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From Death to Life

The Official Magazine of
the Conditional Immortality Association
of New Zealand

Issue 22 March 2002

A friend and colleague of mine led a chapel service I attended recently. He turned us to Romans 4:17 which speaks of "God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did". I scribbled a cross reference in the margin of my Bible and continued listening.

What struck me about this verse was the way it connects the power of God to bring about the resurrection of the dead with God's speaking in the present tense of things that have not yet come to be. This rang a bell in my head.

Without going into all the details of the story (which you can read for yourself in Matthew 22:23-33), the Sadducees who "say that there is no resurrection" (23), came to Jesus to question him concerning the resurrection of the dead. Their aim was to discredit Jesus by showing the absurdity of the orthodox Pharisaic doctrine of the resurrection which they knew Jesus accepted.

In answer to the Sadducees Jesus made a number of points:

- First, he tells them plainly "you are in error" (29a).
- Second, he says, this error stems from the fact that "you do not know the Scriptures" (29b).
- Thirdly, he says this error also stems from the fact that "you do not know ... the power of God" (29c).
- Fourthly, he goes on to affirm the Scriptural doctrine of the resurrection of the dead (30).

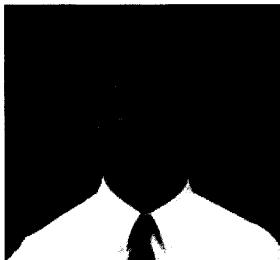
Jesus said that God said, "I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (32). It is often assumed that since God speaks of Himself in the present tense as being the God of the three patriarchs, then they must still have some sort of existence otherwise he would have been something like "I was the God of Abraham".

But this is to ignore the context of Jesus' answer. Both the question and the answer concern the resurrection of the dead. The subject is resurrection from beginning to end. The fact of a continued disembodied existence beyond the grave (if such a thing were possible) does not prove the necessity of the resurrection of the dead at all.

God will give "life to the dead" at the resurrection. Those who know the

Scriptural teaching concerning the resurrection of the dead trust in the power of God to make this event certain. They can accept that God "calls those things which do not exist", such as Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who are now dead, "as though they did" - as though they were now living in the resurrection.

Jesus says that to God "all are alive" (Luke 20:38). This is not the same as saying all actually are alive, but it stresses the certainty of our hope. It stresses that our hope rests on the Scriptures and the power of God. In context, it stresses that our hope is a resurrection hope.



President's Desk

David Burge

Fire and Flood

How the New Testament Uses the First Testament to Teach on Final Punishment

(part one) G. Andrew Peoples

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all. It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed.

Jesus in Luke 17:26-28

Introduction

The New Testament contains a lot more explicit teaching on final punishment than the First Testament¹. However, the New Testament very frequently employs the Scriptures to present such teaching. What follows is an examination of some cases where the New Testament does this, and of what appears to be taught in these New Testament passages about final punishment.

Some clear limitations of the scope of this undertaking must be laid down. While there is a wealth of study that could be (and has been)

done on the beliefs of second temple Judaism with regard to final punishment, and any exhaustive study on New Testament teaching on final punishment would be incomplete without covering intertestamental developments of eschatology and related issues, that is beyond the scope of what is intended here. What is presented here is a study of what the New Testament appears to say about final punishment, in particular in passages where it appears to be employing the First Testament. Within the literature outside the canon of Scripture it is widely acknowledged that a range of different (and conflicting) views on final punishment can be found, and if our intention was to interpret the New Testament *in the light* of such literature, we would be somewhat in the dark — or at any rate unsure² of which light to read the pages of the New Testament under. An assumption is being made here that while intertestamental developments may be of great historical interest, and may explain why various first century groups may have believed one thing or another, of greater significance is canonical scripture. That is to say, when seeking to establish

the relationship between two canonical passages, it is more important to read New Testament revelation against the backdrop of *canonical writings* than of pieces of writing that are not part of the canon.² It might be denied that this assumption is warranted, but it is the presupposition that underlies all that is said here, and a defense of this assumption is beyond the scope of this work. Perhaps a revised name for our topic might be — “An analysis of what the New Testament teaches where it employs the earlier Scriptures to teach on final punishment — *given* the assumption about the place and authority of canonical scripture over and above other literature that is outlined above.”

