

No More Death

***“God shall wipe
away all tears
from their eyes;
and there shall be
no more death,
neither sorrow, nor
crying, neither
shall there be any
more pain: for the
former things are
passed away.”
—Revelation 21:4***

THE VAST MAJORITY OF mankind desires to live as long as possible, not to have life cut off by disease, accident, war, murder, or old age. Medical science tells us that the average life span in the United States is now 80 years, up substantially from the average of just a few decades ago. Scientists tell us further that medical

breakthroughs in coming decades may make it possible for man to live as long as 150 years. As promising as that may sound, however, all of this pales in comparison to what the Bible teaches was God's intent for man. The Creator's purpose concerning man was for him to live forever. It is true that Christians have hoped for everlasting life in heaven for centuries, and certainly the Scriptures contain many promises to that end. However, the Bible also holds out a hope of life, perfect and everlasting, right here on earth. This was God's design and purpose in creating the first human beings, Adam and Eve.

After the creation of our first parents, God told them to “Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish

[fill] the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moveth upon the earth.” The Bible account further states, “The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food.” (Gen. 1:28; 2:8,9) Eden was to be a model for the whole earth, a dominion for its king—man. God’s intent was not for life to be cut short, nor for man to live merely seventy, eighty, or even one-hundred and fifty years, but for life to continue forever.—Ps. 90:10, *English Standard Version*

DEATH THE RESULT OF DISOBEDIENCE

The only reason God’s intent to bestow everlasting life was not realized is that our first parents transgressed the divine law. The promise of everlasting life depended on obedience. This was an absolute requirement from God and was evidenced by his command concerning the tree of the knowledge of good and evil; that the fruit of it not be eaten, else “thou shalt surely die.” (Gen. 2:17) When man disobeyed this command, the sentence was pronounced, and the dying process began to be carried out. God said, “For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.”—Gen. 3:19

When God drove man out of the Garden of Eden, he made special provision so that he could not return. The Bible says this provision was specifically to keep man out of the garden; but why? “Lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat,

and live for ever.” (Gen. 3:22) That was God’s purpose for man—to live forever. The only reason this purpose was not attained was that man sinned. Having sinned, man was taken out of the garden condition which would have otherwise continued his life everlastingly.

Man fights the idea of death. In spite of illness, injury and disease, his determination to live is steadfast. Even among Christians, heaven is many times thought of as merely an alternative place to go when they cannot live here on earth any longer. The Scriptures tell us that God “has put eternity into man’s heart.” (Eccles. 3:11, *ESV*) Indeed, man wants to live, still having this inborn desire with which he was created by God.

SATAN’S LIE

Because of his strong desire to live, man has fallen easy prey to Satan’s deceptions. Satan asked Eve about God’s command that they would die if they ate of the forbidden fruit. She said that was true, confirming what God had spoken. Satan, though, said through the serpent, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 3:1-4) I Timothy 2:14 states that Eve was deceived, and so also much of the human race has succumbed to the same deception. Eve wanted to believe she would not die, so much so that she believed Satan’s lie, “Ye shall not surely die,” rather than God’s command.

As the reality of death eventually made itself evident to our first parents, and as death actually began to take place among man, Satan expanded upon his lie. He thrust upon man the idea that what he was seeing and experiencing was only the

appearance of death. He put forth the notion that man does not really die at all, that death is not what it seems to be, but it is merely a door into another part of an immortal existence. This erroneous thought is the basis of most of the religions of the world. It is the foundation upon which the teaching of reincarnation, and the many other “no death” theories and religious doctrines are built. Even many professed Christians who claim the Bible as their standard, believe, and teach, that there is a part of man that does not die—an immortal soul—when by all other appearances death has claimed another victim. Thus it is that, even here in the twenty-first century, a majority of people of all religious faiths claim that really there is no death, unwittingly giving silent assent to the statement made so long ago by Satan, “Thou shalt not surely die.” The reason for this belief, simply stated, is that no one wants to die!

