

THREE DESTINIES OF MAN

Tragic events so prevalent in our day cause many to seek answers about life, death and the hereafter. Frequently asked questions on the **biblestudent.com** website are: “*What is to become of me after I die? Is death the end?*” “*Will I go to heaven, or will I go to hell because I’ve backslid?*” “*What happens to the billions who have never heard of Christ?*” In answer to these questions, our response is that God has illustrated in His Word three different paths which lead to three different destinies.

THE BROAD WAY THAT LEADS TO DESTRUCTION

Mankind is born dying. There is no choice in the matter—we have all been “*born in sin and shapen in iniquity.*” (Psalm 51:5) Consequently, unless something alters this path, the only destiny for mankind’s billions is to remain dead in their graves forever. “*...wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat...*” (Matthew 7:13) **Many?** Yes, **all** start out on this path, and many will never find their way off of it in this present evil age dominated by sin.

This *broad way* began just over 6,000 years ago when father Adam stood at a crossroads in his life: one path led to continued perfection and happiness—life sustained by God in the Garden of Eden; while the other path followed this slow downward course to the grave. Yes, the whole human race, Adam and all of his offspring, have been born dying because of Adam’s original sin—disobedience unto a simple command given by his Creator in the Garden of Eden. “*And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.*” Genesis 2:16, 17

Adam had been created perfect, and he was also created with the gift of free-will—the privilege to choose between right or wrong. The Heavenly Father foresaw that His perfect son Adam, given a choice, would fall prey to deception, lack of trust in His commands and eventual disobedience. Before Adam disobeyed, God declared to him the penalty for sin—that he would “*surely die.*” (Genesis 2:17) Note that the penalty was death and not eternal torment.

This penalty of death could not be offset by just making a renewed choice to be good. No, Adam and his posterity had been corrupted by sin and the penalty must be paid by all. “*...by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men...*” (Romans 5:12) And thus, unless someone would pay the price for Adam’s original sin and take his place, all would remain on the path to destruction—everlasting death.

In His great wisdom, God not only saw that mankind would start on this long journey toward destruction, but He also set in motion a plan that would work to man’s benefit by allowing the hard lesson of experience. Living with



the consequence of disobedience has been a harsh, yet everlasting teacher. The offsetting price for Adam’s penalty required what the Scriptures call a *ransom* for Adam and his children—Greek: *anti-lutron, corresponding price*. This *ransom* provided an opportunity for Adam and his corrupted seed to be brought back to life with a fresh opportunity to take a different path that would lead to life. Jesus Christ exchanged his perfect life for the life of Adam. The path to life offered by Jesus’ death, however, also requires a choice—a choice to avail oneself of the payment offered for Adam’s penalty and then a choice to live in obedience to the principles of truth and righteousness.

THE PATH LEADING TO LIFE

The theme text in Matthew 7:14 illustrates a path that is difficult—a *narrow way* which is certainly the road less traveled in a world plummeting farther than ever down the road to destruction. Walking this narrow path is the privilege of those who accept the sacrifice Jesus Christ made—paying the penalty for Adam’s disobedience and thus providing the hope of a resurrection from the dead.

The age in which we now live is called the *Gospel Age* otherwise known as the *Good News Age*. Those who choose this path today, contrary to the ways of this present evil world, are dedicated or *consecrated* to a “*high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*” (Philippians 3:14) The Apostle Paul speaks of this as *a new and living way*. “*...enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us...*” Hebrews 10:19, 20

The destiny of one who accepts this *new way* is to travel on a *narrow road* which leads to heaven. But keep in mind that what Adam lost was perfect *human life*, not life as a spirit being. How, then, did life in heaven become the destiny of one who accepts Christ? The spirit nature is a *reward* for accepting the merit of Christ’s shed blood and then laying down one’s life in sacrifice with his—sharing in his death. “*For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection...*”—a resurrection on the spirit plane. (Romans 6:5) This reward does not mean that anyone *born in sin* has merit of his own to deserve such a prize. No, what this means is that one who has accepted, by faith, Christ’s sacrifice receives the right to human life and is *reckoned perfect*. As such, that person is *justified* or *made right before God*. “*...faith is counted for righteousness.*” Romans 4:5

In giving one’s life to serve God—to be dead to self will and alive to do His will—we are following in the footsteps of His beloved Son. By so doing, Jesus himself is “*not ashamed to call us brethren.*” (Hebrews 2:11) If his reward for faithfulness was to be resurrected to the divine nature, then those who become his brethren will likewise receive this reward, if faithful. “*Be thou faithful unto death and I will give thee a crown of life.*” Revelation 2:10

CALLED ACCORDING TO GOD’S PURPOSE

The Apostle Paul calls consecrated Christians *children of God*: “*...and if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together...*” Herein is the qualifier for

receiving the heavenly destiny—if *we suffer with him*. But why should a Christian suffer? Paul goes on to say, “*For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God... For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.*” (Romans 8:17-23) Paul is expressing that the whole creation—mankind, the animals

and even the earth—are all imperfect now. They are all described as *groaning* in their imperfect condition. Again, this was brought upon us all because of father Adam’s original sin.

