

Return to Index on Home Page

Chapter Thirteen

RESOLUTION

The most important "time-marker" to which history now moves forward is the day of the Lord's return. That day marks, for the Lord's people, a focal point. It is the day of their reception into his presence, faultless and with exceeding joy!³⁴²

This reception is not only said to be an event firmly anchored to *his Second Coming*, but it is also said to be an event, equally firmly anchored, to *our departure* from this body. Thus we are driven by what is clearly revealed in Scripture to conclude that these two events — his Second Coming and our departure — are in fact a single event, both occurring at one and the same instant.

Two events become one: what are the implications?

If this is as true for Adam and for Abel as it is for Paul and for you and for me, then clearly the Lord's coming again occurs simultaneously with the death of Adam and the death of Abel and the death of Paul and your death, and my death. Though, as viewed by the record of history, these five deaths are spaced over an immense period of time, yet as seen in the light of eternity, these five deaths all occur at the same moment, the moment of his return.

When Adam dies, let us say, in 3074 B. C., he steps out of time and passes at once to meet the returning Lord. And when Paul dies, let us say, in 67 A. D. — over 3000 years later — he, too, steps at once into the presence of the same returning Lord. *Since for both men the return of the Lord marks for them their journey out of*

³⁴² “Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy, to the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.” Jude 23, 24.

time, both men make that journey across Jordan simultaneously, and therefore together — in company with one another.

Where there is no time, there can be no greater or lesser delay in being received by the Lord, no longer or shorter period of waiting depending upon the historical setting of the death of the individual. That historical setting has no relevance. It does in prospect for the individual, but not at the moment of its occurring. It does while we are still dwelling in time and death is still future, but not when we once come to step into Jordan and make the journey *out* of time. At the moment that our feet touch the waters of Jordan, we each of us instantly move forward to the same point in eternity and pass over together to meet the Lord on the other side.

It is clear that since time is eclipsed when we begin this journey, the death of each saint must mark, for him, the end of time. The last day of this life is, for him, not merely *his* last day but *the* "Last Day" of which the Lord spoke as the climax of the present age! Moreover, it was then that the Lord said He would raise us up: "I will raise him up at *the* last day" (John 6:40). This is therefore tantamount to saying, "I will raise him up on *his* last day."

But more than this: the last day of the believer and the last day of the unbeliever alike becomes also the Day of Judgment (John 12:48³⁴³). In 1 Peter 1:5³⁴⁴ the Lord's people are assured of being kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation — not unto judgment, but unto a salvation that (as Peter puts it) is "ready to be revealed in the last time."

Part of our problem has been that we have interposed a space of time between departure from this life and the last day when our bodies are to be resurrected, where in fact there is no "time" for such a space to exist in. We have done this because we have confused time and eternity, making eternity not so much an entirely different order of experience but merely an extension of time, and time merely a fragment of eternity.

Delitzsch noted that if the laying aside of the body in the grave is really coincident with the liberating of the spirit into glory, then death itself becomes synonymous with resurrection. But he feels that death is never referred to as a resurrection of any kind.³⁴⁵ Yet death and resurrection may indeed be coincident.

³⁴³ "He who rejects me, and receives not my words, has one who judges him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day." John 12:48.

³⁴⁴ ". . . [the believers] who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time." 1 Peter 1:5.

³⁴⁵ Delitzsch, Franz, *A System of Biblical Psychology*, Grand Rapids, Baker, 1966 reprint, p.535. It was a view, however, held by Philo Judaeus. Commenting on Genesis 2:17, he said, "The death of man is the separation of the soul from the body, but the

They are not synonymous, but they do occur together in the sense that they form a single experience. It is not that the interval between them is shortened almost to the vanishing point — as time is apt to be in a deep sleep: time is actually eclipsed altogether. Death becomes an immediate "graduation" into a higher life.³⁴⁶ Indeed, this was how the rabbinical commentators supposed Adam and Eve would have departed this life had they not sinned: by a process akin to a graduation which involves no dying at all but rather marks "a joyful incident in man's career."³⁴⁷

Jordan: a paradigm of death

Consider now the actual circumstances surrounding the crossing of Jordan by the Israelites as they are about to enter the Promised Land, a picture of the saint about to cross the "Jordan of death" into heaven. What happened? Joshua 3:13, 15-17 tells us how the Lord spoke to Joshua and said:

And it shall come to pass, as soon as the soles of the feet of the priests that bear the ark of the Lord, the Lord of all the earth, shall rest in the waters of Jordan, that the waters of Jordan shall be cut off from the waters that come down from above. . . .

death of the soul is the decay of virtue. . . . Whenever Moses speaks of 'dying the death', he means the penalty of death, not that which takes place in the course of nature. That one is in the course of nature in which the soul is parted from the body, but the death-penalty takes place when the soul dies to a life of virtue, and is alive only to that of wickedness. . . . When we are living, the soul is dead and has been entombed in the body as a sepulchre; whereas, when we die, the soul lives forthwith its own proper life, and is released from the body". [See his *Account of the World's Creation Given by Moses*, Loeb Classical Library, translated by F. H. Colson and G. H. Whitaker, Harvard University Press, 1971, p.217, 219]. Then physical death is tantamount to the resurrection of the soul.

³⁴⁶ Edith Buxton (daughter of C. T. Studd, famous wealthy English cricketer who became a missionary) expressed it this way: "Everything that has happened to me seems to point to there being no death. There is always the beyond — new life, new hope. The corn of wheat falls into the ground and apparently dies, but the day comes when the fresh green of new life appears. We waste our emotions in dread of death, who is really a friend of whom few of us are worthy. The end of this life is no stopping place but a translation of our poor lives into a new dimension of activity in eternity" (*Reluctant Missionary*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, 1968, p.190).

³⁴⁷ Ginzberg, Louis, *Legends of the Jews*, Philadelphia, Jewish Publication Society of America, 1955, vol. 5, p.129. The Rabbis referred to a peaceful death as "a kiss of the Almighty".

And as they that bare the ark were come unto Jordan, and the feet of the priests that bare the ark were dipped into the brim of the river (for Jordan overflows all its banks all the time of harvest), that the waters which came down from above stood and rose up [i.e., were backed up]. . . and were cut off. . . .

And the priests that bare the ark of the covenant of the Lord stood firm on dry ground in the midst of Jordan, and all the Israelites passed over on dry ground until all the people were passed clean over Jordan.

What a remarkable paradigm this is of the arrival of the child of God face-to-face with the river of death — a river which, when that time comes (i.e., the time of God's harvest and reaping), seems so often to be "overflowing all its banks."

