

Is Heaven God's Reward for the Righteous?

 sightedmoon.com/so-you-think-youre-going-to-heaven/

News Letter 5856-031

The 4th Year of the 4th Sabbatical Cycle

The 25th year of the 120th Jubilee Cycle

The 8th day of the 8th month 5856 years after the creation of Adam

The 4th Sabbatical Cycle after the 119th Jubilee Cycle

The Middle of the 70th Jubilee Since Yehovah told Moses To go Get His People

The Sabbatical Cycle of Sword, Famines, and Pestilence

September 26, 2020

Shabbat Shalom to the Royal Family of Yehovah,

Update

Time is flying by.

We have thrown out truckloads of memorabilia and things we no longer want. We have burned 42 years of sensitive documents that we no longer need. We have decided on what we will take with us and what we are going to give away or sell. We have gone through the tears that would not stop and the fights that keep coming up. We are now dealing with no one talking and a few who want to understand. We have watched the borders close up and we have wondered if we are doing the right thing. We have gone over the Jubilee cycles so many times I have worn out my copies rechecking the dates to make sure I have not missed anything. We have questioned if, in fact, we are really at the end of this age. We have almost gone through all the emotions that I think I could have in dealing with the information I have been given.

We have been told internal tourism is about to open up in the Philippines but not yet to foreigners. We are coming to the time when I will be homeless and not sure what I will be doing. We have plans "A" "B" and "C" in our minds but not sure if they can be implemented due to the uncertainty of borders and COVID 19 restrictions. My office will be packed up in a few week's time. I hope to be able to keep up with my laptop. But I expect interruptions to the News Letter. Randy has control of the weekly Sabbath service if I am not able to have internet connections. I have never been in such a position of just not knowing how I am going to go forward in all my life. So I just prepare for what is directly in front of me and I pray Yehovah will lead me to where He wants me to be one day at a time

I say this, not looking for empathy or pity. I say this because I know some of you are dealing with the same emotions and unsureness. I get it. Boy, do I get it. But I am not able to forget this scripture from Ezekiel.

Eze 20:33 As I live, says the Lord Jehovah, surely with a mighty hand, and with a stretched out arm, and with fury poured out, I will reign over you.

Eze 20:34 And I will bring you out from the people, and I will gather you out of the lands in which you are scattered among them, with a mighty hand and with a stretched out arm and with fury poured out.

Eze 20:35 And I will bring you into the wilderness of the people, and there I will enter into judgment with you face to face.

Eze 20:36 Just as I entered into judgment with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will enter into judgment with you, says the Lord Jehovah.

Eze 20:37 And I will cause you to pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.

Eze 20:38 And I will purge out from among you the rebels and those who sin against Me. I will bring them out from the land where they reside, and they shall not enter into the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am Jehovah.

We are all going to be taken from our homes. Yehovah is going to do this in a time when He is furious.

Eze 8:14 And He brought me to the opening of the gate of Jehovah's house, toward the north. And behold, women were sitting there, weeping for Tammuz.

Eze 8:15 And He said to me, Have you seen, O son of man? Turn yet again, and you shall see greater evils than these.

Eze 8:16 And He brought me into the inner court of Jehovah's house, and behold, at the opening of the temple of Jehovah, between the porch and the altar, were about twenty-five men with their backs toward the temple of Jehovah and their faces toward the east; and they bowed themselves eastward to the sun.

Eze 8:17 And He said to me, Have you seen, O son of man? Is it a light thing to the house of Judah that they do the hateful things which they do here? For they have filled the land with violence and have turned to provoke Me to anger. And lo, they put the branch to their nose.

Eze 8:18 And I will also deal with fury; My eye shall not spare, nor will I have pity. And though they cry in My ears with a loud voice, I will not hear them.

This is all part of the 4th and 5th curse of Lev 26 that we have been warning you about since 2005, which again Yehovah will do in fury.

Lev 26:23 And if you will not be reformed by Me by these things, but will still walk contrary to Me,

Lev 26:24 then I will walk contrary to you and will punish you seven times more for your sins.

Lev 26:25 And I will bring a sword on you that shall execute the vengeance of the covenant. And when you are gathered inside your cities, I will send the plague among you. And you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.

Lev 26:26 When I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight. And you shall eat and not be satisfied.

Lev 26:27 And if you will not for all of this listen to Me, but will walk contrary to Me,

Lev 26:28 then I will walk contrary to you also in fury. And I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.

Lev 26:29 And you shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters you shall eat.

Yes, we are all going to be taken from our homes. All of us. I have been blessed with being able to sell mine and to set my wife up while I go and prepare a place, Yehovah willing, for her and the rest of my family. And with the help of some of the brethren, to set up something for all of us who are leaving now.

Each of us and all of us are witnessing on the nightly news one major event after another. It just does not seem to stop. Wildfires in Australia that were apocalyptic. Then COVID 19 declared a pandemic by WHO on the very day we kept Passover March 10, 2020. Then we had a run on toilet paper, which might have been the most serious thing of all at the time, but then in April, the UN announced 135 million would die of famine in about three months' time. They then said by Dec 270 Million would die of a biblical sized famine. Then the News was talking about apocalyptic sized locust swarms across Eastern Africa, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and China. Then on May 25th George Floyd was murdered and riots broke out across the USA with about 200 cites on the weekend of May 30, 31st. May 31, 2020, was the very day we have been telling you about since 2005 that would be the start of the war and destruction of the USA, and the UK. The riots spread and increased. A downtown city core was taken over by anarchist and held for a very long time. Looting and murders of whites just for being white took place. White & black militias rose up to defend property and race as more and more people demanded the police be defunded and the money was to be given to BLM and Government leaders agreed. More shootings and deaths developed. Then we had the apocalyptic sized wildfires up and down the west coast of the USA. A smoke so thick it turned the noonday sun into the night in many cities in Oregon and California. The smoke spreading across the USA and into Europe. WHole cites were again burned to the ground. This is now the new normal and everyone wants to blame climate change for

this evil instead of looking at their own sins and not obeying Yehovah. It is Yehovah after all who is sending these things one after another.

Then we had a lull as we kept our Holy Days in August. All of this seemed to match exactly what Cyrus Harding warned us about the Apogee cycles of the moon and is what he calls the crazy cycles.

Once our time for our appointed time with Yehovah was ended, then those who were keeping the Holy Days 30 days later began. And on the eve of Yom Teruah for them, the liberal supreme court judge for the USA died. Chief Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg died on Sept 18, 2020, as Yom Teruah began. And now President Trump is going to choose a new Judge to replace her which will set the court on a conservative direction for many years to come. This is going to upset many on the liberal left. The confirmation will be complete just before the election of the next President on Nov 3, 2020.

As I prepare this on Wednesday, Sept 23, 2020, the stock market is down almost 2000 points since September 2, 2020.

This past week also saw the USA hit a new milestone with the death of over 200,000 people due to COVID 19 and its related causes. Many in the USA are victims of propaganda. The very thing we warned you not to be involved in this spring of conspiracy teachings. Many nations who took the COVID threat seriously have it under control with low death rates now. But in the USA they have conflicting and opposing information about masks herd immunity and vaccinations and isolation coming from the leadership of the country. Many of you are still part of the problem spreading these conspiracies and refuse to repent and get back with Yehovah. As such the death rate in the USA is expected to reach 400,000 in this next year. Some of those who thought this was a joke or that it was just the for the old and not the young, have gotten sick and died. And they are below 40 years of age. Yes, I know many of you are smart enough not to get involved in propaganda and can tell the difference.

Sabbath	6th Cycle	5th Cycle	4th Cycle	3rd Cycle	2nd Cycle	1st Cycle
2044	2037	2030	2023	2016	2009	2002
2043	2036	2029	2022	2015	2008	2001
2042	2035	2028	2021	2014	2007	2000
2041	2034	2027	2020	2013	2006	1999
2040	2033	2026	2019	2012	2005	1998
2039	2032	2025	2018	2011	2004	1997
2038	2031	2024	2017	2010	2003	1996

During this time of COVID 19, many Churches have been banned from fellowshipping in order to help stop the spread of the virus. We think this is hypocritical when you have rallies for presidential campaigns and massive protests and riots, all done with no masks and no social distancing. We cannot help but think of the scriptures that says;

Dan 12:11 And from the time that the daily sacrifice shall be taken away, and the desolating abomination set up, a thousand two hundred and ninety days shall occur.

Churches began to close down at the end of March 2020. The Government also began to order them shut due to the spread of COVID 19. On our countdown page, we have this 1290 count starting at Shavuot 2020. We will now watch and see if an abomination is set up in 2023. The timing of this I am not 100% sure of. BUt I am wondering if the shutting down of places of worship is not the start of this time period.

Sacrifice has been added to the sentence and the word daily is

H8548 (Strong)

תָּמִיד

tāmîyd

taw-meed'

From an unused root meaning to stretch; properly continuance (as indefinite extension); but used only (attributively as adjective) constant (or adverbially constantly); elliptically the regular (daily) sacrifice: – alway (-s), continual (employment, -ly), daily, ([n-]) ever (-more), perpetual.

and the words shall be taken away is from the word;

H5493 (Strong)

שׁוּר סוּר

suûr súûr

soor, soor

A primitive root; to turn off (literally or figuratively): – be [-head], bring, call back, decline, depart, eschew, get [you], go (aside), X grievous, lay away (by), leave undone, be past, pluck away, put (away, down), rebel, remove (to and fro), revolt, X be sour, take (away, off), turn (aside, away, in), withdraw, be without.

So from the time that that the offerings of our lips declines unto the time the abomination is set up is 1290 days.

I thought this to be Shavuot 2020. But I also think it ends when the two witnesses begin. So I am unsure at this time of this period of time.

What I am saying in all of this, is this. The anxiety of this year is not missed by myself and many of you. We are all going to lose our homes at some point. We are all going to be gathered back to Israel at some point. Our things will be taken by others or lost.

What matters the most is our relationship with Yehovah. Do you know Him and does He know you? Have you proven the times we are now in? Have you understood what is meant when we are told to hide ourselves a little while?

Isa 26:20 Come, my people, enter into your rooms and shut your doors around you; hide for a little moment, until the fury has passed by.

Isa 26:21 For behold, Jehovah comes out of His place to punish the people of the earth for their iniquity; the earth also shall reveal her blood, and shall no more cover her dead.

If we are to hide, then the next question is where?

The word rooms here is

H2315 (Strong)

כֶּדֶר

cheder

kheh'-der

From H2314; an apartment (usually literally): – ([bed] inner) chamber, innermost (-ward) part, parlour, + south, X within.

Now go back and read what we told you about the Philippines.

Isaiah 42:11 Let the wilderness and its cities lift up their voice, the villages where Kedar dwells. Let the dwellers of the rock sing, let them shout from the mountain tops.

This word Kedar is

H6938 (Strong)

קֶדָר

qēdâr

kay-dawr'

From H6937; dusky (of the skin or the tent); Kedar, a son of Ishmael; also (collectively) bedawin (as his descendants or representatives): – Kedar.

No, they are not spelt the same. But when you say them they do sound similar. Where are you told to go and hide yourself for a little while?

Here are some more scriptures about the islands just as a reminder.

Isaiah 41:5 The coastlands saw and feared; the ends of the earth were afraid, and drew near, and came.

Isaiah 42:4 He shall not fail nor be discouraged until He has set judgment in the earth; and the coasts shall wait for His Law.

Isaiah 60:9 Surely the coastlands shall wait for Me, and the ships of Tarshish first, to bring your sons from far, their silver and their gold with them, to the name of Jehovah your God, and to the Holy One of Israel, because He has glorified you.

Isaiah 66:19 And I will set a sign among them, and I will send those who escape from them to the nations, to Tarshish, Pul, and Lud, drawers of the bow; to Tubal, and Javan, to the far away coasts that have not heard My fame, nor have seen My glory. And they will declare My glory among the nations.

Psalms 72:8 He shall also have the rule from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth.

9 Those who dwell in the wilderness shall bow before Him; and His enemies shall lick the dust.

10 The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; the kings of Sheba and Seba shall offer gifts.

11 Yes, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him.

Isa 55:1 Ho, everyone who thirsts, come to the waters; and he who has no money, come, buy and eat. Yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price.

Isa 55:2 Why do you weigh silver for what is not bread? and your labor for what never satisfies? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, and let your soul delight itself in fatness.

Isa 55:3 Bow down your ear, and come to Me; hear, and your soul shall live; and I will make an everlasting covenant with you, even the sure mercies of David.

Isa 55:4 Behold, I have given Him for a witness to the people, a Leader and Commander of peoples.

Isa 55:5 Behold, You shall call a nation that You do not know; a nation that did not know You shall run to You because of Jehovah Your God, and for the Holy One of Israel; for He has glorified You.

Isa 55:6 Seek Jehovah while He may be found; call on Him while He is near.

I have sold my home. I am waiting for Yehovah to open up the travel for me to go to hide in Kedar, Cheder, for a while. I am going to prepare for my family and for you to come. I hope you will support our efforts and join us there with your family. And do not forget. If you do not invest in your investment plan, then when it comes time for you to use your plan you won't have anything there to help you. Please do consider investing in what we are doing now. There is not much time left to do so.

In the Mail

Dear Joe.

Its been a while since I wrote.

You have certainly been busy, so I have avoided writing to you for what can be classified as a chat.

As I have said it is hard for me to be a participant on the live streams given the time difference and my commitments Sundays. And have also said that I applaud Paul C (in Queensland) who does.

Nevertheless, the videos and newsletters are critical and inspirational for me. Having many presenters and participants in the conversations is certainly much better than as in other organizations where the Nicolaitans tell you what and how to think. Some of the sabbath discussions reveal people at different stages of understanding. Some views I have held in the past and grown out of, some views that are new and I learn new things. Some just interesting ideas.

I have only been really critical in a few cases, and my criticism and concern have some justification. But what I have realized, is even with some of these different understandings, many of us have truly committed ourselves this year.

What have we committed to?

There are a number of scriptures that reveal how God's people can be cut off. Two very relevant ones for this commitment are the statements that if one does not keep the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Day of Atonement we are cut off.

This year we CHOSE to keep the feasts a month earlier than Judah. We have BET our future eternal life just with that act alone. That is a big commitment for those who made the choice and not just acted as followers.

Therefore I would rather be connected to the Sightedmoon sabbath teaching participants, who are at different stages of understanding, than Judah or Sabbatical-Christian groups who do not have the understanding and/or have not had to make the choice about when to keep the feasts.

I did not make my choice just because J Dumond did too. I am not a "follower" of J. Dumond. Your main teachings I have studied and accepted and now own. But some others, I have studied, but do not fully accept.

