

*If God so loved
the World...*

Why are so many people

GOING TO
HELL?



For more on “sola scriptura” Bible teachings, go to:
www.cgcm.us



© 2009 Guy Swenson All rights reserved.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

This article may be printed, distributed, placed on web sites or quoted as long as this copyright is reproduced with the material, proper attribution given to the author and the material is offered free and at no charge.

Guy Swenson may be reached at guy@cgcm.us

Photo Credits: Cover top: iStock Photos, Bottom: Flucas, Fotolia.com , pg. 5: Gerald Bernard, Fotolia.com, pg. 6: Peter Keruda, sxc.hu, pg. 17: Langdu, iStock Photo, pg. 18: ajaykampani, iStock Photo, pg. 21: Ashley Whitworth, Fotolia.com, pg. 22: Mark Goddard Photography, iStock Photo, pg. 25: Sean Warren, iStock Photo

Graphic Design by Boni Buchanan: Boni@bonibuchanan.com



raditional Christian teachings about hell would consign at least 80% or more of humanity straight to an eternal and never-ending torment in an ever-burning “hell” when they die.

Is this really the action of a just and merciful God?

The common teaching about hell is really a mistaken tradition that has replaced what the Bible actually reveals about life, death and God’s plan of salvation. It has extinguished the real hope that God offers for everyone who has ever lived.

There are simple Biblical truths that open up new avenues of understanding about how God treats everyone with respect and justice. 80% of humanity is not going to be tormented forever in a burning “hell fire.” Read on to find out what traditions hide and what God intends for you to understand.

CONTENTS

*W*HAT WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT ABOUT HELL IS WRONG
– 3 –

*W*HAT IF THE BIBLE TAUGHT THAT EVERYBODY WHO HAS DIED
HAS GONE TO “HELL?”
– 4 –

*S*ATAN AND HIS DEMONS ARE IN A “HELL”
– 6 –

*G*EHENNA: A FIRE THAT DOESN'T JUST SINGE – IT CONSUMES
– 7 –

*T*HE KINGDOM OF SATAN VS THE KINGDOM OF GOD
– 10 –

*W*E'VE BEEN LEFT IGNORANT OF GOD'S REAL PLAN OF
SALVATION FOR HUMANITY
– 12 –

*T*HESE CHOICES INVOLVE ENTIRE NATIONS
– 13 –

*H*OW WILL GOD OFFER SALVATION TO PEOPLE WHO WERE
NEVER CHRISTIANS?
– 14 –

**WHEN THE DEAD COME TO LIFE IT IS CALLED
A “RESURRECTION”**

– 15 –

WHEN IS THIS “RESURRECTION” OF CHRISTIANS?

– 17 –

THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY

– 19 –

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

– 19 –

HOPE FOR BABIES THAT DIE

– 20 –

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES RESURRECTED

– 22 –

THE SECOND RESURRECTION


– 24 –

THE DESTRUCTION OF THE UNREPENTANT WICKED

– 25 –

ANSWERING THE QUESTION OF THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

– 26 –

oward the end of a long airplane flight, the flight attendant sat down next to my wife and me and began chatting. When she found out that I was a church pastor, a troubled look crossed her face.

Her father had just died. He hadn't been a Christian nor had he led a particularly "good" life. After the funeral she had talked to her priest, and he said that her father was not "saved" and was burning in hell.

With tears in her eyes she asked me, "Do you think my dad is burning in hell?"

Whatever I answered had to be succinct because there were only a few minutes left in the flight. This flight attendant had struck at the heart of a "burning" issue: Only about 20% of the world's population even remotely identify themselves as "Christians." Using traditional Christian teachings as a guide, it would seem that God the Father and Jesus the Christ are losing 80% of the world's population to "hell."

I had some good news for the flight attendant – but it wasn't what she expected. You see she, like most people who attend church services or mass, had been taught traditions. Traditions about heaven. Traditions about hell.

These traditions are often only loosely based on what the Bible teaches. When we understand what the Bible clearly teaches on these subjects, it is a fountain of hope and good news.

The good news? God really does love us – all of us. In spite of what many people say, God isn't calling everyone to repentance

today. Some will be given the opportunity to repent later. **Most have never heard what the Bible says about a resurrection when God will give everyone who has ever lived a chance to become a servant of His.**

How can that be? Wait until you see what the Bible really says about God's plan of salvation.

First, we need to get rid of three misconceptions that are stumbling blocks to understanding what God has in store for us and consider that:

1. What We've Been Taught About Hell Is Wrong

Most of us have been taught the wrong ideas about hell. The idea that those who die without becoming Christians are "lost" forever and tormented eternally by demons is not Biblical. What the Bible teaches gives hope.