We live beside the St. Lawrence River, a mighty stream with a substantial current because it narrows from five miles wide to one and a half miles wide where we are. Every so often it rises with surprising suddenness, not over its banks it is true (due to their height) but by several feet. It swirls around the dock submerging it entirely, making everything tremble. The river is a very large moving mass of water and it is mysterious and ominous. Even though it has never actually caused us any harm, it is frightening to observe. Such must have been the appearance of the river Jordan when it was overflowing all its banks. And death must seem like this sometimes, even for the departing saint. In anticipation, it may nearly *always* seem so.

But what happened to the Jordan at Israel's crossing? *As soon as the feet of those who were about to cross it stepped into the river, the river simply ceased to exist as such! They went over dryshod. Jordan never touched them, once they had touched Jordan.* Jesus said: "If any man keep my saying he shall never taste of death" (John 8:52). When Jesus also said, "whosoever liveth and believeth shall never die" (John 11:26), all that Martha could read into this was the promise of resurrection. However verses 23 to 25³⁴⁸ seem to me to indicate that the Lord was hinting at something far more wonderful! But Martha was unable to follow, and the Lord pursued it no further.³⁴⁹

³⁴⁸ "Martha said to Jesus, Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know, that even now, whatsoever you will ask of God, God will give it to you. Jesus said to her, Your brother shall rise again. Martha said to him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day. Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believes in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: and whosoever lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this? She said to him, Yes, Lord: I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who should come into the world." John 11:21-27.

³⁴⁹ As J. S. Whale observed, death and God are the two most absorbing and challenging subjects with which the human mind can occupy itself. "Death", he said, "is

Now I suggest that this is a reflection of the events which terminate the life of the child of God in this world. When the moment of death arrives, we never experience it consciously *as death*. Just as the priests that bore the ark of the covenant found that the river disappeared when they stepped into it, in the same way the saint, once he or she arrives on the threshold of death, will find that the Jordan of death no longer exists. As Paul says, death *has been* (not will be) abolished for the child of God, and life and immortality have been brought to light (2 Timothy 1:10³⁵⁰). I do not mean abolished for those who mourn, but abolished for the one who is mourned. Death is not an enemy for the departing saint, but only for the bereaved.

When we reach that threshold, we shall leave the world behind as the children of Israel finally left Egypt behind when they crossed over into the Promised Land. Stepping out of the world of space means stepping out of the world of time: stepping out of time means stepping into eternity. Depending on how one views it, it is either an exit out of time or an entry into eternity.³⁵¹ Physical death marks the experienced transition in this journey out of Time into Eternity.

When the dying soul leaves the world of time, then that which for those who remain in the world is still future becomes for him an immediate present. Those who "dip their feet into Jordan" discover that the Lord's return, hitherto a future event, is upon them NOW. It is not momentarily *now* as in a vision which will fade, but NOW in a reality which is for ever. Death is not a temporary lapse into unconsciousness from which we shall later recover: it can only be called a "falling asleep" *when viewed from the position of those who remain locked in time*. For those who depart, there is no period of sleeping from which they will awaken in due time.

When Stephen's feet touched the waters of his "Jordan" he saw the Lord standing to receive him. Surely we are not to suppose that this was merely a pre-vision. Undoubtedly the Lord really did receive Stephen unto Himself. But since

the one inescapable fact which compels men to choose between despair and faith". He also noted that "Making sense of life means ultimately, and always, making sense of death". Further, "Death cannot be a purely natural fact for one who is not a purely natural being, but a [redeemable] person, made in God's image". See his *Christian Doctrine*, London, Fontana Books, 1957 (first published in 1941, Cambridge University Press), p.170, 164, 166.

³⁵⁰ "But [God's grace] is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel." 2 Timothy 1:10.

³⁵¹ The Roman philosophers, rejecting annihilation, concluded: *mors est aut exitus aut interitus* ("Death is either an exit or an entry"): as quoted by J. B. Heard in his *The Tripartite Nature of Man*, Edinburgh, Clark, 1868, p.134.

the Lord will not receive *any* of us until He returns for us (John 14:3³⁵²), then for Stephen both events — his dying and his reception by his Lord — must have occurred *at one and the same moment*. No one, in dying, has to *wait* for the coming of the Lord. We cannot speak of waiting when "time is no more" (Revelation 10:6³⁵³). Only those who are still bound in this space-time world have to wait. As each saint leaves this world, there is, instantly, a moving forward to that end point — the Lord's return to receive him unto Himself.

When time becomes eternity

And so, as we one by one touch the waters of Jordan with our feet, we pass at once into the presence of the Lord whom we rise to meet in the air as He returns, and our new bodies rise with us to make us complete in our identity as individual persons. But then we shall discover that those whose feet touched Jordan before us have also *that instant* joined with us, while those who (in the process of history) are yet to die in the Lord before He comes, are also joining us as we make the journey. For we shall experience the telescoping of past, present, *and future* — that future which, from the point of view of the living, intervenes between our being laid in the grave and the Lord's return. But we who have gone to be with the Lord will not experience "the delay" which is yet to be experienced by those left behind who must still complete their pilgrimage in time. For us, *our* pilgrimage and *their* pilgrimage will have been completed at once. It will be as though we shall observe their coming to see us off on the train as we approach the crossing over into that other country, only to find, when we arrive at our destination, that they too are on the train and have made the journey with us!

Thus the "enemy," death, has no power to separate us from the Lord but only to separate us from our loved ones, a separation which (if what I have said is true) occurs for the living but *not* for the departing. The loss is theirs, for they remain when we are gone. *The loss is not ours because in our experience they make the journey with us*, time and delay being things which belong to the life of *this* world, not to that world. That is why so much care was taken to deal with the question of the nature of *Time* in the first part of this volume.

As the child of God makes this passage over Jordan, the river ceases to be a river, and every event in God's scheduled programme for the future as revealed in

³⁵² "If [though] 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 14:3.

³⁵³ "[The angel] sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which therein are, that there should be time no longer." Revelation 10:6.

Scripture which must come to pass between now and the Lord's return, is instantly observed to have been fulfilled already. There is no waiting: the Lord's return is immediate — yet within the time frame of historical processes these same events do not happen until the end of the age, a time still future for those who must plod through the intervening years.

Within the framework of time and space, the resurrection of the body at the Lord's coming is yet future, but to the dying Christian it is in the immediate present.³⁵⁴ In the reality of that other world, there is no difference between “is coming” — which looks to the future, and “now is” — which lies in the immediate present (John 5:25³⁵⁵). Nor does the dying child of God experience any discontinuity imposed by Jordan.

