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Appendix I

(See Chapters 11 and 12)

Some Particularly Problematic Passages

Quoted are in new King James Version unless otherwise noted:

Section A 1 Peter 3:18-20: "The spirits in prison. . ."

*For Christ died for your sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the spirit, through whom also he went and preached to **the spirits in prison** who disobeyed long ago when God waited patiently in the days of Noah while the ark was being built. [NIV]*

Section B Ephesians 4:8-10: "He led captivity captive. . . ."

*Therefore he said, when he ascended up on high, **he led captivity captive**, and gave gifts unto men. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? He that descended is the same that ascended up far above the heavens, that he might fill all things.)*

In connection with these two passages a number of other verses of Scripture are relevant to the discussion. These have been set forth below, not in their biblical order but in the order of reference in the text. The phrases which are specially important in the present context have been emphasized.

The passages important to Section A are as follows:

Genesis 6:1-4

*And it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that **the sons of God** saw the daughters of men that*

they were fair; and they took wives of all which they chose. . . .

*There were giants in the earth in those days; and also after that, when **the sons of God** came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children of them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown.*

Jude 6

*And **the angels which kept not their first estate**, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.*

2 Peter 2:4,5

*God spared not **the angels that sinned** but cast them down to Tartarus [so the Greek, not Hades or Gehenna] and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment.*

Revelation 20:2,7,8,13,14

*And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent which is the Devil and Satan, and bound him a thousand years. . . . And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of **his prison** and shall go out to deceive the nations. . . and death and hell gave up the dead which were in them and were cast into the lake of fire.*

1 Peter 3:19, 20 (already quoted as lead text, but here given a possible alternative rendering, see comment in text below)

*By which [spirit] Enoch also went and made an announcement unto the **spirits in prison**: which were sometime disobedient when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah while the ark was preparing. . . .*

The passages important to Section B are as follows:

Matthew 27:51-53

*And behold the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake and the rocks rent; and **the graves were opened**: and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after the resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many.*

Philippians 2:10

*. . .that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things **under the earth**. . . .*

Matthew 12:29

*How can one **enter into a strong man's house**, and spoil his goods, except he first bind the strong man? And then he will spoil his house.*

Matthew 16:18

*And I say also unto you, That you are Peter and upon this rock will I build my church; and **the gates of hell** shall not prevail against it.*

Revelation 1:18

*I am he who lives and was dead; and behold I am alive for *evermore*. Amen; and have **the keys of hell and death**.*

SECTION A

PREAMBLE:

It is exceedingly difficult to disentangle the complex web of traditional lore that has been woven around these passages from the very earliest days of the Christian Church. This lore has significantly coloured our understanding of what happens to the dead while they await resurrection. And this colouring can be observed in both the Roman Catholic and Protestant branches of the Church. In spite of a very considerable literature, the meaning of these passages is still far from clear.

"SPIRITS IN PRISON" (1 Peter 3:18-20).

In the *Book of Enoch* (Chap. XII. 4; XV. 6-9,12) we have a supposed report of Enoch, the seventh from Adam, in which he describes how he was sent to pronounce judgment upon the Fallen Angels (the *Nephilim*, from the Hebrew word *Napal*, to fall) who had cohabited with the daughters of men in Noah's day (Genesis 6:1-4) and were removed from the earth and bound in chains in a subterranean region called Tartarus (2 Peter 2:4). They were spirit beings, he says, and consequently not subject to physical death as man is and could not, therefore, be put out of action by death. They were accordingly removed by divine intervention; and it seems reasonable to suppose that it was the Lord Himself who undertook to see that it was done.

These angels appear to have been appointed originally as overseers or "Watchmen"³⁷⁰ (so they are called in the apocryphal literature) over human affairs, a duty which led to the unnatural temptation to become sexually involved with the daughters of men. *Enoch* XII. 4 records this circumstance:

Enoch, thou scribe of righteousness, go, declare to the Watchers of the heavens who have left the high heaven, the holy eternal place, and have defiled themselves with women and have done as the children of earth do, and have taken unto themselves wives.

³⁷⁰ A not unlikely appointment in view of Hebrews 1:4* where the (elect?) angels are described as being sent to become ministering spirits to those who shall be heirs of salvation, i.e., the *elect* among men.

