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Chapter Eleven

THE BIBLICAL DATA

The following are the passages of Scripture upon which my thesis depends. There are probably other passages which bear on the matter, but after many years of studying the Bible in the original languages and testing my ideas on my friends and on small audiences, I do not think I have missed very many.

Every hypothesis is tentative by its very nature, and mine is no exception. It can certainly be refined, but it at least forms a starting point and it may be that by opening up fresh avenues of approach, other minds of greater precision will be enabled to hit upon the exact truth.

Some of these passages are expressions of hope (from the Psalms, for example), others seem almost chance observations ('asides,' as it were), some are promises made by the Lord Himself (chiefly in the Gospels), while others are theological in character and categorical in tone (for the most part from the Epistles).

Finding and analyzing this data

I accept without hesitation the position that all Scripture is inspired and is therefore profitable as source material, sometimes in unexpected ways. One should keep a constant look-out for further passages that bear on the issue, which have not hitherto been recognized as doing so. In my view 'inspiration' can have a range of meanings. Broadly, I take it to signify that material is, by inspiration, included within the pages of Holy Writ by God's express intention, whether it is from some secular source such as existing records (cf. Joshua 10:13; 2 Samuel 1:18; etc.²⁵¹), or

²⁵¹ “Then spake Joshua to the Lord in the day when the Lord delivered up the Ammorites before the children of Israel, and he said in the sight of Israel, Sun, stand still upon Gibeon, and you, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon. And the sun stood still, and the moon stayed, till the nation avenged itself upon its enemies. Is this not written in the Book of Jasher?” Joshua 10:12, 13.

is new information resulting directly by revelation, or appears as a chance observation during the course of a normal conversation, or even involves the untruthful words of man or Satan himself (cf. Genesis 3: 4, 5; Job 1:9-11).²⁵² Thus statements are included in the Bible either by divine *instruction*, or by divine *permission*, or by *revelation*.

I am convinced, moreover, that in a great many places, the very wording is overruled in order to ensure that the message is precisely conveyed and not merely the general sense given. In expressing human emotion this may or may not be so important in the ordinary course of events, but where revealed truth in the abstract is involved, it seems to me that it would be virtually impossible for ideas or factual data to be conveyed without the aid of verbal inspiration. Man often chooses words poorly and consequently misleads his hearers. It does not seem to me that God would ever do this. But only rarely can ideas be conveyed by mere images save in mathematical terms. It is words that are crucial as a rule. To claim that *meaning* is inspired but not the *wording* often seems to me to be an evasion.

I would also argue that all Scripture has equal value and authority for whatever reason it came to be included. Any passage may form part and parcel of the resource material at our disposal. Obviously not all passages do, but any passage *may*. The words of the Lord himself do not, in my view, carry more weight than the words of Paul or John or James — even though the Lord's words may have been printed in red ink, as they are in some editions of the Bible. The whole of Scripture, if it is divinely inspired, has equal importance — since the One who inspired it is the same Lord throughout, whether He was the actual speaker or not.

Thus I make no apology for my literalism but rather tend towards the view that it is probably the only way in which to unravel the apparent contradictions that seem clearly to exist between certain key statements that relate to the things we shall

“David lamented with this lamentation over Saul and over Jonathan his son: (also he bade them teach the children of Judah the use of the bow as it is written in the Book of Jasher).” 2 Samuel 1:17, 18.

²⁵² “The woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit from the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God has said, you shall not eat of it, neither shall you touch it, lest you die. The serpent said to the woman, You shall not surely die. For God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Genesis 3:2-5.

“Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, Does Job fear God for nothing? Have you not made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face.” Job 1:9-11.

experience as we make the journey "across Jordan" into the 'forever' world of eternity.

Here, then, is a list of the passages to be examined in this chapter, a list which at first reading seems to give contradictory data but which we hope to reconcile in the final chapter.

Old Testament:	New Testament:
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Psalm 16:9	Luke 23:42,43
Psalm 17:15	John 3:13 1
Isaiah 26:19	John 14:2, 3
Daniel 12:2	Acts 2:34
	1 Corinthians 15:35-53
	2 Corinthians 4:14
	2 Corinthians 5:1-8
	Philippians 1 :23
	Philippians 3:20, 21
	1 Thessalonians 4:13-18
	1 Thessalonians 5:10
	1 John 3:2

Some problem passages, about which there is little if any agreement as to their meaning or relevance to this issue, will be found in Appendix I, including:

New Testament:

Matthew 12:29; 16:18; 27:51-53
Ephesians 4:8-10
1 Peter 3:18-20; 4:6
2 Peter 2:4,5
Jude 6
Revelation 1:18; 20:2,7,13,14.

I do not propose that these passages should be examined in the order in which they appear in Scripture, as though God had so arranged that each succeeding author should add the next piece of required information before laying down his pen. The Word of God is not like other books in this respect. In the end, one usually finds that one has to gather all the available data on any biblical theme and then reflect upon it before the proper ordering of the data becomes clear. The synthesis is likely to require that the data then be re-arranged time and again until, suddenly, like the pieces of a jigsaw puzzle correctly assembled, the whole picture emerges at last.

It means that the deeper truths of God are hidden from the dilettante, from the casual reader or the idly curious: understanding is the reward only of diligent search.

Life is like this. We do not discover the meaning of life in an orderly way by the mere accumulation of facts. Lessons usually come to us in random order, and it is doubtful if it can *ever* be fully understood until it is nearly completed and it comes time to die. . . .

In the laboratory, the same seemingly haphazard accumulation of data is characteristic of scientific research. Many discoveries are made in spite of, rather than because of, the available data. The popular view of the scientist steadily gathering facts, day by day adding just the right piece of information next required to complete the picture to date, is far from the truth. Often the next piece of information actually contradicts the last piece! Time and again one has to abandon a hypothesis in its current state or modify it quite radically, until one day a single insight — often coming quite unsought — provides the missing key. The accumulated data is then re-assembled, perhaps into a set of entirely new relationships, and there it is: the meaning of it all at last, the resolution that reconciles the contradictions! The thrill this gives to the research worker only a research worker can know. . . .

