

ALL THINGS IN CHRIST

In all wisdom and prudence making known to us the mystery of His will according to His good pleasure which He purposed in Him the plan for the fullness of the times

***TO HEAD UP THE ALL THINGS IN THE CHRIST,
the things in the heavens and the things upon the earth, in Him...***

(Ephesians 1:8b-10)

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Challenging Verses

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Introduction

But our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases. (Psalm 115:3 NASB)

This verse is a good reminder for all of us who search God's Word seeking for spiritual truth and revelation. No matter how much we think Scripture reveals to us on any one subject, we must acknowledge that at the end of the day, God is Sovereign and He does whatever He pleases.

Of course, man seems to have the same attitude and often does whatever he pleases, both good and bad; however, God does not move in this way. All that God does is with His ultimate purpose in view as He works out all things for good according to this purpose. God is love, and all His actions are done in love that never fails. He is *the* redemptive, restorative, reconciliatory, reformatory, and revisiting God beyond measure.

So, when we say that God does whatever He pleases, we must see this as a glorious attribute of our God and one in which we can take great joy and comfort.

However, it must also be noted that it seems as if God has established universal principles or laws that He will not violate in dealing with man. So, although we must acknowledge that He does as He pleases, we must also acknowledge that He operates according to His principles or laws, which are a reflection of who He is, in dealing with us as well. If, for a reason only known by Him, God does something outside the box of our understanding, then so be it. He is the Potter and we are the clay, and it is His creation to do with as He pleases.

For example, I am convinced that, according to His Word, Elijah and Enoch were not taken to heaven but died as all men die. In the same vein, I believe the twelve apostles remain asleep in Jesus, meaning they, like the rest of us, are waiting for the resurrection. However, if all of these great men are with the Lord in heaven at this very moment, who am I to challenge God?

But this leaves us with a most pressing question. How are we to resolve differences of understanding regarding God's plan? Many of the Lord's people have visions and dreams, something that Scripture states we are to have in the last days (Acts 2:17). Some are visions and dreams of heaven and hell that many see as proofs that we die and go to heaven or to hell. But are these visions and dreams actual proofs of these things, or do they signify something else? Are we to build doctrine on extra-biblical visions and dreams that are open to all sorts of interpretation, including misinterpretation? It is often said that visions and dreams must not conflict with Scripture. This is a must!

However, what are we to do when people believe that billions of people created to be in the image of God are in an eternal place of literal fire called *hell* when Scripture indicates otherwise? Are we to accept and hold to a dream of hell as proof of its existence, at least as conveyed in the dream, when it can be proven by Scripture that it does not exist as interpreted from the dream?

The point I am making is this: Having visions and dreams is biblical but their interpretation may not be. They must not be used to settle doctrinal differences. The only way we can and must

settle doctrinal differences or, if you will, different interpretation of Scripture is through a healthy study and debate of Scripture. It is all that God has given us to go on in this age.

Perhaps, He is writing a third testament in our age, but He has not revealed to us at this point what it is and where it is to be found. Actually, I believe it is being written on our hearts, so that when we attain to our new immortal bodies, there will be no more debate or dispute over His truth. Simply, we will know His laws and be an expression of them. Thus, the Body of Christ is destined to be the Third Testament, the living expression and witness of Jesus.

Now, this is a long way of introducing the subject of this article.

As the Table of Contents reveals, this article addresses some passages of Scripture that are often used as proof of soul immortality, dying and going to heaven or hell, saints being in heaven today, etc.

As I have studied these issues, I have discovered that there are alternative interpretations of Scripture that, generally, are not included in mainline Christian teaching. Actually, the mainstream adamantly rejects some of these interpretations and labels those who hold to them as heretics destined for hell. Since I do not believe in hell, at least as mainstream Christendom does, I have no fear of hell. What I do fear is missing the Lord's truth that sets us free and keeps us out of bondage.

By the way, what is presented in the following is not original with me; I have simply compiled what others have offered as alternative interpretations. Nevertheless, at this point, I am in their camp on these issues.

The subject matter of some of my writings might be controversial to some, especially when it comes to subjects that challenge mainstream teaching. In writing, I have to limit myself to how much I include in an article; otherwise, they could turn into books in their own right. Come to think of it, some of my articles are at least booklets, and this one is no exception. In spite of this, I still cannot include every possible verse that could be used to further support my conclusions.

At any rate, as I have discussed some of these topics with others, there are certain "pet" or favorite verses that periodically come up to challenge or counter what I have written. This is good, for it causes me to search all the more diligently and seek the Holy Spirit for guidance.

The fact of the matter is that this is all any of us can do. We must rely on the Spirit of truth to lead us into all truth. If we come up with different conclusions, all we can do is leave it at that and trust that in time and with further diligence, the Spirit of God will reveal if we are on or off track with God's truth.

What follows has been compiled and reedited from previous writings, so that there is one up-to-date reference that offers alternative interpretations to some difficult passages of Scripture. Other challenging verses are covered under other writings, such as Articles #17, 40, and 47.

Let us start with some sets of verses.

(13) I charge you in the presence of God, who gives life to all things, and of Christ Jesus, who testified the good confession before Pontius Pilate, (14) that you keep the commandment without stain or reproach until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ, (15) which He will bring about at the proper time—He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords, (16) *who alone possesses immortality* and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. To Him be honor and eternal dominion! Amen. (1 Timothy 6:13-16 NASB)

"No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man. (John 3:13 NASB)

(6) But the righteousness which is of faith says these words, Say not in your heart, Who will go up to heaven? that is, to make Christ come down: (7) Or, Who will go down into the deep? that is, to make Christ come again from the dead: (Romans 10:6-7 BBE)

(24) For Christ did not enter a holy place made with hands, a mere copy of the true one, but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us; (25) nor was it that He would offer Himself often, as the high priest enters the holy place year by year with blood that is not his own. (Hebrews 9:24-25 NASB)

Only one conclusion seems to be available to us in these verses: Jesus alone is immortal, and no one but Jesus has ascended into heaven, for He alone has entered heaven itself to appear on our behalf. If this is not enough evidence of who alone is in heaven today, consider another verse.

"Brethren, I may confidently say to you regarding the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day." (Acts 2:29 NASB)

Peter declared this at Pentecost that occurred after the Lord's final ascension back to the throne. Peter wanted his brethren to know that David *the man* is dead and his body lies in the earth waiting to be raised up from the dead. Why? Because only one has been raised up from among the dead to appear in heaven on our behalf!

So this poses a question...

1. WHEN IS IMMORTALITY PUT ON?

(1) For we know that if the earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. (2) For indeed in this house we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven (3) inasmuch as we, having put it on, will not be found naked. (4) For indeed while we are in this tent, we groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, *so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.* (5) Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave to us the Spirit as a pledge. (2 Corinthians 5:1-5 NASB)

These verses are most often quoted by those who hold that believers go to heaven immediately *in* death, and, it should be added, unbelievers go to hell immediately or, perhaps, later. According to this thinking, Paul wanted to put off his earthly, physical body so he could go to heaven and be with the Lord where he would receive a spiritual body.

To be sure, Paul desired to be with the Lord, as we all should desire, but this does not mean that Paul taught that at death a believer immediately goes to heaven and gets a new body. If this were so, which it is not, then all that Paul taught on the resurrection would be meaningless.

Paul made *no such assertion* and placed *no immediacy* between being in the earthly body and receiving the dwelling from heaven, which Paul called the spiritual body.

As surely as there are physical [soulish] bodies, there are spiritual bodies. And our physical bodies will be changed into spiritual bodies. (1 Corinthians 15:44 CEV [CV])

Paul used the phrase "dwelling from heaven" to identify the source of the dwelling. It is heavenly because it comes from God, and it is spiritual because God is spirit, and God's seed is planted within all who believe (1 John 3:9).

However, this does not mean that the spiritual body will be restricted to heaven, for the saints shall **reign upon the earth** (Revelation 5:10). The spiritual body will be like Jesus' body after He was resurrected and revealed Himself to His disciples.

Again, the only way to receive a spiritual body is through resurrection and transfiguration. In fact, the above opening verses must be interpreted in light of Paul's defense of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. The two cannot and must not be separated. Paul was simply expressing what should be the desire of every believer, that is, immortality that comes through resurrection and transfiguration. We must put off corruption and put on incorruption, and we must put off mortality and put on immortality. The earnest (pledge) of the spirit within us groans for the spiritual body. Are you groaning?

It is vital to understand that Paul referred to the dead as being asleep: **God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus** (i.e., **the dead in Christ**) (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16). Jesus made the same connection between death and sleep: **"Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep. Lazarus is dead"** (John 11:11, 14).

But going back further, the oldest book of the Bible makes the same assertion: **So man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no longer, he will not awake nor be aroused out of his sleep** (Job 14:12). Asaph declared: **Both rider and horse were cast into a dead sleep** (Psalm 76:6). David wrote: **As for me, I shall behold Your face in righteousness; I will be satisfied with Your likeness when I awake** (Psalm 17:15).

Again, according to Peter, **the patriarch David both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day, for it was not David who ascended into heaven** (Acts 2:29, 34). **Sleep signifies a state of unconsciousness.** Solomon wrote that **the dead do not know anything** (Ecclesiastes 9:5). It is safe to state that the ancient Hebrews held this view of death.

Again, Job asked: **"If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my struggle I will wait until my change comes** (Job 14:14), which only comes through resurrection and transfiguration. According to the testimony of Scripture, there is no other way out of the sleep of death, which is an unconscious state.

Death is merely a sleep time for all mankind. It is a state of unconsciousness. One day, all will be awakened from their sleep to rise up and meet the Lord, whether at the first or second resurrection.

"But as for you [i.e., Daniel], go your way to the end; then you will enter into rest and rise again for your allotted portion at the end of the age." (Daniel 12:13 NASB)

The period of sleep or rest will seem like a night, even though it might be a very long time, as in hundreds or thousands of years, as is the case for Daniel. The next moment of consciousness for all the dead will be in the presence of the Lord, even if it is to face the Great White Throne through the second resurrection.

Some people believe that resurrection occurs at the death of the believer. However, this clearly ignores or distorts the fact that the two resurrections are described as major, distinct events at specific points in time (John 5:28-29; 11:24; 1 Corinthians 15:52; 1 Thessalonians 1:10; 4:13-18; Revelation 20:4-6; 11-15). Our expectation is to rise in the first resurrection if we die before the Lord comes. We eagerly wait for our Savior to come from heaven.

There can be no inconsistencies in Paul's writings. The heavenly body comes into view only at the resurrection and snatching away of believers, and this comes into view when our Savior comes from heaven, not when we go to heaven. We are to eagerly wait for Him to come from heaven. To the Philippians, he wrote...

(20) For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; (21) who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself. (Philippians 3:20-21 NASB)

Further, 2 Corinthians 5 must be interpreted in light of 1 Corinthians 15.