I made my choice with full understanding. Nevertheless, I feel quite lonely in the walk most (all) of the time. Although I have a good family life.

Cheers

Pat

Shalom Brother Joe,

I hope all is going well with you and your loved ones. I say loved ones because so many times our spiritual family is even closer to us than our “blood” family. I lost one son in a car accident, my eldest son won’t speak to me and so is the same with the most of my “blood” family.

Just wanted to point out that the great “feminist” Ruth Bader Ginsberg died as we went into Yom Teruah. A person who was wrapped in the worship of Molek, passing the children through the fire, was taken on the evening of September 18, 2020.

If you remember our first conversation, while I was still in New Mexico, I told you that I had heard a word of “Ping pong earthquakes and ping pong volcanoes.” It appears that this is increasing day by day. Where will it end? I don’t know.

You are in the prayers of our tiny Qahal. Also, I just had the opportunity to read your latest book “It was a Riddle Not a Command”. All I can say is that you OVER-achieved yourself. This is a PRIMER for keeping Torah. I will buy more copies and send them to my “blood” family members in hopes that it will sink in. Excellent.

Shalom and Ahavah from your brother in the Messiah,
Cyrus

to you Japheth and all aliyah center in Galelee !
as spoken by phone attached the chart where from 2005 Joseph Dumond
(www.sightedmoon.com) received how to understand the 7 weeks of the prophetic of
Daniel and the middle of this week being 2020 as the shemitah and jubilee years have
been properly established (and it speaks about the 2300 days of hell for all the house of
YsraEl (both judah/israel and the lands that have been established on the torah like
UK/AMERICA CANADA AUSTRALIA NEW ZELAND...))

and here the sharing of the teaching on the web side of Nehemia Gordon :

Hebrew Voices #95 – 2300 Days of Hell

NB : Joseph came in Switzerland in 2014 with the same teaching ...I have been with
Joseph Dumond in 2016 succot in Jerusalem and been strocke by the Ruach as I
understood the sins of my ancestor/faters/teachers about not teaching the 10 words and
specially the 4th commandements that include the moadim (lev.23) and for not obeing
them we are under the jugement of LEV. 26 – even Yeshua sayed : if you love me keep
my commandements (I & the Father are ONE and the Same commandements are required
to love Avinou with the 5 first commandements and the neighbour with the other 5) and
one more that we will learn to do as time come struggle : love one another as HE LOVED
US – like the 1st keila.... Amen

NB : the 2300 days of Daniel 9 have started since shavout 2020... !!! for the next 6.1/4
years we will be in the time that Yeshoua sayed in Mat. 24 ...: NO TIME LIKE THIS
BEFORE... will we be ready and have oil as the 5 wise vergin (?) May His mercy that
never end gant us to understand and obey ! and be fund APPROUVED
SHALOM

Josephine Zimmermann

On Our Way to War

I read the following articles this past week and it got to be thinking about the scripture
in Matthew. I was getting caught up in the nightly News and the violence.

| Mat 24:12 And because iniquity shall abound, the love of many will become cold.

I would like you to read the next article and consider what is being reported. Not the
news but the attitudes of those in the news.

National U.S. political divide becomes increasingly violent, rattling activists and police

Paul Benson, attending a rally for Democratic candidate Hank Gilbert in Tyler, Tex., is
attacked by Blue Lives Matter protesters on July 26. Benson says he was trying to keep
counter-protesters back from the speakers when he was attacked. "I didn't expect this,"

Benson said, “I didn’t know what to expect, but I didn’t expect this.” (Sarah A. Miller/AP)

By Tim Craig

August 27, 2020 at 7:12 p.m. EDT

TYLER, Tex. — The goal of the rally was to oppose the deployment of federal agents to quell protests in American cities — and to register new Democratic voters here in the heart of conservative East Texas.

But it had hardly begun when hundreds of conservative counter-protesters and supporters of President Trump, many with military-style rifles slung over their shoulders, swarmed the town square and began pushing and shoving and yelling obscenities.

One man punched Democrat Nancy Nichols in the chest, she said, and three others pinned her husband against Tyler’s war memorial. Other armed men were positioned around the edges of the square in military-style defensive formation, their hands clutching their rifles. “They were yelling Democrats are f—ing idiots and Democrats are demons,” recalled Nichols, 65. “It makes me feel angry that this is allowed and that our police are allowing this kind of hate-filled atmosphere to take over.”

Nancy Nichols, a Democratic activist and voter deputy registrar, said she was punched in the chest by a counter-protestor at Gilbert’s rally. “It’s honestly made me more hopeful. Let’s bring it all to the surface so it can be healed,” said Nichols, who posed for a portrait at her home in Tyler on Wednesday. (Julia Robinson/For The Washington Post)

The scuffling, which injured a top aide for Democratic congressional candidate Hank Gilbert, is part of a wave of politically tinged violence across the nation in recent weeks after the death of George Floyd in Minneapolis, rattling communities facing a toxic mix of partisanship and guns ahead of the 2020 election.

In a spate of exchanges that have spanned from Kalamazoo, Mich., and Bloomington, Ind., to Chicago and Portland, Ore., people on both sides of the United States’ political and cultural divide have been filmed exchanging punches, beating one another with sticks and flagpoles, or standing face-to-face with weapons, often with police appearing to be little more than observers.

“We are sort of at the stage of polarization where there are more and more people who are seeking confrontation, where they are not simply satisfied with disagreeing with the other side or yelling at the other side, but they want to confront,” said Mark Pitcavage, a historian and senior research fellow at the Anti-Defamation League’s Center on Extremism. “We are not just a polarized society — we are increasingly a confrontational society now.”

Some of the violence has been linked to pro-gun groups and far-right extremist organizations, though even some previously staid political activists have embraced weapons and face-to-face encounters as they navigate this year’s bitter political divisions. On Monday in central Pennsylvania, a man marching from Wisconsin to D.C. for this week’s anniversary of the 1963 March on Washington was shot and wounded. Protesters have also been shot, in some cases fatally,

in Austin, Portland, Louisville and Albuquerque in recent weeks.

The aggressive actions of some protest groups, including weeks of fires and vandalism in Portland and elsewhere, have led to a pushback. A group of people berated customers at D.C. restaurants this week who refused to raise their fist in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement, though the confrontations were nonviolent. But conflicts occasionally have become physical, including a driver beaten unconscious after encountering a protest in Portland earlier this month. He survived with serious injuries.

In some places, police have been on the defensive as left-leaning activists, politicians and faith leaders have accused them of not protecting them, while cozying up to conservatives. Some police leaders say they are struggling to stay ahead of the country's coarsening divide, which they say is being fueled by rampant misinformation on social media designed to stoke tension.

"It seems like we as a country have moved right past the discussion phase of things and now we just are at the stage of conflict, being at odds, distrust and disbelief," said Lance Arnold, the police chief in Weatherford, Tex. "This is not who we are, and it's almost like we are living in a different time and a different place."

Few of the deaths linked to recent protests are known to have been caused by demonstrators

A series of disturbances in northeastern Texas began on July 25 in the western Dallas-Fort Worth exurb of Weatherford, when heavily armed counterprotesters, including members of several far-right Texas-based groups, clashed with demonstrators seeking removal of a Confederate statue from the grounds of the Parker County Courthouse.

The next day, brawls erupted at Gilbert's campaign event in Tyler, about 100 miles east of Dallas. A week later, police were called to break up a gathering of hundreds of motorists, many flying Trump and Confederate flags, who descended on a historical Black church in Dallas that displays a two-story Black Lives Matter sign.

In all three events, participants on all sides said the chaos has left them concerned that America's democracy is teetering uncomfortably, rattling their confidence that either the law or neighborly goodwill can prevent even worse confrontations in the weeks ahead. "This isn't a politician's fight — this is a people's fight," said Martin Holsome, who sits on the Rusk, Tex., town council and is aligned with several armed Texas groups. "What we have seen over the past six months to a year has conditioned us for what is going to happen, and you can either condition yourself to be prepared for it or you can condition yourself to be subject to it."

One new group, Take America Back Texas, has been at the center of efforts to challenge left-wing protesters in Tyler and Weatherford. Leader Brian Phebus, 38, said its membership has surged to 10,000 over the past 2½ months, and he vowed that members will keep showing up at protests and other events where they fear there could be violence.

Wendi Rees, the director of public relations for Take Back America Texas, was part of a counter protest at Tyler City Square, which quickly escalated into a violent clash. "I think

we have racist people in this country, but this country is not racist,” said Rees, who posed for a portrait at her home in Tyler on August 26. (Julia Robinson/For The Washington Post)

Group member Wendi Rees, a conservative, White suburban mother in Tyler, said: “We believe our country is being taken from us. Our constitutional rights, our Second Amendment rights, our First Amendment are all being threatened. So people like me, we have had enough, and we are not going to sit back it let it happen anymore.”

The country’s hostile political climate has challenged local police departments, especially in small towns unaccustomed to dealing with protests and large crowds of people who hold opposing political views. Police agencies face accusations that they are not doing enough to protect social-justice and anti-brutality protesters.

Tony Crawford, a leader of the Parker County Progressives, said he frequently communicated with the police chief in the days leading up to the July 25 protest in Weatherford, trying to ensure police would protect demonstrators. But when rumors spread on social media that “busloads” of residents from Dallas and Fort Worth would be descending on the town to tear down the Confederate monument, hundreds of predominantly White conservative counterprotesters and members of armed conservative groups descended on the site, many heavily armed.

Clashes erupted, with videos showing counterprotesters charging into Crawford’s group. Crawford, who is Black, began frantically texting Arnold asking why more police were not on hand to keep the two sides separated.

“We are surrounded by guns and people talking about shooting us loudly,” Crawford wrote to Arnold, the police chief, according to a log of his text messages.

“We are briefing now,” Arnold wrote back. “We’ll have units up there in a few.”

But Crawford and other anti-Confederate demonstrators said police protection never arrived, even as counterprotesters threw water bottles, spit on them and chased protesters back to their vehicles.

“Y’all abandoned us chief,” Crawford texted a few hours later. “You let us get dragged and attacked while you did nothing.”

In an interview, Arnold said that city and county law enforcement agencies did not have enough manpower to properly police the event. He attributed that to poor communication among police agencies that day as well as limited intelligence on how many counterprotesters were planning to show up.

Arnold said the event also highlights the struggle that police departments throughout the country now face amid the supercharged emotions surrounding political and cultural debates. He has identified several heavily armed counterprotesters and far-right groups that he believes had members involved in recent conflicts in Weatherford, including the Oath Keepers and the Texas Freedom Fighters.

After online warnings, armed civilians bring threat of violence to protests in Kenosha and elsewhere

Arnold said the numbers of counterprotesters are being swelled by “a bunch of ordinary individuals” who are now physically engaging protesters and activists whose politics they

do not agree with. Large crowds are being mobilized online after inflammatory and often false information is posted online by what Arnold described as “fake social media accounts.”

“They are accounts that have been created within the last month or so, do not have a picture or other identifiers that you could use to believe they are more legitimate accounts,” Arnold.

The social media posts are quickly spread, including by self-described militias and more-mainstream conservative groups, and they often give the impression that a specific community faces imminent danger or the potential for violence, Arnold said.

They often use images from past protests or riots in other cities combined with phrases such as, “This is happening in Weatherford right now,” he said. Other social memes falsely claimed that police were asking residents to “come assist us,” Arnold added. “It’s extremely worrisome, because it creates a level of fear,” Arnold said, adding that he is working with the Texas Department of Public Safety and the FBI to identify who is creating the misinformation. “And it creates an environment that is rife for violence between various groups.”

For some conservatives, the images of looting and violence in American cities after Floyd’s death have become a rallying cry. Those scenes prompted Phebus, an Air Force veteran, to help start Take America Back Texas in June, because he believes armed civilians are needed to back law enforcement and protect local property owners from civil disturbances. Phebus said the group now has members in most of Texas’s 254 counties, all of whom stand ready to deploy.

“If anything goes on, anywhere in Texas we can pop up,” said Phebus, adding, “When we show up, [violence] usually doesn’t happen, because of the presence of guns.”

Rees, 50, serves as the group’s leader in Smith County, which includes Tyler, a city named after the only U.S. president to have served in the Confederacy.

A Christian missionary and longtime antiabortion activist, Rees said she became involved in Take America Back Texas after seeing viral videos of the protests that erupted nationwide this summer. She said she believes groups such as Black Lives Matter and antifa protesters plan to one day take over cities such as Tyler, undermining the conservative values that she home-schooled to her four children.

In particular, Rees seethed with fear and anger after she saw a video clip of protesters in Seattle suggesting that homeowners should give up their properties. She also accuses the news media of having a double standard by mentioning the race of police officers involved in deadly shootings, while appearing to downplay it in other crimes, including the death of Cannon Hinnant, a White 5-year-old boy in North Carolina who was allegedly killed by his Black neighbor.

So when Rees heard about Gilbert’s rally in Tyler, she mobilized Take America Back Texas members to show up wearing patriotic clothing, or blue shirts in support of law enforcement. She also wrapped orange tape around their arms and torsos, thinking that would make it easier for police to identify the “patriots,” as Rees and Phebus refer to themselves and others in their groups.

Armed men push a crowd back after a fight broke out in downtown square in Tyler, Tex., when two opposing groups clashed on July 26. (Sarah A. Miller/AP)

But Rees said more than 100 other counterprotesters not affiliated with her group also showed up, including supporters of Gilbert's opponent, Rep. Louie Gohmert (R-Tex.). Others have self-identified as members of Texas militia groups. Jimmy Toler, the chief of the Tyler Police Department, also suspects some members of the Aryan Brotherhood, a white-supremacist group, took part.

As the counterprotesters swarmed the square, some local Democratic leaders who showed up to support Gilbert said they were scared to get out of their vehicles. Others said the sight of so many armed people gave them flashbacks to a war zone or the square's dark history of racial injustice, including public lynchings that persisted here into the 1900s. "There were these guys with long-arm weapons that were standing up on top of things, guarding things, much like when we had guard duty overseas," said Shirley McKeller, a Black retired Army nurse who served in Iraq. "I had to sit there and collect myself. . . . I am accustomed of seeing lots and lots of weapons, but to see them on the square in downtown Tyler, it was devastating to me."

As Gilbert tried to begin his campaign remarks, counterprotesters blew air horns while shouting and jeering over him, he said. Another counterprotester then pulled the plug on Gilbert's sound system mid-speech.

Then the shoving and punching began.

"I was circled by five different people, and they were telling me, 'You need to get out of here,'" said Ryan Miller, 21, who works for Gilbert's campaign. "I looked over at one of my friends and said, 'Help.' As soon as I did that, I was immediately punched in the face several times. . . . And then I turned around and saw someone take a swing at my mom." Another man, wearing a Trump hat, was filmed with his hands around the neck of a Democratic supporter.

