

THE WORD OF RIGHTEOUSNESS

The Believers' Passage through Death

According to the word of righteousness in the New Testament (Heb. 5:13), as believers in Christ, we are accountable to God and His judgment for our living and work. In this age we are disciplined by our wise Father for our perfection (12:5-10), and at the end of this age we will appear before Christ at His judgment seat to receive either a reward or a rebuke according to our living and work during our lifetime (Rom. 14:10-12). Our accountability to God is manifested in two stages: during our lifetime in this age and after either our rapture or our death and resurrection. It is of great importance, therefore, to soberly examine the truth concerning the believers' passage through death. We strongly assert that the thought of the believers' translation to heaven upon death is a leavened, false teaching that deadens the seeking spirit of the Lord's children; it is a soporific that dulls their sense of desperation for faithfulness and approval by God in this age and in the next. In understanding this great subject, we must abandon the traditions in Christianity, which are heavily laden with errors. When a believer dies, his incorporeal spirit and soul go to Paradise, the pleasant part of Hades beneath the earth, not to heaven. There he awaits the day of the Lord's return when he will be resurrected to appear at the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may "receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad" (2 Cor. 5:10).

"The Sleep of Death"

According to the biblical concept, death is the first result of man's fall, the antithesis of eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Gen. 2:17; Rom. 6:23). It is ranked with curse in contraposition to blessing (Deut. 30:19). It entered the world through sin, was passed to all men, is the wages of sin, and reigns with sin (Rom. 5:12, 14, 17, 21). Its might is wielded by the devil, being the last enemy to be abolished, and all men are appointed to die (Heb. 2:14; 1 Cor. 15:26; Heb. 9:27). To a believer, however, death is not the victor. By visiting those who sat in the region and shadow of death and by tasting death on behalf of

everything, Christ nullified death (Matt. 4:16; Heb. 2:9; 2 Tim. 1:10). Therefore, we are freed from the principle, the law, of death by the law of the Spirit of life, we reign in life over it, we are delivered and saved from it, and we are released from its fear (Rom. 8:2; 5:17; 2 Cor. 1:10; James 5:20; Heb. 2:15). And though our body must pass through corruption, death is ultimately stripped of its victory and sting, and we are victorious over it through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:55-57). In the end, death itself will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:14).

Because death and its effects lack finality, the Scriptures use a particular term for the death of the believers. In passing

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from the body, those who are the Lord's are said to sleep in Him. The psalmist said, "Consider and answer me, O Jehovah my God; / Enlighten my eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death" (Psa. 13:3). Ceasing their life on earth, David, Solomon, and all the kings slept with their

fathers and were buried (1 Kings 2:10; 11:43). The ruler of the synagogue said his daughter had died, but Jesus, knowing the true situation, said she was only sleeping, as He also said of Lazarus after his death (Matt. 9:18, 24; John 11:11-14). On the negative side, Paul warned the Corinthians that due to the Lord's judgment some among them were not only weak and sick but were sleeping (1 Cor. 11:30). On the positive side, he comforted the Thessalonians by revealing to them that their believing forebears had not perished but had only "fallen asleep through Jesus" (1 Thes. 4:14). Many believers since Paul's time have comforted one another with these words. Death is a sleep from which we all will awake in resurrection.¹

Sheol Being the Place of the Dead in the Old Testament

The Old Testament is clear concerning where the believing, faithful ones go when they die. Psalm 6:5 says in a parallel couplet, "For in death there is no remembrance of You; / In Sheol who can give thanks to You?" Similarly, Psalm 49:14 says, "Like a flock, they are appointed for Sheol; / Death will shepherd them. / And straight to the

grave they will descend, / And their form will be for Sheol to consume / That there be no abode for them.” *Sheol* is a particular and significant word in Hebrew. It is the most common word used in the Hebrew Bible to refer to the place of the dead. It is uniquely biblical, having no cognate in the other Semitic languages and being found in no extrabiblical myths, as with certain other Hebrew figures (Freedman 101-102).

Sheol is depicted as a place to which one “goes down.” A few examples of this usage are sufficient to demonstrate this principle. In Numbers 16:30 Moses spoke of those who rebelled with Korah, saying, “If Jehovah brings about a new thing, and the ground opens its mouth and swallows them up with all that belongs to them, and they descend alive into Sheol, then you will understand that these men have despised Jehovah.” Verse 33 continues, “So they and all that belonged to them descended alive into Sheol; and the earth closed over them, and they perished from the midst of the congregation.” When the ground split open and swallowed them, the rebellious ones descended, went down, into Sheol. In 1 Samuel 2:6 Hannah prayed, “Jehovah kills and makes alive; / He brings down to Sheol and brings up.” In the inspiration of her poetic utterance, *kills* is parallel to *brings down to Sheol*. Job lamented, “The cloud is consumed and goes away; / Likewise he who goes down into Sheol does not come up” (Job 7:9). In the distress of his spirit and the bitterness of his soul, Job did not look past his day to the day of resurrection, but expected only to go down in death into Sheol. In 21:13 he laments concerning the wicked: “They spend their days in prosperity, / And in a moment they go down into Sheol.” The wicked, he says, live a life of ease and depart downward in a quick, painless death. *Sheol* is used similarly in Psalms 30:3, 88:3-5, Isaiah 14:11, Ezekiel 31:15-17, and 32:27.

Sheol is also depicted as the lowest place possible. In Isaiah 7:11, Jehovah told Ahaz, “Ask for a sign from Jehovah your God; make it as deep as Sheol, or make it as high as high can go.” Sheol, in direct contrast to “as high as high can go,” may be as low as low can go. For this reason, Deuteronomy 32:22 speaks of the “nethermost Sheol.” In the Scriptures it is strongly contrasted with heaven, being opposite to the extreme in direction. Job 11:8 contrasts “deeper than Sheol” with “the height of heaven”; Psalm 139:8 contrasts “make my bed in Sheol” with “ascend into heaven”; and Amos 9:2 contrasts “dig into Sheol” with “go up into heaven.” Sheol is also depicted as the lowest place in Psalm 86:13, Proverbs 9:18, and Isaiah 14:15. Therefore, in Proverbs 15:24 and Isaiah 14:9 Sheol is called the place below or the place beneath.

Sheol, beneath the earth, is the temporary abode of the departed spirits and souls of the human dead. Isaiah alludes to this in his prophecy against the hypocritical

worshippers of Jerusalem: “And you will be brought down; from the ground you will speak, / And your speech will come from low in the dust. / And your voice will be like that of a departed spirit from the ground, / And your speech will twitter from the dust” (Isa. 29:4). Low in the dust of the ground, Isaiah says, is the place of the incorporeal dead, the “departed spirit.” This is confirmed in 1 Samuel 28 in which Saul invokes a medium to speak with Samuel, who is now a “departed spirit” (vv. 3, 8). When the medium saw the dead Samuel, she said, “I see some divine being coming up out of the earth,” and Samuel himself asked, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” (vv. 13, 15). The departed spirit of Samuel, having come up to speak with Saul, must have been in a place below. Sheol, therefore, is the place where the righteous dead are kept, such as Samuel, Jacob, and David (Gen. 37:35; Psa. 16:10). It is also the place where the unrighteous dead are kept, such as those who fought against Israel (Ezek. 32:21, 27).² Clearly then, Sheol is not heaven, and neither is it the hell depicted in mythological and fanciful literature. It is the place of all the dead, prepared by God and revealed uniquely in the Bible. Thus, the Old Testament gives no ground to the leavened, false teaching of “going to heaven” as it is popularly conceived today. G. H. Lang argues in this way, using the words of Ecclesiastes 12:7:

But did not Stephen “go to heaven” when he died? Do not all who die in Christ do so? It has been the almost universal belief of Protestants, but there is no Scripture for it. If Solomon’s words, “the spirit returns to God who gave it,” mean this, then the saints before the time of Christ must have gone there, and, as before remarked, not saints only, but the ungodly also, for the statement applies to all men. (54)

Hades in the New Testament Being Equal to Sheol

In the Septuagint, *Sheol* is most often translated as the Greek *Hades* (ᾍδης). *Hades* appears ten times in the New Testament.³ *Hades* is equal to Sheol; they are one and the same place where the souls and spirits of the dead are kept. As with Sheol, one is “brought down” to Hades, and Hades is in contrast to heaven as the lowest place (Matt. 11:23; Luke 10:15). “Scripture always locates it there and nowhere else....As certainly as heaven is above the surface of the earth so certainly is Hades in the opposite direction” (Lang 53).

