

7. CHRIST ALONE HAS IMMORTALITY! **[QUESTIONS ANSWERED]**

According to Scripture, there is no life *in* death, for the believer and the unbeliever alike. Death is death and not some portal into another life. The only way out of the state of death is through resurrection, which is the only way that our Lord Jesus Christ escaped death. Need we be reminded that Scripture clearly declares that ***Christ alone has immortality*** (1 Timothy 6.16), ***and no one has ascended into heaven except He Who descends out of heaven*** (John 3.13).

According to Paul's evangel to the nations, the believer's hope or expectation is the resurrection, transfiguration and the snatching away to the presence of the Lord when He comes for His body at the conclusion of this present eon. Until that day, all who fall asleep in Jesus are dead, waiting until they hear that mighty shout and the trump of God. This is based on 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4.13-18, for this is when we shall always be with the Lord, and not a day sooner.

The "die and go to heaven (or, to hell)" teaching is defended by many using certain Scriptures. Some Scriptures are used so often and so strongly in defense of this matter that they have been accepted by many believers without a serious intelligent challenge. It is needful that serious students of Scripture diligently study the word to see if what is being preached from many pulpits and Bible classes is truly the truth of the inspired word of God *or* the traditions and interpretative biases of men. The following are some of the most often quoted Scriptures.

- 1. *A medium, Saul and Samuel's appearance.*** [1 Samuel 28]
- 2. *To you am I saying today (Paradise).*** [Luke 23.39-43]
- 3. *No one has ascended into heaven except.*** [John 3.13]
- 4. *By no means be dying for the eons.*** [John 11.25-26]
- 5. *You can not follow Me now, yet you shall.*** [John 13.36]
- 6. *Making ready a place for you.*** [John 14.2-4]
- 7. *Longing to be dressed.*** [2 Corinthians 5.1-5]
- 8. *Out of the body and at home with the Lord.*** [2 Corinthians 5.6-9]
- 9. *Snatched away to the third heaven.*** [2 Corinthians 12.1-4]
- 10. *He captures captivity.*** [Ephesians 4.7-10]
- 11. *For me to be living is Christ.*** [Philippians 1.21-24]
- 12. *Dying once.*** [Hebrews 9.27-28]
- 13. *A cloud of witnesses.*** [Hebrews 12.1-2]
- 14. *Heralding to spirits in jail.*** [1 Peter 3.17-20]
- 15. *The exodus.*** [2 Peter 1.15]
- 16. *The souls under the altar.*** [Revelation 6.9-10]

Well, let us challenge ourselves and see if these oft-quoted passages of Scripture are truly proof that when one dies he or she does not really die.

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1. A medium, Saul and Samuel's appearance. [1 Samuel 28]

The ancient Jews did not believe in the immortality of the soul; however, in the Hebrew Scriptures, we discover a story that many today 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.

However, Scripture must be consistent on any subject, including death. We need to apply the concept 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.

“When you enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to imitate the detestable things of those nations. **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, 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. 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

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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 Jehovah, 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 our 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.

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(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.

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. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. 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

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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.

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, 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.

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Unfortunately, this story has led some of the Lord's people to believe in the immortality of the soul, which is what the deceiving spirits want us to believe in these last days. Let us not be deceived by the doctrines of demons!

2. To you am I saying today (Paradise).

And one of the criminals who were hanged there was hurling abuse at Him, saying, "Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!" But the other answered, and rebuking him said, "Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done nothing wrong." And he was saying, "**Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!**" 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 hanging on a cross next to Jesus, as He hung on the cross, is used almost exclusively by many as proof positive that when a believer dies, he goes straight to heaven to be in the presence of God. Recently, a very well-known preacher even declared 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.

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 Jewss. It was the kingdom promised to David, and which was declared to Mary when Gabriel appeared to her pronouncing her favorable before God.

"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; 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.

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." And the soldiers also mocked Him, coming up to Him, offering Him sour wine, and saying, "If You are the King of the Jews, save Yourself!" Now there was also an inscription above Him, "THIS IS THE KING OF THE JEWS." (Luke 23.35-38 NASB)

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So, it was in this context that the criminal asked Jesus to remember him when He comes in His kingdom, which leads to the second point.

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 this old world ruled according to righteousness and justice? Are their kings and lords of Christ ruling over the nations today? Of course, the answer is no to all these questions. 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 the day of Calvary.

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 Greek Scriptures that refer directly to paradise and each points to the future kingdom. Paul was snatched away into paradise (2 Corinthians 12.4), which is taken up later. 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, or the 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 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 the air.

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Thus, God's word consistently places the emphasis on waiting for the resurrection, and *not* on death and immediately going to heaven. However, this leads to a most pressing question: Then why does Scripture state that *today you shall be with Me*? The answer is that most of our English translations state it this way, but this may not be the intent of the available Greek manuscripts from which the translators derived their particular translation.¹ What we have today that we call the Bible is a translation by men of the inspired word. Consequently, the many English (as well as other language) translations at our disposal today are translations of what men perceive to be the original intent. There is room for error and interpretative bias on all fronts.