A. B. Davidson in his *Theology of the Old Testament* makes a very *a propos* statement in this regard with respect to *biblical* research:²⁵³

One thing that characterizes Scripture in distinction from modern literature [wherever authorship is multiple] is that its deliverances on any subject are consistent throughout. There is no such violent antithesis of opinion [on its subject matter] as occurs in modern literature. From beginning to end of the Bible the view taken of *death*, for example, and *sin*, is self-consistent.

But the full view is nowhere presented at once; and hence, in order to pass a just judgment as to the Scripture's teaching on such a subject, we have to familiarize ourselves with the *whole* of Scripture. The acquiring of this familiarity is not an easy thing. It takes, I might say, the labour and experience of a life time.

The study of Scripture is not essentially different from the study of Nature. In both, what is hidden from the casual student is often revealed to the dedicated one, and the discovery of new truths becomes the most exciting experience imaginable!

This is not to say that novelty has a virtue in itself or that we should ignore what others before us have mined from the Word of God. But it is a fact that every

²⁵³ Davidson, A.B., *The Theology of the Old Testament*, Edinburgh, T. & T. Clark, 1911, p.514.

branch of organized knowledge, including theology, has a constant tendency towards crystallization into a closed system which resists further elaboration or refinement. Yet it does not do to make such elaborations or refinements too freely or too quickly. And it is no less unhealthy to be reluctant to entertain "second thoughts. . . ."

Now I have laid some emphasis on the importance of the actual wording of any text under scrutiny. In the present analysis of the passages listed above, I may be accused of an unwarranted dependence upon "jots and tittles." Admittedly I am taking the wording very seriously and seeking to extract out of the data every ounce of meaning that can be mined. I believe it is safer to err on this side than to treat the words casually as though their precise meaning is a matter of relative indifference so long as we note their broader implications. At any rate, it is surprising how rewarding such attention to detail can be. . . and my own professional life, spent in a research laboratory, has taught me that it can make all the difference in the world to what will be discovered.

SECTION 1

THE TIMING OF HIS COMING: Resolving the Contradiction: "Today" or "When I Come Again"

The first example of two apparently irreconcilable statements to which I wish to draw attention, will be found in John 14:2 and 3 and Luke 23:43. Remember, I am paying strict attention to the actual wording!

The first is a promise made by the Lord to his disciples, which has brought enormous comfort and assurance to God's people in times of stress. Yet the implications of it, if we take it to mean precisely what it says, are almost always overlooked and seldom if ever commented upon from the pulpit. Jesus said (John 14:2, 3):

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 you may be also.

When is this return? Surely, at the end of the present age, and therefore already nearly 2000 years in the future when the promise was made. But the Lord made a similar promise to the penitent thief which implied no such delay in fulfillment. To him, He said: "Verily I say unto you, **Today you shalt be with me in paradise.**" (Luke 23:43.)

Now whatever the word *paradise* may signify, it is clear that *the thief* was to be with the Lord that very day. It seems equally clear that *the disciples* were going

to be with the Lord only after He returns the second time. This appears to signify a long wait for the disciples but an immediate entry for the thief. For the thief, reception was to be that very day: for the disciples, reception was only to be at the end of the age. How do we reconcile these two statements?

It is very difficult to re-interpret the promise to the dying thief in any other way than to take the Lord's words quite literally. And we seem to have little alternative but to do the same with the Lord's words (in John 14:3) to the disciples. Yet there appears clearly to be a contradiction involved.

In short, both promises guarantee a joyful reunion with the Lord: but it looks as though the thief was to be with the Lord thousands of years before the Lord's own disciples were to be. *They* must wait till He returns. . . .

The contradiction: now or later?

However, the prospects of the Lord's disciples, when judged by the statements made in John 14:2 and 3, seem very different from what Paul anticipates for himself and his readers (as stated in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8).

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this *[house]* we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: if so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.

For we who are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that has wrought us for the self-same thing is God, who has also given unto us the earnest of the spirit.

Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, *whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord:* (for we walk by faith, not by sight) we are confident, I say, and *willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.*

2 Corinthians 5:1-8.

Now it is true that we don't at all desire to be without embodiment. What we really desire is a perfect one, such a body as would cause us no shame whatever in heaven and in the presence of the Lord who is now clothed in *his* glorious body. And we are confident that God has constituted us for this very thing.

Furthermore, we have to believe that the change will be somehow wrought instantly, since it is evident that to be absent from this body is to be present with the

Lord, and to be present with the Lord means to have been 'received' by Him, a reception which is only to occur when He returns. Since it is when He returns that our bodies are to be resurrected, these things must somehow *all happen at one time*.

Paul underscores the immediacy of our entry into his presence when he says in Philippians 1:23,

I am in a strait betwixt leaving you, my beloved friends, and having a desire to depart to be with Christ *which is far better*.

So there really is no reconciliation possible between John 14:3 (which promises a delay) and Luke 23:43 (which, in agreement with 2 Corinthians 5:6-8 and Philippians 1:23, assures us there is *no* delay) **unless we assume that the thief's Today is just another way of expressing the disciples' When I come again!** That particular "Today" was (or is) coincident with that "When I come again."

David's hope

Now David's expressed wishes bear out the same seemingly contradictory circumstance. In Psalm 17:15 he says:

As for me, I will behold your face in righteousness [i.e., when I have been made perfect]: *I shall be satisfied when I awake with your likeness.*

There is no question that to "awake" means to be resurrected.²⁵⁴ This is true whether the context refers to the saved or the unsaved as Daniel 12:2 makes clear: "Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

It is true that in the New Testament 'sleep' seems to be reserved for the saints, but this is not true in the Old Testament (cf. 1 Kings 22:40, for instance²⁵⁵) so that it would appear only that there is no mention of the unsaved sleeping in the New Testament. But Daniel 12:2 makes it clear that the unsaved do indeed sleep in death and thus are indeed asleep at this moment, since the resurrection unto Judgment has not yet taken place for them. Thus there is clearly an interval of some length in the

²⁵⁴ An equally specific expression of hope for the resurrection of the *body* is to be found in Isaiah 26:19, "Your dead shall live, *with my dead body* shall they arise. Awake and sing, you that dwell in the dust. . . and the earth shall cast out the dead."

