

The Reward of the Saints At Christ's Return — What Is Its Nature?

Most Protestants and Catholics in America and around the world teach a benign message of the reward of the saints once made spirit. That message usually is that they will become somewhat like angels ... wafting around a cloud-filled heaven of some sort, sitting around playing harps or gazing in awe-struck wonder at the Father on His throne. This sort of perceived reward is coupled with a resurrection immediately after death, the saints ascending into the heavenly abode to be with Jesus and the Father eternally. Little if anything is said about what the activities of those resurrected children of God will be.

Is the word of God silent about the future of His saints after the resurrection? Hardly, for He has revealed all things to us through the spirit He gives:

“But as it is written, eye has not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man [those that do not know Him] the things which God has prepared for them that love Him. But God has revealed them unto us by His spirit, for the spirit searches all things, yes, the deep things of God” (I Corinthians 2:9-10).

The saints of God are no longer called servants, as Christ said,

“... for the servant knows not what his lord does: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of My Father I have made known unto you” (John 15:15).

Do “all things” indicated above include the nature of the reward of the saints after the resurrection? The answer is so obvious it does not need restating, for what could be more important for us than to understand the eternal reward to be given to the saints? Would a loving God withhold from His people the manner of life they will be living for all eternity ... or for at least the beginning of that eternal existence? Is sitting on a cloud playing a harp the type of eternal existence any of us really want? Of a truth, freedom from pain and suffering, tears, and torment as we experience in this life will be a wonderful gift (Revelation 21:4), but can that be all there is to eternal spirit existence? Will there not be some active, constructive, remarkable responsibilities and opportunities opened to the saints upon their becoming spirits possessing awesome new powers?

The answers to these questions are both startling and refreshing, cutting to the core of the deceptions foisted upon modern churchianity today, while at the same time opening up wonderful vistas of hope and understanding to the true saints of the living God ... showing us that in every way we walk in the footsteps of Jesus Christ, not only in this age but on into the coming one. The reality of that understanding will be made clear as we proceed through the word of God.

The Truth of a Future Resurrection

While it is not the focus of this paper to discuss the facts concerning when the resurrection will occur, it is important to know that it is still in the future, as of the year 2004. While it is true that the spirit of man goes back after death to the God who first gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7), that

spirit is not active after death in the sense of the individual actually doing “spirit work” as a spirit being, for death is pictured as a sleep (Matthew 9:24; John 11:11; II Samuel 7:12; I Kings 1:21; Job 7:21; 14:13-14; Daniel 12:2), from which one awakens at the resurrection to spirit life. Note Job 14:14:

“If a man die shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come [at the resurrection]”.

Daniel 12:2 speaks of the saints that have been “sleeping” in the dust of the earth finally awakening [at the resurrection] ... and then,

“... they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament: and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

The word for *sleep* in Daniel 12:2 is *yashen* (Strong 3463), which means “sleepy”; this word in turn is derived from the primary root word *yashen* (Strong 3462) — pronounced the same as the previous word — meaning “to be slack or languid, i.e. (by implication) sleep (figuratively to die).” If Daniel was raised to be active with the Father in heaven immediately at his physical death, then his condition is hardly to be envied by any of us, for it would be a “slack and languid” existence, hardly what any of the saints would desire.

Furthermore, Daniel is told that he will rest and “... stand in your lot at the end of the days” (Daniel 12:13). The Hebrew word for *rest* is *nuwach* (Strong 5117), a primary root meaning “to rest, i.e. settle down”, again referring to an inactive existence until the resurrection previously alluded to in verse 2 ... at the time that Michael will stand up during a period of trouble on earth that has never before been experienced (Daniel 12:1; compare this with Matthew 24:21-24, when the same event is referred to that would result in all flesh being killed except “... those days should be shortened”; no such time has as yet arrived, so these days, as well as the resurrection, are still in the future.).