Rees said her group's members were not responsible for the violence, but she conceded that more needs to be done to keep opposing sides separated at political rallies and protests.

"I think what is happening at these rallies is you have people that are so angry . . . because of what is shown on the news," Rees said, referring to images of unrest across the country. "So they think they can show up, get their violence out and knock the crap out of somebody and not have accountability."

Toler said officers initially held back from the town square because they did not want to "escalate the situation," a tactic that he said they began utilizing when Black Lives Matter protests first erupted in the town in late May.

"We want to give people a little room to breathe so we don't become the target and we don't escalate the situation," said Toler, adding that Tyler police moved to break up the rally once the violence began.

Tyler police have since filed assault charges against three individuals who showed up to protest Gilbert, including a prominent local businessman and his daughter.

But increasingly, both Arnold and Toler said, police are having a difficult time determining whether individuals who show up at counter protests are there to peacefully assemble or to cause problems. And with so many people showing up armed, including growing numbers of left-wing social-justice activists, police are warning people that they need to understand the risks associated with modern-day protests and political activity. “We want everyone to exercise their right to express themselves,” Toler said. “But you have got to understand there are other individuals out there that have other interests and have other motives.”

Holsome, the town councilman who is aligned with the Texas Freedom Fighters and the Oath Keepers, showed up at Gilbert’s Tyler event armed with his AR-15 and .45-caliber pistol, with six or so other guns stored away in his logging truck that he parked nearby. Holsome, who is biracial and identifies as White and Black, said he believes Black Lives Matter protesters have been infiltrated by anarchists who are determined to destabilize small towns in Texas. He also worries that liberals are planning to unfairly steal the election away from Trump.

When Holsome shows up at events, he said, he is continually on guard for any potential hazard that could require him to use his weapons.

“A frozen water bottle will bust your head wide open. A brick will kill you. A two-by-four that is being thrown 20 yards away can kill you,” said Holsome, 41, who has been attending up to six protest events a month this summer. “If I feel like my life is in imminent danger, I am going to use force.”

Pitcavage, from the Anti-Defamation League, said that sentiment is why he fears that the coming months could prove to be especially dangerous as the stress of the pandemic collides with an acrimonious presidential election.

“The fields are fertile for people to come out of the woodwork and show up to these sorts of things,” Pitcavage said.

Despite that danger, Nichols, the Democrat who said she was punched at the Gilbert rally, vows she will keep showing up at events — with her voting registration forms.

“But when I go to rallies now,” she said, “if I see the presence of these goons, I will immediately call the police, the constables, the sheriff, the county judge and anyone else I can think of to make sure there is protection there for everyone,” Nichols said.

Nancy Nichols, a Democratic activist, said she was punched in the chest by a counter protestor at a July rally condemning federal police action in Portland. (Julia Robinson/For The Washington Post)

It was while I read this article that I also watched this teaching from Rabbi Fohrman.

https://www.alephbeta.org/playlist/hidden-meaning-behind-tzom-gedaliah?utm_source=email&utm_medium=newsletter&utm_campaign=09212020-tg

Rosh Hashanah is one of the most powerful holidays of the Jewish calendar. We spent two days in prayer, recommitting ourselves to our relationship with God, and we’re ready to build on that in the days leading up to Yom Kippur. But then, right out of the gate, we’re hit with... Tzom Gedaliah?

Who Was Gedaliah ben Achikam?

Wait, what? Who? Gedaliah? Who was he again? A leader who was killed? And we fast because.. It's his yahrzeit?

It just seems so random – why do we have this fast day right after Rosh Hashanah? And why does this guy, who most of us have never heard about, get his own fast? Okay, yeah, I mean, no one likes political assassinations, but why should we be so pained over this one, thousands of years later?

When I was growing up, we used to say, “you know, we eat so much on Rosh Hashanah, so we fast to burn off those extra calories.” And it's kinda funny – but what if we could approach Tzom Gedaliah meaningfully this year?

I think, if we actually look into the story of Gedaliah, we'll be able to understand why this fast day is so significant. Because Tzom Gedaliah isn't merely commemorating some tragedy that happened to the Jewish people, once upon a time. The story of Gedaliah's rise and fall represents a major turning point in our nation's history. And, it carries a critical message with relevance for all generations.

The History Behind Tzom Gedaliah

The story of Gedaliah is related to us through the lens of Jeremiah.

Let me set the scene for you: The Babylonians have burned the first Temple to ashes. Most of the nation has either been killed or driven into exile, with only a few Jews remaining in the land of Israel. Those surviving Jews, they had lost everything – their Temple, their government. It looked like all was lost.

Jeremiah returns to dwell amongst these survivors. He had until now been taken in chains to Babylonia with the other exiles, but Nevuzaradan, the רב-טבחיהם, “the chief butcher,” – which is a bit of an odd title for the head of the Babylonian military – he lets Jeremiah go.

Nevuzaradan says, “You can go join the remnants of the Jews in Israel, ושבָה אֶל-גְּדַלְיָה בֶן-אֲחִיקָם, and return to Gedaliah, the son of Achikam, the son of Shafan. אֲשֶׁר הִפְקִיד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל בְּעַרְיָהוּדָה whom the king of Babylonia has appointed over the land of Judah.

This is remarkable. The Babylonians had all but wiped out the Jews, but it looks like things are turning around. Jeremiah had been in chains, taken into exile, but now, he's freed. The people had been being forced from the land, but a remnant is allowed to stay. And now, they are even allowed a Jewish leader. Gedaliah is appointed by the Babylonian King!

After all of the death and destruction of the past few years, finally, good things are happening for the Jews back in their homeland. Gedaliah begins to organize the people, he swears to protect them, and organizes them economically. And he becomes a beacon of hope – his sphere of influence expands. Jewish refugees in foreign lands begin to hear the good news...and they begin to return home.

It almost seems like the Kingdom of Judah is being given a second chance for survival. מִכָּל-הַמְּקוֹמוֹת אֲשֶׁר נִדְחוּ-שָׁם וַיָּשׁוּבוּ כָּל-הַיְהוּדִים, – the text tells us that all the Jews returned from all the places where they were driven out. Almost like a total undoing of exile! Can there be a turnaround greater than this?

One of the officers who join Gedaliah, Yochanan ben Kareach, a former captain of the Judean army, he approaches him publicly, with a warning. Baalis, the king of Ammon, has sent an assassin – Yishmael ben Netanyah – to kill you. Gedaliah refuses to believe it. He refuses to believe that Yishmael, a fellow Jew, would be working for a foreign agent.

But Yochanan persists. He warns him a second time, as the text tells us, בְּסֵתֶר, in secrecy. Why does the text tell us it was a secret? Well, maybe what he was saying was: Gedaliah, I understand this show of unity you're doing, this show of strength, but why don't you let me take care of things for you? Let me go, let me kill Yishmael. לֹא יִדַע, don't worry, no one will know!

Because, Gedaliah, he warns, think of the alternative! לְמָה יִכָּבֵה נַפְשִׁי, how can we just let him kill you?? You know what's gonna happen, Gedaliah, you know what happens if he kills you? וְנִפְצוּ כָּל-יְהוּדֵי הַנִּקְבְּצִים אֵלָיו, everyone who has gathered here in Judea, they'll be scattered. וְאֲבָדָה, and the remnants of Judah, who you have been sustaining, will be lost. This precarious thing you've been building? It will be shattered – and everything will be destroyed.

Many of us don't even remember that Gedaliah gets warned, like, why is this a part of the story? To show us how naive Gedaliah was? Maybe, maybe not, but either way, for us following along, we're terrified!

If this were a movie, we'd be screaming at our TV, "Gedaliah, get out of there! Run away! Or at least get some bodyguards!" But Gedaliah once again refuses to believe Yochanan's report.

And then, וַיְהִי בַחֹדֶשׁ הַשְּׁבִיעִי, it came to pass in the seventh month – the month of Tishrei – וַיָּבֹא יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן-נְתַנְיָהּ בֶּן-אֶלְיָשָׁמֶעַ, Yishmael comes, and this time we hear more about who this guy is, and maybe even a clue as to his potential motive. He's מְזִרְעַת הַמְּלוּכָה וְרַבֵּי הַמֶּלֶךְ, Yishmael is of royal descent, he comes from the family of the Kings of Judah and he was an advisor to the previous King, who was exiled by the Babylonians. וַעֲשָׂרָה אַנְשִׁים אִתּוֹ – he's got 10 men with him too.

They all come to Gedaliah's place in Mizpah – וַיֹּאכְלוּ שָׂם לֶחֶם יַחְדָּו – and they sit down together to break bread with Gedaliah. For Gedaliah, this is a great victory. Yishmael is a member of the king's family – his support could be very useful in re-establishing a government in Judah.

But then, as they're all feasting, וַיִּקָּם יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן-נְתַנְיָהּ וַעֲשָׂרַת הָאֲנָשִׁים אֲשֶׁר-הָיוּ אִתּוֹ, Yishmael and his 10 men, they rise up, וַיִּכּוּ אֶת-גְּדַלְיָהוּ בֶּן-אֲחִיקָם בֶּן-שָׁפָן בַּחֶרֶב-וַיָּמָת אֹתוֹ, and they kill Gedaliah by the sword.

Gedaliah בְּאֶרְץ בָּבֶל, אֲשֶׁר-הִפְקִיד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל, who, the text reminds us, was appointed by the King of Babylonia to govern over the land. He was the Jewish people's final hope for political autonomy, but Yishmael and his men dash their dreams. They go on to kill everyone else who was gathered there – Jew and non-Jew alike. It's a bloodbath that leaves the Jewish people leaderless.

The sun rises the next morning, and word of this massacre has not yet gotten out. וַיָּבֹאוּ – eighty men show up from Shechem, Shilo and Samaria – מִגְּלַחֵי זָקָן וְקַרְעֵי בְּגָדֵיהֶם, וּמִתְגַּדְּדִים – they've shaven their beards, they've torn their clothes and they've cut themselves in mourning over the Temple's destruction. Remember, they don't know what happened to Gedaliah. They're crying over the temple's destruction.

וַיֵּצֵא יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן-נְתַנְיָה לְקִרְאָתָם, מִן-הַמְּצֻפָּה – Yishmael goes out from Mitzpah to greet them – וַיֵּלֶךְ הֵלֶךְ, וּבְכָה – and he's crying as he walks towards them. He's faking. He greets them and says – בָּאוּ אֵל-גְּדַלְיָהוּ בֶן-אֲחִיקָם – come on, let's go to Gedaliah. We'll go see him.

But he's setting up a trap. וַיָּבֹאוּ אֵל-תּוֹךְ הָעִיר, when they reach the city, וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ יִשְׁמָעֵאל בֶּן-נְתַנְיָה וְיִשְׁמָעֵאל וְאֶת-כָּל-הַיְּהוּדִים וְאֶת-כָּל-הַכְּנָעִי וְאֶת-כָּל-הַיְּזֻרִים וְאֶת-כָּל-הַיְּזֻרִים וְאֶת-כָּל-הַיְּזֻרִים – Yishmael and his men slaughter these refugees and they throw them into a pit. Why does he do this? Perhaps he wanted to wipe out all people who may have been loyal to Gedaliah. Perhaps he didn't want his terrible deed discovered, and his murderous rampage is an attempt to cover up his tracks. Either way, the tragedy just continues.

After all the chaos and turnover, the people, seeking security, eventually make their way down to Egypt. And, for the first time since the days of Joshua, the continuous presence of the nation of Israel in the land comes to an end.

It's an awful and tragic story. But, where's the lesson in it for us? And, why does it merit its own fast day? Doesn't it feel almost like Tisha b'Av: The Epilogue, kinda like we're beating the dead horse of tragedy? Isn't one day of mourning over the Babylonian destruction enough?

Connections to Gedaliah in the Bible

There's something about this Gedaliah story that's different. Something that has independent relevance to us, years later, that makes it worth commemorating. I want to try to uncover some of that meaning with you now.

Consider the end of the story. Yishmael takes the corpses of those he has massacred and throws them אֶל-תּוֹךְ הַבּוֹר – into a pit.

Where have we seen that before? Maybe in another story, where one man rises to power under a foreign king, and uses his power to take care of his brothers? Where the mistreatment of that brother sets the family on a path that ultimately ends in exile, in Egypt?

Doesn't the Gedaliah story sound eerily similar to the story of the sale of Joseph? I don't think these parallels are coincidental. They're all over this story: Remember Nevuzaradan, the chief military officer who releases Jeremiah from captivity and send him back to Gedaliah? His title was רב-טבחים, master butcher. It's a curious name, and possibly refers to his military prowess, but it's also a neat hint. Where is the only other story where we have a Sar Hatabachim? Potiphar, to whom Joseph is first sold, is the Sar Hatabachim, the minister of butchers!

Okay, that's cute. But there's more: Nevuzaradan tells Jeremiah he can go back to the land of Israel: וְשָׁבָה אֶל-גְּדַלְיָה בֶן-אֲחִיקָם בֶּן-שָׁפָן, and return to Gedaliah, the son of Achikam, the son of Shafan. אֲשֶׁר הֶפְקִיד מֶלֶךְ-בָּבֶל בְּעֵרֵי יְהוּדָה, that the King of Bavel appointed in all the cities of Judah. And that word, hifikid – to appoint, or to entrust – it shows up all over the Joseph story.

It's first used when Potiphar appoints him head over his household. And then, when Joseph is thrown in jail, once again he's appointed – וַיִּפְקֵד – to be in charge of the prison. Then, when Joseph first appears before Pharaoh, he advises him to appoint people throughout the land. And the words he uses: וַיִּפְקֵד פְּקָדִים עַל הָאָרֶץ.

And there's more. Yishmael and his gang are described as 10 men who sit down to break bread: וַיֹּאכְלוּ שָׁם לֶחֶם... עֲשָׂרָה אֲנָשִׁים אֵתוּ. Who are those other 10 men who once sat down to break bread before getting set to perform the most heinous of deeds? The brothers of Joseph were 10 men. Joseph and his brother Benjamin, also a child of Rachel, they weren't involved in the sale, but the other 10 brothers were. And what does the text tell us they did directly before Joseph is sold into slavery? וַיֵּשְׁבוּ, לֶאֱכֹל-לֶחֶם, the 10 brothers sat down to break bread...

And think of the way in which Gedaliah was murdered: Through treachery, deceit, and sneakiness. They ensnare Gedaliah, and then entrap the refugees that come to join him the next day. Those refugees, the text tells us, were coming from Shechem – Shechem is where the sale of Joseph happens. It's where Jacob sends Joseph to find his brothers.

