter that Yeshua had with two criminals while He was hanging on the tree. One criminal spoke mocking words against our Messiah, while the other criminal showed reverence and fear of the LORD. The second man made an interesting request, saying, *"Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom"* (Luke 23:42). To which Yeshua responded, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"* (Luke 23:42-43).

This verse has been used by many to claim that the thief went to heaven with Yeshua the day he died. However, before we jump to any conclusions, there are some very important things we need to consider about this event.

The first thing we need to understand is that there are no commas in the original Greek text, they were all added by translators. Therefore, we do not know for certain if the comma is in the correct location, and punctuation can make a big difference in how we understand a text.

It is quite possible that an improper punctuation might be altering our understanding of this verse. For example, if the comma were placed after "today", it would say, *"Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise"*. By moving the comma, it becomes *"I tell you today"* instead of *"today you will be"*.

The second thing we need to understand is that Yeshua said *"paradise"* not *"heaven"*. Many people assume that paradise is heaven, but they are two very different Greek words. The Greek word "Paradeisō" refers to an "enclosed garden or park", and its Hebrew equivalent "pardes" means a "forest, orchard, or park."

## MEYER

Paradise is most likely a reference to the location of the tree of life. We see this in the book of Revelation, which tells us about "*the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God*" (Revelation 2:7).

The idea that the tree of life is located in paradise can be traced back to the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament), which tells us that "*God planted paradise in Eden.*"

"And the Lord God planted paradise in Eden towards the East..." - Genesis 2:8 (LXX English translation)

Some people have tried to argue that "*paradise*" is actually a compartment in Sheol where the righteous go at death, however there is not a single verse in the Bible that refers to paradise being part of the underworld. This idea comes from extra-biblical sources and not from the Word of God.

The most popular view is that "*paradise*" is another name for heaven, which is why people conclude that the thief went to heaven the day he died. However, we need to remember that Yeshua did not go to Heaven the day He died. He was buried in the grave for three days, and when he rose from the dead He told Mary, "*Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father*" (John 20:17).

This means that Yeshua did not go to heaven during the three days while He was dead. He ascended to heaven after the resurrection. Therefore, if Yeshua did not go to Heaven the day He died, then the thief did not go to heaven that day either.

Listen carefully to the question the thief asked Yeshua. He said, "*remember me when you come into your kingdom*", and Yeshua responded by saying, "*you will be with me in paradise*". He was not changing the subject or giving an unrelated response. He gave a direct answer to the man's

## **im**mortal

request, which lets us know that the Kingdom is paradise.

The thief has not entered paradise yet, but he will when Yeshua returns to setup His kingdom.

MEYER



## Enoch

Many people claim that God took Enoch to heaven, but that is not exactly what the Bible says. It tells us that God took Enoch, but it does not say he went to heaven. We need to be careful that we are not making assumptions and drawing conclusions about things of which the Bible does not tell us. So, let's look at what the Bible says about Enoch to find out if he went to heaven.

"Enoch lived sixty-five years, and begot Methuselah. After he begot Methuselah, Enoch walked with God three hundred years, and had sons and daughters. So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." - Genesis 5:21-24

According to the Bible, Enoch lived to be three hundred and sixty-five years old, before "*God took him*". Nothing is said about where he was taken or why.

Many people assume that Enoch was taken to heaven, but that is not what the text says. We also need to remember that Yeshua said, "*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven*" (John 3:13). This means Enoch could not have been taken to heaven. So, what happened to him?

Let's begin by looking at the phrase "*he was not*". To get a better idea about what that means, we need to look at how it is used in other places in the Bible.

The phrase "*he was not*" can also be translated "*he was no more*" or "*he could not be found*", and it expresses the idea that something no longer exists. When this word is used in other verses in the Bible, it is always in the context of death.

## MEYER

"But God draws the mighty away with His power; He rises up, but no man is sure of life. He gives them security, and they rely on it; Yet His eyes are on their ways. They are exalted for a little while, Then **they are gone**. They are brought low; They are taken out of the way like all others; They dry out like the heads of grain."  
- Job 24:22-24

In this text from the book of Job, we see the word used to express how the mighty will die. They are gone, brought low, taken out of the way, and dry out. These expressions serve as metaphors for death.

We also see the same word used in the Psalms, as an expression of death and destruction.

"For yet a little while and the wicked **shall be no more**; Indeed, you will look carefully for his place, But **it shall be no more**." - Psalm 37:10

The phrase "*shall be no more*" means they have died or been destroyed. The wicked are no more and the place is no more, because both have passed away.

Likewise, the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah use this phrase in the same way.

"The papyrus reeds by the River, by the mouth of the River, And everything sown by the River, Will wither, be driven away, and **be no more**." - Isaiah 19:7

"But I have made Esau bare; I have uncovered his secret places, And he shall not be able to hide himself. His descendants are plundered, His brethren and his neighbors, And he **is no more**." - Jeremiah 49:10

"In those days and in that time," says the Lord, "The iniquity of Israel shall be sought, **but there shall be none**;

## Immortal

And the sins of Judah, but they shall not be found; For I will pardon those whom I preserve."

- Jeremiah 50:20

The use of this phrase indicates that the person or thing is completely dead or gone. However, it does not mean they are in heaven.

The book of Hebrews also talks about Enoch being taken away, but it is slightly different from what is said in Genesis.

"By faith Enoch was taken away so that he did not see death, 'and was not found, because God had taken him'; for before he was taken he had this testimony, that he pleased God." - Hebrews 11:5

At first glance, this sounds like Enoch did not die, but if we keep reading, we find out that he did actually die, because he is listed among all of those who "*died in faith*".

"**These all died in faith**, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off were assured of them, embraced them and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth." - Hebrews 11:13

This section in Hebrews lists a number of heroes of the faith. People such as Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Enoch are all listed here as people who died in the faith and did not receive the promise. If we keep reading to the end of the chapter, we find out that none of them have been made perfect apart from us.