The clear conclusion of these scriptures regarding the resurrection is that the saints “sleep” in the earth after death — and decompose back to the elements — but will be raised to eternal life as spirit at the resurrection when Jesus Christ returns. Thus, one can understand Matthew 24:29-31 when Christ indicated that, when He returns “... in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory”, the angels will gather together the “elect” (saints), at the great sound of the trumpet, “... from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” Since the spirit of man returns to God at death — and God is in heaven (the spirit realm) — then heaven must occupy the same space as the physical realm, only it is in a different dimension. How else could the saints be resting in heaven and still have need to be collected “...one end of heaven to the other”? They are in a sleeping state across all of the earth where they have died, and at the last trumpet, when Christ returns, they are changed to spirit and meet Jesus Christ in the air (I Thessalonians 4:15-17; I Corinthians 15:51-52; Revelation 11:15-18).

The Resurrection Is Still in the Future

While it is not the purpose of this paper to extensively prove that the resurrection is yet in the future, some brief proofs will be outlined here so this critical truth can be understood.

(1) Satan has not yet been put away in the “bottomless pit” (Revelation 10:1-3). Witness the wars, sufferings, death, aging, predation, hurricanes, and other evils of this earth that prove that

Satan is performing his diabolical deceptions and destruction here on the earth, even as he is now the prince of this world's culture and order of things (II Corinthians 4:4; Ephesians 2:2).

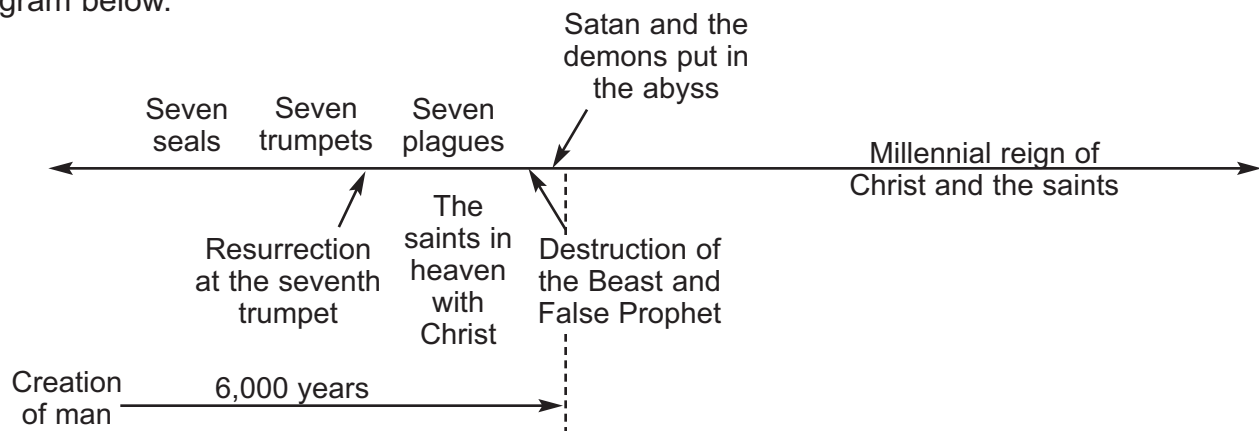
(2) The earth has not yet received the rulership of Jesus Christ and the saints that is predicted for the millennium period, as prophesied must occur in Zechariah 14:3-4, Revelation 20:4, Acts 3:18-24, and many other places as Satan is deposed from his unauthorized reign upon the earth.

(3) The Great Tribulation has not yet arrived. Revelation 6, 8, 9, 11, and 16 speak of signs and events during the seals, trumpets, and plagues that have yet to occur. Nowhere in history are these earth-shattering events recorded; they would surely be had they occurred, for example the "great mountain burning with fire" striking the sea (Revelation 8:8), the army of locusts tormenting men for five months (Revelation 9:1-11), and the 200,000,000 man army of Revelation 9:13-16).

(4) Never has a time occurred in history when all human life on earth could be exterminated ... (Matthew 24:21-22), that is, until the present time with the advent of nuclear, scalar, biological, and chemical weaponry. Thus, we know that the end of the age, when those weapons will indeed be used, is very near. Jesus Christ will return at this time when "...there shall be a time of trouble such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time your [God's] people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book" [at the resurrection; Daniel 12:1; see also Revelation 3:5, where those written in the book of life are shown to be clothed in white raiment, and are present at the marriage supper with Christ in heaven after the resurrection: Revelation 19:6-9].

