

God's Plan for the Future

GOD saves us from sin by offering us the forgiveness of our sins through His Son, Jesus Christ. But is that it? We're still going to die. So how does He propose to save us from death – and is that even possible?

This question is answered very clearly in the Bible. For, as one of God's writers (the Apostle Paul) put it:

If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men the most pitiable (1 Corinthians 15:19).

Resurrection from the Dead

Paul went on to answer his own question as follows:

But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by man also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those who are Christ's at his coming (v20–23).

God does not say that His faithful followers will not die. Nor does the Bible say that any of us has an immortal soul that enables us to continue living straight after we die.



Death is the sentence for sin that we all serve, not the immediate gateway to a better existence.

In Bible language, those who have never heard or have refused to accept the gospel are said to 'perish'. God's people do not 'perish', but 'sleep' – in other words, they will 'wake' from death. It was the same with Jesus: his death was a 'sleep', because God brought him back to life.

In the passage above Jesus is described as the 'firstfruits' of a harvest. So God promises that, when Jesus returns to the earth, one of the first things he will do will be to raise from the dead those who have known the good news of the Kingdom of God.

The Judgment Seat

Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt (Daniel 12:2).

In many places the Bible explains that those who have been raised from the dead will then be judged. The quotation above is from the Old Testament, and it is Paul who wrote in the New Testament about:

...the day when God will judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ (Romans 2:16).

Those 'who sleep in the dust of the earth' and are raised from the dead will appear before Jesus Christ. Some will return to the grave and to 'shame and everlasting contempt' because of their unfaithfulness. But others will be given everlasting life, to live forever on this earth in the Kingdom of God, where conditions will be nothing like those that prevail now.

The Kingdom of God

God's long-term plan is to set up His world-wide Kingdom on the earth:

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

This was predicted in the Old Testament by many of God's prophets.



Now it shall come to pass in the latter days that the mountain of the LORD's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and shall be exalted above the hills; and all nations shall flow to it. Many people shall come and say, "Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths." For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem (Isaiah 2:2-3).

He will judge Your people with righteousness, and Your poor with justice... He will bring justice to the poor of the people; he will save the children of the needy, and will break in pieces the oppressor. They shall fear You as long as the sun and moon endure, throughout all generations... In his days the righteous shall flourish, and abundance of peace, until the moon is no more. He shall have dominion also from sea to sea, and from the River to the ends of the earth (Psalm 72:2-8).

Look to Me, and be saved, all you ends of the earth! For I am God, and there is no other. I have sworn by Myself; the word has gone out of My mouth in righteousness, and shall not return, that to Me every knee shall bow, every tongue shall take an oath. He shall say, 'Surely in the LORD I have righteousness and strength. To Him men shall come, and all shall be ashamed who are incensed against Him (Isaiah 45:22–24).

From just these few examples, and there are many more, we learn several important things about God's Kingdom:

- ◆ It will be a world-wide empire on earth
- ◆ Its capital will be Jerusalem
- ◆ It will last for ever
- ◆ Righteousness and peace will flourish
- ◆ It hasn't happened yet.

The Teaching of Jesus

In the famous 'Lord's Prayer', Jesus taught his disciples to pray for the establishment of this Kingdom.

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be Your name. Your kingdom come. Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven (Matthew 6:9–10).

In those few words Jesus made four things clear:

- ◆ He believed the Old Testament teaching about the Kingdom of God

- ◆ This Kingdom will involve total obedience to God's will
- ◆ It will be on the earth
- ◆ It was still to come, when he spoke.

Just before he rose to heaven before their very eyes, his followers asked him,

Lord, will you at this time restore the kingdom to Israel? (Acts 1:6).

When these same disciples went out to preach, they spoke about the resurrection



of Jesus and the gospel of the Kingdom of God. Philip, who was one of the apostles:

...preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ (8:12).

Indeed, this is the big theme that runs throughout the Bible. The Old Testament gives us a detailed picture of what this Kingdom will be like. The New Testament stresses the characteristics of those who will be selected by Jesus Christ at his return, to receive immortality and rule the earth under his overall control.

The Return of Jesus as King

Years before Jesus was born, God gave a prophecy to King David of Israel about the eventual role of Jesus.

I will establish his throne forever. I will be his Father, and he shall be My son; and I will not take My mercy away from him... And I will establish him in My house and in My kingdom forever; and his throne shall be established forever (1 Chronicles 17:12–14).

The angel Gabriel confirmed this when he spoke to Mary, the mother of Jesus:

He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give him the throne of his father David. And he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end (Luke 1:32–33).

Jesus knew all about his future role:

When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory (Matthew 25:31).

Jesus is not yet ruling on David's throne. He is in heaven with his Father. When he ascended to heaven, a group of his disciples saw him go and angels gave them this message:

While they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel, who also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who was taken up from you into heaven, will so come in like manner as you saw him go into heaven" (Acts 1:10–11).

However, perhaps disappointed that Christ had not returned, the established church lost sight of the Bible teaching about a world-wide Kingdom ruled from Jerusalem. Instead they developed the view that the Kingdom of God is in heaven and that the deceased go there when they die.

It is vital to try to follow Bible teaching as closely as possible, and the original gospel is that Jesus is to return to the earth, so the Kingdom must still be in the future. One day Jesus Christ will rule over Israel – and, from there, over the entire world. This will fulfil the Old Testament prophecies of the Messiah as Saviour and King.

Simply to accept Jesus as our personal Saviour is to understand only part of God's work through His Son. God gave him the name 'Jesus', which means 'God saves'. But He also gave him the title 'Christ' – meaning 'anointed one', the same as 'Messiah'. So, one day Jesus WILL be King!

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