²⁵⁵ So Ahab slept with his fathers. . . ." I Kings 22:40.

light of the Scriptures, separating the time of dying and the time of awakening for the saved and the unsaved alike.

But David certainly closely associates two events he is eager to experience: (1) his acquisition of 'likeness' to the Lord, and (2) his awakening from the dead. Both of these events we know from other passages belong to the time of the Lord's return. Of the first experience we have precise confirmation in 1 John 3:2 which reads: "Beloved, we are even now the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that when He shall appear, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is." Thus David's expectation was the same as ours: to see the Lord when He comes again and at once to be made like Him.

But with respect to the second experience, we know that David did *not* at once pass into the Lord's presence, since years after David's death, the Lord Himself told his listeners (in John 3:13) that *no one* had yet ascended into heaven. It is true that this was spoken before the Lord had died and risen again, but we find Peter re-affirming the fact (Acts 2:34), making particular mention of David himself! He said, "For David is not yet ascended into the heavens."

Thus we have to ask again, How does the immediacy of which Paul speaks come about? And how do we understand the Lord's words to the thief if even David, a man after God's own heart (Acts 13:22²⁵⁶), has not yet entered into the Lord's presence? How do we understand Paul's assurance if, according to the Lord Himself, *no man at all* has yet ascended into heaven?

Is reconciliation possible?

It seems to me that we have been settling for a very imprecise picture of events which will transpire between death and the resurrection of the body, in spite of the fact that we have at the same time been comforting ourselves in the persuasion that we are quite sure about what is to happen. This seems very unsatisfactory and it is strange that the difficulty has not been faced up to long before this. Of course, it has been wrestled with by a few, but the tendency has been to gloss over the problems created by such passages, and to assure ourselves that there is no delay really in our entry into the Lord's presence, and that the delay in respect to our new bodies is of little importance. We really do not need these bodies.

Personally I am convinced we shall be at once with the Lord, but I am equally convinced we *do* need our bodies! I am also convinced there will be no delay in receiving the latter, but that nevertheless *there will be an interval!* It is possible to reconcile these apparent contradictions. Let us therefore pursue the subject a little

²⁵⁶ "[God] raised up unto them David to be their king, to whom also he gave testimony and said, I have found David, the son of Jesse, a man after my own heart, who will fulfill all my will." Acts 13:22

further by examining carefully one of the most precise statements that Paul has made about the events which accompany the Lord's return. I have reserved this for the Second Section of this chapter.

SECTION 2

THE ORDER OF JOINING HIM AT HIS COMING The Precedence of the Dead over the Living

One of the most elaborate and precisely worded portions of Scripture dealing with the events surrounding the passage of the saints into the presence of the Lord is to be found in 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18. It is also one of the most difficult to deal with successfully because the implications of it are highly complex in view of the fact that it is a time of reunion not only of departed spirits with their *resurrected* bodies but also of saints who are still living at the time of the Lord's return with their *transformed* bodies.

The passage deserves (and requires) very careful analysis. It reads as follows:

*I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that you sorrow not, even as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus **will God bring with Him.***

For this we say unto you by the Word of the Lord [i.e., by inspiration] that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall *not* precede them which are asleep.

For the *Lord Himself shall descend from heaven* with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trump of God: **and the dead in Christ shall rise first:** then *we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.*

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

There are several rather special things about these verses. In the first place, Paul makes it clear that he views what he is about to say as particularly important. He says, by way of preface, "I don't want you to be ignorant, brethren — what I am

about to say to you is intended above all to be a comfort and a re-assurance. And for this reason I also want you to know that I have received this detailed information as from the Lord! I speak as a prophet of God: 'Thus says the Lord'."

What is he actually telling us?

When will the dead in Christ be raised?

The environment in which the Thessalonian Christians had grown up was a far from reassuring one when it came to current beliefs about the fate of the dead. Many probably shared the very nebulous 'hope' of the Greek philosophers who followed Plato in the belief that no certainty was possible though logic seemed in favour of some kind of shadowy existence that might not be too bad. According to Plato, Socrates did believe that there were probably gods in that after-world, and he expressed the pious hope that they would be good, not evil. Socrates was not even certain that any human beings would be there, though he himself seems to have felt reasonably confident of being present — which was a fine piece of conceit! There was, of course, no concern for re-embodiment: it was considered undesirable.

But Paul wants God's people to know with absolute certainty that when the Lord returns, He will first raise those who have died in the faith:²⁵⁷ only then will He call up to be with Himself those of his people who at that moment are still alive. So shall we all — the departed saints and the still living alike — join together, transformed and made perfect in spirit and body, to be thereafter forever with the Lord. The living will not go first to join Him, but those who have already departed this life in the faith. Their bodies will be raised from the dust, and they will be instantly re-constituted as whole persons. Then will the still living join their brethren in the Lord in the most marvelous assembly that the mind can conceive! It seems clear that these events follow one another in rapid succession.

²⁵⁷ Paul speaks of the order at the event of His second coming: "The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ [i.e., Christians who have departed this scene] shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17.) That is, not simply "the *bodies* of the dead", but "the dead" — those persons who have died — "will rise to meet the Lord in the air". What else can this possibly signify than those who have departed have **not yet met** the Lord, but will do so when He descends from heaven?

In what form do the dead exist?

Let us now try to imagine exactly what it is that God will have the Lord "bring" with Him (verse 14) when He returns. The language is very specific.