2. We've Been Taught Wrongly About Who Is In Charge

Satan – and Adam – have escaped a lot of the blame for what is going on in this world. Misunderstanding the impact of their roles makes God look weak and incompetent.

3. We've Been Left Ignorant of God's Real Plan

Jesus and the apostles taught about the Kingdom of God. Most preachers today focus on their tradition of the righteous going to heaven and the wicked going straight to hell. When we understand about the Kingdom of God and the resurrections we can see God's plan for offering a fair opportunity for salvation to everyone who ever lived. Suddenly what God is doing makes sense.

So let's take some time to examine where Christians have gotten off track and what the Bible actually teaches. Then we can understand the good news of the hope for everyone who has ever lived – including the unrepentant father of my flight attendant acquaintance.

What the Bible really says about these traditions may surprise you. Let's start with the traditional teaching about "hell."

WHAT WE'VE BEEN TAUGHT ABOUT HELL IS WRONG

Most Christians are taught that those who are not Christians go directly to hell when they die. A popular pastor, author and television teacher, Charles F. Stanley, teaches this about hell:

"Scripture speaks of a literal lake of fire, or hell. But some believers find this hard to reconcile with biblical teachings about God's love, forgiveness, and grace. They consider it excessive for a God of love to send people to hell forever. After all, they reason, how can 70 or 80 years of sin merit an eternity of torment?..."

Now, this in no way implies that hell will be a good place for anybody. People in hell will forever be separated from God and all that is good. As much as I dislike the idea, I do believe that the lake of fire (hell) is a real, literal place. And as hard as it is to grasp, I do accept the Bible's teaching that people will eventually be sent to remain there for eternity."
(IntouchMinistries.org, subject: "Lake of Fire")

Isn't it interesting that even Charles Stanley seems to have difficulty reconciling an intuitive sense of righteous judgment with the traditional teaching about hell? Catholics, like most Protestants, teach this same vision of sinners suffering forever in an ever-burning hell.

Most Protestants and Catholics teach from the same traditions that those who die and are not Christians go to a place of intense and extreme punishment where they spend their eternal life suffering

4 Rules for Eliminating Biblical Errors

1. When understanding a Biblical teaching, all scriptures on the subject from both the Old and the New Testaments must be considered.
2. Unambiguous or explicit statements in the Bible are used to understand analogies or unclear Biblical passages.
3. Positive and negative examples in the Bible can be used to understand appropriate behaviors or God's intents and purposes.
4. Where there is no explicit statement or example, we are left to use Biblical principles as a guide to our behaviors and choices. ❀

in an ever-burning hell fire. In these traditions, those condemned to this fire are eternally tormented by Satan and his demons.

For more than a thousand years this fearsome place of a never-ending fiery torment has been used to frighten people into compliance with church teachings and obedience. As Charles Stanley wondered, doesn't the traditional teaching of hell create a picture of a harsh and unjust God condemning people to eternal torment for sins committed over a short span of life?

That really is a good question. Thankfully, God's plan for salvation is better than what these traditions teach. God is exactly as we have all hoped: both loving and just.

While a few Scriptures are cited by both Catholic and Protestants to substantiate their traditions, when one considers *all* the related passages in the Bible, the truth is really something quite different. These traditional teachings about hell and God's plan of salvation are not sound Biblical teachings. God, as a loving Father, really is working with humanity in a very different way.

If you have one, take out your Bible and look up the scriptures as we go along. Don't believe me, believe what is written in your own Bible.



*W*HAT IF THE BIBLE TAUGHT THAT EVERYBODY WHO HAS DIED HAS GONE TO "HELL?"

Did you know that there are three completely different types of "hell" mentioned in the Bible?

The first "hell" is the grave where people are buried. It is called "hell" in the King James Version of the Bible and others. The Hebrew "sheol" and the Greek "hades" mean the grave and are translated as "hell," "grave" or similar words (like "pit.")

In the King James translation, "hades" is translated as the "grave" in 1 Corinthians 15:55

*"O death, where is thy sting? O **grave** (hades), where is thy victory?"*

When speaking about Jesus being buried in the tomb for three days and three nights, Peter's speech in Acts 2:31 is translated using "hell" for the Greek word "hades:"

"He seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in **hell** (hades) neither his flesh did see corruption."

The Hebrew verse Peter quoted is from Psalm 16:10. There the Hebrew word "sheol" is used in the same manner as the Greek "hades."

"For thou wilt not leave my soul in **hell** (sheol); neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption."

Speaking of Jacob's mourning for the loss of Joseph he says in Genesis 37:35:

"And all his sons and all his daughters rose up to comfort him; but he refused to be comforted; and he said, 'For I will go down into the **grave** (sheol) unto my son mourning'. Thus his father wept for him."

