

## DOES THE BIBLE TEACH PROBATION AFTER DEATH

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Most orthodox theology in the past has taught that once a man dies, his history is closed; he will never again have the chance of accepting Christ, or achieving salvation. I have never attended a revival meeting, or an evangelistic service where this belief was not referred to, or at least INFERRED. The appeal is always made, sometimes with more, sometimes with less force and urgency, to accept Christ now, tonight, for if you should reject him now and die before morning it would be everlastingly too late. The rule which is laid down is that any man who dies without accepting Christ is forever lost. This is the motive force or driving power behind much of our foreign mission program. This school of theology has always taught us that even the heathen who die without accepting Christ will be forever condemned to hell. Some churches in the past, and some even now, have gone so far as to say that an infant which dies without baptism is forever lost. In the days of Jonathan Edwards, good, kind, devout Christian people used to sing with perfect faith,  
Hell is crammed with infants damned,  
And not a day of grace.

What does the Bible teach about probation after death? If a man dies without ever having heard of Christ, is he forever lost? Will there be no chance in the beyond, or must he perish and suffer forever in the fires of hell? First of all, let us approach this question from the standpoint of reason. Our Bible tells us that God made all races, and appointed them the bounds of their habitations. Who, then, is to blame, if a savage in darkest Africa, or a yellow man in Asia never hears of Christ? Either God, who put the heathen where he is, or else the Christian people of the world who have failed to take Christ to him. If there is any justice in God, he will not punish the heathen for something which is God's doing. Neither will he give the Christian heavenly bliss for failing in his duty of proclaiming Christ, while damning the heathen who by the Christian's negligence failed to hear. That would be getting the punishments all mixed up -- backwards.

Let us approach it from another angle of logic. Christ came to redeem all men. His mission of salvation was universal. It included all the people who had lived before his time, and all who were to come after his time. No one who believes in him, who has studied his life and his message, can believe that he came to save only a small fraction of the people of the world. Think of all the billions of people who have lived and died since the world began. How many of them do you think ever heard the name of Christ? Just what the figures would be, we have no way of knowing, but there would be an astronomical number who according to the doctrine that all who have not accepted Christ are lost, would be forever and irretrievably doomed. Take our present enlightened day, for example, after near-

ly two thousand years of proclaiming Christianity to the world. Roughly, only one man in four in today's world even lives in a Christian country. And in a Christian country like the United States, the 1936 figures showed only about 56 million church members, or not quite half the total population. What is to become of all these people, many of whom have lived up to the best light and instruction they have had? Are they to be lost, simply because God put them in the wrong place in the world, or because we failed to take the gospel of Jesus to them? Reason and justice tell us, "No."

But if these who have died without hearing or accepting the gospel of Christ are to be saved, HOW, and WHEN, and WHERE are they to be saved? The Bible is quite explicit on one point. Acts 4:12 concludes: ".....there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved." First Timothy, chapter 2, verse 5, reads: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Jesus Christ....." If men are to be saved, in this life or any other; if they are to be brought back into the presence of God, it must be through the mediation of Jesus, for his is the only name given whereby men may be saved; he is the one Mediator between God and man.

Logically, then, and inevitably, we are led to the belief that there must be some sort of opportunity to hear of Christ and his gospel after death. Death does not end existence. It does not blot out consciousness. The spirit, which is the conscious personality of each one of us, is indestructible. In Christ's parable of Lazarus and the rich man, both were conscious, and each recognized the other. Paul's second Corinthian letter, chapter 5, speaks of being "absent from the body, and present with the Lord," not as if we should be asleep or unconscious, but as if we should be able to know of, and enjoy, our presence with him. Jesus, speaking to the repentant thief on the cross, told him, "This day shalt thou be with me in paradise." What good would it have been to tell this man where he was going, if he were not going to be conscious enough to recognize the place, and Jesus his companion, when he got there?

