The Destiny of Man: Death, Judgment, and the Two Resurrections

For generations, a foundational assumption has permeated traditional religious thought: the belief that at the exact moment of death, a person's conscious soul immediately departs their physical body and travels to either heaven or hell. This narrative has been repeated so frequently in funerals, literature, and art that it is rarely questioned by the average reader. However, when one opens the pages of the King James Bible and examines the precise wording of scripture, a completely different, far more structured, and deeply orderly plan emerges.

The scriptures reveal that the dead do not go to heaven. Instead, they enter a state of complete unconsciousness, frequently described in the Bible as a 'sleep,' where they completely lose awareness of time, thought, and reality. In this state, they await a future, physical or spiritual awakening. The Bible outlines a master timeline consisting of two distinct resurrections: the first resurrection to immortal spirit life for those who are 'born again' in the truest sense, and a second resurrection to physical life for the vast majority of mankind who died without understanding God’s word, so they may be given their first real opportunity to comprehend the truth and be properly judged. This narrative will systematically prove this framework using the exact words of the King James Version.

Section 1: The Current State of the Dead—The Sleep of Unconsciousness

To understand where a person goes when they die, we must first look at how the Bible defines the condition of death itself. If a person immediately goes to heaven to live in bliss with God, they would naturally be active, conscious, and filled with praise. Yet, the Old and New Testaments describe death not as an active heavenly life, but as an absolute cessation of consciousness. King Solomon, renowned for his God-given wisdom, stated this explicitly in the book of Ecclesiastes:

> *"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6)*

If the dead 'know not any thing,' they cannot be experiencing the wonders of heaven or interacting with God. Their thoughts and emotions are entirely paused. The Psalmist confirms this exact state, describing what happens to a man's mental faculties the very moment he stops breathing:

> *"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psalm 146:4)*

Furthermore, the Bible directly addresses whether the dead are in heaven praising God. Psalm 115:17 states clearly: *"The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence."* If righteous souls instantly ascended to the throne room of God upon death, their primary activity would be praise. Yet the scripture declares that they enter 'silence.'

Jesus Christ Himself used this identical terminology when His friend Lazarus died. In John 11, Jesus told His disciples, *"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep."* The disciples, misunderstanding Him, thought Lazarus was merely taking a restful nap. Jesus then clarified in plain, unmistakable words: *"Lazarus is dead." (John 11:11-14).* When Jesus arrived at the tomb, Lazarus had been dead for four days. Crucially, when Jesus resurrected him, Lazarus did not give any account of heaven, celestial visions, or divine encounters. Why? Because he had been in the silent 'sleep' of death, completely unaware of the passage of time.

Section 2: No Man Has Ascended to Heaven

To completely remove any ambiguity, Jesus Christ left a direct, universal statement regarding whether any human being has ever died and gone to heaven. During His conversation with Nicodemus, Jesus declared:

> *"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." (John 3:13)*

This absolute statement eliminates the possibility that Old Testament saints, patriarchs, or prophets went to heaven when they died. Consider the example of King David, a man whom God Himself described as 'a man after mine own heart' (Acts 13:22). If anyone possessed the spiritual qualifications to ascend to heaven immediately upon death, it would be David. Yet, centuries after David's death, on the day of Pentecost, the Apostle Peter openly stated to the gathered crowd:

> *"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day... For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand." (Acts 2:29, 34)*

Peter’s message was unambiguous: David was dead, buried in his tomb on Earth, and had *not* ascended into the heavens. Instead, David, like all other deceased human beings, remains in his grave, awaiting the realization of God's prophetic schedule. The reason why human beings cannot live in heaven in their natural state is structural and tied directly to God's holy nature. As scripture reveals, God cannot be in the presence of sin. Isaiah 59:2 explains, *"But your iniquities have made a separation between you and your God, and your sins have hidden his face from you..."* Because human beings are corrupted by sin, they cannot enter the celestial presence of God until a total, fundamental transformation occurs. That transformation does not happen at death; it happens exclusively at the resurrection.

Section 3: The True Meaning of Being 'Born Again' at the Resurrection

To properly understand how man is made fit to stand before God, we must examine the biblical definition of being 'born again.' In modern religious discourse, this term is frequently treated as an emotional or psychological conversion experience that takes place during a person's physical life. However, Christ's dialogue in John 3 outlines a literal composition change that occurs at the resurrection of the dead.

Jesus explained the structural reality of the spiritual birth to Nicodemus with a clear contrast:

> *"That which is born of the flesh is flesh; and that which is born of the Spirit is spirit. Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." (John 3:6-7)*

Jesus established a foundational rule: whatever is born of the flesh *is flesh*, and whatever is born of the Spirit *is spirit*. Human beings living today are composed of flesh, bone, and blood. Therefore, by Christ's own definition, they have not yet been 'born' of the spirit. They have been *begotten* of the Spirit through repentance and the reception of the Holy Spirit, acting as a spiritual embryo or down payment (**Ephesians 1:14**). The actual birth into spirit composition occurs at the resurrection.