As each child of God passes out of this world, he passes at once into glory, actually *experiencing* no death nor the slightest loss of consciousness nor any time interval in which events continue to unfold in the world he has left and which still awaits the Lord's visible return as a future event. Nor does the dying saint experience any sense of separation from the loved ones who remain behind. For him the “time” that must elapse until those left behind will rejoin him at their dying, is completely eclipsed. They thus arrive in the presence of the Lord when he does.

Implications of this eclipse of time

But this principle can be extended. The joyful destiny of each saint in dying is to be received at once by the Lord as He returns to the earth. His own death *is* the Lord's return, and the more imminent that death is, the more imminent is the Second

³⁵⁴ A similar situation is implicit in 1 Peter 1:7: “that the trial of faith, being much more precious than of gold that perishes, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ”. Here Peter encourages the saints to persevere in spite of severe persecution in order that we might in the end “be found unto praise and honour and glory”. *When* is this praise and glory to be manifest? Is it not when we go to be forever with the Lord? Yes, surely; but this is not precisely what Peter says. He says “*at the appearing of Jesus Christ*”. When Paul speaks of an “instant audience” **when we die**, Peter speaks of instant praise and glory **upon his returning**. This is, by my thesis, precisely the same thing! They are **one** event. Even John seems to have this in mind: “Little children, abide in Him; that, when He shall appear, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at his coming.” (1 John 2:28). When we go into his presence at our departure from this life it will coincide with his appearing, because our *departure* and his *return* (“his coming”) ARE one and the same event — *whenever* our departure may be.

³⁵⁵ “[Jesus said] the hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God and they that hear shall live.” John 5:25.

Coming of the Lord. Nor shall we, once in his presence, wonder about what is happening to the saints we have left behind. They will not, in our experience, have *been* left behind!

Such being the case, the same experience must necessarily be shared by all the saints alike, all who have departed this life and all who will yet depart this life from the creation of Adam to the death of the last saint before the Lord's return. For each and every one of them, all history and all intervening time between that death and the Lord's coming again is totally eclipsed, so that each must find — to his amazement and delight — that as he himself passes over Jordan, Adam too is just about to pass over *his* "Jordan" to be received by the Lord, and so is Noah, and Abraham, and David, Isaiah, the beloved Luke, Paul, Augustine, Luther, Calvin, Wycliffe, Spurgeon, and you, and I!³⁵⁶

From the point of view of the living, this in-gathering must always be seen as sequential (1 Corinthians 15:22-24³⁵⁷). How otherwise can we talk about it? But it is nevertheless experienced as a single glorious moment when the sheep pass into the presence of their Shepherd with joy. None will precede by reason of historical accident or prior birth; and none will be late. None will have longer to wait than others: *for none have any waiting at all.*

It is only when seen from this side of the grave within the framework of time that we can speak of some preceding others into the Lord's presence. Seen from the other side of Jordan, such precedences are meaningless, since where there is no time, there can be no precedence. Thus for those who have passed over, being "present with the Lord" is an already-event. Nevertheless, as seen by those who have not yet passed over Jordan, "no man has yet ascended into heaven."³⁵⁸ Historically, the departed are not there yet because *we* are not there yet. In experience the departed *are* there, because *we* are there too.

³⁵⁶ Is Jesus hinting at this when he says: "Many that are first shall be last; and the last shall be first" (Matthew 19:30) and "So the last shall be first and the first shall be last: for many be called, but few chosen" (Matthew 20:16)?

³⁵⁷ "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. Then comes the end when he shall have delivered up the Kingdom to God, even the Father, when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power." 1 Corinthians 15:22-24.

³⁵⁸ Peter, in his sermon on the day of Pentecost, noted that "David is not yet ascended into the heavens" (Acts 2:34) and Jesus in his conversation with Nicodemus said, "No man has ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man who is in heaven" (John 3:13).

Examples of the eclipse of time

To eclipse time is to cancel out all intervals. To cancel out all intervals, whether the interval be long (as might be supposed for Abel already six thousand years in the grave) or short (as for the saint who was buried yesterday) *is simply to bring the terminal event of the Lord's return to the same instant for all*. Thus, when Adam died, he passed at once in his experience into the Lord's presence, and may have been surprised (speaking "foolishly") to find Noah and Abraham and Daniel and you and me all joining him at the same instant so that we rise to meet the Lord together. *Sleeping* and *waiting* are only terms that accommodate our bondage to time. Adam's last day, 5000 years ago, was and is, in his experience, *the Last Day*, the great day of the Lord's return.

There are other such telescopings of events in Scripture. Did not the Lord say, "Before Abraham was, I am" (John 8:58)? Consider what this means. Let us call the time before Abraham "A," Abraham's time "B," and the moment when the Lord spoke these words "C." About two thousand years elapsed between Abraham and the Lord's incarnation; yet the Lord placed "C" *before* "A" and made all three situations coincident by using the present tense of Himself: "I *am*," We might have expected Him to say, "Before Abraham, I *was*." But this is not what He said.

On another occasion, the disciples were stormbound on the Sea of Galilee and in immediate fear of being shipwrecked. Suddenly, they saw the Lord coming towards them, calmly walking across the tumultuous waves. Naturally they were terrified: it must have seemed to them a portent of the end of their lives, an end for which they were not yet prepared. But the Lord Jesus at once calmed their fears saying, "It is I: be not afraid" (John 6:20). We then have an interesting observation: "They willingly received Him into the ship; and *immediately* the ship was at the land whither they went." When we see the Lord coming, we are in fact already "home," at the land whither we go. Once again, it is not a question of suddenly accelerated time or shortening of distance. It is not a question of time going more quickly, it is a matter of total *eclipse*: not of experiencing a contracted interval, but of arriving at a point that has no extension.

We have already noted (Chapter 5, page 73 above) an example of the telescoping of space and time when we read in Luke 4:5 that during the period of temptation in the wilderness the devil showed to the Lord "all the kingdoms of the world *in a moment* (Greek: a point, *stigma*) of time."

The dying thief's "today" was nothing less than "the day" of the Lord's returning to receive us all. That very day, before he was to see another sunset, he was caught up with the rest of us to meet the Lord in the air — and was indeed that day and forever with the Lord. It is to be so for us all: "absent from the body, present with the Lord." There was — and is — no delay.

Admittedly, it is difficult to conceive of a timeless sleep. But when we exercise our time-bound minds upon the subject, we are almost forced in this situation to use the analogy of sleep since the appearance of the body of the deceased so obviously invites such a simile. Certainly Scripture uses the concept of sleep, though perhaps as an accommodation to our restricted imaginative capacity. Yet when the child of God departs this life, although he may be said to have fallen asleep, it seems that in truth he does not experience falling asleep at all.

