

IS HEAVEN THE REWARD?

Many hold the popular belief that heaven is the only reward of the saved. However, even among those who believe that heaven is the ultimate reward of the saved, there are many different ideas as to when, where, and how one gets to heaven. The concept of going to heaven immediately after death is almost a universally accepted teaching among the world's Christian religions. To even question this teaching would seem like blasphemy to many who believe heaven is the reward of the saved.

What does the Bible actually teach about the reward of the saved? If the dead in Christ go to heaven, we should be able to find abundant proof within the Bible showing when, where, and how people obtain this reward. Can this type of documentation actually be found in the Bible? The answer is, No, it cannot be found in the Bible, but what is found in the Bible about the rewards offered to the saved is far more exciting than the nebulous idea of going off to heaven without a clue as to what one would do there for eternity.

If you want to know what the Bible actually says about the rewards that the Sovereign God has in store for those he calls to participate in his earthly nation of kings, priests, and ambassadors during the gospel age to salvation, you might want to pay careful attention to the information contained in this broadcast. Because, you will hear things that very few people understand or teach about an awesome opportunity that is only being offered during the gospel age of salvation.

THE WORD HEAVEN

There are three heavens referred to in the Bible:

The atmosphere surrounding this world (Gen.1:20; 27:28; Deut.33:28)

Outer space where the planets and stars reside (Gen.1:14-15; Psalms.8:3)

And God's dwelling place 2.Cor.12:2-4; Heb.8:1-5; Rev.2:7;22:1-2)

Of these three heavens, most believe that their reward is to inhabit the third heaven where God

dwells. But, is this really the reward of the saved?

WAS HEAVEN EVER PROMISED AS A REWARD?

Is there any solid proof in the Bible that anyone was ever promised residence in heaven as a reward of the saved? The answer to this question is vitally important in order to gain an understanding of what the Bible actually teaches about the awesome rewards for those who participate in the first resurrection at Christ's return.

NO MAN HAS EVER GONE TO HEAVEN

Before explaining what the rewards of the righteous are to be. It is important to review what the Bible says about who is and who is not in heaven. It is without question that God the Father, Jesus Christ, and the heavenly host of angels are the inhabitants of heaven. But what about humans? Has anyone besides Jesus Christ ever gone to heaven?

In the third chapter of John's gospel, he records this about Jesus having a conversation with the Pharisee Nicodemus, Jesus said:

"Truly, truly, I say to you, we speak of that which we know, and testify of that which we have seen; and you do not believe our witness. If I have told you earthly things and you do not believe them. If I tell you heavenly things, How can you believe them? No man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man . . ." (Jn.3:13 KJV).

How did Jesus know that no man had ascended? He knew this, because he came from heaven and knew who was and was not there.

The Jews of Jesus' time understood that no human had ever gone to heaven; they believed that, when a person died, they were dead, waiting the judgment:

When Jesus told the Jews that if a person kept his teachings, he would never die. The Jews said to him, "Now we know that you have a devil. Abraham is dead, and the prophets; and you say, If a man

keep my saying, he shall never taste death. Are you greater than our father Abraham, which is dead? . . ." (Jn.8:52-53 KJV).

In his first major evangelistic sermon after Jesus' death and resurrection, the Apostle Peter said this:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us to this day. . . For David is not ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:29, 34 KJV).

Peter made these statements about king David fifty days after Jesus had been resurrected. At this point in history, King David was still dead and buried; he had not been resurrected to life.

In Hebrews chapter 11, there is a long list of righteous individuals who died without receiving God's promises:

Beginning in verse 33, the writer says:

"Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection:" (vs.33-35 KJV).

If any are worthy to receive the promises of God, it would surely be these champions of faith: Abraham, and Moses whom God called his friends, Rahab who had faith that God would protect her, because of her kindness to the Israelite spies, and King David who loved God with great zeal. All of these are among the great men and women of faith. However, about thirty years after Jesus' death and resurrection when the letter to the Hebrews was written, these righteous individuals were still dead in their graves.

Continuing in verses 39 the writer says:

"And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise: God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect" (vs.39-40 KJV) See also verse 13.

