

Hope Beyond the Grave

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Chapter I

WHAT IS DEATH?

Death is man's greatest enemy; and the Bible alone, of all the sources of information available to man, furnishes us with definite information concerning the future of those who are struck down by this dread monster. God's Word promises that a time is coming when there "shall be no more death"; and, furthermore, that those who have died shall live again. (Rev. 21:4; John 5:28) A knowledge of the Creator's provision for a dying race should be a real solace to those who mourn for their beloved dead.

Added to the ghastly spectre of death itself, is the almost universal uncertainty of what lies beyond the grave. What happens to an individual the next moment after the heart stops beating? Is that individual still alive in some mysterious way, actually hovering around the undertaking parlors while his friends are gathered to mourn his passing? Or, has he departed to some unknown and "beautiful isle of somewhere"? Or, in the event that the deceased was not a Christian, is he now in the traditional regions of the damned, where he is doomed to suffer an eternity of torture in a hell of fire and brimstone?

Try as we will, we cannot entirely dismiss these questions from our minds. And while many of us may partially console ourselves in the thought that at least many of our close friends and relatives who have died were good characters, and faithful believers in Christianity as they understood it, and hence, according to our accepted beliefs should now be happy in heaven; yet, all of us have had some dear friends, and probably relatives, who have died outside the pale of orthodox belief and practice, and we can't help wondering what has become of these. Are they now suffering, or are they happy?

Science Holds No Hope

Science tells us that there is no evidence of the continuance of human life after the heart stops beating. This being an age of materialism, many are inclined to accept this view. The claim is that so far as the life principle is concerned, man is no different than the lower animals; that the higher intelligence of the human species is not due to the traditional theory that man has hidden within him a separate intelligence called a "soul," or a "spirit," but to the fact that he possesses a superior, a more refined, organism than does the brute creation.

Let us now note a few of the scriptural passages which show clearly that science is right as far as the *present* condition of the dead is concerned. Ecclesiastes 9:5 reads, "For the living know that they shall die: but the *dead know not anything*." Psalm 49:10-2 is also to the point: "For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations: they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless, man being in honor abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish."

In Genesis 2:7 we are told that "the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his

nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” Later, after the transgression of this originally perfect pair, God said, “In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) In Psalm 146:4 David makes an emphatic declaration as to the condition of those who return to the dust. We quote, “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” If language means anything at all then there is no mistaking the fact that these words describe a dead man as being absolutely unconscious, even his thoughts having perished.

Note again the statement of the Psalmist—“His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth.” If a man, as a conscious, living being, was brought into existence by the union of the material body with the breath of life, it would seem reasonable that when these two elements are separated, life would cease; and this is exactly what the text states—“In that very day his thoughts perish.”

Some may wonder about the ‘breath of life,’ thinking perhaps this may be that traditional something-or-other that continues to live on after the body dies. We will leave the subject of the ‘soul’ for subsequent consideration, but let us now examine a passage which describes the *process* of dying, showing exactly what becomes of the two principal elements which divine, creative wisdom has combined to produce human life. It reads: “Then shall the *dust* return to the earth as it was; and the *spirit* shall return unto God who gave it.”—Ecclesiastes 12:7

The key to a proper understanding of this text is found in the word “return,” used with respect to both the body and the spirit. The body is said to *return* to the earth. This is because its elements originally came from the earth. It follows, therefore, that if the spirit *returns to God*, it must have been with God before it entered the human organism. If to be with God in this sense means to be in heaven, then it follows that if the “spirit” here referred to is a conscious entity, capable of enjoying life in a spiritual heaven, it means that every one of us must have been in that spiritual heaven before we were born; else it could not be said that we “return” when we die.

What the “Spirit” Really Is

The Hebrew word here translated “spirit,” is *ruwach*. Prof. Strong, noted authority on the Hebrew and Greek languages, tells us that this Hebrew word *ruwach* means “wind,” or “breath.” It is the same Hebrew word that is translated “breath” in Genesis 7:15, where it is said to be possessed by the lower animals. We quote: “And they went in unto Noah into the ark, two and two of all flesh, wherein is the *breath* [*ruwach*] of life.” If the use of the word *ruwach* to describe the breath or spirit of life in human beings means that we have within us an intelligent entity of some sort that continues to live after the body dies, it also means that the lower animals inherently possess a similar intangible something which can never die.

But when we reason in harmony with the Word of God, all is clear. Genesis 2:7 declares that God created man out of the dust of the ground and “breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” The result of the uniting of the body with the breath of life is said to be that “man became a living soul.” Obviously, when the body returns to the earth, and the breath or spirit of life returns to its original source—to God who gave it—it leaves the individual in exactly the same condition as he was before birth, which was a condition of nonexistence.

To settle this question even more definitely we need only to turn to Ecclesiastes 3:19-21, where the Hebrew word *ruwach* is again used, and there it is said that the breath (*ruwach*) of both man and beast goes to the same place at death. We quote: “For that which befalleth the sons of men, befalleth the beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath [*ruwach*]; so that man hath no pre-eminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place: all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth [that] the spirit of man goeth upward [to heaven] and [that] the spirit of

the beast goeth downward to the earth?"

The records of the New Testament on the subject of death agree fully with those of the Old Testament. Jesus indicates that the dead are in a condition of unconsciousness, which he likens to sleep. In John 11:1-46 we have a wonderfully revealing account of the sickness, death, and awakening of Lazarus, a dear friend of Jesus. Martha and Mary, sisters of Lazarus, were also friends of the Master, and when their brother was taken sick they sent word to Jesus supposing that he would come at once to their aid.

But instead of going immediately to the bedside of his friend Lazarus, Jesus tarried. After some time had elapsed he said to his disciples, "Our friend Lazarus *sleepeth*; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." The disciples misunderstood this, supposing that Jesus referred to natural sleep. Then he said plainly, "Lazarus is *dead*." Later, at the tomb of Lazarus, Jesus addressed this dead one in a loud voice saying, "Lazarus, come forth." And we are told that "he that *was dead came forth*." Not a hint here that Lazarus' "soul" was either in a heaven of bliss or a hell of torment. According to the record, he was asleep in death. Yes, Jesus believed in the "sleep of death."

In the account of the awakening of Lazarus from the sleep of death we have emphasized the fact that the scriptural hope for life beyond the grave is in the assurance that there is to be a *resurrection* of the dead, rather than in the supposition that man possesses inherent immortality. The Apostle Paul fully agrees with this. In I Corinthians 15:12-18 he concludes that if there be no resurrection of the dead, then, "they ... which are fallen asleep in Christ are *perished*."

In the book of Revelation also, we find the same uniformity of thought as to the unconscious condition of the dead. For example, the Revelator says, "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the *dead* which were in them." (Rev. 20:13) We will leave the subject of hell for subsequent consideration. Suffice it now to note the fact that according to the text just quoted, those that are in the scriptural "hell" are declared to be dead. This means that they are not alive and being tormented. The text also reveals that the hope of the dead is that they shall be *brought out* of hell—raised to life.

In brief then, the answer to the question, Where are the dead? is that they are now in a state of unconsciousness; that all hope for life beyond the grave is centered in the scriptural assurance that through the mighty power of the great Creator, exercised by the divine Christ during the coming kingdom period, there is to be a "resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust."—Acts 24:15

Satan's Lie

Before leaving this phase of the subject it is well that we pause long enough to call attention to the origin of the false theory so generally accepted in both Heathendom and Christendom, that "there is no death." If the Bible so clearly teaches that death is a grim reality and man's worst enemy, whence came the idea that it is a friend in the sense of being but the gateway into another life?

The answer to this question is found in the Genesis account of the fall of man into sin and death. Satan, operating through the serpent, in discussing the matter with mother Eve prior to the transgression that brought death, said, "Ye *shall not surely die*." (Gen. 3:4) God has said that the penalty for disobedience would be death—"thou shalt surely die." (Gen. 2:17) The testimony of the entire Bible is consistent with this original statement of what would constitute the penalty for sin. "The wages of sin is death," declares Paul. (Rom. 6:23) "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," says Ezekiel. (18:4)

In Revelation 20:2,3 we get the thought that the "old serpent" that deceived mother Eve has continued to be a deceiver ever since; and history reveals that this is indeed true. Every deceptive effort possible has been made down through the ages to bolster up Satan's lie, "Ye shall not surely die." As a result, nearly everybody today who attempts to believe in a future existence at all, bases his faith on the supposition that

man possesses inherent immortality. But, what say the Scriptures about immortality? The next chapter discusses this point.

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Chapter II

IS MAN IMMORTAL?

The theory of inherent immortality, which alleges that when death overtakes a human being he actually becomes more alive than before it occurred, is based on the supposition that lurking somewhere within the human organism is an elusive, intangible, and invisible ego or intelligence called a "soul." And the claim of theologians is that this soul is immortal or death-proof; hence, that when the body dies, this inner intelligence, or real man, escapes from its prison-house of human limitations and is free to enjoy life forever on a much higher plane of existence—unless, of course, it has been a wicked soul. In the latter case, according to traditional theology, the soul must suffer untold agonies in a burning hell of literal fire; or at best, according to Roman Catholic theology, pass through a long period of suffering in purgatory before it can enjoy the freedom and blessings of heaven.

The expressions "immortal soul," and "undying soul," are so commonly used in religious conversation that it is taken for granted by those who have not made an investigation that they are scriptural terms. For this reason it will be a distinct surprise to many to learn that these expressions are not to be found in the Bible at all. The traditional immortality of the human soul is purely a product of imagination, having no scriptural support whatsoever.

The words "soul" and its plural, "souls," are used in the Bible more than five hundred times, but in no instance is the thought even hinted that human souls are immortal. On the contrary, wherever the Bible discusses the subject of death in connection with the soul, it distinctly and clearly states that the soul, even as the body, is subject to death. For example, through the prophet the Lord says, "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezek. 18:4) And in the New Testament we read the words of Jesus, "And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to *destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna]*." (Matt. 10:28) Yes, even those souls which go to the Bible hell are *destroyed*, not tormented.