Because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:4 NASB)

(53) For this perishable must put on the imperishable, and this mortal must put on immortality. (54) But when this perishable will have put on the imperishable, and this mortal will have put on immortality, then will come about the saying that is written, "DEATH IS SWALLOWED UP in victory. (1 Corinthians 15:53-54 NASB)

Mortality or death is swallowed up in immortality. According to Paul's evangel, there is no other way!

It is unfortunate, but many Christians believe in the immortality of the soul, and, on this basis, they have fallen into the error of the soul going to heaven upon death. However, this belief comes from Greek philosophers, not Scripture, and has long been embraced by pagan religions.

The soul is connected to the body and its blood, **for the soul of the flesh is in the blood** (Leviticus 17:11 DNT). When the spirit of life was breathed into Adam, he became **a living soul**. Soul is not given by God; it comes about when life comes into the body. When the body dies, so does the soul, for the soul is the animation (sensations) or consciousness of the body. Pour out the blood of the body, and the body and soul die. Thus, the soul is nothing apart from the body.

Consider this: If the soul were immortal and went to heaven on death, one would go to heaven unclothed because the heavenly clothing, which is spirit, not soul, only comes at the resurrection and transfiguration. This means that the believer would be naked before God, for the soul does not exist apart from the body, which is the way that mankind is constituted.

Some work around this difficulty by teaching that the soul is clothed with some intermediary covering. Their reasoning is based on *the parable* (not a literal story) of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31). However, this is based on a faulty understanding of this parable. The pagans believed in the immortality of the soul and, sadly, so do many believers.

Finally, some might argue that it is the spirit that is immortal, not the soul. In speaking of death, Solomon wrote: **Then the dust** [i.e., physical body] **will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it** (Ecclesiastes 12:7 NASB).

Answer this question: Do you have any recollection of the spirit prior to your birth? I surely don't!

Scripture gives us no reason to believe our spirit retains consciousness in death either. It simply returns to God who gave it in the first place. I suspect, but cannot prove it, that our memory and identity is somehow retained in the spirit just as a computer retains memory after it is shut off; data is retained even with the power turned off. Let us keep in mind that we must be transfigured into a **spiritual body**, not simply some spirit being. As Paul wrote, we are **waiting eagerly for the redemption of our body** (Romans 8:23).

2. WHAT DOES "PASSED OUT OF DEATH INTO LIFE" MEAN?

"Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life [eonian life; Life of the Ages; age-during life], **and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.** (John 5:24 NASB [CV; WNT; YLT])

This is a very interesting verse, especially the phrase *passed out of death into life*, that can be, and probably is, misinterpreted to support the doctrine of an afterlife *in* death, as if one will never truly die even though the body does, or even a spiritual resurrection when one first believes, as if one will not require a physical resurrection of the body.

But, what did Jesus mean by *passed out of death into life*? When does one not come into judgment, but passes out of death into life? I will give the answer and then explain it.

The answer is discovered in the verses that follow (5:25-29) that speak of the second or general resurrection. Simply, Jesus was not referring to the first resurrection that will occur at the end of our present eon, but to the second resurrection of the rest of the dead that will be raised up to appear before the **Great White Throne Judgment** at least one-thousand years from now (Revelation 20:5; 11). Thus, verse 24 is explained by verses 25-29.

(25) "Truly, truly, I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead will hear the voice of the Son of God, and those who hear will live. (26) "For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself; (27) and He gave Him authority to execute judgment, because He is the Son of Man. (28) "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear His voice, (29) and will come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment. (John 5:25-29 NASB)

We need to be clear that Jesus was presenting the Jewish view of one resurrection (i.e., **a** resurrection) of the dead, not **the** resurrection from among the dead of which Jesus is the firstborn (Colossians 1:18).

As you might recall, Jesus' disciples were puzzled when He first mentioned the phrase *rising from the dead* (Mark 9:9-10). They were puzzled because they had been taught that there was only one general resurrection of the righteous and the wicked. This view is supported by Paul when Ananias the high priest, along with some elders and an attorney, brought charges against Paul before Felix the governor.

(14) "But this I admit to you, that according to the Way which they call a sect I do serve the God of our fathers, believing everything that is in accordance with the Law and that is written in the Prophets; (15) having a hope in God, which these men cherish themselves, that there shall certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked. (Acts 24:14-15 NASB)

Notice that *these men* refer to the Jews that brought the charges against him. Paul clearly acknowledged that their hope was **a** (i.e., one) resurrection that will include two groups of people. This resurrection will occur in *an hour*, that is, at one moment in time, when the dead, all those in the tombs, will hear the voice of the Son of Man who has been given the authority to execute judgment. There is only one judgment that fits this description; it is the Great White Throne Judgment of John's Patmos vision (Revelation 20:11-15), at which time the righteous will be **saved, yet so as through fire** (1 Corinthians 3:15), and the wicked will face judgment that leads to the lake of fire and brimstone, which is the second death [of deeds, not the body] (Revelation 20:14; 21:8). The righteous are the believers who will receive the promise of immortal life but who are disqualified from participating in the *out*-resurrection because they did not conquer while in mortal bodies. The wicked are the unbelievers.

Now, let us return to verse 24 and explain it based on the second resurrection.

The first thing to note is that Jesus did not state that one had to believe in Him but rather had to believe Him, God the Father, who sent Him. Prior to this, it is recorded that the Jews sought to kill Jesus for claiming equality with God (John 5:18).

In response to His claim that God is His Father, Jesus told the Jews that were listening: **"Truly, truly, I say to you, the Son can do nothing of Himself, unless it is something He sees the Father doing; for whatever the Father does, these things the Son also does in like manner** (John 5:19 NASB).

Notice how Jesus did not try to defend His position; He simply stated the fact of His relationship with His Father. We could say that, when Jesus told them to believe Him who sent Him, it was His way of stating: Believe God the Father who said: **This is My beloved Son, in whom I well-pleased, listen to Him** (Matthew 3:17; 17:5; Mark 1:11; 9:7; Luke 3:22; 9:35).

The second thing to note is that *eonian life* is given to all who believe in the Father's declaration and identification of His Son. I realize that most translations use the term *eternal* life, but, as stressed many times in previous writings, concordantly speaking, the word *eonian* is more accurate.

All of us who believe in this age have the promise of immortality or, if you will, an immortal life, that is, the promise of a new body that is no longer subject to death and in which sin has no place. Eonian life speaks of having immortal life in an age. The question is in which age one will come into immortality. Will it be at the end of our present wicked age, meaning one's immortality will come through the first or **out-resurrection and transfiguration**, or will it come through the second resurrection to appear before the **Great White Throne Judgment** that follows the completion of the **Kingdom Age**?

In light of verses 25-29, Jesus was not referring to eonian life during the coming Kingdom Age but to life in the age after this in what Peter called **God's Day** or **the Day of God**, when righteousness dwells on a new earth (2 Peter 3:12), which I believe is either a series of ages or one long age that ends with what Paul called **the consummation of the ages** [eons] (1 Corinthians 10:11 CV). Contextually, in John 5:24, *eonian life* refers to the promise of immortal life that comes through the second resurrection at the Great White Throne and not the *out-resurrection* that Paul sought (Philippians 3:11).

The third thing to note is that one who has eonian life will not come into judgment. For those who know their Bibles, this should cause at least a pause. After all, according to Paul, **we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ** (2 Corinthians 5:10), which he also calls **the judgment seat of God** (Romans 14:10). Do Jesus and Paul contradict each other? No; they are in complete agreement. Paul spoke in general terms without specifying which judgment; however, Jesus specified the judgment as the Great White Throne that leads to the second death, without naming it directly.

There is more than one judgment, just as there is more than one resurrection; the question is in which judgment one will be. Actually, there are three judgments: 1) the judgment of the conquerors at the *out-resurrection* that leads to reigning with Christ in the coming Kingdom

Age; 2) the judgment of the righteous believers at the Great White Throne that leads to life in God's Day; and 3) the judgment of the wicked at the Great White Throne that leads to cleansing in the lake of fire, which is the second death.

Finally, this leads to the phrase *passed out of death into life*. In a general sense, this hope applies to all mankind, but especially to believers. However, in the context of John 5:25-29, there is only one group in view, that is, the righteous believers who received the righteousness of Christ and the promise of immortal life when they first believed. They are excluded from the *out-resurrection*; nevertheless, they are saved, yet so as through fire. They will not have a part in the second death but will pass out of death of all kinds and into the life of the Son of God, **for the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable** (Romans 11:29).

3. WHAT DOES "TO NEVER DIE" MEAN?

In the account of raising Lazarus out of the death state, Jesus spoke to Martha, the sister of Lazarus, about those who believe in Him will never die. As with most traditions of men, this account, as recorded in John 11, is seen by many as proof that death is not really death but another life. Many seem to believe that Jesus was teaching that once a person believes, the person will never die, even if the body dies. This is not what Jesus meant.

Now, I want to approach the explanation of these verses in two ways. The first way is based on using the most common translations of the Greek text. The second is based on using a more literal rendering of the Greek text.

(25) Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: (26) And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25-26 KJV)

(25) Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes on me, though he have died, shall live; (26) and every one who lives and believes on me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11:25-26 DNT)

(25) "I am the Resurrection and the Life," said Jesus; "he who believes in me, even if he has died, he shall live; (26) and every one who is living and is a believer in me shall never, never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26 WNT)

Jesus spoke these marvelously encouraging words that He is the Resurrection and the Life. Notice that He did not state that He could raise the dead or that He had life. Surely, He can and did raise the dead, and He surely had a life that no man has ever had who has walked this earth; but He declared that He is *the* Resurrection and that He is *the* Life, each of which is emphasized with the definite article *the*. In other words, no man can know either resurrection or life apart from Christ, for He is the very essence of both.

Now, with this declaration, Jesus promised that whoever believes in Him will never die, but notice the order of His words. He was not stating that whoever believes in Him would never see

death. On the contrary, He started with death. If a person who believes in Him dies, he will yet live. Those who see that death is not death, but merely a pathway into another existence, might be tempted to take these verses as proof that when believers die they actually will not die but go to heaven. Jesus was not making such a statement. The fact of the matter is that He never introduced the concept of "going to heaven when you die" in this account or in any of His teaching to His disciples.

The context of this account is resurrection and life, with resurrection preceding life or, we could say, with resurrection being the way into immortal life, a life beyond death (i.e., *shall never, never die*). When believers die, they will come to life only through resurrection, and once they come alive through resurrection and are transfigured, they will never face death again. The order of Jesus' words is death, resurrection, life, never to die again. Consequently, the second death will have no power over a believer who has part in the first resurrection or *out-resurrection*.

This is confirmed through John in reference to the martyrs.

Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first [former] resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:6 NASB [CV])

Most all of those who believe in Jesus will face the first death, but once they are resurrected through the very Life of Christ that dwells in them, they will never have to face the second death that will result from the Great White Throne Judgment. In other words, once one who believes in Jesus is resurrected, that one will never, never have to face death again, specifically the second death that is reserved for the unbeliever.