It is an erroneous concept that Hades is the “hell” of mythology and popular Christian tradition. It is unfortunate that *Sheol* is translated in the King James Version as *grave* thirty-one times, *hell* thirty-one times, and *pit* three times, and that *Hades* is translated as *hell* ten times. At least one other New Testament term—*Gehenna*—is also translated as *hell*. An abundance of classical,

neo-classical, and Middle Eastern mythology related to hell, however, obscures the Scriptural meaning of Hades. The Greek of the New Testament distinguishes between Hades and Gehenna (γέεννα), the latter being the place of unquenchable fire (Matt. 5:22; 10:28; 23:33; Mark 9:43). Lang notes, "Sheol and Hades are rendered 'grave,' 'pit,' and 'hell.' The last in its older English meaning was not inaccurate, but it has come now to mean only the final place of the lost, the lake of fire, which never is the sense of Sheol or Hades" (51-52). Freedman speaks of a "demarcation between Hades and GEHENNA," explaining that only the latter is used to describe "the eschatological hell of fire where the ungodly will be punished after death" (104-105). Hades, in contrast to Gehenna, is the temporary holding place of both the godly and the wicked until their resurrection (Acts 2:27; Luke 16:23). The best biblical scholarship since the mid-nineteenth century supports this understanding. M. R. Vincent says concerning Hades,

It is the place to which all who depart this life descend, without reference to their moral character. By this word the Septuagint translated the Hebrew *Sheol*, which has a similar general meaning....Hades and Sheol were alike conceived as a definite place, lower than the world. The passage of both good and bad into it was regarded as a *descent*....There was, indeed, this difference between the Hebrew and the Pagan conceptions; that to the Pagan, Hades was the final home of its tenants, while *Sheol* was a temporary condition. Hence the patriarchs are described (Heb. xi. 16) as looking for a better, heavenly country; and the martyrs as enduring in hope of "a better resurrection." Prophecy declared that the dead should arise and sing, when Sheol itself should be destroyed and its inmates brought forth, some to everlasting life, and others to shame and contempt (Isa. xxvi. 19, Hos. xiii. 14; Dan. xii. 2)....In the New Testament, Hades is the realm of the dead. It cannot be successfully maintained that it is, in particular, the place for sinners. (1:93-95)

That the godly go to Hades when they die is clearly seen in two cases, that of David and that of the Lord Jesus. In Psalm 16:9-10 David says, "Therefore my heart rejoices and my glory exults; / Even my flesh dwells securely. / For You will not abandon my soul to Sheol, / Nor let Your Holy One see the pit." In Acts 2 Peter repeats these words on the day of Pentecost, rendering *Hades* for *Sheol*: "You will not abandon my soul to Hades" (v. 27). Since Peter uses this Psalm to testify of the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus, his argument hinges on the fact

that David, as well as the Lord Jesus, did descend into Hades, but this Jesus, Peter says, "God has raised up, having loosed the pangs of death, since it was not possible for Him to be held by it" (v. 24). He goes on to exposit the words of David: "Therefore, being a prophet and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him to seat One from the fruit of his loins upon his throne, he, seeing this beforehand, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that neither was He abandoned to Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption" (vv. 30-31). According to Peter's inspired utterance, it was Christ, not David only, who went into Hades. Unlike David, however, Christ was raised up from Hades, and His physical body was resurrected from the tomb.

The Lord had prophesied His descent into Hades in Matthew 12:40, saying, "For just as Jonah was in the belly of the great fish three days and three nights, so will the Son of Man be in the heart of the earth three days and three nights." After the Lord was crucified, He remained "in the heart of the earth" until His resurrection. That "the heart of the earth" is a place more profound than the tomb in which the Lord's body was laid is borne

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out by Ephesians 4:9: "Now this, 'He ascended,' what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth?" Here Paul equates "the heart of the earth" to "the lower parts of the earth." This latter phrase is used in Psalm 63:9, which says that those who are

given over to the power of the sword "go into the lower parts of the earth" and is rendered by the Septuagint in the superlative: "the lowest parts." Clearly this a reference to Sheol, or Hades. These passages plainly tell us that after the Lord's death and before His resurrection, His body was buried in the earth, but His spirit descended to Hades. From the above cases we can see that the New Testament gives no ground for a teaching of "going to heaven" after death.

Paradise Being the Pleasant Part of Hades

We are now in a position to understand two key portions of the Scriptures, both in Luke, related to the believers' passage through death. In Luke 23:42 the repenting thief who was crucified with the Lord said to Jesus, "Remember me when You come into Your kingdom." This thief, not understanding dispensational truths, had heard that the Lord Jesus would be King and would receive a kingdom. Therefore, he asked amiss that the Lord would remember him when He comes into His kingdom. Although his prayer was imprecise, the Lord's answer was very clear. Verse 43 says, "And He said to him, Truly I say

to you, Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” It is significant that the Lord did not say, “After many days you shall be with Me in Paradise” or “Today you shall be with Me in heaven.” Rather, He said, “Today you shall be with Me in Paradise.” This “today” was the very day of the Lord’s crucifixion. According to the Lord’s word, the thief joined Him in Paradise that same day. There is, of course, no indication at all in the Scriptures that Jesus ascended into heaven prior to His resurrection. As we have seen, on the day of His crucifixion the Lord descended into the heart of the earth, the lowest parts of the earth, that is, into Hades. The Paradise spoken of by the Lord Jesus, therefore, is equivalent to Hades. It is an erroneous tradition that Paradise is equal to heaven or is in heaven. It is clear that after His crucifixion and before His resurrection, the Lord did not ascend into heaven above the earth. Rather, He descended into Hades beneath the earth where He remained for three days. There in such a place and on that “today” the saved thief joined Him in Paradise.

Luke 16:19-31 is the story of Lazarus and the rich man and their respective deaths. It served as the Lord’s warning to the rich Pharisees, as money lovers who were incited by their riches to indulge in their lust. Commentaries on this portion universally recognize it as a unique account. It is, for example, the only such story told by the Lord in which He gives the name of a character in it. In this story, a certain beggar named Lazarus died and “was carried away by the angels into Abraham’s bosom” (v. 22). *Carried away* here is the aorist infinitive form of ἀποφέρω, implying no direction up or down but simply away from a prior location. *Abraham’s bosom* is a rabbinical phrase, “equivalent to being with Abraham in Paradise” (Vincent 1:398), and *bosom* implies comfort—a mother’s bosom, for example, is the place of greatest comfort for a child—as verse 25 says of Lazarus, “Now he is comforted here.” That Lazarus was carried away to Paradise means that he was now in Hades, as E. Godet says on this portion: “In Jewish theology, the angels are charged with receiving the souls of pious Israelites, and transporting them to that portion of Hades which is reserved for them” (177).