The word "soul" in the Old Testament is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Prof. Young states in his Analytical Concordance of the Scriptures, that this word *nephesh* simply means "animal," or, freely translated, that which is animated, or alive a sentient being. The word is used in the Old Testament in connection with the lower animals as well as man. In Numbers 31:28 it is applied to such animals as beeves, asses, and sheep. Thus, were we to insist that the Hebrew word *nephesh*, translated "soul" in the Old Testament, means *immortal soul*, then we would be bound to conclude that the lower animals also possess immortal souls—a conclusion that few would want to accept.

The word "soul" in the New Testament is translated from the Greek word *psuche*. We know that this word has exactly the same meaning as the Hebrew word *nephesh*, for the reason that the Apostle Peter uses it to translate the latter when he quotes from Psalm 16:10. The apostle's quotation is found in Acts 2:27, and reads: "Because Thou wilt not leave my soul [Greek, *psuche*, Hebrew, *nephesh*] in hell, neither wilt Thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." Peter tells us that this is a prophecy concerning the death and resurrection of Jesus, that his soul was not left in hell.

In Matthew 26:38 Jesus is reported as saying, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, *even unto death*." This is fully in harmony with the prophetic declaration concerning Jesus which says that his soul was "made an

offering for sin.” Yes, Jesus’ *soul died*, and through that great sacrifice the souls of all mankind are redeemed from death, and ultimately will be resurrected from the condition of death.

Another interesting use of the Greek word *psuche* [English, “soul”] in the New Testament is found in Acts 3:19-23. Here we have a prophecy describing the work of restoration, or resurrection, that will be carried on by the Messiah following his second coming and the establishment of his kingdom. We are told that then “every soul which will not hear [obey] that prophet, shall be *destroyed* from among the people.” Thus both the Old and New Testaments emphasize the fact that human souls are *mortal*, subject to death, and that ultimately all wicked souls are to be destroyed—not preserved and tormented, as the Dark-age creeds would have us believe.

First Human Soul Created

Let us now note carefully the process by which the first human soul was brought into being, as this will help us to understand more clearly just what a soul really is. The scriptural account of this is given in Genesis 2:7, which reads: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Note that the soul is here shown to be the result, or product, of a union of the body, or organism, with the breath of life—“man became a living soul.” This passage does not say, as many in the past have erroneously supposed, that God created man and then injected a soul into him—it declares, rather, that in the creation man “became” a soul, which is quite different.

First, according to the record, the organism, or *body*, of man was formed—out of “the dust of the ground.” This is scientifically in harmony with the facts as we know them today, as the body of man is composed entirely of the various chemical elements found in the earth. Then, into this organism was forced the “*breath of life*”—the animating power of the air which we breathe, which is necessary to all animal life. The Hebrew word here translated “breath,” is *neshamah*, which, according to Prof. Young, literally means “breath.” The fact that it was breathed into the *nostrils* of father Adam emphasizes the fact that it was the *breath*. Certainly the nostrils would seem like a peculiar place for an immortal soul to be located.

Now what happened when the breath of life was blown into the nostrils of this first human organism? Simply this, it became alive—or, as the text declares, “a living soul.” Thus seen, the “*soul*” is really that which results from the union of organism with the life-giving qualities of the breath—the “breath of life.” A simple illustration of this is the electric light. The organism of the bulb with its internal vacuum, filament, etc., is not the light; neither is the electricity that flows through that organism, the light; but the union of the organism with the electricity *produces* the light. Destroy the bulb (organism) or cut off the electric current (corresponding to the breath of life) and the light goes out; that is, it ceases to exist, being extinguished.

Just so it is with the human soul. When the body becomes impaired through disease or accident, to the point where it can no longer function sufficiently well to react to the life-sustaining impulses of the breath of life, the soul, or life, of the individual “goes out,” that is, it ceases to exist, it dies. Likewise, if for any reason, or in any manner, the breath of life is kept from the body, as in drowning, or in asphyxiation, the life also ceases—the soul dies.

It should be borne in mind in this connection, of course, that the great secret of *life*, the outward manifestations of which we are able to understand to some extent, is in the hands of the Creator. He is the great Creator, not only of man, but of the lower animals as well. He is to all *life* on earth what the sun is to all natural *light*; that is, he is the source. It is not possible for man to form an organism, put in it some of the earth’s atmosphere, and have it live. The literal air is the breath of life both to humans and to the lower animals, because it is a medium of the Creator by which means the life-principle is communicated to all living things in the earth.

This life-principle, however, is not an intelligence in itself, but merely the power of God by which all life exists. In Genesis 7:15,22, this same breath of life is said to be a possession of the lower animals.

As we pursue our investigation we will discover that the reason the Bible holds out a hope of future and eternal life for human beings who obey the law of God is that the Creator proposes to continue imparting the life-principle to them, and not because he originally put something into their organism which is death-proof.

The Hope of Immortality

As already noted, the expression “immortal soul” is not to be found in the Bible at all. The word “immortal” is used only once in the entire Bible, and in that one instance it is applied to the Lord and not to man. We quote: “Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory for ever and ever.” (I Tim. 1:17) In I Timothy 6:16 we have a passage similar to the foregoing in which the word “immortality” is used. This text is also speaking of the Lord, and reads: “Who *only* hath *immortality*, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honor and power everlasting.” These two scriptural passages should definitely settle the question as to whether man, by nature, is an immortal creature.

The word “immortality” is used four other times in the Bible, and in each case it is descriptive of a *future conditional* reward for those who in this life walk faithfully in the footsteps of the Master. And right here let us emphasize the fact again that we are not attempting to prove that there is no future life for human beings, but rather, that all hope of future life, according to the Bible, is based on the fact that there is to be a resurrection of the dead, rather than on the supposition that we are *by nature* immortal, hence cannot die.

We will leave the general subject of the resurrection for later consideration, pausing here just long enough to note the four scriptures which refer to the Christian’s hope of being exalted to immortality with the Lord. Romans 2:7 reads: “To them [Christians] who, by patient continuance in well doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.” This text shows that immortality is not now a possession of the Christian, but rather that it is something to be sought after, “through patient continuance in well doing.”

In I Corinthians 15:53 we read: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this *mortal* must put on *immortality*.” Here we are told that “immortality” is a quality, which if it is ever to be possessed, must be “put on.” Distinctly does the apostle say that now we are “mortal” beings. The next verse reads: “So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.”

There is just one other text in the Bible in which the word “immortality” appears, and that is II Timothy 1:10. It reads as follows: “But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel.” It is evident from this passage that no one prior to our Lord’s first advent had even as much as an opportunity to strive for immortality, as the church of this Gospel age is encouraged to do. It shows, furthermore, that all hope of life and immortality is centered in Jesus and in his redemptive work.

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Chapter III

WHAT ABOUT HELL?

A doctrine of Christian belief which has been much distorted by the Dark-age superstitions is that which pertains to the punishment of those who disobey the divine law. We have seen the plain teachings of the Bible to be that “the wages of sin is death.” (Rom. 6:23) We have found the scriptural definition of death to be a

state of unconsciousness—symbolically described as sleep. We also found that the death penalty applies to the “soul,” or complete being, and is not limited merely to the disintegration of the human organism. In view of these simple, but definitely stated truths of the Bible, many will naturally and properly inquire about the doctrine of eternal torment for the wicked.

The answer to this apparent difficulty becomes obvious when we realize that the eternal torture theory is purely a man-made dogma and has no support whatsoever in the sacred Scriptures. True, the Bible does say a great deal about hell, even the expression “hell fire” is to be found in the sacred record; yet, upon investigation, it is found that the Bible hell is not a place of torment at all, but is merely the condition of the dead; and that condition, we have discovered, is one of unconsciousness.

All know, of course, that our English Bible is a translation from the Hebrew manuscripts of the Old Testament and the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament. Hence, in order to have a definite foundation of fact upon which to base conclusions on this important matter pertaining to the divine purpose and plan, it is necessary to consult authorities on the Hebrew and Greek languages as to the actual meaning of the various ancient words that are translated “hell” in our English Bible. In doing this, a flood of surprising information at once opens up to us.

We find, for example, that there is only one Hebrew word in the entire Old Testament that is translated hell, and that word is *sheol*. This word appears, in all, 65 times. In our Common Version of the Bible it is translated 31 times grave, 31 times hell, and 3 times pit. Dr. James Strong, Professor of Hebrew and Greek, defines *sheol* as being “the world of the dead.” But in order to arrive at a definite conclusion as to the exact condition that exists in this “world of the dead,” it is necessary to consult the Bible itself.

The Hebrew word *sheol* appears in Ecclesiastes 9:10, where it is translated “grave.” We quote: “Whatsoever thy hand findest to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave [*sheol*] whither thou goest.” This is the inspired definition of the Hebrew word *sheol*—the only word translated hell in the Old Testament. It makes clear that this “world of the dead” is a silent, sleeping world, in which there is no knowledge, no consciousness. For four thousand years, from the creation of Adam to the first advent of Jesus, Jehovah employed no other word than this to describe the condition of the dead. If eternal torture is the penalty for sin, would it not have been most unkind and unjust to keep the people in ignorance of it for so long a period of time?

The good Prophet Job knew that *sheol* was a condition of unconsciousness comparable to sleep, and for this reason, when he was suffering so acutely, both mentally and physically, he asked the Lord to let him go down to this condition. Yes, Job actually prayed to go to the Bible hell. His prayer reads, “O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave [*sheol*], that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!” Note that Job wanted to go to *sheol* in order to *escape* God’s wrath. How different this is from the creedal theory that hell is the place where God visits his wrath most spitefully upon all who go there! Another point to be noted here is that Job was a faithful servant of the Lord, yet he expected to go to the Bible hell when he died. What can this mean?