* "Being made so much better than the angels, as he [Christ] has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they." Hebrews 1:4

Further details are given in *Enoch* XV. 6-9 and 12, which is now addressed to the angels.

But you were formerly spiritual, living the eternal life, and immortal for all generations of the world. And therefore I have not appointed wives for you; for as for the spiritual ones of the heavens, in heaven is their dwelling. And now, the giants who are produced from the spirit and flesh, shall be called evil spirits upon the earth, and *on* the earth shall be their dwelling.

Evil spirits have proceeded from their bodies; because they are born *from* men, and from the holy Watchers is their begetting and primal origin; they shall be evil spirits on earth, and evil spirits shall they be called. . . . And these spirits shall rise up against the children of men and against the women, because they have proceeded from them.

There is nothing in all this that actually conflicts with anything in Scripture. Genesis 6:1-4 seems to be the Old Testament background of the event, and Jude 6 a New Testament reflection. The Jews themselves originally understood the phrase in Genesis 6:2 "the sons of God" as *angels*. It is only later that these sons of God came to be interpreted as saints who forsook the call of separation and formed the kind of unholy alliance that Paul forbids in 2 Corinthians 6:14³⁷¹, though not overtly with any reference to Genesis 6:2. Philo of Alexandria (c. B. C. 20-42 A. D.) appears to have been one of the first to suggest that the sons of God were 'virtuous' men and that the daughters of men were 'wicked and corrupted' women.³⁷² Philo was a wealthy Jewish philosopher and somewhat of a free-thinker, but his views probably reflect contemporary Jewish thought in many ways.

In his work *The Legends of the Jews*, Louis Ginzberg³⁷³ has summary statements of *Enoch* VI - VIII:

³⁷¹ "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship has righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion has light with darkness?" 2 Corinthians 6:14.

³⁷² Philo, Judaeus: *Questions and Answers on Genesis*, translated by Ralph Marcus, London, Heineman, 1961, Supplement, Book I, section 92.

³⁷³ Ginzberg, Louis, *The Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publications Society of America, 1954, vol. 1, p.124, 125, 148.

The depravity of mankind which began to show itself in the time of Enosh [biblical Enos, the third from Adam?], had increased monstrously in the time of his grandson Jared by reason of the fallen angels. When the angels saw the beautiful and attractive daughters of men they lusted after them and said, "We will choose wives for ourselves only from among the daughters of men and beget children with them."

Under the leadership of twenty captains they defiled themselves with the daughters of men unto whom they taught charms [magic?] The issue from these mixed marriages was a race of giants three hundred ells [an ell in Old English equaled four feet three inches!] tall, who consumed the possessions of men. . . . Then the earth complained about the impious evil doers. But the fallen angels continued to corrupt mankind.

Later, Ginzberg has a further statement as follows:

Chiefly, the fallen angels and their giant posterity caused the depravity of mankind. . . . Raphael was told to put the fallen angel Azazel into chains, cast him into a pit of sharp and pointed stones in the desert called Dudael, and cover him with darkness, and so he was to remain until the great day of judgment, when he would be thrown into the fiery pit of hell.

Was *Azazel* another name for Satan, or even the name of one of Satan's chief lieutenants, an individual who re-appears in some of the apocryphal literature of the Christian era? The Old Testament could conceivably be referring to this same spirit being in connection with the scapegoat of Leviticus 16:8.³⁷⁴ This verse refers to one of the goats as being marked "for Azazel," which could therefore signify "for Satan." The significance of this marking might then be that whereas the one goat was to be slain by *man*, the other was to be slain by Satan who has the power of death and the destruction of the body (Hebrews 2:14 and 1 Corinthians 5:4,5³⁷⁵). That Azazel could

³⁷⁴ "And Aaron shall cast lots upon the two goats: one lot for the Lord, and the other for the scapegoat ."* Leviticus 16:8.

* The transliteration of the Hebrew word for "scapegoat" into English is rendered "Azazel".

³⁷⁵ "Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the

refer to Satan was first proposed by Origen (*Contra Celium*, 6.43) and adopted by a number of modern writers, Keil³⁷⁶ among them.

At any rate, the words of Jude 6 (which form part of inspired Scripture) seem to show that there is a kernel of truth in these Jewish traditions. Jude refers to "the angels which kept not their first estate but left their own appointed housing" whom God has "reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." The allusion is unmistakable. And 2 Peter 2:4 seems clearly to be a reference to the destiny of these angels who are reserved in Tartarus, presumably a special form of prison, until that Day.