So, in a very real sense, everyone who dies and is buried "goes to hell" or the grave. The Bible likens death in the grave to be like sleep – not a time of torment.

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

"These things He said, and after that He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up.' Then His disciples said, 'Lord, if he sleeps he will get well.' However, **Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep.**" (John 11:11-13)





The restrained condition of Satan and his demons is also called “hell.” Satan and his demons were at one time faithful angels of God. At some point they rebelled and were cast down to the earth. While angels are very powerful, the fallen angels or demons are under a type of restraint. The Greek word *tartaroo* is used only once when describing this restrained condition of the demons. In 2 Peter 2:4 we find:

“For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to **hell** (*tartaroo*), and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment...” (KJV)

Jude also speaks of these fallen angels in Jude 1:6:

“And the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, **He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day...**”

Isn't it also interesting that the Bible suggests that it really is Satan and his demons that are in a chained condition? The traditional teaching of hell transfers to humans that which is actually the fate of Satan and his demon followers.





*G*EHENNA: A FIRE THAT DOESN'T JUST SINGE – IT CONSUMES

The traditional teachings of hell reflect a human body being inflicted with immense pain from the burning of “hell fire.” The fire is hot enough to cause pain and agony but not so hot as to consume all one’s flesh. While preaching about being burned and scalded day in and day out may make for a scary sermon, the Greek word “gehenna” which is translated “hell” 12 times in the New Testament is actually a much hotter place .

The Greek word “gehenna” actually comes from a Hebrew word “ga-Hinnom” referring to the valley of Hinnom, just outside of Jerusalem. At the time of Jesus it had become a garbage dump with a fire continually burning. As new garbage and the corpses of animals and criminals were tossed onto the fires, the refuse would burn to ash.

This consuming fire is the ultimate destiny for those who, when given a chance to have all deception removed and become Christians, refuse it and willfully choose to reject being a servant of God. The ultimate gehenna fire is likened to molten lava – incredibly hot. Malachi 4:1-3 describes this final judgment of the willfully rebellious in terms of an all consuming fire:

“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.*

But to you who fear my name The Sun of Righteousness shall arise with healing in His wings; and you shall go out and grow fat like stall-fed calves.

You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet on the day that I do this,’ says the LORD of hosts.”

Did you notice that the proud and wicked will be burned up like dried straw and reduced to ashes?

Another example of this final judgment is found in Revelation 20:11-15:

“Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books.”

“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. **And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.**”

This same lake of fire had already received the body of two enemies of Jesus called the “beast” and the “false prophet.” In Revelation 19:20:

✿ Sulfur turns blood red when it melts at a temperature of 239 degrees Fahrenheit (slightly above the boiling point of water). It begins burning at a temperature of between 478 and 511 degrees Fahrenheit.

A fiery lake of burning sulfur (also known as “brimstone” – hence the idea of a “fire and brimstone” sermon) is plenty hot to both kill and turn the bodies of rebels against God into, as the prophet Malachi describes, ash.

“But the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who had performed the miraculous signs on his behalf. With these signs he had deluded those who had received the mark of the beast and worshiped his image. **The two of them were thrown alive into the fiery lake of burning sulfur.**”

So the burning hell fire that Jesus spoke of in Matthew 10:28 is the final and complete extinction of the body and soul.

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but **rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (gehenna).**” (KJV)

Jesus made it abundantly clear that **both the body and the soul can be destroyed**. For these who have rejected God and refused to submit to Jesus, their consciousness, their physical life, their bodies and everything that makes us who we are is snuffed out in a final judgment.

Rather than letting angry, rebellious and hateful people live in some sort of eternal suffering, the merciful God ends their life.

What about Charles F. Stanley's question: "*After all, they reason, how can 70 or 80 years of sin merit an eternity of torment?*" Looking at the Bible passages we've seen, the answer is simple: God doesn't torment unrepentant sinners for an eternity for sins committed over 70 or 80 years.

When everyone has had a full and complete chance to choose whether to submit to God and His Son, the ones still desiring to rebel against God and do evil to their neighbors will be judged, condemned and burned up. Those unrepentant sinners will have no more consciousness, no more thoughts and no more life. Rather than inheriting eternal life through Jesus Christ they will have the absolute stillness of death.

If the wicked are being tormented forever it means they actually have eternal life. This is exactly the opposite of what the apostle Paul wrote in Romans 6:23:

"For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

To fit the common tradition on the fate of the wicked tormented forever in an ever burning hell, Paul would have to write: "**The wages of sin is eternal life in torment**, and the gift of God is eternal life in heaven." That isn't what Paul wrote – yet people persist in teaching and believing a tradition that explicit Bible passages contradict.