The Bible, though, says death is a reality. In Romans 6:23, the Apostle Paul states, “The wages of sin is death.” The prophet, in Ezekiel 18:4, says emphatically, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.” Notice that this verse makes no reference to the soul being immortal at all, but that it is subject to death if found guilty of sin. The condition of death can simply be described as the absence of life, that is, complete nonexistence, or oblivion. Ecclesiastes 9:5 states, “The living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing.” Here no distinction is made between the wicked dead and righteous dead, just that the dead—all of them—“know not anything.”

A HOPE FOR LIFE

Man's hope for everlasting life, based on God's promises, lies in a restoring of life by God through the resurrection of the dead. In I Corinthians 15:13-18, the Apostle Paul states, "If there be no resurrection of the dead, ... your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." Paul is talking about Christians here. If there is no resurrection of the dead, then even Christians "are perished" when they die, to say nothing of the remainder of mankind. Paul, however, assures us in this same chapter that there is to be a resurrection. "Since it was through a man that death resulted, it was also through a man that the resurrection of the dead resulted. For just as all men die by virtue of their descent from Adam, so all such as are in union with Christ will be made to live again." (vss. 21,22, *Williams New Testament*) This resurrection hope is for all, and it is based on the redemptive work of Jesus, which will make it a reality. Sincere students of the Bible should rejoice to believe and claim this as the basis of their hope.

THE GOSPEL OF CHRIST

Speaking of Jesus as our Savior, the Apostle Paul said that he "brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." (II Tim. 1:10) Why does Paul use the two words "life" and "immortality?" He does so because there is a difference. Adam and his race were given life, and every provision for its continuance, if obedient, forever. Adam, though, did not have, nor was ever promised, immortality.

To understand what is meant by the statement that Jesus "brought life and immortality to light

through the gospel,” we must first know what the Gospel is that is mentioned in this verse. This seems like a simple question, but it is surprising how few really understand the full import of this term. Briefly stated, Gospel means good news, or glad tidings. The Greek word translated Gospel in this verse is the same as is used in the familiar words recorded in Luke 2:10,11, “The angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings [good news, especially the Gospel] of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.” Those were indeed good tidings—a Gospel of great joy. However, this was not the first time the Gospel had been preached. The Apostle Paul wrote, “The scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, preached the gospel beforehand to Abraham, saying, In you shall all the nations be blessed.” (Gal. 3:8, *ESV*) Paul here refers to the statement made over 2,000 years earlier by God to Abraham, and repeated to Isaac and Jacob, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” (Gen. 28:14) This was the “Gospel” preached in advance to Abraham. We notice God did not say, “In thee and in thy seed shall all families of the earth be taken to heaven.” No, he said that all the families “of the earth” would be blessed. This, so many centuries before the angels’ announcement, was the original full statement of the Gospel of Christ.

This Gospel theme is developed throughout the Old Testament by the prophets and is associated with the thought of a kingdom. Speaking of a future kingdom through a promised “seed”—Christ—which would bless all mankind, Isaiah 9:7 states, “Of the

increase of his government and peace there shall be no end.” We notice the phrase, “Of the increase,” thus indicating that this kingdom will expand, or increase, to include all nations—all the families of the earth. This progression of prophetic testimony continues until the birth of Jesus, culminating in the words quoted earlier as recorded in Luke 2:10. In short, the Old Testament promised that the seed would come. The angels said the seed is born! Truly this was glad tidings to all people—all the families of the earth—spoken of in both the Old and New Testaments.

THE PROMISED SEED

That Jesus was the promised seed spoken of by God to Abraham, and to which Paul referred in Galatians 3:8, is confirmed by the apostle in this same chapter, just a few verses later. “Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.” (vs. 16) In verse 29, Paul adds further, “And if ye be Christ’s, then are ye Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.” In other words, if you belong to Christ—the seed—if you are true Christians, then you are also counted as additional members of “Abraham’s seed” and inheritors of the same promise, “In thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.”

