

Asking a Question

Commentary for December 1, 2013 — Receiving an Interesting Answer

The article for December 2013 is "Who Are the Nephilim?" I wrote this article to point out information that was new to me and likely new to you. One passage in particular clarifies the issue of who the Nephilim are. Read first the "[December 2013 Newsletter](#)" for introductory information about the December article.

And Now the Question

During the November 2013 Society for Biblical Literature conference in Baltimore, MD, publisher Fortress Press held an event announcing the publication of a new book by Professor N.T. Wright of England. Wright's 45-minute talk was about his new book titled *Paul and the Faithfulness of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God: Volume 4*.¹ Four to five hundred people attended. This book is the latest of some 60 scholarly books he has written. In this book, Wright presents his understanding of Paul's teaching on how salvation is achieved from God through Christ. A blurb on the Fortress Press website explains:

"Wright carefully explores the whole context of Paul's thought and activity — Jewish, Greek and Roman, cultural, philosophical, religious, and imperial — and shows how the apostle's worldview and theology enabled him to engage with the many-sided complexities of first-century life that his churches were facing."

During his lecture, Prof. Wright said that all salvation comes through the works and righteousness of Christ. One point Wright made from Paul was that salvation only comes to believers being **"in Christ,"** an important biblical term repeated some 84 times in the writings of the apostle Paul. This phrase was emphasized often by Dr. Ernest L. Martin, as many ASK readers know. Wright also was clear that Paul stated the goal of salvation was that God would be **"all in all."**

"And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be ALL IN ALL."

• 1 Corinthians 15:28

Later Paul wrote about how God would become **"all in all"** through Christ:

"Which he [God] wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places, Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come:

And has put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things

¹ The other three books in the series are *The New Testament and the People of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God: Volume 1*; *Jesus and the Victory of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God: Volume 2*; and *The Resurrection of the Son of God: Christian Origins and the Question of God: Volume 3*.

to the [ekklesia], Which is his body, the fulness of him that fills ALL IN ALL."

• **Ephesians 1:20–23**

Two microphones were set up for audience questions after Prof. Wright finished his lecture. At first only one person rose to one microphone. Then I went to the second microphone. My question was this, "**Did the apostle Paul teach that God would accomplish universal salvation?**" I emphasized the words "**would accomplish.**" I wondered what his answer would be although I had my suspicions. ²

His answer was an emphatic "No." Romans chapter 3, he continued, prohibited universal salvation from being accomplished (this is a paraphrase). Wright went on to say that the "H-" question (about "hell") was usually the first to be asked, does hell exist and how can God send people there. Wright denied the apostle Paul taught universal salvation.

Romans chapter 1:18 to the end of chapter 3 deals with how mankind lives in relationship to God. Romans chapter 3 deals with the Jews and the law, and their responsibility before God, all in 31 verses. Israel's failure magnifies God. God judges the world (the system He created, *kosmos* in Greek, Romans 3:6, 19) in righteousness.

"Now we know that what things soever the law says, it says to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world [*kosmos*] may become guilty before God. Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: ..."

• **Romans 3:19–20**

This is the state of man through Adam's sin and our progress to death. Yet, "... **by the law is the knowledge of sin**" (Romans 3:20). The Law serves a purpose:

"But now the righteousness of God without the law [better, 'apart from law'] is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets; even the righteousness of God which is by FAITH OF JESUS CHRIST, unto all and upon all them that believe."

• **Romans 3:21–22**

God's righteousness is accomplished without the Law (Paul found it impossible to place any confidence in the Law as a way to secure righteousness and salvation.) The Law to Paul simply pointed out that he and all others were sinners (Romans 3:23) and that only death was awaiting them — not life. The law is not made void through faith, but "**Yea, we establish the law**" (Romans 3:31). Salvation does not come through law-based, human works.

Prof. Wright's answer was biblically incorrect. This is clear from 1 Corinthians 15:22: "**For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.**" Only then can God be "**all in all**" (1 Corinthians 15:28). Paul does teach that God will accomplish universal salvation. Romans chapter 3 does not negate that point at all. The judgment of Romans chapter 3 has nothing to do with any imaginary "eternal" judgment in an unbiblical "hell."

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² I did not ask Wright's opinion on what he believed regarding universal salvation, I asked what his study of Paul showed regarding Paul's teaching.