The story continues: “And the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham from afar and Lazarus in his bosom” (vv. 22-23). We should not take this to mean that to be in Hades is equivalent to being in torment. Godet explains, “The idea of suffering does not lie in the words ἐν τῷ ᾄδῃ [*in Hades*], which our versions render by: *in hell*...The notion of pain is actually found only in the words: *being in torments*” (179). This story brings us into a view of the state after death, in which both Lazarus and the rich man are found in Hades. “The rich man was in Hades (Luke xvi. 23), and *in torments*, but Lazarus was

also in Hades, ‘in Abraham’s bosom’” (Vincent 1:95). This has led students of the Bible, both in ancient times and in modern times, to conceive of Hades as having two sections, a pleasant section and a section of torment. Of these two, only the former, Paradise, is clearly given a name. Vincent defines Paradise as “the department of Hades where the blessed souls await the resurrection; and therefore equivalent to *Abraham’s bosom*” (1:431). H. Olshausen calls the temporary hold of the pious “the joyful abode of Hades” (81).

Some expositors of the previous two centuries use the name *Gehenna* for the place of torment in Hades. Hades, says Vincent, “is the condition following death, which is blessed or the contrary, according to the moral character of the dead, and is therefore divided into different realms, represented by *Paradise* or *Abraham’s bosom*, and *Gehenna*” (1:96). A. T. Robertson is also of this mind:

Hades is technically the unseen world, the Hebrew Sheol, the land of the departed, that is death....The Jews put both Abraham’s bosom and Gehenna in Sheol or Hades (cf. Luke 16:25). Christ was in Hades (Acts 2:27, 31), not in Gehenna....Lazarus was in Hades also for both Paradise (Abraham’s bosom) and Gehenna are in the unseen world beyond the grave....The Jews believed that Gehenna and Paradise were close together. (1:132-133, 2:222-223)

Godet uses the same nomenclature:

Sheol (Heb.), *Hades* (Gr.), the *Inferi* or *infernal regions* (Lat.), simply denote the abode of the dead, without distinguishing the different conditions which it may include, in opposition to the *land of the living*. *Paradise* (xxiii. 43) as well as *Gehenna* (xii. 5) forms part of it. Hence, also, from the midst of his punishment the rich man can behold Abraham and Lazarus. (179)

Olshausen speaks similarly:

The soul...is in an intermediate state, in which the experience of pain or of joy is regulated according to the moral condition of each individual, but that state is still one merely of transition, and not till the resurrection, and the κρίσις ἐσχάτη [last judgment], does the final decision take effect. The dwelling place of souls when unclothed from the body is termed in the language of Scripture ᾄδης = *sh’ol*, and with special reference to the sinful individuals who are found in this place...*Gehenna*...while with reference to the pious it is styled κόλπος Ἀβραάμ, παράδεισος, *bosom of Abraham, paradise*. (Luke xxiii. 43.) (80-81)

In principle then, Hades is divided into two sections: a pleasant part called Paradise for comfort and an unpleasant part for torments.⁴ These two sections are pictured as

being “afar,” separated by a great chasm, yet they are close enough for the rich man and Abraham to converse (Luke 16:23-26). The two sections of Hades are cut off from each other and have no bridge between them for passage. Yet those in the two sections can see and even talk to one another.

At this point we must speak a word of caution and clarification. Many scholars on the subject of Hades and Sheol, such as those cited above, support their understanding by citing Jewish theology or the views concerning death held by the Jews at the time of Christ, and some commentators tell us that Jesus spoke the story in Luke 16 according to the terminology and understanding held by His audience. It is not possible that in speaking the story of Lazarus the Lord would condescend to the understanding of His audience to the point of indulging untrue myths. H. Alford warns us not to use this kind of contextual logic to dismiss the teaching of the two-sided Hades revealed by the Lord’s words:

In the whole of this description, the following canon of interpretation may be safely laid down:—Though it is unnatural to suppose that our Lord would in such a parable formally *reveal* any *new truth* respecting the state of the dead,—yet, in conforming himself to the ordinary language current on these subjects, it is impossible to suppose that He, whose essence is Truth, could have assumed as existing any thing which does not exist. It would destroy the truth of our Lord’s sayings, if we could conceive Him to have used popular language which *did not point at truth*. And accordingly, where *such* language was current, we find Him not adopting, but protesting against it: see Matt. xv. 5. (1:602-603)

It is a serious error to say, “The Lord Jesus condescended to speak in this way to the Jews, but it is not so.” Thus, we are to believe the details of the story of Lazarus and the rich man not because they conform to Jewish theology or the thought of the time but because they are the Lord’s direct words.

Scholarship and Debate on the Teaching of Hades

That Hades is the temporary holding place of the believing and unbelieving dead is a point of disagreement among certain expositors of the Bible. For this reason, we must address some of the scholarship on the subject. In particular, we take exception with R. C. H. Lenski, who rejects the concept of Sheol and Hades as revealed in the verses cited in this article. With regard to Luke 10:15, he says,

The Paradise spoken of by the Lord Jesus is equivalent to the pleasant part of Hades. It is an erroneous tradition that Paradise is equal to heaven or is in heaven. After His crucifixion, the Lord descended into Hades beneath the earth.

The English *hades* and *hell* no more deserve a capital letter than do *heaven* and the *heavens*. “Hades,” the unseen place...is here beyond question the opposite of *heaven* and thus must mean *hell* [the place of eternal punishment]. “Hades” is here not used as a translation of *sheol*, for Jesus is not quoting though he may have used *sheol* in the Aramaic. (Luke 578)

To where then was Lazarus carried in Luke 16? Lenski first answers and then bolsters his position by recommending a nineteenth century French watercolor artist, saying, “His soul was borne into the bliss of heaven by God’s own angels. Tissot has a wonderful painting of two glorious angels with six wings bearing the beggar’s soul into the empyrean” (Luke 849). Lenski is fixed in his view of the world after death:

The Scripture and Jesus are a unit in revealing the existence of only *two places* in the other world, *heaven*, the abode of God and of the angels and the saints, and *hell*, the abode that has been especially prepared for the devil and his angels, to which also all those who follow the devil are consigned....Abraham is pictured as being in *heaven*, the rich man as being in *hell*. What is gained by inventing a second kind of *heaven* (Paradise) and a second kind of *hell* and by uniting them with a gulf between them into a realm of the dead when we already have the real *heaven* and *Paradise* and the real *hell*, both properly divided? The entire Scripture analogy is against this alleged intermediate place. (Luke 852-853)

The church fathers were not against “this alleged intermediate place.” Tertullian writes, “That souls are even now susceptible of torment and of blessing in Hades, though they are disembodied, and notwithstanding their banishment from the flesh, is proved by the case of Lazarus” (557). Concerning the region where Lazarus is, he says,

This region, therefore, I call Abraham’s bosom. Although it is not in *heaven*, it is yet higher than *hell*, and is appointed to afford an interval of rest to the souls of the righteous, until the consummation of all things shall complete the resurrection of all men with the “full recompense of their reward.”...By Abraham’s bosom is meant some temporary receptacle of faithful souls, wherein is even now delineated an image of the future, and where is given some foresight of the glory of both judgments. (406)

Lenski does not offer much in his exposition of Luke to found his argument in Scripture. He does, however, offer a piece of logic from Luke 10:15. In this verse Jesus

berates the unbelieving city: “And you, Capernaum, who have been exalted to heaven, to Hades you will be brought down.” Lenski exposit:

