

BIBLE ANSWERS TO BIBLE QUESTIONS

And Interesting Facts About the Holy Word of God

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ISSUE 2

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QUESTION: I recently heard a pastor on the radio say that the welfare state is taught in the Bible. He used the story of Joseph in Egypt to prove his teaching. Is this true?

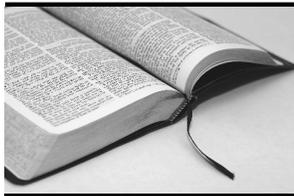
ANSWER: No, it is not true. The purpose of the seven years of plenty and the seven years of famine were not to create a welfare (socialist) state to serve as a Biblical model of government. Actually the Lord used the seven years of plenty followed by the seven years of famine to establish an identifiable people group, known as Israel, from the descendants of Abraham, who would be enslaved for 400 years by the most powerful nation of the day. This is according to a prophecy given directly to Abraham by God concerning their 400 years of slavery and their return to the land of Canaan that the Lord promised would be their inheritance (see Gen. 15:13-18). It is interesting to note that, while they were isolated from the Egyptians in Goshen, the Egyptians themselves became slaves to Pharaoh because of the famine (see Gen. 47:13-19). It is also of note that the Egyptians' servitude began during the seven year famine while the Israelites were gradually enslaved over forty years (Gen. 15:13-16; Ex. 12:40; Acts 7:6; Gal. 3:17). What took place in Joseph's day was not the ordaining of a model of government for God's people to follow. Rather it was the Creator God setting the prophetic stage of history in preparation for His divine judgment on wicked, idolatrous Egypt, while at the same time delivering His chosen people from bondage as a testimony to the nations of His sovereignty over heaven and earth.

Another passage that is misused in trying to show that the Bible teaches that the Gospel promotes a mixture of socialism and Christianity as the ideal for structuring the Church is Acts 2:41-45 with Acts 4:31-36. This error is fostered by the failure to distinguish between prophecy about Israel and the now revealed mystery of the Dispensation of Grace. Peter's discourse in Acts 2 was not the announcing of the beginning of the Church which is the Body of Christ as is popularly, but erroneously, believed by most. Rather, it was the official offering of the Kingdom of Heaven on earth that will come with Jesus Christ's Second Coming. The believing Jews knew that the prophesied seven-year Tribulation would precede Christ's return and they would face great persecution. They were pooling their resources in order to survive the wars, famine and other trials of the Tribulation. But, with Israel's rejection of the King and His Kingdom, God temporarily suspended prophecy and, instead of the Tribulation beginning, He ushered in a new and unforetold Dispensation of Grace that He exclusively revealed to Saul/Paul (Acts 9:1-5, 14-16; 26:9-19; Gal. 1:11-12; Eph. 3:1-10).

QUESTION: What happens today when Jews or Muslims or other good people die, sincerely believing in their heart in God as Creator of Heaven and earth (like Abraham, Moses, and Noah) but did not get the revelation of Christ? Do these people go to Paradise in Heaven where believers in Christ go or is there some other kind of Paradise in Hades where they will wait for their judgment?

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"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." II Timothy 3:16



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ANSWER: First of all, there are “no good people” in God’s eyes as “*all have sinned*” (Rom. 3:12, 23) and are deserving only of God’s wrath. Being sincere in their religious beliefs will not make anyone acceptable to God, no matter how faithfully they might keep the rituals and follow the practices of their religion. This not only includes those who are Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, and so on, but also all who are trying to earn their salvation, even if they call themselves Christians. The Apostle Paul tells us that he was the most faithful and zealous Jew of his day (see Phil. 3:1-6), and he was counting on his sincerity in keeping the religious law of the Jews to gain him acceptance with God. But he discarded it all as “*dung*” in order to know Christ and His righteousness through faith alone in Jesus Christ (Phil. 3:7-9). Following a religion is trusting in one’s own works of the flesh to save them; faith in Christ is trusting in Jesus Christ’s work of redemption on the cross to save us (Rom. 5:1-2; I Cor. 1:18, 21; 15:1-4; II Cor. 5:21). Paul’s sincere zeal in keeping the Law of Moses produced pride in him rather than the righteousness he was striving so hard to achieve. Actually, God’s primary purpose of the Law was not to make man righteous, but to reveal to man that he is a hopeless sinner and thus point him to Christ, “*wherefore the Law was our schoolmaster to bring us to Christ, that we might be justified by faith*” (Gal. 3:24).. “*Therefore by the deeds of the Law no flesh will be justified in His sight: for by the Law is the knowledge of sin*” (Rom. 3:20; also see Rom. 7:5-23; Gal. 3:19-29). It is impossible for sinful man to perfectly keep the tenants of the Law, and failing to do so condemns him. The Law can never make men and women holy, but can only highlight their ungodliness and point them to their need for a Savior. Isaiah said to Israel: “*we are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousness are as filthy rags; and we all do fade as a leaf and our iniquities, like the wind, have taken us away*” (Isa. 64:6). If this is true of Israel, how much more the Gentiles who are