Points of the Resurrection

Immediately after the Great Tribulation the saints will rise — be resurrected — to meet Christ in the air (Matthew 24:29-31; I Corinthians 15:51-52; I Thessalonians 4:15-17). They will then ascend to the Father's heavenly throne for the marriage supper of the Lamb (Revelation 19:6-9), after which the glorified saints will accompany Jesus Christ in putting down the armies of the Beast and the False Prophet (Revelation 19:11-21). This end-time scenario is reviewed in the diagram below.



Scripture makes clear that the saints will reign on the earth, not in some ethereal heavenly realm. Note that Revelation 10:5 states the saints will be kings and priests on the earth. Jesus Christ in Matthew 5:5 emphatically said that the saints will inherit the earth, while Matthew 25:34 tells that the Kingdom on earth will be inherited by the saints.

In The Footsteps of Jesus Christ

Few people who identify themselves as Christians today would ever admit that the reward of the saints is in every way tied to our Savior's reward. Of course, Jesus will always be our "elder brother", but it is the Father's intent to bring *many* sons to glory (Hebrews 2:10), sons *alongside* Jesus Christ in the Kingdom. Notice that Revelation 3:21 states that the overcomers will sit at the Father's throne, just as Jesus Christ now sits on the Father's right hand at His throne (Mark 16:19). Philippians 3:21 shows that our body will be "fashioned like unto" Christ's glorious body. *Fashioned like unto* (Strong 4832) comes from the Greek *summorphoa*, meaning "jointly formed, i.e., (figuratively) similar." Our bodies will be like Christ's body. I John 3:2 indicates we will be *like* Jesus when He appears at the second coming.

On and on go the similarities of Christ's status to the future status of the saints. Romans 8:29 emphatically says that God predestined the saints to be *conformed* to the *image* of His Son, that He (Christ) might be the firstborn among many brethren. To be a brother is to be of the same parentage, and like one another in every way except for minor differences in appearance, talents, and abilities. In this scripture, conformed is the same word (Strong 48932) translated *fashioned like unto* in Philippians 3:21, meaning "jointly formed or similar". *Image*, on the other hand, comes from the Greek *eikon* (Strong 1504), and means "a likeness, i.e. (literally) a statue, profile, or (figuratively) a representation or resemblance". The word *eikon* is used also in I Corinthians 15:49, where the saints, as spirits, will bear the *image* of the heavenly, the express spiritual image of Jesus Christ and the Father, just as mankind was made physically in the express image of Elohim (Genesis 1:26-27). If one has seen Christ he has seen the Father (John 14:9).

II Peter 1:4 reveals that the saints are *partakers* of the divine *nature*. These interesting words have astounding implications. *Partakers* (Strong 2844) is the Greek *koinonos*, meaning "a sharer, i.e. an associate", while *nature* (Strong 5449) comes from *phusis*, an interesting word indicating "growth (by germination or expansion), i.e. (by implication) natural production (lineal descent)." In other words, to be a partaker of God's divine nature means that saints will have the literal genetic inheritance of God!

Furthermore, Jesus quoted Psalm 82:6 in John 10:34-36, saying "You are gods". He then went on to clarify just who these "gods" were. Those who are called gods are those "unto whom the word of God (Jesus Christ) came ... and those to whom the word of God came are the saints! The word for *gods* in Psalm 82:6 is *elohim* (Strong 430), the plural of *el*, or god. Elohim is used to describe spirits as creator, judge, and many other responsibilities that spirits of God fulfill, and Jesus Christ here described the saints as being Elohim! In a similar vein, the saints are to be worshiped like Jesus Christ was (and is) — and only a god can be worshiped — again showing that the saints will be gods (Revelation 3:9).

Note finally that Christ was tempted in every way as we are, but though we sin He never did (Hebrews 4:15). We are made like Him and have experienced life like Him, whose sinlessness enabled Him to be the perfect sacrifice for the sins of all mankind.

Heirs of the Rewards *With* Christ

The saints are destined to be the recipients of the same rewards which have been promised to Jesus Christ! As unfamiliar as this fact may be to most Christians, the truths of Scripture speak for themselves. Romans 8:14 to 23 states that those who possess God's spirit are already the sons of God (verse 14); though still in the flesh, the saints are "sons of God in-waiting", to be spirit sons of God at the resurrection, at the "redemption of our body" (verse 23). Verses 16 and

17 of Romans 8 state that those having God's spirit are His children, and if children, then "... heirs of God, and *joint heirs* with Christ." Joint heirs comes from the Greek *sugkleronomoa* (Strong 4789), meaning "a co-heir, i.e. (by analogy) a participant in common." We as saints have a common inheritance with Christ!

