

ETERNAL LIFE



**ON EARTH
NOT IN HEAVEN**

Eternal life on earth; not in heaven

*And this is the promise that He hath
promised us, even eternal life" (1John 2:25)*

DEATH is something everyone must inevitably face. Sooner or later, its gloomy shadow darkens every home; its chill hand stretches out to blight every creature. It is no respecter of persons. It attacks young and old, rich and poor, strong and weak alike. In a moment, a body of life, healthy and active, can be struck down by accident or disease; and what remains? Only a fading memory of a brief existence, followed by the placing of a tombstone on a grave.

Does this sad picture represent the only purpose of the Creator? Did God form this wonderful world so that man should expend his life seeking vain pleasure or fret out a few short years of torment and sorrow, finally to return into dust in the grave, and there to remain for ever? Are death and decay all that the future holds for mankind?

Theology claims to have an answer, and one which many find attractive. It sets forth the belief that though man dies and his body corrupts, there is within him a particle of the divine essence termed *the soul*; that this soul is immortal, and after the death of the body wends its way to either heaven or hell.

It is claimed that this theory is based upon the teaching of the Bible. But this is not so. The Bible reveals a far more satisfying hope than the teaching of an immaterial soul wending its way to a fairy-land beyond the skies!

The Immortality of the Soul: A Pagan Teaching!

Certainly, this idea was not taught by the apostles of the Lord Jesus, and formed no part of their creed. Therefore, if the immortality of the soul is not taught in the Bible, from whence is it derived? It is a theory borrowed from Grecian and Egyptian mythology and superimposed upon the early Christian faith. It is of pagan origin which explains its universal-acceptance, for where ever we turn, there, in principle, is found the same doctrine. Shintoism, Hinduism, Mahomedanism, Paganism — all hold a similar belief in common with Christendom.

The theory is like a spiritual drug deadening the pain of sorrow, but, in fact, turning people from the true comfort to be found in a correct understanding of the Word of God. If the doctrine of the immortal soul were true, and the grave opened the portals to eternal bliss and joy, then death would be a blessing and not the curse it is, and all would desire it - but they do not. If souls were immortal, the living should rejoice at the death of their friends, acknowledging that they have merely discarded their mortality, been delivered from all pain and trouble, and have entered into a state of eternal perfection and happiness with God.

But the bitter tears of mourning friends, the anguish of heart of close relations, give the lie to the sermonising of clergymen who teach that death is not a reality, but the gateway to life more abundant.

If the theory of the immortality of the soul were true, then it would be wrong and cruel to sustain in mortal life those who are incurably sick, or who suffer constant pain. Far better to end their misery immediately in death, and release the soul to experience the fullness of joy free of all encumbrances, in heaven! Granted the immortality of the soul, what harm has the murderer really committed? On what grounds can he be indicted for destroying life? He has not destroyed life but merely released it for a greater experience!

What is the reaction of preachers, who have eloquently taught of heaven-going at death, when the chill hand of the Great Reaper appears? Do they rejoice that the time of departure is at hand, and that they are about to enter upon their reward? *Quite the contrary*. They evince no anxious longing to reach the haven of rest; there is no joyous expectancy that the time has come at last when the gates of heaven shall swing open that they might enter upon the rewards of life well-lived! No! At such times, the preacher urgently seeks every aid that modern science can provide, that he might retain his hold on life. Obviously the clergy, in common with all humanity, are a little distrustful of the reality of their own theory, for they are most reluctant to give up life upon the earth to experience the glory of an alleged existence in heaven.

In short, all the teaching of theology cannot destroy the facts of nature that death is the end of all.