"And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, **did not receive the promise**, God having provided something better for us, that **they should not be made perfect apart from us**." - Hebrews 11:39-40

Why did these great heroes of the faith not receive the

## MEYER

promise yet? Why have they not been made perfect apart from us? Because we will all be made perfect together at the resurrection. We will all be transformed and given our immortal bodies together, and then we will receive the promise of eternal life, and live with Messiah in the kingdom of God.

But why does the Bible say that "*he did not see death*" if he is listed among those who "*all died in faith*"?

This same phrase is used when Hagar expected Ishmael to die, but she did not want to watch it happen.

"Then she went and sat down across from him at a distance of about a bowshot; for she said to herself, "Let me **not see the death** of the boy." So she sat opposite him, and lifted her voice and wept." - Genesis 21:16

Perhaps Enoch did not see death, because he died in his sleep. What if *God took him* by surprise at a young age? He was not expecting to die at only 365 years, while others were living well past 800 years. This would be comparable to someone dying at 36 while everyone else lived past 80. He did not see death could simply mean he did not expect it, or he did not perceive it happening because he was asleep.

Another interesting theory I have heard is that Enoch was taken to the future, and he will be one of the two witnesses in the last days. This is based on the phrase, "*he was translated*" or "*he was taken away*". This theory says he hasn't seen death yet because he was taken to the future. This is an interesting theory, but it will remain a subject of speculation until the two witnesses are revealed.

I admit that when dealing with Enoch, there is not enough Biblical evidence to know for sure what happened to him,

## Immortal

so we are left to wonder and speculate about it. However, the Bible does not tell us that he went to heaven and making such assumptions should be avoided. Remember that Yeshua said, “*no one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven*” (John 3:13). No one has ascended to heaven except Yeshua, which means Enoch could not have gone to heaven.

MEYER

## Absent from the Body

One of the most commonly misquoted verses in the Bible is 2 Corinthians 5:8. I cannot tell you how many times I have heard people say, “*to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.*” However, that is not what Paul wrote, yet it’s what so many people say to defend their belief that we go immediately to heaven when we die. Look at what the verse in question actually says.

“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”  
- 2 Corinthians 5:8

Do you see the difference? Paul is not claiming that absence from the body equals presence with the Lord. He is simply expressing his desire and preference to be absent from the body because of his greater desire to be present with the Lord. He understands the limitations of his mortal earthly body, and he is expressing his desire to be in the presence of the Lord, which requires the shedding of this mortal body.

We also need to look at the context of this verse to better understand what he is trying to express. Paul begins this chapter by speaking about the new body we will receive in the resurrection.

“For we know that if our earthly house, this tent, is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, **earnestly desiring to be clothed** with our habitation which is from heaven, if indeed, having been clothed, we shall **not be found naked**. For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to

## MEYER

be unclothed, but **further clothed**, that mortality may be swallowed up by life.” - 2 Corinthians 5:1-4

He compares our earthly body to a tent, and says when this tent is destroyed we have a better body waiting for us. Notice that he makes it clear that we do not want to be “*unclothed*” or “*found naked*”, indicating that he is not talking about being disembodied spirits, but “*further clothed*” with our immortal body from heaven, speaking about the new body we will receive at the resurrection.

Remember, this is his second letter to the Corinthians, and in his first letter, Paul spent a significant amount of time explaining the resurrection and the new bodies we will receive when Messiah returns. This provides more context for understanding what is being said in 2 Corinthians 5:8. Paul is not teaching something contradictory to what he taught in his first epistle, he is expanding upon it and drawing from it.

“But someone will say, ‘How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?’ Foolish one, what you sow is not made alive unless it dies. And what you sow, you do not sow that body that shall be, but mere grain - perhaps wheat or some other grain. But God gives it a body as He pleases, and to each seed its own body.”  
- 1 Corinthians 15:35-38

Notice he says in the resurrection we receive a new body, but our old body must first die. This does not imply that we instantly receive our new body at death. He simply says the old must first die. He continues to explain that the new body is received at the resurrection.

“So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. 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



# immortal

spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.” - 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

This was the foundation he laid in his first letter to Corinth, so when they read his words about wanting to be absent from the body and having his earthly tent destroyed, they would have understood that he was speaking about death, and when he said he wanted to receive the heavenly clothing and to be in the presence of the Lord, they would have understood this to be a reference to the resurrection.

Paul also explains that we need a new body because our current body is in the image of Adam, but our new heavenly body will be in the likeness of Yeshua.

“The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption.”

- 1 Corinthians 15:47-50

Receiving our new spiritual body is vital because our current fleshly body cannot inherit the Kingdom of God, which is why Paul expressed a desire to shed his body so that he could be in the presence of the Lord.

“We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.”

- 2 Corinthians 5:8

We are confident and well pleased in knowing that we will someday shed our mortal flesh and enter the presence of the Lord eternally. But as Paul explains, we don't want to be unclothed but further clothed, because we must receive our

## MEYER

heavenly body to enter the kingdom of God. This happens at the resurrection when Messiah returns.

“Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.”

- 1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Notice it's at the last trumpet when the dead are raised that we all receive our immortal bodies together. This is a communal event in which the entire body of Christ receives immortality together. We don't enter the kingdom as individuals, we enter as the united body of believers.

That is why “*WE are confident and well pleased*” that we will be in the presence of the Lord, knowing that we must first shed this mortal body before we can receive our new immortal body at the resurrection.

## Eternal Fire

Another question that people ask is, “*why is it called eternal fire if the wicked do not burn for eternity?*”

A simple answer is, the fire is eternal because it was not created for mortals, it was created for Satan and the fallen angels.

"Then He will also say to those on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, you cursed, into the **everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels**:' - Matthew 25:41

The devil and angels are not mortals, they are heavenly beings, and the Bible says they will be tormented forever and ever.

"The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be **tormented** day and night forever and ever." - Revelation 20:10

It is important to note that when Satan, the beast, and the false prophet are cast into the lake of fire, there is no mention of their death. The Bible is very specific when it mentions those three who will be tormented forever, while there is no mention of anyone else receiving such torment. The Bible says the wicked will be punished, but it doesn't say they will be tormented.

Unlike the devil and his angels, humans will not be able to endure the eternal flames. When a mortal is cast into fire they die, which is why the Bible calls it “*the second death*.”

