

# The Natural and Spiritual Realms

Eric Michael Teitelman

Pastor • Teacher • Worship Leader



House of David  
MINISTRIES

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Yeshua:

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he talks about the physical resurrection of the body. He said, *"Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas, then by the twelve. After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time"* (1 Corinthians 15:3-8, NKJV).<sup>i</sup> Paul's evidence lay in the accounts of more than five hundred credible witnesses.

Pre-Christian Gnostic teachings originating in Alexandria, Egypt, generally despised the natural world and tried introducing their heretical theology into the early church, often refuting the resurrection. Gnosticism teaches that we live in an imperfect world filled with suffering, not brought about by human sin but rather through the failings of its creator.

They believe that human beings are comprised of both a perishable physical body and a spiritual nature, which they consider to be a fragment of the divine essence called the "divine spark."<sup>iii</sup> However, Gnostic salvation is not received through faith in Christ's death and resurrection. They view Jesus as the principal but not exclusive savior, who brings enlightenment to the ignorance of our true origins.

They believe that salvation is thereby brought about by revelation from on high, from a messenger of light, particularly Christ, who they consider the logos of the true God. Salvation becomes a process of both self and divinely guided enlightenment. Ultimate salvation is enlightenment to awareness of the divine spark that returns us to our spiritual origins, forever becoming absolved of this imperfect physical creation. Gnostics, therefore, not only reject the bodily resurrection of Christ. They deny its very concept.

Given the difficulty for human imagination to fully conceive the supernatural power of God, it is not surprising that some within the early church were naively persuaded away from their simple faith in Christ's resurrection. Nowadays, I often hear Christians say how bad this world is and long to go to heaven. After all, Jesus said to "seek *first* the Kingdom of God," which He also called the "Kingdom of Heaven."<sup>iiii</sup> However, scripture also tells us to be *"looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Savior Jesus Christ"* (Titus 2:13).

Some Christians view heaven as a spiritual place, transcendence above this fallen world, like a home within the clouds. This also contradicts the teachings of Yeshua when He said, *"I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one"* (John 17:15). Therefore, we should not be looking to escape this material world. We should be looking for Christ and His Kingdom to be established in it—the natural realm—just as it is already established in heaven—the spiritual realm.<sup>iv</sup>

If Yeshua desired that we stay in the world, waiting and looking for the blessed hope of His glorious appearing, then seeking to escape this material world might sound a bit Gnostic. While the world is fallen and corrupted with sin, God's purpose is ultimately to redeem it so that His Kingdom would be fully manifest in the created natural realm. And we are reminded that when He made mankind in His image, the pinnacle of His entire creation, He said it was *very good*.<sup>v</sup>

So, is heaven a spiritual place separate and far away from this created world, or is it somehow a part of this natural one? We will find out.

After receiving Christ in 2002, I remember how difficult it was for me to understand the spiritual realm, and to a greater extent, to comprehend what would happen to my soul after I died? In reading the New Testament, I discovered that Yeshua rarely spoke of death, except for the final death of the body and soul that would come after the final judgment.<sup>vi</sup> He and Paul generally illustrated how our bodies fall asleep.

Sleep? I thought to myself. I didn't want to sleep for hundreds or thousands of years until the resurrection. Would my soul lose its identity as the person God created me to be? The idea of my soul somehow remaining separated from my body created anxiety for me. And rightfully so. What would my existence feel like as a spirit person, a ghost without a body? Not good, I feared. So, I continued searching scripture and seeking the Lord for understanding.

Some Christians teach that our soul also sleeps until the day of the resurrection. However, Paul refuted this when he said: *"We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord"* (2 Corinthians 5:8). Paul's words brought a level of comfort to me. At least we have been given assurance that when we die, we will be with Christ. But what part of us? Just our spiritual soul or our soul fully united in a resurrected body? This question, unfortunately, right now cannot be answered. We need to continue to believe and hope in the promise of the bodily resurrection.