Genesis 6:4 also indicates that other angels were similarly tempted to intrude into the human life-stream *after* the Flood, and giant offspring again resulted. These giants were perhaps chiefly limited to Canaan. One by one they were slain — five of them by David himself, including the well-known Goliath. They must have terrified their contemporaries, and if the giant cities of Bashan, of which J. L. Porter wrote so eloquently in 1866,³⁷⁷ are any indication, they must have grown into a substantial population of wholly evil beings of extraordinary stature and vigour.

The Book of Jubilees (IV. 15) re-affirms this Jewish belief that it was in the days of Jared that "the angels of the Lord descended upon the earth, those that are called Watchmen, in order that they might teach the children of men to do judgment and right over the earth." In due time these angels forsook the right path (v.23) and "commenced to mix with the daughters of the earth so that they were defiled; and Enoch testified against them all." And (v.25) "on this account God brought the deluge over the whole land of Eden."

Then in *Jubilees* V.1 the recurrence of this invasion is affirmed and it is noted that the sons they bore became giants.

In another apocryphal work entitled *The Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*, and under the *Testament of Reuben* (section 5), the same circumstances are recounted, elaborated slightly by the observation that "they changed themselves into the shape of men, and appeared to them in their congress with their husbands, and

power of death, that is, the devil." Hebrews 2:14.

"... in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you [the Corinthian believers] are gathered together, and with my [Paul] spirit, and with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such a [disobedient] one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus." 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5.

³⁷⁶ Keil, C. F. and F. Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Books of Samuel*, translated from the German by J. Martin, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1950, p.259-265.

³⁷⁷ Porter, J. L., *The Giant Cities of Bashan and Syria's Holy Places*, London, T. Nelson & Sons, 1866, 371 pp.

the women having in their minds desire towards these who thus appeared to them, gave birth to giants."

This, then, is the pre-Christian reservoir of Jewish lore regarding the eruption of fallen angelic beings into the stream of human history: and of what happened to them. They themselves suffered imprisonment in darkness; and their evil offspring suffered slaughter and disembodiment. This led to an unending search for re-embodiment by these wandering beings which the New Testament refers to as evil spirits.

The question is, How much of the New Testament relates to this episode? presumably Jude 6 does, and also 2 Peter 2:4. The events of Revelation 20:2, 7 and 8 certainly indicate that a supernatural spirit being is capable of "imprisonment." Whether 1 Peter 3:19 and 20 relates to the same issue is not clear, although these verses certainly refer back to those who were disobedient *in the time of Noah*. Are these "disobedient spirits in prison" men or angels?

It has been suggested by some commentators that we might take 1 Peter 3:19 as a slightly corrupted text which should be read "in which *Enoch* also went and preached to the spirits in prison" instead of the present reading "in which also *he* went and preached." The passage might then be taken to indicate that while the spirit of Christ *in Noah* sought to warn and evangelize disobedient *men*, Enoch who had already been translated was sent to the *spirits* (the fallen angels) who were in prison, not to evangelize them but to announce their condemnation. Could this be why he was translated bodily? His "mission" required that he retain all his faculties for the task assigned. In verse 19 the word "preached" is a translation of the Greek word *kerusso* which means "to announce" or "proclaim" — not necessarily to evangelize. It is a kind of neutral word and can signify good news or bad news. The Greek word *euangelidzo* (which means specifically "to preach the gospel") is not employed here. However, *kerusso* is often used as a synonym for the latter, so that one could not prove too much by any appeal to the terms of the commission. Besides, it involves both an emendation of the text which is of uncertain validity, as well as employing a select meaning to a word which is quite capable of an alternative rendering. Altogether this interpretation seems somewhat contrived.

Dr. E. W. Bullinger in his *Companion Bible*³⁷⁸ suggests that the word *spirits* here must be interpreted as "angels" since men are not referred to as spirits even in

³⁷⁸ Bullinger, E. W., *The Companion Bible*, Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press, no date, vol. 4, appendix 194, p.213.

heaven: he rejects Hebrews 12:23³⁷⁹ as having any relevance. In this view the spirits in prison are therefore angels, not men. The "visitor" was Christ.