Looking Ahead

- ✿ Satan was an angel who rebelled against God. (Revelation 12:1-9)
- ✿ The serpent in the garden of Eden was this same Satan.
- ✿ When Adam rebelled against God he cast his allegiance with Satan.
- ✿ Satan became the spirit ruler of Adam and his descendants.
- ✿ Satan's influence over mankind has been one of inspiring disobedience to God.
- ✿ Ultimately, Jesus will judge and overthrow Satan, removing the Devil from influencing mankind.

What tradition teaches is that death = eternal life, either in heaven or hell. What the Bible teaches is that eternal life is a gift **ONLY** to Christians. Remember Jesus said that the **body and soul can be destroyed**. (Matthew 10:28) Traditional teachings about sinners spending forever in hell conflict with what the Bible explicitly teaches about eternal life.

How can people be so deceived about what happens after death? The answer is found when we discover who is in charge in this world.

THE KINGDOM OF SATAN VS. THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In the Garden of Eden, Adam chose to serve Satan and reject God. With the exception of those few God called out of spiritual blindness, for Adam and his children, all humanity became, to one degree or another, a servant under Satan's influence. That is why the apostles Paul and John would both write of deception and a blindness that has come upon the entire world.

“Whose minds the god of this age has blinded, who do not believe, lest the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine on them.”
(2 Corinthians 4:4)

“So the great dragon was cast out, that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world; he was cast to the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.” (Revelation 12:9)

Adam's choice was more than a fork in the road. It was the founding of a new kingdom on this earth, inspired and led by Satan and his demons. It was the beginning of an age of deception and death. Adam's children and grandchildren murdered each other.

Sin not only entered the world of man – it conquered the world of man.

So why didn't God stop it? If He is a good God, a loving God, an all powerful God, why didn't He intervene?

First, God has intervened. Usually He has limited that intervention to a person here, a family there – sometimes a whole group of people. Sometimes He pushed one nation out of prominence and let another take its place.

But remember, God didn't choose to reject and abandon mankind. It has been mankind that has chosen – generation after generation – to reject and abandon God. God has respected mankind's decisions and allowed each generation to see the consequences of both personal and collective rebellion against Him.

When people wonder why a good and loving God doesn't heal a sick child, stop a man from murdering his colleagues or prevent a dictator from committing genocide against his enemies, there are often five perspectives lacking:



1.

Even to His obedient servants God does not promise a life without pain, suffering or loss.



2.

God has a plan of salvation for humanity that is on time, on schedule and will produce the best result.



3.

God has the power to resurrect both the righteous and the sinner. This life is not all there is.



4.

God wants mature sons and daughters. Maturity comes through self-sacrifice, delayed gratification and even suffering.



5.

God values our freedom to choose. With that choice, whether good or bad, comes the responsibility and consequences from our decisions.

WE'VE BEEN LEFT IGNORANT OF GOD'S REAL PLAN OF SALVATION FOR HUMANITY

Satan and those angels who also rebelled with him are responsible and accountable for their choices.

It should be noted that not only did Satan and his demons choose to rebel – two thirds of the angels chose *not to rebel* and remained faithful to God.

Next, God allowed Adam to choose – and Adam chose badly. Adam's choice was the foundation of this present world or "age" in which we live. Adam's choice opened the door for Satan to influence Adam, his descendants and ultimately all of mankind.

God allowed Adam to choose – and allowed Satan to be able to influence Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden. God expects mankind to be accountable for their decisions, but He also accepts responsibility and accountability for His decisions. In the book of Revelation there is an indication of the depth to which God accepted responsibility for creating mankind – even when they became rebellious. Before the foundation of this world – before Adam decided to rebel against God and pledge allegiance to Satan, Christ "died."

"All who dwell on the earth will worship him, whose names have not been written in the Book of Life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world."
(Revelation 13:8)

It was thousands of years before Jesus, the Word of God – the Logos – was made flesh and dwelt with men. (John 1:1-18) As the Lamb of God, Jesus was slain about 2,000 years ago.

But when Adam chose to rebel and commit sin, the commitment by God to send His Son to die for the sins of Adam, Eve and every one of their descendants was made. The Lamb of God was as good as dead.

Even knowing the cost, God still allowed Adam to choose between submission to Him and submission to Satan and sin.

This makes it clear just how important it is to God that people be allowed to choose for themselves whether they will be His

servants or not. He allowed the angels to choose. He allowed Adam to choose. He will allow every human being to choose.

But notice I said He **will** allow every human being to choose. We've seen that Satan has used his Adam-given influence to deceive and blind humanity. A spiritually-blinded or deceived person cannot make the same choices as one who sees and understands clearly.

THESE CHOICES INVOLVE ENTIRE NATIONS

God fully intends to bring His Kingdom to this earth to replace and remove the rebellious kingdoms of Satan and mankind. The prophet Daniel was given understanding that ultimately the Kingdom of God would come to do just that.