A careful examination of all the texts in the Old Testament in which the word *sheol* appears will reveal that this “world of the dead” is a condition into which both good and bad, saint and sinner, go at death. It is not necessarily, however, a permanent condition of death. As a matter of fact, Job did not expect to remain in death, so in concluding his prayer, he asked the Lord to remember him by calling him forth from *sheol*. He asks the question, “If a man dies, shall he live again?” and then answers his own question by affirming his hope in the resurrection, thus, “Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands.”—Job 14:13-15

Only once in the Old Testament is the thought of pain associated with the word hell, and that is in Psalm

116:3, which reads: "The sorrows of death compassed me, and the pains of hell [*sheol*] gat hold upon me." David is the speaker in this passage, and while he had yielded to temptation at times, nevertheless, on account of heart loyalty to his Creator, he was said to be a man after "God's own heart." (Acts 13:22) Certainly such a one would not be a proper subject to suffer the tortures of a creedal hell. What, then, does he mean when he says, "The pains of hell gat hold upon me"?

The meaning of David's words in this text is apparent when we take the context into consideration. He is telling how the Lord delivered him from death, even though he was actually sick enough to die. The "pains of hell" to which he refers are clearly the pains and sufferings incident to the dying process—the sickness that finally did result in the prophet's death, although for a time he was delivered from it. Viewed from this standpoint, we can see that all the suffering in the world that eventually leads to death could properly be considered as being the "pains of hell," because it eventuates in the condition of death, *sheol*, the Bible hell.

Hell in the New Testament

The Greek word *hades* is used in the New Testament to translate the Hebrew word *sheol*, when quoting from the Old Testament. An interesting example of this is Acts 2:27, which reads: "Because thou will not leave my soul in hell [*hades*], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption." These words are a quotation from the 16th Psalm, where, according to the Apostle Peter's inspired testimony, the Prophet David foretold the death and resurrection of Jesus. In this prophecy David uses the Hebrew word *sheol*, and in translating it the apostle uses the Greek word *hades*. From this we know that *hades* of the New Testament has exactly the same meaning as *sheol* of the Old Testament. Inasmuch as the prophet in Ecclesiastes 9:10 defines *sheol* as being a condition of unconsciousness, there seems no room for doubt as to the New Testament meaning of the word hell.

David's prophecy of Psalm 16:10 which, as before noted, Peter interprets as referring to the death and resurrection of Jesus, is specially interesting because of the fact that it puts Jesus in the Bible hell during the time he was dead. Thus it is apparent that the Bible hell is not the sort of place that Dark-age theology has represented it to be; for surely we could not think of Jesus as having gone to a place of torture. But, when we remember that the Bible hell is the state or condition of death, we can see why it was necessary for Jesus to go to hell. The Bible makes it clear that Jesus, in his redemptive work for the human race, took the sinner's place in death, that he became a ransom, or corresponding price, for the sins of the world. In doing this, he tasted "death for every man," hence, went into the condition of death, the Bible hell. See Isaiah 53:3-10; I Tim. 2:3-6; Heb. 2:9.

Coming Back from Hell

In order to be fully assured that the Bible hell is not a place of eternal torture as traditional theology would have us believe, let us turn to Revelation 20:13 and 14. In this passage the Greek word *hades*, translated "hell," is used in the Bible for the last time. We quote: "And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [*hades*] delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell [*hades*] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death."

Three outstanding facts become apparent as we study the foregoing passage: First, that the Bible hell is not necessarily a permanent abode of either the wicked or the righteous, for it is said *to deliver up its dead*. Second, that the Bible hell is *not the lake of fire*. Third, that those who are here said to have been in hell were dead while there, and not alive suffering the alleged agonies of the Dark-age abyss of the damned.

As already noted, this is the last mention of hell in the Bible, and here we find it described as a place or condition, entirely emptied of its inhabitants, and then burned up or destroyed in a symbolic lake of fire. Fire

is one of the most destructive elements known to science, and it is here employed by the Lord to picture, or symbolize, the fact that *hades*, the condition of death that resulted from the transgression of our first parents back in Eden is finally to be completely destroyed.—I Cor. 15:26

The Keys of Hell

In Revelation 1:18 the possibility that hell must eventually deliver up its dead is brought to our attention by Jesus himself, in the following words: “I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the *keys* of hell and of death.” Keys are used to unlock doors or gates. Jesus purchased these symbolic keys of hell and death by his own death. This gives him the divine authority to unlock the great prison-house of death and set the captives free; and in the passage which declares that “death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them,” this is exactly what is shown as taking place.

That Jesus now possesses the divine right to raise the dead is also pointed out by the Apostle Paul in Romans 14:9, which reads: “For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.” As the Lord of the dead, he has promised to use his official authority and power, the “keys of hell,” to restore the world to life. This is the import of the Master’s own words as recorded in John 5:28,29: “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection by judgment.” (See Revised Version.)

This evacuation of the dead world from *sheol*, or *hades*, will be followed, as indicated in Revelation 20:14, by the destruction of hell. This was not a new thought to the New Testament writers, for it had been prophesied long before in the Old Testament. Through the Prophet Hosea, the Lord says: “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues: O grave [*sheol*], I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.” (Hos. 13:14) Notice the blessed assurance given in this passage: “Repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.” That is, the Lord had definitely determined to destroy death and hell, and this is sure to be the glorious consummation of his loving purpose on behalf of the fallen race.

The Rich Man in Hell

Those who insist that the Greek word *hades* in the New Testament signifies a place of endless torment, rather than a condition of unconsciousness in death, as the Bible so clearly teaches, cite the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus in an effort to prove their contention. It is true, of course, that the word hell in this parable is a translation of *hades*; but a careful and unbiased examination of the account will show that it cannot be consistently used to prove that good people go to a place of bliss when they die, while evil persons are consigned to a place of torture.

Professor Benjamin Wilson, author of the “Emphatic Diaglott” translation of the New Testament, knowing that *hades* does not signify a place of torment, was puzzled to understand the manner in which it is used in this parable, so he presents a footnote in which is offered evidence that the entire parable may be an interpolation and not actually a part of the sacred writings at all. Whether this be true we cannot say; however, when the account is viewed in the light of its being a *parable* rather than a statement of literal facts, there seems to be no necessity to doubt its authenticity. In order that we might have the details of the parable clearly in mind, we suggest a careful rereading of the account as found in Luke 16:19-31.

Strange, if Literal

According to Dark-age theology this parable is supposed to teach that all good people who believe in Christ go to heaven when they die, and that all evil persons who do not accept Christ in this life go to a place

of eternal torture at death. Yet, strange though it may seem, a careful scrutiny of the parable indicates that nothing at all is said about either good people or evil people; nor is anything said about heaven. All that is said of the supposedly virtuous man of the parable is that he was poor and covered with sores, that he ate crumbs that fell from the rich man's table, and that the dogs licked his sores. Of the rich man it is related merely that he fared sumptuously, wore good clothing, and permitted the poor man to lie at his gate.

Nor, according to the parable, did the diseased beggar go to heaven when he died, but instead was carried by the angels to "Abraham's bosom." If this is a statement of literal fact, it would preclude the possibility of anyone else ever being blessed with a similar reward at death, for the reason that there would not be room for more than one sick beggar in Abraham's bosom. On the other hand, if Abraham's bosom is understood to be symbolic of heaven, and the beggar representative of those who are qualified for heaven, then the only hope for any of us is in becoming poor beggars full of sores before we die—yes, and having dogs lick our sores.

There are many other inconsistencies in this parable if viewed in the light of traditional theology. As a matter of fact, there is not a single item in it that is in harmony with the theory that Christian believers go to heaven when they die, while unbelievers go to a place of torment. The one point in the account that theologians have seized upon to bolster up the God-dishonoring dogma of torture is that the rich man is said to be surrounded with tormenting flames after his death. But what could Jesus have meant by this strange account?

We have already referred to this passage of Scripture as being a parable. In this thought lies the solution of what it really means. In a parable the things said are not to be understood literally. We may not be able to determine dogmatically what Jesus intended to teach by this parable, but the prominence given to "Father Abraham" seems to indicate that it has to do in some way with the experiences of the natural seed of Abraham; as they were the ones in Jesus' day who called Abraham their father. (Matt. 3:9; John 8:33,39; Rom. 4:1) It seems reasonable to conclude, therefore, that the rich man of the parable is intended to illustrate the Jewish nation. This is not an uncommon symbolism, as even today we have "John Bull" to typify the British nation, and "Uncle Sam" to typify the United States.

The Jewish nation was a royal nation in God's sight, chosen by him as the channel through which his promised blessings were to flow out to all other nations. This royal standing of the natural seed of Abraham was represented in the parable by the purple clothing of the rich man. He also wore fine linen, which was illustrative of the typical righteousness that came to the Jews as a result of their endeavor to keep the Mosaic Law, and also through the typical sacrifices of the tabernacle services. And by virtue of all the rich promises made to them, they fared sumptuously every day, even as the parable states. Indeed it was the rich blessings of the Lord to them that proved to be their stumbling block. Paul, quoting from Psalm 69:22, says: "Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumbling block and a recompense unto them."—Romans 11:9

The beggar in the parable seems to be a fitting illustration of the Gentiles at the time of Jesus' first advent. From the standpoint of God's favor they were indeed poor. All the promises had been made to the Jews and through the Jews. Any Gentile up to that time who desired the blessings of the true God was required to become a Jew by being made a proselyte. To the Jews, the Gentiles were "dogs," unworthy of any special consideration.

But the status of both Jews and Gentiles was greatly changed shortly after Jesus' crucifixion and resurrection. The Jews had rejected and crucified their Messiah and as a result were cast off from divine favor. In this sense of the word they died. They lost their place of chief favor before the Lord, and as a nation went into oblivion. But as a people they have continued to live; and from that day until now the flames of persecution have engulfed them almost constantly.

The beggar also died; that is, the Gentiles ceased to be a people wholly ignored by God, but instead divine favor was extended to them, and as many as believed were carried into Abraham's bosom. That is to say, they became heirs of the promises made to and through Abraham. Concerning this Paul says, "The Scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen [Gentiles] through faith, preached before the Gospel unto Abraham." (Gal. 3:8) While it has been possible all through the Gospel age for individual Jews to become Christians and thus become spiritual children of Abraham, divine providence has so overruled the matter as to make the Gentiles the special recipients of his favor along this line—they have occupied the place of chief favor, as illustrated by "Abraham's bosom."

