

Immortality?

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Imortality? Does such a thing exist? Where does it come from? How is it obtained? Since the dawn of the ages mankind has sought answers to these questions in light of the certainty that they will one day face death. Men have theorized to their wits' end in their pursuit of it but apart from YHVH, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob this pursuit is in vain. YHVH is the ONLY being who possesses immortality¹ and has the power to distribute it to whomever He chooses. He will withhold it from the proud but will grant it to those who humble themselves and place their trust in Him.² God has revealed to us in His word the means by which He will distribute it to mankind.

From the beginning of Genesis, we learn that Man was created mortal. God formed Man from the dust of the earth and breathed into him *"the breath of life"* and Man *"became a living soul."*³ God did not place a "soul" in Adam but rather Adam became a *"living soul."* The dust animated by God's breath constitutes a "soul" – a living breathing creature. Neither is a *"living soul"* immortal. It is "living" which requires the *"breath of life"* to sustain it. For all creatures to exist they are dependent on God for this *"breath of life."*⁴ In addition, all physical creatures are dependent on the essentials of their environment in order to live. God created an environment for Adam, placed him in the Garden, and provided him with the necessary food required to sustain him.⁵ Among these food provisions was fruit that came from a source called *"The Tree of Life."* The fruit from this tree was intended to keep Adam in his pristine condition, offset the aging process, and provide Adam with immortality. This is evident from God's words after Adam transgressed His command and then was evicted from the Garden.

Gen. 3:22 NKJ

*22 Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of Us, to know good and evil. And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of **the tree of life**, and eat, and live forever"*

1 1 Timothy 6:16

2 Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6, 1 Peter 5:5

3 Genesis 2:7

4 Job 34:13-15, Isaiah 42:5, Acts 17:24-25, 1 Timothy 6:13

5 Genesis 2:9

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God's warning and punishment to Adam for eating from the "Tree of Knowledge" was physical death.⁶ His removal from the Garden and access to the Tree of Life guaranteed his eventual death and return to the dust. We as Adam's progeny are born outside the Garden, without access to this source of immortality.

God designed the creation in a specific order giving man a rank within that order and a special role. This created order was His original purpose and at the end of the creation week He called it "very good."⁷ Man was created "in the image of God," placed in the Garden to "tend it," and was given dominion "over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."⁸ Man had full dominion over all the earth and everything God placed within it. Adam's transgression caused mankind to lose this rank and authority. But God intends to restore all things.⁹ Paul referred to this original rank and role in the book of Hebrews.

Heb. 2:5 NKJ

*⁵ For He has not put **the world to come**, of which we speak, in subjection to angels*

"The world" [Gr. τὴν οἰκουμένην] means "inhabited land." Here it refers to the land of the creation that God originally placed under Adam's dominion. Paul then quoted from Psalm 8:4-6 which refers to Genesis 1:26-28 and the original role God gave man within the creation.

Heb. 2:6-9 NKJ

⁶ But one testified in a certain place, saying: "What is man that You are mindful of him, Or the son of man that You take care of him?"

⁷ You have made him a little lower than the angels; You have crowned him with glory and honor, And set him over the works of Your hands.

*⁸ You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. **But now we do not yet see all things put under him.***

*⁹ **But we see Jesus**, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.*

6 Genesis 2:17, 3:19

7 Genesis 1:31

8 Genesis 1:26

9 Acts 3:21

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Paul's point was that currently under the conditions of the curse Man is not functioning in this original God-given role. But it is through the Man Jesus Christ, "*the second Adam*,"¹⁰ that mankind will be reinstated back to it. This requires a return to the original order and existence for man under the conditions that were first experienced in the Garden. This return requires mankind to be placed back into the Garden and given a renewed access to the Tree of Life. This is exactly what we find in the book of Revelation.

Rev. 2:7 NKJ

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

The Tree of Life was originally located in "*The Paradise of God*." The term "paradise" is a transliteration of the Greek word [παράδεισος]. It was the common word in Greek for a lush and well-manicured garden or park. It is found in Genesis (LXX) many times for the "*Garden of Eden*."¹¹

Gen. 2:8 NKJ

⁸ *The LORD God planted a **garden** [παράδεισος - LXX] eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.*

Isaiah prophesied of the restoration of the Land in Christ's Kingdom, which is the same Land that Paul referred to in Hebrews 2:5 to be placed under man's dominion. It will again be transformed into "*the Garden of the Lord*."

