

***Believe it or Not....***

## **The Bible Does NOT Promise "Heaven"!**

Millions in the Christian-professing world believe they will be raptured to heaven. They sing of "heavenly mansions," our "home up above," and of "going to be with the Lord."

In thousands of funeral ceremonies, clergymen confidently assure bereaved relatives their loved ones are already in heaven, and the belief is indelibly reinforced in an atmosphere of pain and fear of the unknown. But does the *Bible really teach* Christians go to heaven when they die?

*By Garner Ted Armstrong*

Why is it there are no segregated graveyards?

Never have you seen indicated on tombstones that some of the bodies there were only the physical relics of souls which are now screaming in hell fire!

Yet, such is the belief of millions who confidently assume the teaching of a heavenly home, or an ever-burning hell.

No matter how sinfully the recently departed might have lived, many a pastor seems able to comfort distraught loved ones with the thought that, at the very last moment, cantankerous and crusty old Uncle Claude somehow made it through the pearly gates!

For over twenty-eight years, I have offered a certified cashier's check for \$10,000 to anyone who can come up with the words "immortal soul," "When we get to heaven," "I will see you in heaven," and "We go to heaven when we die."

Not in all those twenty-eight years, with millions hearing my words, has a single person been able to claim the certified cashier's check for \$10,000!

Why not?

Simply because such words *are not in the Bible!*

Remember, there is only *one source* for the real *truth* about what happens at death.

The Bible is God's handbook to man—the revelation of knowledge man could not otherwise discover for himself. The Bible *is revealed* knowledge!

It does not purport to be a textbook on science, mathematics, geology, astronomy, biology, or physics. However, it is that one book from which and through which *all study* should be approached.

God did not waste space in His Word repeating for man, endlessly, thousands of things man could easily discover for himself.

He did, however, *reveal* to the willing hearts and minds of those human beings who are *not hostile* to God's Word a precious fund of knowledge which we could not discover for ourselves!

The Bible is *proved* to be the divinely-revealed Word of God!

Paul said, "All scripture is given by *inspiration of God* [meaning, '*God-breathed*'], and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16).

The divinely-revealed Word of God is the ultimate *source to* which we must go to discover the real *truth* about the reward of the saved, about what happens at death; about the promise of "heaven," or the threat of "hell."

Wouldn't it seem logical to you that if heaven is the reward of the saved; that *if* hell is the reward of sinners; that *if* the saints are *raptured* away to heaven—there would at least be *one scripture* somewhere in the Bible *plainly saying so*?

Is it *logical* to you that of *all the doctrines of the Bible*, these main-line, trunk-of-the-tree "doctrines" of a "rapture," or "going to heaven," or an "ever-burning hell," should be *totally absent* from the Bible?

Millions of churchgoers have sat in church hearing graphic descriptions of heaven. They have heard tear-jerking stories of the death of saintly elderly persons; visions of heaven, last-moment death-bed repentances, and stories of people who have gazed upward as they died and said they saw Jesus coming!

But for all this gingerbread and euphoria around the edges of the subject, these same church-going people have *never* in their *lives* sat down at a lengthy Bible study or church service where they heard a minister *wade through* dozens of *scriptures in the Bible* promising *heaven* as the reward of the saved!

They have heard *vague allusions* from only a few scriptures which are capable of several interpretations!

But they have *never* heard a patient, careful, well-organized, *thorough* Bible study or sermon *proving from the Bible* that heaven is the reward of the saved!

Why haven't they?

Simply because it *cannot be proved*!

### ***Why Did Christ Teach the Resurrection?***

Why did Jesus continually speak of *a resurrection*? He said,

"Verily, verily, I say unto you, the hour is coming, and now is, when the *dead* shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear *shall live*" (John 5:25).

He described those who were in their graves, *dead*, knowing nothing, at the time of the second coming of Christ. "Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the grave shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation" ["judgment," margin] (John 5:28-29).

These scriptures plainly refer to *a future* event. Jesus spoke of a general *resurrection from the dead*, which He called a resurrection "of *life*." He clearly spoke of the opposite of death. He spoke of life.

God's word says "The dead know not anything," and "The memory of them is forgotten." David, in the Psalms, explains that death is a completely mindless state—an *absence* of knowledge and awareness.

