

### **13. The Prophetic End for the Righteous Is Eternal Life**

Jesus was clear in his teaching that he was going to prepare a place for the righteous. He was also certain in his teaching that he would take the disciples back with him to his Father's house. In John 14:2-3, he taught:

2 In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

He also taught that the righteous and the wicked would receive a reckoning for how they lived. He spoke of this in the parable of the sheep and the goats in Matt 25:31-33:

31 "When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, he will sit on his throne in heavenly glory. 32 All the nations will be gathered before him, and he will separate the people one from another as a shepherd separates the sheep from the goats. 33 He will put the sheep on his right and the goats on his left.

The reckoning for the righteous was eternal life according to Matt 25:34: "Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world.'" However, the reckoning for the wicked was eternal fire, according to Matt 25:41: "41 Then he will say to those on his left, 'Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" The parable closes with an emphatic summary in Matt 25:46: "46 Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life."

The teaching—eternal life contrasted to eternal punishment—was central to the obedience to the gospel, as the Lord taught in Mark 16:15-16:

15 He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. 16 Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.

Metaphorically, the New Testament prophecies describe the eternal life offered to believers in powerful and figurative language, such as the water of life, the tree of life, the crown of life, and the New Jerusalem. Each of the metaphors presents the idea of a heavenly home as an ever-increasing reality as the idea connects with symbolic language easily understood by Christians.

#### ***The Water of Life***

Perhaps the river of life concept had its beginning in Jer 2:13, where God used it in reference to 13 "My people have committed two sins:

They have forsaken me,  
the spring of living water,  
and have dug their own cisterns,  
broken cisterns that cannot hold water.

However, Jesus uses the metaphor to describe eternal life given by God and bought by his own blood. The woman at the well poses the question in John 4:10-11:

10 Jesus answered her, "If you knew the gift of God and who it is that asks you for a drink, you would have asked him and he would have given you living water."

11 "Sir," the woman said, "you have nothing to draw with and the well is deep. Where can you get this living water?"

In John 4:13-14, Jesus answers connecting the living water to eternal life:

13 Jesus answered, "Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, 14 but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life."

*Revelation* teaches that all Christians who overcome receive "springs of living water." These are the Christians, who have endured and washed their robes in the blood of Jesus in Rev 7:14-17: "And he said, 'These are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.'" In the description that follows, these Christians are before the throne of God, where the Lamb is at the center and where he leads them to springs of living water in Rev 7:17:

17 For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd;  
he will lead them to springs of living water.

And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes."

The wonders of this blessing of living water are great and marvelous: we will serve God day and night; he will spread his tent over us; we will never hunger or thirst; the sun will not beat upon us.

This metaphor of living water from a river of life extends to the very end of *Revelation*. In Rev 21:6, the Lord said: "6 He said to me: 'It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life.'" Rev 22:1-2 places this spring in heaven itself:

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.

The invitation of the Lord offered at the very end of *Revelation* in Rev 22:17 restates the wonderful promise:

17 The Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life."

### **The Tree of Life**

The metaphor, *tree of life*, just like *the living water*, describes heaven's glory in a way that we can understand. The symbolism begins in the beginning in Gen 2:9:

9 And the Lord God made all kinds of trees grow out of the ground – trees that were pleasing to the eye and good for food. In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

The tree of life was so important that God protected it from fallen man, connecting it in meaning to eternal life in Gen 3:22:

22 And the Lord God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever."

Thus, God reserved the tree of life (eternal life) as the final reward for man. The Lord returned to it when he addressed the seven churches of Asia in *Revelation*. In Rev 2:7, the Lord identified the tree of life as a promise to Christians who overcome and placed it in the paradise of God:

7 He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will give the right to eat from the tree of life, which is in the paradise of God.

The passage clearly asserts the tree is in the paradise of God; and Rev 22:1-2 places the tree of life in the heavenly city on each side of the river of life:

22 Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb 2 down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life. . . .

Paradise of God and the heavenly city are the same; and so are the river of life and the tree of life. In Rev 7, the lesson saw the living water going to those who "are they who have come out of the great tribulation; they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb." Now, in Rev 22:14-15, those who washed their robes have a right to the tree of life:

14 "Blessed are those who wash their robes, that they may have the right to the tree of life and may go through the gates into the city. 15 Outside are the dogs, those who practice magic arts, the sexually immoral, the murderers, the idolaters and everyone who loves and practices falsehood.

Not only are these evil doers excluded from the tree of life, but perverters of God's revelation are also excluded in Rev 22:19:

19 And if anyone takes words away from this book of prophecy, God will take away from him his share in the tree of life and in the holy city, which are described in this book.

### ***The Paradise of God***

Above, Jesus spoke of the tree of life as the paradise of God, and John later in *Revelation* found that tree in the heavenly city, making a direct connection between paradise of God and heaven. Jesus introduced the symbol of paradise in response to the thief on the cross, who asked in Luke 23:42: "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom." Jesus answered in a most definitive way in verse 43: "Jesus answered him, 'I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise.'"

Paul used the word in 2 Cor 12:2-4 to describe a man who was taken up to the third heaven (contemporaries understood this to be the heaven where God is; and indeed, the Bible teaches only of three heavens:

2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven. Whether it was in the body or out of the body I do not know — God knows. 3 And I know that this man — whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, but God knows— 4 was caught up to paradise. He heard inexpressible things, things that man is not permitted to tell.