Simply, Jesus was declaring that His Life would raise up all who believe in Him, and when they are raised they will be immortal.

Now, let us look at the second approach to this subject by considering a more accurate and literal rendering of verse 26, as presented in the *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* by Jay P. Green, Sr. and the *Concordant Greek Text* by Concordant Publishing Concern. This one verse is an excellent example of the traditions of men and interpretative bias being woven into the translation of Greek text.

The *Interlinear Greek-English New Testament* and the *Concordant Greek Text* show the Greek text and under each Greek word the equivalent English word or phrase is shown. This is called an *English Sublinear* because the English words appear on a line below the Greek text. Greek does not read like English, so a sublinear generally is not what we would call readable English. The editors or translators often take these words and form them into readable sentences. It is during this process that the traditions of men or interpretative biases become part of the translations.

The sublinear rendering in the *Interlinear* is: ***And everyone living and believing into Me, not ever shall die to the age.*** Anyone with a searching mind will immediately notice that the word

age appears in the Greek text, and yet it is almost always left out of most English versions. In case you missed the significance of this rendering, the Greek text contains the word *aiōn*, which translated means "age" or "eon," a long period of time with a beginning and an end. For those who use the *King James Version*, do you see the word *age* or *eon* in your Bible? Of course not!

But consider how Mr. Green translates his sublinear English into what he calls a literal translation: ***And everyone living and believing into Me shall not ever die forever.*** Notice that the Greek word *aiōn*, which he translated as *age* is now the word *forever*. How does one go from *age* to *forever* unless one's own interpretative bias is applied? So much for a literal translation!

The *Concordant Greek Sublinear* reads: ***And every the living and believing into me not no maybe-from-dying into the eon.*** In the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, it is translated: ***And everyone who is living and believing in Me, should by no means be dying for the eon.***

There is no bias built into this rendering, and as such, it is the most accurate and literal translation. By allowing the word *eon* into the verse, as it should be, the reader is left to interpret the verse, which also is as it should be.

So, what is the meaning of Jesus' words? Simply, Jesus was looking forward to the oncoming eon, which is the Messianic era (1,000-year reign of Christ). The conquering believers will enter eonian life in the oncoming eon. This is what the Jews of that day were looking for, and what Jesus was telling them they would enter through resurrection by believing on the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. There is no other way, for Christ is *the Way*!

4. WHAT DOES "TO BE DYING ONCE" MEAN?

After the Lord's death on the cross, it is recorded that many dead saints came out of the tombs and entered Jerusalem.

(51) And lo! the curtain of the temple is rent in two from above to the bottom, and the earth quaked, and the rocks are rent, (52) and the tombs were opened. And many bodies of the reposing saints were roused, (53) and, coming out of the tombs after His rousing, they entered into the holy city and are disclosed to many. (Matthew 27:51-53 CV)

Many teach that those who came out of the tomb walked the earth and then were taken up to heaven. However, no place in Scripture are we told that this, in fact, happened. Further, there is no indication that they were placed beyond death; that is, they were incorruptible and immortal. If they were, then they would still be walking this earth today. Consequently, we have every reason to believe that they died again, just like Lazarus who was raised from the dead and later died, according to the historical record.

Now, some might argue that, according to Hebrews, all men are destined to die once and then comes judgment. Doesn't this mean that the ones who came out of the tombs could not have died again? Perhaps not!

(27) And, in as much as it is reserved to the men to be dying once, yet after this a judging, (28) thus Christ also, being offered once for the bearing of the sins of many, will be seen a second time, by those awaiting Him, apart from sin, for salvation, through faith. (Hebrews 9:27-28 CV)

First, this cannot be taken as an absolute statement of truth, for we know that when the Lord comes for His people, those who are alive and remain will not see death; they will go from mortality to immortality without ever seeing death. So it is not an absolute truth that all must die. However, let it be understood that until that glorious day, death is the lot of all.

Second, notice the concordant rendering of this verse. It refers to "the men," not all men. Most translations state "unto men," and at least one states "all mankind." These are misleading, particularly the latter one, for they lead one to believe that it refers to all men, not the men. The question that this poses is: Who are the men? The answer to this question lies in the context of this portion of Scripture.

The Hebrews writer contrasted the two types of priests that the Hebrew believers could appreciate—the Levitical priests and the Chief Priest, who is Christ. All one needs to do is to read Hebrews to see the clear unveiling of how the priests all died, but Christ now lives. His priesthood is much greater. He is a priest of the order of Melchizedek (Hebrews 7:17). The first part of the sentence refers to the Levitical priests: ***And, in as much as it is reserved to the men to be dying once, yet after this a judging.*** The men in view are priests who all died in office. Their service was limited. However, part of their service dealt with judging.

Consequently, the men in view are the Levitical priests and the judging is that which occurred through them. Judging does not refer to the judgment of all mankind for sin, which was completed by the finished work of the cross. This deals with the judging of the innocent manslayers.

(22) 'But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, (23) or with any deadly object of stone, and without seeing it dropped on him so that he died, while he was not his enemy nor seeking his injury, (24) then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the blood avenger according to these ordinances. (25) 'The congregation shall deliver the manslayer from the hand of the blood avenger, and the congregation shall restore him to his city of refuge to which he fled; and he shall live in it until the death of the high priest who was anointed with the holy oil. (26) 'But if the manslayer at any time goes beyond the border of his city of refuge to which he may flee, (27) and the blood avenger finds him outside the border of his city of refuge, and the blood avenger kills the manslayer, he will not be guilty of blood (28) because he should have remained in his city of refuge until the death of the high priest. But after the death of the high priest the manslayer shall return to the land of his possession. (29) 'These things shall be for a statutory ordinance to you throughout your generations in all your dwellings. (Numbers 35:22-29 NASB)

The manslayer was commanded to go to a city of refuge until the death of the high priest. The period of time that the manslayer remained in the city was determined by the life of the high

priest. When the high priest died, then, we could say, the sentence of judging was complete and the manslayer could return to his land.

This is exactly what will happen with the Jews and the coming Kingdom. They demanded the death of Messiah, which makes them the manslaughterers. They are banished from the land and are in a time of judging that will yet intensify. However, there is good news, for ***thus Christ also, being offered once for the bearing of the sins of many.***

The Chief Priest has died and now lives to intercede for them; the judging will end when He comes a second time apart from sin, not as the Chief Priest but as the Deliverer. In that day, the Jews who believe will have completed their sentence of judging in the city of refuge; they will be treated as if innocent and will enter eonian life in the Kingdom, along with the nations.

"And of their sins and their lawlessnesses should I under no circumstances still be reminded."
(Hebrews 8:12b CV)

This is the promise of the New Covenant that the Hebrew believers needed to understand.

5. WHAT DO "THE MANY ABODES" (MANSIONS) MEAN?

In my Father's house are many mansions (*mone*): if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. (John 14:2 KJV)

I must confess weariness in hearing so many preachers speak of dying, going to heaven, and living in heavenly mansions for all eternity. It is as if this is to be the entire expectation of believers, as if Christ died on the cross just so He could save a few people and give them mansions to live in forever and ever. Of course, the same ones who hold this view also see billions of people roasting and toasting in an eternal *hell*, created according to the carnal mind of man.

Very seldom do I hear any purpose attached to living in these mansions. It is as if life will go on. Granted, it is always presented as a glorious life; after all, we will see our loved ones and walk on golden streets with them as we pluck fruit from the tree of life. Others paint very romantic images of heaven as a place filled with fields of flowers and the air filled with beautiful angelic singing. However, again, seldom do I hear any real purpose for such a life. Frankly, to me it seems very boring, especially if such an existence is to go on forever and ever. The thought of having a mansion to live in has no appeal to me whatsoever, even if it is a place that will never decay, never require a new paint job or a new roof. Somehow, I miss the value of the cross in such an expectation.

Stop and think about this for a moment and ask yourself this question: Did Christ die for me just so I could have a mansion in the sky and I could live eternally in that place? Is this truly your expectation? I realize many would answer that it is not the only expectation but merely a part of it. Personally, that being even a part of my expectation leaves me cold.

Could it be that Jesus was not referring to a physical mansion at all but to something far greater and far more spiritual?

Many translations use the words *mansions*, *dwelling places*, or *rooms*, which leads one to think of physical structures. However, other translations rightly use the word *abode*, which has a greater meaning.

In my Father's house there are many abodes (*mone*); were it not so, I had told you: for I go to prepare you a place.... (John 14:2 DNT)

In My Father's house are many abodes (*mone*); yet if not I would have told you, for I am going to make ready a place for you. (John 14:2 CV)

The Greek word for *abode* is *mone*, which means "a staying, that is, residence"; it is most often translated as *abode* or *mansion*. This noun form comes from the verb form *meno*, which means "to stay in a given place, state, relation or expectancy." It is most often translated as the word *abide*; the same word often used by John, the abiding apostle. In fact, Jesus began to unfold the meaning of the "mansions" in John 14, with the explanation found in the next chapter.

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode (*mone*) with him." (John 14:23 NASB)

(4) "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself unless it abides (*meno*) in the vine, so neither can you unless you abide (*meno*) in Me. (5) I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides (*meno*) in Me and I in him, he bears much fruit, for apart from Me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone does not abide (*meno*) in Me, he is thrown away as a branch and dries up; and they gather them, and cast them into the fire and they are burned. (7) If you abide (*meno*) in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be done for you. (8) My Father is glorified by this, that you bear much fruit, and so prove to be My disciples. (9) Just as the Father has loved Me, I have also loved you; abide (*meno*) in My love. (10) If you keep My commandments, you will abide (*meno*) in My love; just as I have kept My Father's commandments and abide (*meno*) in His love." (John 15:4-10 NASB)

The word *abode* is from the same Greek word that is so often translated as *mansion*. Perhaps Jesus was saying: "We will come to him and make Our mansion with him." In other words: "We will make Our home with him," or "We will take up residence in him."

According to the Lord's words, the heart of the matter is we abiding in Him and He is abiding in us. It is not about physical structures but about a spiritual reality or, we could say, **a living relationship**, and this relationship is explained by the Body of Christ. All who are in Christ are in His Body, which has many parts, each with different functions.

Consequently, Jesus was referring to His Body that would come forth following His resurrection and ascension back to the throne of God. His Body is His Father's house, the dwelling of God *in* spirit (see Ephesians 2:22) that is being built up as **New Jerusalem**.

(5) Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; (6) but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:5-6 NASB)

The Son is not faithful over a physical mansion but over a house, which refers to a collection of people who have an expectation that they will be transfigured into the image of Christ; they have no expectation that they will occupy physical mansions.