Why did Paul in Galatians 3:16 say there was but one seed, Christ, but in verse 29 state that all true Christians are part of Abraham’s seed? The apostle in another place uses the illustration of a human body to help answer this question. “As the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members

of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ.” (I Cor. 12:12) Here Christ is likened to the human body, with Jesus as its “head,” and the church, all true Christians, as the other “body” members. (Col. 1:18) The “one body,” in total, constitutes the Christ. This Christ class, head and body together, is the one seed which Paul speaks of and which the Bible, in both the Old and New Testaments, states will eventually bless all people. These statements of Scripture help to explain why the work of restoring mankind from his “death” condition could not start immediately after Jesus’ death and resurrection, and why his kingdom could not then be established. The intervening work of this present Gospel Age has been to select and develop the body—the seed class, the members of the Christ—as they are to be the ones to share in the future work of blessing mankind with their head, Jesus. The prospective members of this special class must be “transformed by the renewing” of their minds and be proven; they must take up their cross; they must be baptized into Jesus’ death. “Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death?” (Rom. 6:3; 12:1,2) These must, figuratively speaking, have only Jesus as their head, and must follow him, “whithersoever he goeth.” (Rev. 14:4) As Paul said, “If we suffer, we shall also reign with him.”—II Tim. 2:12

THE REWARD OF THE CHURCH—IMMORTALITY

Jesus, the night before his crucifixion, made a wonderful promise to his disciples, those who would be true Christians. “In my Father’s house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare

a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also.” (John 14:2,3) There are many spheres of life which exist in God’s universe: the lower animals, humans, angels, principalities, many “mansions” and planes of existence. However, Jesus here is saying that none of these will be the dwelling place of his church, his bride. Notice, he says, “I go to prepare a place for you,” a new place that never existed before. Apostle John states further, “It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” (I John 3:2) Jesus, when he was resurrected, was highly exalted. “God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name.” (Phil. 2:9) The church, his body members, will also receive a similar glorious resurrection, and be with him. They are spoken of by the Apostle Paul as those who “seek for glory and honour and immortality.”—Rom. 2:7

Recalling the verse quoted earlier that Jesus brought “life and immortality to light through the gospel,” we now can see that the “life” herein mentioned is the future hope of the world here on earth, restored to human perfection. “Immortality,” on the other hand, is the reward of faithfulness for those who truly follow Jesus even unto death. “Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.” “To him that overcometh 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.” “On such the second death hath no power.” (Rev. 2:10; 3:21; 20:6) The difference between life and immortality is that life is dependent on outside sustenance for

its continuance, but immortality has no such requirement. Immortality was first possessed only by God. He exalted his son Jesus to this high position upon his faithfulness as man's Redeemer. The faithful church, Jesus' body members, the remainder of the seed class, will also be exalted to this same divine, immortal nature possessed by God and Jesus. "Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature."—II Pet. 1:4

The purpose of the present Gospel Age has been to search out those truly willing to follow in Jesus' footsteps, to lay down their lives in sacrifice as he did. (Rom. 12:1; Ps. 50:5) Even among professed Christians, relatively few have been willing to live a life of complete dedication to God. "Narrow is the way," Jesus said, which leads to this high heavenly reward, and "few there be that find it." (Matt. 7:14) The Master further said that it would be only a "little flock" to whom would be given the kingdom of heaven. (Luke 12:32) Nearly twenty centuries have passed and the selection of this faithful class is not yet complete, but soon it shall be finished. Then the blessings of life and restoration will flow to "all the families of the earth" through the promised kingdom of the Christ, the promised seed.—Rom. 8:19, *ESV*

DEATH TO BE SWALLOWED UP IN VICTORY

The Apostle Paul speaks concerning the kingdom over which Christ will rule, saying, "He must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (I Cor. 15:25,26) Later, in this chapter, a sequential order

is given to the entire matter. "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly." (vs. 49) That is, there is to be a change of nature for the church, from the earthly to the heavenly. In verse 54, Paul continues, "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." This verse reminds us that humans are not immortal, because one cannot have immortality "put on" if they already possess it. The faithful church will have immortality put on by the power of God! The final phrase, "Death is swallowed up in victory," follows the sequence of events talked about earlier in the verse. In other words, once the faithful church is complete and receives its reward, "then shall be brought to pass" the sum total of all the other promises of the Bible concerning the earthly kingdom. Mankind's restoration, and the blessing of all the families of the earth, will be thus found to fulfill the statement, "Death is swallowed up in victory."