Another very important fact is that the Greek manuscripts do not have punctuation; this has been added by the translators. The meaning of Jesus' response will change depending where a comma is placed in relation to the word *today*. Consider the following wording: And he said to Jesus, "Be reminded of me, Lord, whenever Thou mayest be coming in Thy kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Verily, to you am I saying *today*, with Me shall you be in paradise" (Luke 23.42-43 cv).

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 (2,000 years) in the future when He would *be coming* (future) in His kingdom. Given all the other points that have been made and in light of all Scripture on this matter, this appears to be the most plausible understanding of this account.

3. No one has ascended into heaven except.

"And no one has ascended into heaven except He Who descends out of heaven."
(John 3.13 cv)

Jesus spoke these words in response to questions posed by Nicodemus, a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews (John 3.1). Jesus had just spoken about being born again, something that puzzled this Jewish ruler and teacher of Israel. Leading up to verse 13, Jesus asked: *"If I told you of the terrestrial and you are not believing, how shall you be believing if I should be telling you of the celestial?"* (John 3.12 cv).

Heaven can be used to describe the vast reaches of the universe, and it can be used for the atmosphere around the earth. However, the reference to the celestial in verse 12 makes it clear that Jesus referred to something other than the air around the earth. He could have been referring to the vast reaches of the universe, even the far north, or another dimension entirely, one beyond the three spatial dimensions in which terrestrial or earthly mankind lives and where the throne of God resides. Personally, I see the whole matter of heaven as something dimensional and not so much related to a physical location. Either way, it must stand according to Scripture that no one has ascended into heaven or the celestials except Christ

¹ Actually, we do not have the original writings of the Greek Scriptures; these were lost early on in the history of the ecclesia. All that is available are hand-written copies of the originals.

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alone, the One who has entered into heaven itself, now to be disclosed to the face of God for our sakes (Hebrews 9.24 cv). Accordingly, no one from mankind is with Christ today.

If we are to believe Scripture, which we must, then we are faced with a question: What about Enoch and Elijah? Many teach that they are in heaven today. Some teach that they are not at the throne but in some intermediary heaven, perhaps a so-called second heaven. This sounds all well and good until we start searching Scripture and discover that it is found nowhere in the sacred text. It simply has been made up by man to explain where one believes Enoch and Elijah to be, that is in heaven.

However, the most pressing question is: ***Are Enoch and Elijah in heaven or did they die like all mankind?***

I realize the answer to this question will go against the grain of most orthodox teaching on this subject, but we must continually seek for the truth, even if it upsets the coconut cart.

First, let us look at 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.

So all the days of Enoch were three hundred and sixty-five years. 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. 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**, 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 Version reads differently than most translations, but perhaps it gives us a clearer picture of what happened to Enoch. The Greek word for *transfer* means “after-place” and *transference* means “after-placing.”

In the Greek Scriptures, we discover the words used in reference to the father’s bones being transferred to Shechem (Acts 7.16), being transferred to a different evangel (Galatians 1.6), the transference of the priesthood and law (Hebrews 7.12),

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and the transference of that which can be shaken to the kingdom that cannot be shaken (Hebrew 12.27).

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 point of this verse is that all we are told is that Enoch was not acquainted with 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.

In faith died all these, not being requited with the promises, but perceiving them ahead and saluting them, and avowing that they are strangers and expatriates on the earth. (Hebrews 11.13 cv)

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 "*in faith died all these*." 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 that point, which were 365 years.

Now, let us look at Elijah.

And it came about when the LORD was about to take up Elijah by a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. ... 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 2.1, 11 NASB)

Most people assume that heaven in these verses refers to the vast spaces of the universe, but actually it refers to the atmospheric heavens associated with the earth's atmosphere, the heaven in which the birds fly. For example: "*Let birds fly above the earth in the open expanse of the heavens*" (Genesis 1.20 NASB). Also, a whirlwind is more of a weather phenomenon, like a violent storm, even a tornado.

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One other fact that will help our understanding is that in the Hebrew text, the preposition *into* is not used, that is, it does not state *into* heaven; *into* has been added by the translators. Thus, the meaning is more in line with the thought that Elijah was removed by a tempest heavenward.

So, where was Elijah taken? We don't know. With his service as a prophet completed, perhaps the Lord removed him to a far distant region for some other service until he died. This was necessary so that Elisha could be placed in service as a prophet.

An interesting observation has been offered by one commentator who states that the letter written by Elijah, as recorded in 2 Chronicles 21.12-15, concerned events that occurred well after (about ten years) Elijah went up in the tempest. This would prove that Elijah was not taken up to heaven.

Finally, the question arises as to the appearance of Elijah and Moses on the mount when Jesus was transformed (Matthew 17.1-8).