Paul explains that this *poor groaning creation* is *waiting* in its dying condition for the selection of the church, *the sons of God*, to be in heaven with Jesus. The resurrection of the remainder of the human race must wait until Christ’s blood has secured the completion of his *body*. “*Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name... as it is written, After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up: That the residue of men might seek after the Lord...*” It is this residue, the *poor groaning creation* that is *waiting* for the completion of *the body of Christ*. Acts 15:14-17; 1 Corinthians 12:12

BILLIONS HAVE NO CHOICE

Even today, in our so-called *age of enlightenment*, most people of the world are still in ignorance of this path to glory. Their destiny is determined by the circumstances into which they are born—there is no choice but to follow that path. If we are *children of God* and brothers of Christ, then we will soon develop in our hearts compassion for the world still living in ignorance, and we will desire that they, too, might find a way of escape from the everlasting penalty of death. We will search the Scriptures to determine through them if there is a hope for the lost and dying race of mankind. And, praise God, we do find and delight in the promise that God is the “*Savior of all men, specially of those that believe.*” (1 Timothy 4:10) This Scripture illustrates a hope for those who never knew Christ—those who will believe when they come up from their graves in the general resurrection on the earth. This resurrection was opened to all as a result of Christ’s death upon the cross—offsetting the penalty of Adamic death. 1 Corinthians 15:19-23



Yes, it is not Christ-like to selfishly say, *“I am saved and it doesn’t matter what happens to the rest of the world sitting in darkness.”* No, if we are to grow into the likeness of God’s beloved Son, we will grow in love and compassion and desire what God desires: *“all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.”* 1 Timothy 2:4

THE HIGHWAY OF HOLINESS

The Book of Isaiah brings to our attention a hope for the billions who have lived in darkness—those who have never had the opportunity to walk the narrow path that leads to life in heaven: *“And a highway shall be there, and a way. And it shall be called the way of holiness, the unclean shall not pass over it, but it shall be for those. The wayfaring men though fools, shall not err therein. No lion shall be there, nor any ravenous beast shall go up thereon; it shall not be found there but the redeemed shall walk there. The **ransomed** of the Lord shall return and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads. They shall obtain joy and gladness and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”* Isaiah 35:8-10



Unlike the path of the Christian today, this *highway* is far from narrow or difficult. It is wide enough and easy enough that even a *fool* would not stumble there upon. This *highway* is for the same *ransomed of the Lord* spoken of in 1 Timothy 2:3-6: Jesus Christ *“gave himself a ransom for **all** to be testified in due time.”* Again, there will be a free-will choice to accept this offer of life, and those who wish to follow the path of righteousness and obedience will have the opportunity to *“learn righteousness.”* (Isaiah 26:9) All who do not accept this path will be cut off from life everlastingly in the *second death*. (Acts 3:18-23; Revelation 20:14) Whoever chooses the path of righteousness will be taught how to live lovingly and unselfishly with all of God’s creation. And there will be no lion-like characters there. During this time Satan, the great adversary of God and man, will be bound for a thousand years. He will not be allowed to deceive and tempt the world in God’s Kingdom for he will be restricted.

Where will this *highway of holiness* be? Will it be in heaven with Christ and his church? No, remember that heaven is the destiny of those who sacrificed their justified humanity to become *dead with Christ*. Recall, too, that Adam did not lose a spiritual life, but an earthly life. Christ gave his *flesh for the life of the world*. Therefore, the life offered to the *residue of men* is here upon this earth. Revelation 20:2, 3

TWO PATHS OF SALVATION

The Bible has thus shown us three paths, with three different destinies—two of these paths provide a hope of salvation. The heavenly hope is reached by walking that *narrow way*, following in Christ’s footsteps now. After the body of Christ is complete and these sons of God are revealed, there will be a *highway*—the second hope of salvation. God’s will shall be done *in earth* as it is being done *in heaven*. Matthew 6:10

This is God’s plan complete and the final solution to the disobedience and fall of man in the opening chapters of Genesis. The revelation given to the Apostle John concludes the story of redemption: *“And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away... And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And 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.” Revelation 21:1-4

What is this *new Jerusalem*? Christ and his *brethren*—the glorified church reigning from the heavens. When the church of Christ is complete, fully tested, fully developed in character, and fully trained in righteousness, the world of mankind will be released from the prison house of death and brought up to perfect life on the *highway of holiness* with an opportunity to live in accordance with God’s laws. Then, even the earth shall be restored to its original perfection. The new heaven and the new earth will have replaced the first heaven and the first earth.

The promise of a resurrection and a brighter day for all the world of mankind should thrill the hearts of those who have received the privilege of enlightenment. It should give great comfort to know that God’s penalty of death is for the purpose of education and not a vindictive, demonic thirst for revenge. God’s gracious plan complete, when death *“is swallowed up in victory”* and where the earth becomes a glorious *“footstool”* for His feet—is the hope of the church now and is the future hope of the world in Christ our Savior. 1 Corinthians 15:54; Isaiah 60:13-14