As the Lord Himself assured us, "He that lives and believes shall never die" (John 11:26) which, in the present context, translates into "He that lives and believes shall never *sleep*." Not to "taste of death" (John 8:52) can only mean not actually to fall asleep either. In other words, in departing, we journey at once without loss of consciousness into the presence of the Lord exactly as Paul also assured us, despite the appearance to the contrary as the mourners look upon our apparently sleeping body.

I may be accused of excessive literalism, but as I read what Scripture tells us, I assume that not to taste death means just that — *not to taste of death at all*. I believe that the abolishing of death and the recovery of immortality, so far as experience is concerned means the abolishment of death — though obviously not yet so far as *appearance* goes in this world of time.

I also believe that the necessity of the resurrection of the body, in order to allow for the conscious expression of the spirit and thus the real existence of the whole human person, is clearly indicated by the resurrection of the body of Jesus Christ in his manhood. He evidently could not continue *as to his manhood* without embodiment. This is entirely in harmony with the assurance of bodily resurrection which forms such a prominent part of Paul's theology and of the promises of all the other New Testament writers as well.

Putting it all together, we have to suppose that the dying saint does indeed pass at once out of time into eternity, out of this world into the next, out of the company of earthly companions into the glorious company of the Lord and his saints, *instantly*. This translation occupies no time whatever, not even the fraction of a second, since there *is* no room for even that fraction of a second's delay in a timeless world.

The logic requiring an interim state

Now, as we have emphasized again and again, the effect of projecting a time interval — even the smallest one conceivable — between death and resurrection has been to invite a continuing debate as to what happens to the disembodied soul in the interim. Once an interim was assumed, it seemed necessary to occupy it with conscious existence despite the lack of a body which, as far as the evidence goes, is for man the only organ or vehicle of consciousness.

Now while Martin Luther did not reject the concept of an interval of sleep, he did reject the idea that it was a time of conscious waiting. The soul, he held, is indeed indestructible because it is in God's keeping; but this does not necessarily involve *conscious* existence while it is disembodied — otherwise, why bother with bodily resurrection? But a large segment of Protestant theology failed to see the force of Luther's reasoning and, like the Roman Catholic Church, accepted an intermediate state which involved a kind of ghostly half-fulfilled condition of existence while the soul awaited embodiment. It is strange that we have held fast for so long to some such form of provisional existence, with all the difficulties it involves. You may recall Luther's remark (on page 80 in the preceding Chapter 6), made with characteristic forthrightness: "It would take a foolish soul to desire its body when it is in heaven!"

Luther's insights

Some time after this manuscript was completed and about ready to be submitted to a publisher, I acquired a copy of *The Theology of Martin Luther* by Paul Althaus, and was delighted to find towards the end of it that Luther clearly anticipated some of the ideas which have been explored in the present volume. It seemed disruptive to introduce his insights piecemeal and I have therefore adopted the policy of inserting some of the observations of Althaus as they relate to my thesis (with some condensing in the interests of brevity) in this final chapter.³⁵⁹

Althaus quotes extensively from Luther, using apt phrases interjected appropriately into his own commentary. For simplicity and clarity, I am simply reproducing the comments of Althaus, placing them between quotation marks, while setting in a bolder typeface the actual words of Luther himself in the hope of particularly drawing the reader's attention to their compatibility with my thesis. All these excerpts from Althaus' book will be found to occur between pages 412 and 417 inclusive. In what follows, I have indicated deletions from the Althaus text by the use of a succession of dots.

Althaus, noting Luther's comments on "whoever believes in me will never die" (John 11:26), wrote:

"This is what a man must hold to when he dies. In this he finds a place to rest in peace; for he is then **held and preserved in the bosom of Christ to the Last Day**. This deep insight demonstrates the significance of Luther's reformation for eschatology. The traditional

³⁵⁹ Althaus, Paul, *The Theology of Martin Luther*, Philadelphia, PA., Fortress Press, 1966 (3rd printing, 1975), translated by Robert C. Schultz, p.412-417. For permission to quote at length, I am most grateful to the publishers.

doctrines said much about the various places where the souls of the dead were. Topographical maps of the intermediate state (*Zwischenzustand*) were available. . . .

"The hope of the early Church centred on the resurrection on the Last Day This resurrection happens to the total man and not only to the body. Paul speaks of the resurrection not of 'the body' but of 'the dead.'

"Together with this hope for the resurrection on the Last Day, we find still another thought in Paul. Dying leads immediately to full participation with Christ and life with Him (2 Corinthians 5:6 ff; Philippians 1:23). The apostle apparently felt that there was no contradiction between these two thoughts. In this letter to the Philippians, he first says that he expects to be immediately united with Christ, and later says that Christians expect to receive a new bodily existence, and therewith life out of death, from the Lord when He comes again. Paul makes no attempt to reconcile these two thoughts. . . .

"The Church's doctrine of eschatology, however, *attempted to put these two expectations of hope into a temporal relationship to each other* [my emphasis]. This is done through the concept of an 'intermediate state' between the death of the individual and the Last Day when he will receive a new bodily existence."

Althaus then explains how the New Testament idea of resurrection which affects the whole man gave way to the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul. The Last Day, as a consequence, lost much of its significance, since departed souls have already received all that is decisively important long before this. Eschatological interests were no longer strongly directed to the Day of Christ's coming again.

But *the difference between this and the hope of the New Testament is, of course, very great indeed*. So that, against this background, as Althaus points out, we are better able to measure the real significance of Luther's Reformation in relation to eschatology.

Althaus observes:

"Luther generally understands the condition between death and the resurrection as a deep and dreamless sleep without consciousness and feeling. When the dead are awakened on the Last Day, they will — like a man who awakes in the morning — know neither where they were nor how long they have rested. **For just as a man who falls asleep and sleeps soundly until morning does not know what has happened to him when he wakes up, so we shall suddenly rise on the Last Day; and we shall**

know neither what death has been like nor how we have come through it. Luther therefore says nothing about souls without their bodies enjoying true life and blessedness before the resurrection.

Again, Althaus quotes from Luther verbatim: **"We are to sleep until He comes and knocks on the grave and says, 'Dr. Martin, get up'. Then I will arise in a moment and will be eternally happy with Him."** Althaus then comments on this by saying that Luther can, as the Apostle Paul does, stress the fact that Christ and eternal life await us *immediately* [emphasis mine] beyond death. Holding these two views side by side created no problems for Luther. For he recognized that our earthly concepts and measurements of time are no longer valid on the other side of death.