“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall

## MEYER

have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is **the second death**." - Revelation 21:8

The Bible makes it clear that the lake of fire is a place of pain and punishment for the wicked, and we should make every effort to avoid it at all costs. Yeshua taught that it is better to pluck out your eye or cut off your hand than to have your whole body thrown into the fire of Gehenna.

"If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [Gehenna]. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into hell [Gehenna]." - Matthew 5:29-30

I have had minor burns on my skin over the years, and although they were only minor, they were extremely painful. I cannot imagine how terrible it would be to have your entire body burning to death in a fire. I would not want to suffer one second in a fire like that, and I would not wish it upon anyone else either.

That is why I am so thankful that God is so gracious that He does not allow humans to become immortal in their sin, so they will find grace even in their punishment.

## Resurrected Saints

There is an interesting event recorded in the Gospel of Matthew, which tells us that the graves opened up the day Yeshua died, and many dead saints came out of their graves after His resurrection and walked around Jerusalem.

“And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many.”

- Matthew 27:50-53

However, the Bible does not tell us what happened to those people afterward. We don't know if they continued living for a few hours, days, weeks, or years, which has led to a lot of speculation and myths about what might have happened to them. I really wish we were given more information about them, but unfortunately we are left to wonder.

Some people have incorrectly concluded that these saints were the “*firstfruits*” of the resurrection and Yeshua took them with Him when He ascended into heaven, but we know that Yeshua Himself is the firstfruits, because the Bible tells us, “*now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep*” (1 Cor. 15:20).

The firstfruits offering is a single sheaf that is waved before the LORD, and Yeshua is that sheaf. Also, the Bible says nothing about other people ascending to heaven with Him.

We must also realize that if these resurrected saints were

## MEYER

taken up to heaven, they would have been given their perfect immortal bodies, however, the Bible tells us that we will all be made perfect together, and that even the great fathers of our faith (such as Abraham, Isaac, Moses, etc.) will not be made perfect apart from us.

“And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the promise, God having provided something better for us, that they should not be made perfect apart from us.” - Hebrews 11:39-40

Therefore, if Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many other great men of faith have not yet been made perfect, then we cannot conclude that the people who came out of their graves after Yeshua was resurrected were made perfect at that time.

There are a number of examples in the Bible of people who died and came back to life, but were not given immortality. Lazarus is a prime example of someone who was dead for four days before he was raised back to life, and he did not become immortal. Another example is when the ruler of the synagogue's daughter died, and Yeshua raised her back to life. She was not given an immortal body at that time, and she did not ascend to heaven, she simply came back to life as a mortal.

It is inconsistent with Scripture to conclude that a number of unnamed persons ascended into heaven, when the Bible tells us that no one has ascended.

If we tried to name some of the people in the Bible who might be worthy to be taken to heaven with Yeshua, the list would surely include people such as King David, Moses, and Abraham, however, all of those men are listed by name as not having receiving the promise yet.

## immortal

Also, in Peter's sermon, he specifically says that David has not ascended into heaven, but remains in his grave.

"Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day... For David did not ascend into the heavens..." - Acts 2:29,34

The only thing we can safely assume about the resurrected saints is that they eventually died again. We don't know if they were alive for a few hours, or if they were like Lazarus, and given a number of years to continue their lives. However, the Bible does not support the idea that they ascended to heaven.

MEYER



## Under the Altar

The book of Revelation speaks about the souls of martyrs being under the altar. Does that mean the dead martyrs are currently in heaven?

"When He opened the fifth seal, I saw **under the altar the souls of those who had been slain** for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed." - Revelation 6:9-11

Why are these people just hanging around under the altar? An altar is a place of sacrifice and offering. It is used in worship, and the sacrifices that are placed on the altar are dedicated and offered up to God. Saying that the martyrs are under the altar conveys the idea that they offered their lives as a sacrifice to God, as an act of worship. These people were willing to die for their faith, and it is considered an act of worship to God. In fact, Paul encourages believers to consider themselves to be a *"living sacrifice"*.

"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."  
- Romans 12:1

So, it is not difficult to see how these men and women poured out their lives as a type of sacrifice. It is important to clarify that their blood is considered to be a sacrifice of devotion, not atonement.

## MEYER

So, are these dead saints alive in heaven under the altar? The Bible says, “*the dead know nothing*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5), and they “*do not praise the Lord*” (Psalm 115:17), so how can dead souls cry out from under the altar? This is actually very similar to a story found in the book of Genesis, in which the blood of Abel, the first martyr, cries out from the ground.

"Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, "Where is Abel your brother?" He said, "I do not know. Am I my brother's keeper?" And He said, "What have you done? The voice of **your brother's blood cries out to Me** from the ground."

- Genesis 4:8-10

We understand this to be a literary device in which Abel's blood is personified in a type of anthropomorphism. His blood did not actually have a voice, but it symbolically cried out from the ground. In like manner, the book of Hebrews tells us that Abel continues to speak from the grave because of his *more excellent sacrifice*.

“By faith Abel offered to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, through which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts; **and through it he being dead still speaks.**” - Hebrews 11:4

This same type of literary device is being applied to the “*martyrs under the altar*”, who are able to cry out even though they are currently dead. The dead souls do not literally speak, but they are symbolically crying out to God just as Abel's blood did.

The martyrs are also told to “*rest a little while longer*”, which indicates they are still sleeping in their graves, waiting the resurrection.

According to the Bible, the priests were instructed to place some of the blood on the horns of the altar of incense, but they poured most of it on the ground below the altar of burnt offering (Leviticus 4:7). Revelation also mentions these *“golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.”* (Revelation 5:8) This might also indicate that the prayers of the martyrs were the sacrifices that ascended like incense up to heaven.

The book of Revelation is not telling us that disembodied souls are sitting under the altar in heaven (which seems like a type of punishment). Instead, it is trying to convey the idea that the martyrs have not been forgotten, and their sacrifice was not in vain. Their lives are received as a act of worship, and although they are dead, God hears their cries, and He will set things right in His perfect timing.