Since the spirit returns to God at death and is there presumably preserved in God's keeping until it is to be reunited with its body again, and since there is reason to believe that the spirit without the body is not a conscious entity but only one component of personal identity, we have to try to visualize in what form these spirits are brought back by Jesus to the earth.

Clearly they are brought back specifically for the purpose of completion by union with their resurrected bodies which thus reconstitutes them as whole persons. To view them as mere "essences" of soul-stuff rather than conscious beings is difficult admittedly. It may therefore help to consider a parallel situation which must surely occur at the ensoulment of every newborn child. The situation is, therefore, by no means without precedent.

In the generation of every one of us, our parents supply the body, but it is God who forms the spirit and infuses it into the body when that body is ready to receive it. What precisely is it that God infuses? It is surely not a finished, fully formed personality, though it may indeed have the potential structure necessary for the personality which God intends shall develop. Evidently, what God infuses is indeed a potential, some essence, or as Thomas Aquinas would have used the word, some "substance." It is not a *physical* substance but spiritual; not substance in the concrete sense but substantial in the sense that it is a reality, albeit only a spiritual one. Perhaps the nearest approximation we might have is that of an angelic being immediately after his creation. By this I do not mean we are embodied angels, but that what God creates is not simply a cloud with no defined boundaries. It is something sufficiently identifiable that it can be spoken of as taken back again by God unto Himself when the body is no longer able to house it appropriately (Ecclesiastes 12:7 carries this implication²⁵⁸).

The accounts we have of persons brought back to life (like the daughter of Jairus, for example, in Luke 8:55²⁵⁹) indicate something of this sort where it is said

²⁵⁸ “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.” Ecclesiastes 12:7.

²⁵⁹ “A man named Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue, came and fell at Jesus' feet and begged him to come to his house. For he had an only daughter, about twelve years of age, and she lay dying. But as he [Jesus] went . . . one came from the ruler of the synagogue's house, saying, Your daughter is dead: trouble not the Master. But when Jesus heard it he said, Fear not; only believe, and she shall be made whole. When he came to the house . . . all were weeping and bewailing her, and he said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleeps. They laughed

that her spirit returned again. From whence does it return, if not from God, since it returned to God in death (Job 34:14-15; Psalm 31:5; Acts 7:59; etc.²⁶⁰)? Evidently the spirit has two places of rest: in the body or in God's keeping, and it passes back and forth between the two.²⁶¹

What is it that thus comes and goes, passing back and forth between its body and its Creator? We assume it is a *person*, but such an assumption poses some problems which seem insoluble — problems which relate to the part played in the acquisition of conscious identity by its reunion with the resurrected body.²⁶²

It cannot really be doubted that we need a body for conscious existence in *this* world. Nor can it be doubted that we need a body in the *next* world: otherwise the Lord would not bring the spirits of the departed saints with Him when He returns

him to scorn, knowing that she was dead. He put them all out. He took her by the hand, and called, saying, Maid, arise. And her spirit came again, and she arose immediately.” Luke 8:49-55

²⁶⁰ “If he [God] set his heart upon a man, if he gather unto himself his [man’s] spirit and breath; all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.” Job 34:14, 15.

“Into your hand I commit my spirit: you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth.” Psalm 31:5.

“And they stoned Stephen, as he was calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Acts 7:59.

²⁶¹ But does the spirit pass *back and forth* — is it not a “one way street”? Where was Lazarus’ spirit in those four days? There seem to be three situations possible: a) in death, the spirit leaves the body; b) in resuscitation, the spirit returns to the body; and c) in resurrection, the body is reunited with the spirit. The difference in the latter two is that in resuscitation both the body and the spirit are unchanged whereas in resurrection it is a new body reunited with a perfected spirit. Death occurs when the body no longer permits expression of the spirit whereas in resuscitation the body is brought, by *external* means, to a condition which permits, once again, expression of the spirit. Whether the spirit had really left the body in such a case is a moot point. In “out-of-body” experiences (OBEs) where people recount experiences of “having gone to heaven” (or otherwise), it is doubtful that death has actually occurred, since it is not possible for a memory to be engrammed if the “machinery” is not operating. The author, on November 27, 1983, suffered within 2 hours 4 cardiac arrests, yet had no memory of events for almost 12 hours, even though in that period he carried on normal conversations with nurses and friends. So even when a person is clinically pronounced dead by doctors, it appears that OBEs are really evidence, not of death, but of life.

²⁶² On what constitutes a person, see Martin Chemnitz, *The Two Natures of Christ*, translated by J. A. O. Preuss, St. Louis, MO., Concordia Press, 1971, p.92, 94, 100.

in order expressly to reunite them with their bodies. And why are those who are alive and remain at his coming first clothed in a transformed body²⁶³ before being admitted to that happy throng? For we are told clearly that there is at that moment to be a change.

To the last question, the only answer must be that those who remain alive at his coming are not to be joined with the dead in Christ by being converted into ghosts, but rather the spirits of those who have already died in the Lord are to be **embodied again** and so made like the transformed living. We have here presumptive evidence that the *union of the living saints with the departed saints is possible only by embodiment of the departed saints to match the living*, not by disembodiment of the living saints to correspond with the dead. If this were not the case, we would have to ask why those alive at his coming do not merely shed their bodies and rise like birds out of an imprisoning cage. In short, it must be because, as the body without the spirit is inert, so the SPIRIT WITHOUT THE BODY IS INERT ALSO. Neither spirit nor body is a person without the other.

Perhaps these dead bodies do not arise to meet their spirits in the air but arise because these spirits are first infused into them in the earth so that they everywhere stand up whole and perfected as people, like the dry bones in Ezekiel's valley (Ezekiel 37:1-10²⁶⁴).

²⁶³ Paul says, “Our citizenship is in heaven; from whence we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who will transform this wretched body of ours that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body” (Philippians 3:20; 21). This transformation is evidently a passport to citizenship.

