

first time a truly Christian nation. Third, the salvation of Israel must be through the new covenant made in the blood of Christ already established with the church, not through a rebuilt Jewish temple with a revival of the Mosaic sacrificial system. Hebrews flatly affirms that the whole Mosaic system is obsolete and about to pass away. Therefore the popular Dispensational position that Israel is the "clock of prophecy" is misguided. Possibly the modern return of Israel to Palestine is a part of God's purpose for Israel, but the New Testament sheds no light on this problem. However, the preservation of Israel as a people through the centuries is a sign that God has not cast off his people Israel.

III THE INTERMEDIATE STATE

*There's a land beyond the river
That they call the sweet forever,
And we only reach that shore by faith's decree;
One by one we reach the portals,
There to dwell with the immortals,
When they ring those golden bells for you and me.*

THIS OLD EVANGELISTIC SONG EXPRESSES THE IDEA MANY Christians have of life after death. When we die, "we go to heaven." The popular idea is that heaven is a state of blessedness — "the sweet forever" — through whose portals the man of faith passes when he dies and crosses the river of death. There, in a state of disembodied blessedness, he will "dwell with the immortals."

Such thinking, popular as it is, is more an expression of Greek thought than of biblical theology. The Greeks — at least many of them who followed in the philosophical tradition of Plato — believed in a cosmic dualism. There were two worlds — the seen and the unseen, the visible and the invisible, the phenomenal and the noumenal. The visible world was a realm of ebb and flow, flux and change, instability, having only the appearance of reality. The unseen world was the world of permanence, of ultimate reality. In the same way man was a dualism of body and soul. The body belongs to the phenomenal world, the soul to the noumenal world. The body was not evil per se as in later Gnosticism but was a bur-

den and a hindrance to the soul. *Soma-sema*: the body was the tomb of the soul. The wise man was he who learned to discipline and subdue the passions and appetites of the body and cultivate the soul, the highest faculty of which was mind. "Salvation" — a biblical, not a Greek concept — meant that at death the soul would be liberated from the body and take its flight to the noumenal world.

The biblical idea of the world and man is very different. Fundamental to Old Testament thought is the belief that God is the creator, that the world is God's world and is therefore in itself good. "And God saw that it [creation] was good" (Gen. 1:12, 18, 21, 25, 31). The world was created for God's glory (Ps. 19:1); the ultimate goal and destiny of creation is to glorify and praise the creator (Ps. 98:7-9). The Hebrews had no concept of nature; to them the world was the scene of God's constant activity. Thunder was the voice of God (Ps. 29:3-5); pestilence was the heavy hand of the Lord (1 Sam. 5:6); human breath is the breath of God inbreathed in man's face (Gen. 2:7; Ps. 104:29).

The Old Testament never views the earth as an alien place nor as an indifferent theater on which man lives out his temporal life while seeking a heavenly destiny. Man and the world together belong to the order of creation; in a real sense of the word, the world *participates* in man's fate. There is no antithesis between physical and spiritual life, between the inner and the outer dimensions in man, between the lower and higher realms. Life is viewed in its wholeness as the full enjoyment of all of God's gifts. Some Christian theologians would consider this crassly materialistic; but a profound theology underlies it. Life, which can be enjoyed only from the perspective of obedience to God and love for him (Deut. 30:1-3) means physical prosperity and productivity (Deut. 30:9); a long life (Ps. 34:12; 91:16); bodily health and well being (Prov. 4:22; 22:4); physical security (Deut. 8:1); in brief, the enjoyment of all of God's gifts (Ps. 103:1-5). However, the enjoyment of these good things by themselves can-

not be called life, for life means the enjoyment of God's gifts *in fellowship with God*. It is God alone who is the source of all good things including life itself (Ps. 36:9). Those who forsake the Lord will be put to shame, for they have abandoned the fountain of life (Jer. 17:13). While health and bodily well-being are included in all that life means, man does not live by bread alone (Deut. 8:3); and the enjoyment of God's gifts apart from obedience to the word of God is not life.