Many people have believed in the past that God had provided some way for the salvation of the heathen. Some have said that they will be saved by conscience, that is, by living up to the best they knew. If that be true, then it was not necessary for Jesus to die for any of us; we might all have been saved by conscience. The Jews believe to this day that God will provide some means of saving the heathen in some other world. Judaism has never been much concerned about missionary work among the heathen. Jonah is the only missionary to the heathen mentioned in the Old Testament. But Latter Day Saints go a step further, and proclaim what some few isolated men of other churches have proclaimed. Usually they have been labelled as heretics, and put out from their pastorates or their chairs of theology in schools and seminaries. But we confidently assert that God has provided a plan of salvation for those who never know Christ here; that the gospel will be preached in the spirit world; that even the spirits who are in hell, or the prison house, or in purgatory if you prefer the Catholic word for it, will have an opportunity to accept Christ, lay hold of his pardoning and redeeming grace that forgives and washes away their sin, and gives them a right to salvation from the second death.

We do not hold this belief, or state it so boldly, without what we believe to be adequate scriptural proof, as well as the proof of reason which we have already presented to you. Bear in mind as we proceed, that probably 150 BILLION people have lived on this old earth since the day of Creation. Out of all that number, not more than a billion, or a billion and a half at most, ever heard the name of Christ. Only one person in four, approximately, lives in a Christian nation today, as we have already said.

Now let us read from the fifth chapter of John, verses 24 to 29. They are the words of Jesus. "He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. 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. For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is the Son of Man. Marvel not at this, for the hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves 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."

Notice in this reading that "the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God, and they that hear shall live," and that the hour "now is" when this shall be. Some may say that this voice of the Son of God will be the voice with which he calls men to the resurrection. This is true in the concluding verses of our reading. But a different kind of call is meant in verse 25. Verse 24 has already said that he that heareth and believeth hath everlasting life, and shall not come unto condemnation. Verse 25 follows it, offering that same everlasting life to the dead who will hear the voice of the Son of God, accept him as their Savior, and receive his gift of everlasting life. "They that hear shall live," in the resurrection, certainly, but also after the resurrection, everlastingly. And notice in verse 28 that the basis of judgment is to be works -- "they that have DONE GOOD unto the resurrection of life, and they that have DONE EVIL unto the resurrection of damnation." The inference is very strong here that many who did good will be saved by their acceptance of the voice of Jesus after death, and that they who hear shall live, everlastingly.

A still clearer scripture is found in First Peter, 3:18-20. We quote: "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison, which sometime (Revised version says aforetime) were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water." Here is a clear, if rather fragmentary account, of a visitation of Christ to the spirits in hell or in the prison house -- spirits which were sinful and disobedient in the days of Noah. He went to them in spirit form; he was quickened by the Spirit, "by the which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison.." Why should he preach, if there was no chance for them even if they heard and were converted? Let us read on into the next chapter, and stop at the sixth verse...."For this cause was the gospel

preached also to them that are dead (Revised Version reads For unto this end was the gospel preached even to the dead\* that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the Spirit." They were to be judged, then, according to the works done in the flesh, with due consideration being given to their opportunity to know right from wrong, but they were to live according to God, by the plan of salvation he had laid down for all men --acceptance of his Son Jesus Christ as savior and Redeemer.

Nor was this mission of preaching to the dead unexpected, or unheralded in the old testament. The prophets had expected and foretold it. Isaiah, speaking of the last days, when many wicked men should be fighting against the kingdom of Christ, says (Chap. 24, verses 21,22) "...they shall be gathered together, as prisoners are gathered in the pit, and shall be shut up in the prison, and after many days they shall be visited." By whom, and for what purpose? By some messenger of Christ, or perhaps by Christ himself, who will preach the gospel of salvation to them, and offer them one more chance to accept the Christ they had not heard about or understood on earth. The 42nd chapter of Isaiah, outlining the mission of Christ, includes these words in verse 7: "To open the blind eyes, to bring out the prisoners from the prison, and them that sit in darkness out of the prison house." And the 49th chapter of Isaiah, verse 9, continues this thought, or reiterates it, with the words, "That thou mayest say to the prisoners, go forth; to them that are in darkness, shew yourselves." Compare also the 61st chapter of Isaiah, in which Christ is foretold as one who is to proclaim liberty to the captive. All the captives in the Roman world of that day would have been only a drop in the bucket compared to those who were in captivity in the prison house of sin, waiting for Christ to come and show them the way out.