Althaus quotes Luther once again:

"Here you must put time out of your mind and know that in that world there is neither time nor a measurement of time, but everything is one eternal moment. . . ."³⁶⁰

Since there is no measuring of time in God's sight, a thousand years before Him must be as though they were only a day; for this reason the first man Adam is just as close to Him as the last man who will be born before the Last Day. . . .

Althaus comments on this statement, explaining that (in Luther's view) for those who have died, the Last Day comes very soon after their death — even **immediately** (so Luther) when they die. As Luther himself put it: **"Each of us has his own Last Day when he dies."**

Pursuing Luther's argument, Althaus observes that we therefore arrive at the end of the world and the Last Day at the very moment of our death. Yet it comes no sooner to the departed than to all generations after us, until the temporal end of the world. Quoting Luther once again, **"In that life a thousand years before God will not even be one day. And when we are resurrected, it will seem to Adam and the patriarchs just as though they were living half an hour ago. There is no time there. . . . The patriarchs will not reach the Last Day before we do."**

Althaus concludes: "This understanding of *the Last Day as something which is always near and even present when we die* is the unity in which these two lines of expectation, which we found previously in Paul, flow together without *excluding each other*" [emphasis mine].

³⁶⁰ Althaus has a footnote here in which he remarks: "Note that Luther thinks of time as being set aside *not only subjectively* for those who sleep, *but also objectively* in God's eternity".

Reactions to this thesis

The discovery of Luther's position on this subject, a position of which I was previously quite unaware, came as an exciting one. And it encouraged me greatly since it can be very disturbing to find oneself way out in left field where no one else is. When I first began to explore this line of thought and wrote about the subject in the early 1930s, few Christians of my acquaintance could either understand or accept the idea of timelessness. As the Theory of Relativity filtered down into the arena of the intelligent reading public and the idea of timelessness became a subject of discussion, it was possible to present my thesis to more receptive audiences — as was done before the Kelvin Institute in the 1930s, and at an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship Conference held at Elburn, near Chicago, in 1954. In 1958 a Doorway Paper explored the thesis in some detail and the response to it encouraged me to attempt a book length manuscript to cover it more thoroughly — and thus came about the writing of this volume. The translation into English of the *Theology of Martin Luther* and its publication in 1975 therefore came as a wonderful stimulus to finalize *Journey out of Time*.

I know this has not been an easy book to read. If my thesis should turn out to be a generative one, others will struggle to put it into more effective form, to create ways of saying things with greater facility and to employ analogues which better suit the purpose than mine have done.

In due course what has really been terribly difficult to reduce to comprehensible language will be spelled out so simply and so effectively that it will seem obvious to the reader how it all ought to have been set forth in the first place. But the first attempt to describe a new concept is always the most difficult, and only very rarely succeeds until others who happen to be sympathetic to the idea have had time to try their hand at it also.

It seems to me that the whole subject rests somewhere in a kind of neutral territory that lies between intellectual comprehension and intuition — an almost inspired perception that is of a spiritual nature. Over the years, I have often observed that minds less trammled with education and more nurtured on simple Bible study will grasp the complexities of the situation and go away rejoicing with a very real understanding. And not infrequently they have added to my own. Others have gone away shaking their learned heads and saying, "All too speculative — frankly, I don't think we ought to trouble ourselves with such things."

Yet there are some who *do* "trouble themselves with such things," and who are still open-minded and who have the possible advantage over others of not knowing enough of what has been said in the past, and are therefore not in a mental straight-jacket as a result. It is possible to know too much of traditional wisdom to be able to learn any more: too much has to be un-learned first. It is amazing to

discover what one may *not* see when habit of thought and fear of being counted 'odd' have successfully put blinkers on one's vision.

Events portrayed diagrammatically

In conclusion, I want to make one more attempt to work out my thesis, as I see it, in the historical setting of biblical events from the day of Adam's creation until the day of the Lord's return. And I want to do it with a series of diagrams, each of which builds upon the previous one, thus hopefully making their meaning fairly easy to grasp. I know how frightening diagrams can be!

I am making only two basically simple assumptions as to the historical framework, neither of which need to be considered as anything more than a reference point for the sake only of concrete discussion. The two assumptions are that Adam was created somewhere around 4000 B. C., and that the Lord will return in the not too distant future, let us say 2020 A. D. The actual dates are quite unimportant in themselves as far as the diagrams are concerned. But for many readers it may help to be rather specific in order to make the picture fit within the framework of biblical history as commonly understood, allowing very loosely for what is prophesied about the future.

Adam's creation date can be altered to suit the reader's preference and it will make absolutely no difference to the diagrams if all the figures are adjusted accordingly. And as to the date of the Lord's return, it must be understood as entirely provisional — it is, after all, totally hidden from us at the moment. All we know for *certain* is that it is a future *certainly!*

So, looking first at Figure 8.

Here we have a span of history B.C. and A.D., with Adam's date of creation at one end and the Lord's return at the other. The first Adam was placed on the earth to have dominion over it — and he failed miserably. The second Adam will come to the earth to have dominion over it - and will succeed magnificently. These two points in time are therefore highly significant — and antithetical.

If Adam was created 4004 B.C., as many chronologists in the past have concluded, and if he lived 930 years as the Bible says, he died somewhere about 3074 B.C. It depends on the length of the biblical year, whether it was 360 days long or 365 days long. I have indicated this presumptive data on the diagram. At the other end of the scale I have shown the Lord's return to earth as being in 2020 A.D. The arrow at this point indicates his descent from heaven. This is not to be taken as a prediction, it is adopted completely arbitrarily in order to be specific for the reasons stated above. I am not pretending to be a prophet. All that is assumed with confidence is that we are to enter his presence at the time of his coming again. The Figure is therefore straight forward enough and quite easily comprehended.

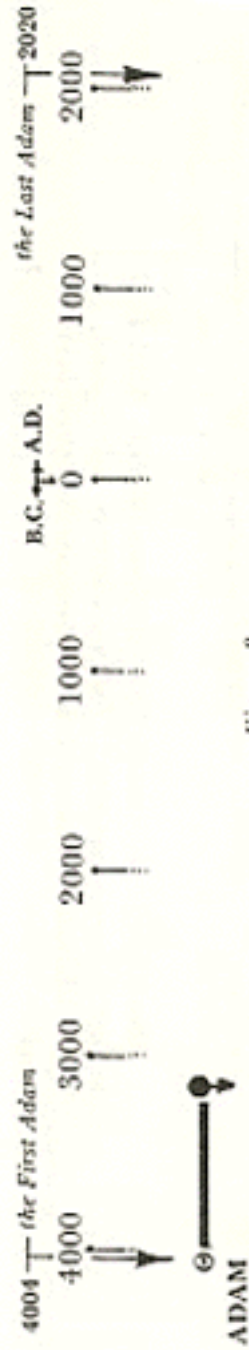


Figure 8

Symbols: ⊗ signifies creation (or birth); ⊗• signifies death and burial; — signifies life span.