When Jesus left this earth, He went to prepare a place for His people, and that place is a spiritual body that is His Complement. When Jesus came to this earth 2,000 years ago, a body was prepared for Him (Hebrews 10:5). However, if He had remained in that body without going to death and being raised from the dead, He would not have received another body. When He ascended back to heaven to be with His Father, another body was prepared for Him. He returned to His Father so that the Spirit of God could come upon a new, spiritual body on earth. The spirit of God resides in bodies of flesh and blood as an earnest of the spirit that will fill the Body of Christ in the next eon when the body is fully glorified, celestial, and spiritual. Until then, the many abiding places are in this spiritual body of many members with different functions that is being built as the dwelling of God *in spirit*.

Today, to function properly in His spiritual body, which is the ecclesia, we need to abide in Christ and Christ in us. We have a foretaste of what is to come when our beloved Lord comes to meet His Body face to face. What a glorious day that will be!

So, let us not look for mansions in the sky. Let us look for the building up of the Body of Christ, which is the spiritual house of God, the dwelling of God *in spirit*, the abode of God. Let us abide in Christ!

6. WHO WAS LED CAPTIVE?

(7) Now to each one of us was given grace in accord with the measure of the gratuity of Christ. (8) Wherefore He is saying, Ascending on high, He captures captivity and gives gifts to mankind. (9) Now the 'He ascended,' what is it except that He first descended also into the lower parts of the earth? (10) He Who descends is the Same Who ascends also, up over all who are of the heavens, that He should be completing all. (Ephesians 4:7-10 CV)

(17) The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; the Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness. (18) You have ascended on high, You have led captive Your captives; You have received gifts among men, even among the rebellious also, that the LORD God may dwell there. (Psalm 68:17-18 NASB)

Using Ephesians 4:8, some teach that when Jesus ascended on high, He opened up hades, the pagan holding chamber in the earth for dead, yet living souls, released them and took them to heaven with Him. Those in Abraham's bosom, according to their interpretation of *the parable* of the rich man and Lazarus, were transferred from the underworld to heaven. This is all based on

pagan beliefs about the soul at death going to one of two compartments in the earth, one called paradise (i.e., Abraham's bosom) and the other called hades (hell to some).

This parable is explained in Article #40, February 2012, *Rich Man & Lazarus – A Parable*.

Paul quoted Psalm 68, which some people call the *War Hymn of the Great Conqueror*. It speaks of God arising and scattering His enemies. We discover victorious declarations of God marching through the wilderness and Sinai quaking at the presence of God, the God of Israel. Then in verse 17, we discover another reference to Sinai when the Lord was with Israel. This occurred when the Lord gave the Israelites the law as He appeared on Mount Sinai. In their unbelief, they came under the curse of the law. They were held captive by the law, which was brought forth to reveal sin and to lead them to Christ (Galatians 3:10, 19, 24).

Christ ascended on high, having defeated sin and death and releasing mankind from its stranglehold: ***For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death*** (Romans 8:2 NASB). ***It was for freedom that Christ set us free*** (Galatians 5:1 NASB). All obstacles and hindrances were removed by Christ and are removed in Christ.

In His ascension and exaltation, Christ gave forth gifts to mankind. But what is the greatest gift? It is grace! The law is fulfilled by grace. Notice how Paul brought grace into the matter. ***Now to each one of us was given grace in accord with the measure of the gratuity of Christ.***

Then Paul quoted Psalm 68:18, not in reference to Mount Sinai but to Christ's ascent to the throne of God. Christ captured captivity or removed the bondage of sin and death that held mankind in its grip, and according to the measure of the gratuity (grace) of Christ, He gave grace to His Body, so that each member might be equipped for service and for the growth of the Body for the building up of itself in love (Ephesians 4:11-16).

This has nothing to do with opening up pagan holding chambers. It has everything to do with grace and equipping the Body of Christ.

Christ is the One who descended into the lower parts of the earth. Notice that this does not mean that He descended to the center of the earth or even under the earth to release dead souls or spirits but merely into the lower parts of the earth. To inject such a concept at this point in Paul's epistle is out of the question, for it would make no sense to what Paul was trying to convey about the Body of Christ and walking worthy of the calling.

The simple explanation for this is discovered in the fact that some of the area in the land of Israel where Jesus walked is well below sea level. For example, the Dead Sea is 1,290 feet below sea level. Surely, this is the lowest part of the earth. Jesus never descended into some pagan chamber hidden in the earth. When He walked this earth, Jesus walked below sea level; but when He died, He was placed in a tomb above sea level from which He was roused from the state of death.

Consequently, Paul never introduced the pagan concept of Christ releasing the dead from the earth. Rather, Paul reinforced the idea of the Body of Christ being released from bondage by

grace, so that His Body might grow up. When Christ ascended back to His Father's throne, He bestowed grace and gifts upon those who believe.

Now, there is another facet of Paul quoting Psalm 68 that is discovered in what he wrote to the Colossians.

(13) When you were dead in your transgressions and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He made you alive together with Him, having forgiven us all our transgressions, (14) having canceled out the certificate of debt consisting of decrees against us, which was hostile to us; and He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. (15) When He had disarmed the rulers and authorities, He made a public display of them, having triumphed over them through Him. (Colossians 2:13-15 NASB)

First, note that Paul speaks of the lot of all mankind who were dead in their transgressions and the uncircumcision of their hearts was made alive in Him. This did not occur when someone "asked Jesus into their hearts"; it occurred at the cross. Think about the implications for all mankind! At the cross, the certificate of debt created when Adam sinned, which later became decrees that condemned all of us, was nailed to the cross. In other words, the debt was paid for all, none excluded. All the obstacles for ALL have been taken out of the way! Glory to God!

But here is the point: When Jesus took all of us to the cross and brought all of us into a death to the carnal flesh, He also made a public display of rulers and authorities and disarmed them. God triumphed over all these enemies through His Son.

In ancient days, when a general of an army defeated his foe, the captured enemy would often be stripped naked and publically paraded by the general so that the people of his nation would see his great conquest and those would be humiliated.

This is the picture Paul had in mind when he wrote verse 15, and the same thing could be said for Ephesians 4:8. Jesus led captive the captured rulers and authorizes and displayed them.

By the way, these rulers could be representative of earthly ones that down through the many centuries had stood against God's Kingdom, or they could be the powers and principalities in the heavenly places (Ephesians 6:12). Either way, we can be assured that the Lord Jesus was and is and will ever be the Victor.

7. WHAT HAPPENED TO ENOCH?

Of all the men in the Bible, only Enoch and Noah are described as ones who "walked with God" (Genesis 5:24; 6:9). However, Enoch's life is recorded unlike any other in Scripture.

(23) So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. (24) Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him. (Genesis 5:23-24 NASB)

All we are told in the book of beginnings is that Enoch was not. God took him, but we are not told where. It is as if he walked before God for 365 years and then his history stopped. He was not! What does this mean? Where was he taken? Everyone assumes it was to heaven, but Scripture does not state this as a fact; we have to assume so to make the statement. However, our saying so does not make it a fact. The next place we read of Enoch is in the Hebrews epistle.

By faith Enoch was transferred [metatithemi], so as not to be acquainted with death, and was not found, because God transfers him. For before his transference he is attested to have pleased God well. (Hebrews 11:5 CV)

The *Concordant Literal New Testament* (CV) reads differently than most translations, but perhaps it gives us a clearer picture of what happened to Enoch. The Greek root word *metatithemi* is translated as *transferred*; implying Enoch was simply transferred from one place to another.

The first thing to note is that the same word is used in reference to bones being transferred to Shechem (Acts 7:16) and one's thinking being transferred to a different evangel or deserting the true gospel for a false gospel (Galatians 1:6), the transference of the priesthood and law (Hebrews 7:12), and the transference of that which can be shaken to the Kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrew 12:27). These examples hardly give the impression of one being taken up, especially the reference to transferring dead bones.

This analysis tells us that these words are not used to refer to being taken up to heaven. In one case, it actually refers to the transference of dead bones (Acts 7:16).

The second thing to note is that Enoch was not acquainted with death. Genesis simply states Enoch was not, but Hebrews states Enoch was transferred so as not to be acquainted with death. The word *acquainted* means "to perceive." In other words, Enoch did not perceive death. Other translations state that Enoch was translated so that he would not see death. Why did the writer state it this way? Why didn't he just state clearly that Enoch did not die?

Again, in the Greek, the word for *acquaintance* has the meaning "to perceive." The *English Sublinear to the Concordant Greek Text* states it as *to-be-perceiving death*. In other words, all we are told is that Enoch did not perceive death because he was well-pleasing to God. The major reason for this action on God's part was Enoch's walk that pleased God.

There is one other verse that might answer the question for us, and that is discovered a few verses later in the Hebrews epistle.

All these died in faith, without receiving the promises, but having seen them and having welcomed them from a distance, and having confessed that they were strangers and exiles on the earth. (Hebrews 11:13 NASB)

The phrase "*all these*" must refer to all the names that preceded this verse, from Abel to Sarah, which obviously includes Enoch. In other words, Enoch is included in the "*all these died in faith.*" We must conclude that Enoch died.

But to where was he transferred? We are not told, but perhaps there were wicked men who sought Enoch's life, and God transferred him beyond their reach and beyond his immediate family. All his family knew was that this righteous man was being sought by evil men, and all of a sudden he was not there. There was no body and no sign of Enoch. So his days were numbered at 365 years.

First, perhaps there were wicked men who sought Enoch's life, and God transferred him beyond their reach and beyond his immediate family. After all, Enoch preached judgment to his generation, which would have made him a very unpopular preacher in a day in which **the earth was filled with violence and all flesh had corrupted their way upon the earth** (Genesis 6:11-13).

(14) And "the seventh from Adam," Enoch, also prophesied to these men, saying, Behold, "the Lord came with" myriads "of His saints," (15) "to do judgment against all, and to rebuke all" the ungodly of them concerning all their ungodly works which they ungodly did, "and concerning all the hard things ungodly sinners spoke against Him." I Enoch 1:9; 5:4; 60:8 (Jude 1:14-15 LITV)

All his family knew was that this righteous man was being sought by evil men, and all of a sudden he was not there. There was no body and no sign of Enoch. So his days were numbered at that point. Like Elijah (2 Kings 2:11) and Philip (Acts 8:39), Enoch could have been supernaturally transported (transferred) to another place on earth that kept him from evil men.

Second, some have speculated that Enoch was actually murdered by the evil men of his day, for he only lived 365 days, which was a rather early death compared to the longevity of his relatives who lived into their 800's. According to this view, it is speculated that God removed his body and buried it, just as He later did with Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6). An offshoot of this view is that Enoch was not murdered but that God simply caused him to fall asleep instantly without experiencing the death process, and then He buried his body. Enoch, like the millions that followed, waits for resurrection.

At any rate, we really do not know for sure what happened to Enoch, but it appears more likely than not that he is dead and did not go to heaven. He died just as all born of Adam's race have died, for **in Adam all die** (1 Corinthians 15:22). No human has ascended to heaven except Jesus, the Son of God and the Son of Man (John 3:13), and no human has immortality except **the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords** (1 Timothy 6:15-16).