Recorded in chapter 2, Daniel was given the interpretation to Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a great statue with a head of gold, chest of silver, belly and thighs of bronze, legs of iron and feet of iron and clay mixed which was struck by a stone that grew into a mountain. Daniel reveals to the king that the Babylonian empire is the head of gold and that it would be succeeded through time by a sequence of kingdoms inferior to Babylon. Finally, all the kingdoms of men will be replaced with a Kingdom of God:

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

The Kingdom of God was central to the ministry of Jesus. (The terms Kingdom of God and Kingdom of Heaven are used interchangeably in the teachings of Jesus.)

“Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came to Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, and saying, ‘The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.’” (Mark 1:14-15)

In Luke 4:43 Jesus showed how important this was to Him:

“...but He said to them, ‘I must preach the kingdom of God to the other cities also, because for this purpose I have been sent.’”)

Jesus said that he was a king and promised His disciples that they would rule with Him in the kingdom of God:

“So Jesus said to them, ‘Assuredly I say to you, that in the regeneration, when the Son of Man sits on the throne of His glory, **you who have followed Me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel.**’”
(Matthew 19:28)

John echoes the vision of Nebuchadnezzar in Revelation 11:15:

“Then the seventh angel sounded: And there were loud voices in heaven, saying, ‘**The kingdoms of this world have become the kingdoms of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever!**’”

Now WILL GOD OFFER SALVATION TO PEOPLE WHO WERE NEVER CHRISTIANS?

With the coming of Jesus, the Son of God, we have a full and complete outline of God’s plan of salvation in the Bible:

Adam, as the father of all humanity, was first given the choice of whom he would serve: Sin and Satan or obedience and God. Adam chose sin. With that choice death entered into the age of man and Satan was given great influence.

For at least 4,000 years, God chose a few to represent Him and to further His eventual plan to save humanity. These included Abraham, Moses and King David.

Jesus came as the last Adam and through His choice became an atoning sacrifice that allowed for the reconciliation of mankind with God the Father.

Christians, the disciples of Jesus, were told to carry this message of hope and salvation to the entire world. Those God selected (or “called”) were given the opportunity to reject Satan’s influence, turn away from sin and choose submission to God and receive the Holy Spirit as a down payment on eternal life. This chance was opened to people regardless of gender or race.

There were – and are – two limiting factors: Satan still has free reign to deceive people and God was not yet calling everyone to salvation.

At some point in the future, Jesus will return and establish the Kingdom of God as a physical, world-ruling government on the earth. As we have seen, Jesus will be the King of all nations and each apostle will sit on a throne, one for each of the tribes of Israel. When Jesus returns, Christians who are dead will come to life.

*W*HEN THE DEAD COME TO LIFE IT IS CALLED A “RESURRECTION”

The apostle Paul wrote of a day of resurrection for the saints – those Christians in whom the Holy Spirit of God dwells. First, let’s examine 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18:

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

For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep. For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God.

And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words.”

Paul speaks of death as “sleep” – and the dead Christians will be resurrected to eternal life. Those of us who are alive will be changed from mortal to immortal. Paul makes further comment on this resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15:20-24. He points out that there is a sequence of resurrections: Jesus as the “firstfruits,” then next the disciples of Jesus and, as we will see later, finally all people.

“But now Christ **is risen from the dead**, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all

shall be made alive. **But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at His coming.** Then comes the end, **when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power."**

Speaking of the resurrection of Christians who have died Paul continues in verses 50-55:

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption. Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.**

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal *must* put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written:

“Death is swallowed up in victory.
O Death, where is your sting?
O Hades, where is your victory?””

Note that God never intended the human body to inherit eternal life. The human body is “mortal.” That means it can die. It is corruptible. The Christian who is resurrected to eternal life is given a new and different body that is not mortal, but is immortal – no longer subject to death and decay.

“It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body.
There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.”

Paul adds to this thought in Philippians 3:20-21 showing that the resurrected body of a Christian will be like that of the resurrected Jesus Christ:

“For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself.”



*W*HEN IS THIS “RESURRECTION” OF CHRISTIANS?

As Jesus returns to the earth, the claim He makes on the Kingdom is contested by Satan, the leaders of nations and by people all over the world. Great armies are assembled to fight against Jesus, His angels and the resurrected Christians. After a climactic battle, the opposing armies are defeated.

The prophecies of these battles are found in Zechariah 14 and Revelation 19.