Man Is Mortal

In view of our rejection of the theory of the immortality of the soul, the reader may ask: *Since Christendom almost universally accept this doctrine, is not our repudiation of it a repudiation of Christianity?*

It is true that most religious groups accept this theory as basic to their conception of salvation, but that does not mean that it is true. Truth must be determined upon the evidence of the Bible, not that of popular opinion. The theory of an immortal soul is attractive because people want to escape from the inevitability and reality of death, and therefore most are prepared to close their eyes to facts, and believe that death is actually the gateway to life! Blinded by a false theory, they fail to recognise their greatest enemy: death, and neglect to seek a means of overcoming it.

Because of this and in spite of the fact that most churches teach this doctrine, we claim that our repudiation of it is not a rejection of true

Christianity, for, unfortunately, Christendom is sadly astray from the Bible. In both teaching and practice it fulfils the prediction of Paul: **"The time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears. And they shall turn away their ears from the Truth, and shall be turned unto fables"** (2Timothy 4:3-4).

It does not require a theological education to ascertain the truth of what we claim, for the Bible can be read with a simple understanding by the most humble man or woman. It is not designed as a textbook for theology, but is God's revelation to man, revealing the way of salvation to all who will heed its message. If the reader takes a Concordance and examines the many references to the word "soul" in the Bible he can determine for himself the true facts. He will discover that the words "immortal soul" do not once occur in conjunction in the Bible! He will also find that the word *soul* occurs some 800 times in the Bible, and in such a way as to prove beyond all doubt that it is mortal. For example:

"The soul that sinneth it shall die" (Ezekiel 18:4).

"He [God] spared not their soul from death" (Psalm 78:50).

"What man is he that liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?" (Psalm 89:48).

"None can keep alive his own soul" (Psalm 22:29).

"He [Christ] poured out his soul unto death" (Isaiah 53:12).

These references show that the mortality of man, and of the soul, are clearly taught. Many similar statements could be quoted, for this fact is basic to God's revelation to man, and is consistently set forth throughout the Bible.

Actually the word *soul* is used in many different ways, though never

in the sense of an immaterial spark of immortality in man. In Genesis 12:5, it is used to define literal people. In Numbers 31:28 it is used both for men, cattle, asses and sheep. Sometimes, it is used in the sense of the mind, disposition, or life. It is spoken as being capable of hunger (Proverbs 19:15), of being satisfied with food (Lamentations 1:11, 19), of going into the grave (Job 33:22, 28), of coming out of it (Psalm 30:3). It is applied to birds, fish, animals, as well as to man (Genesis. 1:20, 30). Actually, the very same Hebrew words translated "living soul" in Gen. 2:7 and applied to man, are rendered "living creature" in Gen. 1:24, and applied to cattle, creeping things, and beasts of the earth. In these verses a "living soul" defines a breathing body of life.

Never once, in the hundreds of references throughout the Bible, is the soul ever said to be immortal, or to continue in life after the death of the body.

In his Hebrew Lexicon, Parkhurst wrote concerning *nephesh* (the Hebrew word translated "soul"):

"As a noun, nephesh hath been supposed to signify the spiritual part of a man, or, what we commonly call his soul; I must, for myself, confess that I can find no passage where it hath undoubtedly this meaning."

William Tyndale, who first translated the Bible into English, wrote: *"In putting departed souls in heaven, hell and purgatory, you destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the Pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ, and the fleshly doctrine of Philosophers together - things so contrary that they cannot agree... If the souls be in heaven... what cause is there of the resurrection?"*

What About Hell?

Related to the theory of the immortality of the soul, is the teaching that God condemns the wicked to everlasting torments in hell. It is logical, of course, that if souls are immortal, and those of the righteous ascend to heaven at death, a place must be found also for the unrighteous. And, as most people are ignorant of the saving truths of Christ, and therefore, according to Bible teaching, are "without hope" (Ephesians 2:12), then "hell" must be the destiny of most people.

But again, an examination of the evidence reveals that theology has sadly distorted the plain teaching of the Bible.

