

Are The Heathen Lost? – Part 2

by ATRI Staff Writer

What about those who have never heard the Gospel, or those very religious pagans who have sincerely worshipped their own gods all of their life? Will God consign them to hell?

Last month we started to answer that question. Our first point was that men are not in total spiritual darkness.

Secondly, the Bible clearly teaches that God does not want the heathen to perish. Second Peter 3:9 says, “The Lord is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.”

Thirdly, the Bible is very clear that anyone who wishes to establish a relationship with God will receive the necessary information on which to make that decision.

If however that decision is not made in this life, is there a further opportunity for men to decide about God and salvation after this life?

The Bible clearly answers with “No.” Hebrews 9:27 states, “It is appointed unto man once to die, and after this the judgment.” Daniel 12:2 says, “And many of those who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake; these to everlasting life, but the others to disgrace and everlasting contempt.”

Paul did not think there would be another chance after death when he wrote, “**Now** is the accepted time; behold, **now** is the day of salvation” (2 Cor. 6:2).

In 2 Thessalonians 1:6-9 we read, “The Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels and in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God [it doesn’t say that they will be given another chance], and obey not the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ: who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of His power.” Here Paul teaches that when Christ comes there will not be time for people to make up their mind. When Christ comes it will be too late. It also does not suggest that there will be a time before the judgment that they will be given another chance.

Jesus Christ Himself urged men to accept Him. He said, “For the son of man is come to seek and to save that which was lost” (Luke 19:9-10). Also the writer to the Hebrews says, “How shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?” (Heb. 2:3). In both cases the clear assumption is that this life “provides the only setting for that choice to be made.

An additional question remains. If men do know of the one supreme God, do they necessarily know God's Son who died for their sins? Must they know about God's Son in order to be saved? If so, what chance do the heathen have?

The Bible teaches very plainly that, "Neither is there salvation in any other; for there is no other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved" (Acts 4:12). Jesus Himself said, "No man comes unto the Father but by me." Men across the world must believe that God has sent the Savior, the God-Man, into the world to die for their sins.

What chance do the heathen have? Paul answers this in Acts 17:27, when he says, "God made them so that they would seek for Him and perhaps reach out for Him and find Him." Also, John 1:9 says, "Jesus was the true light, which coming into the world enlightens every man." If men will follow the light they **do** have, it will lead them to the greater light.

Even after saying all of this, I still admit that we do not have a total biblical answer to this question of how God has dealt with heathen nations in the past. Obviously some of these verses create tensions for us. For example, we do not know exactly how God can lead a heathen to the knowledge of Christ, but because God has not revealed that to us does not mean that the heathen cannot come to that knowledge.

Don Richardson in his book, *Eternity in Their Hearts*, documents stories all the way from the Santal people in India to the majestic fortresses in Peru built by the 15th Century Incan king, to the educated philosophers of ancient Athens 600 years before Christ. He relates incredible examples of how the concept of a supreme God has been learned and accepted for centuries in hundreds of cultures throughout the world.

In his research, Richardson came across a question written in the documents of the pagan Inca people. These people were cut off from the Judeo-Christian illumination. Their question was, "Is 'Inti' the true god? If not, who is?" Richardson asks, "How could they find the answer to a question like that?"

He goes on to say the answer is quite simple. They could learn from old traditions lying dormant within their own culture! That such an event is possible was foreseen by none other than the Apostle Paul when he wrote that, "Let all nations go their own way. Yet He has not left Himself without testimony" (Acts 14:16, 17). Richardson goes on to relate that God has indeed prepared the primitive pagan world to receive the Gospel.

In the end God will judge fairly. The very nature of God prevents Him from being unfair. Genesis 18:25 asks, "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?"

The Bible teaches that in most cases, man is not searching for God but actually turning away from God. Paul says in Romans 1:20, "For even though they knew God they did not honor Him as God or give thanks." In Romans 2 Paul clearly teaches that the heathen, without the law, have a God-given conscience which sets their standard of right and wrong. Their conscience will be that which accuses them or defends them in the day of judgment, according to Paul. Whether we are talking about the heathen in New Guinea or a man in America, neither will be punished by

God because they did not hear the Gospel, rather, they will be punished for the wrong deeds they willfully and knowingly committed. God's judgment will be fair.

In conclusion: The Bible teaches that men are lost and it is not God's fault. God will judge fairly. Men are not in total spiritual darkness. God does not want any to perish, but He will judge men for their sins. **This** life is the time when men must make an eternal decision.

Though men are lost, the Bible teaches they really don't want to know God if it requires they must change and repent. In spite of this, God has commanded His children to go and preach to lost men everywhere, who have rebelled and turned away from knowing Him.