We must understand the Old Testament concept of man to understand its view of the intermediate state, and we must understand the Old Testament concept of the world to understand its doctrine of man. Just as there is no trace of dualistic thinking about the world, so the Old Testament view of man is not dualistic. Man is not, as the Greeks thought, a dualism of body and soul, or of body and spirit. "Spirit" is God's breath, God's power, working in the world (Isa. 40:7; 31:3). It is God's breath creating and sustaining life (Ps. 33:6; 104:29-30). Man's "spirit" is man's breath which comes from God (Isa. 42:5; Job 33:4; 27:3; 32:8). When God breathed into man the breath of life, man became a living being (literally, "soul," Gen. 2:7). Animals, as well as man, are sustained by the breath of life (Gen. 7:15). Therefore, the basic meaning of "soul" (*nephesh*) in the Old Testament is the principle of life which animates both men (Exod. 21:23; Judg. 5:18; Ps. 33:19) and animals (Prov. 12:10). The meaning of soul — *nephesh* — is then extended to designate man as a person (Gen. 14:21; Exod. 16:16; Num. 5:6; Ezek. 33:6 [RSV, "anyone"]; Deut. 24:7 [RSV, "one"]; Gen. 46:18 [sixteen "persons"]), and is also extended to designate the seat of the appetites and desires, and the self with its emotions and thoughts. Nowhere, however, do body or flesh and soul or spirit represent two parts of men — the lower and the higher.

The Old Testament's concept of existence after death is closely related to its view of man. The soul or spirit does not escape the physical world to flee to the world

of God. Rather, man descends to Sheol. Sheol is thought of as a place beneath the earth (Ps. 86:13; Prov. 15:24; Ezek. 26:20), in the depths of the earth (Ps. 63:9; Ezek. 31:14; 32:18). However, Sheol cannot be identified with the grave, for unburied dead are in Sheol (Gen. 37:35). Thus Sheol is seen as synonymous with death — a state rather than a place. It is a state of existence removed from the blessings of God (Eccl. 9:10; Isa. 38:18; Ps. 115:17; 88:12). Consciousness and identity are not destroyed. In Ezekiel 32:17-32, the Egyptians are condemned to go down to the nether world, that is, to be slain in battle, and the inmates of Sheol are pictured as the Assyrians, the Elamites, the Edomites — each people gathered together according to their human relationships. Isaiah 14:9-10 pictures the dead in Sheol rousing themselves to meet the king of Babylon. Those who had been kings of the earth are seen as rising from their thrones to welcome their erstwhile companion.

What is seen in Sheol is not man's soul or spirit but the *rephaim*, translated "shades" in the Revised Standard Version, the "dead" in the King James. "The shades below tremble, the waters and their inhabitants" (Job 26:5). The shades are unable to rise up and praise God (Ps. 88:10). "Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come, it rouses the shades to greet you, all who were kings of the nations" (Isa. 14:9; see also Prov. 9:18).

The shades are not to be identified with man's departed soul or spirit. It seems to be some kind of a pale replica of man himself. It attests to the Hebrews' conviction, shared with other ancient peoples, that death does not mean the end of human existence. It appears that God has implanted in the hearts of men everywhere the idea that somehow man will survive death.

However, the Hebrew concept of death also witnesses to the conviction that *life is bodily life*. For the shades in Sheol, conscious fellowship with God has been lost; therefore descent to Sheol does not mean life.

In only a few places does the revelation given in the Old

Testament transcend the expectation of existence in Sheol. The Psalmist writes, "For thou wilt not give me up to Sheol, or let thy godly one see the Pit. Thou dost show me the path of life; in thy presence there is fullness of joy, in thy right hand are pleasures for evermore" (Ps. 16:10-11). Here the Psalmist is seized by the conviction that for the godly man who has lived on earth in conscious fellowship with God, Sheol cannot be the last word. He believes that God will show him the path of life which will pass from the underworld into the presence of God when the dead will experience continuing fellowship with God.

Another glimmer of the same hope is found in Psalm 49:15, "But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me." The same thought occurs in Psalm 73:24, "Thou dost guide me with thy counsel, and afterward thou wilt receive me to glory."

However, in the Old Testament life is bodily existence. This is why the doctrine of bodily resurrection is essential to life.

When we turn to the New Testament, the most vivid passage that seems to tell something about the intermediate state is the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. Those who take this as a revelation about existence after death point to the fact that it is not called a parable, and contrary to Jesus' usual custom in parables, a concrete name is given to one of his characters — Lazarus. However, "Lazarus" is the Greek form of a Hebrew word meaning "God has helped" and has the symbolic significance that since the poor man could not trust the rich man, he trusted God, who in turn helped him with the gift of salvation. If this is a true story, it teaches that the intermediate state is divided into two parts — Hades and Abraham's bosom. Hades is the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew Sheol. These two divisions are separated by a great gulf, which did not, however, prevent communication back and forth. It teaches that the wicked in Hades are in torment in flames while the righteous are in blessedness in Abraham's bosom.