The issue of three heavens versus the seven of the Jews and Muslims is explained by Barnes:

[To the third heaven] The Jews sometimes speak of seven heavens, and Muhammed has borrowed this idea from the Jews. But the Bible speaks of but three heavens, and among the Jews in the apostolic ages also the heavens were divided into three:

- (1) The aerial, including the clouds and the atmosphere, the heavens above us, until we come to the stars.
- (2) The starry heavens, the heavens in which the sun, moon, and stars appear to be situated.
- (3) The heavens beyond the stars. That heaven was supposed to be the residence of God, of angels, and of holy spirits. It was this upper heaven, the dwelling-place of God, to which Paul was taken, and whose wonders he was permitted to behold—this region where God dwelt; where Christ was seated at the right hand of the Father, and where the spirits of the just were assembled. (from Barnes' Notes, Electronic Database Copyright © 1997, 2003, 2005, 2006 by BibleSoft, Inc. All rights reserved.)

Once again paradise and heaven become synonymous.

Some interpret *Abraham's bosom* in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus, in Luke 16:22-26, as *paradise*, which may well be the case. However, it cannot be, as is taught, a division of Hades, the realm of the dead, where the rich man was in torment and heaven at the same time. Whatever the case, the righteous dead go immediately to a state of bliss; and those who die to sin and die literally in the Lord share this state of bliss. The Lord promised Daniel this state in Dan 12:13: "13 "As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance." Rev 6:9-11 describes the destiny of the souls of those who die to sin and die physically in the Lord:

I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. 10 They called out in a loud voice, "How long, Sovereign Lord, holy and true, until you judge the inhabitants of the earth and avenge our blood?" 11 Then each of them was given a white robe, and they were told to wait a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and brothers who were to be killed as they had been was completed.

The death that killed the fellow servants is the death Paul spoke of in 1 Cor 15:31-32: "31 I die every day — I mean that, brothers — just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord."

### ***The Crown of Life***

By persevering under trial and temptation, by being patient in suffering, by suffering persecution, and by being faithful unto death, Christians are promised the crown of life. Of overcoming temptation and trial, James wrote in James 1:12:

12 Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.

By being faithful unto the point of death, Jesus promised the crown of life in Rev 2:10:

10 Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life.

As Paul's life was about to end, he said in 2 Tim 4:7: "7 I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith." Based on this, he was confident that he would receive the crown of righteousness, and concluded in 2 Tim 4:8:

8 Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day — and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.

### **The New Jerusalem**

The Bible portrays the heavenly home of the saved as the New or the Heavenly Jerusalem. Christians come to that reality before they die in its synonymous form, the church. The Hebrew writer put these together in Heb 12:22-23:

22 But you have come to Mount Zion, to the **heavenly Jerusalem**, the **city** of the living God. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in **joyful assembly**, 23 to **the church** of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. [Emphasis added]

*Revelation* extends this same city into heaven in Rev 3:12:

12 Him who overcomes I will make a pillar in the temple of my God. Never again will he leave it. I will write on him the name of my God and the **name of the city** of my God, **the new Jerusalem**, which is coming down out of heaven from my God; and I will also write on him my new name. [Emphasis added]

In Rev 21:2-4, The Holy City is the new Jerusalem, where God and His throne are and where pain and sorrow and death are no more:

2 I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. 4 He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away."

### **Study Questions from the Scriptures**

1. John 14:2-3: How many rooms are in the Father's house? What is Jesus preparing?
2. Matt 25:31-33:31 When Jesus comes, where will he be sitting? What will he do with the sheep and the goats? Who are the sheep and goats?
3. Matt 25:34: What will happen to those on the right hand?
4. Matt 25:41: What will happen to those on the left hand?
5. Matt 25:46: Who will get eternal life?
6. Mark 16:15-16:15: What will happen to those who believe and are baptized? What will happen to those who do not believe?
7. Jer 2:13: Who is the spring of living water? Where were they looking for water?
8. John 4:10-11: For what should the women at the well have asked? What would Jesus have?
9. John 4:13-14: What does the water that Jesus gives well up to? What will never happen again if you the water given by Jesus?
10. Rev 7:14-17: Who has washed their robes and made them white?
11. Rev 7:17: Who is in the center of the throne of God? To what does he lead us?
12. Rev 21:6-7: Who gives us to drink without cost?
13. Rev 22:1-2: What does the river of the water of life look like?
14. Rev 22:17:17: What free gift is offered the thirsty? Who says, "Come"
15. Gen 2:9: What was in the middle of the Garden of Eden?
16. Gen 3:22: What did God keep from man? Why?
17. Rev 2:7: What will Jesus give those who overcome? What is the tree of life called?
18. Rev 22:1-3: Where is the tree of life?
19. Rev 22:14-15: Who is kept from the tree of life? Who is blessed?

20. Rev 22:19: If we take away from this book of prophecy, what will God take away from us?
21. Luke 23:42: What did the thief on the cross ask for? Where did Jesus say that the thief would be on that day?
22. 2 Cor 12:2-4: What is the third heaven? What is paradise?
23. Luke 16:22-26: What parable is found here?
24. Dan 12:13: What would happen to Daniel between his end and the end of the days? What will he receive at the end of the days?
25. Rev 6:9-11: What were those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained told to do?
26. 1 Cor 15:31-32: How many times did Paul die?
27. James 1:12: What will the ones, who persevere trial and temptation, receive?
28. Rev 2:10: What will those faithful to the point of death receive?
29. 2 Tim 4:7: What was Paul to receive? What had he done?
30. Heb 12:22-23: What is the heavenly Jerusalem? To what else did they come? Where are the names of the church written?
31. Rev 3:12-13: What will be written on those who overcome?
32. Rev 21:2-4: What is the Holy City? Who is the bride of Christ? Where will the dwelling of God be? What will God himself do? What will not be in heaven?