“Hades” cannot mean *das Totenreich*, the realm of the dead, into which some say all the dead descend. If it is a place that is different from heaven and from hell, a receptacle for all dead men which really existed, it would be pointless for Jesus to declare that obdurate Capernaum shall be cast thither—where else would dead men go? No; hades is the place of the damned. (*Luke* 578)

At first glance, Lenski’s argument bears consideration, but it does not have much depth. Here Jesus says that Capernaum has been “exalted to heaven,” and it will be “brought down” to Hades. Neither Capernaum nor the men in it ever ascended to heaven. To be exalted to heaven, then, is a metaphor for self-boast in worldly glory, security, and riches. In the same way, to be brought down to Hades in this instance is a metaphor for degradation and destruction. The Lord is not stating the very pedestrian fact that the men in Capernaum will one day die and then go where dead men go. He is prophesying in figurative speech that Capernaum and the unbelieving in it will fall into destruction. Vincent compares the Lord’s words here to those of Zophar in Job 11:8 and 9, in which he poetically describes the depths of God and the limit of the Almighty: “It is the height of heaven....It is deeper than Sheol.” Vincent says, “The words about Capernaum...are merely a rhetorical expression of a fall from the height of earthly glory to the deepest degradation, and have no more bearing upon the moral character of Hades than the words of Zophar (Job xi. 7, 8) about the perfection of the Almighty” (1:95). Lenski’s logic falls short, and his argument against a realm of the dead other than heaven or hell has no foundation in Luke 10.

Lenski is strongly motivated and biased against the scriptural teaching of Hades by three factors. First, from his sentimental reference to Tissot’s painting, an unbreakable bond with the traditional concept of heaven and hell as cherished and taught blindly in Christendom for many centuries can be inferred. Second, he believes that any notion of a realm other than heaven or hell paves the way for the heretical doctrine of purgatory. Concerning the teaching of a realm of the dead having “two compartments, an upper and a lower,” he says:

The latter is developed so as to make possible a conversion for those who in this life remained without the gospel, and the borders between this idea and the Catholic purgatory become very dim....All speculation which claims the discovery of a third or intermediate abode treads the outworn paths of Romanism and merely modifies the Catholic views. (*Luke* 851-852)

Clearly, the story of Lazarus and the rich man teaches the very opposite of what Lenski loathes. Whereas the heretical doctrine of purgatory allows for the possibility of after-death salvation, the Word of God says that between the sections of Hades there is an impassible chasm, as Abraham said to the rich man: “And besides all these things, between us and you a great chasm is fixed, so that those wanting to pass from here to you cannot, neither from there to us may any cross over” (Luke 16:26). There is more than a “very dim” border between the words of the Lord and the heresy of purgatory. We do not have the Scriptures or their enlightened interpretation to credit for the teaching of post-mortem conversions; the teaching of purgatory is yet another burden of leaven introduced into Christendom in its early centuries, for which the proper teaching of Hades cannot be faulted.

The third factor in Lenski’s opposition to the scriptural notion of Hades is that a too literal or topographic interpretation of Luke 16 transmutes the spiritual realm of the dead into one so physical as to not be tenable. He says, “All conceptions of time and space, succession and distance, must be removed for the other world. We know that they do not exist there” (*Luke* 849). He objects, for example, that a notion of space or direction is implied by the fact that the rich man “lifted up his eyes” (Luke 16:23), as if to look from a lower realm to a higher one. Vincent, however, is not reticent to speak of Hades as an actual locale. He says, “Hades, then, in the New Testament, is a broad and general conception, with an idea of *locality* bound up with it” (1:95-96). Alford allows that the lifting up of eyes may be idiomatic, as one is said to look up to someone of a higher rank, without respect to physical proportions. Thus, *lifted up his eyes* refers “not necessarily to a *higher place*, though that *may* be meant.” His proposal follows the pattern of Augustine’s maxim: “*Superbus temporis, mendicus inferni*” (haughty in time, beggarly in the lower region) (1:603). Alford allows for either a spatial or metaphorical interpretation without shrinking back from both. In dealing with difficult issues in the parabolic portions of Scriptures, it is sometimes fair to avoid too literal an interpretation, but to add “though that *may* be meant” always does honor to the Word of God. Lenski should heed Alford’s caution: “It would destroy the truth of our Lord’s sayings, if we could conceive Him to have used popular language which *did not point at truth*” (1:602-603).

To distance the student of the Scriptures from the notions of time and space in the spiritual realm, Lenski all but annuls the major details of the account in Luke 16. In the words of the Lord, Abraham and the rich man converse, but Lenski says, “The real question is whether the blessed and the damned are able to see and to speak with each other as that is here represented. The answer is negative” (*Luke* 854). Indeed, we must exercise a spirit of wisdom

and revelation to see the realities portrayed in pictures, and we must avoid excessively literal or physical interpretations of figurative speech lest we soon find ourselves doting on watercolors of angels with six wings. However, we must not in haste and fear find a simple, homiletic, underlying thought in parables and dismiss the details with a sweeping “negative.” All Scripture is God-breathed, and in Luke 16 there is much breath for the open spirit and instruction for the seeking mind.

Lenski concludes that in conceiving and speaking of a realm of the dead, “It is folly to rationalize, speculate, draw conclusions with our finite minds beyond what is so inadequately conveyed to us” (*Luke* 850). J. P. Lange disagrees that what is spoken concerning Hades in Luke 16 is “inadequately conveyed,” saying, “Although it is not the immediate purpose of this parable...to give a special instruction about future things, yet many a question about the other world is here answered in a satisfactory manner” (8:256). In framing his teaching on the supports of tradition and fear of heresy, Lenski fails to draw conclusions from what is adequately conveyed to us, that is, from the actual words of the Lord Jesus in this most unique account. In doing so he finds himself at odds with the best scholarship on this subject, and even worse, in promoting the leavened traditions of Christendom concerning heaven and hell, he places his teachings in rank with the very errors that he seeks to oppose. Too many a genuine believer in the Lord has been drugged into a life of dullness by the expectation of “two glorious angels with six wings” bearing his soul “into the empyrean.” Some may say that love and devotion alone, along with the hope of a “heavenly mansion,” are incentive enough for the Christian to live a life of faithfulness. But God, knowing the frailty of human nature, has given us His word of righteousness. We shall not ascend to heaven upon death. Rather, we shall rest for a while in the pleasant part of Hades and then be resurrected to appear before the judgment seat of Christ. Our portion at that time will not depend on the work of the glorious angels; it will depend on our own life and work prior to our death.

Paradise Not Being “Transferred” to Heaven

Up to this point we have seen that Sheol, or Hades, is the temporary hold of both the saved and unsaved after their death and before their resurrection. Moreover, it is divided into two sections, departments, or realms, the pleasant section called Paradise and the unpleasant section of torments. It is not the case, therefore, that upon death the saved go

to heaven and the unsaved to hell, as is popularly taught and received in Christendom. To this the best expositors attest. However, beginning from the early twentieth century certain post-Brethren teachers formulated the doctrine that at Christ’s ascension all the saved dead in Paradise were led to heaven, where they now abide. As a corollary to this teaching, those who die in Christ in the New Testament age now go straight to heaven and not to Paradise, which has been vacated and abandoned, while the unbelieving dead continue to go to the unpleasant part of Hades to await the resurrection unto condemnation. C. I. Scofield is the leading spokesman of this school:

Hades was formerly in two divisions, the abodes respectively of the saved and of the lost. The former was called “paradise” and “Abraham’s bosom.” Both designations were Talmudic, but adopted by Christ in Lk. 16:22; 23:43....So far as the unsaved dead are concerned, no change of their place or condition is revealed in Scripture. At the judgment of the great white throne, Hades will give them up, they will be judged, and will pass into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:13, 14). But a change has taken place which affects paradise. Paul was “caught up to the third heaven...into paradise” (2 Cor. 12:1-4). Paradise, therefore, is now in the immediate presence of God. It is believed that Eph. 4:8-10 indicates the time of the change. “When he ascended up on high he led a multitude of captives.” It is immediately added that He had previously “descended first into the lower parts of the earth,” i.e. the paradise division of Hades. (1098-1099)

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Scofield bases his teaching on two passages. The first is 2 Corinthians 12, of which verses 2 to 4 say,

I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago (whether in the body I do not know, or outside the body I do not know; God knows) such a one was caught away to the third heaven. And I know such a man (whether in the body or outside the body, I do not know; God knows), that he was caught away into Paradise and heard unspeakable words, which it is not allowed for a man to speak.