There is an underemphasized miracle in the Book of Matthew. It is written, *"And Jesus cried out again with a loud voice, and yielded up His spirit. Then, behold, the veil of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom; and the earth quaked, and the rocks were split, and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the graves after His resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many"* (Matthew 27:50-53).

Here, we see a reference to those whose bodies had fallen asleep. Their bodies died. However, their souls were alive because of their faith in the God of Israel, and now they came to life in new resurrected bodies. Yeshua declared these saints were part of a *first* resurrection when He said:

*"But the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection. Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with Him a thousand years" (Revelation 20:5).*

Therefore, I believe the "first resurrection" is a dispensation of time that began the day Christ died on the cross. Those who were raised on that day are part of the first resurrection. And we who are in Christ, who have either fallen asleep or remain alive until His second coming, are also part of this first resurrection. It is written, *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first" (1 Thessalonians 4:16).*

The rest of humanity will be raised in what is called the "second resurrection." Therefore, every person conceived or born will rise from their sleep, some to eternal life in Christ, and others to eternal separation from God.<sup>vii</sup> For us who are in Christ, the only unanswerable question again is the timing of Yeshua's advent and *our* resurrection. As it is written, *"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only" (Matthew 24:36).*

Nonetheless, our hope is in knowing that we will one day rise from the grave to be with Christ, and we shall be kings and priests of God and Christ and shall reign with Him in His Kingdom. And we will be resurrected into physical bodies and shall reign over a physical earth—this natural realm.

Christ demonstrated to His disciples that He had been raised in physical form when He said, *"Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself. Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39).* Interesting. Our resurrected bodies will be made of flesh and bones. But somehow, Christ was able to appear and suddenly disappear.<sup>viii</sup> It is like He existed in two realms, one natural and one spiritual. There is something about the Kingdom of God that is presently incomplete. So, let us discover how it all comes together.

Paul wrote about the flesh, the natural realm, from an alternate perspective. He said, *"Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption" (1 Corinthians 20:50).* Yeshua was evidently raised from the grave with flesh and bones and appeared to His disciples, and now Paul says that flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom. Was Paul contradicting the bodily resurrection?

Yeshua shared a different but equally challenging parable about the resurrection when He said, *"For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).* Are not the angels, spirits sent forth to minister to those who will inherit salvation, meaning the church?<sup>ix</sup> Are we now going to be resurrected as genderless spirit

beings? I am confused. Flesh and bones, angelic spirit beings, what exactly are we? Paul gives us the answer. He said:

*"So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption [sin], it is raised in incorruption [without sin]. It is sown in dishonor [unclean and unholy], it is raised in glory [sanctified and holy]. It is sown in weakness [mortal], it is raised in power [immortal]. It is sown a natural body [spiritually dead], it is raised a spiritual body [spiritually alive]. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body. And so it is written, 'The first man Adam became a living being.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit" (1 Corinthians 42-45).*

*"However, the spiritual is not first, but the natural, and afterward the spiritual. The first man [Adam] was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man [Christ] is the Lord from heaven. 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. And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man" (1 Corinthians 46-49).*

We need to understand that any present reference to our physical bodies will remain attached to the fallen nature of Adam, and any relation to our future resurrected bodies will permanently be attached to the perfect nature of Christ. Paul did not deny the bodily resurrection. He was describing the order of creation.

We were first born into a natural world with a fallen, spiritually dead nature that we inherited from Adam.<sup>x</sup> Then we became a new creation in Christ where we will be physically resurrected into the Kingdom of God and made spiritually and physically alive in Him.

Even though we wait for our bodily resurrection, sin is no longer part of who we are.<sup>xi</sup> Paul said, *"But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me" (Romans 7:17)*. How is this possible? I sin every day, often without realizing it, because our newly created being is temporarily dwelling within an old body still corrupted with a sinful nature. Thus, Paul sounded conflicted when he said: *"For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do, that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do" (Romans 7:15)*.

Paul was tormented by his old sinful nature, even desiring to leave his physical body to be with the Lord.<sup>xii</sup> However, he also understood the Lord has sanctified and set apart our new nature so that it cannot sin or be corrupted by our old sinful nature, lest we crucify Christ a second time.<sup>xiii</sup> This does not give us a license to sin, but it assures that we are never under any condemnation when we sin.<sup>xiv</sup> Discipline, yes. But condemnation, no.