Certainly the word "*hell*" appears in the Bible, but the meaning of the word, and context in which it appears, clearly reveal that it relates to the grave. In fact, the Hebrew word *sheol* has been translated both *grave* and *hell* in the Old Testament, but both context and consistency demand that all passages should be uniformly rendered "grave." The equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol* in the Greek New Testament is the word *hades*. In 1Corinthians 15:55, the word "hell" has been rendered "the grave" (see the margin). The Revised Version renders it "death" because many Greek texts have the word *thanatos* ("death") in place of *hades* ("grave"). In any case, this passage is a quotation from Hosea 13:14 where *sheol* is properly rendered "grave".

That this Greek word *hades* has been incorrectly rendered *hell*, is clearly seen in the following reference, where it obviously relates to the grave. Speaking on the day of Pentecost, Peter declared: "**He [David] seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption. This Jesus hath God raised up...**" (Acts 2:31-32). Peter was quoting from Psalm 16:10, "**Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell**" to show that it was prophetic of the resurrection of Jesus from the grave! Therefore, Peter's inspired comment upon Psalm 16:10

shows beyond all doubt that the hell of the Bible is nothing more than the grave.

Why, then, did the translators use the word *hell*? Possibly because the word (which is of Anglo-Saxon origin) originally meant *to cover over or conceal*, and thus came to represent the place of the unseen, the grave. A similar style of language is still used in parts of England. To *hele* a cottage means to cover it; to *hele* potatoes is to cover them; a *helmet* is a covering for the head. Understood as the place of covering or concealment, *hell* is a synonym for the grave, as a place of concealment where the dead are "*covered over*."

Another word (*Gehenna*), has been translated "*hell fire*," and mainly the passages where this word is found are quoted in support of the theory of everlasting torments in hell. But *Gehenna* is the name of a valley just outside of Jerusalem which was used as a great rubbish destructor. The refuse of the city was burnt there, and the bodies of certain criminals were thrown here to be ignominiously consumed. The place thus became identified with complete and utter destruction (not with everlasting torments, for the criminals were dead before being thrown there), and it is in that sense that the word is used in the New Testament. Anybody consigned to *Gehenna* is condemned to complete oblivion, a more merciful fate than the endless torture and diabolic cruelty of the "hell" of clerical teaching, which is a blasphemous reflection upon a loving and merciful God. The world condemns a Hitler or an Idi Amin because of the misery and suffering, though temporary, they brought upon a section of humanity, and yet accepts that God consigns to everlasting torment the souls of the ignorant and the wicked. In Jeremiah 19:5, God condemns Israel for "burning their sons with fire for burnt offerings unto Baal," and He declares "I commanded this not, nor spake of it, *neither came it into My mind*." These words certainly emphasise that God has not "in mind" to torment souls in fiery, sulphuric flames of hell - an abhorrent theological fiction of imagination. "*Gehenna*", as used in the New Testament, is a figure of speech denoting utter destruction: the fate which will come to all who reject

God's way of life.

Death Is A State of Unconsciousness

The Bible describes death as a state of complete unconsciousness, during which life is extinct, and the body corrupts and decays into dust. The decree of heaven to Adam consequent upon his sin was: **"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"** (Genesis 3:19). This description of death is endorsed by subsequent teaching of Scripture as follows:

"In death there is no remembrance of Thee [i.e. God]; in the grave who shall give Thee thanks" (Psalm 6:5).

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:10).

"The slain that lie in the grave, whom Thou [God] rememberest no more; and they are cut off from Thy hand" (Psalm 88:5).

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psalm 115:17).

"The grave cannot praise thee [God], death cannot celebrate Thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day" (Isaiah 38:18-19).

"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:4).

How completely different is this teaching to that of an immortal soul that wends its way to heaven at the death of the body! Yet it represents but a small portion of the evidence that could be found in the Bible, teaching that man is mortal and death is absolute. It shows the

fallacy of the theory that represents the grave as the doorway to a greater experience in life than ever before. Instead, death is revealed as a state of silence: thoughts perish, the voice of utterance is silenced, praise to God ceases, work, knowledge and wisdom comes to an end!