Isaiah 51:3 LXX

³ *And now I will comfort you, **O Zion**. And I have comforted all her desert places; and I will make her desert places as **the Garden** [παράδεισος], and her western places as **the Garden** [παράδεισος] **of the Lord**; they will find in her gladness and exultation, thanksgiving and the voice of praise.*

John's vision of the "*New Jerusalem*" also concerns this land and the city that will reside in it which will be inhabited by the saints.

10 1 Corinthians 15:45

11 Genesis 2:9, 2:10, 2:15, 2:16, 3:1-3, 3:8, 3:10, 3:23-24

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Rev. 22:1-2 NKJ

¹ And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb.

² In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, **was the tree of life**, which bore twelve fruits, each tree yielding its fruit every month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

This “pure river of the water of life” will be the same river that was in the original Paradise of God.

Gen. 2:10 NKJ

¹⁰ Now **a river went out of Eden** to water the garden [**παράδεισος**], and from there it parted and became four riverheads

John observed the Tree of Life on both sides of this river and quoted prophecy directly from the prophet Ezekiel concerning his vision of the Millennial Temple.

Ezek. 47:1-12 NKJ

¹ Then he brought me back to the door of the temple; and **there was water, flowing from under the threshold of the temple toward the east**, for the front of the temple faced east; the water was flowing from under the right side of the temple, south of the altar.

² He brought me out by way of the north gate and led me around on the outside to the outer gateway that faces east; and there was water, running out on the right side.

³ And when the man went out to the east with the line in his hand, he measured one thousand cubits, and he brought me through the waters; the water came up to my ankles.

⁴ Again he measured one thousand and brought me through the waters; the water came up to my knees. Again he measured one thousand and brought me through; the water came up to my waist.

⁵ Again he measured one thousand, and it was **a river** that I could not cross; for the water was too deep, water in which one must swim, a river that could not be crossed.

⁶ He said to me, “Son of man, have you seen this?” Then he brought me and returned me to the bank of the river.

⁷ When I returned, there, along **the bank of the river, were very many trees on one side and the other**.

⁸ Then he said to me: “This water flows toward the eastern region, goes down into the valley, and enters the sea. When it reaches the sea, its waters are healed.

⁹ “And it shall be that every living thing that moves, wherever the rivers go, will live. There will be a very great multitude of fish, because these waters go there; for they will be healed, and everything will live wherever the river goes.

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¹⁰ "It shall be that fishermen will stand by it from En Gedi to En Eglaim; they will be places for spreading their nets. Their fish will be of the same kinds as the fish of the Great Sea, exceedingly many.

¹¹ "But its swamps and marshes will not be healed; they will be given over to salt.

¹² "**Along the bank of the river, on this side and that, will grow all kinds of trees used for food; their leaves will not wither, and their fruit will not fail. They will bear fruit every month, because their water flows from the sanctuary. Their fruit will be for food, and their leaves for medicine.**"

The "Trees" Ezekiel saw in his vision are the same Tree (s) of Life which John saw. This is evident in that both are located on "either side of the river" they bear fruit every month of the year and the fruit is for the consumption of the Saints. The leaves will be used for medicine among the mortal nations whom will be governed by Christ and the Saints throughout the duration of the Millennium.

John also quoted directly from the Prophet Isaiah in His vision.

Isa. 65:17-22 NKJ

¹⁷ "For behold, **I create new heavens and a new earth**; And the former shall not be remembered or come to mind. ¹⁸ But be glad and rejoice forever in what I create; For behold, I create **Jerusalem** as a rejoicing, And her people a joy. ¹⁹ I will rejoice in **Jerusalem**, And joy in My people; The voice of weeping shall no longer be heard in her, Nor the voice of crying. ²⁰ "No more shall an infant from there live but a few days, Nor an old man who has not fulfilled his days; For the child shall die one hundred years old, But the sinner being one hundred years old shall be accursed. ²¹ They shall build houses and inhabit them; They shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. ²² They shall not build and another inhabit; They shall not plant and another eat; **For as the days of a tree, so shall be the days of My people**, And My elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands.