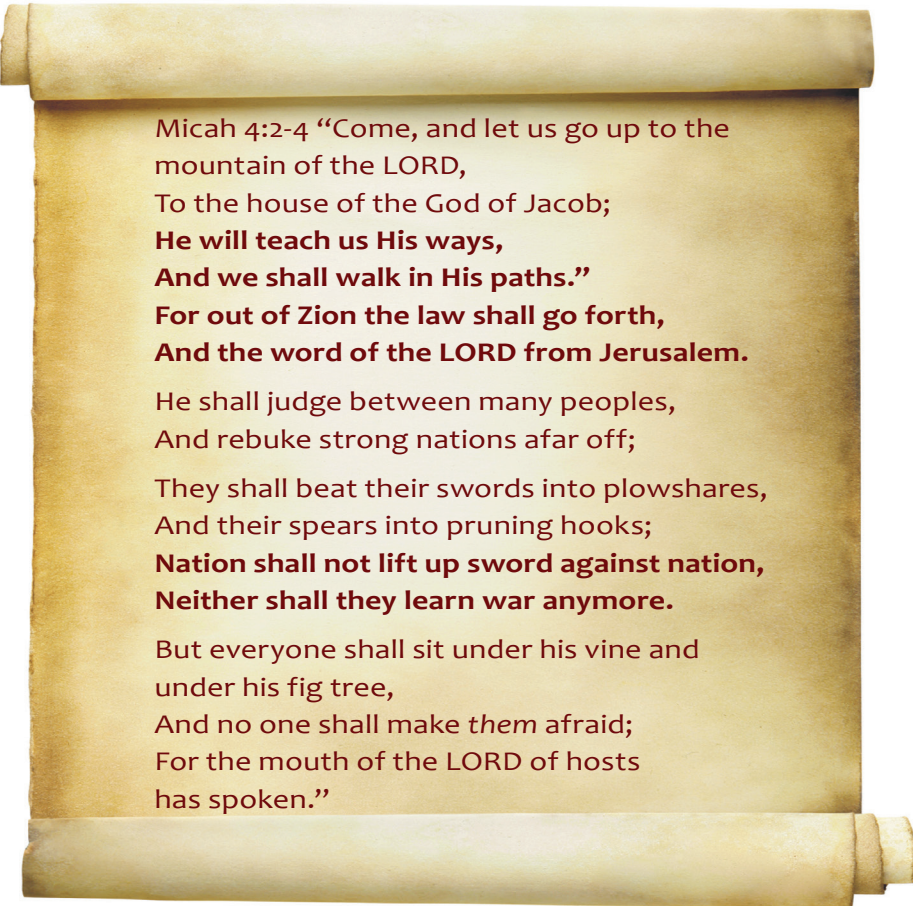
It is after these battles that a remarkable thing happens: Revelation 20 begins the description of an angel who descends from heaven and grabs Satan, chains him, casts him into a great abyss and sets a seal on it so Satan can no longer influence mankind. Satan remains there for 1,000 years. The Latin term for 1,000 years is “millennium.”

Finally, reconciliation can begin between God and mankind. It was through the first Adam that Satan entered into the kingdom of man. Jesus as the last Adam eliminates Satan's influence for an extended period of time – 1,000 years. It is then that a great harvest is possible.

Without the deceiving influence of the bound and restrained Satan, who will then be the “ex-god of this world”, people will be able to choose for themselves whether to become a Christian.

During the time of the millennium (the 1,000 year reign of Jesus on the earth), most nations will eventually welcome the leadership of Jesus.

Many nations shall come and say:

A scroll with a light beige, aged appearance, featuring a central rectangular panel with a slightly darker, textured background. The scroll is partially unrolled at the top and bottom, showing the inner layers of the paper. The text is written in a dark red, serif font, with some lines in bold. The scroll is set against a plain white background.

Micah 4:2-4 “Come, and let us go up to the
mountain of the LORD,
To the house of the God of Jacob;
**He will teach us His ways,
And we shall walk in His paths.”**
**For out of Zion the law shall go forth,
And the word of the LORD from Jerusalem.**

He shall judge between many peoples,
And rebuke strong nations afar off;

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.**

But everyone shall sit under his vine and
under his fig tree,
And no one shall make *them* afraid;
For the mouth of the LORD of hosts
has spoken.”

This passage evokes a beautiful picture of the Lord changing how nations act toward each other and how they treat their own people.

THIS IS NOT THE END OF THE STORY

The story does not end here. Even though people have seen that Jesus as King of the Kingdom of God is a righteous and just ruler, not everyone chooses to yield themselves willingly and fully to Jesus as their own personal Lord, Master, High Priest and King.

Revelation 20:7-10 tells us that when the 1,000 years are finished, Satan is let loose from his prison. He reaches out and deceives nations who gather an army against Jerusalem, where the throne of Jesus sits.

Fire comes out of heaven and burns up those who rebelled. Satan and his demons are gathered up and thrown into the lake of fire, where the beast and the false prophet had already been cast. There Satan and his demons are tormented day and night forever and ever.