Christ set out the alternative before men in the familiar statement of John 3:16:

"God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

The alternative is either to "perish" or attain to "everlasting life". The declaration makes no provision for an immortal soul, and, in fact, destroys such a theory by the use of the word "perish". If the soul were immortal it would be impossible to destroy it, and the use of such a word would be entirely out of place.

The same truth emerges from a discourse on resurrection contained in 1Corinthians 15. There, the apostle Paul makes the point that apart from a physical resurrection from the dead, man is without hope. He declares: **"Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished"** (1Corinthians 15:18).

But how could Paul write this if mankind possesses an immortal soul! Under no circumstances could it be said that they have "perished," even apart from a resurrection; for would not their souls be immortal and in heaven? And notice that it is those "in Christ," or the righteous, to whom he is referring, showing that eternal life relies upon resurrection and not on an immortal soul. Obviously Paul did not believe the current, widespread doctrine! His belief was consistent with the teaching of the Bible from Genesis to Revelation, which, in different language, time and again declares: **"For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything... their love, their hatred, and their envy is now perished"** (Ecclesiastes 9: 5).

An outstanding Bible student has well-written: *"It is something to know that there is not a single promise of heaven at death in the whole Bible, and not a single declaration that man has an immortal soul; and that all the supposed evidence contained in the Bible in favour of these doctrines, is so decidedly ambiguous, as to be open to disputation as to its meaning. It is important, because the testimony in favor of the opposite view is so clear and explicit that it cannot be set aside without the grossest violation of the fundamental laws of language"* (R. Roberts, in "Christendom Astray From the Bible").

What About Eternal Life?

So far we have presented a negative argument refuting the widespread belief in the present possession of immortality, supplying evidence from the Bible to demonstrate the error of the theory of an immortal soul, and affirming that death is a state of UNCONSCIOUSNESS.

The positive side of the case is revealed in the Bible teaching concerning eternal life. It shows clearly that whilst eternal life, or immortality, is not inherent in a person, it is something to be attained through a resurrection from the dead. Jesus Christ declared: **"I am the resurrection and the life, he that believeth in me though he were dead, yet shall he live"** (John 6:40; 11:25). This statement of the Lord is supplemented by other references from the Bible such as the following:

"This is the PROMISE, that he hath promised us, even eternal life" (1John 2:25).

"Paul [wrote] in hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Titus 1:2).

"God will render to every man according to his deeds: to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and

honor and immortality (He will render), **eternal life**" (Romans 2:6-7).

In these three references, eternal life is set forth (1) as a promise; (2) as a hope; (3) as a reward for righteousness.

It is not set forth as an inherent possession.

The Lord Jesus also referred to it as a reward to be attained at his second coming. This is revealed in a conversation he had with his disciples. Peter, as their spokesman, approached him with a very significant question, asking: "**Behold, we have forsaken all, and followed thee; what shall we have therefore?**" (Matthew 19:27). The Lord replied that his disciples would receive positions of honor and glory in the kingdom that he will set up on earth at his return, and that, at the same time, those who have sacrificed their own will in order to serve him faithfully "**shall inherit everlasting life**" (Matthew 19:28-29).

Everlasting life, therefore, is something to which we must attain, not something that a person has in the form of a "**soul**". It is something that is promised, not something that is possessed.

Eternal life will not be granted indiscriminately to all who *think* they are righteous, but only those who do the will of God. He has clearly set down in Scripture the terms of salvation, and what constitutes righteousness. It is summed up in the words of Christ to Nicodemus: "**Except a man be born of water and of spirit he cannot enter the kingdom of God**" (John 3:5). To be "**born of water**" is to manifest a new way of life consequent upon the act of baptism, and this can only be brought about by an understanding of the significance of the rite. Thus, in describing baptism, Paul declared: "**Ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you**" (Romans 6:17). Those to whom he wrote had obeyed this teaching by embracing Christ in the way prescribed in the same chapter (by baptism), and by reflecting Christlike qualities in their

lives.