Twice in this eleventh chapter these righteous individuals are mentioned as having died without receiving the promises that God made to them.

The simple truth is that Abel, Enoch, Abraham, Moses, Rahab, David, the righteous of all ages, and the prophets, including Enoch and Elijah, are not alive in heaven; they are dead awaiting the return of Jesus to resurrect them and give them their reward. See Matt.24:29-31; 1.Cor.15:50-54; 1.Thes.4:16-17; 2.Thes.2:1-8.

WHAT ARE THE REWARDS OF THE RIGHTEOUS?

Believe it or not, the reward for being righteous is not to float around heaven playing harp music for eternity. God the Father and Jesus Christ have something far more spectacular in store for those who are found worthy to take part in the first resurrection.

The apostle Paul said this to the Corinthians about the rewards reserved in heaven for the righteous:

"But as it is written, Eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for them that love him" (1.Cor.2:9 KJV).

The following are just some of the rewards that are mentioned in the Bible that are reserved for righteousness:

- To have one's name in the Book of Life (Phil.4:3)
- To become an immortal spirit-being (Rom.2:7)
- To become a son of God (Jn.1:12; Rom.8:14)
- To be a joint-heir with Christ (Rom.8:16-18)

- To inherit all things (Rev.21:7)
- To inherit the earth (Psa.37:9)
- To inherit the Kingdom of God (Matt.25:31-34)

To have access to New Jerusalem (Rev.22:14)

To be in the first resurrection (Rev.20:6)

To be a co-ruler with Christ (Rev.2:26-27)

To become a king and a priest in the Kingdom of God (Rev.1:4-6)

These are just a few of the enormous rewards that God has promised to those who live a righteous life. The magnitude of the rewards for those who obtain salvation is so far beyond our imagination and dreams that it defies human comprehension.

THE BOOK OF LIFE

For the righteous, the Book of Life is the most important book that has ever been written, because their names are recorded within its pages. However, some feel that, because the saints' names are recorded in heaven, they will go to heaven after death. Therefore, it is important to know what the Bible really says about the Book of Life and how it pertains to the righteous.

While beseeching God to spare the Israelites who had rebelled at Sinai, Moses said the following:

"Yet now, if you will forgive their sin"; and if not, blot me, I pray you, out of your book which you have written. And the Lord God said to Moses, Whosoever has sinned against me, him will I blot out of my book" (Ex.32:32-33 KJV Para.). See also Psa.69:28; Rev.21:27; 22:19.

The following are three major things to notice about this book:

1. It is God's property.
2. God controls whose name can be placed into or taken out of it.
3. If a person's name is taken out of it, they will not have eternal life.

It is very evident that the righteous have their names recorded in the Book of Life, which is in heaven. However, there is absolutely nothing anywhere in the scriptures that remotely indicates that the saved are going to heaven because their names are written in the Book of Life. It is obvious from the many references throughout the Bible that refer to the Book of Life, that this book is a record, not a permit to reside in heaven:

Jesus told his disciples:

"Behold, I give to you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over, the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. Notwithstanding, do not rejoice in this, that the spirits are subject to you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven" (Lk.10:19-20 KJV). See also Phil.4:3, Heb.12:23; Rev.13:7-8;17:8.

In the Book of Revelation Jesus said:

"He that overcomes, the same shall be clothed in white raiment; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels" (Rev.3:5 KJV).

IMMORTALITY

The quality of life promised by the Father is comparable to that which he himself has. God is a spirit-being who inherently possesses the highest form of life: immortality on the divine plane of existence. Immortal life springs forth from itself and is not dependent on any other source to sustain it, because it is self-sustaining:

It is abundantly clear from studying the Bible that God the Father intends to share immortality with those he calls to repentance, baptism, and conversion prior to the first resurrection. It is the acquisition of immortality that allows a person to pass beyond this physical existence into the Family of God as a son of God.

The apostle Paul told the elect at Corinth:

"Behold I show 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1.Cor.15:51-54 KJV). See also 2.Tim.1:9-10; Rev.20:6.

If you want to know what the Bible actually says about immortal life and how to obtain it, get a copy of my book, "How to Become Immortal.