Finally, I have a thought about Enoch's 365 years. Perhaps it pushes the envelope a bit, but I will give it a try anyway. We know that with God **one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day** (2 Peter 3:8), and that no man has ever lived a full thousand years or one full day of God or **God's day**. The most is attributed to Methuselah at 969 years. However, Enoch lived 365 years. Bear with me for moment. According to scientists, since Adam, the earth has continually rotated around the sun approximately every 365.25 days, thus giving us a 365-day calendar (except leap year). Applying the day-year principle, could we not say that **Man's day** is 365 years, in contrast to God's day of 1,000 years. Enoch lived his life fully before God, or if you will, before the Son (Sun) of God. His life of 365 years rotated around the Son. This is what

made him pleasing to God. This is what Man's day was meant to be like. Could we conclude that Enoch being transferred by God at 365 years signifies a life that fully rotates around (given to) the Son and that this is what Man's day is to be like while we live in mortal bodies as we wait for immortality and entrance into God's day? I will leave it for you to decide.

8. WHAT HAPPENED TO ELIJAH?

As they were going along and talking, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire and horses of fire which separated the two of them. And Elijah went up by a whirlwind to heaven. (2 Kings 2:11 NASB)

It is often taught that when Elijah was taken up in a chariot of fire, he was taken to heaven, the place of God's throne, or, as some call it, the second or third heaven. Since he was alive when this occurred, it is also taught that he did not see death, that is, he became immortal. In other words, according to this view, Elijah has been alive and well since the 9th century BC, living in heaven with God. With this view, some claim that this proves that when believers die, they too go to heaven to be with the Lord.

About 900 years after Elijah was taken up in a chariot, Jesus made a statement of fact that obviously disputes the view that Elijah ascended into heaven, the place from which the Son of Man descended to earth.

"No one has ascended into heaven, but He who descended from heaven: the Son of Man." (John 3:13 NASB)

Scripture is silent on the origin of Elijah other than he was a Tishbite. However, James (5:17) tells us that he had a nature like ours, which means he possessed the same weaknesses and frailties of the flesh as we all do, and this comes from occupying mortal bodies of flesh and blood as we all do. If he had not descended from heaven, then according to the One who should know, it follows that he had not ascended to heaven either.

Only Jesus, the Son of Man, descended from the Father's throne, and only He was raised from among the dead, according to the spirit of holiness (Romans 1:4), and deemed worthy to ascend back to heaven to be with His Father. Christ entered into heaven itself to appear in the presence of God for us (Hebrews 9:24), that is, all mankind, as the High Priest according to the order of Melchizedek.

As further proof, Paul stressed the immortality of Jesus as the King of kings.

Now to the King eternal, immortal [incorruptible], invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen. (1 Timothy 1:17 NASB)

(15) He who is the blessed and only Sovereign, the King of kings and Lord of lords (16) who alone possesses immortality and dwells in unapproachable light, whom no man has seen or can see. (1 Timothy 6:15-16 NASB)

No mere mortal can stand in the presence of God; only one who is immortal, that is, beyond death, can do so. Keep in mind that Paul wrote to Timothy years after Jesus had ascended back to the throne. Many had died before and after Jesus' resurrection, and, according to Paul, no one possesses immortality, including Elijah, as well as Enoch. Only Jesus the King of kings is presently immortal. Further, as the Son of Man, Jesus is the first man born of a woman to possess immortality.

If we accept these premises as fact, then the question remains as to where Elijah was taken. What does it mean that he went up by a whirlwind to heaven? To answer this, it is important to note that Scripture speaks of more than one heaven.

The first is the atmosphere around the earth in which the birds fly and our weather and climate are formed. For example: **Let the birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens** (Genesis 1:20 NASB; also Genesis 7:11-12; Job 35:11; Jeremiah 16:4).

The second heaven is outer space, the place of other planets, the moon, sun, and stars. Scripture speaks of **the stars of heaven** (Genesis 26:4; Deuteronomy 1:10; 28:62; Isaiah 13:10). David wrote: **When I consider thy heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which thou hast ordained** (Psalm 8:3 KJV).

The third heaven is generally thought to be where Jesus ascended to sit at the right hand of the throne in the heavens (Hebrews 8:1). The designation of the third heaven is attributed to Paul who testified that he was **snatched away to the third heaven** (2 Corinthians 12:2 CV).

However, there is an alternative explanation to the meaning of the third heaven. Paul could have been referring to the third chronological heaven, specifically the one referred to in 2 Peter 3:13 and Revelation 21:1. According to Peter, there was a heaven long ago [the first chronological heaven (2 Peter 3:5)]; there is a present heaven that is reserved for fire [the second chronological heaven (2 Peter 3:7)]; and there will be a future heaven in which righteousness dwells [the third chronological heaven (2 Peter 3:13)]. By the way, the same applies to the earth.

Personally, I see heaven as the place of God's abode as more of a dimension or realm, as in spirit dimension, than a physical place trillions of light years from earth in the far reaches of the universe. Earth is enveloped by God's realm.

So, into which heaven was Elijah taken? I believe the correct answer is the first heaven, the atmosphere around the earth that gives us life. Most likely, Elijah was taken up in a whirlwind, which is more of a weather phenomenon, like a violent storm, even a tornado, and transported to another region in the Middle East, much like when the Spirit of God snatched away Philip to Azotus after he shared with the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8:39). Having completed his public ministry and passing the mantle to Elisha, Elijah lived out his days and died.

There is one other proof that Elijah remained on earth after his chariot ride in the air. Second Chronicles refers to a writing attributed to Elijah that was sent to Jehoram, king of Israel,

perhaps 10 years after Elijah had gone up in the whirlwind, indicating that Elijah was still alive on earth.

And there came a writing to him from Elijah the prophet, saying, Thus saith the LORD God of David thy father, Because thou hast not walked in the ways of Jehoshaphat thy father, nor in the ways of Asa king of Judah... (2 Chronicles 21:12 KJV)

Not surprisingly, there are some who challenge this conclusion, for it does not fit their template that when we die we go to heaven. In a side note, in *The Companion Bible*, E.W. Bullinger challenges this conclusion: "*Why assume that Elijah then sent it? It might have "come" as Holy Scripture comes to us today, though written in the past. It does not say a "letter," [based on the Hebrew] but any writing written at any time; probably a prophetic writing to be delivered at this particular time.*"

However, Scripture does not indicate this, so why assume it? Besides, Bullinger's conclusion leads to a direct contradiction of Scripture regarding Christ being the only one who is immortal and who has ascended to heaven.

Finally, some might challenge the idea that Elijah remained alive on earth because he appeared with Jesus and Moses on the mount as Jesus was transfigured (Matthew 17:1-8). It could have been a vision. But most likely, what the disciples witnessed simply transcended time. The Father opened the portal of time and allowed the disciples to see outside of time. I know that this may be difficult to comprehend, for we are so locked into our mindsets of a physical world, but we need to realize that God is spirit, and His realm is not bound by time. After all, there are other examples of transcending time, most notably, Paul who was snatched away to the third heaven and Paradise, and John who, *in spirit*, was given vision of what would transpire for the next 2,000 years from his day. Again, this is the only way to reconcile Scripture and avoid obvious contradictions regarding immortality and ascendancy.

9. WHAT HAPPENED TO THE THIEF ON THE CROSS?

(39) And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" (40) But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? (41) And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." (42) And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" (43) And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:39-43 NASB)

The story of the criminals being crucified along with Jesus is used by many to teach that this is proof positive that when a believer dies, he goes straight to heaven to be in the presence of God.

I once heard a very well-known preacher declare that this story "absolutely proves without any doubt" that the death of a believer leads to instant ascent to heaven. To be sure, this brother in

Christ means well in his preaching, but this particular story declares *nothing of the sort*. Let me be more emphatic: this story has nothing whatsoever to do with where a believer goes *in* death.

So, what did Jesus mean when He told the thief he would be with Him in Paradise?

First, the criminal asked Jesus to remember him when He comes in His Kingdom. To what kingdom was the criminal referring? In that day, there was only one kingdom that was expected by the Jews. It was the Kingdom promised to David; the same one declared to Mary when Gabriel appeared to her pronouncing her favorable before God.

(32) "He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; (33) and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever; and His kingdom will have no end." (Luke 1:32-33 NASB; see Isaiah 9:6-7; Daniel 7:13-14)

Even if he did not know all the facts surrounding Christ's future Kingdom, the criminal surely understood the insults being hurled at Jesus as He hung on the cross.

(35) And the people stood by, looking on. And even the rulers were sneering at Him, saying, "He saved others; let Him save Himself if this is the Christ of God, His Chosen One." (36) And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, (37) and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" (38) Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." (Luke 23:35-38 NASB)

It was in this context that the criminal asked Jesus to remember him when He comes in His Kingdom.

Did the Kingdom of Christ come to rule over the nations in that day or any of the days that followed? If it did come, then according to the prophets, the world should be experiencing righteous and just rule. Can anyone find such a thing throughout the nations today? Is our modern world ruled according to righteousness and justice? Are there kings and lords of Christ ruling over the nations today? Of course, the answer to all these questions is *no*. Consequently, there is only one conclusion to draw: Jesus was not promising the criminal a place in the Kingdom upon his death. Jesus' answer to the criminal had to be in reference to a day that would not commence for at least 2,000 years from Calvary, considering we are still waiting for our Savior to come from heaven.

Second, some might argue that Jesus promised the criminal a place in paradise, not in His Kingdom. There are only two other places in the New Testament that refer directly to paradise, and each points to the future Kingdom. Paul was snatched away into paradise (2 Corinthians 12:4). Then, it is promised to those believers who overcome (the conquerors) that they may eat of the tree of life in the paradise of God (Revelation 2:7). It must be added that all of the promises to those who conquer, as recorded in the seven epistles to the ecclesia (Revelation 2-3), refer to entering paradise in some fashion. Of course, John, along with Paul, actually saw paradise.

Third, many preachers place their emphasis on the word *today* as proof that the criminal and Jesus both went to paradise in that day. However, when Jesus died, He went into the tomb (grave) as a dead man, until God raised Him from the dead on the third day. Jesus then ascended to His Father (John 20:17), returned to the earth, and appeared to His disciples over a forty-day period, before finally ascending into a cloud as the disciples watched (Acts 1:9-11; 2:14-36). Today, He is *not* in paradise but seated upon His Father's throne in heaven.

The Hebrew believers were encouraged that Christ entered **into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us** (Hebrews 9:24). Please note that these believers had no expectant hope that they were to go to heaven *in* death. In fact, a few verses later, they were encouraged *to wait* for Christ to come *a second time* for salvation apart from sin (Hebrews 9:28).