Jesus further illustrated the physical properties of a spirit-born individual in the next verse:

> *"The wind bloweth where it listeth, and thou hearest the sound thereof, but canst not tell whence it cometh, and whither it goeth: so is every one that is born of the Spirit." (John 3:8)*

A person who is fully born of the spirit has a composition like the wind—invisible to physical eyes, capable of moving through physical barriers, yet fully real and powerful. Human believers today cannot do this. They are bound by physical limitations. The actual transformation from a flesh-and-blood entity to a spirit-composed entity is explained beautifully by the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Corinthians:

> *"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption... It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (1 Corinthians 15:50, 44)*

Paul explicitly states that 'flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom.' Therefore, no human can enter the divine realm of God in their current physical form. This composition change requires a literal resurrection, where the 'natural body' (sown in death) is raised as a 'spiritual body'—composed entirely of spirit, exactly as God is spirit (**John 4:24**). It is at this exact moment of resurrection that a believer is fully born again, conforming to the likeness of Christ, who is *"the firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18).*

Section 4: The First Resurrection—To Spiritual Life

The Bible outlines a clear order for those who will be raised. Not everyone is resurrected at the same time. The master timeline begins with what scripture designates as the 'First Resurrection.' This

resurrection occurs precisely at the second coming of Jesus Christ and is reserved exclusively for the saints—those who lived their lives in obedience to God and died with the Holy Spirit.

The Apostle Paul describes the mechanics of this event in high detail, showing that both the living saints and the sleeping saints receive their spiritual bodies simultaneously:

> *"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." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)*

Notice carefully that the dead do not descend *with* Christ from heaven as disembodied souls. Rather, 'the dead in Christ shall rise first'—meaning they rise up *out of their graves* on the Earth to meet Him in the air. Paul further explains the instantaneous nature of this composition change in 1 Corinthians:

> *"Behold, I shew 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 15:51-53)*

Those who are part of this first resurrection are completely freed from the corruption of flesh and the vulnerability of sin. They are made immortal spirit beings, fully fit to exist in the brilliant presence of God. The book of Revelation highlights the distinct status and role of these individuals:

> *"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 20:6)*

This scripture confirms that the purpose of the first resurrection is not to abandon the creation and float away to a distant heaven. Instead, these spirit-born believers are appointed to reign as kings and priests *with Christ* during His 1,000-year millennial rule on the Earth, bringing peace, order, and true governance to the world.

Section 5: The Second Resurrection—To Physical Life and Understanding

If the first resurrection is strictly for the 'dead in Christ' who lived and died in faithful obedience, an obvious question arises: What happens to the billions of human beings who have died throughout history without ever knowing God, understanding His laws, or hearing the name of Jesus Christ? This group includes billions of unevangelized people, children who died in infancy, and individuals who were blinded by false religions or secular philosophies.

Traditional theology often leaves no room for these people, assuming they are automatically condemned to hell because they were not 'saved' during their physical lifetimes. However, God's plan is infinitely more merciful and logical. The book of Revelation reveals that there is a temporal gap of 1,000 years between the first resurrection and the awakening of the rest of mankind:

> *"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished." (Revelation 20:5)*

This brings us to the **Second Resurrection**, often referred to as the Great White Throne Judgment. The Apostle John describes this awe-inspiring vision in Revelation 20:

> *"And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works." (Revelation 20:11-12)*

This scripture is often misinterpreted as a terrifying, instantaneous sentencing hearing where people are thrown straight into a lake of fire. However, a careful reading reveals a profound period of education and judgment based on understanding. Let us break down what actually occurs during this second resurrection:

Aspect	Biblical Description	Theological Meaning
The Composition	Physical Flesh and Blood	Unlike the first resurrection, these individuals are raised back to physical life as mortal human beings, requiring a physical framework to learn, grow, and experience God's truths for the first time.
The 'Books' Opened	Biblical Scripture (The Books)	The Greek word 'biblia' means books. In this context, it refers to the opening of the scriptures to their human understanding. Their minds are unblinded, and they finally comprehend God's word.
The Evaluation	Judged According to Works	This is not a 10-second sentencing, but a period of time where they live under the opened scriptures and are evaluated on how they apply God's law once they actually know it.

This physical resurrection to a state of initial understanding is perfectly illustrated in the Old Testament, specifically in the famous vision of the Valley of Dry Bones found in Ezekiel 37. The prophet Ezekiel is shown a valley filled with the skeletal remains of millions of Israelites who died in a state of spiritual hopelessness, saying, *"Our bones are dried, and our hope is lost" (Ezekiel 37:11).* God then explains exactly how He will raise them, proving that this resurrection is physical and occurs on the Earth:

> *"Thus saith the Lord GOD unto these bones; Behold, I will cause breath to enter into you, and ye shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and ye shall live; and ye shall know that I am the LORD... 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." (Ezekiel 37:5-6, 12)*

This is a literal description of a physical resurrection. God does not take these bones to heaven; He opens their earthly graves, covers them with sinews, flesh, and skin, and breathes physical life back into them. Crucially, look at the stated purpose of this resurrection: *"and ye shall know that I am the LORD."* During their first physical lifetimes, these people did *not* know the Lord in truth. They were spiritually blind. This second resurrection is an awakening of *understanding* for the very first time, allowing them to see the truth clearly so they can choose to follow God's word and have their names written in the Book of Life.

Conclusion: A Perfect and Orderly Master Plan

When the layers of traditional religious assumptions are stripped away, the King James Bible presents a beautiful, just, and highly organized timeline for human history. Man does not escape to a heavenly realm immediately at death, nor does an unevangelized person instantly drop into eternal torment. God's plan is built on absolute justice and structured order.

Death is a silent sleep where the body and thoughts rest in the earth, completely unconscious. All human beings remain in this state, awaiting one of two grand resurrections. Those who were called, converted, and begotten by the Spirit in this age will rise in the First Resurrection at Christ's return, fully changed into immortal spirit composition—finally born again as spirit beings fit to rule alongside Him. The rest of mankind, who lived and died in spiritual ignorance, will be awakened a thousand years later in the Second Resurrection. They will be returned to physical life on Earth, their minds unblinded, to read the opened books of scripture for the first time, giving them a fair, righteous opportunity to know God and be properly judged according to His word. It is a plan that reflects the deep wisdom, patience, and absolute mercy of the Creator.