²⁶⁴ “The hand of the Lord was upon me [Ezekiel], and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones, and caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry. And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know. Again he said unto me, Prophesy upon these bones, and say unto them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God unto these bones: Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: and I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live: and you shall know that I am the Lord. So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone. And when I beheld, lo, the sinew and flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above; but there was no breath in them. Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army” Ezekiel 37:1-10.

These resurrected saints, made alive and reconstituted by the awakening of their bodies out of their long sleep, rise up to meet the Lord first. Only then are we "who are alive and remain caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." Thus we are all brought together into the Lord's presence at the same instant — the instant of his coming again. Those asleep in Jesus precede us by a mere moment.

Problem of delay still unresolved

Yet, while we may have *pointed up* the problem of reconciling such promises of immediacy as are reflected in Luke 23:43²⁶⁵ and 2 Corinthians 5:8²⁶⁶, with the foreseen delay clearly implied in John 14:3²⁶⁷, we have not *resolved* it.²⁶⁸

Even in this 'pointing up' of the problem I shall no doubt be accused of speculation and 'going beyond the evidence.' Speculating I am certainly doing: going beyond the evidence is a matter of opinion — though *all* rethinking is viewed as this by those who prefer established confusion to novel truth.

But speculation which may be anathema to the cautious theologian is the very life-blood of scientific progress, where it is called by another name — hypothesizing.

²⁶⁵ “And Jesus said unto him [the thief], Verily I say unto you, Today you shall be with me in paradise.” Luke 23:43.

²⁶⁶ “We are always confident, knowing that, while we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (for we walk by faith, not by sight): we are confident, I [Paul] say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 5:6-8.

²⁶⁷ “I [Jesus] 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 you may be also.” John 14:2b, 3.

²⁶⁸ The thief on the cross was promised “Today shall you be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43). Was the Lord (as God) in Paradise while Jesus (the man) was actually in the grave? Surely he was, as to his manhood, in the grave. And it must, I think, be assumed that it is as a *man* that He said (to the thief) “You shall be *with ME*”. For it is as MAN that He is to come again that we may be *with Him* (“where I am”, as He told the disciples, John 14:3). Thus it cannot be argued that the thief received a promise that “on that very day” he would be accompanying the Lord *as God* (i.e., in his divine person) as He went to announce his victory over death to the spirits in prison (I Peter 3:19). While his body lay in the tomb He existed as God: but not as MAN. So the thief, a man, could in no way have been with Him who was God only. Thus the promise could not in fact have meant “Today” in the temporal sense but only in the *experiential* sense.

And no one would deny that in science it has proved a most fruitful exercise in advancing understanding of natural law.

If, as many would think, theology is also to be viewed as a "science," may it not be time to set ourselves free from the stigma attached to speculation and to attempt to exercise our God-given imaginative skills in the interests of extending our understanding of the *Word* of God just as the scientific community has extended its understanding of the *works* of God? I speak as a scientist by training and profession, but also as a dedicated Bible student by inclination.

How else than by asking bold questions shall we advance our grasp of the meaning of Scripture in some areas which hitherto — by our more timid and conservative methods — have remained so poorly elucidated that there are almost as many *conflicting* explanations and interpretations as there are students? It is clear that we need a new key and a fresh look. This is particularly so in view of Paul's opening remark, "I would *not* have you to be ignorant," and in view of his insistence that he had received what he wrote very specifically as "by the word of the Lord." We must surely apply ourselves very seriously to any passage so singled out by its author as this one is.

It may seem an absurd thing that God should preserve some essence of spiritual identity that represents the individual, a mere "essence" having no consciousness. But is this more difficult for God than to preserve some form of *physical* identity that represents each individual's *body* which can be called into being at his will though it has long since returned to the dust or been effectively annihilated in an atomic explosion? With God all things are possible.

Perhaps it is sufficient that God should preserve our spirits as a kind of memory in the divine mind to be later re-created at will, something after the order of what the neurophysiologist would call an *engram* in the brain, a construct easily recovered by the operator by "pressing the right button." After all, nothing existed until God had created it. Out of what did the forms of animals, trees, rocks, metals, *anything* in fact, arise into being save that each was first a thought in the mind of God? Until He spoke, it was not done. And surely He did not speak without first having a thought to express. Such thoughts in the mind of God were realities in the strictest sense though not yet physical ones.

So, then, it will not be any more difficult for God to reconstitute the dead in Christ, body and spirit alike, when the time comes for the Lord's return. This is in fact what it means to "raise up," in many cases. As Paul says, "Knowing this that He who raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you" (2 Corinthians 4: 14). Wonderful, is this! God will 'present us,' and the Lord will 'receive us'! And we are none of us to appear single and alone: we are all to be presented together. . . "us with you," Paul affirms. We go into his presence as a family.

But if we *all* go into the Lord's presence together, does this include the penitent thief? Since our reception is future, how then did he enter into his presence that very day? Either his passage has been delayed or ours is somehow to be advanced. Who adjusts to whom? All that seems certain at the moment is that we shall all go to meet the Lord *together*. It is this which underlies Paul exhortation, "Wherefore comfort one another" (1 Thessalonians 5:10, 11).

SECTION 3

THE NATURE OF THE RESURRECTED BODY AT HIS COMING

But it is natural that we should also want to know what kind of a body we shall have when we join the great assembly of the Lord's people and make the journey out of time. Paul spells out for us (in 1 Corinthians 15:35-57) how a spiritual body is possible and what kind of relationship it bears to our present one. This passage, illuminated by many others in Scripture, forms a kind of base on which to make some predictions. Several key points can be affirmed with a fair degree of assurance. We have broken up this passage into three segments, each followed by a comment.

Transformed, yet the same

"But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and, With what body do they come?

You fool, that which you sow is not quickened, except it die; and that which you sow, you sow not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain. *But God gives it a body as it has pleased him, to every seed its own body.*

All flesh is not the same flesh: but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial; but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars; for one star differs from another star in glory.

So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness, it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body."