Further, the Thessalonian believers were commended because they were waiting for God's Son to come from heaven (1 Thessalonians 1:10). When they were concerned over their loved ones who had fallen asleep in Jesus, Paul did *not* encourage them that there was no need to be concerned, for they were in heaven already. Rather, he encouraged them that they were asleep in Jesus and would be resurrected (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). They were to comfort one another with these words about the resurrection and snatching away to meet the Lord in air.

Thus, God's word consistently places the emphasis on waiting for the resurrection, and *not* on death and immediately going to heaven.

Fourth, many cite the use of the word *today* as proof that the thief went to paradise that day when he died. However, we need to understand that the Greek language from which the English versions were translated had no punctuation as do our modern-day versions of the Bible. In other words, punctuation had to be placed in the text by the translators and editors. As such, this alone opens up the door for interpretative bias.

Without punctuation, Luke 23:43 reads: **"Truly I say to you today you shall be with Me in Paradise."** But notice that the meaning of Jesus' words changes, depending on where a comma is placed in relation to the word *today*. If it is placed after *today*, it simply means that Jesus was making a statement of a future promise on that day. He was not promising that the thief would be in paradise with Him on that particular or specific day. Recognizing this as the more likely interpretation, some translations have placed the comma after the word *today*.

"Verily, to you am I saying *today*, with Me shall you be in paradise." (Luke 23:43 CV)

Verily I say unto thee *this day*: with me shalt thou be in Paradise. (Luke 23:43 REB)

Given this rendering, Jesus was merely stating that on *that* particular day (*today*) He made a promise to the criminal that referred to a day many years into the future when He would *be coming* (future) in His Kingdom. For the thief, this day was either 2,000 years (first resurrection) or 3,000 years (second resurrection) into the future. We are not given an indication of which one was promised. I suspect the latter, for this is when paradise, New Jerusalem, truly comes into view for all to see and enter into it.

Especially in light of Scripture on immortality and ascension into heaven, this appears to be the most plausible understanding of this passage.

10. IS THE GREAT CLOUD OF WITNESSES ALIVE?

The New Testament contains several references to clouds. The Greek word for *cloud* is *nephele*, which denotes a cloudy, shapeless mass covering the heavens that, metaphorically speaking, refers to a dense multitude. The origin of the word indicates that it could refer to a mass of rock, signifying a mass of anything. Thus, it conveys the picture of a dense mass.

A study of the cloud references reveals that clouds refer to the witness of the faithful conquerors in Christ, whether dead or alive. Let us start with the dead.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud [*nephele*] of witnesses surrounding [encompassing] us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.... (Hebrews 12:1 NASB [CV])

It is fascinating how often this verse is presented as if the faithful dead are not really dead but alive in heaven, as if it were a big stadium, and all these dead but alive *in death* ones [oxymoronic concept] are in the bleachers of this heavenly stadium, looking down, and literally cheering us on.

This might help to bolster the view that there are dead ones in heaven today, but this is not what the writer of the Hebrews epistle meant, nor is it the teaching of Scripture.

The witnesses are all those mentioned in the previous chapter of the epistle from Abel on down to the wanderers in the caves. All gained approval through their faith, but not one of them received what was promised. These saints are dead and awaiting the *better resurrection* (Hebrews 11:13, 35); none of them is watching from heaven.

The English Sublinear of the Concordant Greek Text uses the phrase *about-lying* for the translated word *encompassing* or *surrounding*. A cloud is lying about; meaning they are dead in the grave.

First, in this context, a cloud is merely a figure of speech for a mass of witnesses that has gone before us. A witness is one who testifies. Their testimony is the testimony of their lives of faith. This is what encompasses us or lies about us in the graves today. It is the witness of their faith that conquered or, we could say, of their conquering life. It is like Abel's blood that cries to God from the ground.

Second, clouds are mentioned in the snatching away in clouds of the saints at the *parousia* of the Lord (1 Thessalonians 4:17). The conquerors in Christ who hold to the testimony of Jesus are the ones who are snatched away. When all are snatched away, they are like a cloud (a mass) of witnesses. Whether actual physical clouds are involved is not the issue. The fact of the

matter is that this great mass of people is a witness based on their faith exercised during their lives. The clouds are symbolic of their witness.

Third, the same thing is seen with our Lord Jesus as He was taken up and received in a cloud.

(9) And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud [nephēle] received Him out of their sight. (10) And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. (11) They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." (Acts 1:9-11 NASB)

The fact that a cloud received Him indicates something of importance. He is the faithful and true Witness (Revelation 3:14), and the cloud that took Him up signified this fact.

Fourth, there are two more verses that deal with the coming of the Lord and clouds. The first one records Jesus being brought before the whole Council as He was about to face the cross (Matthew 26:59). They demanded to know whether He was the Christ, the Son of God, to which He responded: **Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven [ouranos]** (Matthew 26:64 KJV).

This was a rather strange thing to say to the men that accused Him and, ultimately, demanded His death as they rejected Him as the King of Israel. How could they have seen Him coming in the clouds of heaven? After all, Jesus spoke as if in that day they would see Him coming in the clouds of heaven. Shortly after, He would be seated at the right of God the Father, but how would they see this? When these rejecters of Christ stoned Stephen to death, surely, they did not see heaven opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right of God (Acts 7:55-57) as Stephen saw.

In the days that followed, there was only one way for them to see Him coming in the clouds, and that was by seeing the witness of His faithful disciples that had followed Him and that, after Calvary, at Pentecost, had received an earnest of the spirit (2 Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14). The ecclesia in that day was the cloud of witnesses, many of whom were later martyred for their testimony. Consequently, the ones that rejected Christ saw Him in the dense mass, the cloud of witnesses born from above that were alive on earth at that time. These were the ones who were of the Way and later called Christians; a mass of little rocks or living stones built upon the Rock or the living, precious Stone.

But how did these rejecters of Christ see Him seated at the right hand of power? Again, they saw it in the faithful cloud of witnesses who were spiritually seated together with Christ Jesus among the celestials (Ephesians 2:6). In other words, when they looked at Christians, the body of Christ, they saw the Head, figuratively speaking, sitting on the right hand of power. While He walked the earth, Jesus stated in various ways that if anyone saw Him, they saw the Father. In like fashion, in that day, as well as today, when one saw (sees) His Body, he saw (sees) the Lord, the Head of His Body.

If we put aside the ones that rejected Christ in that day and fast forward to our day, we discover that there are still a people who claim to be Jews, but they are not (Revelation 2:9), for they too reject Christ. A day is coming, and I believe soon, that these, who Jesus calls liars, will see Christ, the One they reject, come to this earth as His life is manifested in the sons of glory. This will be a prophetic fulfillment of Jesus' words to the Council over 2,000 years ago.

There is more to be gleaned from Jesus' words, for the word *heaven* comes from the Greek word *ouranos*, which is similar to the Greek word *oros*, which means "to rise; a mountain (as lifting itself above the plain)." The word *mountain* often refers to *kingdom*. Consequently, one could say that **He is coming in the glory (clouds) of His kingdom (of heaven).**

How will this glory be manifested? The answer lies in another verse about His coming.

Behold, he cometh with [nephelē] clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen. (Revelation 1:7 KJV)

Most translations state "with the clouds." However, the article *the* is not in the Greek, so it seems that the *KJV* is a bit more accurate. The Greek word translated *with* is *meta*, which is a preposition that means "accompaniment or amid." Thus, the Lord will come amid clouds. If we take clouds to mean a witness [i.e., a mass rock (living stones) of witnesses], then perhaps a better way of stating it is: **Behold, a witness will accompany Him!** Or, yet another way of stating it is: **Behold, He will accompany a witness!** This witness is the company of conquerors that is glorified as He is glorified, the sons of glory (Romans 8:21; Hebrews 2:10).

Thus, we can conclude that, figuratively and spiritually, clouds refer to the witness of the faithful, either past (dead) or present (alive). A loud voice in heaven attests to this great cloud of witnesses **who hold to the testimony of Jesus** (Revelation 19:10).

"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." (Revelation 12:11 NASB)

May we be a great cloud, a massive rock, of witnesses in the days leading up to the coming of the Kingdom of our Lord!

11. ARE THE SOULS UNDER THE ALTAR ALIVE?

(9) When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; (10) and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" (11) And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Revelation 6:9-11 NASB)

What does "the souls under the altar" mean? Are they alive, which would indicate that the soul is immortal? Or, do these souls signify something spiritual or figurative?

At one time, I thought and wrote that they are alive in the bowels of the earth, but I have been adjusted on this matter. So, at the outset, I must state that these souls are dead and in the grave, waiting for the first resurrection into immortality. What proof do we have of this conclusion?

First, they have been slain, so they are dead, not alive. If we agree with Solomon that **the dead do not know anything** (Ecclesiastes 9:5), then these souls must not know anything either.

Second, the altar was the place upon which the sacrifices were offered, which indicates that these souls suffered death, meaning their blood was poured out on the altar of the martyrs.

The soul is the seat of sensations or the experience of the body; kill the body, that is, pour out its blood, and the soul ceases as well, for the soul is in the blood.

For the soul of the flesh is in the blood; and I have given it to you upon the altar to make atonement for your souls, for it is the blood that maketh atonement for the soul. (Leviticus 17:11 DNT)

When a sacrifice was made on the altar to make atonement for the souls of the sons of Israel, the blood of the animal flowed through the grating and below the altar. Consequently, the blood of these souls, as martyrs, was poured out, and it is the blood that actually sits under the altar and cries out.

Third, their cry is like the blood of righteous Abel and of all the martyrs' blood (Luke 11:50-51) that cries out from the ground. Abel is not crying out, but the voice (testimony) of his spilt blood is crying out (Genesis 4:10). It is merely figurative language.

Fourth, it is the word of their testimony that cries out, for these martyrs did not love their life when faced with death.

"And they overcame him because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death." (Revelation 12:11 NASB)

The souls under the altar are ones who will surely gain their life or *eonian life* in the coming kingdom of Christ, for they were willing to literally lose their soul life for the sake of gaining the Kingdom of Christ in the age to come.

(25) "For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. (26) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? (27) "For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and WILL THEN REPAY EVERY MAN ACCORDING TO HIS DEEDS. (Matthew 16:25-27 NASB)

They are in the camp of the great cloud of witnesses, ones who died without receiving the promises and who await *in* death the better resurrection, not only to immortal life but to eonian life, a life in the age to come.

Therefore, since we have so great a cloud of witnesses surrounding us, let us also lay aside every encumbrance and the sin which so easily entangles us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us.... (Hebrews 12:1 NASB)

They are also in the camp of the ecclesia in Smyrna who were told to be faithful until death and who did not fail.

'Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.' (Revelation 2:10 NASB)

Finally, they are in the camp of the beheaded souls that will reign with Christ for a thousand years.