Yishmael sneakily draws in the refugees, those men who are mourning, tearing their clothes, and crying. To pretend he is on their side, וַיִּבְכֶּה, הֵלֵךְ הֵלֵךְ; Yishmael goes out crying to greet them. Yishmael sheds crocodile tears.

The brothers, too, engage in deceit that causes others to tear their clothes, and to mourn. When the brothers bring Joseph's bloody coat to their father Jacob, we're told וַיִּקְרַע יַעֲקֹב וַיִּשָׁקֵב, Jacob tears his clothes, וַיִּתְאַבֵּל עַל-בְּנוֹ, יָמִים רַבִּים, he mourns over his son for many years, וַיִּבְךְ אֹתוֹ, אָבִיו, and he cries for Joseph. The brothers, too, would've had to shed their own crocodile tears to keep up the ruse.

And speaking of the bloody coat, remember how it got bloody in the first place? וַיִּשְׁחָטוּ – the brothers slaughtered a goat, and took its blood to deceive their father. That same word is used to describe what Yishmael does to those refugees from Shechem – וַיִּשְׁחָטֵם, he slaughters them.

And, here's what clinches it for me. Yishmael throws his victims אל-תוך הבור, into the pit. Doesn't that sound like it was taken straight out of the Joseph story? וַיִּקְחֵהוּ, his brothers grab him, וַיִּשְׁלְכֵהוּ אֹתוֹ, הַבְּרֶה, they cast him into the bor, the pit. It's as if the text is calling out to us – the story of Joseph. It's happening again!

And now, we face the obvious question: why? Why are all these parallels here? What's it mean? When you hear the story of the assassination, you can't help but identify with Gedaliah – he's the good guy and Yishmael and his despicable band of 10 men, they're the bad guys. But you know the problem with stories about good guys and bad guys? They don't really have any great lessons.

What Is the Lesson Behind Gedaliah's Story?

What do we learn from Tzom Gedaliah? Don't murder. Good. So what's for break fast? Bagels and lox, anyone?? But what if this story is more complex... Who was Yishmael, and what motivated him?

Well, while we're thinking back to stories in the book of Genesis, let's go even further back, to Yishmael, the son of Abraham. Yishmael was Abraham's firstborn, but it was Isaac, not Yishmael, who was chosen to carry on his father's legacy. Despite being Abraham's eldest, Yishmael was given second place status in the family.

And now, generations later, we have another Yishmael, who comes from royal descent, who served under the King of Judah, watching as somebody else from his family, his nation, sits upon the throne. And he can't bear it. He doesn't see Gedaliah as his brother, he sees him as an enemy. An enemy he needs to eliminate. And you know what? This isn't the only story of sibling conflict where a Yishmael shows up.

He also makes a surprise appearance in the story of Joseph and his brothers. When Joseph was sitting in that pit, you know what they decided to do with him? They said, לְכוּ וְנִמְכְּרֵנוּ, let's sell him to the Ishmaelites, the descendants of Yishmael, the first rejected brother in our family.

It's as if Joseph's brothers also identified with Yishmael, the rejected son, and they turned their resentment into vengeance against their brother. This is what the sale of Joseph is really about. Brothers fighting brothers. Brothers betraying brothers. And at its core, the tragic story of Gedaliah is a replay of this same dynamic.

Gedaliah was a glint of hope, a light at the end of a very dark tunnel. But what brought it crumbling to the ground, was brothers stabbing brothers in the back. We don't know exactly why; maybe Yishmael was jealous of Gedaliah, he wanted to be the one in charge. Or, maybe he was self-righteously angry – remember, Gedaliah was appointed by the king of Babylonia; maybe Yishmael thought that Gedaliah was treasonous, cooperating with the enemy. Either way, Gedaliah and Yishmael's politics differed, and for Yishmael, the ends justified the means.

But consider Gedaliah, why were we told that he was warned, to show you Gedaliah's naivete? I don't think so. When Gedaliah is told of a plot by one brother to turn on the

other, he just won't believe it.

In Gedaliah's worldview, brothers lift up other brothers, they don't tear them down. But the text tells us, he receives the warning again, this time, בְּסֵתֶר, in secret. Yochanan says, לִמָּוֶת יִכָּכֶּה נִפְשׁוֹ, how can we let him kill you? Those words are also borrowed from the Joseph story. They are the words Reuven uses to plead with his brothers for mercy on Joseph's behalf: לֹא נִכְנֹוּ נַפְשׁ – let us not be murderers. What's going on here? Why are we told about this warning twice, and in secret?

Why Do We Fast on Tzom Gedaliah?

The, text, I think, is telling us that Gedaliah could've stooped to Yishmael's level. He could've donned the tactics of Joseph's brothers. He was warned. He too could've let the ends justify the means. But Gedaliah will have none of it. Even in secret, even if nobody knows, he will not shed the blood of his brother.

So here's what I take out of Tzom Gedaliah: There are many times where we hold self righteous political opinions.

There are times we think we are so right, and our opponents so wrong, that we let the ends justify the means. Most of us don't consider assassinating our political opponents, that's a little extreme – although there have been these kinds of idealistically motivated assassinations in our nation's recent history – but how many of us lose sight of the humanity, of the brotherhood, that holds our nation together.

Consider how we relate to people who we don't agree with politically. How easily do we let our self-righteousness blind us to the people on the other side of the aisle? How easily do we dismiss them and say, "It's people like you who are destroying our country!"?

Jewish history is full of sinat chinam, of brother turning on brother. We divide ourselves into little camps, thinking that only we are right, when the goal of rebuilding a nation, when return, rebirth, and unity is tragically overlooked. It's what happened between Joseph and his brothers all those years before, it happens again here, in the case of Gedaliah and Yishmael, and it still happens with us, today.

What Is Tzom Gedaliah Really About?

I think that this story carries an important message, specifically for this time of year. On Rosh Hashanah, we spend two full days focused on God, our King, our Creator, our Father. But if we have a parent, we also have siblings. And if we reconnect to our Father on Rosh Hashanah, well, we reconnect with our siblings on Asseret Yemei Teshuva – the days of repentance leading up to Yom Kippur.

This is the time to examine ourselves. When push comes to shove, can I see the humanity of my brothers and sisters? Can I work to find a common ground of communication? Can I cross the divide and connect with them, person to person, to see what we can accomplish together?

Only when I can make peace with my brothers, only when I begin to see myself as part of a larger family, can I expect to fully connect to God, the Father of us all. Have an easy and meaningful fast.

Then after seeing what Rabbi Fohrman posted I saw the following article about the upcoming election.

Hillary Clinton: Biden ‘should not concede under any circumstances’

Joe Concha 8/25/2020

□



Former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said in a new interview that Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden “should not concede under any circumstances” because she believes the final results in November’s election are “going to drag out” due to mail-in voting.” Joe Biden should not concede under any circumstances because I think this is going to drag out, and eventually, I do believe he will win if we don’t give an inch and if we are as focused and relentless as the other side is,” Clinton told former aide Jennifer Palmieri on Showtime’s “The Circus.”

“I think that [Republicans] have a couple of scenarios that they are looking toward. One is messing up absentee balloting. They believe that helps them so that they then get maybe a narrow advantage in the Electoral College on Election Day,” Clinton, the 2016 Democratic nominee, alleged. “So we’ve got to have a massive legal operation, and I know the Biden campaign is working on that.”

In a surprise appearance at the Republican National Convention on Monday, President Trump told delegates that expansion of access to mail-in voting was politically driven.

“What they’re doing is using COVID to steal an election,” Trump argued. “They’re using COVID to defraud the American people, all of our people, of a fair and free election. We can’t do that.”

Many political observers have said it is unlikely a winner will be able to be declared on Election Day due to the delays that come with mail-in voting.

Now come fast forward to Friday, Sept 18, 2020, the start of the Feast of Trumpets for many of our brethren.

Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg, the demure firebrand who in her 80s became a legal, cultural and feminist icon, died Friday. The Supreme Court announced her death, saying the cause was complications from metastatic cancer of the pancreas. Then the Democrats began to say the opposite to what they had said four years ago. And the Republicans also said the opposite to what they were saying four years ago when Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia died in President Obama’s final months in office. Actually his death was in February of that year.

If there is a close election and they have to go to the courts, a 9th judge may be needed.

And as I write this, protests are again breaking out in Kentucky over the grand jury’s decision not to indict police officers on criminal charges directly related to Breonna Taylor’s death. Mob rule is what they want. Justice in a court of law is not good enough. Two police were shot in the riot that night.

I want to remind you of your history.

The Nazi Party was one of several far-right political parties active in Germany after the end of the First World War.[1] The party platform included removal of the Weimar Republic, rejection of the terms of the Treaty of Versailles, radical antisemitism, and anti-Bolshevism.[2] They promised a strong central government, increased Lebensraum (living space) for Germanic peoples, formation of a Volksgemeinschaft (people’s community) based on race, and racial cleansing via the active suppression of Jews, who would be stripped of their citizenship and civil rights.[3]

While imprisoned in 1924 after the failed Beer Hall Putsch, Hitler dictated Mein Kampf to his deputy, Rudolf Hess.[4] The book is an autobiography and exposition of Hitler’s ideology in which he laid out his plans for transforming German society into one based on race. In it he outlined his belief in Jewish Bolshevism, a conspiracy theory that posited the existence of an international Jewish conspiracy for world domination in which the Jews were the mortal enemy of the German people. Throughout his life Hitler never wavered in his world view as expounded in Mein Kampf.[5] The Nazi Party advocated the

concept of a Volksgemeinschaft (“people’s community”) with the aim of uniting all Germans as national comrades, whilst excluding those deemed either to be community aliens or of a foreign race (Fremdvölkische).[6]

Discrimination against Jews intensified after the Nazis seized power; following a month-long series of attacks by members of the Sturmabteilung (SA; paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party) on Jewish businesses, synagogues, and members of the legal profession, on 1 April 1933 Hitler declared a national boycott of Jewish businesses.[7] By 1933, many people who were not Nazi Party members advocated segregating Jews from the rest of German society.[8] The Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service, passed on 7 April 1933, forced all non-Aryans to retire from the legal profession and civil service.[9] Similar legislation soon deprived Jewish members of other professions of their right to practise.[9] In 1934, the Nazi Party published a pamphlet titled “Warum Arierparagraph?” (“Why the Aryan Law?”), which summarised the perceived need for the law.[10] As part of the drive to remove Jewish influence from cultural life, members of the National Socialist Student League removed from libraries any books considered un-German, and a nationwide book burning was held on 10 May.[11] Violence and economic pressure were used by the regime to encourage Jews to voluntarily leave the country. [12] Legislation passed in July 1933 stripped naturalised German Jews of their citizenship, creating a legal basis for recent immigrants (particularly Eastern European Jews) to be deported.[9] Many towns posted signs forbidding entry to Jews. [13] Throughout 1933 and 1934, Jewish businesses were denied access to markets, forbidden to advertise in newspapers, and deprived of access to government contracts. Citizens were harassed and subjected to violent attacks.[14]

Disenchanted with the unfulfilled promise of Nazi Party leaders to eliminate Jews from German society, SA members were eager to lash out against the Jewish minority as a way of expressing their frustrations. A Gestapo report from early 1935 stated that the rank and file of the Nazi Party would set in motion a solution to the “Jewish problem ... from below that the government would then have to follow”. [27] Assaults, vandalism, and boycotts against Jews, which the Nazi government had temporarily curbed in 1934, increased again in 1935 amidst a propaganda campaign authorised at the highest levels of government.[27] Most non-party members ignored the boycotts and objected to the violence out of concern for their own safety.[28] The Israeli historian Otto Dov Kulka argues that there was a disparity between the views of the Alte Kämpfer (longtime party members) and the general public, but that even those Germans who were not politically active favoured bringing in tougher new antisemitic laws in 1935.[29] The matter was raised to the forefront of the state agenda as a result of this antisemitic agitation.[30]

The Interior Minister Wilhelm Frick announced on 25 July that a law forbidding marriages between Jews and non-Jews would shortly be promulgated, and recommended that registrars should avoid issuing licences for such marriages for the time being. The draft law also called for a ban on marriage for persons with hereditary illnesses.[31]

Kristallnacht (German pronunciation: [kʁɪs'talnaçt] (listen)) or the Night of Broken Glass, also called the November Pogrom(s),^{[1][2]} was a pogrom against Jews carried out by SA paramilitary forces and civilians throughout Nazi Germany on 9–10 November 1938. The German authorities looked on without intervening.^[3] The name Kristallnacht (“Crystal Night”) comes from the shards of broken glass that littered the streets after the windows of Jewish-owned stores, buildings and synagogues were smashed. The pretext for the attacks was the assassination of the German diplomat Ernst vom Rath^[4] by Herschel Grynszpan, a 17-year-old German-born Polish Jew living in Paris.

Jewish homes, hospitals and schools were ransacked as attackers demolished buildings with sledgehammers.^[5] Rioters destroyed 267 synagogues throughout Germany, Austria and the Sudetenland.^[6] Over 7,000 Jewish businesses were damaged or destroyed,^[7] ^[8] and 30,000 Jewish men were arrested and incarcerated in concentration camps. ^[9] British historian Martin Gilbert wrote that no event in the history of German Jews between 1933 and 1945 was so widely reported as it was happening, and the accounts from foreign journalists working in Germany sent shockwaves around the world.^[5] The Times of London observed on 11 November 1938: “No foreign propagandist bent upon blackening Germany before the world could outdo the tale of burnings and beatings, of blackguardly assaults on defenceless and innocent people, which disgraced that country yesterday.”^[10]

Estimates of fatalities caused by the attacks have varied. Early reports estimated that 91 Jews had been murdered.^[a] Modern analysis of German scholarly sources puts the figure much higher; when deaths from post-arrest maltreatment and subsequent suicides are included, the death toll reaches the hundreds, with Richard J. Evans estimating 638 deaths by suicide.^[11] Historians view Kristallnacht as a prelude to the Final Solution and the murder of six million Jews during the Holocaust.^[12]

Ten years after Hitler wrote Mein Kampf the persecution of the Jews began and in just 4 short years it crescendoed with Kristallnacht.

You are witnessing the socialist striving to gain power in the USA. They have joined forces with Black Lives Matter, as well as CAIR which is The Council on American–Islamic Relations. Also in this mix are the ANTIFA groups. On the other side are the Conservatives along with the Christians and evangelicals.