The third heaven, no doubt, is the heaven above the heavens, the highest heaven (Deut. 10:14; Psa. 148:4), where the Lord Jesus and God are today. The question, of course, is related to Paradise in 2 Corinthians 2:4. If viewed as two equivalent, parallel statements, verse 2 and verses 3 and 4 place *third heaven* and *Paradise* in correspondence. However, the conjunction *and* between these two statements is an important word. Let us repeat verses 2 to 4, this time eliding the portions parenthesized by Darby and other

translators: "I know a man in Christ, fourteen years ago...such a one was caught away to the third heaven. And I know such a man...that he was caught away into Paradise." *And* here indicates that what is mentioned in verses 3 and 4 and what is mentioned in the preceding verse are two different matters. Verse 2 tells us that the apostle was caught away to the third heaven. Verses 3 and 4 tell us something further, that the apostle was caught away also to another place, into Paradise. This indicates strongly that Paradise is not the same as the third heaven in verse 2; it refers to a place other than the third heaven.

Whereas the conjunction *and* lends much insight to this passage, the verbal *caught away* gives us little clue in itself as to what Paul experienced. Although wrongly translated as "caught up" in the King James Version and others, the Greek words in verses 2 and 4 are aorist forms of ἀρπάζω, meaning "snatch" or "carry away." It is the same word used of Philip in Acts 8:39 and carries in itself no meaning of vertical direction, either up or down. In 2 Corinthians 12:2 it means "caught away," and in verse 4 it means "caught away." There is no linguistic ground to say that the implication of *up* with respect to the third heaven in verse 2 imposes the same meaning with respect to Paradise in verse 4.

The subject of this passage, therefore, is neither the third heaven nor Paradise but the visions and revelations of the Lord concerning the situation in the entire universe. Verse 1 says, "To boast is necessary, though indeed not expedient; yet I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord," and in verse 7 Paul speaks of the transcendence, or exceeding greatness, of the revelations. In the universe there are mainly three sections: the heavens, the earth, and Hades, which is underneath the earth. Philippians 2:9 and 10 say, "Therefore also God highly exalted Him and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven and on earth and under the earth." Those who are in heaven are angels, those who are on earth are men, and those who are under the earth are the dead. *In heaven and on earth and under the earth*, therefore, is an all-inclusive designation of the universe, encompassing all creation. As a man living on earth, the apostle knew the things of the earth. But men do not know the things either in the heavens or in Hades. The apostle, however, was brought away to both of these unknown places. Hence, he received visions and revelations of these hidden regions. For this reason he mentioned these two uttermost parts of the universe. By bringing Paul to the third heaven above and to Paradise under the earth, God gave Paul the transcendence of revelations concerning the entire situation of God and man in the three main sections of the universe. The true meaning of 2 Corinthians 12:1 through 4 demands that the third heaven and Paradise be two places, not one. As Lang

notes, in verse 1 Paul had said that "he was about to speak of 'visions,' not of only one vision, whereas he did not mention more than one, unless the two are separate events" (56).

The second portion of the Scriptures that Scofield uses for his thesis is Ephesians 4:8-10. These verses say,

Therefore the Scripture says, "Having ascended to the height, He led captive those taken captive and gave gifts to men." (Now this, "He ascended," what is it except that He also descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended, He is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens that He might fill all things.)

Scofield says that these verses indicate the time of the change that affected Paradise. First Christ descended "into the lower parts of the earth," that is, into Hades, and then He ascended to the height, that is, to the third heaven. Having ascended to the height, Scofield says, He led captive those taken captive by translating the dead in Hades to heaven.

There are two main schools of interpretation of this passage, particularly as to whom "those taken captive" refers in verse 8. One interpretation is that those taken captive are said to be not the righteous dead but the devil, sin, and death. Clearly this interpretation, supported by writers such as Chrysostom in the former times and M. Henry and Lang in modern times, gives no ground to Scofield's teaching of a translation of believers (Schaff 104, Henry 703, Lang 56). A better, more comprehensive interpretation, however, is that the captives are men, the redeemed ones, who were taken captive by Satan before being saved by Christ's death and resurrection. In His ascension Christ led the redeemed ones captive; that is, He rescued them from Satan's captivity. In Christ's ascension there was a procession of these vanquished foes, including Satan, his angels, and us the sinners, led as captives from a war, for a celebration of Christ's victory.

Little or no ground is found in either of these two schools of interpretation to support that in Christ's triumphal procession there was an actual translation of the saved dead from Paradise in Hades to the third heaven. The principle of Ephesians 4:8 to 11 is that by Christ's travelling from heaven to earth in His incarnation, from earth to Hades after His crucifixion, from Hades back to earth in His resurrection, and from earth back to heaven in His ascension, Christ gained all His redeemed ones and conquered Satan, who had usurped us and held us under his power of death. He then presented His captives to His Father, who in turn gave them back to Him as gifts. Then Christ gave all these captives as gifts to men, specifically as gifts in His Body, the church. It is important that we realize that the gifts given to men

in verse 8 are men themselves. As we shall see, the giving of these men as gifts to the church precludes the possibility that they are now in heaven. Concerning the word *gifts* (δόματα) in verse 8, K. S. Wuest says,

The word here is not *charisma*, referring to special gifts such as the gifts noted in I Cor. 12:4-11, but *doma*, a general term for that which is given. These gifts are the gifted men mentioned in 4:11. Christ gave these gifts to the Church when He ascended to Heaven. (98)

W. R. Nicoll speaks similarly concerning *gave* in verses 8 and 11:

The “giving” here refers to the *call* of the Church’s Head, the point being the gift of Christ to the Church in the form of certain men chosen by Him and equipped by Him to do service toward the building up of His body...The primary thing is the *persons*, not the offices...The *men* are Christ’s gifts to the Church and to every member of it. (329)

Lange goes beyond these two authorities to say that the men given as gifts were the very men in Christ’s triumphal procession into heaven. Concerning “those taken captive” and “gave gifts to men” he says,

By “captivity,” αἰχμαλωσία, ...we must understand captives, a troop or group of them, and not prison, captivity (Luther). This the parallelism which follows in the Psalm (LXX.: ἀπειθοῦντες, Vulgate: *non credentes* [the unbelieving]) teaches us; indeed the next clause (ἔλαβες δόματα ἐν ἀνθρώπῳ [received gifts in man]) indicates plainly enough that the notion of αἰχμαλωσία is that of a *turba captivorum*, a crowd of captives, since the passage speaks of gifts in the man (in the human race), in men, presents consisting in men....By “men,” τοῖς ἀνθρώποις we must understand chiefly men conquered by Him, His men, to whom He has given gifts of grace, that they themselves may and can become gifts for men in wider circles (see ver. 11; Acts ii. 33). (11:145)