“And the devil who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” (Revelation 20:10 NIV)

What has been traditionally taught would be the fate of sinners – eternal torment – is apparently the appropriate punishment for Satan and his demons who have been rebelling for longer than any person who has ever lived.

THE GREAT WHITE THRONE JUDGMENT

The Great White Throne Judgment is a time of resurrection to physical life for everyone who has ever lived and not been given the chance to understand and decide about making a covenant with God the Father through Jesus Christ.

Actually, quite a lot is written about this period of time. John was told in the book of Revelation that it was the time when “the rest of the dead” were resurrected.

“...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 worshiped 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.**”

(Note: these martyrs, along with the rest of the Christians are resurrected or changed at the return of Jesus. This is the “first” resurrection.)

“(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)

So there is a **first resurrection for Christians to immortal life with no possibility of a second death.** John is also told that the rest of the dead (those who are not Christians):

- *Do come to life.*
- *Are subject to a second death.*

Remember what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 15:22-23 about a future resurrection of everyone who ever lived?

“For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: ...”

HOPE FOR BABIES THAT DIE

When my wife was a little girl, after hearing a sermon on hell, she asked a deacon in her Missionary Baptist Church what would be the fate of her older brother who had died shortly after birth. He grimaced a little, and then said, “Honey, he is in hell, but it isn’t as hot as the rest of hell.” This was hardly comforting to a little girl worried about what was happening to a baby brother she never saw.

That teaching she heard about hell is only a tradition. It isn’t what the Bible teaches. For the babies that die, God lets them “sleep” in peace (1 Thessalonians 4:13) until what is called “The Great White Throne Judgment.”



The revelation to John about this second, great resurrection continues in verses 11-15:

“Then I saw a **great white throne** and him who was seated on it. Earth and sky fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. **And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne**, and books were opened. Another book was opened, which is the book of life. **The dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books.** The sea gave up the

dead that were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what he had done.

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. **The lake of fire is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.**" (Revelation 20:11-15)

We see a resurrection of the dead and them standing before God being judged by what they had done. A specific reference to this resurrection and how long this judgment takes is amplified by Ezekiel. He is taken by the Spirit of God into a valley full of dry bones. God challenges Ezekiel, asking:

"Son of man, can these bones live?" So I answered, 'O Lord GOD, You know.'" (Ezekiel 37:3)

THE VALLEY OF DRY BONES RESURRECTED

As you read through the chapter, God has Ezekiel speak to the bones and through a progression of steps, bones come together, are covered with muscle and flesh. Finally the breath of life comes into them and the people of the whole house of Israel, long dead and buried, come to life.



Remarkably, one more thing happens – those ancient Israelites who may have lived hundreds of years before the birth of Jesus are given the Holy Spirit.

“Then He said to me, ‘Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They indeed say, ‘Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!’ Therefore prophesy and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD: Behold, O My people, **I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves**, and bring you into the land of Israel.

Then you shall know that I *am* the LORD, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves. **I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land.** Then you shall know that I, the LORD, have spoken it and performed it,’ says the LORD.” (Ezekiel 37:11-15)

So the people of both the House of Israel and the House of Judah who lived thousands of years ago will be resurrected to a physical life, given the Holy Spirit and, as verses 24-28 show, be ruled by a resurrected King David. They will enter the eternal covenant (the New Covenant) and God will place his sanctuary in the middle of their nation.

“David My servant shall be king over them, and they shall all have one shepherd; they shall also walk in My judgments and observe My statutes, and do them. ... Moreover **I will make a covenant of peace with them**, and it shall be an everlasting covenant with them; I will establish them and multiply them, and **I will set My sanctuary in their midst forevermore.** My tabernacle also shall be with them; indeed I will be their God, and they shall be My people.” (Ezekiel 37:24-28)

How long this period of time where David rules over them is not clearly revealed. But what is happening to Israel in Ezekiel 37 is a more detailed explanation of how all the dead, small and great, will be resurrected and stand before God in the **Great White Throne Judgment** of Revelation 20.

We can only speculate as to who will parent all the babies that have died through the years. How much more comforting is it to know that

a loving God does not send babies to an eternity of suffering – even if, as the Baptist deacon taught my wife, “it isn’t as hot as the rest of hell.” Biblical truth is so much better than religious tradition.