It serves as a reminder that God has not forgotten His people, even during times of tribulation.

MEYER

## The Rapture

The “Rapture” theory is one of the most popular and recent doctrines to have developed in modern Christianity. It was developed in the late nineteenth century, and has become exceedingly popular in the past 50 years.

There are a number of variations about the rapture, such as pre-tribulation, mid-tribulation, or post-tribulation, but the general idea is that all Christians will be taken up to heaven at some point during the last days.

It is sometimes referred to as the “secret rapture” because they believe it will come suddenly and without warning. They teach that the rapture could happen at any moment, so we must always be ready because *no one knows the day or the hour*.

Many of the recent books and movies about the rapture convey an almost comical situation in which piles of clothes are left on chairs where people once sat, vehicles are suddenly abandoned while driving down the road, and everyone on earth (who are “*Left Behind*”) are overcome with confusion and fear.

But is that really what the Bible says will happen? The popularity of a teaching does not determine its truthfulness. The Bible is our source for truth and doctrine, and we must find out if the Rapture theory lines up with the Scriptures.

There are a few verses that are commonly used to support the Rapture, but the single most important verse used to support it is 1 Thess. 4:17.

“Then we who are alive and remain shall be **caught up** together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the

## MEYER

air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.”

- 1 Thessalonians 4:17

This verse is where the word “Rapture” originates, because the Latin Vulgate translates the Greek word “harpagesometha” as “*rapiemur*”, which becomes “*rapture*” in English. However, I am not aware of any English translations which use the word “*rapture*” in this text. Most say “*caught up*”, “*snatched up*”, or “*taken up*”.

"The catching up of believers by Christ at the time of His return. The word came into use by way of the Latin *rapio* used to translate the Greek term of 1 Thess. 4:17 , harpagesometha. Living believers are said to be “caught up” to meet the Lord at His coming.”<sup>i</sup>

The word “harpagesometha” means “*to take by an open display of force*” (not covertly or secretly), which contradicts the idea of a “*secret rapture*”. Also, when we look at the context of this verse we find out that Paul is not talking about a secret rapture, he is talking about the resurrection of the dead.

“But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord **will by no means precede those who are asleep**. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And **the dead in Christ will rise first**. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord.” - 1 Thess. 4:13-17

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<sup>i</sup> Butler, Trent C. Editor. Entry for 'Rapture'. Holman Bible Dictionary. 1991.

## Immortal

Many who hold to the rapture theory claim that it will happen secretly and without warning, but these verses describe a shout and a trumpet that will announce the return of the Messiah. Likewise, trumpets are mentioned in other verses that have been used to support the rapture.

“And He will send His angels with a **great sound of a trumpet**, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.”

- Matthew 24:31

“in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at **the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound**, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.”

- 1 Corinthians 15:52

It doesn't sound like this event will be much of a secret if trumpets from heaven are announcing the Messiah's return and the resurrection of the dead.

The most popular version of the rapture theory is the pre-tribulation rapture, which states that Messiah will take his people out of the earth right before the tribulation begins, but they say He will not actually return to earth until the end of the tribulation. This is problematic though, because 1 Thessalonians 4:15 calls it “*the coming of the Lord*”. This means He is coming down, not simply calling people up.

Likewise, Paul said that when Yeshua returns, “*the dead in Christ will rise first*”. This is the “*first resurrection*” spoken about in Revelation. However the book of Revelation tells us that the first resurrection will take place after the tribulation, and after Satan is bound for a thousand years.

“... He laid hold of the dragon, that serpent of old, who is the Devil and Satan, and **bound him for a thousand years**; and he cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal on him, so that he should deceive

## MEYER

the nations no more till the thousand years were finished... Then I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their witness to Jesus and for the word of God, **who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark on their foreheads or on their hands. And they lived and reigned with Christ for a thousand years.** But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.** Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years."  
- Revelation 20:4-6

This resurrection cannot be before the tribulation, because those who were martyred during the tribulation are among the ones who are part of the first resurrection. We know this because it says they *"had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received his mark in their foreheads or on their hands."*

The Bible says, *"we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep... the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them..."* So, if we who are alive do not proceed those who are dead, then how are we "raptured" up to heaven before the tribulation? It simply does not line up with Scripture.

I previously mentioned Matthew 24:31 and 1 Corinthians 15:52, now lets take a closer look at the context of those verses to see what they are actually describing.

In Matthew 24, Yeshua is answering a question that His disciples asked, saying, *"Tell us, when will these things be? And what will be the sign of Your coming, and of the end of the age?"* (Matthew 24:3) To which Yeshua responded by describing a number of events that will take place before He



## Immortal

returns. He warned that there will be false Christs, false prophets, wars, famines, earthquakes, and tribulation before His return. Then He described His return.

**"Immediately after the tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then 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 coming on the clouds** of heaven with power and great glory. And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will **gather together His elect** from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other." - Matthew 24:29-31

It is very clear from this passage that Yeshua is going to return after the tribulation to gather His people. We have the same elements here as we did in 1 Thessalonians 4 (the trumpet sound, Messiah coming in the clouds, and gathering His people to Him), but Yeshua makes it very clear that these things will happen *"immediately after the tribulation"*, not before as the pre-tribulation theory proposes.

1 Corinthians 15:52 is one of the most popular "rapture" verses, but it has also been misunderstood and taken out of context in effort to support this theory.

The entire chapter of 1 Corinthians 15 is about the resurrection of the dead. Verse 52 is part of Paul's answer to the question, *"How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?"* (1 Cor. 15:35) He points out that there are different types of bodies belonging to humans, animals, and angels. Then he explains that our body will be changed into an immortal spiritual body at the resurrection.

"So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in

## MEYER

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. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." - 1 Corinthians 15:42-44

Then Paul explains that we must obtain a spiritual body before we can inherit the kingdom of God, because corruption cannot inherit incorruption. Now, look at the text in question, and the verses surrounding it, to see how it fits into Paul's argument for the resurrection.