Solomon, David's son, explained that men die a death exactly as do beasts (Ecclesiastes 3:19). He said "Yea they all have *one breath*."

God's Word reveals that human beings live a physical, *chemical* existence. We are mortal, temporary, transitory creatures; sustained by the material elements of this physical creation. We are water-drinking, air-breathing, food-ingesting creatures whose life is dependent solely upon our bloodstream and the foods (as fuel) we take into our systems.

When we die, a total cessation of this physical, chemical existence occurs. Death is the *absence of life*. The Bible describes those who go down into their graves as being just as *dead* as any animal is dead!

But Jesus Christ spoke of a time when they will be raised up *to life!* Notice, He did not describe a supposed "immortal soul" being *placed back into* a formerly dead, decayed body!

Read the entire fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians. This is called the "resurrection chapter." In this marvelous portion of scripture are found some of the most important and plainest doctrines of the Word of God. Not only is the resurrection described in great *detail*, but even "foolish questions" are answered. Continually, people think they have discovered a question too difficult even for *God*. They will relate, tiresomely, the devouring of bodies buried at sea by sharks. Then they describe how the sharks are finally

caught by a fisherman, and their livers sold in the market. They then say that some other human being eats the shark's liver, and therefore a portion of the bodies of the dead, by providing fuel for a shark's stomach, being absorbed into its body and becoming a part of its liver, now becomes a part of the body of another living person! So how does God solve the problem, they ask?

They will describe what happens when people are fused into nothingness in an atomic explosion, burnt in a crematorium and their ashes scattered over the mountains, in the air, or at sea; or even puzzle endlessly over what happens to those who died centuries ago where even the bones themselves have turned to nothing but dust.

To such questing minds, it seems impossible for God to "resurrect" the body that *was*. The Apostle Paul shows these are "foolish questions," and answers them *thoroughly* in the famous "resurrection chapter" of 1 Corinthians 15.

"But some man will say, how are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come? Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die: And that which thou sowest, thou sowest *not that body that shall be*, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or some other grain: But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed His own body. All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial: but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption: it is raised in incorruption: It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness: it is raised in power: It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a *natural* body, and there is a *spiritual body*" (I Corinthians 15:35-44).

Notice first that the Apostle Paul refers to carnal human reasonings about just how God is going to bring back an utterly corrupted and decayed human body as a question proposed by a *fool*.

Then, He shows that through the unlimited miracle working power of God a completely corrupt, dishonorable, *natural* body which can waste away to become fused once again with the elements of this earth ("*dust* thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return") is to be resurrected as a *spirit being!*

"Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which *is natural*; and afterward that which is spiritual ... and as we have borne the image of the *earthly*, we shall also *bear the image of the heavenly*. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood *cannot inherit* the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. Behold I show you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, *at the last trump*; for the trumpet shall sound, and the *dead shall be raised incorruptible*, and we shall be *changed*. For this corruptible must *put on* incorruption, and this mortal must *put on* immortality! " (1 Corinthians 15:46-53).

You need to read all of this marvelously revealing chapter in your own Bible. Read it *slowly*, accept it on face value, *as it is*, and believe it as the very Word of God!

If you *do*, you will never again be confused about the *resurrection of the dead*.

This revealing chapter plainly shows that, at death, your physical, temporal bodies, sustained in a *chemical* existence by the natural elements of this earth; food, water, and air, completely cease to function, and that total unconsciousness and *oblivion* results!

Not only is there a complete cessation of life—there is total loss of *consciousness*!

Then, within moments after death, the physical body begins to *decay*.

This beautiful fifteenth chapter of I Corinthians explains that no matter how rapidly that decaying process (whether being blown to bits in an atomic explosion or slowly decaying in a normal grave) God is capable of completely *re-creating* a new *spirit life*, giving the individual a brand-new *spirit body*!

The Apostle Paul went to great pains to explain it is not the old, decaying, "corrupted" body which is raised, but a *spiritual body*.

There are literally *dozens* of scriptures in the Bible which speak of a great resurrection.

Notice another of the most important. "And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the Word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished [this is the first resurrection]. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in *the first resurrection*: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:4-6).