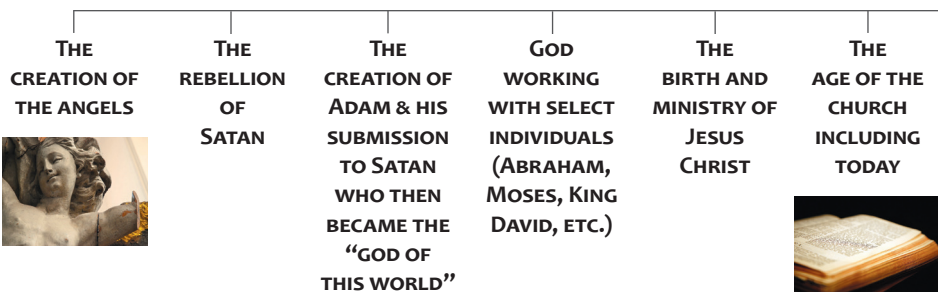
THE SECOND RESURRECTION

This Great White Throne Judgment is the second great resurrection. John was already told the resurrection of Christians at the beginning of the 1,000 year reign of Jesus was the “first” resurrection. While the second death had no power over those in the first resurrection, it does have power over those in the second resurrection.

Just as Ezekiel 37 shows God giving the opportunity for repentance to the whole house of Israel, we see this as an example of what God will do for all the rest of mankind who hadn’t been called to become Christians in their lives. Now Satan, the deceiving spirit, has been removed and everyone resurrected in the Great White Throne Judgment will have a chance to repent and receive God’s Holy Spirit. Revelation 20:12-13 shows that the “books” (the Greek “biblos”) are opened. It appears that understanding of the Bible is now freely available. Satan and the deception he brought is gone for good. Like Israel, God expects people to repent of sin and learn to live a life of blessing to others.

Another book is opened: The Book of Life. The names written in the Book of Life are those who have entered into a spiritual covenant with God the Father through Jesus.

God’s Plan of Salvation Milestones



THE DESTRUCTION OF THE UNREPENTANT WICKED

Even during the time of Jesus there were those who were not deceived, were called by God, but instead chose willfully to refuse to submit to Him. They, and others who have followed, are the unrepentant wicked. Upon these, as well as any unrepentant sinners resurrected in the second resurrection (the Great White Throne Judgment), finally comes “the second death.”

“The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire.” (Revelation 20:13-15)

How one reads these verses can influence the speculation as to whether these wicked are raised with “the rest of the dead” in the second resurrection or will rise later for judgment in a later or third resurrection that focuses only on the wicked. Either way, those who refuse to submit to Jesus and enter into an eternal covenant do not have their names written in the Book of Life.

These wicked are cast into the burning lake of fire where they experience “the second death.”

Two things to note. First, the use of terms “the first” or “the second” or even “the third” resurrection are not meant to imply that one person is resurrected two or three times. Rather, they

THE RETURN
OF JESUS
“FIRST
RESURRECTION”
(OF ALL
CHRISTIANS),
BINDING OF
SATAN, BEGINS
THE 1,000 YEAR
MILLENNIUM

THE
END OF THE
MILLENNIUM &
SATAN
LOOSED FOR A
SHORT PERIOD
OF TIME

THE
GREAT WHITE
THRONE
JUDGEMENT
(SECOND
RESURRECTION)



THE
FINAL
JUDGEMENT
OF THE
UNREPENTANT
WICKED BEING
CAST INTO THE
LAKE OF FIRE

THE
NEW HEAVENS
AND THE
NEW EARTH



describe general resurrections of different people that occur in a series and at different times. Hebrews 9:27 speaks of death from this life leading to a time of judgment. That judgment comes after a resurrection.

Second, remember that the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ (Romans 6:23). The second death is not eternal life in a lake of fire. Rather, it is the cessation of life in an instant. The wicked are burned up and their thoughts perish.

*A*NSWERING THE QUESTION OF THE FLIGHT ATTENDANT

To answer the question of the flight attendant on the airplane, it is likely that her father was deceived by Satan and never had a chance to repent. Even during the time of Jesus, Satan was stealing away the words Jesus put in the hearts of the listeners. Jesus described this in the explanation of the Parable of the Sower in Mark 4:

“The sower sows the word. And these are the ones by the wayside where the word is sown. When they hear, Satan comes immediately and takes away the word that was sown in their hearts.” (Mark 4:14-15)

God knows what happened to her father, the circumstances of his life and what covenants he did or did not make. God will be utterly just in placing her father in the proper resurrection. No one will be punished unjustly because of the influence of Satan or a lack of a calling by God.

God is more just than many Christians give Him credit. There is not going to be an eternity of suffering because people were deceived, died as babies or ignorantly lived a sinful or wicked life for their “70 or 80 years.” Whether God opens a person’s mind during their lifetime or resurrects them later and removes Satan’s deceiving influence, everyone will have a full and complete chance to choose life in service to God.

God expects us to make a choice when our mind is opened to truth and the deception of Satan is removed. The fact that you are reading this may indicate that your mind is open.

If you want to know for sure what is the right choice and how to make it, contact us. We are here to make disciples for Jesus Christ and want to have a part in connecting you with Him.