"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed - in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and **the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: 'Death is swallowed up in victory.' 'O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?'" - 1 Corinthians 15:51-55

Notice again that Paul mentions the trumpet sound, and the dead being resurrected, and we who are alive being changed with them. This is the same event that he was describing in 1 Thess. 4, which takes place after the tribulation. This entire chapter in 1 Corinthians is about the resurrection of the dead.

Another related Scripture that is often cited as "*proof of the resurrection*" is found in Matthew 24, and it speaks about one person being taken while another is left.

"Then two men will be in the field: one will be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: one will be taken and the other left. Watch therefore, for

## Immortal

you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”  
- Matthew 24:40-42

This one is very popular, because at first glance it seems to really fit the rapture theory. In fact, this is where the “*Left Behind*” book series got its name. However, we must look at the context of these verses to find out when this event takes place, and who is being taken and who is being “left behind”.

“Immediately **after the tribulation** of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. Then 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 coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory... **But as the days of Noah were, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.** For as in the days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered the ark, and did not know until **the flood came and took them all away, so also will the coming of the Son of Man be.** Then two men will be in the field: **one will be taken** and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill: **one will be taken** and the other left. Watch therefore, for you do not know what hour your Lord is coming.”  
- Matthew 24:29,30,37-42

Yeshua said that His return will be like the days of Noah, and just as the flood took away everyone outside of the boat, so also will there be people who are taken away when Messiah returns. He is saying that the wicked will be removed from the earth once again, just as was done in the days of Noah. This is the opposite of the “*Left Behind*” series which portrays the godly as the ones being taken away.

Also, notice that He said He would return “*Immediately after the tribulation*”, and people will be taken away at “*the coming of the Son of Man*”. Therefore, this snatching away of the wicked people from the earth will take place after the tribulation, and the godly people will remain on earth with Yeshua as part of His kingdom. Therefore, we do not want to be the ones who are taken away, “*as the days of Noah were*”.

So, where did the rapture doctrine come from, and why has it become so popular today?

The earliest record of anyone proposing a rapture theory was in 1590, by a Catholic Jesuit named Francisco Ribera, but there is no documented evidence of anyone teaching the rapture prior to the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The first known mention was in an essay published in 1788 by Morgan Edwards,<sup>i</sup> and the next was by a Jesuit priest named Manuel Lacunza in 1811 who wrote “*La venida del Mesías en gloria y majestad*” (The Coming of the Messiah in Glory and Majesty) under the false-name Juan Josafat Ben Ezra, which was translated into English by Edward Irving in 1827.

In 1827, John Nelson Darby put forth the most noteworthy works regarding the rapture, which caused the theory to circulate among the masses. As a result, Darby is believed by many to be the one who introduced the rapture concept, since there were no major Christian teachings about it prior to him. However, according to Dr. Samuel Prideaux Tregelles, Darby’s works on the rapture can actually be traced back to Edward Irving<sup>ii</sup>, who received his information from the Jesuit priest, Manuel Lacunza. Even though he was not the first to mention it, Darby was definitely the one who made it popular.

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<sup>i</sup> Marotta, Frank (1995). Morgan Edwards: An Eighteenth Century Pretribulationist. Jackson Township, New Jersey: Present Truth Publishers.

<sup>ii</sup> Tregelles, Samuel Prideaux (2006-04-01). The Hope of Christ's Second Coming. Milesburg, PA: Strong Tower Publishing.

Darby is also called the “*father of dispensationalism*”, because he was so instrumental in spreading the dispensationalist mindset. Dispensationalism is the belief that God deals differently with the Church than He did with the Israelites.

Darby taught that the prophetic timetable had been paused at the founding of the church and that the unfulfilled Biblical prophecies will not take place until after the Rapture of the church. He also taught that the Rapture would be a “secret” catching away that could happen at any moment without any signs or warnings.

By the late 1800’s, preachers such as C. I. Scofield began teaching the Rapture theory along with dispensationalism, and increasing its popularity among protestant churches worldwide. Scofield also published his own translation of the Bible called the “*Scofield Reference Bible*”, which he used to teach the Rapture theory in his footnotes. With over three million copies printed in the first fifty years, this popular Bible was widely distributed in both the United States and England. Many of the preachers who read this Bible accepted its footnotes as authoritative, and began teaching the Rapture theory in their own churches. This is when the rapture really became a common belief among protestants.

The Rapture became even more popular in the 1970s when Hal Lindsey wrote “*The Late Great Planet Earth*“, and in the 1990s with the “*Left Behind*” series by Jim Jenkins and Tim LaHaye. The “*Left Behind*” books were so popular that in 1998, the first four books of the series held the top four slots in the New York Times best-seller list simultaneously, and the total sales for this series has surpassed 65 million copies.

Obviously, the rapture theory has become very popular

## MEYER

among Christians, but popularity is not what determines sound doctrine. Our doctrine must come from the Word of God alone, and not the imaginations of men.

## Purgatory

Does the Bible teach about purgatory?

The Latin word purgatory means “*to purge or make clean*”, and the Catholic Church teaches that people go to Purgatory to be purified or purged from sin. This is what the Catholic Encyclopedia has to say about the purpose of purgatory.

“Purgatory in accordance with Catholic teaching is a place or condition of temporal punishment for those who, departing this life in God's grace, are, not entirely free from venial faults, or have not fully paid the satisfaction due to their transgressions.”<sup>i</sup>

Purgatory is a place of punishment and purification for sins that have not been completely paid for. This means our Messiah was not able to completely atone for our sins, and we need to serve time in Purgatory to pay off the debt we still owe. This unbiblical doctrine renders the sacrifice of Yeshua meaningless, since we must work off our own debt in the underworld.

The Bible says, “*For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing.*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5) If the dead know nothing, how are they able to pay off their sin debt in purgatory?

The word “purgatory” is never even mentioned in the Bible, nor is there mention of a place of purification in death. The Scriptures give absolutely no indication that we will have any opportunity to pay off our debt after we die.

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<sup>i</sup> Obstat, Nihil. Lafort, Remy, Censor. Entry for 'Purgatory'. The Catholic Encyclopedia. Robert Appleton Company. New York. 1914.