This statement by Paul is a quotation from Isaiah 25. In that prophecy, Christ's kingdom is pictured as a mountain. The Israelites could relate to this, because God ruled over them as their King. Their seat of religious authority was in the city of Jerusalem, specifically the Temple, which was located on Mount Zion, picturing God's divine authority over them. "In this mountain shall the LORD of hosts make unto all people a feast of fat things, a feast of wines on the lees, of fat things full of marrow, of wines on the lees well refined. ... He will swallow

up death in victory; and the Lord GOD will wipe away tears from off all faces; ... And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us: this is the LORD; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his salvation.” (Isa. 25:6,8,9) Paul says that as soon as the work of gathering the true church is complete, when they have put on immortality, it will then be time for this prophecy of Isaiah, and so many others like it, to be fulfilled here upon the earth.

CHRIST’S EARTHLY KINGDOM

Christ’s kingdom will be a time of peace, not war. Notice the words of the prophets concerning this time. “I will break the bow and the sword and the battle out of the earth, and will make them to lie down safely.” (Hos. 2:18) “I will cut off the chariot, ... and the battle bow shall be cut off: and he shall speak peace unto the heathen: and his dominion shall be from sea even to sea, and from the river even to the ends of the earth.” (Zech. 9:10) “The desire of all nations shall come. ... And in this place will I give peace, saith the LORD of hosts.” (Hag. 2:7,9) “My people shall dwell in a peaceable habitation, and in sure dwellings, and in quiet resting places.” (Isa. 32:18) Will there always be war and unrest? No, not according to the Bible. It was the psalmist who wrote, “He maketh wars to cease unto the end of the earth; he breaketh the bow, and cutteth the spear in sunder; he burneth the chariot in the fire. Be still, and know that I am God: I will be exalted among the heathen, I will be exalted in the earth.” (Ps. 46:9,10) These are staggering promises!

Many things will change in Christ's kingdom on earth. Today we often ask others, "How are you?" The response is many times, "Oh, so-so. I have this or that ache or pain." These are common topics of conversation in today's world. Notice, though, what the prophet says concerning the coming kingdom, "The inhabitant shall not say, I am sick." (Isa. 33:24) Man will no longer need to ask "how are you," because all will be well, and none will be sick. This is what the coming kingdom will bring. Everyone will have the opportunity to live, not having their life cut off by war, killing, disease, or any other malady, for these will be things of the past. Life will not be to merely the age of 70, 80, or 150 years as the scientists predict, but forever, to all who obey the kingdom's righteous laws.

GOD'S WORD IS SURE

The Apostle John, in Revelation chapters 20-22, gives many beautiful pictures of the coming kingdom. Among these are the words which include our opening text, "I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." (Rev. 21:3,4) If, as these verses say, there shall be no more death, it means that the people will be living forever. Thus, indeed, they "shall not say, I am sick."

Many of the statements given to John the Revelator were provided through various angels, or messengers.

However, the message of Revelation 21:5 is so important, so awesome and colossal, that God did not even allow an angel to deliver it. He says, as it were, “Step aside, I want to tell this to John myself, it is so important!” This verse says, “He that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write: for these words are true and faithful.” What words are “true and faithful?” Those of the previous verse, “There shall be no more death.” We have the guarantee of this by no less than God’s own sure word. Let us echo these words of the psalmist: “My mouth shall speak the praise of the LORD: and let all flesh bless his holy name for ever and ever.”—Ps. 145:21 ■