In a society where extremism is the norm and free speech is only tolerated when it matches what the Mob or the majority says is a dangerous society. When expressing your opinion or saying something that the majority does not like, will get you fired, we have lost our way. When opposing views are not tolerated and are met with fist and beatings and death, our end is nigh. I asked you many years ago in an article ***When Will Your Tolerance Become Intolerable?*** It seems to me now that tolerance has left the building and violence is coming in the door. You know the end time chronology. You know the scriptures better than I do. You know the history of the Jews and how they denied what they saw coming and did not leave. When do you stop denying what you're seeing and accept it for what it is?



The preamble to this weeks Study

I want to just remind you all of what we have covered thus far in our study of this Eighth Day Feast.

Firstly that Yehshua kept it as we are told in John 10:22 and that this Eighth Day Feast was also known as the Feast of Dedication which came at the end of Sukkot. Although dedication means Chanukah in Hebrew, this day was in no way connected to the feast currently known as the Feast of Chanukah kept around Christmas (The false feast of Hanukkah is just over a month from now).

Next, you learned about that in order to understand this Feast Day you had to ask for wisdom, knowledge and understanding in order to gain the righteousness you need to be in the Kingdom. All of this is given to you as you obey the commandment and this is how we show Yehovah we love Him, by keeping the commandments. These are the laws of that Kingdom, which you are as a Priest are going to teach, or as a King you're going to enforce those laws.

Next, you were shown that Yehovah desires to dwell with us. But we must keep the rules of the Kingdom which are the Ten Commandments. We are to put sin out of our lives in order to be a part of that Kingdom as shown to us in the Feast of Unleavened Bread. Yeshua was the first fruit to come back to life from the grave defeating Satan who had the power of death and the grave until that time. The 24 elders are part of those first fruits who were once human beings on this earth and came out of the grave when Yeshua did as we read in Matthew 27. This is represented by the barley wave offering each year. The 7 days of Unleavened Bread are represented in the 7 millennial days leading up to the 8th Day Feast or the 8th Millennium. The 7th Millennium of man putting sin out of our existence.

The First Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread we likened to when Adam was killed for sinning on the first millennial day in the same way the first born of Egypt died on the first day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread otherwise known as Passover night.

The Seventh Day of the Feast of Unleavened Bread is represented by the time when the Egyptian armies were destroyed when the frozen walls of water came crashing back down on them after Israel had crossed over the Red Sea. This represents the time at the end of the 7th millennium when Satan will be cast into the lake of fire along with the grave and death after all of those who are going to keep the Torah also known as the Holy Spirit represented by the water cross over from sin in Egypt under Satan to rule under Yehovah.

The 7th Day weekly Sabbath is then compared to the 7th Millennial Rest. Again in all of this we are learning about the 8th Day Feast.

Last week we had to stop our teachings about the Holy Days in comparing them to the millenniums and address the false teachings about hell which cloud and confuse people about the Eighth Day Feast. Once you remove these false teachings from your mind, then the truth will be more readily visible and the Eighth Day Feast more plain to understand.

Heaven and Hell go hand in hand and the false teachings about you going to heaven abound just as they do for you going to hell. Once again Satan is confusing the truth of Yehovah's plan of Salvation in order to keep you from being a part of it. This week we are going to look at Heaven and whether or not you or anyone goes there. Once we remove the false teachings, only then can we understand the truth of the Eighth Day Feast and the awesomeness of Yehovah.

Heaven will you be there?

If heaven is the reward for good people, why does the Bible reveal so little about what they will do there for eternity? Could it be that this isn't our reward at all and that God has something far different in mind?

Is the reward of the righteous an eternity in heaven? It seems almost four out of five Americans believe it is (*National Review*, Nov. 9, 1998). Through the centuries this has been the hope taught by traditional Christianity.

What would going to heaven be like? What would we do there for all eternity? More fundamentally, does the Bible actually present heaven as the reward of those who are saved?

Human imaginings about heaven

Beliefs about heaven as the reward of the saved have varied considerably through the centuries. Traditional pictures of heaven sometimes show an entrance with a rainbow arching over it, perhaps marked by a bridge of gold or glass. St. Peter is usually represented as the doorkeeper. The inhabitants are shown accompanied by angels, or they may appear as angels themselves, having apparently sprouted a pair of wings.

Another common view in the popular consciousness has the inhabitants sitting about on clouds plucking harps. The decor of heaven often features jewels, stars, candles and trumpets. Theologians and philosophers have adapted their concepts of heaven through the centuries, influenced by the society around them. “Monks and friars, depending on whether they felt more at home in the countryside or in the city, preached a heaven defined primarily in terms of environment” (Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History*, 1988, p. 108).

Based in part on their own experiences and preferences, some religious teachers have foreseen a rural setting while others have imagined an urban paradise. For the latter, “heaven became a city...or the visionary experience of celestial castles. Accounts of the other world resonate with descriptions of golden streets, jewelled buildings, and richly dressed residents” (ibid.).

Some in the Renaissance era envisioned a spicier paradise: “In its boldest form, the new theology envisioned heaven as a place of erotic human love in the bucolic setting of a comfortable natural landscape” (ibid., p. 112).

An eternity in heaven doing what?

The relationship the heavenly inhabitants might have with God has been debated. A modern author describes the way many people have imagined interaction with God in heaven: “There the saints shall eternally, without interruption, feast their eyes upon Him, and be ever viewing His glorious perfections” (John MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven*, 1996, p. 221).

Others believe that, if this is all they are to do forever, heaven may prove to be a pretty boring place. As the same writer just quoted from puts it, the prayer of many could be: “Please God, don’t take me to heaven yet...I haven’t even been to Hawaii!” (p. 49).

The modern Christian concepts of heaven present a diverse landscape. Another writer says: “I have a theory that heaven will offer faithful Christians whatever they sacrificed on earth for Jesus’ sake. My mountain-climbing friend who intentionally lives in a slum area of Chicago will have Yosemite Valleys all to himself. A missionary doctor in the parched land of Sudan will have her own private rain forest to explore” (Philip Yancey, “What’s a Heaven For?” *Christianity Today*, Oct. 26, 1998).

For many people the most important aspect of heaven is the opportunity to see their loved ones again: “By far the most persuasive element of the modern heaven for many contemporary Christians is the hope of meeting the family again. Countless ‘in memoriam’ sections of newspapers throughout Europe and America reflect the belief that families parted by death will be reunited” (McDannell and Lang, p. 309).

God does have a plan that will reunite loved ones, as we will see. But the popular ideas of heaven fall far short of capturing the majesty and purpose of God’s plan.

Do people go to heaven at death?

The popular belief is that a good person goes to heaven immediately when he or she dies. But for the traditional Christian, things aren’t quite that simple. According to this view, the body goes to the grave, but the soul ascends to heaven.

The Westminster Confession of Faith, written in the 17th century, states: “The bodies of men after death return to dust, and see corruption; but their souls, (which never die nor sleep,) having an immortal subsistence, immediately return to God who gave them. The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies.”

But does this concept agree with the Bible? Do the Scriptures indeed state that righteous people go to heaven when they die?

David, the king of Israel and author of many of the Psalms, whom God called “a man after My own heart” (Acts 13:22), did *not* go to heaven at his death. The apostle Peter, speaking under God’s inspiration, states, “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” (Acts 2:29). He then adds that “David *did not* ascend into the heavens” (verse 34).

David is included in Hebrews 11:32 among those who died in faith, making him one of those of whom verse 39 says, “And all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, *did not receive the promise.*”

The Gospel of John, written about 1,000 years after David's death, states, "*No one has ascended to heaven* but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man [i.e., Jesus Christ]" (John 3:13). This means that Abraham, Moses, David, the prophets and all other righteous men and women who lived before Christ's first coming *did not go to heaven*. They were buried in the grave as David was.

The view that a person's soul goes to heaven at death—though held by many in good faith—*cannot be found in the Bible*. It results from a misunderstanding of the Scriptures and confusion over what the Bible teaches about the resurrection.

Why a resurrection?

Theologians widely acknowledge that the Bible speaks of a resurrection, even if they're not sure what it means or when it takes place. The most common view is that at the resurrection the body rises to be reunited with the soul in heaven. But, as we pointed out earlier, the concept of the immortality of the soul—the soul as existing as something apart from the body—is not biblical. It takes its origins from pagan philosophy and tradition rather than the writers of the Bible.

We might pose this question: If it were true that at the resurrection the body is to rise to be united with the soul in heaven, why would God do things this way? What purpose would the resurrection serve? Why keep the body in the grave?

If the righteous immediately go to heaven at death, why wouldn't God send the complete being—soul and body—to heaven simultaneously, instead of keeping soul and body apart through the ages? For that matter, why even have a resurrection? If the soul goes immediately to heaven, why bother with bringing bodies back to life? The inescapable fact is that if popular teaching about heaven is true, there would be no logical reason for the resurrection.

Why do we see so much confusion about how the resurrection fits with the traditional view of heaven? Perhaps it's because support for the idea of going to heaven at death is not found in the Bible!

What is the Kingdom of Heaven?

Many people believe they will go to heaven because Jesus spoke repeatedly of the Kingdom of Heaven. In Matthew 5:3, for example, He says, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven." Three other verses in Matthew 5 refer to the faithful entering "the kingdom of heaven," and the phrase appears throughout the book of Matthew a total of 32 times.

However, note that while Matthew is the *only* biblical writer who uses the term *Kingdom of Heaven*, other Bible writers use the term *Kingdom of God*—which appears 69 times in the New Testament. A comparison between events described in

Matthew's Gospel and the other Gospel writers shows that the terms are used interchangeably.

For example, Matthew 5:3 records Jesus' words as: "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the *kingdom of heaven*." Luke, in describing the same blessing, records Jesus' words as: "Blessed are you poor, for yours is the *kingdom of God*" (Luke 6:20).

Similarly, where Matthew 19:14 records Jesus as saying, "Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of heaven," both Luke 18:16 and Mark 10:14 use the term "kingdom of God" rather than "kingdom of heaven." You can see other examples by comparing Matthew 4:17 and Mark 1:14-15, Matthew 13:31 and Mark 4:30-31, and Matthew 19:23 and Luke 18:24.

So why do we see two different terms—"kingdom of heaven" and "kingdom of God"—used to describe the same thing?

To understand, we must consider an important cultural sensitivity and practice of Christ's day. In obedience to the third of the Ten Commandments, which forbade taking God's name in vain (Exodus 20:7), it was common to avoid routinely using the word "God." Instead people would substitute another word that others would understand as referring to God.

Often this seems to have been Jesus Christ's practice too. For example, shortly before His crucifixion when He is challenged under oath to state whether He was truly the Son of God, He responds: "It is as you said. Nevertheless, I say to you, hereafter you will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of *the Power*, and coming on the clouds of heaven" (Matthew 26:64). Here He clearly used "the Power" as a synonym for God—and this was obviously understood by the priests and religious authorities, who wanted to execute Him for blasphemy.

As recorded in Matthew's Gospel, on about half the occasions when Jesus refers to God the Father, He substitutes another word. When speaking of the Kingdom of God, which was the core of His message (Mark 1:14-15), He nearly always uses the term "kingdom of *heaven*" instead. He isn't talking about a kingdom that existed in heaven to which believers would go, but rather using a term that was synonymous with "kingdom of God," as is clear from the other New Testament writers.

The other writers, who focused more on non-Jewish audiences in their books, use "kingdom of God" to make plain what Jesus meant. Thus, Christ's use of the phrase "kingdom of heaven" does not mean the Kingdom is *in* heaven, but that it is of God, who is Himself in heaven. At the same time, however, the term is also accurate in the sense that this Kingdom will be established *from* heaven—as Jesus will bring it to earth from there, as we will see.

Jesus' followers will join Him on earth

Jesus did not tell His disciples they should expect to dwell in heaven. He spoke instead of a kingdom belonging to God in heaven that is to be established *on the earth* at Christ's second coming. Notice Jesus' explanation that He would come to join His followers *on earth at His return* rather than have them come to live with Him in heaven where He currently resides.

After Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection, He spent 40 days teaching His disciples, instructing them about the Kingdom of God (Acts 1:3). After this He joined His Father in heaven. Notice the instruction His disciples received after He rose into the sky:

"Now when He had spoken these things, while they watched, He was taken up, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, 'Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, *will so come in like manner as you saw Him go into heaven*'" (Acts 1:9-11).

Jesus speaks repeatedly of His return to establish the Kingdom of God *on earth* (Matthew 25:31-34; Luke 21:27-31). He will return to earth and establish His Kingdom *here*—not in heaven. In what is commonly called the Lord's Prayer, He instructs His followers to pray to their heavenly Father, "*Your kingdom come*" (Matthew 6:10; Luke 11:2). That kingdom is the true goal of every Christian (Matthew 6:33); we are to pray for its arrival.

In Luke 19:12 Jesus speaks of Himself in a parable, comparing Himself to "a certain nobleman [who] went into a far country to receive for himself a kingdom and to return." The "far country" is His Father's dwelling place, which is in heaven. Jesus will bring the Kingdom of God to earth at His return.

Our eternal abode is to be here

One Old Testament prophecy is so specific about Jesus' return that it tells us exactly *where* He will arrive back on earth to establish His Kingdom: "And in that day *His feet will stand on the Mount of Olives*, which faces Jerusalem on the east...And the LORD shall be King over all the earth" (Zechariah 14:4, 9).

The incident we read about in the book of Acts that describes Jesus' ascension tells us that it was on the Mount of Olives that He last talked with His disciples, and it was from the same mountain that He rose into the clouds before their eyes. He will return to the same mountain to begin His reign in the Kingdom of God.

Recall again that in Matthew 5:3 Jesus said the poor in spirit, the humble, would inherit the Kingdom of Heaven. Then consider that just two verses later, in verse 5, Jesus states, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit *the earth*." How do we reconcile

these statements? By understanding that the Kingdom of Heaven, the Kingdom of God, will be established on the earth.

This verse and many others describe the saints ruling *on earth* in God's Kingdom. For example, Revelation 5:10, speaking of the resurrected saints, says: "You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and *they will reign on the earth*" (NIV).

Even beyond that, Revelation 21 and 22 state that ultimately God the Father and the heavenly city of God, the New Jerusalem, will descend to the earth, then renewed. The earth, then, will be the place of God's throne. And the repentant of mankind, then glorified, will dwell with Him forever.

Yet we will not then be confined to the earth but will inherit the entire vast universe and spirit realm as coheirs with Jesus.

The reward of the saints is eternal life in the Kingdom of God. This will be given when Christ returns, but, as we have seen, Jesus will reign with His faithful followers *on the earth* rather than in heaven. And in the end, even God the Father will dwell with the saved *here*. The glorious future God has planned for us is far beyond any human dreams of life in heaven!

Ancient Pagan Belief in Heaven

The idea that souls go to heaven at death originated in pagan religion, not the Bible.