W. G. T. Shedd, in his *Dogmatic Theology*, considers that Christ's descent into the nether region, Hades, has no warrant in Scripture. His view, widely shared, is that the Hades of Acts 2:31 simply means "the grave."³⁸⁰ The Apostles' Creed merely committed the Church to a belief that the Lord Jesus really died and was indeed buried — although some of those who helped to fashion this creed may well have privately interpreted the word *hell* (in Acts 2:31³⁸¹) as something more than just the grave. Shedd observed that Augustine, Bede, Aquinas, Beza, and most of the Reformed theologians, have explained 1 Peter 3:18-20 as meaning only that Christ preached to *men* who were disobedient in Noah's time, his spirit being in Noah who spoke in his name in somewhat the same sense as in 1 Peter 1:11.³⁸²

Charles Hodge, in his *Systematic Theology*, favours Shedd's interpretation by observing that it is not appropriate to present the Gospel to those who have departed this life for it is a way of salvation only to the living. He assumed that the words "in prison" merely signify "in the grave."³⁸³

We therefore seem to have only four passages which specifically bear upon the events of Genesis 6:1-4, namely, 1 Peter 3:19, 20; 2 Peter 2:4; Jude 6, and Revelation 20:7 and 8. In a sense it is not necessary for us to know such things at all, except that the effects of this angelic intrusion have left a tragic impress upon human history, for these evil demons are still Satan's most active agents in the world today and are still bent upon our hurt and on hindering God's purposes.

The subject is relevant to the thesis of this volume, however, since the manifest consciousness of these fallen and imprisoned spirits might seem to indicate that disembodied man also has consciousness. But that such angelic beings should

³⁷⁹ “But you have come . . .to the city of the living God . . .and to an innumerable company of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn . . .and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect . . .and to Jesus, the mediator of the new covenant. . . .” Hebrews 12:22-24.

³⁸⁰ Shedd, W. G. T., *Dogmatic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, reprint of 1888, vol. 2, p. 605.

³⁸¹ “He [David] . . . spoke of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither did his flesh see corruption.” Acts 2:31.

³⁸² “. . .the prophets have inquired and searched diligently . . .searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify. . . .” 1 Peter 1:10-11.

³⁸³ Hodge, Charles, *Systematic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1973 (reprint of 1872), vol. 2, p.620.

have consciousness without embodiment is not surprising in view of the fact that *angels were created this way*. They are by constitution conscious without bodies. These four passages of Scripture therefore do not seriously challenge the thesis of this volume.

SECTION B

PREAMBLE:

To the extent that all the dead have seemed to be in Satan's possession, liberating the bodies *of those who belong to the Lord* is tantamount in the symbolic sense to releasing them from Satan's prison. This could be the general sense of Ephesians 4:8-10; Matthew 12:29 and 16:18, and Revelation 1:18. It is easy to see how such an event could be re-cast in the form of a drama in which the dead are represented as crying out for release, the Messiah is represented as forcibly breaking down the door of the prison, and Satan is represented as being vanquished in his own house. The apocryphal literature, both pre-Christian and Christian, deals with these events. Of particular importance is *The Gospel of Nicodemus*. Let us examine this literature briefly and a number of other traditions that seem to bear upon the matter, and then attempt to sort out the sequence of events in the six passages referred to above as important to this Section.

"LED CAPTIVITY CAPTIVE" (Eph. 4:8-10).

The idea that the grave is not so much a resting place for the body as a *prison* from which the dead are to be rescued by the living, is very ancient indeed. It was generally cast in the form of a rescue of a particular loved one by some single individual, rather than the rescue of all the dead by some great world redeemer. It goes back to the earliest times of written and oral record and is found in similar form in many areas of the Old World. The most ancient record that we have at present of such a theme comes from the Sumerians.

In this account the heroic Queen of heaven, Inanna by name, descends to the Nether World to rescue her beloved husband (?) named Dumuzi. She adorns herself impressively with jewelry since her sister happens to be Queen of this Nether World and is also her bitter enemy. Her sister's name is Ereshkigal. It appears that the idea of adornment is to display her own wealth and power. She gives instructions to her attendant, a male figure named Ninshubur, that if she does not return after three days he is to set up a hue and cry in heaven and to appeal particularly to the god Enlil not to let her be put to death. Failing this, he is to try and get help from the moon god,

Nanna; and if this mission also fails, he is to go to the "god of wisdom" whom she believes will surely come to her rescue.