Paul explained very clearly that Messiah will judge both the living and the dead when he returns, which means no one has been judged yet.

“I charge you therefore before God and the Lord Jesus Christ, who will judge the living and the dead at His appearing and His kingdom” - 2 Timothy 4:1

However, the Catholic church teaches that people are judged immediately at death, and their eternal destiny is decided among three possible outcomes. The righteous go to Heaven, the unrighteous go to Hell, and those who are not righteous enough end up in Purgatory to burn off their sins.

According to the “*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*”, the topic of purgatory is addressed in the following dialogue.

### **210. What is purgatory?**

Purgatory is the state of those who die in God’s friendship, assured of their eternal salvation, but who still have need of purification to enter into the happiness of heaven.<sup>i</sup>

So, purgatory is a place where “*those who die in God’s friendship*” go because “*they still have need of purification*”? The idea that we can be partially righteous is not Biblical. We are either righteous or we are sinners, it is black or white, there is no grey area. There is no such thing as being partially righteous.

"When I say to the righteous that he shall surely live, but he trusts in his own righteousness and commits iniquity, none of his righteous works shall be remembered; but

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<sup>i</sup> Catholic Church. (2005). *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.



## Immortal

because of the iniquity that he has committed, he shall die." - Ezekiel 33:13

None of his righteous works will be remembered because, "*whoever shall keep the whole law, and yet stumble in one point, he is guilty of all.*" (James 2:10) This means we cannot be partially righteous. We are either righteous or we are sinners.

Also, sins cannot be erased by punishing the sinner. There is nothing we can do to expiate our own sins. It is only through the blood of Yeshua that we are able to find atonement for our sins. The Bible says that the blood of Messiah cleanses us from all sin.

"But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses us from all sin.**" - 1 John 1:7

If we still have need for purification, that means the blood of Messiah is not enough. By teaching purgatory, they are saying that Yeshua is not able to "*cleanse us from all sin*". However, the Bible says He came to completely save us.

"Therefore **He is also able to save to the uttermost** those who come to God through Him, since He always lives to make intercession for them." - Hebrews 7:25

The doctrine of purgatory diminishes the work of Yeshua by establishing another means of salvation.

It also teaches that the fate of the dead can be affected by the actions of the living. This has led to the practice of prayer for the dead and giving of indulgences. The "*Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*" talks about how the living help the dead.

**211. How can we help the souls being purified in purgatory?**

Because of the communion of saints, the faithful who are still pilgrims on earth are able to help the souls in purgatory by offering prayers in suffrage for them, especially the Eucharistic sacrifice. They also help them by almsgiving, indulgences, and works of penance.<sup>i</sup>

The Catholic doctrine of purgatory stands in opposition to the Biblical teachings about salvation, forgiveness, death, and resurrection, and it was one of the main things the Protestant reformers sought to eradicate from the church. There is absolutely no Scriptural support for the doctrine of purgatory, and protestants are right to oppose this heresy.

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<sup>i</sup> Catholic Church. (2005). *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*. Ottawa: Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops.

## Witch of Endor

The Bible talks about how Saul obtained help from a witch to try to communicate with the spirit of Samuel. This particular event is used to support the belief that disembodied spirits remain alive after their body dies. Many people also believe the spirit or soul of the dead go immediately to heaven or hell. However, that's not what the Bible says.

As we look at the events of Saul and the witch of Endor I see three possible scenarios.

The first scenario is that it was actually the spirit of Samuel that was raised up by the witch. This is the most popular understanding, but I think it has the most problems and I think it is the least likely scenario, and we will see why in a moment.

The second possibility is that the witch summoned a demon that pretended to be Samuel. This is quite possible since witches gain power through demons, and the Bible even says she had a “familiar spirit”, which most likely refers to a demon.

And the third possible scenario is that there was no spirit at all and the witch simply tricked Saul to get back at him for banishing the necromancers from the kingdom. Considering other things that are said in the Bible, I think this is also very likely, and we will look at those things as well.

The account of the witch of Endor is found in 1 Samuel chapter 28. This chapter starts out by telling us that Samuel died and Saul got rid of everyone who practiced necromancy.

## MEYER

“Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had lamented him, and buried him in Ramah, even in his own city. And Saul had put away those that had familiar spirits, and the wizards, out of the land.” - 1 Samuel 28:3

Some translations say mediums or necromancers, but this translation says “familiar spirits”. Ultimately they all mean the same thing. The Hebrew word used here is “Ob” and means “a leather bottle” because of the hollow sounds they make when doing their séance, and it refers to mediums, necromancers, or those who have a familiar spirit.

Saul put away the necromancers because the Bible says they should not even be found among God’s people.

“There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For all who do these things are an abomination to the Lord, and because of these abominations the Lord your God drives them out from before you.”

- Deuteronomy 18:10-12

Saul should have heeded the warning of Leviticus though, because it tells us not to consult with them.

“Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them, to be defiled by them: I am the Lord your God.” - Leviticus 19:31

In fact, it is quite possible that Saul died as a result of turning to a necromancer for advice, because the Bible says the person who does that will be cut off.

“And the person who turns to mediums and familiar spirits, to prostitute himself with them, I will set My face

## Immortal

against that person and cut him off from his people.”

- Leviticus 20:6

It was good that Saul cast the necromancers out of the kingdom, but according to the Bible, he should have had them stoned to death.

“A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death; they shall stone them with stones. Their blood shall be upon them.”

- Leviticus 20:27

If he had stoned all of the necromancers as the Bible says, then he would have never gotten himself into the situation that he did.

Alright, let's move on. We find out that the Philistines gathered against Israel, and Saul was afraid and didn't know what to do, so he asked God for help, but when he didn't get a response from God, he decided to consult with a medium instead.

“And when Saul enquired of the LORD, the LORD answered him not, neither by dreams, nor by Urim, nor by prophets. Then said Saul unto his servants, Seek me a woman that hath a familiar spirit, that I may go to her, and enquire of her. And his servants said to him, Behold, there is a woman that hath a familiar spirit at Endor.”