True righteousness, therefore, is dependent upon understanding the will and purpose of God. The Lord instructed his disciples: "**Go into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature; he that believeth and is baptised shall be saved**" (Mark 16:16). An intelligent belief of the gospel must precede baptism if a person is to be saved. In fact the Bible clearly shows, that immersion, in the absence of an intelligent belief, is invalid. It is the comprehension of the significance of the rite that gives true meaning to the act.

Why is knowledge so necessary? Because God wants a person's heart and mind as well as his body. If we do not develop an intellectual appreciation of God's way which is above what the mind naturally thinks, we are not in a position to offer acceptable worship, for we will not be mentally in harmony with God. But the more we think upon the things of God, the more our thoughts will be diverted into the channel of His ideas and ideals, and the transforming influence of His truth will find expression in a changed life. God's revelation is not designed merely to teach people something, but to *change them* for the kingdom, to fit them for eternal life in the Age to come. The more we draw God into our lives, the more our character will conform to His righteous ways, and will become worth preserving, which will be achieved when the body is changed to incorruptibility (1Corinthians 15:51-54). In the absence of such mental and moral transformation, flesh is merely animated dust (Genesis 18:27), not worthy of eternal existence, but destined to return to the dust from where it came.

Hope In A Resurrection

The resurrection of Christ demonstrated the way by which life eternal can be attained. It constituted a basic doctrine of early Christianity that completely separated the gospel message from the philosophies of man. The record states: "**When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, we will hear thee again of this matter**" (Acts 17:32).

To such as Paul, however, it provided hope, for he realised the reality and finality of death, apart from a resurrection. When called upon to defend the faith, he boldly answered: **"Of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question"** (Acts 23:6). Never once did the Apostle imply that believers possessed an immortal soul, or that their reward would be found in heaven. He taught that the grave brought to a complete end all conscious existence in any form, and he looked forward in hope to the return of Christ and a bodily resurrection unto life eternal. Here are examples of his teaching:

"As in Adam all die, even so in Christ, shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order; Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming" (1Corinthians 15:22-23).

"The Lord Jesus Christ shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom... 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 unto all them also that love his appearing" (2Timothy 4:1, 8).

In defending the faith before Felix, the Roman procurator of Judea, Paul declared: **"There is a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust"** (Acts 24:15). Later before king Agrippa, he declared that he stood to defend **"the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers,"** and in order to emphasise what that involved, he continued, **"Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you that God should raise the dead?"** (Acts 26:68). The faithful David, the man after God's own heart, and concerning whom Peter said, he **"is not ascended into the heavens,"** believed in the resurrection, proclaiming: **"Thou which hast shewed me great and sore troubles, shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side"** (Psalm 71:20-21).

The prophet Isaiah confirmed it: **"Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise"** (Isaiah 26:19).

Daniel taught it: **"Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt"** (Daniel 12:2).

Both Old and New Testaments, therefore, combine in consistently teaching this doctrine. It is fatal to the theory of an immortal soul, or of heaven-going at death. If the soul has gone to its reward, why raise the body from the grave? Theology replies: for the purpose of judgment. It would reward first, and judge after! It would consign souls to heaven or hell, and then, millenniums after, it would reunite them to their bodies for the purpose of judgment! Such teaching is completely inconsistent, and quite contrary to the Word of Truth.

The doctrine of a physical resurrection is an embarrassment to those who believe in the immortality of the soul, and though they cannot dispute it because it is so plainly taught in the Bible, they destroy its power and significance by relegating it to a position of minor importance.

Who Will Be Raised?

It is sometimes claimed that if all the countless millions that ever lived were suddenly raised from the dead there would not be found room for them upon the earth. This is disputed by others. The fact of the matter, however, is that all people will not be raised from the dead, and, indeed, only a minority will enjoy that experience. The Bible clearly shows that those who lack an understanding of God's purpose will not be raised for judgment (see Psalm 49:19-20; 88:5. Isaiah 26:14; 43:17; Jeremiah 51:57), and Paul describes such as **"having no hope, and being without God in the world"** (Ephesians 2:12).