1 Corinthians 15:35-44.

Comment: It pleased God to establish in nature a principle of correspondence for every form of life which reproduces itself by being planted in the

earth. What springs up is recognizably a derivative: the second generation is like the parent form and yet has a new individuality of its own — the same *species* of seeds are harvested but not the same *actual* seeds. Even the Lord's body "planted in the earth" emerged in a different form (*en hetero morphe* — so the Greek of Mark 16:12²⁶⁹), though still identifiably his very own. There is in each planting a genuine continuity between what is sown and what is reaped. This is true in nature and it is true also as to the supernatural harvest of which Paul is speaking. What is to be raised will retain that much of the character of the original to establish unequivocal identity. *The important point is that a true correspondence will be preserved:* "to every seed its *own* body."

Even Job rested secure in the hope that he, too, would see the Lord *for himself*. As he put it: "I know that my redeemer lives and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: and although after [worms have destroyed] my skin, worms [shall also] destroy my body, *yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself, and my own eyes shall behold:* [I myself] and no other" (Job 19:25-27).

The relevance *for us* of what is implied by the phrase *en hetero morphe* (as applied to the Lord's body in Mark 16:12) is to be found in Paul's statement in Philippians 3:21²⁷⁰ in which he says that the Lord Jesus Christ will change this abject body of ours in order that it may be re-fashioned like unto *his* glorious body.

Consider, then, what his resurrected and glorified body was capable of! He could pass at will through solid walls or locked doors (John 20:19²⁷¹), and yet if He so desired, He could be touched and handled as though his body were as materially solid as the hands or fingers that reached out to touch Him (Luke 24:39²⁷²).

He could prove the substantiality of his flesh by taking food and eating it before their eyes (Luke 24:41-43²⁷³) and yet a few moments later vanish — and the

²⁶⁹ "After that [the resurrection] he [Jesus] appeared in another form unto two of them as they walked. . ." Mark 16:12.

²⁷⁰ "Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself." Philippians 3:21.

²⁷¹ "Then the same day at evening, being the first day of the week, when the doors were shut where the disciples were assembled for fear of the Jews, came Jesus and stood in the midst, and said unto them, Peace be unto you." John 20:19.

²⁷² "Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have. And when he had thus spoken, he showed them his hands and his feet." Luke 24:39.

²⁷³ "And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, he said unto them, Have you here any meat? And they gave him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an

food ingested was so absorbed by his body that it vanished with him!²⁷⁴ At the home of his two friends in Emmaus He sat at supper and took bread and broke it (Luke 24:28-31²⁷⁵), thereby proving (as did almost every act during this wonderful forty-day resurrection period) that the *spiritual* quality of his body which allowed Him to appear and disappear at will, in no way prevented him from penetrating the old familiar environment of his earthly residence nor from acting physically upon the materials that were natural to that environment.²⁷⁶

honeycomb, and he took it, and did eat before them.” Luke 24:41-43.

²⁷⁴ It seems clear that He did this on more than one occasion — perhaps on many occasions, in fact. Peter tells us that chosen witnesses “did eat and drink with Him after He rose from the dead” (Acts 10:41). What proof of the reality of his glorified body could be more convincing? In another connection, we have already referred to one of the post-resurrections scenes in which the Lord had prepared a breakfast for his disciples. Here we seem to have a highly physical manipulation of coals of fire, of fish, and of bread. One only has to ask oneself how He lit the fire, and where He obtained the fish and the loaves, to realize how completely the Lord was able to enter into the physical environment of the disciples even while He was able at the same time to be completely independent of it.

²⁷⁵ “And they [Jesus and the two friends] drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and he made as though he would have gone further. But they constrained him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And he went in to tarry with them. And it came to pass, as he sat at meat with them, he took bread, and blessed it, and brake, and gave to them. And their eyes were opened, and they knew him: and he vanished out of their sight.” Luke 24:28-31.

²⁷⁶ God is so pure as a substance (i.e., like a perfect sheet of glass) that our earthly eyes would look right through him and never detect his presence. The Lord Jesus in his resurrection body can likewise be present with us and yet be wholly invisible. But He can “open” our eyes. And, then, with our ‘converted’ vision made momentarily concordant with *his* reality, we shall suddenly be able to see Him perfectly. When we have a *body* like his glorified body, *our* means of response will be concordant with *his* means of communicating his presence. . . . And suddenly “we shall see Him as He is, because we shall be *like* Him”! (I John 3:2). Undoubtedly He can in like manner “open” our ears so that we can hear his voice: not inwardly, mystically, privately, or ‘in a manner of speaking’ or subjectively only, but we will hear it **objectively**. Similarly, we shall be able to reach out and make objective contact with Him, “handle Him” and prove the objective reality of his immediate presence.

In short, as He was (and is) in His glorified body, so shall we be in ours and what He could do with that body we shall do with ours. The dream of simply soaring freely through space by a mere act of will, or breaking through barriers, or total freedom of passage anywhere and everywhere will be ours. Time and space as *limitations* will be no

How clearly this shows that the transformed bodies we are to have will not be barred from the *familiar* things of this earth even though we shall transcend their limitations. Nor will such participation be denied us when we return with Him to share his glory during the Millennium.

We shall share the kind of "materialization" He was able to assume during those forty days, because when He returns we are always to be in his company and shall surely have some part to play. Our spiritual bodies will be capable of doing these simple and beautiful things that *His* spiritual body was capable of doing. The Lord is to return (John 14:3²⁷⁷) exactly as He went (Acts 1:11²⁷⁸), and to return with all his saints (Zechariah 14:5²⁷⁹) — with us, no less! We have every assurance that we shall be like Him (1 John 3:2²⁸⁰). This likeness is so specifically stated that it must mean that during the Millennium we shall enjoy the same unique experience of re-penetration of this earthly environment as He will.