In verse 22 the Hebrew has the definite article making it "THE Tree" pointing to a specific "Tree" that Isaiah's readers would be familiar with. This is why the LXX reads: "For according to the days of The Tree of Life will be the days of My people." In the Greek "according to" is the preposition κατά. When the object of the proposition κατά is in the accusative case (as "days" is here) it denotes extent of time or length of time. This implies that in the Kingdom as long as God sustains the Tree of Life, God's people will continue to live.

John also equated access to the New Jerusalem with access to The Tree of life.

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Rev. 22:14 NKJ

¹⁴ *Blessed are those who do His commandments, that they may have the right to **the tree of life**, and may enter through **the gates into the city**.*

This is the reason John says that in the New Jerusalem “*there shall be no more death*”¹² for God’s people. The phrase “*eternal life*” [ζωὴν αἰώνιον]¹³ appears numerous times throughout the Bible yet the only basis on which we have to interpret the meaning of this term comes from the Genesis account. We learn that “*eternal life*” is physical life that never ceases as long as man has access to the Tree of life.

Resurrection is obviously required in order for the saints to live again¹⁴ and obtain “*eternal life*.” A common misnomer that Christians have with regard to the resurrection is that our bodies will become inherently immortal. This is largely due to the influence that Platonism has had on Christianity. Platonism’s “immortality of the soul” teaches the existence of a non-corporeal “soul” that is itself inherently immortal. The Bible claims God alone possesses this quality. Man is dust, will return to the dust and only resurrection will provide him again with conscious life. After resurrection life will still be dependent on God. This is why Paul uses language concerning the Resurrection that indicates we will not possess immortality inherent to ourselves. The language he uses for our bodies after the Resurrection describes immortality as if it’s a garment to be worn over our flesh.

1 Cor. 15:53-54 NKJ

⁵³ *For this corruptible must **put on**¹⁵ incorruption, and this mortal must **put on** immortality.*

⁵⁴ *So when this corruptible has **put on** incorruption, and this mortal has **put on** immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.”*

Paul’s clothing language implies that the outer garment does not become part of the person. Rather it is a covering concealing the person beneath it. Paul uses the same language regarding the Resurrection in his second epistle to the Corinthians:

¹² Revelation 21:4

¹³ Daniel 12:2 (LXX), Matt. 19:16, 29; 25:46; Mk. 10:17, 30; Lk. 10:25; 18:18, 30; Jn. 3:15-16, 36; 4:14, 36; 5:24, 39; 6:27, 40, 47, 54; 10:28; 12:25; 17:2; Acts 13:48; Rom. 2:7; 5:21; 6:22; Gal. 6:8; 1 Tim. 1:16; 1 Jn. 3:15; 5:11, 13; Jude 1:21

¹⁴ Revelation 20:4

¹⁵ “Put on” is the verb [ἐνδύω] which means to dress or clothe. It is also in the middle voice which requires the subject’s participation in the verbal action. Lit- to clothe oneself in or wear. (Cf. Matt 6:25)

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2 Cor. 5:4 NKJ

⁴ For we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, not because we want to be unclothed, but **further clothed**,¹⁶ that mortality may be swallowed up by life.

In this case, our "corruption" and our "mortality" is over-clothed with God's "incorruption" and "immortality". Without this "clothing" we are still "corruptible" and "mortal" thus subject to decay and death. Paul's quote from Isaiah 25:8 LXX, "*Death is swallowed up in victory,*" implies the same thing. The thing swallowed still remains beneath that which swallows it. We will still retain our "mortality" beneath God's covering of "immortality."

Resurrection requires that the same mortal body of flesh¹⁷ after death will "*stand again.*"¹⁸ Resurrection also in and of itself does not equate to immortality as there have been many whom God has raised from the dead and died afterward.¹⁹ In the "*Resurrection of the Just*" the bodies of the saints will be transformed in order to become perfected human flesh just as Adam was perfect from the moment he was created "*very good.*" We will still be inherently mortal. An external source will be required to remain in a state of life indefinitely. This source is what the fruit from the Tree of Life is designed to accomplish. The nutrients from this fruit supplied by God will cause a reversal of the effects of decay and aging, providing perfect health. Thereby our "mortality" will remain covered with God's immortality.