The idea that "souls" go to heaven at death originated in pagan religion, not the Bible. A brief look at ancient history reveals that the people of Babylon, Egypt, and other kingdoms imagined such an afterlife.

According to *This Believing World*, by Lewis Browne, the Egyptian god Osiris was thought to have been killed, resurrected and taken to heaven: "Osiris came to life again! He was miraculously resurrected from death and taken up to heaven; and there in heaven, so the myth declared, he lived on eternally" (1946, p. 83).

Browne explains: "The Egyptians reasoned that if it was the fate of the god Osiris to be resurrected after death, then a way could be found to make it the fate of man, too...The bliss of immortality that had formerly been reserved only for kings was then promised to all men...The heavenly existence of the dead was carried on in the realm of Osiris, and it was described in considerable detail by the Egyptian theologians. It was believed that on death the soul of a man set out at once to reach a Judgment Hall on high...and stood before the celestial throne of Osiris, the Judge. There it gave account of itself to Osiris and his forty-two associate gods" (p. 84).

If able to satisfy the gods, "the soul was straightway gathered into the fold of Osiris. But

if it could not, if it was found wanting when weighed in the heavenly balances, then it was cast into a hell, to be rent to shreds of the 'Devouress.' For only the righteous souls, only the guiltless, were thought to be deserving of life everlasting" (pp. 86-87).

This idea of men being able to follow their savior-god into heaven was a central focus of the ancient mystery religions. Browne continues: "Mankind everywhere, in Mexico and Iceland, in Zululand and China, makes more or less the same wild guesses in its convulsive effort to solve the riddle of existence..."

"In very early times that idea flourished not alone among the Babylonians and Egyptians, but also among the barbaric tribes in and around Greece...These mysteries [came] down from Thrace or across the sea from Egypt and Asia Minor...They declared that for every man, no matter how poor or vicious, there was a place in heaven. All one had to do was to be 'initiated' into the secrets of the cult...then salvation was assured him, and no excess of vice and moral turpitude [i.e., depravity] could close the gates of paradise in his face. He was saved forevermore" (pp. 96-99).

Man has always wanted to live without ever dying. This world and all it offers has never satisfied humanity. For centuries mankind has searched for security and happiness in the hope of going to heaven at death. Regrettably, too many have embraced beliefs that cannot be proven true.

God alone knows the answers to the mysteries of life and death, and He reveals them in His Word, the Holy Bible. Contrary to what so many think, God does not promise eternity in heaven as the reward of the saved. Instead, Jesus says those who overcome will reign with Him in the coming Kingdom of God, which will be established on earth at His return (Revelation 3:21; 5:10; 11:15). Ultimately, they will inherit the entire universe and spirit realm as coheirs with Christ (compare Romans 8:17; Hebrews 1:1-2; 2:5-11; Revelation 21:7).

Paul's Desire to "Depart and Be With Christ"

Many have assumed from Paul's words in Philippians 1:23-24 that he believed that at the moment of his death his consciousness would leave his body to join Christ in heaven. But is this the case?

The apostle Paul dedicated his life to preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God (Acts 14:22; 19:8; 20:25; 28:23, 31). In the process he was subjected to persecution, beatings and several periods of imprisonment. When he wrote his letter to the Philippians, he was enduring a period of house arrest in Rome. Paul knew that the Roman government had authority to put prisoners to death. Paul knew what the future might hold for him, whether it be execution on the one hand or his release on the other.

In Philippians 1:23-24 he writes of the two possible outcomes: “For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you.”

Many have assumed from Paul’s words here that he believed that at the moment of his death his consciousness would leave his body to join Christ in heaven. But is this the case?

Before focusing on what this scripture says, let’s notice what it does *not* say. It does *not* say *when* or *where* Paul would be with Christ if he departed. Neither is the terminology of departure intended to be geographic—as in leaving the earth to go to heaven. There is no reference to heaven in these verses. To conclude otherwise is to read assumptions into Paul’s words. Paul is simply referring to departing from his present, physical life—leaving it behind through death.

When writing to the Philippians here, Paul was struggling with two desires. He wanted to be done with his fleshly life and be with Christ, but he also wanted to remain with God’s people.

In his second letter to Timothy he speaks dogmatically of what lies ahead, knowing the end of his physical life is near and he is ready to depart: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me *on that Day*, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Paul, then, understood that he was not to receive his reward *immediately at death*. He knew that if executed, he would go to the grave, and there his remains would lie until the time of his resurrection. He understood that, since the dead have no thought processes whatsoever, in his next waking moment he would be with the returning Messiah, Jesus, joining Him along with the other saints at the time of the resurrection.

As he wrote to Timothy, he knew there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness that he would be given “*on that Day*” of Christ’s appearing— at Jesus’ second coming. As Paul noted, Jesus will bring Paul’s reward with Him. Paul will receive it *at that time*, not before, along with all others who will be resurrected at Christ’s return.

Describing this resurrection, Paul explains to the church in Corinth: “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 knew he would receive his reward—his “change”—at Christ’s coming. He also knew that death before that time would mean “sleep,” unconsciousness, until the resurrection.

The time from Paul’s death until his resurrection at the same time as all of Christ’s followers will seem to him but a mere moment. He will be with Christ as a glorified son

of God in the next moment of his consciousness. No wonder Paul, weary of his sufferings in this life, desired to depart from it and to be with Christ!

Did Elijah Go to Heaven?

A biblical event many cite to support belief that the righteous go to heaven when they die involves the prophet Elijah.

Elijah was a prophet of God in the ninth century B.C. The Bible states that “Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:11). But does this contradict the testimony of John’s Gospel, which stated some 900 years after Elijah’s time that “no one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man”? (John 3:13).

How can we explain this seeming biblical discrepancy? A closer look shows that the two passages can be reconciled easily enough.

Careful study shows that *three* “heavens” are actually discussed in the Bible. One is God’s dwelling place—the place of His throne—and the heaven where the resurrected Jesus is today. Speaking of Christ, who is our High Priest, the Bible says, “We have such a High Priest, who is seated at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens” (Hebrews 8:1). Heaven is specifically called God’s dwelling place (Deuteronomy 26:15). The apostle Paul calls this heaven the “*third* heaven” (2 Corinthians 12:2)—showing, as noted, that there are two others. It’s described as the “third” because, being in the spirit realm, it is beyond the other two, which are in the physical realm.

Another heaven discussed in the Bible, second in proximity to us, is what we call outer space. It is the domain of the moon, planets, comets, asteroids, sun and stars. David spoke of this when he reflected on the awesomeness of God’s creative handiwork, which he described as “Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained” (Psalm 8:3). Many scriptures mention “the stars of heaven” (Genesis 26:4; Deuteronomy 1:10; 28:62; Isaiah 13:10).

Yet another heaven, closest to us in proximity, is the envelope of air that surrounds our planet, consisting of oxygen and other gases. This heaven—earth’s atmosphere—is mentioned in such passages as Genesis 7:11-12, which describes the great flood of Noah’s day: “The windows of heaven were opened. And the rain was on the earth forty days and forty nights.” The Bible also speaks of “the birds of heaven,” those that fly overhead (Job 35:11; Jeremiah 16:4).

To determine which heaven is meant in a Bible passage, we must carefully consider the context. It was into the lower reaches of this first, closest heaven—the earth’s atmosphere—that Elijah was taken. Let’s notice the proof.

God had earlier told Elijah he was to anoint a man named Elisha as a prophet to succeed him (1 Kings 19:16). Later, as the two men walked together, Elijah said to Elisha, “What may I do for you, before I am taken away from you?” (2 Kings 2:9). This led to a discussion of God’s gifts to Elisha that would allow him to fill Elijah’s role.

“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” (verse 11). Elijah was now gone. The former followers and students of Elijah were now to look to Elisha as their new leader. “Now when the sons of the prophets who were from Jericho saw him, they said, ‘The spirit of Elijah rests on Elisha’” (2 Kings 2:15).

Many readers assume that Elijah at that point was made immortal and taken to the heaven where God resides. This was not the case. The sons of the prophets knew otherwise. They knew the whirlwind had simply removed Elijah to another location on earth. They exclaimed to Elisha: “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).

The disciples were concerned for Elijah’s safety, so they sent out a party of 50 men to search for him. The 50 searched for three days but did not find him (2 Kings 2:17).

Another passage proves conclusively that Elijah was not taken up to live in heaven. The Bible records that Elijah wrote a letter to Jehoram, the king of Judah, several years after he was removed in the whirlwind.

Notice the sequence of events recorded for us in the Bible. Elijah’s last recorded and dated act occurred during the reign of the Israelite king Ahaziah when Elijah told the king he would die for his sins (2 Kings 1:3, 17). Ahaziah’s reign lasted only about a year, ca. 850 B.C.

Elijah’s removal and replacement by Elisha is then recorded in the next chapter, 2 Kings 2. The story continues with incidents from Elisha’s life, including an encounter with Jehoshaphat, king of Judah (2 Kings 3:11-14). Several years later Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, succeeded his father as king of Judah, ca. 845 B.C. (2 Kings 8:16).

Jehoram proved to be a wicked king, leading the nation of Judah in rebellion against God’s commandments. A few years into Jehoram’s reign, and several years after Elijah’s removal, Jehoram received a letter *from Elijah* warning the king of dire consequences because of his sins. This letter is recorded in 2 Chronicles 21:12-15.

This letter proves that the prophet was still alive and on earth some years after he was removed by the whirlwind and replaced by Elisha. God had chosen Elisha to succeed Elijah as His prophet, so He bodily removed Elijah to another place, where he continued to live for at least several more years—as his letter to Jehoram demonstrates.

The Bible tells us nothing more about Elijah's life following his writing of the letter. But he eventually died, just like the other prophets and righteous men of the Old Testament, who all died in faith, not yet receiving the eternal life God had promised (Hebrews 11:39).

Again, a careful reading of the Scriptures shows that Elijah's miraculous removal by a fiery chariot involved transporting him to another location on earth, not to eternal life in heaven.

Was Enoch Taken to Heaven?

Some people believe Genesis 5:24 and Hebrews 11:5 declare that God took Enoch to heaven. But is that what these verses say?

Genesis 5:24 tells us that "Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him." Hebrews 11:5 adds: "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."

Some erroneously jump to the conclusion that Enoch was taken up into heaven, but notice the Bible nowhere says this. It simply says that God "took him." It does not specify *where* he was taken.

Jesus Christ later states in the Gospel of John that "Scripture cannot be broken" (John 10:35). One of the points He makes is that one passage of the Bible cannot contradict another passage.

This same Gospel of John reveals a startling fact very pertinent to this matter: "*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).

Clearly, Jesus Christ was the only human being who had ascended into heaven. The phrase "who is in heaven" lets us know that this was written by the apostle John after Christ's return to heaven. So even as late as this statement, no human being—and that includes Enoch—had ascended into heaven.

We later read about Enoch's faith in Hebrews 11:5: "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." The word rendered "taken" can also mean "transferred elsewhere." And the New American Standard Bible says this was done "so that he *would not* see death"—a better translation than "did not," as we know from the same chapter of Hebrews that he died.

Notice in verse 13 the summary given of all of the men and women of faith listed here, including Enoch: "*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). So Enoch definitely died as well as all the rest.

How, then, can it be that Enoch was transferred elsewhere so he wouldn't see death? God doesn't give us all the details of what happened, but a few scenarios have been proposed that do not conflict with the fact that Enoch died as the Bible says.

It may be that God transported Enoch elsewhere to keep him from being killed at a certain time—perhaps protecting him from martyrdom at the hands of angry persecutors who didn't like his announcement of coming divine judgment (see Jude 14-16). God likewise supernaturally transported Elijah and Philip to other places on earth (see 2 Kings 2:11; Acts 8:39).

On the other hand, we should observe that Enoch died young for his time—at age 365 while those before and after him lived into their 800s and 900s. Because of this, some speculate that God “took him” from life prematurely so that he would not have to live out his remaining centuries in a miserable world (compare Isaiah 57:1-2). His next moment of consciousness will be the resurrection. In this case, “so that he would not see death” would refer to his not having to experience the process of dying—his life ending instantly.

Still others, putting the likelihood of Enoch experiencing persecution together with his early death, have concluded that Enoch was murdered—martyred for his preaching. Enoch being taken and not found would then refer to God removing his body and burying it—as happened with Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6).

In this case, Enoch being taken or transferred so that he would not see death is taken as separate matter—that of him being spiritually converted, transferred from the world's ways to God's way of living, so that he would not see ultimate death in the lake of fire (compare Colossians 1:13; John 8:51).

Again, we don't have enough details to know exactly what is intended. But we do know that Enoch did not skip death and go to heaven. He died, and no human being has ascended to heaven except Jesus Christ.

The Thief on the Cross

(We leave this in here for you to consider. We provide another explanation below).

Many people think Jesus assured the thief on the cross that he would go to heaven with Him that very day. But is this really what Jesus Christ meant?

As Jesus Christ hung dying, He told a convicted criminal being crucified with Him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). Many people think Jesus assured the man he would go to heaven with Him that very day. But is this really what He meant?

The placement of the comma after “you” and before “today” would certainly seem to indicate this. However, notice how an entirely different meaning is conveyed if the comma is placed *after* “today” rather than before: “Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.”

The Day Yehshua was speaking about was the Millennial day. That millennial day ended in 84 CE. When Yehshua came out of the grave at the end of the Sabbath, the Saints were also raised up and went into Jerusalem at that same time. We believe the thief on the tree also was raised at this time and during this same millennial day and ascended with them that wave sheaf day at 9 AM.

Mat 27:50 And crying again with a loud voice, Jesus released His spirit.

Mat 27:51 And, behold! The veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. And the earth quaked, and the rocks were sheared,

Mat 27:52 and the tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep arose,

Mat 27:53 and coming out of the tomb after His resurrection they went into the holy city and appeared to many.

No punctuation in the original Bible texts

We need to first understand that original texts of the Bible (Greek for the New Testament and Hebrew and some Aramaic for the Old Testament) used no punctuation.

As Dr. E.W. Bullinger explains in *The Companion Bible*: “None of our modern marks of punctuation are found [in Bible texts] until the ninth century...The punctuation of all modern editions of the Greek text, and of all versions made from it, rests entirely *on human authority*, and has no weight whatever in determining or even influencing the interpretation of a single passage” (1990, Appendix 94, p. 136, emphasis in original).

In most cases translators and publishers of the Bible have done an admirable job using punctuation to clarify the meaning of the Scriptures. But this is one case where their doctrinal bias has regrettably obscured the meaning of Christ’s words. By placing a comma *before* “today” in Christ’s statement to the dying man rather than *after* it, they have Jesus saying something He never intended.