Just as Jesus spoke of a resurrection to "life" and a resurrection to judgment," so this revealing scripture shows the dead in Christ being resurrected at the second coming of Christ, and *then reigning* with Jesus Christ for a thousand years, while "the rest of the dead, " (those who were *never converted*), remain totally oblivious to all this passage of time until after the thousand years are over!

You see, beginning in verse II to the end of chapter 20, the picture of the "great white throne judgment," or the great latter-day resurrection of perhaps *billions* of human beings who will then be given an opportunity for salvation!

Read the 37th chapter of Ezekiel in the light of the last part of Revelation 20.

The famous "dry bones" of Ezekiel's prophecy are stated to be "the *whole house of Israel*" (verse 2) who are to be resurrected in this great "white throne judgment."

God says "Behold, O my people, I will *open your graves, and* cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And ye shall know that I am the Eternal when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves. And shall put my spirit in you, and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the Eternal have spoken it, and performed it, saith the Eternal" (Ezekiel 37:12-14).

Here again, you see two *opposites*: death, complete unconsciousness—human bodies by the millions decaying, forgotten in their graves—In *contrast* to a great future *resurrection to life even after* the millennial reign of Jesus Christ!

Time and again, the Bible speaks of *the first resurrection* at the precise instant of the second coming of Christ!

In this regard, study carefully one of the cherished scriptures used by proponents of the "hope of heaven" doctrine.

Turn to 1 Thessalonians 4, commencing to read with verse 13. "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which *sleep in Jesus* will God bring with Him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep. For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the *dead in Christ* shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them *in the clouds*, to meet the Lord *in the air*: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words. "

This text is used over and over again to imply that Christians *go to heaven!*

Search the scriptures again, however, and you will see this scripture says *nothing* about going to heaven!

What does it say?

It says both the "dead in Christ (who have been completely *dead*, oblivious, unconscious of the passage of time in their graves) and the living Christians will "be caught up together with them *in the clouds*, to meet the Lord *in the air*..."

This does not say "up in *heaven!*" It says "in the *clouds*."

*Clouds* are as much a part of this *earth* as the oceans, the mountains, or anything else composed of *matter*.

While you may think of clouds as not being literally composed of *matter*, if they were not *particulate matter*, they would be invisible, and you could not see them. Even so, the *air itself* is, in practical fact, "material," meaning it occupies space, has weight, is subjected to certain rigid and unalterable laws, and is composed of a wide variety of gases.

Our "atmosphere" is a thin envelope of life-supporting gases which are held close to the surface of the earth by gravity. Living plants produce oxygen, which is necessary for human and animal survival.

Clouds are merely *vapor*, formed by condensation and the forming of tiny ice particles when moisture-laden air is subjected to changes in pressure and temperature.

Most jet air travel is well above the majority of all clouds. Certainly, all of the orbital satellites are far above the clouds, and yet are held in an orbital pattern above the earth, established by the pull of *gravity*.

When the Bible speaks of Jesus Christ *returning to this earth* it plainly reveals He is coming *all the way back down*, just as He left.

Read, in the first chapter of Acts, of the *very first message ever* to come back down from heaven after Jesus ascended to His Father:

"And when He [Jesus] had spoken these things, while they [the disciples] beheld, He was taken up; and a *cloud* received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel; Which also said, ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken *up from* you into heaven, shall *so come* in like manner as you have seen Him go into heaven" (Acts 1:9-11).

They watched Jesus being enveloped *in the clouds* only a very few hundred feet above their heads! Jesus would have been *completely invisible* if He were only a very few *thousand* feet from them! The scripture plainly shows He was *still visible until clouds* obscured Him from their view.

That meant the clouds had to be *quite low* on this occasion!

The Bible then says He will *come back to this earth*, "in like manner" as they saw Him go into heaven!

Turn back to I Thessalonians 4 and read the passage quoted again.

Notice what it *does not say*. It does not say anything whatsoever about "going to heaven." It says nothing whatsoever about "an immortal soul"!

Rather, as plainly corroborated by many other scriptures, it shows the resurrection of the dead in Christ, and the instantaneous change (I Corinthians 15:50-52) of those who are "alive and remain," to be caught up together *as one group* "in the clouds," and finally concludes by saying "... and so shall we ever be with the Lord. And where will the Lord *be* on that same day?"