- 1 Samuel 28:7

Notice that God was not speaking to Saul at all, not even through the prophets, and Samuel was one of the prophets. In fact, Samuel was the main prophet during the time of Saul, which is why Saul tried to contact him. So, if God was not speaking to Saul through the prophets, then why would God allow a witch to raise up Samuel to speak to Saul? This is the first problem I see with the idea that it was actually the ghost of Samuel.

## MEYER

Next we see that Saul disguised himself and went to speak with the woman, and asked her to bring up the spirit of Samuel.

“...and he said, I pray thee, divine unto me by the familiar spirit, and bring me him up, whom I shall name unto thee... Then said the woman, Whom shall I bring up unto thee? And he said, Bring me up Samuel.”

- 1 Samuel 28:8-11

Notice that Saul asked her to use a "familiar spirit" to call up Samuel. According to Webster's Dictionary, a "familiar spirit" is "a spirit or demon that serves or prompts an individual."<sup>i</sup> This is why God forbids the practice of mediums, divination, and necromancy, because it involves the use of evil spirits.

“Sorcerers or necromancers, who professed to call up the dead to answer questions, were said to have a "familiar spirit"... Such a person was called by the Hebrews an 'Ob , Which properly means a leathern bottle; for sorcerers were regarded as vessels containing the inspiring demon. This Hebrew word was equivalent to the pytho of the Greeks, and was used to denote both the person and the spirit which possessed him.”<sup>ii</sup>

By saying the woman had a familiar spirit, the Bible is telling us that she was demon possessed. It is believed that these demons would assist witches in their divination and practice of magic.

The term necromancy is derived from a combination of two Greek words, nekρός meaning "dead body", and manteía meaning "prophecy or divination". Therefore, the witch was using divination with the aid of her personal demon (or

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<sup>i</sup> Merriam-Webster Online Dictionary. Entry for Familiar Spirit. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/familiar%20spirit>

<sup>ii</sup> Easton, Matthew George. (1897) Entry for 'Familiar Spirit'. Easton's Bible Dictionary.

familiar spirit) to speak to the dead.

After she preformed her séance, she was afraid because of what she saw, but Saul admonished her to tell him about it.

“And the king said unto her, Be not afraid: for what sawest thou? And the woman said unto Saul, I saw gods (Elohim) ascending out of the earth. And he said unto her, What form is he of? And she said, An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.” - 1 Samuel 28:13-14

The witch claimed to see Elohim ascending from the ground. The word Elohim is typically translated as "gods" and in this case seems to refer to spirits.

This word can be used in reference to the one true God, but it can also be used in reference to pagan gods. It's important to point out that the Bible tells us that pagan gods are actually demons.

“...the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to demons and not to God, and I do not want you to have fellowship with demons.” - 1 Corinthians 10:20

As a side note, some people think that the righteous dead go immediately to heaven, which is not Biblical. The Bible says the dead wait in their grave for the resurrection, and I have several teachings about this if you are interested.

They like to use this verse to say that Samuel is alive in heaven, but if Samuel was in heaven, then why does this spirit come up from the ground? Coming up from the ground indicates that he came up from the grave or the pit. If this was actually the spirit of Samuel, we must assume that his spirit was not in heaven, but in the grave. Notice also that Samuel said, "Why have you disturbed me by

## MEYER

bringing me up?", indicating that Samuel was resting in the grave, and Saul disturbed his sleep.

However, I believe it's more likely that this was a demonic spirit that came to deceive Saul. The text itself is a bit ambiguous because the witch said she saw "gods", but "Saul perceived that it was Samuel." This is important to note, because the entire encounter is based on Saul's perception. Was his perception right? Was this really Samuel, or was Saul deceived?

The Bible speaks about lying spirits who speak through false prophets to declare disaster against those who seek them.

"Then a spirit came forward and stood before the Lord, and said, 'I will persuade him.' The Lord said to him, 'In what way?' So he said, 'I will go out and be a lying spirit in the mouth of all his prophets.' And the Lord said, 'You shall persuade him, and also prevail. Go out and do so.' Therefore look! The Lord has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these prophets of yours, and the Lord has declared disaster against you." - 1 Kings 22:21-23

I think it's very possible that's what happened to Saul. He sought help from a witch and a lying spirit deceived him and declared disaster against him.

The spirit told Saul that God is his enemy, and he is about to die and be with Samuel. This is another indicator that Samuel was not in heaven, because if Saul is God's enemy, then he wouldn't join Samuel in heaven. But if Samuel was in the grave waiting for the resurrection, then Saul could join him there.

"Then Samuel said: 'Why then do you ask me, seeing the Lord has departed from you and has become your enemy? ... Moreover the Lord will also deliver Israel with you



## Immortal

into the hand of the Philistines. And tomorrow you and your sons will be with me..." - 1 Samuel 28:16-19

The main reason why I don't believe this was actually the spirit of Samuel is because the Bible says the dead know nothing.

"For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten." - Ecclesiastes 9:5

If the dead know nothing, how would Samuel be able to tell Saul anything?

It's interesting to note that the practice of necromancy actually has connections with ventriloquism. In fact, the Septuagint uses the Greek word *gastromancy*, from the words *gastēr* meaning "belly" and *manteia* meaning "prophecy", indicating divination by use of guttural sounds, and translated as "ventriloquist" in English. The medium (or ventriloquist) would chirp, whisper, and mutter during their séance, and these noises were thought to be the voices of the dead. The Bible even mentions the mutterings and whispers of mediums in Isaiah.

"And when they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living?" - Isaiah 8:19

Remember that the Hebrew word "Ob" means leather bottle, and Strong's Exhaustive Concordance says,

"properly, a mumble, i.e. A water skin (from its hollow sound); hence a necromancer (ventriloquist, as from a jar) bottle, familiar spirit."<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> Strong, J. (1890). Strong's exhaustive concordance of the Bible. Abingdon Press.

Likewise, the Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew English Lexicon says,

“as chirping & muttering, in practice of their art of seeking dead for instruction, probably ventriloquism”<sup>i</sup>

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says,

“These terms refer to the necromancers themselves... who practiced ventriloquism in connection with their magical rites.”<sup>ii</sup>

The Jewish Encyclopedia says similar things about it.