How could Elijah and Moses appear on the mount if they are dead? Perhaps, it was a vision. The disciples were given a vision of their appearance; there was not an actual appearing of them. Or perhaps, 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 a difficult one to apprehend, 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.

This leads to the two witnesses in Revelation 11.1-13: Are they Elijah and Moses? The answer is simple; we are not told. Jesus did say that Elijah must come (Matthew 17.10-12), but did He mean that he would personally reappear on earth or that one in the spirit and power of Elijah would appear? After all, Jesus also said that if they had accepted John the baptist, then Elijah had come. Or perhaps, the two witnesses are not even persons, but the spirit and power of Elijah and Moses manifested through a spiritual vessel of conquerors.

4. By no means be dying for the eon.

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 accurate and literal rendering of the Greek text.

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Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11.25-26 KJV)

Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life: he that believes on me, though he have died, shall live; and every one who lives and believes on me shall never die. Believest thou this? (John 11.25-26 DNT)

“I am the Resurrection and the Life,” said Jesus; “he who believes in me, even if he has died, he shall live; 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 [CVI])

Most 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

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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, 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! ²

The *Concordant Greek Sublinear* reads: *And every the living and believing into me not no may-be-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***.

² In another publication edited by Mr. Green (*Literal Translation of the Holy Bible*), the word *age* is maintained.

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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 Jesus was telling them how they would enter that day through resurrection by believing on the One who is the Resurrection and the Life. There is no other way, for Christ is *the Way!*

5. You can not follow Me now, yet you shall.

Simon Peter is saying to Him, "Lord, whither art Thou going?" Jesus answered him, "Where I am going, you can not follow Me now, yet you shall be following subsequently." (John 13.36 cv)

What did Jesus mean by these words? Where was He going? Jesus was going to the stake (cross) to be killed. He made no mention of going to heaven or of the disciples following Him to heaven. Jesus was telling Peter that he too would face death through the cross, a fact noted in the history of the early ecclesia. In fact, except for John, all the disciples suffered violent deaths (see Matthew 10.16-18).

6. Making ready a place for you.

"In My Father's house are many abodes; yet if not I would have told you, for I am going to make ready a place for you. And if I should be going and making ready a place for you, I am coming again and I will be taking you along to Myself, that where I am, you also may be. And where I am going you are aware, and of the way you are aware." (John 14.2-4 cv)

These words of Jesus are often cited as another proof that when believers die they go to heaven and receive a home. It is often described in songs as "the mansion in the sky." This all sounds good, but it is not what Jesus stated.

First, He stated it to His Jewish disciples in reference to something they understood: the temple in Jerusalem that had many abodes in it. His promise was not a heavenly promise but an earthly one. To the dispersed Israelite believers, Peter wrote: *Yet you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation* (1 Peter 2.9 cv). This is a description of the true sons of Israel during the millennial kingdom. The abodes refer to the temple, which speaks of the royal priesthood. This would have been readily understood by His twelve disciples.

Second, notice the actual order of Jesus' words. He said He would be going away and making ready a place for them, and then He would be coming again, at which time He would take them along with Him. Along with Him where? There is only one place, and that is a place of prominence in His kingdom. In other words, His

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whole point dealt with His coming, which speaks of when He comes to set up His millennial kingdom. We also know that when He comes, He will place His apostles on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel (Matthew 19.28).

So, Jesus was comforting them that when He comes in His kingdom, they will not be left out. This comfort was needed because He was about to leave them by being impaled on a stake, which was something they were having a hard time understanding.

Third, it appears that the disciples had no problem with this part of Jesus' statement; however, they did not understand the last part: *And where I am going you are aware, and of the way you are aware*. Thomas did not understand this part, for he asked for an explanation. Notice that Jesus never said that He was going to heaven. Instead, He spoke these often-quoted words: *"I am the Way and the Truth and the Life"* (John 14.6 cv). Not once in the following verses did Jesus bring heaven into the conversation. Rather, Jesus gave them instruction for after His departure.

7. Longing to be dressed.

For we are aware that, if our terrestrial tabernacle house should be demolished, we have a building of God, a house not made by hands, eonian, in the heavens. For in this also we are groaning, longing to be dressed in our habitation which is out of heaven, if so be that, being dressed also, we shall not be found naked. For we also, who are in the tabernacle, are groaning, being burdened, on which we are not wanting to be stripped, but to be dressed, that the mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He Who produces us for this same longing is God, Who is also giving us the earnest of the spirit. (2 Corinthians 5.1-5 cv)

These verses are most often quoted by those who hold that the believer goes to heaven immediately *in* death. According to them, Paul wanted to put off his earthly body so he could go to heaven and be with the Lord. To be sure, Paul desired to be with the Lord, as we should all desire, but this does not mean that Paul taught that at death a believer immediately goes to heaven. Many people who support this view read this into Paul's words and simply do not allow Scripture to speak for itself.