Inanna arrives at the seven gates and is admitted, but at each gate she is robbed of some of her jewelry. Finally, stark-naked, she is brought kneeling before Ereshkigal, her evil sister. She is condemned by the Nether World court, somehow put to death, and then hung from a stake.

Three days and three nights pass. On the fourth day her attendant, Ninshubur, proceeds upon his mission of rescue. His mission is a failure.

He then fashions two sexless creatures, *kurgarru* and *kalaturri*, entrusts them with "the food of life" and "water of life," and instructs them to proceed to the Nether World and sprinkle the corpse of Inanna. This they do, and Inanna revives. When she leaves the Nether World, the dead hasten to go with her. Thereafter surrounded by this ghostly throng, she wanders from city to city in Sumer. What happens in the end is not known since unfortunately some of the tablets are missing.³⁸⁴

This story, pieced together from some thirteen fragments, is dated approximately 2000 B.C., but it is assumed that the story is considerably older.

Why her beloved husband needed rescuing from the nether regions is not known since the tablets containing the opening of the story are probably missing also. But it is rather remarkable in that it reflects faintly a kind of prophetic forecast of the death of the Lord by crucifixion, his burial for three days and three nights, and, even more strongly, the resurrection with Him of a certain number of the dead who then visit a city (Jerusalem). It might also be noted that Inanna is slain *before* she is hung, a circumstance which is reflected in the wording of Acts 5:30.³⁸⁵ The resuscitation of Inanna was accomplished by the food (bread?) and water of life.

The next account in chronological order tells of the descent of the Queen of heaven (now under the name of Ishtar) into the Nether World.³⁸⁶ It is believed this is essentially the same story, though it is by no means merely a translation from Sumerian into Babylonian. It has not yet been established how much later it is, but probably several centuries.

The plot is basically similar, and the casting very little different. The heroine has the same status, but her reasons for visiting the Nether World are not specifically

³⁸⁴ Pritchard, James B., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton University Press, 1969, p.52, 57.

³⁸⁵ "The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom you slew and hanged on a tree." Acts 5:30.

³⁸⁶ Pritchard, James B., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, Princeton University Press, 1969, p. 106-109.

stated. There are a few new details. Instead of a main gate, there is now a door with a bolt, a bolt in place for so long that it is covered with dust. She arrives at the door, much adorned like her predecessor, and demands entrance. When refused, she threatens to "smash the door" and "shatter the bolt." She explains her purpose: "I will raise up the dead. . .so that the dead will outnumber the living." The doorkeeper asks her to stop her violence, saying, "I will go to announce your name to Queen Ereshkigal." It then turns out that Ishtar is sister to Ereshkigal, as her predecessor had also been.

She is allowed in and, like her predecessor, is gradually stripped of all her jewelry until she is quite naked. A similar fate awaits her. But it appears that she is rescued by being sprinkled with the water of life, and this rescue seems to have been helped in some way by the fact that during her absence the world above had been rendered infertile to a dangerous point. As she passes back through each of the seven gates, she recovers one by one all her pieces of jewelry and her clothing. Towards the end of the tablet, it turns out that what she really went to do was to rescue her lover Tammuz, who had recently died. She succeeds in her mission and Tammuz is revived. Having previously promised that if Tammuz is recovered from the dead, all the rest of the dead would also rise, we presume that they do; unfortunately the remainder of the tablet is missing.

Various forms of this story are known over a wide area, being reflected in the Greek legends of Dionysus who rescues Semele, and Heracles who rescues Alcestis. The tragic story of Orpheus and Euridice is in the same genre, though in this instance the ending is very sad. Orpheus is promised success provided that he does not look back to see if his love is following him until he is back in the world above. At the last moment when he is about to step out of the Nether World, he cannot resist the temptation to assure himself that she is still following: and looking back, he loses Euridice for ever. In India a similar legend appears involving Buddha who is himself the liberator. This is told in his biography, *Lalita Vistara*. It is, however, considered by some authorities on Indian literature that this legend is a borrowed embellishment from poorly remembered early missionary teaching regarding events connected with the resurrection of Christ.