Other scriptures also reveal that the saints are sons of God, and as sons they are receivers of His inheritance. II Corinthians 6:17-18 says we must come out from among the unclean of this world and be His sons. Hebrews 12:7-8 says the same, that we are chastened because we are sons of God. The saints are called sons of God in I John 3:1-2 due to the Father's love, and as the world does not know Christ (or the Father) so it does not know us. We will be *like Him* (Christ) when He appears ... that is, spirits that will live forever.

Notice how Galatians 4:3-7 shows that the saints — having received the spirit of Christ — are *now* sons of God, redeemed by Christ that they might receive the *adoption of sons* (verse 5). These words are translated from the Greek *huiothesia* (Strong 5206), meaning "the placing as a son, i.e. adoption." Moreover, Paul goes on to say in verse 7 that "... you are no more a servant, but a son, and if a son then an *heir* of God through Christ." The word *heir* (Strong 2818) is the Greek *kleronomoa*, "a partitioning, i.e. getting by appointment; a sharer by lot, i.e. an inheritor (literally or figuratively); by implication a possessor." Thus, the saints are full sons of the Father, making them brothers to Christ, and possessors of the same inheritance as Christ. Of course, Jesus Christ, as the firstborn of many brethren (Romans 8:29), will achieve a greater overall inheritance, but even the younger sons receive a substantial inheritance as well, as indicated in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:12, 31).

Hebrews 2:10-14 reveals that Jesus Christ, the Captain of salvation for the saints, is bringing many sons to glory — through His own suffering sacrifices as well as through the suffering of the saints (Romans 8:17; II Timothy 2:12; I Peter 4:13; I Peter 2:21) — "... for both He that sanctifies (Christ) and they who are sanctified (the saints), are all of one; for which cause He is not ashamed to call them *brethren* ..." (verse 11). *Brethren* (Strong 80) is from the Greek *adelphoa*, "a brother (literally or figuratively)". As brethren to Christ, the saints share in the inheritance of Christ.

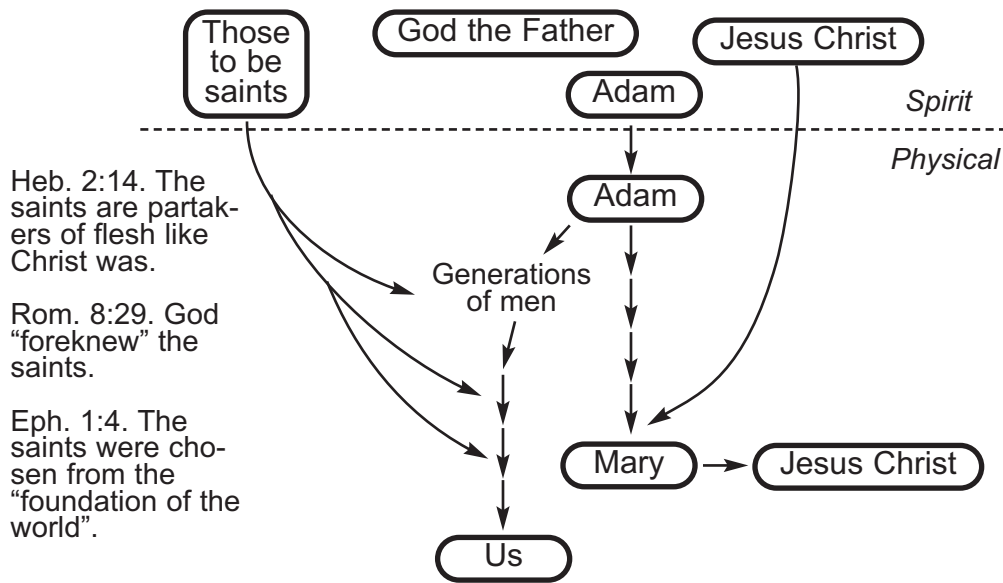
The inheritance of the saints has been predestined "... before the foundation of the world ...", Jesus Christ having predestined the saints to be *adopted children* (Strong 5206; see this meaning earlier). Ephesians 1:4-11 continues on to reveal that all things, both on earth and in heaven, have been gathered together unto Christ (verse 10), and in that inheritance we also share (verse 11). As Jesus Christ has inherited all things (Hebrews 1:2; Matthew 28:18; John 3:35), so He shares that awesome abundance with His sons the saints.