Just as the rich man in the parable petitioned Abraham to send Lazarus with a drop of water to cool his tongue—to ease his suffering—so more than once down through the age the Jews as a people have implored God to send a measure of relief through Christian sources! But the hardships and persecutions have continued. There has indeed been a great gulf fixed between Jew and the spiritually favored Gentile during all this long period—a gulf that has been impossible to bridge. Nothing in the parable, however, indicates that this torment of the rich man was to last forever. Other Scriptures show clearly that the time is even now here when the Jewish nation is to be restored to her former place of divine favor as the natural seed of Abraham.

Another interesting point in the parable is that the "five brethren" mentioned by the rich man were also said to have Abraham as their father. When the nation was released 500 years prior to our Lord's first advent, those who actually returned to Palestine were mostly of two tribes, although a few from all tribes returned. If this one rich man stood for the two tribes, then the other ten tribes, the majority of which did not have the opportunity of coming in direct contact with the teachings of the Messiah at his first advent, would be properly represented by the five brethren, a ratio of one to two.

Thus seen, every detail of the parable is found to be in harmony with the Bible as well as with historical facts; whereas if we undertake to think of it as being a literal statement intended to show the final rewards of the righteous, it is most inconsistent and absurd. Not only so, but it would mean that the Bible is contradictory and unreliable because, as we have already seen, *sheol* in the Old Testament and *hades* in the New Testament are specifically stated to be conditions where there is no knowledge, whereas in this parable there is said to be torment in *hades*. But all is clear when we realize that it is *national* death here referred to, while the people of the nation continue to live and to be persecuted.

Undying Worms — Unquenchable Fire

While *sheol* is the only Old Testament word translated "hell," *hades*, its Greek equivalent, is not the only word translated "hell" in the New Testament. Just outside of ancient Jerusalem was a valley in which dead carcasses and other offal of the city were burned; and it is said that brimstone was used as an aid in this work of destruction—probably as a disinfectant. This place was called in the Hebrew the *Valley of Hinnom*; and the Greeks called it *Gehenna*. So this Greek word *Gehenna* is used a few times in the New Testament, and in the Common Version Bible is translated by our English word "hell." It is said that the dead bodies of certain criminals considered by the Jews as unworthy of a resurrection were cast into *Gehenna*; hence Jesus employs this word to describe a condition of eternal destruction into which wholly wilful sinners must ultimately go.

This word *Gehenna* is translated "hell" in Mark 9:43-48, which reads as follows: "And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that shall never be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thy foot offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter halt into life, than having two feet to be cast into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched. And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two

eyes to be cast into hell fire: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched."

In each instance in the foregoing passage the word hell is a translation of the Greek word *Gehenna*, and is clearly, therefore, an allusion to the symbolic significance of the destructive effects of the fires that burned continuously in the *Valley of Hinnom*. The whole picture is one of destruction rather than of torment. Even the mention of the worms that die not, intensifies this picture of destruction; as these worms are unquestionably those which infest all dead carcasses. The translators of this passage, of course, believed in the theory of eternal torture and they did the best they could to give us a translation that would seemingly lend support to their superstitions. Hence the "unquenchable" fire and the "undying worms" give the text an appearance that convinces some that eternal torture in a hell of fire must indeed be the fate of the wicked.

If we will but use our common sense, however, we shall find that the passage presents no problem of this kind at all. Any fire that completely consumes that which is being burned is properly called an unquenchable fire. A fire that continues to burn until all combustible material at hand is consumed is a fire that is not quenched, yet it is not an eternal fire. So Jesus was here illustrating the fact that sinners would not be able to escape the full penalty of sin, which is death, or destruction—that the fires of destruction will not be quenched. Also that in case the symbolic fire did not for any reason complete the work of destruction the ever-present "worms" would. Hence from every standpoint we can see that the Master was here using a symbol of destruction, which again bears out the united testimony of the Scriptures that the "wages of sin is death."—Romans 6:23

The remainder of this passage of Scripture is also symbolic. One's eyes, hands, and feet are esteemed most highly because of their usefulness, and Jesus' suggestion that the Christian part with them rather than lose everlasting life is just another way of saying that we should be willing to make any kind of sacrifice in this life rather than jeopardize our eternal existence.

The first application of the passage evidently is only to Christians—those who have covenanted to follow in the footsteps of Jesus—although the same principle will apply to the wilfully wicked during the Millennium. Christians are now on trial for life, and the surest way of gaining the victory is through the sacrifice of everything in the divine service.

Isaiah 66:24 describes the destruction of wilful sinners during the Millennial age in similar language as used by the Master. Jesus may have been quoting this passage, applying the symbolism of destruction to those who are now on trial for life. We quote: "And they shall go forth, and look upon the carcasses of the men that have transgressed against Me: for their worm shall not die, neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorring unto all flesh."

The Smoke of Their Torment

Revelation 14:10,11 is sometimes cited as proof of the torment doctrine. This portion of Scripture reads as follows: "The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb: and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever: and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name."

If the foregoing passage is intended by the Lord to be a literal statement of fact, then not many of the world of mankind need to be especially concerned about it, for the torment is said to be upon those who worship either a beast or the image of a beast. While some in heathen lands have worshiped beasts, few, if any, have ever worshiped a literal beast such as is here described—a beast like a leopard, with the feet of a bear, the mouth of a lion, and with seven heads and ten horns. (Rev. 13:1,2) The passage is still more puzzling from a literal standpoint when we note that the tormenting takes place in the presence of the holy

angels, which could easily be construed to mean in heaven. Surely such a condition of things in heaven would make that a totally different kind of place from what many have thought it to be.

The Book of Revelation is one of symbols, and this passage is no exception to the rule. The “beast” here is evidently a false religio-political system that demands the worship of men; and the thought symbolically presented is that those who profess to follow the Lamb and worship the true God yet give allegiance to this beast instead are to be subjected to troubles of various kinds, partaking of the sufferings that are to come upon all false systems during the great “time of trouble” with which this age will finally end. There is nothing in this passage to indicate that the torment takes place after death.

The “smoke” of their torments is evidently a symbolic way of saying that the evidence, or remembrance, of their torments will ever continue to be a reminder of the result of worshiping anything or anybody except the true God. Regardless of what all the details of this passage may signify, it certainly cannot be consistently used to prove the Dark-age theory of the eternal torture of the wicked.

How Satan Will Be Tormented

Some, in seeking to “prove” the doctrine of eternal torment, have seized upon the statement of Revelation 20:10, claiming that it supports the torment theory. We quote: “And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” We have already seen that the Bible makes a clear distinction between the “lake of fire” and “hell,” or *hades*, in that the latter is said to be cast into the former. (Rev. 20:14) This “torment” said to come upon Satan is evidently limited to him and could not apply to those who are delivered from hell, and who are said to have their “tears wiped away.”—Rev. 21:4.

How, then, is Satan to be tormented? Is the Dark-age theory applicable to him if not to anyone else? We do not think so. The Greek word here translated “tormented” is, according to Professor Strong, from the Greek word *basanos*, the literal meaning of which he gives as “touchstone.” The same word is translated “ vexed” in II Peter 2:8, where we are told of the effect of the wicked deeds of the Sodomites upon the soul of righteous Lot. The thought in Lot’s case evidently is that he was daily learning by comparison the terrible results of a life of godlessness.

To get the correct thought of how the devil is to be “tormented” it is helpful to consider the prophecy of Isaiah 14:15-17. We quote: “Yet thou shalt be brought down to hell [*sheol*], to the sides of the pit. They that see thee shall narrowly look upon thee, and consider thee, saying, Is this the man that made the earth to tremble, that did shake the kingdoms; that made the world as a wilderness, and destroyed the cities thereof, that opened not the house of his prisoners [of death]?”

Comparing this prophecy relative to the destruction of Satan with the statement of the Revelator concerning his “torment,” the thought seems clear that the devil is to become an everlasting example of the terrible results of a course of rebellion against God, that throughout the ages of eternity the saved of mankind will continue to hold him in *derision*. Not that the devil himself will actually be conscious of the derision in which he is held. This would not be necessary within the meaning of the text. For example, in our own manner of speaking we sometimes hear it said of one who had been disliked in his community, ‘Now that the man is dead, let him rest, as nothing can be accomplished by continuing to talk about him.’

Actually, of course, nothing that we might say or do would affect in any way one who has died, just as the everlasting ignominy that is to be heaped upon Satan will not affect him when he is finally destroyed in the lake of fire; nevertheless, the people will not let him rest; they will continue to hold him up as an example of the dire results of an evil, selfish course. Thus the divine permission of evil will be seen to result in an everlasting blessing to all the willing and obedient of the human family, being a “touchstone” by which all will

be able to discern intelligently between good and evil. Doubtless the majority will choose the good.

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Chapter IV

SPIRITS AND SPIRITUALISM

“For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: by which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.” —I Peter 3:18-20

That the truth of God’s Word cannot be properly understood and appreciated except by taking into account its entire testimony on a given subject is well illustrated by its several statements concerning the condition and whereabouts of Jesus during the interim between his death and his resurrection.

In an Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus, quoted by the Apostle Peter, and applied by him to the death and resurrection of the Master, Jesus is said to have been in *hell*. (Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:27-32) Through a misunderstanding of what Jesus himself said to the thief on the cross many have been led to believe that he went to “paradise” the moment he died; and from a surface reading of our present text it would appear that he went somewhere to preach to “spirits in prison.”

In a previous discussion we learned that the Bible hell is the condition of death; that *sheol* in the Old Testament and *hades* in the New are words which describe a condition of *utter unconsciousness*. (Eccl. 9:10) As Jesus died a ransom, or substitute, for father Adam and his race, thus taking the sinner’s place, it therefore was necessary that he go into this condition of death, the Bible hell.

“He made his grave with the wicked,” declared the prophet concerning Jesus. (Isa. 53:9) It is in harmony with this basic fact of biblical truth that we must seek an understanding of whatever else the sacred Word may have to say concerning the whereabouts of Jesus between the time of his death on the cross and his resurrection from the dead the third day thereafter.