Those taken captive and led in Christ’s triumphal procession into heaven became the very gifts given to men, that is, to the church. Some of these gifts are particular ones, as mentioned in verse 11: “And He Himself gave some as apostles and some as prophets and some as evangelists and some as shepherds and teachers.” Says Lange,

For what God conquers, overcomes, leads with Himself, takes to Himself, makes His own, He does not wish to

retain for Himself, but He transforms it, endows it, and makes it a gift: His captives become His servants....So in a higher sense Christ; He made Saul Paul, the enemy and destroyer of His church an Apostle. (11:145)

Saul himself was taken captive and led in triumph, as W. J. Conybeare and J. S. Howson say concerning “leads us in triumph” in 2 Corinthians 2:14:

The full phrase means, *to lead captive in a triumph over the enemies of Christ*. The metaphor is taken from the triumphal procession of a victorious general. God is celebrating His triumph over His enemies; St. Paul (who had been so great an opponent of the Gospel) is a captive following in the train of the triumphal procession. (444)

As a conquered and captured captive in the train of Christ’s triumph, Saul became Paul the apostle, one of the gifts in Ephesians 4:11. Here we may now draw the conclusion of this matter with respect to the condition of Paradise and Hades. “Those taken captive” and led in Christ’s triumph over His enemies are not the Old Testament dead kept in Paradise. Rather, they are those who

became gifts to the church, such as Paul and the other apostles. Clearly, Paul was not one of the dead in Paradise, nor were the other apostles, prophets, evangelists, and shepherds and teachers of the New Testament era. They had never been in Paradise and thus could not

have been translated to heaven. Therefore, Scofield’s thesis that the dead in Paradise were taken to heaven in Christ’s ascension cannot be supported. Paradise still functions today as it did before the ascension. It is the temporary place of comfort, the bosom of Abraham, for the righteous dead, including the dead in Christ in the New Testament age. Again, there is no tenable ground here for the teaching that the New Testament believers are taken to heaven after their death.

The Righteous Dead Being in Paradise until the End of the Age

There is another crucial text on this subject. In Psalm 16:10, as quoted by Peter in Acts 2:27, David declares that God would not abandon his soul to Hades nor permit him to see corruption. This, said Peter, was fulfilled in Christ in that He rose from the dead, not in David, who at the time of Acts remained deceased and buried in his tomb. Peter continues, “For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, Sit at My right hand’” (v. 34). Lang says concerning this,

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It has been often asserted that when the Lord rose he released from Hades the godly dead and removed them to Paradise in the presence of God, and that ever since all His people go there at death. The Scripture nowhere declares this, but is wholly against it...It is known definitely that one of the most renowned of Old Testament men of God did *not* ascend to heaven with the Lord, for at Pentecost, which was after the ascension, Peter distinctly stated that "David has not ascended into the heavens" (Darby, Acts 2.34). Why was David left behind? There is no reason to think he was: the other godly dead also stayed there, as far as Scripture is concerned. (54)

The stakes of a misinterpretation of this passage are high. If indeed David ascended to heaven, the prophetic force of the Messianic psalm is annulled; it would be a psalm of David's victory over Hades, not Christ's. Lang continues,

The aorist used [for *ascended*] (*anabee*) covered all preceding time, from the death of David to the speech of Peter. Moreover, if at *any* time David had ascended the point and conclusiveness of Peter's argument were gone. Its cogency lay in the fact that *no one* but Jesus Christ had ascended: therefore He and He alone fulfilled the prophecy; for if *any one* else had ascended from the grave to the throne of God how should it be certain that *he* did not fulfill the prediction? (54-55)

This proves that up to the time of Pentecost, fifty days after the resurrection of Christ and ten days after His ascension, David still had not ascended into the heavens. This fact annuls the inaccurate teaching that Christ brought Paradise, with all the Old Testament saints, from Hades into the heavens.

Revelation 6:9 says, "And when He opened 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." The fifth seal in Revelation discloses Christian martyrdom from the first century to the time near the end of this age, and the vision of verses 9 through 11 is of the prayer of the martyrs shortly before the beginning of the great tribulation. At this time, the souls of the martyrs are "underneath the altar." The altar here is the altar of sacrifice in the outer court of the tabernacle and temple, as indicated by *slain*, not the altar of incense. In figure, the inner temple of God (ναός, 11:19) is in heaven, while the altar of the tabernacle and the temple is in the outer court, which signifies the earth, for the earth is the place where "these martyrs of Christ sacrificed person and life in His cause" (Lang 64). Hence, the area underneath the altar is the region underneath the earth, where the souls of the martyred saints are. Revelation 6:11 says, "And to each of them was given a white robe; and it was said to them that they should rest yet a little while, until also the number of their fellow slaves and their brothers

who were about to be killed, even as they were, is completed." The martyrs under the altar were told to "rest yet a little while." They are, according to this word, not in their final place of rest but in a particular place of rest for "a little while." This place is the Paradise to which the Lord Jesus went after His death. It is in the heart of the earth and is a section of Hades, the comfortable section, where Abraham is. This also shows that at the end of this age, the souls of the martyred saints of the New Testament age will still be in Paradise, from which they will soon be resurrected.

First Thessalonians 4:13 and 14 say, "But we do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who are sleeping, that you would not grieve even as also the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose, so also those who have fallen asleep through Jesus, God will bring with Him." Verse 14 says that when Jesus comes again, He will bring the dead and resurrected believers with Him. This is similar to Paul's word in 3:13, in which he speaks of "the coming of our Lord Jesus with all His saints." *With Him* should not be misunderstood to mean that the dead in Christ, those who have fallen asleep through Jesus, shall accompany Jesus in His descent from heaven. This is not possible, since it is not until the Lord's coming that the dead in Christ shall rise, as 4:16 says, "Because the Lord Himself, with a shout of command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, will descend from heaven, and the dead in Christ will rise first." Concerning *bring with Him* in verse 14, Alford says,

When Jesus shall appear, they also shall appear with Him, being...raised at His coming. Of their disembodied souls there is here no mention: nor is the meaning, as often understood, that God will bring them (their disembodied souls, to be joined to their raised bodies) with Him: but the bringing them with Jesus = their being raised when Jesus appears. (3:274)

The thought here is that the whole being of the dead in Christ will rise at the coming of Jesus. At the time of the Lord's coming, the bodies of all the righteous dead will still be in the earth, and their spirits and souls will be in Paradise in Hades, in the heart of the earth. When the Lord Jesus descends from heaven in His coming back, their bodies will rise from the earth, and their spirits and souls will come out of Hades to be clothed with a resurrected body. Thus, the Lord Jesus will come down from heaven, and the sleeping believers will rise up from the earth, that is, from a different direction but at the same time "with Him."

Verse 17 says that we who are living, who are left remaining, "will be caught up together with them"; that is, the resurrected dead and the raptured living believers will be snatched away together. To be sure, if the dead in Christ

had been in heaven, there would be no need for them to rise and be carried away to be with the Lord at His coming. Rather, the Thessalonians who had fallen asleep, along with David and the martyrs under the altar, shall remain in Paradise in Hades until the second coming of the Lord when they shall be resurrected.

Based on the testimony of the above cited verses of Scripture, the teaching of the believers' immediate ascent into heaven upon death has no ground in the Scriptures. It is a false comfort that obscures the fact that upon resurrection we will stand before the judgment seat of Christ, where the martyrs and other faithful ones will be rewarded and where the unfaithful ones will receive a rebuke.