(4) Then I saw thrones, and they sat on them, and judgment was given to them. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony of Jesus and because of the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or his image, and had not received the mark on their forehead and on their hand; and they came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (5) The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were completed. This is the first resurrection. (6) Blessed and holy is the one who has a part in the first resurrection; over these the second death has no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with Him for a thousand years. (Revelation 20:4-6 NASB)

Consequently, there is no reason to view these martyrs as being alive under an altar. Can you imagine what this would look like if this were taken literally? It is simply a figurative statement indicating that their blood will be avenged by God. It is stated that more martyrs will follow, and it will be an encouragement to them to endure even unto death.

Only the Lord knows, but some of us may yet be called upon to die for the Lord Jesus before His kingdom comes. If so, may we take comfort knowing that our blood will cry out along with all those faithful servants that preceded us! It will be like a sleep. Our next conscious moment will be looking into the face of the love of our life, the very **Author and Perfecter of faith** (Hebrews 12:2).

Let us be ever mindful that **Christ alone has immortality** (1 Timothy 6:16), for **no one has ascended into heaven except He Who descended out of heaven** (John 3:13), and His name is **Jesus the Anointed One, the Messiah, the King of kings and Lord of lords, the Son of God, and the Son of Man.**

12. DO A MEDIUM AND SAUL PROVE THERE IS AN AFTERLIFE? [1 SAMUEL 28]

The ancient Israelites did not believe in the immortality of the soul. However, in Hebrew Scripture, there is a story that some view as proof that the soul is immortal; that is, the soul never dies, it merely goes into another realm in the earth (hades) or heaven (paradise). The story is the account of Saul visiting a medium who calls up Samuel from the dead.

The question that this story poses is this: Was it truly Samuel, or a demon impersonating Samuel, or some sort of vision from God to teach Saul a lesson? It seems that those who have written on this story are pretty much split on the interpretation.

We need to apply the principle that if the majority of Scripture supports one interpretation, then when we come upon something that does not fit, or even seems contrary, we need to study it carefully to see why. The solution is not to interpret it as if it does not fit, but to see how it does fit and interpret it accordingly. Scripture cannot leave us with two contrary answers, particularly with something as important as this topic. Unfortunately, it seems that many take the one Scripture that does not fit and force all the other Scriptures to coincide with the contrary one. This is a dangerous approach, for it can lead to more confusion.

Before looking at the specifics of this story, we need to see how God views mediums.

(9) "When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. (10) There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, (11) or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. (12) For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you." (Deuteronomy 18:9-12 NASB)

The Lord specifically warned the Israelites not to call on a medium, which was a very common practice among the heathen nations. This, along with many other practices of the nations, was a detestable thing to the Lord. The Israelites were to seek the Lord and not seek the ways of the heathen. So, we are given a very clear indication of how the Lord views such practices.

Further, Scripture acknowledges that demons exist, and they are deceivers. Paul even warned that in the last days people would be heeding deceiving spirits and the doctrines of demons (1 Timothy 4:1). To prove this is a reality today, one only needs to do a word search on the Internet on this topic. It is amazing how many web sites seem to be from cults that focus on the medium of En-dor or, as some call her, the witch of Endor.

As the story goes, Saul, the king of Israel, was afraid of the Philistines and sought the Lord, but He did not answer him. Saul had been given specific instructions from the Lord to utterly destroy the Amalekites; however, he failed to do so, which angered the Lord (1 Samuel 15:1-11). When confronted by Samuel that he had not completely destroyed his enemies as instructed, Saul lied and blamed it on others (1 Samuel 15:13-21). Samuel gave his verdict on this sin.

For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as idolatry and teraphim. Because thou hast rejected the word of Jehovah, he hath also rejected thee from being king. (1 Samuel 15:23 ASV)

Notice that Saul's sin was the sin of witchcraft or divination, as in other translations. The result was that the Lord rejected Saul's kingship (1 Samuel 15:24-28). We could say that the die had been cast for Saul.

And Samuel came no more to see Saul until the day of his death; for Samuel mourned for Saul: and Jehovah repented that he had made Saul king over Israel. (1 Samuel 15:35 ASV)

Now the Spirit of Jehovah departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Jehovah troubled him. (1 Samuel 16:14 ASV)

Instead of having the spirit of the Lord, Saul was troubled by an evil spirit. This led Saul to seek counsel from that which was forbidden to all the Israelites. Saul had been turned over to what the heathens of the nations sought.

Now, in this context, Saul sought a medium when the Lord refused to answer his cries. Most likely, this was driven by the evil spirit that troubled him. This is a fact that must play heavily on the interpretation of this story, for it places it on the ground of the world of darkness and removes the Lord from any direct part in it, other than to allow it to happen.

Let us look at this story line by line in 1 Samuel 28.

(7) Then Saul said to his servants, "Seek for me a woman who is a medium, that I may go to her and inquire of her." And his servants said to him, "Behold, there is a woman who is a medium at En-dor." (8) Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said, "Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall name to you."

Saul knew that this was something to be hidden and thus had to be done in the cloak of night, for sin always seeks to be hidden in darkness.

(9) But the woman said to him, "Behold, you know what Saul has done, how he has cut off those who are mediums and spiritists from the land. Why are you then laying a snare for my life to bring about my death?"

Saul had forbidden the use of mediums in the land, but now he was doing what he knew was against the Lord's command. He had crossed the line. This should remind us of what James wrote.

(13) Let no one say when he is tempted, "I am being tempted by God"; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. (14) But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. (15) Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death. (James 1:13-15 NASB)

God cannot be tempted by evil; therefore, this action was not of God.

(10) Saul vowed to her by the LORD, saying, "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing." (11) Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" And he said, "Bring up Samuel for me."

The medium gave Saul his request and sought for Samuel.

(12) When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice; and the woman spoke to Saul, saying, "Why have you deceived me? For you are Saul."

The evil spirit must have revealed to the medium that Saul was making the request, or the spirit had been stalking Saul all along and knew his every move.

(13) The king said to her, "Do not be afraid; but what do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "I see a divine being coming up out of the earth." (14) He said to her, "What is his form?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped with a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and did homage.

Notice that Saul did not see the figure himself; he had to rely on the medium. Saul thought it was Samuel, for this is whom he sought; but this does not prove it was, in fact, Samuel, for evil spirits were at work. If it truly was Samuel, then we would have to conclude that the demons have power to bring up dead saints, which is impossible, for this is strictly in God's power. Also, coming up from the grave was a pagan concept. The pagans believed in an elaborate underworld in which the dead reside alive.

(15) Then Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" And Saul answered, "I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and no longer answers me, either through prophets or by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me what I should do." (16) Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has departed from you and has become your adversary? (17) "The LORD has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David (18) "As you did not obey the LORD and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the LORD has done this thing to you this day. (19) "Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!"

This was not a prophecy, for all that was spoken to Saul was known to anyone watching and listening to Saul and Samuel while Samuel was still alive. This discounts the notion that something new was being spoken.

(20) Then Saul immediately fell full length upon the ground and was very afraid because of the words of Samuel; also there was no strength in him, for he had eaten no food all day and all night. (1 Samuel 28:7-20 NASB)

Saul's reaction was only natural for someone about to die in fear.

The facts of this story are this: the Lord was not talking to Saul anymore; Saul was troubled by an evil spirit; he sought help from a medium or witch to contact the dead, something forbidden by God, for it would only open someone up to the demons; the demonic spirit associated with the medium fooled Saul into believing it was Samuel, for how else could Saul know since the spirit of God had departed from him; the Lord could not have been behind this evil practice, even to teach Saul a lesson; the Lord allowed it because Saul had opened himself up to it; his act was an abomination to the Lord, and Saul paid the price with his life.

Concerning this last point, there is one more proof.

(13) So Saul died for his trespass which he committed against the LORD, because of the word of the LORD which he did not keep; and also because he asked counsel of a medium, making inquiry of it, (14) and did not inquire of the LORD. Therefore He killed him and turned the kingdom to David the son of Jesse. (1 Chronicles 10:13-14 NASB)

The Lord killed Saul, not only because he disobeyed Him, but because he sought a medium.

There is only one conclusion to be made that coincides with all other Scripture: Samuel was not called up from the dead; consequently, the soul is not immortal, based on this story. Samuel was dead and continues to be dead, waiting for the resurrection of his people.

13. WHO ARE THE SPIRITS IN JAIL?

(17) For it is better to be suffering for doing good, if the will of God may be willing, than for doing evil, (18) seeing that Christ also, for our sakes, once died concerning sins, the just for the sake of the unjust, that He may be leading us to God; being put to death, indeed, in flesh, yet vivified in spirit, (19) in which, being gone to the spirits in jail also, (20) He heralds to those once stubborn, when the patience of God awaited in the days of Noah while the ark was being constructed, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were brought safely through water.... (1 Peter 3:17-20 CV)

This is a difficult passage that is not without much controversy and interpretation. Frankly, I have struggled over its meaning; nevertheless, I offer *an opinion*. Some people argue that since man is never called a spirit, this cannot refer to man and must refer to spirit beings (i.e., angels) that were imprisoned in Noah's day. As this thinking goes, these angels are imprisoned, and Christ appeared to them after He was resurrected. Perhaps this is correct. Of course, others believe that Christ appeared to them while He was dead for three days, but this I reject because it redefines death as another life.

However, the context could indicate that this is a reference to man and not to spirit beings. First, Christ is referred to as vivified in spirit and a vivifying Spirit (1 Corinthians 15:45 CV), and is He not a Man? Second, those who were stubborn were those humans that lived in Noah's day. Third, the emphasis in these verses is on doing good rather than evil, and Christ, the Just, dying

for sins and the sake of the unjust. Christ died for unjust mankind. Could this merely be figurative language to indicate that in Noah's day the ancients were preached to, but they ignored the warnings, and all were condemned to death? Noah must have preached under the power of the Spirit of God. In other words, Christ did not preach directly to them, for He did it through righteous Noah. They rejected the message and died. Consequently, their spirits returned to God and figuratively are in prison; that is, there is no chance for their spirits that are in the state of death to come alive and return to earth. Their future is the Great White Throne and the second death. If Christ did preach to them, perhaps this too speaks figuratively of the testimony of His death and vivification. Christ's death testifies against all unrighteousness and testifies for all righteousness, reaching back to the ancient days of Noah.

14. WHAT IS THE MEANING OF TARTARUS?

Peter was the only inspired writer of Scripture to use the word *tartarus*, which is translated by the *King James Version* and others as *hell*. However, Jude made a similar statement about the messengers, which commentators seem to agree are one and the same messengers as Peter mentioned.

For if God spares not sinning messengers, but thrusting them into the gloomy caverns of Tartarus, gives them up to be kept for chastening judging.... (2 Peter 2:4 CV)

Besides, messengers who keep not their own sovereignty, but leave their own habitation, He has kept in imperceptible bonds under gloom for the judging of the great day. (Jude 6 CV)

These verses can be summed up very simply: There are messengers that have sinned and God puts them through chastening judging, just like He does all mankind. However, there are other points that are worth mentioning.