Although, with respect to our bodies, that which is raised up *is* the same "species" of body, it will not be the *same* body. It will be metamorphized. In our case (though not in the Lord's), what is defective will be healed, what has been mortalized by sin will become immortal, what is corrupted will be uncorruptible, what is feeble is to be full of power, what is now vulnerable to a thousand kinds of injury will be totally invulnerable. Here the important point is that while identity will have been preserved, *it will be a body endowed with entirely new potential*. There will be no

more; they will both be open sesames to achievement beyond our wildest dreams. And in due course the New Heaven and the New Earth will be designed to enhance the potential of this new achievement to the full.

²⁷⁷ “I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there you may be also.” John 14:3.

²⁷⁸ “And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel: who also said, You men of Galilee, why do you stand gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven.” Acts 1:10, 11

²⁷⁹ “Then shall the Lord go forth. . . and his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives. . . and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with you. . . .” Zechariah 14:3, 4, 5b.

²⁸⁰ “Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it does not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.” John 3:2.

more thirst, no more hunger, no more pain, or hurt, or tears (Revelation 21:4²⁸¹), no more aging or death, and no more limitations of time and space.

Transformed, but with a different energy source

"And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural; and afterward that which is spiritual.

The first man is of the earth, earthly: the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthly: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly. And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.

Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption."

1 Corinthians 15:45-50

Comment: Our present body is dependent upon food and oxygen as the source of its physical energy. In that world *the source of energy will be of a different kind*, a kind that will free us from all the circumspections of matter and space (and therefore of time also), and so of any dependence upon the present world order — "first that which is natural, and afterwards that which is spiritual," as Paul puts it.

As to the source of energy of this spiritual body, we really know nothing for certain. We may conceivably have a clue, however, in Luke 24:39, when the Lord chose his words carefully in saying, "Handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see me have."

The phrase "flesh and bones" is not a normal one, the more familiar words being rather "flesh and blood." I cannot believe that this change in wording was accidental. The usual form is common enough, as will be seen by reference to Matthew 16:17; John 1:12-13; 1 Corinthians 15:50; and Hebrews 2:14.²⁸² But when

²⁸¹ "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." Revelation 21:4.

²⁸² "And Jesus answered and said, Blessed are you, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood has not revealed it unto you, but my Father who is in heaven." Matthew 16:17.

"As many as received him, to them gave he the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name, who were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God." John 1:12-13.

"Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; neither does corruption inherit incorruption." 1 Corinthians 15:50.

Paul speaks of our new relationship to the Lord, he too avoids the phrase "flesh and blood," calling us rather members of "his flesh and of his bones" (Ephesians 5:30²⁸³). This surely is not accidental either.

It is striking that what remains in the grave longer than the rest of the body is the skeleton, the bones. The Lord took from his tomb all that might have left any doubt as to the identity of his person — even retaining the evidence of his wounds. Perhaps our bones will be gathered together, too, no matter what has happened to them, and then re-assembled as they were re-assembled in Ezekiel's valley (Ezekiel 37:7²⁸⁴)!

I believe firmly that when the Lord returns, it is to assume kingship over this present world, to rule in righteousness for a period of time which we refer to as the *Millennium*. It is at this time that, as co-workers with Him, we shall need to be able to move back and forth between two worlds, a heavenly one and an earthly one — as He was able to do with complete freedom and with no incongruity during the forty post-resurrection days. Once this old world is done away with and we live entirely in a new heaven and a new earth, it seems likely that no such dual form of existence will be needed since our transformed bodies will be completely concordant with the new kind of universe: no back-and-forth movement will be needed.

When the Lord returns, we are going to be part of his entourage (Zechariah 14:5²⁸⁵ and Jude 14²⁸⁶). His return is specifically to rule a Kingdom upon earth in which righteousness will triumph over wickedness. Many details of this Kingdom are provided in Scripture, such as those given in Isaiah 35²⁸⁷ and

"Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same." Hebrews 2:14.

²⁸³ "For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones." Ephesians 5:30.

²⁸⁴ "So I prophesied as I was commanded, and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold a shaking, and the bones came together, bone to his bone." Ezekiel 37:7.

²⁸⁵ "Then shall the Lord go forth. . . and his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives. . . and the Lord my God shall come, and all the saints with thee." Zechariah 14:3, 4, 5.

²⁸⁶ "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of his saints." Jude 14.

²⁸⁷ ". . .The desert shall rejoice and blossom as the rose. . . and shall see the glory of the Lord, and the excellency of our God. . . behold, your God will come. . . He will come and save you. Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing. . . and

Daniel 2:44 and 45.²⁸⁸ It is to be an idyllic Kingdom, where nature and man will be at peace, where the wolf and the lamb will live together (Isaiah 11:6; 65:25²⁸⁹) and the lion shall eat straw like the ox (Isaiah 11:7²⁹⁰), and where there will be neither hurt nor harm in any part of his Kingdom (Isaiah 11:9²⁹¹). The primal youthfulness of man will be restored (Isaiah 65:20²⁹²) and a pre-Flood longevity will be recovered but without its violence or evil consequences. In this government, the saints are surely to play a part, moving freely in and out of time and effortlessly crossing the line between the physical world and the spiritual world. For us, this will be a situation comparable to that of the Lord before his ascension. It is a circumstance which belongs only to the period of the Lord's kingship upon this present earth.

I am well aware that the details of these events as they are to be witnessed on earth are not interpreted by all students of the Bible in the same way. But I am convinced that there are some certainties stated here in such unequivocal terms that they can hardly be questioned. The Lord's return will be as personal and as real an

the ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away.” Isaiah 35:1, 2, 4-6, 10.

²⁸⁸ “In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed; and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand forever. Forasmuch as you saw that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God has made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter.” Daniel 2:44, 45.

²⁸⁹ “The wolf also shall dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid; and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together; and a little child shall lead them.” Isaiah 11:6

“The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, and the lion shall eat straw like the bullock, and dust shall be the serpent’s meat. They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, says the Lord.” Isaiah 65:66.

²⁹⁰ “And the cow and the bear shall feed; their young ones shall lie down together; and the lion shall eat straw like the ox.” Isaiah 11:7.