Jesus expressed the truth in these words: **"I am the resurrection**

and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live" (John 11:25). The Lord declared that those who **"believe"** will live again, and in doing so he emphasised that **"light"** or **"knowledge"** is the ground of responsibility. He who knows the will of God will be raised to judgment whether he performs that will or not, for to know is to be held responsible to do so. Christ taught that those who refuse to submit to the requirements of the Truth will **"see"** Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, with all of similar faith, granted eternal life in the kingdom of God, whilst they, themselves, will be **"cast out"** (Luke 13:28. John 3:19). The Roman governor, Felix, to whom Paul preached, and who had an understanding of what was required (Acts 24:22), **"trembled"** when Paul reasoned with him of **"judgment to come"** (Acts 24:25), because he doubtless recognised that he, himself, would be included. among the rejected in that day (Romans 2:7, 8, 16).

The Bible teaches that the responsible dead (both just and unjust) will be raised, and, together with the living, will be assembled before the judgment seat of Christ at his coming, to receive **"in body what they have done in this life"** whether it be good or bad (2Corinthians 5:10; Romans 14:10-12). Those who by **"patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory, honor and immortality," will receive eternal life** (Romans 2:7). Those who have rejected Christ's way of life, will experience **"tribulation and anguish,"** ending in the **"second death,"** which will again bring them to the grave from whence they will have come (Revelation 2:11; 21:7-8; Galatians 6:8; Romans 6:21-23).

Most people, however, live in ignorance of divine Truth, and will remain forever in the grave, for upon what grounds could those who are ignorant of the divine way be judged?

Where Eternity Will be Spent

It is a common belief that heaven is the reward of the righteous, but the Bible does not teach it. Jesus declared that **"no man hath as-**

cended up to heaven" (John 3:13), and this was endorsed by Peter, who pointed to the fact that not even the righteous David had ascended there (Acts 2:34).

What the Bible *does* teach throughout, is that an eternal inheritance upon the earth can be attained. Read carefully Psalm 37, and note the emphasis upon the earthly inheritance of the righteous. Four times it proclaims that **"such as be blessed"** of God shall inherit the earth (vv. 9, 11, 22, 29). It contains such statements as **"evildoers shall be cut off; but those that wait upon the Lord, they shall inherit the earth"** (v. 9); **"the seed of the wicked shall be cut off"** but **"the righteous shall inherit the land, and dwell therein for ever"** (vv 28, 29). It proclaims the promise (later quoted by the Lord, see Matthew 5:5), that **"the meek shall inherit the earth"** (v. 11), and points to a time when **"the wicked shall not be."** That is not the case today, but the very reverse; but it shall be brought about at the second coming of the Lord Jesus.

And what more does a person desire? Nobody wants to die, but who would refuse the gift of life eternal with an everlasting inheritance upon an earth freed of the oppressions, the frustrations, and the evils of today? That is the hope set forth by the Bible, and for which the Lord instructed his disciples to pray, saying: **"Our Father which art in heaven, hallowed by thy name. Thy kingdom come. THY WILL BE DONE IN EARTH AS IT IS IN HEAVEN"** (Matthew 6:10). That is the time of which the angels sang at the birth of Jesus: **"Glory to God in the highest: upon earth peace, and good will toward men"** (Luke 2:14).

This is consistent with the teaching of Jesus. He impressed his disciples with the reality of death by declaring that they will be **"recompensed at the resurrection of the just"** (Luke 14:14). He taught them that the Son of Man shall return, and **"then he shall reward every man"** (Matthew 16:27). He concluded his last message to his followers with a wonderful promise: **"Behold I come quickly [or unexpectedly] and my reward is with me, to give**

every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). He declared that he will bring the reward with him, not that man would go to him to heaven to receive it! He will bring it when he returns once again to this earth (Philippians 3:20-21. 1John 3:1-2).