In order to understand clearly just how it was possible for Jesus to preach to “spirits in prison” at a time when other scriptures show that he was unconscious in death it is necessary first of all to determine who the “spirits” were to whom he preached. It is this information that Peter gives us in the words, “Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah.”

In his second epistle, Peter furnishes us with even more definite identification of the “spirits,” saying, “For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but spared Noah, the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly.”—II Peter 2:4,5

From the foregoing quotation it will be seen that the “spirits” to whom Jesus preached were a certain group of “angels” who had been disobedient to God at the time of the flood. The Apostle Jude also mentions these same beings, similarly referring to them as “angels,” and describing their special sin as being that they “kept not their first estate.” Jude also explains, even as Peter does, that these “angels” are now imprisoned, Jude adding that they are in “chains of darkness,” waiting for the judgment of the great day.—Jude 6

These “spirits in prison” then, are not the “spirits” or “ghosts” of human beings who have died, but are

spirit creatures on the angelic plane of existence. This is an important truth ever to keep in mind.

We are well aware that on God's earthly plane of creation, which is visible and understandable to us, there are various levels of existence, from the lowest form of shellfish life up to man, who in his perfection was the king of this material or earthly domain. The Scriptures show that this same variety in the divine creation extends to a higher realm, far beyond that which is visible to us, that above man, the highest of God's earthly creatures, there is a spirit world; and that in this spirit world, even as in the natural, there are various orders of beings, such as angels, cherubim, etc.

Concerning man the Psalmist declares, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the angels." (Psa. 8:5) When Jesus came to earth to die as man's Redeemer, he was "made flesh," and as a man he died; but when resurrected he was highly exalted "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." (Ephesians 1:21) Thus do the Scriptures point out a clear line of demarcation between the earthly and the spirit planes of existence.

The Bible indicates that at the present time there are both holy and unholy angels; although when created all these spirit creatures were in harmony with God, and served him in various capacities. Of those angels which remained in harmony with the Creator the apostle says that they are now "ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation."—Heb. 1:14

Again, "And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire." (Heb. 1:7) Concerning these angelic servants of Christians, Jesus said: "Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven."—Matt. 18:10

Earthly and Heavenly "Angels"

The student of the Scriptures should not be confused by the fact that in the Bible the term "angel" is sometimes applied to human beings. The word literally means servant, or messenger, and it is always necessary to determine from the context whether or not the passage in which it is used has reference to human messengers or to heavenly, or spirit messengers.

On the other hand, the Scriptures clearly indicate that there are spirit creatures called "angels." For example, the night that Jesus was born an "angel" announced his birth to the shepherds. That it was a spirit being who performed this service is evident from the words: "And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:10-14) Likewise, it was a spirit being that announced to Mary that she was to be the mother of Jesus, and it was also a spirit being that ministered to Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane. Jesus referred to heavenly beings when he said that he could ask of his Father and more than twelve legions of angels would be provided to assist and protect him.—Luke 1:26-38; 22:43; Matthew 26:53

But as we have already seen, not all of these angelic creatures remained loyal to Jehovah, their Creator—some of them having been "disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah." (I Pet. 3:20) These unfaithful ones, by common usage, have come to be designated as the "fallen angels." The Scriptures show that as a punishment for their rebellion they are now held, or imprisoned, in "chains of darkness."

Where Are the "Spirits"?

In a text already quoted the apostle gives us some very important information as to what constitutes the prison-house of these fallen angels. We quote the text again: "For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."—II Pet. 2:4

The word “hell” in the passage just quoted is not a translation either of the Greek word *hades* or of *Gehenna*. The term here used by the apostle is *tartaroo*; and this is the only time it appears in the Bible. *Tartaroo* is from the Greek word *tartarus*, a term used in Grecian mythology as the name for a dark abyss or prison. In the text under consideration the entire expression, “*cast down to hell*,” is used to translate *tartaroo*; so evidently the word refers more to an act than to a place. The fall of the angels who sinned was from honor and dignity into dishonor and condemnation; so the thought seems to be: “God spared not the angels who sinned, but *degraded them*, and delivered them into chains of darkness.”

These angels in their original state of holiness were mighty and powerful and honorable. They evidently possessed great liberties; and in their service of God and of his earthly friends they probably were frequent travelers between the earth and other parts of the Creator’s vast universe. Jude says that these angels “kept not their first estate.” This throws light on the words of Genesis 6:2, which reads: “That the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all which they chose.” In other words, the “sin” of these angels was, in part, at least, that of materializing as human beings and indulging in illegitimate relationship with the daughters of men.

At different times during the historical period covered by the Bible various ones of the holy messengers, or angels, were sent to earth to deliver messages to the prophets and others; and on many of these occasions they were permitted to materialize and appear as human beings. An example of this is furnished in the visit of the three angels to Abraham prior to the birth of Isaac. (Gen. 18) Such materializations were permissible when sanctioned by the Lord, and when the angels taking part in them did not exceed their privileges. But the angels that sinned before the flood “kept not their first estate,” that is, they preferred to continue their association with mankind as human beings.

Having limited and degraded their own powers by illicit relationship with the fallen human race, how fitting it was that their punishment should be that of being cast down, or abased, and at the same time ‘restrained in chains of darkness.’ The thought contained in the use of the word “prison,” as found in our text, is that of the restraint of liberty; so these “spirits” have indeed been in “prison,” restrained of much of the normal liberty that was theirs while in full fellowship and harmony with the Creator.

There is much scriptural evidence to support the thought that the *place* of incarceration of these fallen angels is that of our earth’s atmosphere, their sphere of influence being limited largely to a more or less indirect contact with the human family. In the Gospel accounts of Jesus’ ministry we find frequent mention of his casting out “devils,” or “demons.” Later, the apostles were privileged to render a similar service for different ones. While higher critics try to prove that these cases of “obsession” thus dealt with by Jesus and the apostles were but cases of insanity or nervous disorders, there is altogether too definite a thought of personality attached to these “devils” to permit of any such liberal interpretation.

King Saul and the Witch of Endor

Not only in the New Testament, but in the Old as well, we find evidence of the limited activities of these fallen angels or “Spirits in prison.” There is, for example, the case of King Saul and the Witch of Endor. All witchcraft was forbidden by the Mosaic Law, yet these ancient spirit mediums persisted in their nefarious practices even though it was at the risk of death. Just as spirit mediums today claim ability to communicate with the dead, so evidently the Witch of Endor made similar professions. Anyway, when King Saul, because of his wickedness, lost the favor of God and saw that he was in grave danger of being defeated by his enemies, he appealed to the witch to get in touch with Samuel to see if the dead prophet could do anything for him.

The account of this ancient séance is recorded in I Samuel 28:7-20. Many students of the Bible, in reading this story of Saul’s supposed communication with the dead prophet Samuel, have concluded that it furnishes

excellent scriptural proof that the dead are not really dead at all, but alive somewhere, and that they can be communicated with under certain conditions, especially by the aid of a spirit medium. In fact, all down through the ages, Satan has used this same method of deceit in an effort to give the lie to the plain teachings of the Scriptures that the “wages of sin is death.” As we examine briefly some of the facts concerning Saul’s visit to the witch, we will readily discern that much the same analogy could be applied to modern séances, and with the same result.—Rom. 6:23

First of all, it will be noted that according to Saul’s own words, he was no longer in favor with God. He said to the witch, “God is departed from me and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams.” While Samuel was alive he was a faithful servant and prophet of the Lord, and was never willing to go contrary to the Lord’s wishes; yet here we find Saul, who himself admitted that God would not favor the idea, asking the witch to obtain a message from this faithful prophet.

Are we to suppose that in the event Samuel were alive, either in heaven or some other place, he would be any less obedient to the Lord than he was while here on the earth? Or are we supposed to believe that this wicked witch, under condemnation by the Lord, had the power to thwart the divine will, and not only produce Samuel, but inveigle a message from him to comfort this rebellious king? Evidently, then, this account is given us in the Bible merely as an historical record of important events in Saul’s life, but with no thought of accrediting the witch’s claim of having seen and talked with Samuel.

The methods used by the evil spirits through the medium at Endor were similar to those in use today. They caused to pass before the witch’s mental vision the familiar likeness of the aged prophet, wearing, as was his custom, a long mantle. When she described the mental or “astral” picture, Saul recognized it at once as a description of Samuel. But Saul himself saw nothing—he ‘perceived,’ from the description, that it was Samuel.

Easily convinced, as people under such circumstances usually are, Saul did not stop to question how it could be that Samuel looked as old and as stooped as he did while alive on the earth, if he were now a spirit being and far better off than before. Nor did Saul think to inquire why Samuel wore the same old mantle in the spirit world that he wore when he knew him as an earthly being not even stopping to consider that the prophet’s mantle, gray hair, etc., had long before decayed in the grave. Saul had been forsaken by the Lord, and now was easily deceived by these “lying spirits” who impersonated the prophet and spoke to Saul in his name through their medium, the witch.

“Why hast thou *disquieted* me to bring me up?” she represented the dead prophet as asking. It was generally understood by the Israelites in the days of King Saul that the dead were actually asleep in *sheol*, hence the question, “Why hast thou *disquieted* me,” would not sound strange. But can we imagine for a moment that this condemned witch had the power to raise the prophet from the dead? Or, to look at the matter from the standpoint of modern spiritualism, that Samuel was not really dead at all, but enjoying himself in the spirit world, does it not seem strange that he was declared by the witch to come “up” from earth instead of “down” from heaven?

And from the standpoint of modern theology, how utterly absurd is “Samuel’s” prophecy concerning Saul’s defeat and death in the battle of the coming day! We quote: “Tomorrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the Lord also shall deliver the hosts of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.” Imagine the faithful Samuel and the beloved Jonathan together in the spirit world with the wicked King Saul! Does this fit very well with the creedal theology of the Dark Ages? Certainly not! Ultimately, of course (but not the next day), all these were together in death, in *sheol*, the Bible hell, where they still are awaiting the resurrection, when all will be called forth by the Son of Man; but it did not require any super-natural power on the witch’s part to forecast truly the approaching defeat and death of Saul. In fact, Saul already feared it, hence his appeal to the

witch.