“The Septuagint generally translates the word by "ventriloquist," deriving this meaning from the tone of voice adopted by the necromancer... The "possessor of the ob" stooped while speaking, to make it appear as if the spirit spoke from his joints and arms... the speech of these necromancers being therefore called whispering and muttering”<sup>iii</sup>

Notice that all of these Concordances and Lexicons offer ventriloquist as a proper definition of the Hebrew word “ob.”

What if the conversation with Samuel was a clever deception of a skilled ventriloquist? She was recently banished by Saul, who was now seeking her help. She could have easily used this as an opportunity to take vengeance against him. All she really did was reinforce his own fears by telling him the Philistines would defeat him in battle. However, Saul was not slain in battle, he killed himself, which could be considered an act of self-fulfilling prophecy.

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<sup>i</sup> Brown, Francis, 1849-1916. The Brown, Driver, Briggs Hebrew And English Lexicon

<sup>ii</sup> Bromiley, G. W. (1979). The International standard Bible encyclopedia. Grand Rapids, Mich: W.B. Eerdmans.

<sup>iii</sup> Singer, I., & Adler, C. (1901). The Jewish Encyclopedia. New York, NY: Funk & Wagnalls.

## Immortal

Think about mediums today. They are either demon possessed or they are charlatans who trick people into thinking they speak to the dead. I believe these are the two most likely scenarios for the witch of Endor as well. Either she spoke to a demon who pretended to be Samuel, or she tricked Saul through ventriloquism.

Thinking that it was actually the spirit of Samuel seems to contradict what the Bible is telling us, because the Bible tells us the dead know nothing, and this text itself tells us that God didn't speak to Saul through the prophets.

This event becomes sort of a satire in which King Saul seeks help from the dead but ends up killing himself. It shows the irony of seeking help from the dead, because the dead can do nothing to help the living.

MEYER

## Near-Death Experiences

What about all of the people who claimed to have died and gone to heaven or hell?

There have been many books and movies based on claims that people have gone to heaven or hell and returned to tell about it. It seems to be quite a popular subject, and many people have been convinced that these stories are true, but we need to ask if those stories line up with what the Bible says? The Bible should always be our authority on these things, and we must let it guide us to the truth.

The Bible gives us some great examples and descriptions of heaven through visions that certain prophets recorded in the Scriptures. These visions of heaven can serve as a guideline for helping us determine if a particular experience was real or not.

When we examine the stories of near-death experiences, many of the authors seem to focus on how they felt, who they saw, and how important they are for having seen such things. They often point out things they came to understand through their experience, which they could not have learned through Scripture alone. These stories end up being very self-centered and shallow, in contrast with Biblical visions of heaven.

Three Biblical authors recorded visions of heaven (Isaiah, Ezekiel, and John), but none of them are described as having near-death experiences. As we look at the Biblical visions of heaven, notice that they focus completely on the majesty of God, and say nothing about themselves except that they are unworthy to be in God's presence. Isaiah gives us a perfect example of this.

## MEYER

“...I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His robe filled the temple. Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. And one cried to another and said: "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; The whole earth is full of His glory!" And the posts of the door were shaken by the voice of him who cried out, and the house was filled with smoke. So I said: ‘Woe is me, for I am undone! Because I am a man of unclean lips, And I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; For my eyes have seen the King, The Lord of hosts.’” - Isaiah 6:1-5

Notice that Isaiah did not tell us about getting to speak with departed family members, or how happy and peaceful he felt. When he saw a vision of heaven, he said, “*Woe is me, for I am undone... I am a man of unclean lips...*” He was not comforted by his vision of heaven, nor was he reassured of his goodness and accomplishments. He was made acutely aware of his own sinfulness and he understood how unworthy he really was.

Notice also that everything in his vision points to the glory, holiness, and majesty of the Almighty God. When standing in the presence of God, Isaiah was not concerned with talking to dead relatives or sightseeing, because he was completely captivated by the Holy One on the throne.

When we compare this with the stories of people who claim to have died and gone to heaven, we find that they could not be more different from one another. If those people truly went to heaven, they would not be preoccupied with familiar faces and strange conversations, because their full and undivided attention would have been focused on God Almighty.

Paul also mentions a man who had a vision of heaven, but explains that he “*heard inexpressible words, which it is not*

## immortal

*lawful for a man to utter.*" (2 Cor. 12:4) However, those who claim they went to heaven have no problem talking about everything they saw and heard, often claiming they were sent back to share what they experienced.

Yeshua said, "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead." (Luke 16:31)

Did God change His mind? Did He decide to start sending people back to tell us how beautiful heaven is so that we will want to go there?

God has given us His Word, and if we will not listen to Moses and the prophets, then why would He send someone back to write a New York Times bestseller about heaven?

If we believe the Bible, then we cannot believe the testimony of someone who claims they went to heaven, because the Bible plainly says, "*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven.*" (John 3:13)

We should not concern ourselves with fanciful tales from people who claim to have gone to heaven, because they are not compatible with the Word of God.

Why do so many people claim to have experienced heaven in near-death situations?

Some people sincerely believe they experienced heaven, but many of these experiences are caused by extreme trauma leading to vivid dreams. Others remember things from long ago that seem very real. Lack of oxygen and the introduction of drugs in the brain also play a role in the things people claim to have experienced. No matter how sincere they might be, they did not actually go to heaven.

## MEYER

However, there are some greedy liars who make up elaborate stories, hoping to get rich off those who flock to read their rubbish. These people are selfish charlatans who peddle their poison for profit. They are doing the work of the devil, but claim they were sent by God. *Beware of false prophets* (Matthew 7:15), and do not let them fool you with fables.

"For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables." - 2 Timothy 4:3-4

We cannot let personal experiences guide our beliefs. The Bible must be our source for doctrine, and everything else must be put to the scrutiny of the Word of God.



## Final words

I hope this book has challenged you to dig deeper into the Word of God. I encourage you to share this book with anyone who is interested. Loan it to your friends, talk about it in your Bible study, give it to your Pastor, whatever it takes to share this information with as many people as possible.

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