²⁹¹ “They shall not hurt nor destroy in all my holy mountain, for the earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea.” Isaiah 11:9.

²⁹² “There shall be no more thence an infant of days, nor an old man that has not filled his days: for the child shall die an hundred years old; but the sinner being an hundred years old shall be accursed.” Isaiah 65:20.

event as His ascension was. *He will so come in like manner* (Acts 1:10-11²⁹³). He did not Himself know, when the disciples asked Him, exactly *when* He would come (Acts 1:7²⁹⁴), but in my view *He must be coming soon* since we appear to be living in an environment that has been damaged almost beyond repair. He is coming to establish a Kingdom in righteousness, *a Kingdom upon earth*, a Kingdom which takes cognizance of nature as well as of man. This earthly Kingdom will be worldwide but it will come to an end; and when it does, it will mark the end of the present physical order. The new heaven and the new earth will replace it and it will be a universe which does not experience any "running down."

The saints in this world are bound to its natural order. In the righteous Kingdom which the Lord is to establish when He returns, the saints in their transformed bodies will be free to move from one world to the other. In the end, when the new heaven and the new earth are established, such back-and-forth movement will no longer be necessary since heaven and earth will once again form a true universe in which the secular and the spiritual are completely fused. There may be disagreement as to how these events succeed one another in their ordering, but anyone who accepts the Scriptures as the touchstone of truth can hardly question that the reality of these events was clearly assumed by the writers themselves.

Transformed, instantly and permanently

"Behold, I show you a mystery. We shall not all sleep²⁹⁵, 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.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption,

²⁹³ "And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel: who also said, You men of Galilee, why stand you gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, who is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as you have seen him go into heaven." Acts 1:10-11.

²⁹⁴ After the resurrection, "[the disciples] asked [Jesus], Lord, will you at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel? And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the time or the seasons, which the Father has put in his own power." Acts 1:6, 7.

²⁹⁵ Those who state quite categorically that soul-sleeping is a new heresy are quite mistaken. When Paul says, "we shall not *all* sleep" and then specifies that this applies only to those fortunate ones who will still be alive when Jesus returns, he is stating quite unequivocally that the vast majority of the saints (like David and Stephen) *do* fall asleep. Those who *will not* sleep are the fortunate exceptions.

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.

O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

I Corinthians 15:51-57.

Comment: So we shall experience a change by which our bodies will be fitted for life on a far higher plane in an entirely new environment with a different principle of operation. The change will be instantaneous, "in the twinkling of an eye" — not like the change of a chrysalis into a butterfly, which takes *time*.

Because we are designed to live in a new heaven and a new earth, a unique feature of which will be that they will remain forever (Isaiah 66:22²⁹⁶), so our bodies will accordingly never again be subject to senile decay or wearing out either. Thus the form of the human body, made inconceivably beautiful by its re-creation in perfection, will never spoil with age. And yet I do not doubt that each body will have a beauty that is unique to its possessor and wholly reflective of the personality which animates it. No human society on earth will ever have witnessed such "beautiful people."

The suddenness of this departure to be with the Lord is often spoken of in Scripture as to its selective nature. Compare, for example, how one is to be taken and one is to be left where a couple may be working together in the field or even when they have [perhaps] retired for the night. And as for the unexpectedness of it, the Lord warned that He would come as a thief in the night (Matthew 24:40-43).²⁹⁷

The change will be permanent since the energy source will be inexhaustible. Scientists will recognize this as a universe free from the law of entropy. When man was created he was in such a position that he could die but was under no necessity of doing so: i.e., death was a *possibility* only. After man was fallen, the situation radically changed. He was now destined to die: death has become a *certainty*.²⁹⁸ In

²⁹⁶ "For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I shall make, shall remain before me, says the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain." Isaiah 66:22.

²⁹⁷ "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken and the other left. Two women will be grinding at the mill; the one shall be taken, and the other left. Watch therefore: for you know not what hour your Lord does come. But know this, that if the goodman of the house had known in what watch the thief would come, he would have watched, and would not have suffered his house to be broken up. Therefore be also ready; for in such an hour as you think not, the Son of Man will come." Matthew 24:40-44.

²⁹⁸ Scripture is quite unequivocal about the certainty of death: "It is appointed unto [all] men once to die" (Hebrews 9:27); "In Adam all die" (2 Corinthians 5:22);

the new universe the situation will once more be radically changed and death, being abolished, will be an *impossibility*.

The Quest

Such, then, are the basic data which underlie the perceived problems surrounding the nature of the intermediate state. And such are the basic data which any acceptable resolution must accommodate successfully. It is, in my view, an exciting quest — and full of promise.

The redemption that is in Christ Jesus by no means finds its *goal* in the present order of things. The universe as it now exists (within which our existence is framed) is only a stage in a process of preparation for the glory which is yet to be revealed for all who are in Christ.

As we shall see from the brief survey in the next chapter of how commentators in the past have sought to resolve these problems, the problems themselves, though clarified, have unfortunately remained unresolved.

One possible way out of the dilemma — and an exciting way out, though one which requires a certain perceptiveness and genuinely challenges the mind — is the subject of the final chapter of this volume. Perhaps one of its most rewarding features is the manner in which it freshly illuminates passages of Scripture hitherto largely ignored in discussions of this subject. It does indeed bring new treasures out of old (Matthew 13:52²⁹⁹).

☞ PROCEED



“. . . death passed upon *all* men. . . .” (Romans 5:12). Yet Paul also says, does he not, that we shall not all die because those who survive to the Second Coming will be caught up into the air without tasting death (1 Corinthians 15:51). However, he does *not* say that not all shall **die** but rather that not all shall **sleep** — which is an entirely different thing. On this problem of translation “without tasting of death”, see Appendix 3, Elijah and Enoch.

²⁹⁹ “Then said he [Jesus] unto them, Therefore every scribe who is instructed unto the kingdom of heaven is like unto a man that is an householder, who brings forth out of his treasure things new and old.” Matthew 13:52.