Some of Paul's language in 1 Corinthians 15 has caused Christians to misinterpret the nature of immortality after the Resurrection. This again is due to Platonic presuppositions imposed on the words of Paul.

1 Cor. 15:44-49 NKJ

⁴⁴ ***It*** is sown a natural body, ***it*** is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

⁴⁵ And so it is written, "*The first man Adam became a living being.*" The last Adam became a life-giving spirit.

⁴⁶ However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual.

⁴⁷ The first man was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man is the Lord from heaven.

⁴⁸ As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly.

16 Paul uses the compound verb [ἐπενδύω] which means to "to put on over" [something else].

17 Job 19:25-27, Isaiah 26:19, Acts 2:30-31, Luke 24:39, John 20:27, 2 Cor 4:10-11, 2Cor 5:10

18 Resurrection Gr. [ἀνάστασις] from the preposition [ἀνά]- up, back, again and [στάσις]- to stand

19 1 Kings 17:22, 2 Kings 13:21, 2 Kings 4:34, Matt 9:25, Matt 27:53, Mark 5:41, Luke 7:15, John 11:43, Acts 9:40, Acts 20:10, Hebrews 11:35

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⁴⁹ *And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man.*

Notice that the same body that goes into the grave is the same body that comes out of the grave in the Resurrection. The mistake many Christians make is their understanding of the term “spiritual.” The word “spiritual” does not define a new kind of substance or a different kind of body. The word “spiritual” refers to something that has been changed by the power of God’s Breath. This is evident throughout the previous chapters in 1 Corinthians where Paul calls Christians “spiritual.”²⁰ Neither does the adjective “heavenly”²¹ refer to a new kind of substance. It refers to the heavenly sphere of influence on a particular situation or person. The “natural” vs. the “spiritual” refers to Adam’s condition after he no longer had God’s supernatural intervention provided to him through the Tree of Life. It was the natural course for his body to decay and eventually die without God’s constant supernatural (spiritual) supply.

Paul was addressing the present state of humanity under the curse of death, not Adam’s perfect condition before he sinned. All humans are part of Adam because we came out of his body. Humans are all dying because of sin and having been cut off from access to the Tree of Life. This natural state outside the Garden is “first” as far as all of Adam’s descendants are concerned. Afterward, the saints will have the hope of being regenerated physically in the Resurrection because of Jesus Christ who will grant us the “*life-giving breath*.” The same process that occurred with Adam when he was originally formed in Genesis 2:7 will occur for the saints in the Resurrection.²² And this will be accomplished by heaven’s influence on the creation via God’s Breath.

Luke 20:36 is also offered as proof that we will become inherently immortal after the Resurrection and in no need of The Tree of Life. “*Nor can they die anymore, for they are equal to the angels and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection*” (NKJ). Yet this translation is a result of translator bias. First, Jesus was not teaching that ontologically we will be “*equal to the angels*” in the Resurrection. That would require discarding our flesh to become “*spirits*.”²³ The context of Jesus’ answer to the Sadducees pertained to marriage and procreation for the resurrected. In the Resurrection, we will no longer

20 1 Corinthians 2:15, 1 Corinthians 3:1, 1 Corinthians 14:37

21 The adjective, [επορανιος], is a compound word, with the preposition [επι] prefixed to the adjective, [ουρανιος], “heavenly.” The preposition [επι] means to superimpose something over something else – literally, “to cover” (of time, place, or order). It could be used of covering a bed with a blanket, covering a particular city with a radio broadcast, or a state’s governmental authority over that state.

22 Ezekiel 37:5-10, Revelation 11:11

23 Hebrews 1:7

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reproduce. This is how we will be similar to angels. The confusion stems from the clause, “nor can they die any more.”

The Greek reads as follows:

οὐδὲ γὰρ ἀποθανεῖν ἔτι δύνανται

“For not to die still **they ARE ABLE** (or have power).”