Our new creation is protected, and I like to think, fully sealed and preserved for the day of our resurrection. We praise the Lord that this decaying body will return to the dust of the earth where it came from so that we may receive God's new eternal body, as it is written, *"For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19)*.

We need to understand that our spiritual body, the new creation in Christ, will never be fully complete without our natural resurrected body. In Christ, our resurrected bodies will be wholly

united with our new spiritual nature—the new creation—to become one perfect being fully transformed into the image of Christ. It is written, *“For our citizenship is in [the Kingdom of] heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body, according to the working by which He is able even to subdue all things to Himself” (Philippians 3:20-21).*

Paul affirmed this dual nature, physical and spiritual existing as *one* created being when he said: *“As we have born the image of Adam, even in the resurrection, we will now also bear the image of Christ.”* The key here is *also*. Our natural appearance inherited from Adam will forever remain part of our identity, even in the resurrection. But our spiritual nature, which is the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, has come from Christ.

For this reason, it is written, *“And they sang a new song, saying: ‘You are worthy to take the scroll, And to open its seals; For You were slain, And have redeemed us to God by Your blood Out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation, And have made us kings and priests to our God; And we shall reign on the earth’” (Revelation 5:9-10).*

All the families of the earth will be represented in the Kingdom of God, and yes, we will reign with Christ on this earth. Only the Spirit of God can unite us as *one new man* in Christ, not our ethnicities. For this reason, Paul said, *“There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28).* Still, it is our ethnicities that bring diversity to God’s Kingdom where we read, *“every tribe, tongue, people, and nation.”*

And what about the *new* heaven and *new* earth? There will be a second resurrection and final judgment at the end of the Millennial Kingdom, the one-thousand-year reign of Christ and His church over the earth. It is written, *“And they were judged, each one according to his works. Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:13-15).*

After that, we read about a new creation, as it is written, *“Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away” (Revelation 21:1).* And guess what? We will witness God’s workmanship in this new creation. And maybe, just quite possibly, we will participate in it as well.

This newly created physical universe will be unlike anything we have ever seen. It is written, *“Come, I will show you the bride, the Lamb’s wife. And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God” (Revelation 21:9-10).*

This city, the New Jerusalem, is the church, but this city is also a city. Can this be possible? Yes, because the natural and spiritual realms will unite as one and forever be inseparable in the new creation.<sup>xv</sup> Heaven will invade earth, as it is written, *“In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace which He made to abound*

*toward us in all wisdom and prudence, having made known to us the mystery of His will, according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Himself, that in the dispensation of the fullness of the times He might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven and which are on earth—in Him” (Ephesians 1:7-10).*

And in the fullness of this time, the whole of creation will be in complete unity and exist in the oneness and peace of God forever. Therefore, we read, *“Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God” (Revelation 21:3).*

Amen!

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<sup>i</sup> All Scripture quotations are taken from the New King James Bible (NKJV) unless otherwise noted, Thomas Nelson Inc., 1982.

<sup>ii</sup> Hoeller, A. Stephan. *The Gnostic World View: A Brief Summary of Gnosticism*. The Gnosis Archive. Gnosis.org.

<sup>iii</sup> Matthew 6:33.

<sup>iv</sup> Matthew 6:10.

<sup>v</sup> Genesis 1:31.

<sup>vi</sup> Matthew 10:28.

<sup>vii</sup> Daniel 12:2.

<sup>viii</sup> Mark 16:12, 14.

<sup>ix</sup> Hebrews 1:14.

<sup>x</sup> Genesis 3:19.

<sup>xi</sup> Psalm 51:5.

<sup>xii</sup> Philippians 1:21-23.

<sup>xiii</sup> Hebrews 6:4-6.

<sup>xiv</sup> Romans 7:7, 8:1.

<sup>xv</sup> 1 Corinthians 15:28.