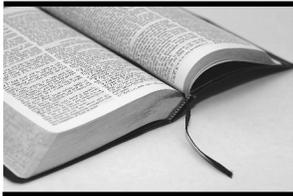
without God and without hope? We can fool other people with our religious piety, but we cannot fool God as He knows the true thoughts and motives of our hearts (see Jer. 17:9-10; Heb. 4:12).

Today there are only two destinations available to members of the human race. For those who die without Christ, it is to suffer in Hades until the final judgment of the Great White Throne (Rev. 20:11-15). Those who have trusted in Christ as Savior go to Heaven to be with their Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ (II Cor. 5:5-8) to await their resurrection (Phil. 3:20-21; I Thess. 4:13-18).

As for the Old Testament saints such as Abraham, Moses, Noah, etc., they did go to Paradise, which was formally in Sheol, when they died. However, it was not because they were good, but because they “*believed God.*” That is to say, they not only believed in God as the Creator, but they also believed He could and would do what He said He would. Even though he was old and childless and his wife was well past the child bearing age, the Lord God told Abram/Abraham that he would have an uncountable number of physical descendants (see Gen. 15:1-5). Even though it was humanly impossible for this to happen, Abram/Abraham “*believed in the Lord; and He (the Lord) counted it to him (Abram/Abraham) for righteousness*” (Gen. 15:6). In other words, Abram/Abraham was justified through faith. This means that he was saved on credit, so to speak. But after the cross, where Jesus Christ shed His blood of redemption for sinners (Rom. 5:8-9), the blood of Christ was applied retroactively to Abram/Abraham and all others who had died in faith before the cross.

Something else that must be considered when looking at this subject is the heart attitude of those who are counted righteous in God’s sight. An example is Abram/Abraham’s grandson, Jacob/Israel. When he fled Canaan to escape the wrath of his brother, Esau, God appeared to Jacob/Israel in a

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dream when he stayed overnight at Bethel (Gen. 28:1-5; 10-11). In this vision, the Lord assured him that one day He would safely return him to Canaan and his descendants would inherit it just as He had promised his grandfather, Abram/Abraham, and his father, Isaac (Gen. 28:12-15). Being frightened by the vision, when he awoke Jacob/Israel performed a religious rite. That is, he set up the stone he had slept on as a pillar and poured oil on it (Gen. 28:16-19). This may seem like an act of faith meant to honor God, but he was not told to do it. It was something he took upon himself to do. He was actually trying to impress God with his own efforts. When we read the vow he made in conjunction with the ritual he performed, we find that it was really meant to be a religious monument to his personal worthiness (Gen. 28:20-22). Rather than believing that God would bless and protect him as He promised He would, Jacob/Israel sanctimoniously informed the Lord God of his fathers that if He first kept him safe in his travels, gave him bread to eat, provided him raiment, and brought him back to his father's house in Canaan in peace, then he would make the Lord his God. And to seal the deal, Jacob/Israel promised that if the Lord indeed did these things for him, he would declare the place where he had set up the stone for a pillar to be God's house. To top it off, he assured the Lord that when He prospered him, he would give back to Him a tenth of all he was given. While this kind of attempt to bargain with God appeals to the human heart as being worthy of honor, it is an affront to the very nature of God. You don't demand that the Lord bless you to prove Himself to you before you recognize Him as God. God is God and He does not need anything from us. In fact, we have nothing of any merit to offer Him. He does not bargain with man, but requires man to acknowledge who He is and to trust and obey Him.