Such a story as this may have been passed from one traveling storyteller to another or it may merely reflect a very common human situation in which two lovers are separated by the death of one, whom the other is then determined to bring back to life or perish in the attempt. But it is curious how many suggestive parallelisms there are with the circumstances surrounding the Lord's death and resurrection, as though the Lord in Old Testament times had revealed (very early in human history) some truths regarding the plan of salvation, details which have not been preserved in Scripture itself.

It seems likely that the substance of some of these stories were known to the early Church Fathers, for many of them seem to have interpreted certain passages of Scripture in their light, and considered the doctrine of the Lord's descent into Hades to rescue the Old Testament saints as an important aspect of his saving work. It was not, however, formally written into the Church's statement of Faith until the Fourth Synod of Sirmium in 359 A.D. Such passages as Ephesians 4:9-10 and 1 Peter 4:6 were believed to be best accounted for on such a supposition. That the Lord's soul was not left in hell (Acts 2:27³⁸⁷) was thought to be evidence of just such a successful "rescue mission to bring up the dead from their prison."

In the earlier centuries of the Christian era, a number of apocryphal writings appeared which, while they were not considered to be canonical, seem to have greatly influenced the thinking of the more imaginative writers of the Church. One of these apocryphal books is the so-called *Gospel of Nicodemus*. It claims to represent the events of the trial, crucifixion, and resurrection of Christ as Nicodemus saw it. It also purports to tell us some of the things which accompanied the rising from the dead of many of the saints which slept, as recorded in Matthew 27:51-53.

Chapter XII of the *Gospel of Nicodemus* relates the experience of two individuals named Charinus and Lenthius who are said to have been raised from their graves at this time. Matthew 27:51 and 52 records that "the veil of the temple was rent in twain from top to bottom; and the earth did quake; and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened." We are then told that "many bodies of the saints that slept arose," but according to verse 53 they did not actually come out of the graves until after the resurrection of the Lord. Perhaps we are to understand that the earthquake which occurred when the Lord died resulted in the opening up of many graves but that those who were buried therein did not actually come forth until three days later when the Lord Himself had risen.

According to Nicodemus, among those who arose and visited Jerusalem were these two brothers, allegedly the sons of Simeon who had blessed Jesus in the Temple (as recorded in Luke 2:25-35). The brothers told the story (in chap. XII. 15 f.) of how they had died and descended into Hades, and felt their experience was so important that they insisted on being provided with paper to write it all down. Chapter XIII is their account. It is an interesting record.

All the Old Testament saints were in this prison "under the earth" (Philippians 2:10), including such worthies as Adam, Seth, David, Isaiah, their father Simeon, a little man named John the Baptist, and even Lazarus briefly (whom, Satan complained, was taken away from him by force — chap. XV.18).

Shortly after finding themselves in this dismal underworld, the two brothers notice that suddenly the dark prison seems to be growing lighter, and as everyone wonders at it, Adam "the father of all mankind" says: "That light is the everlasting

³⁸⁷ "Thou [God] will not leave my soul in hell." Acts 2:27.

Light who has promised to translate us to everlasting life." This causes great excitement and Satan, becoming anxious, determines to secure the doors more strongly. As the light increases, the saints cry out, "Lift up your gates, O ye princes; and be ye lift up, O everlasting gates, and the King of Glory shall come in" (Psalm 24:7). Satan then demands, "Who is this King of Glory?" (Psalm 24:8). And David at once replies, "The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle." Isaiah then adds his own prophetic exultation: "Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out her dead" (Isaiah 26:19). Meanwhile, very appropriately, David quotes Psalm 107:13-16: "Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and brake their bands in sunder. Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men! For he hath broken the gates of brass and cut the bars of iron in sunder."

The appearance of passages such as these quoted in this context would seem so appropriate to a reader who was predisposed to such a reconstruction of the events as to greatly strengthen the impression that the *Gospel of Nicodemus*, though not itself canonical, was nevertheless essentially true and much credence seems to have been placed in it by common people.

Meanwhile, the Lord suddenly appears in the form of a man, "visiting them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death" (Luke 1:79). The saints in exultation cry out: "This is the Lord who was once slain upon the cross" (XVII.5). Then the King of Glory, trampling upon death, seizes the prince of hell, deprives him of all his power, and takes Adam and all the other saints with Him to glory (XVII.13).