Paul made *no such assertion*. He placed *no immediacy* between being in the earthly body and dressed with the heavenly body. He was expressing what should be the desire of every chosen believer. In fact, Paul stated that God Himself produces this longing in us, which is confirmed by the spirit.

While on this earth, we live in bodies of death (Romans 7.24), and the spirit within us groans for the heavenly body of glory, which, according to Scripture and, uniquely, Paul's evangel, only comes at the resurrection. We must put off corrup-

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tion and put on incorruption, and we must put off mortality and put on immortality; this occurs only with the resurrection and transfiguration about which Paul taught. A heavenly body is beyond death, and we are only beyond death through resurrection. ³

In his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul devoted much space to defending the resurrection of the Lord and the resurrection of believers. We shall all be changed at the last trump, which means that a day will come when Christ will raise from among the dead all those who belong to Him. Paul saw death simply as a sleep.

By the way, so did Jesus. “*Our friend Lazarus has **fallen asleep**. Lazarus is **dead***” (John 11.1, 14).

Paul obviously saw himself falling asleep in Jesus and one day waking up and being snatched away into the presence of His Lord and Savior. Any other view contradicts Paul’s defense of the resurrection and makes the resurrection some secondary and less meaningful matter to the believer. After all, if at death a believer is already in heaven enjoying the eternal bliss of glory, then what is the purpose of the resurrection? ⁴

When we are young, generally we do not view our bodies as humiliation. In fact, many youth of our day worship the body and see no humiliation in it. They dress up the body, flaunt it to sexually entice one another and pamper it to keep it looking young. However, the longer we live, the more we take on the groan that Paul described, even more so as the eyes of our heart are opened to see more clearly our celestial calling in Christ. We begin to groan to be clothed with a spiritual body that can live among the celestials in Christ; a body that is not of flesh and blood but one energized by spirit; a body that does not require oxygen to energize the blood; a body that does not necessarily require food; a body that knows no disease, illness and death. It is a body like our Lord Jesus’ body.

There can be no inconsistencies in Paul’s writings. The heavenly body comes into view only at the resurrection and snatching away of believers. To the Philippians, he wrote: For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; *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); or, For our realm is inherent in the heavens, out of which we are awaiting a Saviour also, the Lord, Jesus Christ, *Who will transfigure the body of our humiliation*, to conform

³ Technically, resurrection does not put one beyond death. Mortality must put on immortality, which means that one must be changed completely, that is, transfigured, to enter the celestial realm. In Jesus’ day, several were resurrected, but they were not beyond death, for they later died.

⁴ Some people believe that resurrection occurs at the death of the believer; however, the lost remain in the death state until the great white throne judgment. Need we be reminded that Paul placed the resurrection at the coming (presence) of the Lord when all who are asleep in Christ will be raised from among the dead. This is our expectation.

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it to the body of His glory, in accord with the operation which enables Him even to subject all to Himself (Philippians 3.20-21 cv).

When does a believer receive this new heavenly body? Only when the Savior comes from heaven, just as Paul wrote to the Thessalonians (1 Thessalonians 1.10; 4.13-18).

However, the proof lies within what Paul taught the Corinthians. In his first epistle, Paul presented to the immature Corinthians the truth of the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15). In his defense of the resurrection, Paul contrasted for them the earthly or soulish body with the heavenly or spiritual body, which the believer receives with the resurrection. *We shall all be changed* is Paul's declaration. We must put off the old corruptible body and put on the new incorruptible body.

Notice how Paul connected the verses under discussion (2 Corinthians 5.1-5) with the closing words of his defense of the resurrection, recognizing that he first wrote about the resurrection.

For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality. Now, whenever this corruptible should be putting on incorruption and **this mortal should be putting on immortality**, then shall come to pass the word which is written, Swallowed up was Death by Victory. (1 Corinthians 15.53-54 cv)

We are not wanting to be stripped, but to be dressed, that **the mortal may be swallowed up by life**. (2 Corinthians 5.4 cv)

So according to Paul, his longing to be dressed in our habitation, which is out of heaven, must be joined with the end of mortality, which is putting off mortality and putting on immortality. This fact is always ignored by those who teach that believers go to heaven immediately upon death. Paul taught no such thing.

Further, it is also incorrectly taught that the *soul* goes to heaven immediately. For this to occur, a believer would have to go to heaven unclothed because the clothing 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. 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. Soul relates to the sensations of the body; thus, it is nothing apart from the body.

Many preachers 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. Apart from this one parable and one story in the Hebrew Scriptures about Saul and the medium, there are no other

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Scriptures that indicate the soul must receive some intermediary covering. It is simply the figment of imagination that has been incorrectly institutionalized as truth within Christendom and repeated countless times from the pulpits until no one questions its validity as presented in Scripture. It has led many to wrongly believe that the soul is something that can exist by itself, and thus is immortal. The pagans believed in the immortality of the soul and, sadly, so do many believers.