BECOME A SON OF GOD

While explaining the type of life style that a truly righteous person should live, Paul explains the close family relationship that one has with God the Father, Paul says:

"Come out from among them, and be you separate, says the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father to you, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty," (2.Cor.6:17-18 KJV).]

The writer to the Hebrews also said that the righteousness become a spiritual son of God the Father and a brother of Jesus Christ:

"For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons into glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings. For both he that sanctifies and they who are sanctified are all one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren," (Heb.2:10-11 KJV).

Jesus who was the Creator God before he came to earth as a human suffered an unjust death so that you and I can become his brother and a son of God the Father just as he now is. To become a brother of Jesus Christ and a son of the God the Father in his

divine family is an awesome reward.

JOINT-HEIR WITH CHRIST

Paul said that, through the righteous sacrifice of Jesus Christ, we are adopted into the divine family of God and become and heir of God. Paul said:

"But when the fullness of time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law, To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because you are sons, God has sent forth the spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying Abba, Father. Wherefore you are no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Gal.4:4-7 KJV).

INHERIT ALL THINGS

What an amazing reward! Not only are the righteous heirs, but also joint-heirs with Jesus. Moreover, they will share in the inheritance of all that exists now and forever.

In the Book of Revelation Jesus says this about God's heirs: "He that overcomes shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son" (Rev.21:7 KJV).

But Just what are the righteous to inherit?

INHERIT THE EARTH

Part of the promise that God gave to Abraham was that he and his descendants would inherit the earth and be a blessing to all nations forever. See Gen.12:2-3; 13:15-16; 15:7, 18:18; 26:1-5; Rom.4:13.

Jesus said: "Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matt.5:5 KJV).

The Bible clearly shows that, when the righteous become spirit-beings, they will inherit the earth. But, what possible use could they have for a physical earth? It seems that the earth would be of no use to them unless God is not finished with his plan for the salvation of humanity after Christ

returns. Therein lies one of the purposes for the earth as an inheritance; it is to be inhabited by both spirit and physical beings as God's plan for the salvation of humanity continues after Christ returns.

INHERIT THE KINGDOM OF GOD

Jesus also said : "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven" (Matt.5:3 KJV).

Here, Jesus speaks of those who will obtain the ultimate joy of sharing the rewards of the Kingdom of God with him because of their spirit of humility. The undeniable fact is that there is a Kingdom [a government] of Heaven, which is owned by God the Father, and the righteous are to inherit it.

When Jesus told the parable of the shepherd dividing his sheep from the goats, he clearly reveals that the Kingdom of God was prepared as an inheritance for the righteous before mankind was created:

Jesus said:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he shall sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King [Jesus] say to them on his right hand, Come, you blessed of my Father [God the Father], inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world:" (Matt.25:31-34 KJV Para.). See also Jms.2:5.

HAVE ACCESS TO NEW JERUSALEM

Not only do the righteous inherit the Kingdom of God but also they have access to New Jerusalem from where the Father will rule all of his creation.

Revelation chapter 22, verse 14 says this:

"Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city" (Rev.22:14

KJV). See also Rev. 21:1 through 22:13.

CO-RULERSHIP WITH CHRIST

For those who are called to salvation in this age and overcome the trials of this life. Jesus promises co-rulership with him in the Kingdom of God:

Revelation chapter 3, verse 1 says that:

"To him that overcomes will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne" (Rev.3:21 KJV).

Revelation chapter 2, beginning in verse 26 says:

"And he that overcomes, and keeps my works to the end, to him will I give power over the nations: And he shall rule them with a rod of Iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Rev.2:26-27 KJV).

TO BECOME A KING AND A PRIEST

In his introduction to the Book of Revelation, the apostle John speaks of two more rewards for those who maintain a righteous lifestyle during this age, John says:

"John to the seven churches which are in Asia: Grace to you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne; And from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth. To him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, And has made us kings and priests to God and his Father; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Be it so" (Rev.1:4-6 KJV). See also Rev.5:10.

John speaks of the future when he says that the elect are kings and priests. This indicates that as far as the Father is concerned, this reward and responsibility has already been given to his elect children.

IN MY FATHER'S HOUSE

Jesus said this to his disciples:

"In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am" (Jn.14:2-3 NIV).