We know this because the Bible clearly says Jesus Himself did not go to paradise or heaven on the day He died! Instead *He died and was buried in the grave*. Notice the apostle Paul’s clear statement in 1 Corinthians 15:3-4: “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.”

Notice what Christ told Mary soon after He had been resurrected: “Do not cling to Me, for *I have not yet ascended to My Father*” (John 20:17). A full three days after His death, Jesus Himself clearly said that He had not yet ascended to heaven.

Jesus had earlier plainly said that He would lie in the grave for three days and three nights (Matthew 12:40). The Scriptures nowhere say that His body was buried while His soul went elsewhere. Jesus died and was buried. He went only to the grave. Therefore the dying criminal *could not* have been with Jesus in heaven that day, because *Jesus Himself did not go there then*.

If Jesus was not telling the man he would be in heaven or paradise on that day, what was He telling him?

Future Kingdom and paradise on earth

A fundamental principle for sound Bible study is to carefully check the context. Notice the specific wording of the man’s request: “Lord, remember me *when You come into Your kingdom*” (Luke 23:42). Notice that the thief expressed no expectation of immediately going to heaven with Jesus at the moment they died.

He may have already known something about the nature of the Kingdom of God—that it would be a literal kingdom to be established on earth by the Messiah, which many Jews of that day understood. Jesus Himself had previously given an entire parable “because they thought that the kingdom of God would immediately appear” (Luke 19:11). Jesus also taught His disciples to pray, “Your kingdom come” (Luke 11:2). This Kingdom, is the Kingdom that Jesus will establish *on earth at His return*, not a location in heaven to which we go when we die.

Notice also Jesus’ response to the man, telling him, “...you will be with Me *in Paradise*.” Understanding the nature of the biblical use of the term *paradise* is crucial to understanding this passage.

The Greek word here translated “paradise,” *paradeisos*, means an enclosed garden or park. In the Septuagint, a Greek translation of the Old Testament in common use at the time of Christ, this same word was used in references to the Garden of Eden. Besides its occurrence in Luke 23, the word is used only two other times in the New Testament. In both cases it refers to the place of God’s presence.

In 2 Corinthians 12:2-4 Paul describes a *vision* in which he “was caught up into Paradise.” Paul says this paradise was in “the third heaven”—the dwelling place of God.

Jesus tells us that “the tree of life” is located “in the midst of the Paradise of God” (Revelation 2:7). Revelation 22:2 explains that the tree of life is to be in the New Jerusalem. God will come *from heaven* with this New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:2-3) after the resurrections of the dead mentioned in Revelation 20. Only at that time will men dwell with God in this paradise.

Furthermore, the restoration of the land of Israel that will take place under the coming reign of Christ is compared in Isaiah 51:3 to the Garden of Eden—again, *paradeisos* in the Septuagint.

Putting together all these scriptures, we can see that the paradise Christ mentioned, in which men will dwell with God in His Kingdom, is to be *at a future time*.

How do we know this was Christ's meaning? Again, as noted above, Jesus plainly said He was going to be dead and buried for the following three days and nights, after which He clearly told Mary that He had not yet ascended to heaven.

Some theologians and religious denominations try to redefine Christ's use of *paradise* to say that this referred to where the righteous dead went before Jesus came—a sort of temporary “holding place” next to hell because heaven wasn't available to them until Christ ascended to heaven after His death and opened the way for them to follow.

This concept, however, is straight out of pagan Greek mythology about life after death (the Elysian Fields as the section of the Greek underworld for good people) and not something taught in the Bible. The idea that the righteous dead of Old Testament times went to a place called “paradise” and later ascended to heaven after Jesus was resurrected is disproved by the apostle Peter's plain statements in Acts 2:29 and 34—almost two months after Christ's death and resurrection—that King David “is both dead and buried” and “David *did not* ascend into the heavens.”

Putting together the relevant scriptures, we can see here the truth of the matter. The robber, facing imminent death while being crucified alongside Jesus (Luke 23:39-41), sought comfort and assurance. Jesus provided it, telling the man, “Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” The “Paradise” of which Jesus spoke wasn't heaven, but the Eden-like world to which the man would be resurrected according to God's plan—as touched on later in this booklet.

Hebrew idiom lost in translation

Part of His reply, “Assuredly I say to you today” was a “common Hebrew idiom...which is constantly used for very solemn emphasis” (*The Companion Bible*, Appendix 173, p. 192). Examples of this Hebrew phrase, worded very similarly to Christ's statement, can be found in Deuteronomy 30:18 (“I announce to you today that you shall surely perish”) and Acts 20:26 (“Therefore, I declare to you today that I am innocent of the blood of all men”—New International Version).

Many centuries later, when the punctuation marks we see in our English versions were inserted, Jesus' meaning was distorted by the wrong placement of the comma, and this Hebrew figure of speech was obscured. (Several other Bible translations and reference works, among them the Rotherham Translation, *The Emphatic Diaglott*, The Concordant Literal New Testament and *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament*, recognize the Hebrew idiom and correctly place the

comma after “today” for proper punctuation.)

In conclusion, Jesus never said nor implied that the dying man would be in paradise or heaven on that very day. Christ was encouraging him by solemnly assuring him that a time would come, in God’s future Kingdom on earth, when the man would be resurrected and would see Jesus again.

This dramatic event can be properly understood only when we comprehend the time frame of God’s plan of salvation and the promised resurrections described in the Bible.

(again we have a different understanding which we will share with you next week. Then you be the judge of the two.)

Are There Saved Human Beings in Heaven?

The popular teaching is that when Christians die they immediately go to heaven, where they take up residence in their permanent abode. But can we find such a teaching in the Bible? Have any human beings ever ascended to heaven?

In Revelation:19:1, relaying what he experienced in a spiritual vision, the apostle John states, “After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God!’”

Must the great multitude praising God here be throngs of saved human beings now living in heaven? Have any human beings ever ascended to heaven?

The popular teaching is that when Christians die they immediately go to heaven, where they take up residence in their permanent abode. But can we find such a teaching in the Bible?

To understand the truth on any biblical teaching, we must consider *all* the passages on a subject. When we do, the truth then usually becomes clear. We must also look at plain biblical statements and passages first, and from them understand the meaning of those that are less clear.

Notice one such clear statement in John:3:13: “*No one has ascended to heaven* but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man [Jesus Christ] who is in heaven.”

John wrote these words decades after Jesus died and ascended to heaven—and well after many of Christ’s followers had died—but he still affirmed that *no one other than Jesus* had gone to heaven.

Whose voices, then, could John have been hearing when he recorded in the book of Revelation what he heard and saw? He refers to voices many places in the book. Let’s notice one example in particular:

“Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’” (Revelation:5:11-12). So there are at least hundreds of millions of angels, and the voices in Revelation 19 could well be theirs.

Moreover, we should remember that John in the book of Revelation was receiving a vision of the future—with Revelation 19 concerning events at the time of Christ’s return and the resurrection of His followers. Even if verse 1 were referring to saved human beings appearing briefly before God in heaven and praising Him at that time (just after their resurrection), this would not mean that they are doing so today.

Indeed, those who have died are still dead and in the grave—unconscious and unable to praise God (Psalm:6:5; 30:9; Isaiah:38:18). Scripture, as we have seen, shows that no human being except Jesus Christ has ever entered heaven, and that remains so today. The voices referred to in Revelation 19, then, cannot be those of saved human beings now in heaven.

The Resurrection: God’s Promise of Life after Death

The Bible clearly teaches that the dead will be raised in a resurrection. But if their souls have already gone to heaven or hell at death, what’s the point? Could it be that popular beliefs don’t agree with the Bible?

If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job:14:14). This question has intrigued the minds of men from ancient times to our day.

In the Bible God inspired the patriarch Job not only to pose this important question but to give us the answer. Responding to God, Job says: “All the days of [or from] my hard service I will wait, *till my change comes*. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands” (Job:14:14-15). Job affirmed that the dead *will* live again through a resurrection.

Other passages in the Old Testament also affirm the resurrection. Daniel:12:2, for example, prophesies of a time yet future when “many of those *who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake ...*”

But the way to eternal life was not fully understood in those days. It remained for Christ to come and fully reveal the truth. Jesus states: “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live” (John:11:25). It is through Christ that we can experience our own resurrection from the dead. “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive” (1 Corinthians:15:22).

Let’s delve further into this matter of the resurrection. What is the impact of this teaching? And what lies ahead in terms of who will be resurrected and when?

More than a glimmer of hope

The teaching of the good news of the resurrection—that man can escape the power of the grave—set Christianity apart from other first-century religions and philosophies. Among Jewish sects the concept of a resurrection was a subject of controversy. Some dogmatically denied the dead would rise, and others said they would (Acts:23:8).

The world in which Jesus lived, besides being Jewish, was heavily influenced by the culture of the two empires—Greek and Roman—that had successively dominated the region for several centuries. The Greek and Roman religions held little hope for the dead.

“The old Greek belief, and its Roman counterpart, held that once the body was dead the disembodied soul lived in a miserable twilight existence...Sadness, silence and hopelessness seemed to brood over the life after death...Death was to men of those days the ultimate disaster” (J.B. Phillips, *Ring of Truth: A Translator’s Testimony*, 1967, pp. 40-41).

The *New Bible Dictionary* affirms the dreary outlook of the day and tells us that the resurrection of Christ gave men more than a glimmer of hope. “The most startling characteristic of the first Christian preaching is its emphasis on the resurrection. The first preachers were sure that Christ had risen, and sure, in consequence, that believers would in due course rise also. This set them off from all the other teachers of the ancient world...Nothing is more characteristic of even the best thought of the day than its hopelessness in the face of death. Clearly the resurrection is of the very first importance for the Christian faith” (1996, p. 1010, “Resurrection”).

A truth that launched the Church

The riveting truth of the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah launched the New Testament Church. Preaching on the day of the Church’s founding, as recorded in Acts 2, the apostle Peter thundered the good news:

“Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a Man attested by God to you by miracles, wonders, and signs which God did through Him in your midst, as you yourselves also know—Him, being delivered by the determined purpose and foreknowledge of God, you have taken by lawless hands, have crucified, and put to death; *whom God raised up*, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be held by it” (Acts:2:22-24).

The news of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth spread like a shock wave through the land. Jesus’ disciples were galvanized into action and began to preach with zeal. What had been regarded as a band of renegade Jews soon grew into the thriving Church.

In its early days the Church grew by thousands (Acts:2:41; 4:4). The young Church spread hope—hope of eternal life through the resurrection. The disciples taught under God’s inspiration that all who accept Jesus as their personal Savior, repent, are baptized

and receive the Holy Spirit will be resurrected (compare Acts:2:38; Romans:8:11).

The resurrection the disciples expected was not some sort of substandard half-life, such as the Greeks and Romans believed lay beyond the grave. The disciples were called to “take hold of the life that is *truly* life” (1 Timothy:6:19, NIV).

Jesus had told them before He was crucified, “Because I live, you will live also” (John:14:19). Jesus had also shared with His disciples His intention for all of mankind: “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly” (John:10:10). Though we may enter into the abundant life of which Christ spoke in this life, it reaches its full realization in the resurrection from the dead.

The resurrection gives meaning to life

The first-century world held many conflicting ideas about life after death. Pagan philosophies had clouded the understanding of most people.

Our situation is similar. In the Western world a significant number of people believe nothing lies beyond the grave. Atheism and agnosticism have left their marks. The world needs to hear and understand the original resurrection message of Christ and the apostles.

Many people, like those of the ancient world, are anxious about the matter of death. The truth of the resurrection proclaimed by God’s Word can counter the anxiety and hopelessness inherent in any approach that excludes God.

Speaking of the return of Christ and the accompanying resurrection of the faithful, Paul encourages believers to “*comfort one another with these words*” (1 Thessalonians:4:18). The truth of the resurrection provides comfort for our natural anxiety about death.

The resurrection: historical fact

Why should we believe in a resurrection from the dead? We should take heart because the resurrection of Christ, in whose steps we follow, is a biblically and historically confirmed *fact*.

After being executed and entombed, Jesus’ body disappeared, and even His enemies who wanted to refute His resurrection could not explain away the empty tomb. Jesus’ resurrection was confirmed by many witnesses—including on one occasion 500 people (1 Corinthians:15:6). Peter, speaking on behalf of all the apostles, triumphantly proclaimed, “We are His *witnesses* to these things”—to the fact that “the God of our fathers *raised up Jesus*” (Acts:5:30-32).

Years later Paul similarly said of Jesus that “God raised Him from the dead [and] *He was seen for many days* by those who came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are *His witnesses* to the people” (Acts:13:30-31). The apostles and other members

of the early Church *gave their lives* as willing martyrs for this truth—for they knew for certain that it was indeed the truth.

Every person in his own order

The fact that Jesus was resurrected as a forerunner of the future resurrection of His followers is understood by many Bible readers. What is not so clear to many is that the Bible describes *more than one* future resurrection.

In 1 Corinthians 15, Paul writes: “But now, Christ is risen from the dead, the *first-fruit* of those who have fallen asleep . . . For just as in Adam all die, so also in Christ *all* will be made alive. *But each in his own order*; Christ the first-fruits, then those who belong to Christ at his appearing. And then the end, when he shall hand over his kingdom to God his Father” (verses 20-24, Montgomery New Testament).

The reference to firstfruits indicates that *other* fruits are to follow—Jesus here followed by those who are His at His return. Paul specifies that God has set an order in His plan by which He will bring up everyone—“all,” as it says—in a resurrection. And in this order, not everyone will be resurrected *at the same time*.

Notice that Jesus is here called the firstfruits. Yet His followers are elsewhere called firstfruits themselves—and firstborn (James:1:18; Hebrews:12:23). Thus Christ is the first of the firstfruits. The implication is that yet others will follow as later fruits—at “the end,” as we saw in 1 Corinthians:15:24. And other scriptures confirm that, as we will see.

Those who believe that people go to heaven or hell at death have been troubled at the indications they see in Scripture that comparatively few will be saved. They frequently base this assumption on such passages as Matthew:7:13-14: “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.”

In these verses Jesus explains what happens in “this present evil age” (Galatians:1:4), in which God is not calling everyone to be converted *now*. We read in Revelation:12:9 that Satan “deceives the whole world.” John writes, “We know that we are of God, and the whole world lies under the sway of the wicked one” (1 John:5:19).

Mankind as a whole is deceived—*for the time being*. Jesus states, “No one can come to Me unless the Father who sent Me draws him; and I will raise him up at the last day” (John:6:44). Jesus plainly indicates here that only certain ones will be in the resurrection to which He refers—those who are specifically called by God. The Bible teaches that in this particular age—the age preceding the return of Christ—God is calling only a small portion of mankind to enter and partake of His Kingdom.