Remember, He is *coming back*. He is not merely going to "visit the general vicinity" of the earth, catching away saints in a so-called "rapture" and take them off to heaven!

Notice the proof, from your own Bible!

"Behold the day of the Lord cometh, and thy spoils shall be divided in the midst of thee. For I will gather all nations against Jerusalem to battle; and the city shall be taken, and the houses rifled, and the women ravished; and half of the city shall go forth into captivity, and the residue of the people shall not be cut off from the city. Then shall the Eternal go forth, and fight against those nations, as when He fought in the day of battle. And His feet shall stand *in that day* upon the Mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the Mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south" (Zechariah 14:1-4).

The setting of this prophecy is the *day of the Lord*. The day of the Lord is that period of time immediately following the heavenly signs of Revelation 7, and the first five "seals" of Revelation 6, or the *great tribulation* prophesied by Jesus in Matthew 24.

The gathering of all nations against Jerusalem to battle is the same great battle depicted in Revelation 19:11-21.

Here, John sees the heavens opened in vision, and Jesus Christ sitting on a white horse, followed by heavenly armies, returning to this earth to "smite the nations" and "rule them with a rod of iron. "

In the vision, John said he "saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against Him that sat on the horse, and against His army." And describes the destruction of both the beast and the false prophet on the very same day of the second coming of Jesus Christ.

What will happen *after* the dead in Christ and the living Christians are caught up together to meet the returning Christ in the air?

The Bible says "And His feet shall stand *in that day* upon the Mount of Olives! "

They are gathered from all nations, taken by powerful angels to meet Jesus Christ as He returns directly to the Mount of Olives, and so descend *with Him* to Jerusalem!

Notice! "And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall *see* the Son of man coming in the *clouds of heaven* with power and great glory. And He shall send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together the elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:30-31).

Notice again the description of Jesus Christ *returning to this earth!*

The false doctrine of Christians "going to heaven" would make completely unnecessary any second coming of Christ. If "souls" were *already* "in heaven" from the time they died, then why should Christ come back? Why should such "souls" be taken from heaven, placed back into decayed bodies, resurrected, and then the whole process of deciding where they belong begun all over again?

The false doctrine of the "immortality of the soul" and Christians "going to heaven" *does away* with the second coming of Christ—which is the greatest prophesied event in the Bible!

No, "souls" *do not* go to heaven—neither do people. Christ is *coming back* to this earth. He is coming *all the way* back; coming with *clouds*, to catch the converted righteous up into the *air* with Him, take them to a place just above Jerusalem, and then, "His feet shall stand on the Mount of Olives" *in that same day!*

Obviously, these many biblical proofs of the second coming of Christ utterly negate the false doctrine of souls going to heaven.

Now, let's notice some of Christ's parables about His coming kingdom; about the fact it will be set up *on this literal earth*, and see some of the prophecies about conditions on the earth during the millennium.

Read again the parable of the pounds and the talents. One example is found in Matthew 25:14-30, and another in Luke 19:12-27.

In each case, those who overcome are promised of Jesus Christ *rulership* over cities!

In the parable of the talents (Matthew 25), Jesus says, "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee *ruler* over many things: enter thou into the joy of the Lord."

In the case of the parable of the pounds (Luke 19) Jesus says, "Well, thou good servant: because thou hast been faithful in a very little, have thou *authority over ten cities*" (Luke 19:17).

Do these plain words of your Savior "fit" into the traditional teaching you have always heard—perhaps just taken for granted? Anything about "heaven" here? No, but *rulership over cities*, occupied by *human beings*, during the 1,000- year reign of Christ on earth *is* offered to those who are living a life of overcoming—*of qualifying* for such positions!

Notice! "And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give *power over the nations*: And he shall rule them with a rod of iron; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers: even as I received of my Father" (Revelation 2:26, 27).

There is no way to "spiritualize" these plain words away! Jesus Christ means exactly what He *says!* Those who are living a life of *overcoming* the pulls and tugs of human nature; the works of *the flesh* (Galatians 5:19-21) and who *qualify* will be given actual power and authority over cities, counties, states, and whole *nations!* Do you remember what Jesus said to His disciples just prior to His crucifixion? "...Verily I say unto you, that ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of His glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel! (Matthew 19:28).