Now, returning to the text in question, Paul stated: *For in this also we are groaning, longing to be dressed in our habitation which is out of heaven, if so be that, being dressed also, we shall not be found naked.*

Death strips us of our earthly tent. We have no heavenly tent in which to reside at death. Why? Because Paul placed the heavenly tent as something that we receive with the resurrection and snatching away! We groan as long as we are in these bodies of humiliation waiting for our transfiguration when our Savior comes out of heaven, so that we can enter the celestial realm with new glorified bodies like His. Death is merely a sleep time for believers. One day, they will be awakened from their sleep to rise and meet the Lord. The period of sleep will seem like a night, even though it might be a very long time.

Scripture refers to only two types of bodies: the soulish and soilish body of flesh and blood, and the spiritual and celestial (heavenly) body of flesh and bone. There is no intermediary body for just the soul or the spirit.

8. Out of the body, and to be at home with the Lord.

Paul continued to express the longing in his heart in the next four verses.

Being, then, courageous always, and aware that, being at home in the body, we are away from home from the Lord (for by faith are we walking, not by perception), yet we are encouraged, and are delighting rather to be away from home out of the body and to be at home with the Lord. Wherefore we are ambitious also, whether at home or away from home, to be well pleasing to Him. (2 Corinthians 5.6-9 cv)

There is one pastor who has a daily radio ministry, and practically every time I listen to him he uses these verses, in particular, to tell his audience that they will go to heaven immediately when they die, if they believe. Every time, he states something like this: "Paul taught that to be away from the body is to be with the Lord; therefore, you go to heaven when you die. This is what Paul taught." Dear reader, this is not what Paul taught. Let us look carefully at what Paul stated, which by the way is merely an extension of what he stated in the previous verses that we just looked at. Paul did not change his message.

The first part is very obvious: if we are in the body, which is our earthly home, we are away from home from the Lord. In the meantime, the earnest of the spirit leads us to walk by faith. Faith says that one day we will be with the Lord. On the basis of

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faith, Paul was encouraged that our delight is rather to be away from these bodies of humiliation and to be at home with the Lord. Notice that Paul in no way stated that death is the way that leads immediately to being at home with the Lord. One must read this into Paul's words.

Unfortunately, some people do exactly such a thing; that is, they read words into this verse that are not there. Notice that when Paul stated that we *are delighting rather to be away from home out of the body and to be at home with the Lord*, he joined the two thoughts with the conjunction *and*. Some misstate Paul's words by declaring that to be out of the body *is* to be at home with the Lord. Listen carefully next time this verse is recited from the pulpit and note if this is how it is stated. Please note that the verb *is* is not in Paul's words, and by using this word, one changes the meaning of the phrase. Paul made no such connection, as if one immediately leads to the other.

Paul's final words of this section refer back to verse 6. We are ambitious, whether at home, that is, *at home in the body*, or away from home, that is, *away from the Lord*, to be well-pleasing to Him. It is merely the same thing expressed from different angles. Being ambitious and well pleasing can only refer to our current walk of faith and not to life after death.

9. Snatched away to the third heaven and paradise.

If boasting must be, though it is not expedient, indeed, yet I shall also be coming to apparitions and revelations of the Lord. I am acquainted with a man in Christ, fourteen years before this, (whether in a body I am not aware, or outside of the body, I am not aware—God is aware) such a one was snatched away to the third heaven. And I am acquainted with such a man (whether in a body or outside of the body I am not aware—God is aware) that he was snatched away into paradise and hears ineffable declarations, which it is not allowed a man to speak. (2 Corinthians 12.1-4 cv)

Another set of Scriptures that is used by some to try to prove that the believer goes to paradise upon death is located in the second epistle to the Corinthians. It is taught that the believer, upon death, is caught up to the third heaven and to paradise. But this cannot be the proper understanding of these verses.

First, Paul was snatched away, but he did not know how this occurred, whether in the body or out of the body. In other words, he did not claim that this event was linked to anything he or anybody else had taught. He simply was snatched away to these places and heard things that were unutterable that man is not allowed to speak.

Second, note that he was snatched away *to* the third heaven and snatched away *into* paradise. Some translations place a bias into these verses by stating that Paul was caught *up*, not to or into. This has led to the teaching that Paul was caught up

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from this earth, which for some people it refers to either the experience at death or the rapture. However, this cannot be determined from Paul's description of his experience. He did not know if he was in the body or in the spirit. He simply had a powerful experience.

Third, Paul was obviously snatched away to something not of this earth and time. It is most probable that he was snatched away to the third heaven, and it was there that he saw paradise. Let us look at each one separately.