The lineage of the saints as sons of God is illustrated in the following figure. It is not known precisely who the sons of God were before they became flesh, but it is likely that some of the many sons of God in the heavenly realm may constitute those who have become, and will become, sons of God in the flesh.

"Forasmuch then as the children [the saints, sons of God] are partakers of flesh and blood, he [Christ] also Himself likewise took part of the same, that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil ..." (Hebrews 2:14).

Responsibilities in the New Age

The nature and responsibilities of the saints as spirit beings is beyond belief! As a king and



a priest (Revelation 5:10), the resurrected spirit sons of God will fulfill the joint roles of secular administrator and spiritual master within one being ... for in reality these duties cannot be separated. The major task of the spirit saints, alongside Jesus Christ, will be to direct the rebuilding of a shattered exosphere and culture on the earth, after the horrendous destruction wrought by the Great Tribulation and the Day of the Lord (the seven trumpets and the seven plagues). As revealed in Acts 8:17-24, there will be a restoring of the earth to Edenic perfection, a restructuring of the entire physical and social character of all things on the planet, making it once again the ideal place for mankind to live ... but this time without any interference of the Serpent, Satan the devil (Revelation 20:1-3).

"Repent you therefore and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the *times of refreshing* shall come from the presence of the Lord: and He [the Father] shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you, whom the heaven must receive until the times of *restitution of all things*, which God has spoken by the mouth of all His holy prophets since the world began" (Acts 8:19-21).

This new age will be so different from human experience for nearly all of the 6,000 years of mankind's existence on earth that the contrast will be like light versus dark. Isaiah 11:6-9 speaks of this time, when the lion and lamb, the bear and the calf will dwell peacefully together. Snakes will not be venomous, and competition and predation will be gone ... for the author of such evils, Satan the devil, will not be influencing life on earth. Diseases, blindness, lameness, and deafness will be gone, unproductive land will become fruitful (Isaiah 35:1-10), and families will live in joy and peace. Perhaps even death will cease, for an accursed man will live to be 100 years old (Isaiah 65:17-25). There is no indication that any people will live evil and accursed lives during this time. All of nature and society will be built around God's character, the ways of love, joy, peace, kindness, patience, humility, and gentleness that express His nature, and the nature of the saints who possess God's spirit (Galatians 5:22-23).

As Christ was the Great Teacher who came from the Father (John 3:2), so will the saints be teachers come from God to direct people living during the coming age (Isaiah 30:20-21), to build their world to Edenic perfection. Only those people who will heed Christ and the saints will survive the disasters at the end of this age (Acts 3:23), so all of mankind that come into the new age

will be teachable. They will all accept God's ways, and build a renewed culture of Godliness worldwide.

A Future in the Footsteps of Jesus Christ

When Jesus called out a people from this evil, chaotic world to be like Him, He meant what He said. Our future is to be like Jesus Christ in every way, though He will always be our Elder Brother. As all things are bequeathed to Him, so will all things be given to the saints as co-heirs and adopted children alongside Him. Recall that Jesus Christ did not even put Himself above any of the disciples in His day, nor does He place Himself above any of His saints today.

“Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5).

This scripture shows that the mind of Jesus Christ was to esteem others better than Himself, never to lift Himself above others ... and He is the Son of God! Therein lies true humility and love. After all, who should think of himself as superior to a brother made, like oneself, in the image of God?

Our lives in this new age will be saturated with love for one another (John 13:34-35). We may very well carry this love to other planets in far-flung solar systems across the universe; as Christ was the Creator on earth (John 1:1-3, 14), so we may create other worlds elsewhere. Rest assured that we, the saints, will not be drifting around heaven all day, playing harps and sitting on clouds. We will be building up civilizations and ecosystems in a pattern like Jesus Christ, the Father, and other members of Elohim did in Genesis 1 ... and we will be spreading the way of love to every corner of influence our spirit lives touch.

by Paul W. Syltje — October 5, 2004