This part of the story seems to be an elaboration of Matthew 12:29 in which the strong man is first bound and then his goods are "spoiled." To this may perhaps be added Matthew 16:18 with a slight shift in emphasis: "the gates of hell shall not prevail against him." We therefore have an imaginative interpretation of Revelation 1:18, "I am he who lives and was dead; and behold I am alive for ever more. Amen; and have the keys of hell and death."

Now it is certain that Scripture owes nothing to such imaginative reconstructions, but biblical passages like these might very well form the basis of apocryphal creations in the first place. Once the reconstruction had become current (and no doubt the *Gospel of Nicodemus* was only one version of it), the early Church Fathers sometimes appealed to what was probably a very widely accepted belief regarding the fate and rescue of the dead. Their appeal to this common tradition, intended only to reinforce the validity and acceptableness of their own teaching, in due time made Scripture seem increasingly to support just such a vivid picture of the interim period between the death and resurrection of the Old Testament saints. In time it became the widely accepted orthodox interpretation. It was naturally extended

subsequently to cover all who had died in the present age as well, all who are awaiting the resurrection which is to accompany the Lord's return. The Roman Catholic Church made it a very practical doctrine and one which turned out to be to their benefit economically.

It is easy to see how death could be considered, by even the most conservative of commentators in the early Church, a form of imprisonment; and how, in view of the fact that Satan was given the power of death over men (Hebrews 2:14 and 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5³⁸⁸), the Lord's victory over Satan might be viewed as a sundering of the bars of the prison which kept them in darkness. Ephesians 4:8-10 could logically be taken to describe just such a victory achieved by the Lord in his death and burial in the grave, this descent into the grave then being referred to as a descent into a place called *hell* or the nether world, which was peopled by saint and sinner alike. The resurrection in which a number of saints clearly took part as a kind of firstfruits of the harvest sheaf would be taken as the harbinger of a much larger resurrection which is later to mark his personal return to the world of the living. Figurative interpretations of sober factual statements of Scripture have on many occasions been embroidered in similar ways — to the detriment of the truth. Whatever is the correct explanation of these difficult passages, it does not seem that it is really to be sought in these pagan myths and apocryphal accounts.

If this is how these stories found their way into Christian tradition, if this is how it has come about that an interim period has been crystallized to such an extent as to become part and parcel of the evangelical faith, it may be time to rethink the whole issue through again. There may, in fact, be no grounds whatever for the common supposition that there is a period of suspense in a kind of half-fulfilled state of bliss which seems to be chiefly occupied in waiting for the resurrection of the body.

Certainly, conservative evangelicals have entirely eliminated from the more ancient reconstruction the absurd details which left the departing saints in a very uncomfortable situation, and certainly the whole concept of purgatory is seen as entirely contrary to the doctrine of salvation by grace through faith alone. Nevertheless there remain certain almost insoluble problems so long as we hold to

³⁸⁸ “Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil.” Hebrews 2:14.

“In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. . . deliver such a one [a disobedient Christian] unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.” 1 Corinthians 5:4, 5.

the idea of a conscious period of waiting in an "unclothed" state for the resurrection of the body.

I believe all the verses which have been referred to in Section B have to be re-examined — in so far as they really do apply to man and not to evil spirits or fallen angels. Some different way of interpreting them is needed which does not fall into the error of confusing what is said of the Lord's ministry of making men spiritually "alive from the dead" with some kind of physical visitation to an underworld. Men are dead, even while they live, and even more dead than ever once they have been buried "under the earth": yet both kinds of dead men will rise to his praise. In the final analysis, it is not the body itself which is the prison of the spirit, but death which imprisons the body, and which thus effectively "captures" the person. And this captivity applies so long as the "person" is in a state of disembodied unconsciousness.

If my thesis is correct, it is of no importance to the saints who were left behind that only a few were raised when the Lord Jesus arose from the dead. In *our* time-frame there appears to have been a selective separation, but in the experience of the dead themselves no such selective separation or special privilege need exist. All the Old Testament saints, both those who came out of their graves when Christ arose as well as those who were left behind, and we who are still alive — as well as those who have died in the Lord since that time — are all raised together with our glorified bodies to meet the Lord as He returns at the same instant. From our point of view there seem to have been a few privileged ones, but from their point of view they need not be aware of having anticipated anyone else. "Anticipation" is a word-trap, in a time-less world.

➡ PROCEED