Paul was the only one of all the inspired writers to refer to the third heaven. Most commentators view the third heaven as a third level in the heavens that currently exists and to which believers are taken when they die. It is seen as the place where the throne of God is. However, where in Scripture are we told this supposed fact? If this is true, then it should be and, in fact, must be explained by Scripture. The fact of the matter is that it is not found in Scripture, other than in this one epistle. How are we to answer this dilemma? There is only one way, and that is to view the third heaven, as well as paradise, in light of John's experience as recorded in the Revelation of Jesus Christ. ⁵

As John was caught away in spirit to perceive the Lord's day, so was Paul caught away in spirit to see the Lord's day, which John also saw, as recorded in Revelation 21-22. In other words, Paul saw beyond the coming millennial kingdom to the eon of the eons in which there is a new heaven and new earth, and the new Jerusalem comes down out of heaven.

The third heaven refers to the new heaven that is to come when our current heavens and earth will pass away with a roar, and the elements will be destroyed with intense heat (see 2 Peter 3.10).

We know that this will be the third heaven, chronologically, as presented in Scripture. According to Peter, there was an original heaven (the *first* heaven of old) before the disruption; there is a current heaven (the *second* heaven now reserved for purging by fire); and there will be yet another heaven (the *third* heaven after the present passes away, or is cleansed and purged) as declared by John and which Paul was allowed to see (see 2 Peter 3.5-13).

Since Paul was snatched away to the third heaven, the paradise that he was caught away to must be in relation to the time of the third heaven as well, for this

⁵ Some commentators use the following Scriptures to support the view that there are three heavens: The first heaven refers to the part of the earth's atmosphere from which comes rain and in which the birds fly (Genesis 8.2; Deuteronomy 11.11; 28.24; Isaiah 55.10); the second heaven refers to all the host of heaven or where the sun, moon and stars reside (Deuteronomy 4.19; 17.3; 2 Kings 23.5; Isaiah 13.10; Jeremiah 8.2; Revelation 12.1); the third heaven refers to where God resides. However, the fact of the matter is that there are several heavens above the earth. Science has proven that there are five spheres or "heavens" above our earth: the troposphere (weather, clouds and birds), stratosphere (ozone layer), mesosphere, ionosphere (auroras) and the exosphere, which leads to outer space. One could argue that perhaps there are seven heavens, which is the number of perfection of what is in view.

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coincides with John's vision on the isle of Patmos. While he was caught away to the third heaven, he saw the paradise.

At this point, I believe it is important to inject a thought about the spiritual side of Paul's experience. Although I refer to time and chronology, Paul's experience must be viewed in light of his revelation about the body of Christ being among the celestials. The third heaven is not so much about time and space as it is about His body entering the realm of God, which is both spiritual and celestial. Is this not the heaven of God? Most surely it is!

Now, what is the paradise? Paradise refers to a park, which is what the garden of Eden was before Adam disobeyed God's one command. In the book of consummation, the Revelation, we discover a garden as well, but there it is described as a city-garden (note the trees of life and the river of life), and it is called the new Jerusalem. As the new heaven and earth came into view, John saw this city coming down out of heaven, having the glory of God. Undoubtedly, Paul saw this same view, but there is a difference in their experiences. John was called up hither and saw it, but Paul was snatched away to it and heard it.

There is one more matter relating to Paul's experience, and that relates to the new creation. Paul alone referred to the body of Christ as a new creation in Christ (2 Corinthians 5.17; Galatians 6.15). Being snatched away to the third heaven and to paradise refers to being snatched away to the new creation, when all things are new (Revelation 21.5). The new creation comes into view with the last eon of the five eons or *the eon of the eons*. Paul saw a truth that has been lost among the countless teachings of Christendom; the body of Christ is joined with the last of the eons when there is a new heaven and a new earth. As glorious as the next eon will be, the millennial kingdom on earth will pale in comparison to the glory of the last eon when God makes all new. Paul saw the destiny of all the saints, and although he could not speak what he heard, he could nevertheless proclaim that he saw the new creation, which is in Christ. Ultimately, this new creation will extend to all mankind, to the praise and glory of God.

Thus, based on Scripture, we can conclude that Paul was given great revelation of the future destiny of mankind, which has nothing to do with what happens when one dies.

Thank God!

10. He captures captivity.

Now to each one of us was given grace in accord with the measure of the gratuity of Christ. Wherefore He is saying, Ascending on high, He captures captivity and gives gifts to mankind. Now the 'He ascended,' what is it except that He first descended also into the lower parts of the earth? He Who

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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*)

The chariots of God are myriads, thousands upon thousands; The Lord is among them as at Sinai, in holiness. 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 68.17-19 *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 alive 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). By now, the reader should be able to see the error in such teaching.

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 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 *NASB*).

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

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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.

11. For me to be living is Christ.

Another Scripture used by many as their proof text that the believer goes to heaven upon death is found in Paul's epistle to the Philippians.