Jesus Christ says that even those who live in *this* day can have an opportunity for *co-rulership* in His new *government* which is to be set up on this earth after His second coming!

"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" (Revelation 3:21).

Jesus Christ is coming to inherit a *literal throne!* That throne is *on this earth*. How many little children have memorized the following words at "Christmas-time," repeating the enunciation by the angel to Mary concerning the *birth* of Jesus Christ, and not known *what they said?*

"And the angel said unto her, Fear not, Mary: for thou hast found favor with God. And, behold, thou shalt conceive in thy womb, and bring forth a Son, and shalt call His name JESUS. He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Highest: and the Lord God shall give unto Him *the throne of His father David*; and He shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of His kingdom there shall be no end!" (Luke 1:30-33).

God made a *binding covenant* with David, telling him because David remained faithful to God's laws and precepts that there would never fail seed from David's own family to sit upon His physical throne! Believe it or not, that throne *still exists* on this earth!

Read the prophecy of Daniel's second chapter, where you see, after the description of the four great successive world-ruling Gentile kingdoms, a "stone cut out without hands" which *smites* the image on its *feet* [the ten toes representing the ten kings of Revelation 17] and which then "becomes a great mountain and fills the whole earth."

Clearly, in this prophecy, the figurative stone represents the returning, conquering *Christ!* The great image represents the successive stages of the Gentile world-ruling kingdoms, culminating in the BEAST depicted in Daniel 7, and Revelation 13 and 17.

The ten kings which fight Christ at His coming (Revelation 17) are represented by the ten toes of the great image, mixed with iron and miry clay.

The "great mountain" is symbolic of the *Kingdom of God* which will rule over the entirety of the earth!

***God's Kingdom to Rule on Earth***

There is voluminous evidence in the Bible that the Kingdom of God will reign *on this earth!*

Let's notice just a *few* of the more outstanding proofs.

"But in the last days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of the House of the Eternal shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and *people* [physical human beings will still be alive on the earth during that day!] shall flow unto it. And many nations shall come, and say, Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the Eternal, and to the House of the God of Jacob and He will teach us of His ways and we will walk in His paths: for the law shall go forth of Zion, and the Word of the Eternal from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among many *people*, and rebuke strong nations afar off; and 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 they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of the Eternal of Hosts has spoken it" (Micah 4:1-4).

Here, you see the symbol of the Kingdom of God established over all the other nations, greater and lesser!

Then you see representative ambassadors from all countries on earth agreeing, finally, to come to God's headquarters' city in Jerusalem, learning of the ways of God; learning to *keep His laws*, learning to convert weapons of war into implements of *peace!*

Here is a graphic description of God *finally forcing* upon mankind the ways of peace, happiness, prosperity, bounteous joy!

Ugly, death-dealing tanks will be smelted down, and turned into farming implements. There will be no "war colleges," or military academies, teaching the "art" of *war!*

Notice a parallel scripture: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that the mountain of the Lord's House shall be established in the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow unto it. And many people shall go and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the House of the God of Jacob; and He will teach us of His ways, and we will walk in His paths: for out of Zion shall go forth the law and the Word of the Lord from Jerusalem. And He shall judge among the nations, and shall rebuke many people: and 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" (Isaiah 2:2-4).

Again, we see the complete *rehabilitation* of the earth. It is the time of "restitution" of all things (Acts 3:21). A time for reconstruction, reeducation; a time for global *revolution*, when those who are *born of God* by a resurrection from the dead, are changed instantaneously (as you learned in I Corinthians 15) and who have become members of the very *family of God*, will join Jesus Christ in positions of leadership and *rulership* over the human, physical *remnants* of the great global holocaust that is sure to come!

But mankind *will survive!* (Matthew 24:21, 22).