Being Clothed Upon with a Transfigured Body

Another New Testament passage that deals with the nature of the believers' passage through death is 2 Corinthians 5, in which Paul speaks of his aspiration for the redemption of his body. Verses 1 and 2 say, "For we know that if our earthly tabernacle dwelling is taken down, we have a building from God, a dwelling not made with hands, eternal, in the heavens. For also in this we groan, longing to be clothed upon with our dwelling place from heaven." Verse 1 speaks of two dwellings, an earthly tabernacle dwelling and a building from God in the heavens. Once again Lenski represents the traditional misconception that a believers' destination is heaven, to which one ascends immediately upon death. He writes, "All true Christians know what is so comforting and strengthening for all of us, that our true home is in heaven" (Corinthians 995). Lenski argues that the tabernacle dwelling in verse 1 is our tentlike earthly existence and earthly life in the abstract sense. Thus, he strongly discounts the Revised Version's marginal rendering of "bodily frame" for *tabernacle*, which Bauer and Moulton follow in their dictionaries (Corinthians 997). The Corinthians, he says, were too ordinary a people to understand such a philosophic metaphor. Nicoll disagrees: "The use of σκῆνος [*tabernacle*, or *tent*] as a depreciatory term for the 'bodily frame'...is the 'tenement house,' the 'earthen vessel'" (65). Lange also takes this latter view:

It was the death of his present body, here figuratively called the destruction of his earthly tabernacle....The body is thus described as a dwelling of the spirit which is easily broken up....In the same way we have σκῆνωμα in 2 Pet. i. 13 f. The word σκῆνος (*tent*) was frequently used among the Greeks for the earthly habitation or

covering of the soul, but invariably with reference to the earthly body, and always with some allusion to the fundamental notion of a temporary tent. (10:79)

In the same way Vincent says, "The transient character of the body is thus indicated" (3:316). Therefore, *tabernacle* refers to our physical body, in which our person dwells and which is not only for our living but also for our worshipping God (2 Pet. 1:13-14; 1 Cor. 6:19). For this earthly tabernacle to be "taken down" refers to the death and dissolution of the body.

In parallel with his interpretation of *earthly tabernacle*, Lenski argues that the building which we have from God in 2 Corinthians 5:1 is our heavenly existence, a blessed life in heaven. Of such a life he says, "It is there in heaven awaiting us. The mansions for this existence are already built (John 14:2)" (Corinthians 997). His logic is expressed in the following conditional statement: "If 'our tent house here on earth' = our *bodily* frame, our house of the soul, then 'a building from God,' etc., must mean a corresponding heavenly *body*" (998). He finds both the hypothesis and the conclusion of this statement unbearable.

When the Lord Jesus descends
from heaven in His coming back,
the bodies of the righteous dead will rise
from the earth, and their spirits and souls
will come out of Hades to be clothed
with a resurrected body.

He rejects the concept of the heavenly body, which he derisively calls "some kind of body from God" (998), by saying that it must of necessity denote something theological and anti-scriptural, such as an ethereal body composed of ether or fire, as some propose. He says,

"The Scriptures know of no ethereal body that our soul puts on when it leaves the body of clay" (1001). We believe that it is Lenski's predisposition toward the tradition of heaven that causes him to so summarily reject the concept of a spiritual body as a building from God. Vincent disagrees with this predisposed logic, telling us plainly that the building of God is the "resurrection-body" (3:316). Lange says similarly: "This building (οἰκοδομή) is not the city of God nor the house of the Father...but the resurrection body, the result of a new Divine creation. This is still further defined as an house not made by hands" (10:80).

The building from God which we have is our resurrected, transfigured body, the spiritual body mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15, and is in contrast to the dying, physical, natural body that we have today. Paul longed, if possible, to remain alive unto the Lord's coming, but if his tabernacle were to be taken down, that is, if he did not remain alive, he possessed a building from God, a building with a foundation, in contrast to the tabernacle, which had no foundation. Moreover, we have this building in the heavens. *In the heavens* is in contrast to *earthly*, that is, on the

earth. Alford, Vincent, and Lange join *in the heavens* with *we have*, meaning not that our glorified body is in heaven, but that our possession of it, even at the present time, is in heaven.

In 2 Corinthians 5:2 Paul uses the double metaphor of a garment and a dwelling place. To be clothed upon with our dwelling place from heaven is to have our body transfigured and conformed to the body of Christ's glory. The apostles groaned in the desire not to be unclothed, disembodied, that is, in the desire not to die but to put on the spiritual body, to have their body transfigured, to have their body redeemed, to have death swallowed up in their mortal body by resurrection life, putting incorruption on the corruptible and immortality upon the mortal (Phil. 3:21; Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor. 15:53-54). For our mortal part to be swallowed up by life is for it to be "absorbed in and transmuted by that glorious principle of life which our new clothing shall superinduce upon us" (Alford 2:659); "the new imperishable life which becomes manifest when the body is changed, and its mortality is forever abolished" (Lange 10:82).

In 2 Corinthians 5:3 and 4 Paul says, "If indeed, being clothed, we will not be found naked. For also, we who are in this tabernacle groan, being burdened, in that we do not desire to be unclothed, but clothed upon, that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life." The apostles were expecting to be transfigured in their bodies, to be clothed with a spiritual body to meet the Lord before they died and were disembodied, that they might not be found naked. To be found naked is to be without a body, while to be clothed is to put on a transfigured body. Alford so strongly finds this meaning in *clothed* and *naked* that he says of verse 3, "The verse *asserts strongly*, with a view to substantiate and explain ver. 2, the *truth of the resurrection or glorified body*," seeing in it a continuation from 1 Corinthians 15 of the refutation of those who do not believe in the resurrection of the body (2:658). Alford's thought here is that without interpreting this passage with respect to the transfiguration of the body in resurrection, we weaken, if not annul, Paul's argument for the resurrection of the dead. Therefore, this passage in 2 Corinthians must not be taken to construe the notion of "going to heaven." Rather, it is an expression of the apostle's deep longing to meet Christ in his resurrection body.

Paul does not directly touch the subject of Paradise as the intermediate place of the believing dead in 2 Corinthians 5. However, Alford finds it implicit in this passage, placing an interval between the time of the dissolution of our body in verse 1 and our being clothed with our dwelling place from God in verse 2, adding, "The intermediate state, though lightly passed over, as not belonging to the subject, is evidently in the mind of St. Paul" (2:657). During this interval, as we have seen, the

disembodied spirit and soul of the believing dead are in Paradise, in the bosom of Abraham. A dead person, being disembodied, is naked, without a body as a covering before God. "The spirit of man appears to be by itself naked, as it were unclothed. It is therefore incomplete before God until it is invested with a new body of spiritual power and light" (Lange 10:89). In the figure of the Old Testament, the priests had to be fully and gloriously clothed in order to come before God to serve Him; their nakedness had to be covered when they ministered that they might not bear iniquity (Exo. 28:1-3, 42-43). In the fulfillment of the type, the disembodied spirit of a dead believer, as an incomplete being, cannot appear in full glory before God. Says Lang,

No "naked," that is, unembodied, soul can be presented before the presence of God's glory, because for that it must be without blemish....Were a man, however perfect his form, and even were he of the royal family, to present himself naked on a court day before the king upon his throne he would be severely blamed. Not only comeliness of person, but clothing, and suitable clothing, is indispensable....Shall the King of kings receive less respect? (61)

Therefore, God has arranged a place for the dead to be kept until the time of their resurrection when they put on a glorified, transfigured body. As we have seen, this holding place is Paradise in Hades. Lang concludes that it is "not death, but resurrection or rapture" (61) alone that fits the believer for translation into the presence of God. Concerning the full experience of the indestructible eternal life, he says,

It can be reached only by resurrection or rapture, never by death. It will be no small profit from this discussion if it be seen that the opinion that the believer goes at death to glory diminishes the sense of need of resurrection or rapture, and consequently of the return of Christ when these will take place. (66)

In 2 Corinthians 5:6 through 8, Paul continues,

Therefore being always of good courage and knowing that while we are at home in the body, we are abroad from the Lord (for we walk by faith, not by appearance)—we are of good courage then and are well pleased rather to be abroad from the body and at home with the Lord.