For to me to be living is Christ, and to be dying, gain. Now if it is to be living in flesh, this to me means fruit from work, and what I shall be preferring I am not making known. (Yet I am being pressed out of the two, having a yearning for the solution and to be together with Christ, for it, rather, is much better.) Yet to be staying in the flesh is more necessary because of you. (Philippians 1.21-24 *cv*)

There is no doubt whatsoever that Paul wanted to be with the Lord, but he never stated that he was going to be with Him immediately upon his death; this is what many preachers read into Paul's words, but this does not make it a correct understanding. Paul's desire to be with the Lord cannot conflict with his desire for the resurrection when all will be changed.

To begin, Paul was contrasting two conditions, both of which would bring glory to Christ. If Paul lived, his life would be gain for the cause and glory of Christ; if he died as a martyr, this too would be gain for the cause of Christ. Throughout his epistles, Paul never wrote of seeking gain for himself; it was always for Christ and His people (e.g., 1 Corinthians 15.31; 2 Corinthians 8.23; 11.23-29; 2 Thessalonians 1.12; 2 Timothy 2.10). Paul died daily and suffered tremendously for the cause of Christ.

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In spite of all his trials and even being jailed at the end of his life, Paul remained fruitful in the work of the Lord, and all of us are recipients of that fruit, even after 2,000 years.

We could say that Paul was caught between two outcomes, the better and the best. He desired that in life or death he would bring glory to Christ; he never desired glory for himself. If he lived, he would be fruitful in Christ's service; if he died as a martyr, this too would bring glory to Christ. Either way, it would be gain to Christ and not to him. This is what Paul meant when he questioned which he preferred.

But notice the next line: *Yet I am being pressed out of the two, having a yearning for the solution and to be together with Christ, for it, rather, is much better.* Paul was pressed out of the two, that is, life or death; but he yearned for the better solution, and that was to be together with Christ. In other words, Paul injected a third option to remaining alive or death. The better option was to be together with Christ, which according to Paul's teaching only comes at the resurrection, transfiguration and the snatching away to meet the Lord. Paul's solution was the resurrection, for this was and is the hope of the evangel that he was entrusted with to take to the nations. This is the better solution with which Paul very clearly encouraged the Thessalonians who were waiting for the Son to come from heaven.

Then we who are alive and remain will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we shall always be with the Lord. Therefore comfort one another with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4.17-18 NASB)

So we shall always be with the Lord. This is the comfort that Paul gave the nations. It was *not* death and then immediately going to heaven. It was death, resurrection, transformation and glorification in the presence of the Lord. Notice that Paul never mentions "going to heaven." The air is not heaven!

Paul faced his imminent death with triumph and a shout of victory. What greater legacy could he leave to his beloved brethren than to remind them that there is a glorious hope on the horizon? There is "a better" coming and all should set their hearts on this, as Paul did. Consider Paul's testament to his beloved son of the faith, Timothy.

For I am already a libation, and the period of my dissolution is imminent. I have contended the ideal contest. I have finished my career. I have kept the faith. Furthermore, there is reserved for me the wreath of righteousness, which the Lord, the just Judge, will be paying to me in that day; yet not to me only, but also to all who love His advent. (2 Timothy 4.6-8 cv)

His death was imminent; his dissolution had come, which simply means he was about to die. Paul knew he would receive a reward in *that day*, which is the future day of Christ, not the day of his death. Paul joined *that day* to *His advent*, which

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refers to the return of the Lord. All who love His advent will be rewarded as Paul will be rewarded in that day.

In concluding his letter to Timothy, Paul brought the expectation into view again: *The Lord will be rescuing me from every wicked work and will be saving me for His celestial kingdom (2 Timothy 4.18 cv)*. Paul and all who love the Lord will be saved for His celestial kingdom, which comes at His advent.

This is *the better*, and this is what we are encouraged to love and to expect, as Paul did.

12. Dying once.

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

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, and the tombs were opened. And many bodies of the reposing saints were roused, 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)

Following the same thought that He captured captivity, 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!

And, in as much as it is reserved to the men to be dying once, yet after this a judging, 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

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not an absolute truth that all must die. However, let it be understood that until that glorious day, death is the lot of all. ⁶

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 manslaughterers.

But if he pushed him suddenly without enmity, or threw something at him without lying in wait, 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, then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the blood avenger according to these ordinances. 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. But if the manslayer at any time goes beyond the border of his city of refuge to which he may flee, 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 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. 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.

⁶ I have often wondered if those who will be alive and remain will actually experience a moment of death as they are set free from their mortal body to take on an immortal body of glory. I picture it as a light switch being turned off and then on. Just a thought!

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This is exactly what will happen with the Jews and the coming kingdom. They demanded the death of Messiah, which makes them the manslayers. 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.