However, there is one teaching in this passage which contradicts the total biblical teaching about the intermediate state, namely, that judgment and reward take place immediately after death. Elsewhere judgment always occurs at the Second Coming of Christ. Since this passage reflects ideas about Hades that were current in Judaism, we conclude that this is not meant to be a true story but is a parable based on contemporary ideas. Furthermore, Jesus nowhere teaches that wealth per se deserves hell while poverty deserves heaven. The parable is really not about the poor man and his fate, but about the five brothers. The key line is: "If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead" (16:31). The parable is about the hardness and obduracy of the Jews who refuse to accept the witness of Scripture to the person of Jesus.

The clearest word in the Gospels about the intermediate state — at least of the righteous — is found in Jesus' word to the dying criminal. The thief had been deeply impressed by Jesus' conduct and he finally turned to Jesus with the prayer, "Jesus, remember me when you come in your kingly power" (Lk. 23:42). Apparently the thief had known something about the controversy over Jesus' messiahship, and he concludes that, in spite of the fact that Jesus was crucified, he was indeed the Messiah, and at some undefined day in the future, he would appear as God's anointed to establish his kingdom. In reply Jesus said, "Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise" (Lk. 23:43).

"Paradise" is a Greek loan-word from Persian which means "park" or "garden." In the Old Testament it was used of the garden of Eden (Ezek. 28:13; 31:8). In later Jewish writing, it becomes a term designating the blessed abode of the righteous between death and resurrection. Paul refers to Paradise as the dwelling place of God in II Corinthians 12:4. He was caught up in ecstasy so that he caught a glimpse of Paradise. Because the thief has expressed faith in Jesus, he will enjoy fellowship with him

in the presence of God "today," that is, immediately after death.

The New Testament nowhere goes beyond this statement that the redeemed enjoy fellowship with Christ in the intermediate state. Paul affirms the same thing, but adds no new light on the state of the dead, when he says that in contrast to the sufferings he has experienced as an apostle, he would prefer "to depart [from this life] and be with Christ, for that is far better" (Phil. 1:23). The reference to the "heavenly kingdom" in II Timothy 4:18 probably points to the same hope.

One passage in Paul is thought by some scholars to throw more light on the intermediate state:

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. Here [in the body] we groan, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling, so that by putting it on we may not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent [of our earthly body] we sigh with anxiety; not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. . . . So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord. So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him. (II Cor. 5:1-9)

This passage is interpreted in two very different ways by evangelical scholars. Some place emphasis upon the verb: If our earthly body is destroyed in death, *we have* at the moment of death our redeemed bodies, "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." It is true that in his earlier letters, Paul places the resurrection at the Parousia (Second Coming) of Christ (I Thess. 4). The usual view is that between the writing of First and Second Corinthians, Paul faced the danger of imminent death as he had never done before (II Cor. 6:9) and this led him to reflect on what will happen after death. This in turn led him to change

his mind and to conclude that those in Christ would put on their resurrection bodies immediately after death. Therefore II Corinthians 5 is the fullest word in the New Testament about the state of the righteous dead.

There are several difficulties in this view. In the first place, Paul was no stranger to death before he wrote II Corinthians. In I Corinthians 15:31, Paul says, "I die every day"; he is constantly facing the danger of physical death. In the second place, in Philipians 3:20-21, Paul places the transformation of the body at the Second Coming of Christ as he had done in I Thesalonians. There is therefore evidence that he had not changed his mind about the intermediate state.

Finally, if II Corinthians 5 describes a body received at death, it is difficult to see why Paul still thought there was need of a further resurrection at the Parousia of Christ. The body described in II Corinthians strikes the note of eschatological finality: "so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:4). However, in Philipians 3:20, written after Corinthians, Paul is clearly expecting the reception of the transformed resurrection body at the Second Advent. "But our commonwealth is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will change our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power which enables him even to subject all things to himself."