Charles Wesley was evidently puzzled by the manner in which the “medium” of Endor put both good and bad together in death, for he wrote:

What do those solemn words portend?
 A gleam of hope when life shall end?
 Thou and thy son shall surely be
 Tomorrow in repose with me:
 Not in a state of hellish pain,
 If Saul with Samuel remain;
 Not in a state of damned despair,
 If loving Jonathan be there.

Actually, of course, Saul was not in communication with Samuel at all, but with one or more of the “spirits in prison” whose chief activity since the time of the flood has been to deceive mankind, particularly with respect to the condition of the dead. The mention in the Scriptures of these necromancers, witches, and mediums leads us to infer that through mediums these fallen angels were seeking fellowship with Israel. But apparently it is the custom for these mediums to change their manner of manifestation from time to time; just as witchcraft flourished for a time in New England and Ohio, and throughout Europe, gradually dying out and being succeeded by Spiritualism, whose tipping and rapping manifestations also are gradually giving way to clairvoyance and attempted materializations. In the days of the Lord and the apostles the operation of these “spirits” had evidently changed from the witchcraft method to that of *obsession and possession*.

Modern Work of the “Spirits”

Having been once given the power to materialize as men, yet abusing it, these fallen angels still seem bent on exercising their powers through human agencies, either by the use of “mediums” or through direct control of the mind, as in obsession. It is evident, however, that the human will must consent to this foreign domination before these “spirits” can take possession. But when they do take possession, apparently the will becomes so broken down that there is no longer any power of resistance; hence the service of Jesus and the apostles was so much appreciated by those possessed of devils in their day.

But while these fallen angelic beings may change from time to time their method of contacting and deceiving the human race, their influence in general is always away from God and away from the truth of his Word. In modern times much ado is made about talking with the dead, yet in all the thousands of attempts that have been made—scientifically controlled, and otherwise—what has been the total result? True, by absurd “identifications” such as the Witch of Endor succeeded in foisting upon Saul, many have been convinced that they have been in touch with their dead friends and relatives—but here it has ended. No worthwhile information has ever been procured through spiritualistic sources.

How Christ Preached to the Spirits in Prison

Now that we have identified these “spirits” to whom Peter tells us Jesus preached, the question arises, How was this preaching accomplished? How could Jesus be in *sheol*, or *hades*, where there is no consciousness, yet at the same time be preaching to these fallen angels? The explanation of this apparent difficulty is simple when we examine the passage a little more critically. According to the Common Version English Bible, the apostle said that Jesus “*went* and preached to the spirits in prison.” But Greek authorities are agreed that the words “*went* and *preached*” are used in the sense of accomplishing something and not in the sense of going to any particular place. In other words, these two words are a needless addition to the text. In olden times it was customary to use expressions of this kind, and even today we find they are

sometimes used.

Dr. Benjamin Wilson, in his Emphatic Diaglott, translates this passage of Scripture, "He preached to the spirits in prison," leaving out the two words, "went and," as being unnecessary to a proper understanding of the text. In the footnote to this text he shows that other authorities agree with him in this respect. Leaving out then, these two unnecessary words, the full text reads, "For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; *by which* also he preached unto the spirits in prison." (I Pet. 3:18,19) The meaning here is apparent, namely, that it was by his death and resurrection that Jesus preached to these fallen angels—an object lesson, taught by his faithfulness to the Heavenly Father and Creator, against whom these "spirits" had rebelled.

Lucifer was the first of these spirit beings to rebel against God; and he evidently exercised a great deal of influence over those who later joined the ranks of the rebels. In Matthew 25:41 the expression, "the devil and his angels", indicates a close relationship existing between Satan and these other fallen spirit beings. It was the spirit of ambition and pride that led to Lucifer's fall (Isa. 14:14); and apparently the same spirit has pervaded the ranks of these lesser fallen angels. Jesus' faithfulness, therefore, a faithfulness that led him to humble himself and became obedient unto death, would be a *powerful sermon* to these "spirits in prison." And the power of that sermon would be greatly increased when these "spirits" noted that Jesus on account of his faithfulness was raised from the dead and highly exalted to a place at the right hand of God, while they were degraded and abased because of their disloyalty.

Thus we find that one by one when properly understood, the various scriptural passages bearing on the condition of the dead are seen to be in harmony with that great fundamental truth that the "wages of sin is death," and that the "dead know not anything."—Eccl. 9:5

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Chapter V

WHAT IS HEAVEN?

"Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you." —I Peter 1:3,4

If we are to have a scriptural understanding of what lies beyond the grave for both sinners and saints, it is necessary to take into consideration what the inspired record has to say concerning heaven. There is no mistaking the scriptural fact that God created man to live upon the earth, and that the earth was created as a home for man. While man lost his earthly dominion, and was sentenced to death because of sin, restoration to life upon the earth has been assured for him through the death and resurrection of Jesus, as the Redeemer. The exception to this general resurrection for all men to a life of human perfection on an earth made glorious are the faithful footstep followers of the Master who, the Scriptures make clear, are to receive a heavenly reward.

The Bible, particularly the New Testament, has a great deal to say about heaven and about the heavenly hopes. Jesus, for example, said, "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also."—John 14:2,3

This is a very definite promise, clearly implying a change from earthly to spiritual conditions. Much misconception has been attached to these words of the Master, however. We often hear expressed the hope of possessing one of these “many mansions,” yet Jesus distinctly shows that they were not for his followers, but rather that he was going away to “prepare a place” for them. The thought is that there already were many “mansions” at the time he spoke, but that a new place, or condition, was to be provided for his followers.

The expression, “many mansions,” conveys the idea merely of dwelling places or conditions in which there is a superabundance of blessing and joy. The earth itself, and the condition of perfect human life represented in our first parents, was doubtless one of these “mansions.” This mansion, of course, was forfeited because of sin, yet it is to be restored in God’s due time, as we shall see later.

And then there are, according to the Scriptures, various angelic planes of existence. These, too, could properly be included among the many “mansions” mentioned by the Master. How many planes or orders of life there are in the Creator’s spiritual realm we do not know; but judging from the great variety of life that exists in what we call the material realm, there must be many. But now there was to be a “new creation”—another plane of existence was to be prepared and provided for the church—a place with Jesus and to which he was exalted at the time of his resurrection.

The Church’s Future Position

Jesus said, “That where I am, there ye may be also.” This shows that the future state of the Master’s faithful followers will be the same place, or condition, to which he was exalted. Concerning Jesus’ exaltation the apostle says, “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth.”—Phil. 2:9,10

High exaltation, indeed, was given to the Master by the Heavenly Father, even to the “right hand of the throne of God.” (Heb. 12:2) And this same highly exalted condition is being “prepared” for the church. Note Jesus’ promise in Revelation 3:21: “To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.”

No wonder Peter said that through the resurrection of Christ the Christian is “begotten again to a lively hope, … to an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you.” But note the apostle’s words in the verse that follows: “Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation *ready to be revealed in the last time.*”—I Peter 1:5

The “last time” or “last days” mentioned frequently in the Bible, has reference to that period following the second coming of Christ. This means that the heavenly inheritance reserved for the church has not, down through the centuries, been received by each individual Christian at the moment of death, as creedal theology teaches, but is a reward to be given at the end of the age when Jesus returns and the dead are raised. And this agrees with the Master’s own promise concerning the “place” to be prepared for his followers: “I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go … I will come again, and receive you unto myself, that where I am, there ye may be also.” How evident it is from these words that no Christian can hope to be with the Master until he “comes again,” and “receives” them unto himself.

The Apostle Paul bears testimony to the same fact as follows: “I have fought a good fight.... I have kept the faith: henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give *me at that day:* and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.” (II Tim. 4:7,8) Ah, yes, well did the apostle know that his heavenly reward as a joint-heir with Christ in the messianic kingdom would not be received until the end of the age, when Jesus would return to take all his saints unto himself.

Paul's Earnest Desire

Through a mistranslation of Paul's words in Philippians 1:23, some have been led to believe that the apostle expected to be in heaven with Jesus immediately upon his death. We quote the passage as it appears in the Common Version: "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." The word "depart" in this text is from the Greek word *analousai*, and evidently should have been translated "returning," and is so translated by Prof. Wilson in his Emphatic Diaglott.

In the preceding verses the apostle explains that he is not sure whether or not he is shortly to be executed, or whether he is to be released by the Roman authorities and so be permitted to continue on for a time in the ministry. He had no choice between these two things—"I am in a strait betwixt [the definite article, "the," although omitted in A.V., is in the original Greek text] two." But there was a third thing he did very much prefer, and that was the *analousai*; and his preference for this was that he might be with Christ.

Paul knew that he could not be with Christ until the "returning" of the Master, and he was merely giving expression to his longing desire for this glorious consummation of every true Christian's hope. Prof. Wilson, in a footnote on this text in his Emphatic Diaglott, comments as follows:

"The word *analousai* occurs in Luke 12:36, and is here rendered 'return'—'Be you like men waiting for their master, when he will return,' etc. Jesus had taught his disciples that he would come again, or return. ... Paul believed this doctrine and taught it to others, and was looking for and waiting for the Savior from heaven ... when ... he would 'ever be with the Lord'."

But even though some may insist on the correctness of the Common Version translation, it still would not prove that Paul expected to go to heaven the moment he died. There were only two possible things from which he might choose—one was a little longer time to live and serve the truth and the brethren, the other was to fall asleep in death. But there was something which would be "far better" than either of these, and that was to be with Christ; but this he knew was impossible at that time. He knew that the "returning" of Christ was a long way in the future; and he also knew his reward as a Christian would not be given to him until he received it in the resurrection at the last day.—II Tim. 4:7,8

"Our Earthly House"

The words of the Apostle Paul in II Corinthians 5:1-9 are sometimes misconstrued to mean that Christians go to heaven immediately when they die; but the passage does not teach this when properly understood. Paul says, "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." Paul knew that this glorious provision of heavenly life had been promised by Jesus, but did he expect to receive it at the moment of death?