When Adam steps into 'Jordan', all the centuries between his death and the Lord's return are eclipsed, and at the time of his death he passes at once to the year 2020 and the Lord's Second Coming. This is displayed graphically in Figure 9.

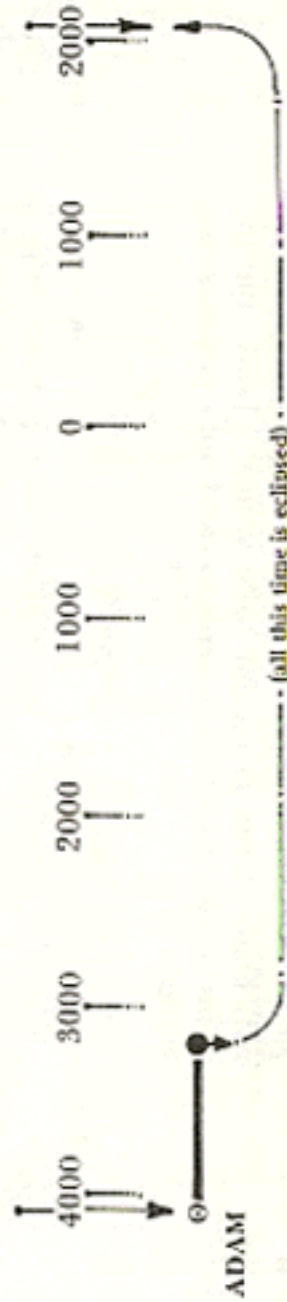
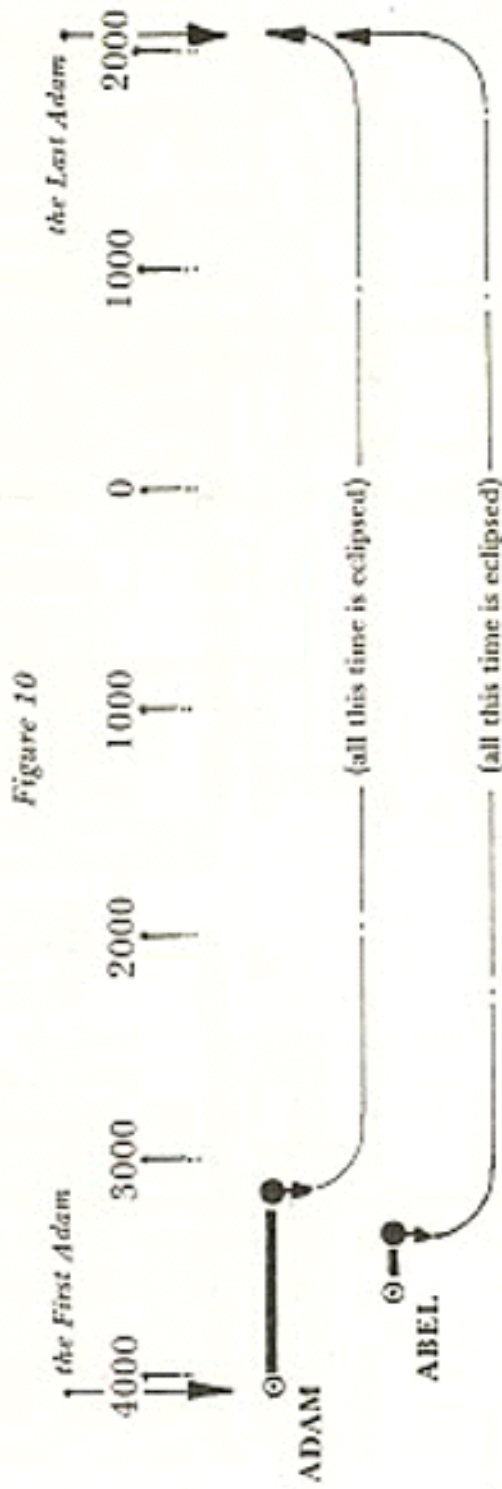


Figure 9

Adam is followed by Abel who nevertheless predeceased him. Viewed from our time frame, Abel therefore anticipates Adam in passing to be with the Lord. But in point of fact they both enter into the Lord's presence together.



Thus Abel and Adam exit at different times, Abel first because he was murdered 750 years before Adam died, yet they both enter into the Lord's presence together as He returns.

Then come Abraham and David as examples of the many saints who followed in the succeeding years (Fig.11).