“This is the first resurrection”

The coming resurrection of those who are called now in this age is further described in the 20th chapter of Revelation.

Let's notice how John describes that resurrection: "I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. *They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years.* (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) *This is the first resurrection.*

"Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years" (Revelation:20:4-6, NIV). Notice that some are resurrected at the beginning of the 1,000-year reign of Christ—at "the first resurrection." Those in this resurrection of the faithful will be raised immortal and incorruptible to reign with Him, never to die from then on.

But notice that the use of the term *first resurrection* shows that at least one more must follow!

Another resurrection follows

Indeed, as we can see, the same passage explains in a parenthetical note, "The *rest* of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended." Clearly there is another resurrection 1,000 years *after* the first, and in this resurrection *others* will have the opportunity to receive salvation. They will be called to understand God's truth and His plan during a period sometimes referred to as the "great white throne" judgment (verse 11).

This time of judgment is further described in verse 12: "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."

Those resurrected in this group have never completely understood the truth of God. Consider that *the majority of all people who have ever lived have never heard God's truth.* Rather than condemn such people to eternal suffering in a fiery hell, the God of the Bible is much more comforting and encouraging. He will extend the opportunity for eternal life *to everyone* —to relatively few in this age, but to billions of people in the coming second or general resurrection.

Judgment is much more than a final decision to reward or condemn. Judgment is a *proces*s that takes place over time before a final decision is rendered. Those brought to a temporary, physical life again in this resurrection (see Ezekiel:37:1-14) will, for the *first* time, have their minds opened to the truth of God's plan. They will have the opportunity to decide whether they will accept and follow God's instruction or not.

After coming to see the truth, they will be judged according to their response to their new understanding. Many will accept that truth, repent and receive God's gift of eternal life—joining those made immortal in the first resurrection.

Past generations will be resurrected together

Jesus Himself spoke of this second resurrection period when He said that even the sinners of the long-destroyed city of Sodom would have the opportunity to repent in a future judgment. As He sent His disciples out on a mission to preach the gospel (Matthew:10:9-14), He told them that some they would encounter would reject their message. Of these Jesus said, "Assuredly, I say to you, it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah in the day of judgment than for that city" (Matthew:10:15).

That there is room for tolerance in that day toward Sodom and Gomorrah shows they will have opportunity to repent and enter God's Kingdom. This is because, when they formerly lived, they either never had opportunity to know God or His way or never fully understood what they heard. The time for their calling and judgment is *yet future*. This is not a *second chance* for salvation, as some might view it. Rather, this will be their *first* chance—their first opportunity to act on a clear understanding of God's truth.

In a similar example, Jesus said the long-dead people of the ancient Assyrian city of Nineveh and the biblical "queen of the South" from Solomon's time "will rise up in the judgment" alongside those from Christ's generation (Matthew:12:41-42). The people from those generations had lived and died many centuries earlier, never having understood the true God or His plan to offer eternal life through His Son Jesus the Messiah.

Having great mercy toward all people, God will offer salvation to all who lived and died in all ages without ever really knowing Him. The Bible tells us that God does not play favorites (Acts:10:34; Romans:2:11). He calls all at the time that is appropriate for them, and eventually all will be given the same wonderful opportunity to receive His gift of salvation.

Evidence of a third resurrection

Other scriptures indicate that a third group, the wicked who refuse to accept God and His way of life, will be resurrected just before final destruction in the lake of fire.

Jesus explained that some would deliberately and knowingly despise God's truth and spiritual understanding. These individuals, He said, will not be forgiven "either in this age or in the age to come" (Matthew:12:31-32).

Yet "*all* who are in the graves will hear [Christ's] voice and come forth" (John:5:28-29). Even those who will not be forgiven are to be resurrected from the dead.

This group will consist of those who have deliberately rejected God's way of life even after they have been "once enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit" (Hebrews:6:4-6). These few are people who were once forgiven and converted but later chose to reject the Holy Spirit and priceless knowledge God gave to them.

Because they "trampled the Son of God under foot,...treated as an unholy thing the blood of the covenant that sanctified him, and...insulted the Spirit of grace," for them "no sacrifice for sins is left, but only a fearful expectation of judgment and of raging fire that will consume the enemies of God" (Hebrews:10:26-29, NIV).

As we saw earlier, God has revealed that the ultimate fate of the incorrigibly wicked is to be burned up: "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 up,' says the LORD of hosts, 'That will leave them neither root nor branch'" (Malachi:4:1).

This will be the end for those few who stubbornly have or will have refused to repent of their own self-willed rebellion in spite of all the opportunities made available to them by God. They will be destroyed in the lake of fire, dying in "the second death," from which there will be no resurrection (Revelation:20:13-14; Revelation:21:8).

We are even told that death itself and hades (the grave) will be destroyed in this fire (Revelation:20:14). That is because the judgment of God will then be complete. Those who are saved will never again have to fear death. Paul's words in 1 Corinthians:15:26 will have then come to pass: "The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

Your Awesome Future

A careful study of the Scriptures reveals major problems with popular beliefs about life after death. Sadly, these misguided ideas have masked the truth about the incredible future God has planned for us!

In light of these biblical truths, where does that leave us? As we have seen, the beliefs of people about the nature of heaven and hell have ranged over a broad—and confusing—spectrum. But there is one thing on which we all should agree: "The living know that they will die" (Ecclesiastes:9:5).

The prospect of death has hung over the heads of mankind as long as human beings have existed. When people do not understand God's truth, they are gripped by the fear of death and enslaved in a cruel and unforgiving bondage.

The Expositor's Bible Commentary summarizes how the truth of the resurrection, exemplified in the resurrection of Christ, transformed the outlook of many: "In the first century this [fear of death] was very real. The philosophers urged people to be calm in the face of death, and some of them managed to do so. But to most people this brought

no relief. Fear was widespread, as the hopeless tone of the inscriptions on tombs clearly illustrates. But one of the many wonderful things about the Christian gospel is that it delivers men and women from this fear...They are saved with a sure hope of life eternal, a life whose best lies beyond the grave” (Leon Morris, 1981, Vol. 12, p. 29, note on Hebrews:2:14-15).

The Bible reveals that the best that man can experience lies beyond the grave. It shows us that converted Christians will inherit eternal life at the first resurrection and that death will never again lay a claim on them: “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’” (1 Corinthians:15:54).

The life to come will be vastly superior to this present, temporary existence. It will be a life abounding in both purpose and pleasure: “In your presence is fullness of joy; at Your right hand are pleasures forevermore,” wrote David (Psalm:16:11).

Let us now catch a glimpse of what awaits those who receive eternal life in the first resurrection.

What will we be like?

We can know in general terms what we will be like in this resurrection because the Bible tells us we will be like the resurrected Jesus. “The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven...And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man” (1 Corinthians:15:47, 49).

We learn that in the resurrection we will take on the same image, or likeness, that Christ has. This includes becoming a spirit being with a spirit body rather than flesh and blood (see verses 45, 50).

Moreover, Paul tells us that true Christians will “share the likeness of his Son,” who is “the eldest among a large family of brothers” (Romans:8:29, Revised English Bible). Did you catch that? We will be Jesus’ brothers and share His likeness. Though Christ has eternally existed and we have not, we will be elevated to a plane so high that we are called *children of God* and *brothers of Jesus Christ*.

The apostle John confirms these same two truths—that we’ll be children of God and that we’ll have the same glorified form as Jesus Christ. “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us,” he writes, “that we should be called *children of God*” (1 John:3:1). And in the next verse he tells us, “We know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is.”

Raised in unimaginable splendor, we will share the divine glory and dominion of Christ (Romans:8:16-18; 2 Corinthians:3:18; 2 Thessalonians:2:14; Hebrews:1:1-3; 2:5-9; Revelation:21:7)—though we will never equal Him. He is the one Son of God who has always existed, superior to all but the Father.

The glory of Christ

What is the glory of Christ like? During His physical ministry on earth, He gave three of His disciples a preview of His appearance in this glorified spiritual state. “He was transfigured...His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light” (Matthew:17:2).

Years later, at the writing of the book of Revelation, John saw a vision of the resurrected, glorified Christ. Notice how John describes His awesome appearance: “His hair was as white as snow-white wool, and his eyes flamed like fire; his feet were like burnished bronze refined in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of a mighty torrent...His face shone like the sun in full strength” (Revelation:1:14-16, REB).

This language describes Jesus Christ, the glorified Son of God, as a being of awe-inspiring brilliance. We, too, will share that dazzling appearance!

After His resurrection Jesus had the ability to take on the appearance He had when He existed in the flesh. Early on the morning after He rose from the garden tomb, Mary Magdalene visited His grave. When she saw the tomb was empty, she began to weep (John:20:11).

Then “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’” (verse 15). So Jesus appeared to Mary as a normal human being rather than in His radiant state. She at first mistook Him for the gardener.

On another occasion Jesus appeared from nowhere inside a closed room where His disciples were meeting: “And after eight days His disciples were again inside...Jesus came, the doors being shut, and stood in the midst, and said, ‘Peace to you!’” (John:20:26). After His resurrection Jesus was able to pass through solid barriers—such as the walls of a building or the stone enclosure of His tomb.

Like Jesus, when we are changed to spirit we will not be limited by the laws that govern physical things. With the ability to simply materialize as Jesus did, we will not be subject to restrictions on physical objects. As part of this change we will no longer need to eat to survive, but apparently will have the option of eating for pleasure and fellowship if we choose. In two of Jesus’ post-resurrection appearances He shared a meal with His disciples (Luke:24:28-30; John:21:9-15).

Those to whom God gives eternal life in the resurrection will forever possess these supernatural characteristics. Notice the description of the resurrection in the book of Daniel: “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever”(Daniel:12:2-3, NIV).

To better understand just what all this means, be sure to read our free booklet **What Is Your Destiny?**

What will we do as spirit beings?

As spirit beings in God's family, we will live and work at the highest possible level and environment. Jesus said, "And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent" (John:17:3). We will spend eternity with God in His environment—the world of spirit and unimaginable power. We will not sit idle in our new life. We will be positively occupied. Jesus said, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working" (John:5:17).

When Christ returns to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, those in the first resurrection will serve as judges (Revelation:20:4) and priests (verse 6) and will "reign on the earth" (Revelation:5:10). We will not go to heaven to live passively and idly.

Jesus will return to a world that has largely destroyed itself by living in opposition to the commands of its Creator. He will teach people to obey God's laws. He will begin a massive reeducation process to help people *un* learn their old ways of doing things and for the first time learn to do things God's way.

Notice Isaiah's prophecy of this future rule of Jesus as Messiah and King over the earth, wherein "mountains" and "hills" are symbolic of larger and smaller kingdoms or political states respectively:

"Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people 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 shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.

"He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore" (Isaiah:2:2-4).

At that time Christ will teach all people who have not known God's way. He will be assisted in this by all who are changed into glorified children of God in the resurrection at His return (see Luke:20:36).

If we enter that new life we will be endowed with great power and unlimited energy. As immortal members of God's family we will be like "the everlasting God, the LORD, the Creator of the ends of the earth, [who] neither faints nor is weary" (Isaiah:40:28).

A change for the better

Describing the event that will change our mortal bodies, Paul writes: "The sun has a splendour of its own, the moon another splendour, and the stars yet another; and one

star differs from another in brightness. So it is with the resurrection of the dead: what is sown as a perishable thing *is raised imperishable*. Sown in humiliation, *it is raised in glory*; sown in weakness, *it is raised in power*; sown a physical body, *it is raised a spiritual body*” (1 Corinthians:15:41-44, REB).

God will give us bodies that will never tire nor grow ill—and minds having the kind of supernatural abilities He has. Reigning with Christ (Revelation:2:26; 3:21), we will help bring about worldwide peace. We will assist in spreading the knowledge of God to the most distant lands in His globe-spanning program of reeducation. “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain,” He tells us, “for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the LORD as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah:11:9).

Those changed at Christ’s return will include all His faithful followers at His return as well as the dead who were called, had repented and who lived in faithful obedience to God. It will include all of the faithful listed in Hebrews 11, who “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” (verse 13).

Those who died in faith include Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (verses 17-21). The promise they have not yet received is the promise of the Kingdom of God. As Jesus says, “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” (Matthew:8:11). Remember that the Kingdom of Heaven is synonymous with the Kingdom of God, which Christ will establish on earth at His return.

Responding to God’s invitation

You can be among those who arise from all parts of the world in the resurrection to be with Christ in His Kingdom— *if you respond to God’s invitation*. God is issuing that call through the preaching of the gospel. This very booklet you are reading is part of that effort.

The calling of God is not offered to everyone in this age. Jesus told His disciples that the understanding of God’s truth is not yet available to many: “It has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given” (Matthew:13:11).

The Bible speaks in several places about God’s “elect” or chosen people. They are called to understand these things now, in this present age, but the rest—the vast majority—will not be called until later.

Most of the people of Israel, God’s nation spoken of extensively in the Old Testament, were not called to understand the Kingdom of God during their lifetimes. Their hearts were hardened, their minds blinded. But the opportunity for most of them will come in the second resurrection. “Israel has not obtained what it seeks; but the elect have obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Romans:11:7).

Yet as Paul explains in this same chapter, the time is coming when “all Israel will be saved, as it is written: ‘The Deliverer will come out of Zion, and He will turn away ungodliness from Jacob [i.e., Israel]’” (verse 26). God’s calling is carried out according to His timetable. When all is said and done, His plan is entirely fair to everyone.

Peter explains that those who now become a part of His Church are chosen in this age to receive salvation in the first resurrection. Peter says of them, “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” (1 Peter:2:9).

The good news is that God eventually will offer eternal life to everyone who repents. He desires that everyone enter His Kingdom. He wants to share this opportunity for eternal life with all (2 Peter:3:9).

In a final, breathtaking view of what God has in store for those who serve Him, the apostle John was inspired to write this glimpse of the future in Revelation, the last book of the Bible: “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...He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son” (Revelation:21:4, 7).

The future God has planned for us is fantastic beyond belief! It is far superior to the fanciful heaven of men’s imagination. God will share the real future with all who repent and turn from their sins. As for those who willfully refuse to repent, they will not suffer forever in hell. They will simply cease to be. But this need not happen to you.

You may share in the eternal Kingdom of God if you heed the words Jesus spoke when He began His ministry: “The time has come...The kingdom of God is near . *Repent and believe the good news!*” (Mark:1:15, NIV).

Take comfort in the truth of God. There is no need to fear death if you turn your life toward Him. After all, He wants you to live with Him in abundant joy forever and ever. And He’ll make that happen—if you let Him!

0 Comments

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