Evidently not, for in the fourth verse he continues, "Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." In I Corinthians 15:51-55 he shows clearly that the church will not be clothed upon with immortality until the resurrection, at the sounding of "the last trump." This puts it beyond the second coming of Christ, and is in agreement with all the other scriptures bearing on the subject.

When in II Corinthians 5:8 Paul speaks of being "absent from the body," and of being "present with the Lord," he apparently is not contrasting this present life with the resurrected life beyond the grave, but rather is speaking of two conditions that are possible for the Christian right here in this life. One, a condition of nearness to the Lord, through faithfulness in doing his will, and the other that of comparative alienation from him through unfaithfulness in heeding his words of instruction. Paul says, "Wherefore we labor, that whether present or absent we may be accepted of him." That is, whether we are always able to realize a sense of nearness to the Lord, or whether at times we may feel far away from him because of our imperfections, we as Christians should labor earnestly that we might finally be accepted of him, and hear the Master's "well

"Their Works Do Follow Them"

Revelation 14:13 is a precious promise applying during a very limited period at the end of the age, and cannot properly be used as a general statement describing God's method of dealing with his people throughout the Gospel age. It reads: "Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors; and their works do follow them."

The expression, "from henceforth," is the key to a proper understanding of this passage, showing, as it does, that the promise is applicable only from a given time forward. The context indicates that the time alluded to is at the end of the age, following the second coming of Christ; that there would be a period called a "harvest," during which the faithful saints, when completing their earthly course in death, would not need to remain *asleep* in death, but would be immediately *resurrected* to take part in the activity relative to the establishment of the new kingdom.

Paul alludes to this in I Corinthians 15:51,52: "Behold, I show you a mystery," says the apostle, indicating that what he is about to mention is an exception to the general rule, "We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."

Yes, all the saints must die—be "faithful unto death"—and "all" must be changed in order to put on immortality; but there will be some, at the sounding of the last trump, who will not need to remain "asleep" in death. These are the ones who, while they will cease in death from their laborious toil in the Master's service, being immediately resurrected, will continue right on with their work for him. But even this immediate change from mortality to immortality will not be because they are death-proof, but because their resurrection will come at the moment of death—they do not need to wait in sleep until the second coming of the Lord, as was necessary for the remainder of the church.

"No Man Hath Ascended into Heaven"

No heavenly promises were given to God's faithful servants prior to the first advent of Jesus; and the Master himself makes it plain that up until that time no one had gone to heaven. We quote Jesus' words: "And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man." (John 3:13) The apostles of Jesus understood this matter clearly, for Peter, speaking on the day of Pentecost concerning the faithful patriarch David, said, "For David is not ascended into the heavens."—Acts 2:34

It is supposed by many that Enoch, whom God translated, was taken to heaven, but not so. Evidently Enoch's "translation" consisted merely of his being removed in death without the necessity of himself experiencing the dying processes incident to death; and possibly before he had the distressing experience of seeing others die. The record is that he was translated that "he should not see death."

Paul, in the 11th chapter of Hebrews, includes Enoch among the faithful ones of the past, concerning whom he said, "These all died." (Heb. 11:5,13) In Genesis 5:24 we are told that Enoch "was not; for God took him." A similar expression to this is found in Jeremiah 31:15, where, in describing the condition of Rachel's dead children, it says that they "were not." The evidence is convincing, then, that whatever else may be implied in the thought of Enoch's translation, he *did not go to heaven*.

Elijah and the Chariot

Some contend that Elijah must be in heaven, inasmuch as they suppose he was taken up into heaven in a chariot. But the record shows that the fiery chariot merely separated Elijah from Elisha. It was the whirlwind that caused Elijah to ascend into heaven. See II Kings 2:11. It should be remembered in this connection that

the words “heaven” and “heavens” are often used in the Scriptures as descriptive of the circumambient atmosphere about the earth; and it was evidently into this “heaven” that Elijah was taken by the whirlwind that ended his eventful life. See Genesis 1:8,9,14,15,17,20, and 7:11,23; Zech. 2:6

The fact that in the transfiguration vision the disciple saw Elijah and Moses does not mean that these two prophets were then actually alive somewhere in heaven. In coming down from the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus said to his disciples, “Tell the *vision* to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.” (Matt. 17:9) A vision is not a reality. Peter saw a vision of unclean animals let down from heaven in a sheet, but they were not real animals. John, on the Isle of Patmos, had a series of visions in which all sorts of objects, animate and inanimate, appeared before him in a great historical panorama of two ages, but none of the things he saw were realities. So the disciples saw a vision in which Moses and Elijah appeared, yet both of those prophets were actually asleep in death, and still are to this day, and will be until the resurrection.—Heb. 11:35,39,40

This transfiguration vision was of the kingdom of Christ when established to reign over the earth. All true Christians, then exalted to heavenly glory, will reign with Christ, the purpose of this reign being to bless mankind in general with health and life upon the earth. It will be during this time that paradise is to be restored.

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Chapter VI

WHERE IS PARADISE?

Many people use the words “paradise” and “heaven” as if they were synonymous, and usually both terms are thought of as applying to a state or place of spiritual bliss far removed from this material world of sin and death. And it is held that all good Christians go to this place immediately at death. There are some, however, who make a distinction between paradise and heaven, claiming that the former is a sort of intermediate state into which nearly everyone enters at death, and where they remain until the future judgment day, when they will be transferred either to a heaven of bliss, eternal in duration, or to a hell of torture, which likewise is to be unending.

A careful study of the Scriptures indicates that the foregoing views are erroneous, and that this misconception is but another indication of the archdeceiver’s effort to bolster up his original lie, “Thou shalt not surely die.” If the dead are really dead, as we have discovered the Scriptures so clearly teach, then those who die cannot possibly be enjoying themselves, either in paradise or in heaven.

The word “paradise” means, literally, a garden or park. It is properly and scripturally applied to the Garden of Eden, from which man was expelled because of sin. In Ezekiel 36:34,35 the prophet indicates that a Garden of Eden condition is to be restored in the earth; which, according to the Apostle Peter’s testimony in Acts 3:19-21, is also the united declaration of all God’s holy prophets. Peter here refers to the period in which the rehabilitation of the earthly paradise is to be accomplished as the “times of restitution of all things.”

By checking carefully the apostle’s words in Acts 3:19-21 it will be noticed that the “restitution” period is to follow the second coming of Christ—“Whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things.” If, then, paradise is to be a worldwide state of happiness and perfection here on earth, it not only was not in existence at the time of Jesus’ first advent, but according to Peter’s words will not become a reality until Christ returns and establishes his kingdom.

The Thief in Paradise

What did Jesus mean by his promise to the thief on the cross? Jesus' statement, "Thou shalt be with me in paradise," is in reply to the thief's request, "Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom." (Luke 23:42) We are not to suppose that the thief knew very much about the proposed kingdom of the Messiah. It was not necessary that he should know a great deal about it in order to make a request of this kind. The inscription displayed over the Master's head showed clearly that he claimed to be a king; and while at the time it did not look as though Jesus would ever be able to exercise kingly authority or be in a position to help anyone, the thief doubtless reasoned that it could do no harm to show a measure of respect to and recognition of this alleged criminal king by asking to be admitted to his kingdom.

But this gesture of friendliness on the part of the thief, prompted by a mere wish which was father to his request, was taken up by Jesus and translated by him into a living, radiant promise "Thou shalt be with me in paradise." That Jesus' reply was intended as an acknowledgment of the appropriateness of the thief's request is indicated by his use of the word "verily"—in other words, Your request is in harmony with the divine plan. I am a King, I will have a kingdom, and you will be remembered in that kingdom—"Thou shalt be with me in paradise."

That Jesus' kingdom had not yet been established at the time he made this promise to the thief is evident in that he taught his disciples to pray, "Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven." (Matt. 6:10) Not only does this inspired prayer emphasize the fact that the messianic kingdom was not then a reality, but it also substantiates the thought we have already discovered, namely, that when it does come it is to be right here on earth.

The thief, then, asked for an earthly blessing, and Jesus' reply promised an earthly blessing. These earthly blessings of the restored paradise under the administration of the messianic kingdom will be available for all mankind when the times of "restitution" are ushered in. Until then, however, the friendly thief, as well as all who are in the graves, must wait for the promised blessings wait in the sleep of death, until the morning of earth's new day, when they will be awakened by the voice of the Son of man.—John 5:28

What, then, did Jesus mean by the expression, "This day," in his promise to the thief on the cross? The apparent difficulty in harmonizing this passage with the general testimony of the Scriptures relative to the condition of the dead has been caused by a misplacement of the comma in our Common Verse English translation of the Bible. The original, inspired writings of the Bible were not punctuated at all, because punctuation had not at that time been invented. Punctuation, in fact, is of comparatively modern origin, having been introduced into literature only a few hundred years ago.

The translators of our English Bible, believing, as nearly the whole religious world does, that the moment of death is the moment of translation into heavenly bliss, inserted the comma in this passage to make it read in harmony with their theological dogmas. By merely changing the position of this comma we get the proper thought from the text: "Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise." Thus does the Master reveal the implicit confidence he had in the Heavenly Father's program for him.

The "today" in Jesus' statement was a day when from the human standpoint it seemed impossible that he should ever have a kingdom. But the Master's faith was so great that he was able with full confidence, even at a time when every natural circumstance challenged his hope, to assure the thief definitely and positively that there was indeed to be a messianic kingdom—paradise was to be restored, and he would be there and have an opportunity of enjoying its blessings.

Paul Caught Up into Paradise

In II Corinthians 12:1-4, Paul tells of a vision in which he was "caught up into paradise." This, as the apostle explains, was a "vision," and it does not at all imply that paradise was then actually in existence. The apostle explains that in this same vision he was also caught up to the "third heaven." This information gives us

the key to the meaning of the entire vision.