Christ will return to *this physical earth*, and will grant positions of responsibility and *rulership* to those who have truly *qualified* to be members of His kingdom! Notice a description of conditions extant on earth after Christ has begun to rule: "But with righteousness shall He judge the poor, and reprove with equity for the meek of the earth: and He shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked. And righteousness shall be the girdle of His loins, and faithfulness the girdle of His reins. The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them. And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together: and the lion shall eat straw like the ox. And the suckling child shall play on the hole of the asp, and the weaned child shall put his hand on the cockatrice' den. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain: for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. And in that

day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and His rest shall be glorious. And it shall come to pass in that day, that the Lord shall set His hand again the second time to recover the remnant of His people, which shall be left, from Assyria, and from Egypt, and from Pathros, and from Cush, and from Elam, and from Shinar, and from Hamath, and from the islands of the sea. And He shall set up an ensign for the nations, and shall assemble the outcasts of Israel, and gather together the dispersed of Judah from the four corners of the earth" (Isaiah 11:4-12).

It is impossible to misinterpret or misunderstand this plain scripture! Obviously, the "rod out of the stem of Jesse" (Jesse was David's father and therefore of the lineage of Christ) and a "Branch" which was to grow out of his roots is a metaphorical reference to *Jesus Christ*.

Read verse 2, "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon Him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Eternal."

Commencing with verse 4, you see the description of the righteous judgments of Jesus Christ *returning to this earth* as the conquering King of kings and Lord of lords (read Revelation 19).

Immediately following, you see the *conditions* which shall become extant over *all the earth* during the millennial reign of Jesus Christ!

Are there wolves, lions, oxen and poisonous snakes up in heaven? Nonsense!

Here, you see a description of the "time of restitution of all things" of which Peter prophesied immediately following the day of Pentecost, and the birthday of the Church. Peter said, "And He shall send Jesus Christ [predicting Jesus' *second* coming!], which before was preached unto you: Whom the heaven must receive UNTIL the times of restitution of all things [the *restoring* of everything], which God hath spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 3:20, 21).

The very *nature of animals* shall be changed!

Read the entire passage slowly and carefully. You need no one to "interpret" what it says, or attempt to *change* its meaning! Clearly, this is a detailed description of conditions to become extant on this earth immediately after the second coming of Jesus Christ, and in the first years of His Kingdom!

Here, many of the *nations* of the earth, identified by their ancient names, are mentioned. God says He will regather the *second time* the remnant of His people from nations all over the earth, and from the "islands [coastlands] of the sea."

### ***Heavenly Retirement, or Hard Work?***

Does it make any sense to you? What if our young men just entering the army, navy or marines, underwent six weeks of primary training, then several months of additional training, literally *transforming* them from civilians into military men, skilled in the use of modern weapons and military equipment, only to have their drill instructor announce to them on the moment of their graduation from "boot camp" or primary training: "Well, men, that's it! You have all done a marvelous job. You have become skilled through the rigors of physical exercise, weapons handling, running obstacle courses, learning close-order drill and the Manual of Arms. Now, you are full-fledged military men! Now, it is time for all of you to *retire!* "

Sounds *ludicrous*, when put that way, doesn't it?

Yet, Jesus said "It is through *much tribulation* we must enter the Kingdom of God." And promised His true servants "In the world ye shall have tribulation, but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world!" (John 16:33). Peter cried out, "If the righteous *scarcely* be saved, what shall be the end of them that obey not the gospel of God?" (1 Peter 4:17).

In the sermon on the mount, Jesus described the way into His soon-coming Kingdom as the "strait," meaning *difficult* route! The way that leads to *destruction* He described as a broad, well-lit avenue with glittering lights and dazzling attractions. But the way into His Kingdom He described as ruddy, rocky, narrow, winding, and extremely *difficult*!

Frequently, the Bible uses the analogy of *military service* when speaking of Christians. The *seal* of the Garner Ted Armstrong Evangelistic Association shows a helmet, breastplate, and crossed swords, with a quotation from Ephesians 6:11-18, which says, in part, "Put on the whole armour of God ... having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness; and your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace; above all, taking the shield of faith ... the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the spirit, which is the Word of God."

The Apostle Paul urged Timothy to perform "as a good *soldier* of Jesus Christ" (2 Timothy 2:3).

On another occasion, Paul said, "For the *weapons* of our *warfare* are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strongholds..." (2 Corinthians 10:4).