Because this is one of the primary scriptures many quote to support their belief in going to heaven after death, it is important to discover what Jesus actually said.

The Greek word in this text, can mean 'staying', 'tarrying,' 'abiding,' or 'place to stay' (e.g., an inn or watch house). In the New Testament, it only occurs twice and denotes a dwelling place or an abode. Moreover, there are many Rabbinic parallels that denote the phrase "my father's house" as a place of rest.

In this text, Jesus is making a statement of fact. He will go to prepare a place for the righteous where his Father dwells. The Greek word for 'place' is 'topos', which can mean a geographical location, but it can also be used in its abstract form to mean a position or office of endeavor. Other scriptures show that what Jesus is preparing is not only a space to inhabit but also positions and offices of authority within which the elect will function.

Because Jesus says he will come back and take the elect to the place he has prepared for them, many feel this means that they are going to be in heaven with Christ. However, the Bible clearly show that ecclesiastical and governmental positions will be given to the righteous through which they will govern the physical earth with Christ for at least a thousand years.

Additionally, Christ said nothing about heaven being the place of reward or residence for the saints; he merely states that he was going to prepare a place for them and take them there so they can be where he is. Many scriptures show that after his return, he will administer the government

of God over the earth from Jerusalem. See Isa.11:5-9; 27:13; 65:17-25; Mic.4:1-7; Zech.8:3-4.

In John chapter 14, Jesus merely explains that he would go to heaven to prepare positions and offices of authority and responsibility in which the elect will function in the Kingdom of God. Just because the elect have access to heavenly Jerusalem (Rev.20:6, 21:27; 22:14) does not prevent them from reigning on earth with Jesus.

There is no doubt that Jesus went to heaven to prepare a place for the elect and there is no doubt that the elect will be wherever Jesus is going to be. In fact, the place where Jesus is going to be is right here on earth with righteous individuals who have obtained salvation.

Jesus telling his disciple that he was going to prepare a place for them, does not prove that heaven is the reward of the saved and that at death the righteous are carried off to heaven to reside for all eternity. What readily becomes apparent when one researches the teaching of heaven as the reward is that this teaching relies on mis-translations, obscure scriptures, and traditions to support this teaching.

OUR HOPE IS IN HEAVEN

Some people feel that because there are scriptures which state that the hope of the righteous is laid up in heaven, the reward of the saved will be to go to heaven at death. But just what is this hope that is laid up in heaven for the righteous? Is it to reside in heaven forever or is it something very different?

Paul said to the Colossians:

"We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, Since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which you have to all the saints, For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof you heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel;" (Col.1:3-5 KJV).

The English word 'hope' in this text is from a Greek word ('elpis'), which connotes 'faith', 'trust', 'assurance', 'an expectation of the future', and

'comfort in distress'.

Paul says the hope of the righteous is reserved in heaven. But, what is this hope of the righteous reserved in heaven?

The apostle Paul does not say that our hope is to go to heaven or that our hope is to be with Christ in heaven. He just says that our hope (that is, our faith, trust, assurance, and expectation) is laid up in heaven.

Many of the things that are laid up in heaven as rewards will be given according to the effort of each individual. Jesus said, "But lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust does corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matt.6:20 KJV).

How does one lay up treasures in heaven? Many scriptures document that it takes special effort to gain rewards outside of the gift of immortality and eternal life:

Jesus said:

"Behold I am coming soon! My reward is with me, and I will give to everyone according to what he has done" (Rev.22:12 NIV).

And the apostle John said this:

"Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for, but that you may be rewarded fully" (2.Jn.8 NIV).

The hope that is laid up in heaven is the faith that God the Father and Jesus Christ who are in heaven will fulfill their promises to give us our rewards in that great day when Jesus returns to rule the earth.

REWARDS ARE RESERVED IN HEAVEN

There are many scriptures that show that the rewards for the saints are reserved in heaven. However, do any of these references state that the saint's reward is heaven, or that they must reside in heaven to receive their reward? Absolutely not!

Jesus said:

"Rejoice, and be exceedingly glad: for great is your reward in heaven: . . ." (Matt.5:12 KJV; Lk.6:23).