The Apostle Peter, in his second epistle, chapter 3, tells us of this “third heaven” seen in vision by Paul. Peter, in fact, mentions all three “heavens,” and not merely the “third” one. He explains that the first of these heavens existed before the flood of Noah’s day, and that it was destroyed at the time of the flood. He relates also that the second heavens came into being at the time of the flood, and are to be destroyed following the second coming of Christ. “Nevertheless,” continues the apostle, “we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.”

This “new heavens” for which we look would, then, be the “third.” Peter speaks also of a “new earth.” It is this “new earth” that Paul describes as the “paradise” of his vision. Now Peter makes it plain that both the new or “third” heavens and the new or “paradise” earth are to be created, or brought into being, following the second coming of Christ. This confirms our previous findings, namely, that paradise is not yet in existence, hence that no one can go to paradise at the moment of death.

Blessings in “Paradise” Earth

Peter says that we “according to his promise” look for “new heavens and a new earth.” The “promise” to which the apostle evidently alludes is that of Isaiah 65:17-25. One of the outstanding facts in connection with this promise, as will be noted upon reading it, is that with the creation of the “new earth” there comes “rejoicing”; the end of “weeping”; no more thence “an infant of days”; economic security in that those who build houses will “inhabit them”; “they shall not labor in vain, nor bring forth trouble”; before they call the Lord “will answer”; “the wolf and the lamb shall feed together”; and finally the all-comprehensive promise, “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain [kingdom], saith the Lord.”

Yes, this is one of the glorious kingdom promises of the Bible, as the term “mountain” here is used to symbolize God’s kingdom. It is that mountain described by Daniel (2:35,44,45) which is to grow and fill the whole earth. It is the kingdom in which the thief on the cross will be remembered: the kingdom which will restore paradise conditions worldwide. Nothing in this prophecy indicates that it is a promise of heavenly blessings—it is all earthly.

The same new heavens and new earth are mentioned in Revelation 21:1-4, with the same blessings promised to follow their establishment. And what wonderful, far-reaching blessings they are! We quote: “And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.”

Both Isaiah and the Revelator associate the “new heavens” and the “new earth” with the “new Jerusalem.” Paul, in Galatians 4:26, identifies the church as this heavenly Jerusalem class. The church is also called the “bride” of Christ, and in Revelation 21:9,10 we learn that this “bride” is indeed the “new Jerusalem.” Thus it is that when the new heavens and the new earth are finally established the church class will have already been completed, and will be with the Lord Jesus as joint-heirs with him in this new kingdom arrangement.

Then, as his bride, they will join in the blessed work of restoring life to all who will hear and come to the fountain of life then provided—“And the Spirit [our Lord Jesus] and the bride say, Come. ... And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.” (Rev. 22:17) This water of life is shown to come out from underneath the throne of God and of the Lamb—a beautiful, combined symbolism telling us that the blessings of life then available will be subject to the governmental regulations of the new kingdom—the “throne”—and will be free to all who desire them because of the redemptive work of the slain Lamb.— Rev. 22:1

The “heavens” and “earth” are also, of course, symbolic; and the Scriptures indicate that they represent the two phases of the new kingdom: the heavenly phase composed primarily of Jesus and his glorified church,

who will be the spiritual, unseen rulers in the kingdom; and the earthly phase made up principally of the resurrected ancient prophets and other worthy ones of the past, who are to become “princes in all the earth.”—Psalm 45:16

Jesus said, “Ye shall see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and all the prophets in the kingdom of God,” and sure enough, they will be resurrected from the dead and restored to perfect human life; and it will be these perfect “statesmen,” representatives of the divine Christ, who will deal directly with the world of mankind. Yes, it will be a real kingdom, and when it is established, real blessings of life are to be the result to the whole groaning creation.

This, then, is the hope the Scriptures hold out to us as a comfort and stay in time of need. Glory, honor, and immortality, as joint heirs with Jesus in his kingdom for all faithful Christians; and restored human life in an earthly paradise for all others of mankind who, when the kingdom of the Messiah is established, obey its laws and accept “the water of life freely.”

Kingdom Blessings

And what a glorious time of blessing this divine kingdom will provide for the sin-sick world in answer to the prayer, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven”! A new dispensation indeed it will be. The changes from one dispensation to another in the past have been marked and prominent, but this change will be the most outstanding and eventful of all because it will mean a transfer of world rulership from Satan’s reign of death to the Messiah’s reign of life; from the superstitious worship of false gods to the intelligent worship of Jehovah the true God, and Christ, his Son, the world’s Redeemer and Life-giver.

The very thought of such far-reaching changes would be staggering to faith were it not for the realization that they have been promised and planned by the Almighty God and Creator of the universe, who is as abundantly able to restore the dead to life, through his Son, as he was to create life in the first place. And what a spectacle it will be—a whole race returning to God and to life with songs of everlasting joy upon their lips and in their hearts! As, yes, “they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.”— Isa. 35:10

The sorrow and sighing now seem inseparable from our being, yet the divine promise is that they shall “flee away.” Sin, sickness, and death have been the causes of all the sorrow in the world, and these “enemies” of the race are to be destroyed by the kingdom power of the Messiah. Thus, though weeping in sackcloth and ashes has endured throughout the long night of the dominion of sin and death, joy awaits the groaning creation in the Millennial morning now so soon to dawn. Then the tears shall be wiped away from all faces, and beauty shall be given for ashes, and the oil of joy for the spirit of heaviness.

In Isaiah 25:6-9 the prophet gives us a prophetic description of the new kingdom, when paradise conditions shall be restored worldwide, and a part of this prophecy declares that God will then “swallow up death in victory.” In I Corinthians 15:54 the Apostle Paul quotes this promise and explains that it will be fulfilled following the exaltation of the church to immortality with her Lord. One of the original promises of kingdom blessings was given to Abraham, in which God told him that through his seed all the families of the earth were to be blessed.

In Galatians 3:8,16, and 27-29, Paul explains that the fulfilment of the promise made to Abraham will come through Christ and his glorified church, his faithful footstep followers of this age. This, then, is why paradise conditions of life and happiness have not heretofore been restored to the earth; that is, Christ’s followers of this age, who are to share his heavenly home, and be joint-heirs with him in dispensing blessings of life to the world, must first of all be selected and prepared for their high position in the kingdom.

The signs of the times indicate beyond any question of a doubt that we are living in the end of this age,

when the work of selecting the church of Christ is nearly complete. This means that the “sweet by and by” of the world’s golden age of blessing is now drawing near, that soon the dark night of weeping shall give way to a morning of song. And what a glad time that will be when funerals will no longer be the order of the day, but in their place will come the happy reunion of friends and relatives once loved, but lost awhile in death—a reunion that will be permanent for all those who then obey the laws of that divine kingdom, and through obedience become partakers of the restorative powers of the divine Christ and his glorified bride.—Rev. 22:17

And no creature of the redeemed race will be too low for divine grace to reach through the all-powerful and blessed agency of the kingdom. No degradation of sin will be too deep for the hand of mercy to fathom, to rescue the blood-bought soul; no darkness of ignorance and superstition will be too dense in any heart but that the light of divine truth and love will penetrate its gloom and bring to it a knowledge of the joy and gladness of the new day and an opportunity through obedience to share in its blessings. No disease that can attack and pollute the physical system will be beyond the prompt control of the Great Physician. And no deformity, or monstrosity, or superfluity, or mental imbecility will be able to resist his healing touch.

But let no one for a moment suppose that this means universal reconciliation and salvation of every individual irrespective of their obedience to the laws of the new kingdom; for the Scriptures do not teach any such unconditional salvation. In Acts 3:19-23 the apostle tells us about the coming time of restoration which God has promised by the mouth of all his holy prophets, but makes it clear that the receiving of those blessings by the individual will depend upon obedience to “that prophet”—the divine Christ. He says: “And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.”

Paul raised the question of how one can believe on Christ if he has not heard of him. Indeed, no one will be either saved or lost in his ignorance. The Scriptures teach that no one will be destroyed in what the Revelator describes as the “second death” until, through a clear knowledge of the truth, he has had a full opportunity to believe and obey. To accomplish this end the plan of God provides for an awakening of all who, sleep in death. This awakening is referred to by Paul where he says that it is God’s will that all shall be “saved”—not saved eternally, but saved from the sleep of death in order that they might come to a knowledge of the truth, particularly the truth concerning God’s gift of his Son to be their Redeemer. But *eternal* life will be the happy portion only of those who, when they are enlightened, “believe” on him. This limit of God’s grace is clearly stated in John 3:16, which reads: “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that *whosoever believeth* in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.”

It is not for us to conjecture as to how many or few will reject the grace of God during the Millennial period, when the pure message of truth shall cover the earth, ocean deep. Present conditions offer us no criterion by which to judge, because the world as a whole at the present time is blinded by the deceptive influences of the great deceiver, Satan. It is a mistake to suppose that all who live within sound of church bells have a fair opportunity to know about Christ and believe on him for the reason that there are so many conflicting church bells. That is to say, they themselves are hopelessly divided as to what constitutes truth; and if the blind lead the blind, what can we expect but that both will fall into the ditch of confusion and doubt. It is even so.

But at the very beginning of the kingdom period, in which the thief on the cross asked to be remembered, Satan, the archdeceiver of mankind, will be bound. (Rev. 20:1,2) The coming into power of the Messiah is likened by the prophet to the rising of the sun, the new King of earth being styled the “Sun of Righteousness,” which is to rise with health and life-giving powers, scattering the mists of darkness and superstition, and enlightening the world with the true Gospel of the love of God.

That will be the time when all will have a bona fide opportunity to prove their loyalty to the divine principles of righteousness then being exemplified in the messianic kingdom arrangements, being privileged to dwell eternally in that restored earthly paradise. Those who do not believe and obey will, according to the Scriptures, be “destroyed from among the people.”—Acts 3:23

Thus shall God’s kingdom come, and his will be done on earth, as it is done in heaven. Thus shall The Christ reign as the Father’s vicegerent until he shall have put down all antagonistic authority and power, and caused every knee to bow and every tongue to confess the wisdom, justice, love, and power of God the Father.

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