For these reasons, the more traditional interpretation of II Corinthians 5 still seems preferable. Paul is speaking principally of the resurrection body. Death has lost its terror, for it is not the end of life. On the contrary, we know that we have a body awaiting us — a resurrection body — an eternal body, a heavenly body. The present tense, "we have" a building from God, expresses the certainty of receiving this heavenly body. In Romans 8:30, Paul speaks of the final eschatological event — glorification — in the past tense, so certain is he that he will experience it. "Those whom he called, he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified." When this body

is received, "that which is mortal [will be] swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:4). Paul looks forward to the resurrection because in our earthly existence we groan from weakness, sickness, and suffering, and long to put on our heavenly dwelling. The alternative to the resurrection is "being found naked" — being a disembodied spirit. And even though death has lost its terror, it remains a formidable enemy. Paul does not anticipate with any delight the putting off of the mortal tent, for it means being "unclothed" — without a body; and what he longs for is to be "further clothed [at the resurrection] so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life" (II Cor. 5:4). In this Paul stands in sharp contrast to Greek dualism which considered the body a hindrance to man's best self and looked forward to attaining to a disembodied, "spiritual" realm. For Paul the resurrection means everything. Apparently he has been given no divine guidance about the state of the dead after death. All he can say is "nakedness."

However, there is one fact which takes the sting out of leaving the body even before receiving the resurrection body. "So we are always of good courage; we know that while we are at home in the body, we are away from the Lord, for we walk by faith, not by sight. We are of good courage [even in the face of disembodiment], and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (II Cor. 5:6-8). Here Paul says the same things he says in Philipians 1:23. He knows nothing about the state of the righteous dead, and he shrinks from dying short of the resurrection. But even so death holds no fear, for the dead will be with Christ while they await the resurrection.

In summary, Paul's witness agrees with the word of Jesus to the dying thief. God's people will be with him after death; but the New Testament gives us few details about the nature of the intermediate state.

There is one glimpse of the intermediate state in Hebrews 12:23, where there is a passing reference to "the spirits of just men made perfect." This is probably not a

general statement but a specific one, referring to the Old Testament saints. The author has concluded Chapter 11 — his great roll call of Old Testament heroes — by saying, "And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had foreseen something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect" (Heb. 11:39-40). This "perfection" is found in Jesus Christ, "For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14). "Perfection" by the death of Christ is what the Old Testament sacrificial system could not do — bring men into a living fellowship with God. This has been accomplished *now* for New Testament saints, and it has also been accomplished for the Old Testament saints after their death, for they too were men of faith.

A notoriously difficult passage is found in I Peter 3:19-20: "[in the Spirit] he went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, during the building of the ark, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were saved through water." This passage has received and still does receive diverse interpretations. We can here do little more than mention the three major interpretations. The older patristic interpretation is that in the intermediate state Christ in the spirit went and preached the gospel to the spirits of dead men imprisoned in Hades who lived either in the days of Noah or in the time before Christ. This view soon lost favor, for it opened the door to the possibility of salvation after death. A second view, held by Augustine and many Reformers, is that Christ in his preexistent state of being preached the gospel through Noah to Noah's living contemporaries. The third view, most widely accepted today, is that in the intermediate state Christ proclaimed the victory of the gospel to fallen angels imprisoned in Hades. The "preaching" involved need not mean an offer of salvation, but the triumphant announcement that through his death and resurrection Christ had broken the power of the spirit world.

This may find some support in Jude 6: "And the angels that did not keep their own position but left their proper dwelling have been kept by him in eternal chains in nether gloom until the judgment of the great day."

Doubtless some interpreters would look to Revelation 6:9 for further light on the intermediate state: "When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne." However, this sheds no light on this question. It is rather a metaphorical way to describe the death of the martyrs and has nothing to say about their dwelling place after death. In the Old Testament, when animals were sacrificed to the Lord, their blood was poured out at the foot of the altar (Lev. 4:7). The souls of the martyrs are seen under the altar in heaven because their lives had been poured out as a sacrificial offering to God. The New Testament often employs the language of sacrificial death. Facing death, the apostle Paul wrote, "For I am already on the point of being sacrificed" (II Tim. 4:6). At an earlier date he had written, "For if I am to be poured as a libation upon the sacrificial offering of your faith, I am glad" (Phil. 2:17). The Christian martyrs in the Revelation are viewed as sacrifices offered to God. In fact, they were slain on earth, and their blood wet the ground; but in Christian faith the sacrifice was really made in heaven where their souls — their lives — were offered at the heavenly altar.

In summary, the New Testament has very little to say about the intermediate state. In fact, it sheds no light on the state of the unrighteous dead. The one fact that is taught by both the Gospels and Paul is that the righteous dead — believers — are with Christ in the presence of God, awaiting the resurrection. While this is a state of blessedness, the entire Bible witnesses to the fact that the final redemption must include the resurrection and transformation of the body.

The Last Things

AN ESCHATOLOGY FOR LAYMEN

by

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