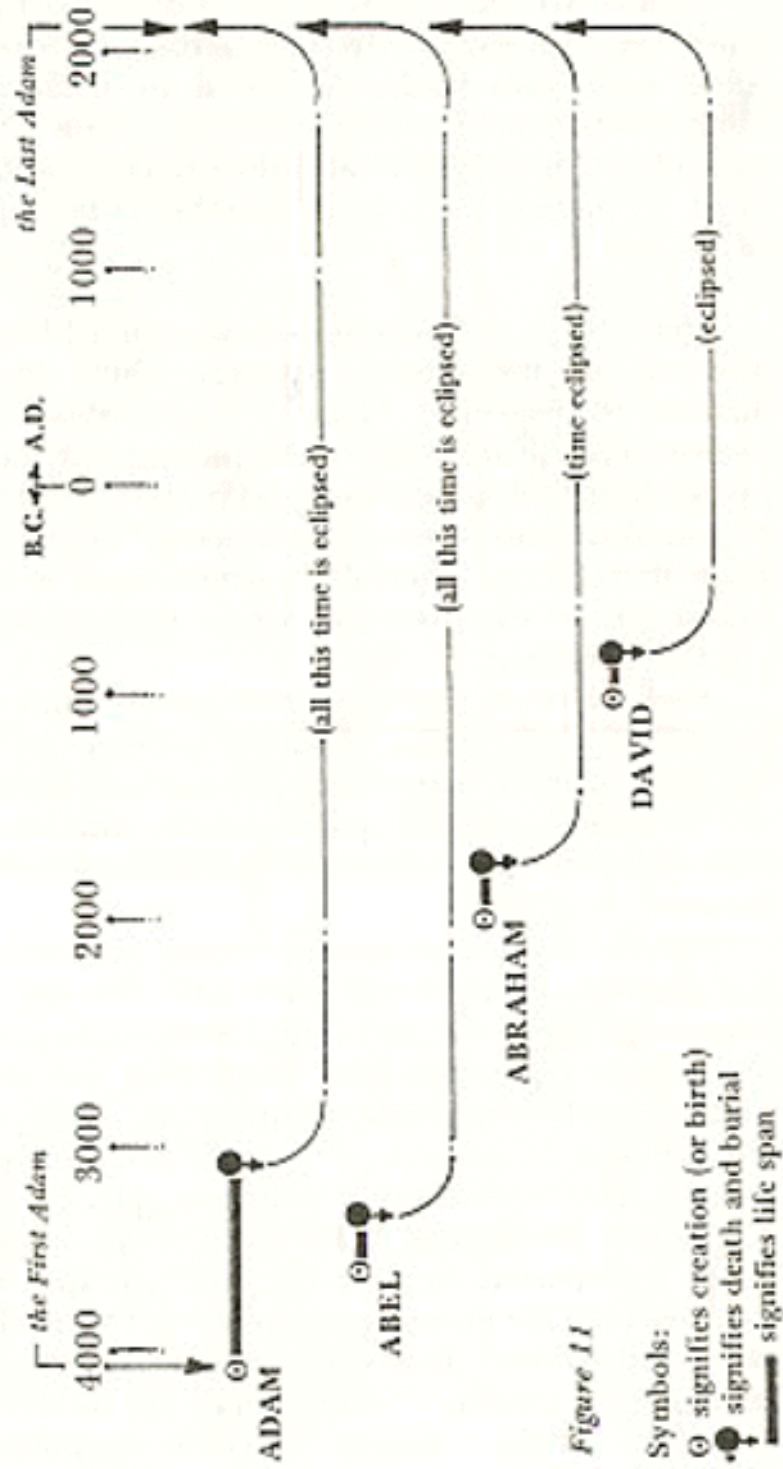


Figure 11

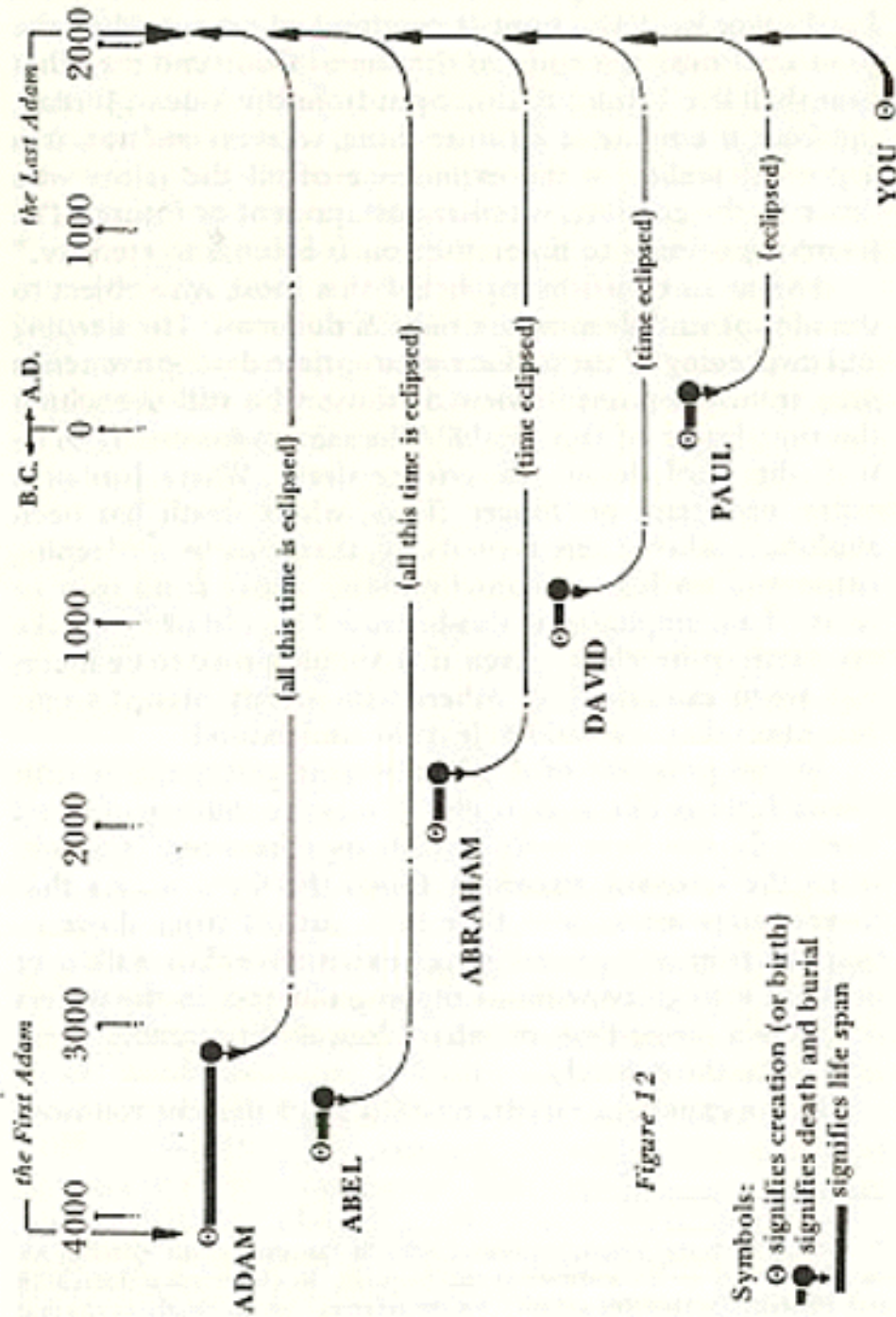


Figure 12

And so we add names as the centuries go by and as the saints come one by one to the crossing of Jordan. Arriving there, each finds Jordan has dried up. Each also finds all other saints touching its bank at the same moment; and each passes directly over into the presence of the returning Lord, all making the journey together at the same moment (Fig. 12).³⁶¹

“Whosoever believes. . . shall never die.”

Here, then, is a possible solution that I believe accommodates all the crucial passages which are otherwise difficult to reconcile. These "irreconcilables" would now seem to disappear as the whole picture which emerges displays a beautiful concordance with itself. And the problem of a kind of half-identity in a supposed interim is resolved, since there *is* no interval in which such a half-identity would ever be experienced. Where there is no time, there can be no interval.