A World Fit For Immortals

The Bible teaches that though immortality will be given to the righteous at the second coming of Jesus Christ (1Corinthians 15:23, 52-54), he is coming, not only to judge and reward his followers, but to establish his rule over all the earth. Jerusalem will become the metropolis of his administration, the future capital of the world. It will be called, "**the City of the Lord, the Zion of the Holy One of Israel**" (Isaiah 60:14), the "**city of the great King**" (the Lord Jesus) Matthew 5:34-35). The Bible declares: "**At that time they shall call Jerusalem the Throne of the Lord; and all the nations shall be gathered unto it; to the name of the Lord, to Jerusalem; neither shall they walk any more after the imagination of their evil heart**" (Jeremiah 3:17). Then the present evil conditions will be replaced with the glorious reign of the Lord Jesus.

From this centre, Christ will rule in conjunction with his immortalised followers, who will form the aristocracy of his kingdom. In Revelation 5:9-10 they are represented as singing: "**Thou hast redeemed us to God by thy blood out of every kindred and tongue, and people and nation, and hast made us kings and priests and we shall reign ON THE EARTH**".

The prophet Isaiah predicted that "**a king** (the Lord Jesus) **shall reign in righteousness, and princes** (his immortalised followers) **shall rule in equity**" (Isaiah 32:1), and Jesus told his disciples that they would be set up as judges over the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19:28), then completely restored to their land.

Such a purpose necessitates the return of Jesus Christ to the earth.

And here, again, the teaching of the Bible is plain. The disciples who witnessed the Lord ascend into heaven were told: **"Why stand ye gazing up into heaven [as though their hope was there!]; this same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven"** (Acts 1:11).

The Promised Millennium

For 1,000 years (Revelation 20:4), the reign of Christ on earth will continue. His teaching, emanating from Jerusalem and going forth to all nations (Isaiah 2:2-4) will bring about great changes, both moral, political, and religious, introducing an epoch of righteousness and peace: **"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 any more."** The mortal populations of the earth, ruled over by Christ and his immortalised followers, will learn the principles of righteousness, and submit to his beneficent authority. The prophet Zechariah records: **"Yea, many people and strong nations shall come to seek the Lord of Hosts in Jerusalem, and to pray before the Lord"** (Zechariah 8:22. See also ch. 14:16).

The earth will become the glorious dwelling of happiness and peace, as preparatory to the final act of glory, at the end of the 1,000 years' reign of Christ, when death itself will come to an end. The Bible teaches that Christ **"must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet; the last enemy that shall be destroyed is death"** (1Corinthians 15:25-26). The earth will then have passed through three stages: (1) the present, in which sin and death is everywhere in evidence; (2) Christ's second advent, when his followers who are worthy will be made like him, immortal, but the rest of mankind will remain mortal; (3) At the end of the millennial reign, when death will be eliminated from the earth, and a perfected world when **"God may be all and in all"**. (1Corinthians 15:28).

It will be the privilege of those who faithfully follow Christ now, to rule with him, as his immortal associates, at his return. This requires that they come to an understanding of the purpose of God, and submit to His will, firstly by being baptised, and then by obeying His precepts. Is this reward worth striving for? The world today can only provide frustration, worry and death, whereas in Christ there is **"promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come"** (1Timothy 4:8).

Why not search into these matters? Remember you are the arbiter of your own eternal destiny, and Christ has made it possible for you to gain the victory. We earnestly recommend that you read this article again, and closely examine the references quoted from the Bible. If you find this article fully in agreement with Scripture, why not pay yourself the compliment of searching deeper into the teaching of the Bible, that you might, with enlightened mind, embrace Christ in the way appointed, and commence a walk that could gain for you an inheritance in the kingdom of God, and enjoyment of life for evermore.

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