13. A cloud of witnesses.

Surely, in consequence, then, we also, having so vast a cloud of witnesses encompassing us, putting off every impediment and the popular sin, may be racing with endurance the contest lying before us, looking off to the Inaugurator and Perfecter of faith, Jesus, Who, for the joy lying before Him, endures a cross, despising the shame, besides is seated at the right hand of the throne of God. (Hebrews 12.1-2 cv)

Many preachers declare that the cloud of witnesses refers to all the dead (but alive) believers that are in heaven looking down on the living saints on earth. It is amazing how often this verse is presented as if the believers are in a big stadium, and all the dead saints are in the bleachers, looking down and cheering them on. This might help to bolster a preacher's view that all the dead in Christ go to heaven upon death, but this is not what the writer of the Hebrews epistle meant. It is important to keep Scripture in context.

The witnesses are all those mentioned in the previous chapter of the epistle, from Abel on down to the wanderers in the caves. All of them gained approval through their faith, but not one of them received what was promised. These are the saints of the Hebrew Scriptures who are dead and awaiting the better resurrection. None of them is watching from heaven, for they are dead.

A witness is one who testifies. Their testimony is the testimony of their lives of faith. This is what encompassed the Hebrew believers.

Further, the English Sublinear of the Concordant Greek Text has the phrase *about-lying* for the translated word *encompassing*. The cloud is lying about, meaning

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they are dead in the grave and not looking down, which excludes the possibility that these witnesses are alive and looking down from heaven. The origin of the word *cloud* indicates that it refers to a mass of rock, signifying a mass of anything. In the context, a cloud is merely a figure of speech for a mass of witnesses.

Thus, the witness is in their testimony of faith and not in them looking down on others.

14. Heralding to spirits in jail.

For it is better to be suffering for doing good, if the will of God may be willing, than for doing evil, 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, in which, being gone to the spirits in jail also, 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.

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15. The exodus.

As he approached his death, Peter referred to it as his *exodus*.

Yet I shall endeavor to have you, after **my exodus**, to make mention of these things, ever and anon, also. (2 Peter 1.15 cv)

Some translations use the word *departure* and others use the word *decease*. The Greek word *exodus* means “out-way.” Some people might think that Peter was referring to his exodus from earth to heaven, but this cannot be his meaning. The same word is used in reference to Jesus’ death and resurrection when He appeared on the mount as He was transfigured in the presence of His three disciples. Exodus in this case starts with death and proceeds to resurrection and ascension. Without dying on the cross, Jesus could never have exited this world. His exodus was through death, as it will be for all His people, except the few who are alive and remain when He comes. The resurrection of the Lord’s people has not come yet; therefore, Peter has only accomplished the first part of the exodus, which is death.

And lo! two men conferred with Him, who were Moses and Elijah, who, being seen in the glory, spoke of His exodus, which He was about to be completing in Jerusalem. (Luke 9.30-31 cv)

The third use of the word *exodus* in Greek Scripture refers to the exodus of the sons of Israel.

By faith Joseph, at his decease, remembers concerning the exodus of the sons of Israel, and gives directions concerning his bones. (Hebrews 11.22 cv)

Notice how the decease or death of Joseph is the primary emphasis of this verse. Even the exodus of the sons of Israel involved death, the death of the Pascal lamb and the parting of the Red Sea, which signified death, burial and resurrection. Consequently, there is no reason to look at the word *exodus* in these cases as anything other than death that can only be remedied by the future resurrection from among the dead.

16. The souls under the altar.

And when It opens the fifth seal, **I perceived underneath the altar the souls of those who have been slain because of the word of God and because of the testimony which they had.** And they cry with a loud voice, saying, “Till when, O Owner, holy and true, art Thou not judging and avenging our blood on those dwelling on the earth?” (Revelation 6.9-10 cv)

Some might wonder about these souls under the altar. Are they alive, which would indicate that the soul is immortal? The answer is no; they are not alive. I must

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confess that at one time I thought and wrote that they are alive, but I have been adjusted on this matter.

First, they have been slain, so they are dead, not alive.

Second, the altar was the place upon which the sacrifices were offered, which indicates that these souls suffered death. The soul is the seat of sensations, and the soul is in the blood. When a sacrifice was made on the altar, the blood of the animal flowed through the grating and below the altar. Consequently, as martyrs, the blood of these souls was poured out, and it is the blood that actually sits under the altar.

Third, their cry is like the cry of Abel's blood that cries from the ground, as does the blood of all the martyrs. Abel is not crying out, but the testimony of his spilt blood is crying out. It is merely figurative language.

Consequently, there is no reason to view these martyrs as being alive under an altar. Can you imagine the scene if this was 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.

Who are these martyrs? Most likely, they are the ones from the ecclesia in Smyrna who are told to be faithful until death, as well as all the saints that face the martyr's death (Revelation 2.10).

Christ alone!

We must hold to Scripture and not weave into our understanding discrepancies that are based on the traditions of men.

[Christ] alone has immortality. (1 Timothy 6.16)

And no one has ascended into heaven except He Who descends out of heaven. (John 3.13)