Many English translations incorrectly translate this clause as though the negative adverb οὐδὲ (not) is modifying the verb δύνανται (have power or ability). However, when the Greek makes δύναμαι (to have ability or power) into a negative (unable or powerless), the negative adverb or particle immediately precedes the verb δύναμαι.²⁴ Here the negative adverb οὐδὲ modifies and negates the infinitive verb ἀποθανεῖν (to die) which immediately follows it. It does not modify and negate the indicative verb δύνανται (to have power or ability). Having power or ability is not what is being negated by the adverb. Rather, “to die” itself is negated (thus not to die) because the saints will be given this new ability or power. It is the difference between “they are unable to die” and “they have ability not to die.” The former suggests an inherent power of immortality possessed by the resurrected, but the latter implies that the saints will be given a new ability or power to remain alive. This new power or ability to remain alive will come from their direct access to the Tree of Life which God will supernaturally provide.

This begs the question, if our bodies inherently remain mortal after the Resurrection and require full dependence upon God’s supernatural intervention via the Tree of Life, then what about Jesus’ body now? The Scriptures do affirm that our bodies will become as His since His body is the prototype for ours in the Resurrection.²⁵ When the Son of God willingly “emptied Himself”²⁶ of the form of God to become human He became exactly like us in “all things.”²⁷ Jesus was born into our same situation, without access to the Tree of Life. He lived as a mortal amongst mortals. He experienced the process of aging as any other man and would have grown old and died if God had not intervened. When God raised Him from the dead His body was changed into the absolute perfected state that existed originally with Adam. He is now the “second Adam.” When Jesus returns our imperfect bodies will also be changed like His. Jesus’ body after His resurrection was not some new substance not subject to the laws of nature. The Gospel accounts make it clear that the body that went into the tomb is the same body that came

²⁴ Genesis 31:35, Job 10:15, Isaiah 29:11, Jeremiah 20:9 (LXX), Matthew 26:53, Luke 11:7, Luke 14:20, John 5:30, John 13:37

²⁵ 1 Corinthians 15:49, Philippians 3:21, 1 John 3:2

²⁶ Philippians 2:6-8

²⁷ John 1:14, Hebrews 2:14, Hebrews 2:17, 1 John 4:2

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out, bearing the scars of the crucifixion.²⁸ Jesus also ate food and drank after His resurrection.²⁹ Jesus still remains a Jew and physical descendent of David.³⁰ Paul wrote to Timothy long after Jesus had ascended to heaven:

1 Tim. 6:13-16 NKJ

¹³ *I urge you in the sight of **God who gives life to all things**, and before Christ Jesus who witnessed the good confession before Pontius Pilate,*

¹⁴ *that you keep this commandment without spot, blameless until our Lord Jesus Christ's appearing,*

¹⁵ *which He will manifest in His own time, He who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings and Lord of lords,*

¹⁶ ***who alone has immortality**,³¹ dwelling in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see, to whom be honor and everlasting power. Amen.*

Jesus is now dwelling “*in the flesh*” beside the Father at His right hand.³² The Father “is light” and Jesus is with Him “*in the light*.”³³ We can be certain that the Father is providing immortality to His Son. Whether Jesus is eating from the Tree of Life in heaven the text does not say. But a God who created this vast universe could easily create a mini-physical environment for His Son that includes this element. The whole story of the Bible after the fall of mankind is about the restoration of the perfect state of the creation, and God's coming to dwell among men as it was originally in Eden. Eternal life is not about something different or greater than the perfect environment of Eden. Satan's first lie was to deceive man into thinking that he can become something greater than what he was originally designed to be.³⁴ Let us place our trust and hope in God's actual promises in the Bible to bring us back to what mankind once had. Let us be counted worthy to be included among those who are given “*a right to the Tree of Life*” and to be clothed with immortality.

28 Luke 24:39-40, John 20:27

29 Luke 24:41-43, John 21:12, Acts 10:41

30 Revelation 5:5, Revelation 22:16

31 “Has” [ἔχων] is a present tense continuous participle

32 Mark 16:19, Acts 1:11, Acts 2:33, Romans 8:34, Colossians 3:1, Hebrews 10:12, Hebrews 12:2, 1 Peter 3:22

33 1 John 1:5, 1 John 1:7

34 Genesis 2:5