Who is stronger, Christ, or Satan? Is Satan to have his hundred or hundred and fifty billion, and Christ forced to be satisfied with a paltry hundred and forty-four thousand, as some believe? No, that would make Christ a weak, ineffectual, beaten sort of Savior. He is going to triumph over Satan, entering the very gates of hell to proclaim deliverance to the captive --to preach to the spirits in prison, and give them another chance to claim the power and the redeeming grace of their Savior. In John's vision on Patmos, Jesus is represented as saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold, I am alive forevermore, amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." Jesus could not be the "savior of the world" while the majority of the people of the world were still subject to the powers of death and hell and the Devil himself.

In two of the psalms (22:27, and 86:9) the promise is made that "all nations" or "all the kindreds of the nations" shall worship thee. Isaiah 45:22,23, and Philippians 2:9-11 both predict that the day shall come when every knee shall bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord. These predictions could not be fulfilled if the devil continued to hold dominion over most of the billions who have dwelt on the earth. There is forgiveness for every sin save one --the sin against the Holy Ghost. God does not want to see one soul lost. His love follows us even into hell, and offers us even there a means of escape through the name of Jesus. The 20th chapter of the book of Revelation, verse 14, indicates quite clearly that when hell shall have served its purpose in bringing men to repentance,

it, too, will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, together with those few who still refused to repent of their sins, who had continued to deny their Christ or who had once known him and then forsaken him and denied the Holy Ghost that witnessed his divinity.

May we sum it up this way. Men will be saved by just one thing, and one thing alone --by acceptance of Christ as their savior. They will be lost in just one way --by rejecting him, willfully, voluntarily, after having had an opportunity to know of him and to accept him. We cannot willfully reject someone of whom we have never heard. Therefore those who have not heard of Christ in this life will have a chance to hear him preached in the spirit world that lies beyond this world. Even there, men may be saved from eternal death through belief on him.

All men, everywhere, have some code of conduct, some law, some scripture, some tradition, some conscience, by which they may shape their lives. We shall be judged according to our works, taking into consideration our degree of knowledge of God and his laws. We shall be rewarded for our good deeds, but punished for our bad ones, until we see the error of them, and are willing to repent of them. He that knew his Lord's will and did it not shall be beaten with many stripes, but he who knew not his Lord's will, and did it not, but did the best he knew how, shall be beaten with few stripes --not for vengeance, but for correction.

But unless our names are written in the Book of Life, we shall be cast into the lake of fire, into the second death, when the first or physical death, and hell, are cast therein to be destroyed. Unless we have accepted Christ, either here or hereafter, we shall have no part with him; we shall not live with him.

Does this mean, then, that we may procrastinate the day of salvation --that we may do as we please here, have our fun, and then accept Christ and repent of our sins after we are dead? Not at all. We shall suffer to the uttermost farthing for every sin that we willfully and knowingly commit. Once any man knows within his heart that Jesus is his Savior, his Redeemer, it is a sin to reject that testimony and continue in sinful living. Once we know that Jesus is the Christ, and reject him, we have rejected the testimony of the Holy Ghost, and that Spirit will no longer dwell with us. Perhaps, having had the knowledge of Jesus once, if you refuse to act on that knowledge, you may never have the same opportunity again. The preaching in the prison house of the hereafter is for those who never had an opportunity to know him, or to be convinced that he was their savior, here. If we do have that knowledge and that opportunity NOW, and if we continue in procrastination, we are in danger, (for any whose name is not written in the Lamb's book of life shall be cast into the lake of fire, into utter oblivion.)