Such a resolution preserves intact what has always seemed to me the most wonderful prospect for the departing saint, namely, immediate passage into the presence of the Lord *and* immediate participation, with all other saints from Adam to the end of the age, in the Lord's return to the earth in glory.

For the living who remain behind as each saint makes this journey, death is still an enemy because it separates from loved ones. But for those who step into Jordan, death is neither a separation from loved ones nor an interim of waiting: only immediate glorification. Nor is there any discontinuity of consciousness or of the sense of personal identity, since we are never without a body.

Thus in the evening of life when the time finally arrives for us to depart to be with the Lord, the shadow of death is turned into the morning of a new day (Amos 5:8³⁶²). Every man is equidistant from that great Day. No one arrives embarrassingly early, or late: and every one will be perfectly clothed for the occasion. It will be the most wonderful union imaginable.

³⁶¹ This was 'foreseen' by Enoch, "the seventh from Adam", who saw "the Lord coming with ten thousands of his saints" (Jude 14). Even John seems to hint at this when he says, "We know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is" (1 John 3:2). In other words, we shall not see Him until He appears, i.e., until He comes again. Or, to put it differently again, when we see Him it will be at his coming again. Thus our leaving this life "this day" will prove for us to be the time of his coming again, as it will for all his saints. Thus we shall, like Enoch, see Him coming with all his saints when we go at once to be with Him.

³⁶² "Seek him who makes the seven stars and Orion, and turns the shadow of death into the morning, and makes the day dark with night. . . ." Amos 5:8.

This fusion of present and future is reflected in the Lord's words: "The hour is coming and now is when the dead shall hear the voice of the son of God: and they that hear shall live" (John 5:25). Seen from this side of Jordan, *the* hour is coming is a future thing, whereas *and now is* is a present reality in the experience of all the saints who arrive at the Crossing, whether past, present or future. The *is coming* belongs to time: the *now is* belongs to eternity.³⁶³

I want to re-affirm my belief that those who object to the idea of soul-sleeping are right in doing so. The sleeping and awakening of the soul are appropriate descriptive terms only from the point of view of those who still live within the time-frame of this world. The saints who depart to be with the Lord do not *experience* sleep. Where Jordan is rolled back and no longer flows, where death has been abolished, where there is no dying, there can be no sleeping either and no loss of consciousness. There *is* no river to cross. I am emphasizing this because I should like to make my thesis quite clear. Even if it should prove to be incorrect when examined by others without my bias, it seems important that it should at least be understood.

In the prospect of death, the saint anticipates it with mixed feelings like anyone else, just as the children of Israel faced a Jordan river *in flood* with apprehension. It is only when the moment arrives to touch the flood waters that these waters are seen to have been cut off from above so that the river as such no longer exists. We thus walk over dryshod into glory without dipping our feet in the waters themselves, regardless of what clinical appearances there may be to the contrary.

In the experience itself, death is not a descent followed by a resurrection, but an immediate graduation. As Jesus said: "Whosoever lives and believes shall never die." Only to those who remain locked in time does it seem a descent, and for them the promise of rising again is therefore very necessary. The eclipse of time for the departing believer in this experience obliterates any pause that might be anticipated between departing and arriving.

The transition is a single smooth journey out of time into eternity, from a lower order of consciousness into a higher one, from a dying world into an incorruptible one that passes not away — above all, from a Presence that is mediated, into a Presence that is immediate. And so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Alleluia!

THE END

³⁶³ The Lord's words could, of course, refer in this case to the effect of his earthly ministry on his audience at that moment. But his words in John 5:28 and 29 ("Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation") seem to make this unlikely, for the reference here is clearly to *physical* resurrection.

PERSONAL POSTSCRIPT

Let me close with an expression of personal faith. Paul tells us that "Christ in us is the hope of glory" (Colossians 1:27). I am convinced this is true, almost inconceivable though it is. I cannot examine my own soul without despairing of the state of it. Though I have known and walked with the Lord for almost fifty years, I do not yet see — except upon very rare occasions and then only in a very tentative way — that I am a better person than I was when I first became by his grace a member of the blameless family of God. Yet those few brief moments of clearer vision assure me that there is indeed a seed of new life that is bearing everlasting fruit in my heart as the Lord Jesus Christ, my Saviour, finds ways and means to re-form (one could almost say re-incarnate) Himself in me as a new creation (2 Corinthians 5:17³⁶⁴). For this is the source of my new life (Galatians 2:20³⁶⁵). *This*, and this alone, is my hope of glory: Christ in me. It is the assurance of Paul and it is the hope of every child of God.

When I find myself in his wonderful presence, it will not be as a miserable wretch, apologizing before God for my ragged soul that would seem scarcely worth the price of its purchase. No, it will be a glorious new me! It will be a perfected spirit (with all that belongs to the old sinful self buried and done with for ever) reunited with a resurrected body made like unto *his* "glorious body" (Philippians 3:21³⁶⁶) to form in some wholly satisfying way a new, yet identifiable, Arthur C. Custance. But because that name represents the old person and not the new, that name, like the old person it represents, will no longer be used or even remembered. I shall have a new name (Revelation. 2:17³⁶⁷). This is the promise of eternity. . . a

³⁶⁴ "If any man be in Christ Jesus, he is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold all things are become new." 2 Corinthians 5:17.

³⁶⁵ "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ lives in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faithfulness of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me." Galatians 2:20.

³⁶⁶ "[the Lord Jesus Christ] 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.

³⁶⁷ "He that has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches; To him who overcomes will I give to eat of the hidden manna and will give him a white stone, and

glorious new nature worthy to behold the Lord in his glory and to form a part of his royal court.

Meanwhile, I do not look for the Lord's return and the glory that shall be revealed as an event coming long after I depart from this scene. I look for it the very moment I am called home to be with Him.³⁶⁸ And I have every confidence of joining Him with all his saints who have gone before me and with all who shall have come after me. This is my expectation: and this will be my fulfillment.³⁶⁹

What a day of rejoicing that will be!

➤ PROCEED TO
APPENDIXES & INDEXES



in the stone a “new name written, which no man knows except he who receives it.”

³⁶⁸ For Arthur, “that very moment” was October 22, 1985, at noon.

³⁶⁹ And what a fulfillment! The One who had kept him from falling in this life, now presented him before the glorious Presence not only “faultless” but “with exceeding joy”! That is the prospect promised in Jude 24, 25: “Now unto him who is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory, with exceeding joy, to the only wise God, our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.”