Twenty years later, when he returned to Canaan, Jacob/Israel had changed. He had been greatly blessed materially while he was gone, and he had also been humbled (see Gen. 32:1-2). Where he had arrogantly demanded God bless him before he would believe on Him, he now called out to God, (1) recognizing the Lord as the Sovereign God that He is (Gen. 32:9). (2) Acknowledging his utter unworthiness to receive any favor at all from the Lord God (Gen. 32:10). (3) By faith asking God to save him from the vengeful wrath of his brother (Gen. 32:11). (4) And he prayed, based on God's Word, believing that the Lord could and would do what He said He would (Gen. 32:12). It was after this that the Lord God changed Jacob's name, which means "he will take by the heel," to Israel, which means "he shall be a prince of God" (Gen. 32:28), marking a change of relationship between Jacob/Israel and the God of Abraham and Isaac. Jacob/Israel had become a believer through faith.

I wish I could say that there is hope of salvation for good, sincere, religious people who die apart from faith in Christ, but I cannot because nothing of the sort is taught in the Scriptures and one of the cruelest and evil things we can ever do is offer people false hope. It is the truth alone that provides real hope. *"That we should be to the praise of His glory, who first trusted in Christ. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that Holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession unto the praise of His glory"* (Eph. 1:12-14).

THE TIME OF CHRIST'S INCARNATION

Most reference works refer to the time of Christ's earthly ministry as the "time of His incarnation," but this is not an accurate description. This implies that

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Jesus Christ's incarnation is something that is only of the past, which is not true. The term "incarnation" means "in flesh" and, as it is used of Christ, it refers to His assuming a human nature and taking on a human body through the supernatural conception of the Virgin Mary. Jesus Christ is the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14). The Person of Jesus Christ, who is the Son of God, resided in His human body from conception until He died on the cross and entered into Hades for three days and nights (Ps. 16:10; Matt. 12:40; 16:21; etc.; Acts 2:27). In the resurrection, He reentered the same body He had previously lived in for thirty-three years or so. The same Body that hung on the cross, was placed in Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, and that He rose from the dead in. He still resides in the very same body of flesh and bone that He left the tomb in and appeared to His apostles in (Lk. 24:1-7, 36-39) and after forty days ascended into heaven in (Acts 1:2-3, 9) and will one day return to earth in (Acts 1:10-11; Zech. 14:4). It is now in a glorified form, but the body that the "Man, Christ Jesus" now resides in in Heaven is the body of His earthly sojourn. He still wears, and always will, the scars of the cross; the marks of His work of redemption by which those who believe are set free from the slave market of sin (Eph. 1:7); Rom. 3:23-25). The time of the incarnation of Jesus Christ continues today and will never end. It guarantees the eventual resurrection of every believer into eternal life (Rom. 8:23; I Cor. 15:49-54; Phil. 3:20-21; I Thess. 4:13-18).

NOTABLE PERSONS OF THE BIBLE

"Elizabeth"

A relative of Mary, the mother of the Lord Jesus, Elizabeth and her husband Zechariah, "were both righteous before God." This childless couple were both old when the angel Gabriel appeared to Zechariah in the Temple as he carried out his duties as a priest. Gabriel's message from God to Zechariah was that, in answer to prayer, his wife Elizabeth would conceive and bear him a son who would be "filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother's womb." Elizabeth became pregnant just as the angel Gabriel said she would and gave birth to a son that they named John as they had been instructed; he is popularly known as John the Baptist today. The ministry he was commissioned to was to "go before the face of the Lord to prepare His ways" (see Luke chapter one for the full account). John said that the purpose of his ministry of baptizing was that Jesus Christ "should be made manifest to Israel, therefore am I come baptizing with water" (John 1:31; see vs. 19-34).

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BEREAN BIBLE INSTITUTE
116 Kettle Moraine Drive S.
PO Box 587
Slinger, Wisconsin 53086

Phone: (262) 644-5504
Fax: (262) 644-5507
E-mail: bbi@bereanbibleinstitute.org
Web: bereanbibleinstitute.org

President & Executive Editor: Robert E. Nix, Ph.D.
Managing Editor: W. Edward Bedore, Th.D.
Associate Editor: Matthew Ritchey, M. BS.
Layout: Jessica Sadler