First, these verses do not state that these messengers are in an eternal *hell* of torment. The *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* states that *tartaroo* means "to incarcerate in the eternal torment." However, there is nothing in these verses that implies an eternal torment for the sinning messengers. Further, some translations use the word *hades* instead of *hell*; however, the Greek text does not use this word, and there is no reason for the translators to use it, other than to heap more confusion on the word *hades*.

Second, the word *Tartarus* comes from the Greek pagans who named the unseen world *Tartaros*. The word is found in Greek literature of that day, and it referred to the murky abyss, the lowest region of the world, as far below as earth is from heaven in which immortals (i.e., their pagan gods) were punished. It is described as a dark, gloomy pit, surrounded by a wall of bronze, and beyond that, a three-fold layer of night. It was the primary prison for their defeated gods. Even Roman mythology saw *Tartarus* as the place where sinners are sent, which has a flaming river, a hydra with fifty black, gaping jaws, lashing whips and a deep pit.

It is difficult to imagine that Peter used the word in the exact same way that the pagan's did. More likely, he used it as a common term of his day, which had some similarity to the pagan

word, but did not have the exact same meaning given to it by the pagans. In other words, he adapted the word for his own use. Again, neither Peter nor Jude indicated a burning inferno inspired by images of the modern-day *hell*.

Third, the word used in the Greek is the verb *tartaroo*, which means "casting or thrusting them into." Since it is a verb, there is no reason to capitalize it and make it into the proper noun *Tartarus*. This only adds to the impression that it is a very special place and opens one up to accept pagan mythology. The *Darby New Translation* seems to have avoided this pitfall, although it has these messengers being cast down when the thought is being thrust into.

For if God spared not the angels who had sinned, but having cast them down to the deepest pit of gloom has delivered them to chains of darkness to be kept for judgment.... (2 Peter 2:4 DNT)

Fourth, the *Concordant Greek Text English Sublinear* states "to-caverns of-gloom tartarusing," indicating action rather than a specific place. The place is indicated by the caverns of gloom, which is how Darby translated it.

Fifth, 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6 seem to have referred to the same messengers. Jude stated that they are kept in *imperceptible* bonds under gloom. Most translations state that they are in everlasting or eternal bonds, which incorrectly adds to the confusion, for it places these messengers in an *eternal* dungeon.

The *English Sublinear* states "un-perceived," which translates to the word *imperceptible*. According to *Webster's Dictionary*, *imperceptible* means "not plain or distinct to the senses or the mind; especially, so slight, gradual, subtle, etc. as not to be easily perceived."

In other words, these bonds are not to be perceived, or better yet, we cannot perceive them. All that we know is that God is keeping or preserving these messengers for a future day and purpose. Some would say that they are in an eternal dungeon in the earth; but how can this be so when, according to Peter, the earth itself does not have an eternal future? The current heavens and earth will be cleansed by fire following the next eon as God's day and new heavens and a new earth come into view (2 Peter 3:12-13; Revelation 21:1).

Sixth, in these verses, Peter and Jude referred to sinning messengers that are being kept for chastening judgment and the judging of the great day. Chastening is not an eternal punishment, for the word speaks of discipline, such as training or correction with a view to full restoration. This is not eternal but rather eonian in nature. It is very similar to the discipline of Hebrews 12:7-11.

Seventh, the question arises as to the nature of these sinning messengers. Do they refer to mankind or celestial beings?

Sinning messengers—celestial beings?

If we carefully consider the text, it seems that these messengers are already under chastening judgment, for they are bound. If they are literally bound, then this would indicate they are celestial beings, since there is no prison for departed (dead) humans.

Where these celestial beings are bound is a question without a clear answer. By their very nature, the realm of the celestial beings is celestial or heavenly. Since they are in caverns of gloom or places of darkness, perhaps they are on the back side of the moon or in a black hole in the universe. These are just as likely places for messengers to be jailed, since they are celestial beings. In any case, they are not allowed to roam freely, which leads to the next point.

Who are the recipients of the chastening judgment? Are they the sinning messengers, or are they others, such as humans, who will be judged in the great day? In other words, who gets trained by discipline? Could it be that these messengers, who are kept in bonds, are being held for some other purpose?

The *Weymouth New Testament* states that God is keeping these angels in *readiness for judgment*, which implies that they have been preserved for a purpose related to judgment. Similarly, the *Concordant Literal New Testament* states that they are being kept for *the judging of the great day*.

One commentator suggests that these messengers are the same ones who are released with the sound of the sixth trumpet of the second woe (Revelation 9:12-21). Four messengers that are bound at the great river Euphrates are ***made ready for the hour, and day, and month, and year, that they should be killing a third of mankind***. Then we are told that *troops of cavalry numbering two hundred millions go forth and kill a third of mankind by the fire and the fumes and the sulphur*. Truly, this is a great day of judging on the earth as God executes this judgment through these messengers.

The messengers are bound at the Euphrates, which means that they are held or restricted to a certain area on earth. The command to the sixth messenger to release these prisoners comes forth from the horns of the golden altar, which is before God. These four messengers are prepared for one thing, and that is to bring judgment upon multitudes, and they will do this by instigating and leading a 200 million cavalry. Could it be that their gloomy caverns are not in the earth, but associated with a region of the earth around this great river?

Now, take special note that the judgment is not for eternal torment. The judgment is death upon a third of mankind. In other words, the multitudes that are killed do not enter some other form of life in a living hell of torment.

Based strictly on the context of Peter's epistle, it would appear that physical death is in view. After all, the great deluge of Noah's day resulted in the death of all mankind except Noah and his family. The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah resulted in the death of all the inhabitants of these cities, except Lot and his family.

However, there is another option and that is it refers to death of the carnal flesh (deeds) and not the physical body.

Keep in mind that *The Revelation of Jesus Christ*, which God gave to John, was (is) to *signify* the things that must take place. *Signify* refers to *symbols*, and as such, much of the language of *The Revelation* must be seen as symbolic language that must be discerned **spiritual to spiritual**.

The point is that God knows how to rescue the devout (just or righteous) out of trial, and the unjust will be judged by death, not life. Consider the full text.

(4) For if God did not spare angels [messengers] when they sinned, but cast them into hell [tartarus] and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; (5) and did not spare the ancient world, but preserved Noah, a preacher of righteousness, with seven others, when He brought a flood upon the world of the ungodly; (6) and if He condemned the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah to destruction by reducing them to ashes, having made them an example to those who would live ungodly lives thereafter; (7) and if He rescued righteous Lot, oppressed by the sensual conduct of unprincipled men (8) (for by what he saw and heard that righteous man, while living among them, felt his righteous soul tormented day after day by their lawless deeds), (9) then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, (10) and especially those who indulge the flesh in its corrupt desires and despise authority. Daring, self-willed, they do not tremble when they revile angelic majesties, (11) whereas angels who are greater in might and power do not bring a reviling judgment against them before the Lord. (2 Peter 2:4-11 NASB)

According to Peter, God guards Noah, a herald of righteousness, and rescues the just man, Lot. Consequently, the Lord is acquainted with the rescue of the devout out of trial. By contrast, God spares not sinning messengers, brings a deluge on the world of the irreverent, and condemns the cities by reducing them to cinders, as an example for the irreverent. Thus, God rescues the reverent and brings death upon the irreverent as a chastening judgment with a view toward full restoration.

Sinning Messengers—mankind?

The Greek word *aggelos* simply means "messenger" and refers to an occupation and not a nature, and by itself makes no distinction as to whether it refers to a man or a celestial being. To be an *aggelos*, all one needs to possess is a message. According to Scripture, men that were *aggelos* included John the baptist (Matthew 11:10; Mark 1:2; Luke 7:27), John the Baptist's disciples (Luke 7:24), Jesus' disciples (Luke 9:52), and the spies at Jericho (James 2:25).

This leads us to the second part of our inquiry; whether the sinning messengers could refer to mankind. To pursue this question, let us first concentrate on Jude's epistle. One commentator has suggested that Jude 5-7 refers to three situations found in the Hebrew Scriptures in relation to Israel.

Now I am intending to remind you, you who once are aware of all, that the Lord, when saving the people out of the land of Egypt, secondly destroys those who believe not. (Jude 5 CV)

It is not difficult to see that this refers to Numbers 13:1-33; 14:22-23, 36-38, which recounts the Israelites reaching the land of Canaan and sending in the spies. Unfortunately, the majority believed the spies with an evil report and tempted the Lord ten times, resulting in them being barred from Canaan and the first generation dying in the wilderness. The men that gave the evil report died by a plague. They were not able to enter because of unbelief (Hebrews 3:19).

Besides, messengers who keep not their own sovereignty, but leave their own habitation, He has kept in imperceptible bonds under gloom for the judging of the great day. (Jude 6 CV)

This might relate to the story of Korah, Dathan and Abiram recorded in Numbers 16:1-40. As the story goes, these princes of the congregation murmured against Moses and Aaron, leaving their own habitation or their designated places of leadership, which was having assigned sovereignty over the people. They wanted to take the place of Moses and Aaron, which was going directly against God's chosen vessels. They formed a mob with two hundred and fifty princes from the congregation and went against Moses and Aaron. In response to their defiance, God opened the earth, and these rebellious men went down alive into an open pit, the earth closed back up, and they perished. Then fire came down upon the two hundred and fifty other rebels. Could this be judgment on the sinning messengers? They are not alive in some pit but dead, waiting for the day of judgment of the unjust. *They are kept in imperceptible bonds* could be a reference to being in the un-perceived, which is the unseen.

As Sodom and Gomorrah and the cities about them in like manner to these committing ultra-prostitution, and coming away after other flesh, are lying before us, a specimen, experiencing the justice of fire eonian. (Jude 7 CV)

The account of Sodom and Gomorrah is recorded in Genesis 19:24-25. We need not spend any time on these two cities other than to note that the fire of God rained down on them, and they became a heap of cinders.

Thus, looking at all three stories as connected to the Hebrew Scriptures, we could conclude that the messengers are humans and not celestial beings.

But what about the verses in Peter's epistle; could these sinning messengers be humans as well? It seems that Peter followed the same pattern as Jude. He started with sinning messengers, proceeded to Noah, and then ended with Sodom and Gomorrah. Since Noah's day and the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah are real-life events, perhaps the sinning messengers being thrust into gloomy caverns refers to a real-life human event preceding Noah entering the ark. Could these sinning messengers be false preachers in the day of Noah? As Noah stood for righteousness in an evil day, perhaps these sinning messengers were the antithesis to Noah. With the great deluge, such men were covered with miles of water that surely was a gloomy cavern (a figure of speech). They are dead and awaiting the judgment of the unjust.

Perhaps, this is the better interpretation, because it seems strange to introduce angels into the context of Peter's epistle. The fact that the pagans of that day believed in a place called Tartarus should raise some suspicions that this had anything to do with angels. Why would Peter inject a concept held by pagans? Most likely he did not inject such pagan thought; therefore, we must interpret his words in light of all Scripture on the matter.