Jesus said, "To him that *overcometh*, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give *power over the nations*: And he shall *rule them* with a rod of iron..." (Revelation 2:26, 27).

God uses these analogies to show Christians that they are involved in *training*, and in a kind of *warfare*, as if professional *soldiers*.

A Christian is one who is continually *overcoming*; learning, studying, growing, gaining wisdom, knowledge, patience, love, and humility! A Christian is *fighting* (1 Corinthians 9:26), but fighting Satan the devil, and resisting the pulls of *human nature*, not fighting physical enemies with guns and bullets!

This human life is a vast *training ground* for the Kingdom of God!

It is "boot camp"—primary training—for those who are to finally *graduate* into the very Kingdom and Family of God, to become qualified to RULE the world with Jesus Christ!

The Christian life has great PURPOSE! God is working out a PLAN here below! Yet, millions fail to see that great purpose they remain *ignorant* of God's plan in their lives!

Nowhere does the Bible preach "Christian *retirement*"! *Think of it!* Does not much of the music, many of the sermons, and a great deal of so-called "Christian" teaching portray an eternity of idleness and ease; of beatific bliss and indolent delight?

Do not the visionary "heavens" of many of the other religions of the world picture virtually the same thing? One thinks of the song "The Lazy Ole Sun Got Nothin' to do But Roll Around Heaven All Day," in this context. Reference to the "heavenly rocking chair" and "heavenly mansions" are liberally sprinkled through some of the mythological teachings of professing Christianity.

But the *truth* of God is far different!

The *truth* is that Almighty God is calling a cadre of individuals (and not all the world is being called NOW!) as the advance *emissaries* of His soon-coming Kingdom! Even as Jesus Christ called only twelve disciples and formed them into the nucleus of His "group of called-out ones" or His "church" (which more properly should be translated "assembly" in modern English), so that SAME Jesus Christ is calling out a select group whom He calls "the *very elect*" (Matthew 24:22) for rigorous training to *qualify* to become future WORLD RULERS with Him!

*Does anyone* really comprehend the awe-inspiring breadth and scope of God's great plan and purpose?

The churches simply do not teach it! What church teaches that its members are now *qualifying* to become city managers, mayors, ambassadors, princes, presidents, premiers and prime ministers, **KINGS** in the world to come? But city managers, mayors and premiers with a *difference*! That difference is being imbued with a divine power of **ALMIGHTY GOD**!

Future leaders in Christ's soon-coming Kingdom will not be hampered by years-long "studies" by vested interests and government-paid bureaucrats. Decisions involving hygiene, transportation, civil justice, the environment, care for the elderly, etc., etc., will not be hampered and bogged down by years of committee studies, city council meetings, voting and elections, court trials, referendums and lawsuits! Rather, those who will *rule* with Jesus Christ will have wisdom far exceeding that of Solomon; the very love and mercy of Jesus Christ; with which they will be able to rule forcibly, swiftly, in mercy and righteousness, but with sternness and **POWER** where necessary!

After all, it is *here on earth* where the *problems are*!

There are no "problems" to solve in heaven! Almighty God is not calling a group to be put through rigorous training, overcoming and growing in the knowledge and love of Jesus Christ; fighting *themselves*; having their very human nature *changed* from that of jealousy, lust, avarice and greed to the character of Jesus Christ of love, goodness, meekness, mercy, kindness and understanding, in order to *retire*!

Instead, Jesus Christ promises **CO-RULERSHIP WITH HIM!**

"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!" (Revelation 3:21).

John, in vision, wrote, "And I looked, and lo, a Lamb [Christ] stood on the Mount Zion [which is in Jerusalem, *on this earth!*] and *with Him* an hundred and forty and four thousand, having His Father's name written in their foreheads ... these were redeemed from among men, being *the firstfruits* unto God and to the Lamb! " (Revelation 14:1-4).

Is it possible **YOU** are being called, *now*, to become one of those comparatively few individuals? Could God, actually, be performing the *miracle of opening your mind* to see His **TRUTH**?

Millions around you are in spiritual darkness. The big churches and major denominations do not teach these simple truths from the Word of God! The *millions* believe they are "going to heaven" when they die; believe in an immortal soul, and an ever-burning hell!

-End-

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