The apostle Peter said the rewards of the righteous are reserved in heaven, Peter said:

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy has begotten us again to a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fades not away, reserved in heaven for you" (1.Pet.1:3-4 KJV). See also Acts 23:6; 24:15, Tit.1:2.

There is no denying that the scriptures show that the reward of the righteous is reserved in heaven. However, are there any clear scriptures that say heaven is the reward of the saved or that the inheritance of the saints is to live in heaven forever? No, there are not! In fact, nowhere in the entire Bible does it say that going to heaven is the reward of the saved.

SUMMARY

Simple logic should tell us, that if the righteous were to go directly to heaven at death to receive their reward, why would they need to be resurrected (1.Cor.15:52-53)? It simply does not make any sense to resurrect (restore to life) a person who is already alive. Moreover, all of the scriptures that speak in great detail about the resurrection of God's elect would be meaningless, and there would be no reason for Christ to return and bring the elect a reward, if they have already received it.

The apostle Paul said he and the other children of God will receive their reward when Jesus returns to earth: Paul said:

"Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but to all them also that love his appearing" (2.Tim.4:8 KJV). See also Matt.16:21; Rev.11:18; 14:12-13; 22:12.

Why do those who teach that going to heaven is the reward of the saved rely on mistranslations, obscure scriptures, and tradition for their support of this teaching? The simple truth is that the Bible does not teach that heaven is the reward of the saved. This teaching is another example of the many contradictions between what people believe and what the Bible actually says.

There are many sincere and dedicated people who believe that they are worshiping God in truth and that the reward of living a righteous life is to go off to heaven at death. However, this is not what the Bible says. Sincerity and dedication do not equal truth! Only truth is truth! Sincerity only shows the attitude with which people do what they do.

Only God determines what truth is and is not. The Bible teaches that, "There is a way which seems right to a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Pro.14:12 KJV).

Its apparent that many people are truly dedicated to their religious precepts, but this does not mean that they understand the truth of God. The sad fact, is that, most people today who profess to believe in the Bible, have been misled by false prophets and teachers, who teach a counterfeit of God's truth.

If this were not true, there would only be one truth being taught and only one unified body teaching this one truth. Instead there are more than 20,000 differing associations and organizations who profess to teach biblical truth, but they all differ in what they believe and teach as truth. Logic tells us that, because both the Old and New Testaments record that there is only one faith and only one method of worship that is acceptable to God, if any one of these thousands of differing groups is correct in their worship of God and their understanding of what is written in the Bible, then all the others are incorrect and stand condemned as followers and teachers of a false system of worship and belief.

As confusing as all of the opinions are about what happens after a persons physical death and what a righteous person will be doing for all eternity. You do not have to be confused, because a small amount of study into the first resurrection, the plan of God

for the salvation of mankind, and the responsibilities of the righteous after Christ returns, will easily disprove the teaching of going off to heaven as the only reward for the righteous.

The rewards God has prepared for the righteous are far more exciting than going off to heaven. The Bible teaches that the rewards of the righteous are immortality, becoming a son of God the Father, a joint inheritance and rulership with Jesus Christ in the God family, and much, much more. The Bible also teaches a life full of peace, happiness, joy, excitement, and pleasures forever for those who obtain salvation:

King David said of the awesome rewards that will given to the righteous:

"You will make me to know the way of life. In your presence are fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forever" (Psa.16:11 Para.).

The teaching that the righteous go directly to heaven after death is a false teaching and the scriptures clearly show the error of this belief. As you can see by the clear scriptures that I have presented, that there is a great contradiction between what people believe about the rewards offered for living a righteous life and what the Bible actually says.

God the Father in offering a tremendous opportunity to those who will heed his call during this age, this opportunity is far more than to going off to heaven and leading some meaningless unproductive life for eternity. What the Bible reveals about this opportunity and the rewards that are offered is truly astounding:

I see that my time is up, if you want to know more about the rewards being offered for living a righteous life and how to guarantee that you receive them or want to know more about the other subjects that I have briefly touched on in this in this broadcast, Write to me at the at the address given in the following announcement. Until next time this is Bud Cocherell for Bible Research .org.

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