Here Paul speaks of being at home with the Lord. Our body is in the material realm; the Lord is in the spiritual realm. In this sense we are abroad from the Lord when we are at home in our body. To be abroad from the body is to die, thus being released from the material realm to be with the Lord in the spiritual realm. The apostles, who

were always being persecuted unto death (1:8-9; 4:11; 11:23; 1 Cor. 15:31), were well pleased rather to die than they might be released from their confining body to be at home with the Lord in a better realm. This is similar to Paul's word in Philippians 1:23: "But I am constrained between the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for this is far better." To be with Christ is a matter of degree, not place. "The departure (*ἀναλῦσαι*) brings him into this higher life of fellowship with Christ" (Lange 11:25). Paul desired to be with Christ in a higher degree, although he was already with Him constantly. Through his physical death he would be with Christ to a fuller extent than he enjoyed in this earthly life. By this we can see that the emphasis of Paul's word in 2 Corinthians 5 is one of condition and not location. It reveals his poignant and earnest desire to meet the Lord in a body of incorruption, to be clothed upon with the transfigured body. His words make no clear indication of the place to which believers go when they die, and to retrofit them into the traditional concept of going to heaven upon death is to misconstrue them beyond their means.

In sharp contrast to the leavened teaching of heaven, Paul adds the following word in verses 9 and 10:

Therefore also we are determined, whether at home or abroad, to gain the honor of being well pleasing to Him. For we must all be manifested before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done through the body according to what he has practiced, whether good or bad.

Whereas the traditional teaching of heaven drugs the Lord's children into dullness, the judgment seat of Christ stirred Paul to diligence in the fear of the Lord.

Christ during all the ages.... The fathers interpreted the sleep as death, which is unavoidable because of the Lord's delay. (*Matthew* 961-965)

Most of the believers in the church age will sleep the sleep of death. Then at the

translation into heaven? Whereas the traditional teaching of heaven drugs the Lord's children into dullness, the judgment seat of Christ stirred Paul to diligence in the fear of the Lord.

Matthew 25:1 through 13 may be the greatest parable in the Gospels concerning a believer's passage through death and his portion afterwards. In this parable, ten virgins take their lamps and go forth to meet the bridegroom, but five are wise and five are foolish in their preparation. Because the bridegroom tarried, they "all became drowsy and slept" (v. 5), and upon waking, some were found with oil and some without.⁵ In this parable the Lord tells us that the majority of the believers will sleep, that is, die, before His coming. In the interpretation of these details, we are now happy to quote Lenski:

We may at once say that the parable applies to all of us during this entire time....At the Parousia each of us will meet the Lord in the very condition in which we were when death removed us from this world. Foolish or wise, with or without oil, we shall appear when Jesus returns....These ten virgins represent all the followers of

Lord's coming they will resurrect to stand before Him to have their measure of oil examined. What then shall be the portion of those who appear before Christ without preparation, to whom the Lord will shut the door and say, "I do not know you"? (Matt. 25:10-12). Under the influence of the leavened teaching of heaven, Lenski does not give an answer, for he is unable to complete the thought which he begins well.

Hebrews 12:5 through 10 clearly tells us that "whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives." God chastens His children "for what is profitable that we might partake of His holiness." Although all who pursue Him know His chastening in this lifetime, what assurance do we have that there is no possibility of chastisement after death and resurrection? The holy Scriptures give us no such assurance. What righteous judge nullifies a debt on the grounds that the debtor has slumbered and again awakened? Even the effectiveness of the Lord's redemption does not exempt us from necessary and profitable chastisement in this age; as sons, those who receive His redemption still know His chastening. How then shall we by His redemption alone be spared

Then he adds, "Knowing therefore the fear of the Lord, we persuade men" (v. 11). Paul's view of his passage into and through death was not a sentimental wish to be borne into the empyrean realm by angels. Rather, he expected that after his death and subsequent resurrection, he would appear before the judgment seat of Christ, on account of which he labored in the fear of the Lord. How different the apostle's teaching is from the sugarcoated teaching of "going to heaven"!

Our Need for Maturity and Faithfulness Prior to Our Death

Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5 are the most fitting conclusion for our argument against the leavened teaching of heaven as the believers' destination after death. If eternal bliss in the empyrean realm is the portion of the believers, then what need is there for the judgment seat of Christ? And what shall be the outcome of disapproval at that judgment seat if all is settled and secure upon our immediate

from chastisement in the next age? The parables of the Lord indicate to us that those who fall asleep in Christ in immaturity and indebtedness shall for a time rest in the bosom of Abraham, and then they shall awake in their immaturity and indebtedness to be judged by Christ. Thus, our complete portion and destiny are not determined immediately upon death, for neither the Old nor the New Testament gives any ground to the teaching of “going to heaven” as it is popularly conceived today. Rather, Paul said that after death and resurrection we will all stand before the judgment seat of Christ. This is the clear word of the Bible, the word of righteousness. May we be delivered from the stupefying drug of wrong teachings, purge out the leaven of the teaching of heaven, and determine in the fear of the Lord, whether in life or in death, to be well pleasing to Him.

by John Campbell

Notes

¹By sleep, of course, we do not mean the psychopannychia, the death of the soul in which it lies unconscious and senseless in the interval between death and the judgment. For a lengthy refutation of the error of the senseless sleep or annihilation of the soul, see Calvin’s *Psychopannychia* (Beveridge 413).

²The concept that the righteous and wicked dead go in different directions after death is pagan. “Most scholars affirm that changes in the understandings of retribution and immortality, most likely through the influence of Persian and Hellenistic thought, resulted in different eternal abodes for the righteous and the wicked...The development of...these concepts is notably absent from the Hebrew Bible.” (Freedman 104)

³In Paul’s quotation of Hosea 13:14, most authoritative manuscripts have θάνατος in 1 Corinthians 15:55, rather than ᾄδης, which the King James Version wrongly renders as *grave*.

⁴Strictly speaking, I do not agree with the use of *Gehenna* as the unpleasant part of Hades, but I am willing to tolerate it for the purposes of this article as long as the reader understands its use as intended by the cited scholars. Because of its continual fire, Gehenna became the symbol of the lake of fire, the place of eternal punishment for the perishing unbelievers, where the smoke of fire and brimstone goes up “forever and ever” (Rev. 14:10-11; 19:3; 20:14-15; 21:8). “The word γέεννα, *hell*...is specially used to denote the place of future punishment” (Vincent 1:95). *Future* here should be understood as eschatological and eternal, not temporary. Thus, Gehenna is not the unpleasant part of Hades, the temporary hold of the unsaved. Hades itself, after giving up its unbelieving dead, is cast into the lake of fire (20:13-14). Hence, the unpleasant part of Hades is unnamed in the Scriptures.

⁵The parable of the virgins in Matthew 25 is of great

significance with regard to the word of righteousness, and it requires a thorough expounding. Such an expounding must be reserved for a later time.

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