There are a number of ways the New Testament uses the Scriptures to teach about final punishment. It uses direct quotations. It uses historical recollection, where an event in the first Testament is described or referred to, without actually quoting any Scripture verbatim. It also uses imagery that clearly has its origin in the First Testament, where the imagery has already been given meaning in earlier revelation, making it possible to bring up

a meaning by presenting the same image again.

It will be argued here that these New Testament passages on final punishment that employ earlier Scripture, when studied closely, do not sit well with traditional interpretations. This is because the traditional concept of final punishment entails eternal torment of the lost, whereas the message of these texts seems to run counter to this concept (even though they feature among the key proof-texts for eternal torment). Doubtless, if the New Testament is read against the backdrop of the assumption that eternal torment is true, it might be possible to forge a way of harmonizing these texts with the doctrine. Doubtless also — these texts are not *all* that the New Testament has to say on final punishment. It is not being suggested that the New Testament usage of earlier scripture on this subject is possible because the older Scriptures teach a clear and comprehensive doctrine on final punishment (regardless of whether the Scriptures *did* do this or not). However, positively stated, it will be argued that not only do these texts lack good grounds for belief in eternal torment, they are better understood as teaching that God will finally destroy His enemies forever.

**Matthew 24:36-41 and
Luke 17:26-37**

Matthew 24:40-41 has long been a popular catch phrase

in premillennial circles. Larry Norman immortalised it in his hit song about the rapture. "I Wish We'd All Been Ready":

A man and wife asleep in bed, she hears a noise and turns her head he's gone, I wish we'd all been ready.

Two men walking up a hill, one disappears and ones left standing still, I wish we'd all been ready.

There's no time to change your mind - The Son has come and you've been left behind

The New Testament passages on final punishment that employ earlier Scripture do not sit well with traditional interpretations

The impression one gets is that this song was intended to invoke a strong emotional response. How terrible — to be *left behind!* One will be taken and another left, and, it is said, it is far better to be taken than left behind. Like many premillennialists, Douglas Moo also finds the rapture in these verses. He writes,

The verb for "taken" is used of the Rapture in John 14:3 (although to be sure, it is used in other ways) and it is significant that the verb for "take" in judgment in verse 39 is different than the one used in verses 40-41. And the analogy to the flood may suggest that just as Noah was saved by being taken away from the scene of judgment so believers at the Parousia will be taken away, through the Rapture, from the scene of Judgment.³

R.T. France uses a similar semantic argument, reasoning that "taken is the same verb used. e.g.. In 1:20; 17:1; 18:16; 20:17; it implies to take someone to be with you, and therefore here points to the salvation rather than the destruction of the one 'taken'."⁴ But this is wholly unpersuasive. Moo's aside comment is correct, it is certainly true that the Greek term for "take" here is used in "other ways" than to signify the "rapture" in John 14:3 (if we concede that the rapture is a biblical concern at all, and that it is present in John). It is about as ambiguous as our English word "take," and as such has no intrinsic value (positive or negative) attached to it (as we will see from John Walvoord shortly, it is also capable, for example, of being used of a man "taken" away to be executed). There is no basis for making the unqualified term for "take" have a qualified meaning of "take to be with God" in and of itself.

Moo's comment about the word for "took" in v.39 also needs comment. He sees it as significant that it is different from the word used in v.40, suggesting that the word for "took" in the flood refers to terrible judgement, not the word for "taken" in reference to the return of Christ refers to the glorious rapture, and that these meanings are somehow evident in the two different words that are used. But this argument is no stronger than the previous one. The verb in v.39 (αἶρω) is

just as ambiguous as that used in v.40 (παράλαμβανω). There is no intrinsic meaning of judgement in it at all. It can be used for angels lifting up Jesus if He were to throw Himself off a building (Mt. 4:6), of taking up one's cross (Mt. 16:24), or of Jesus lifting up His eyes (Jn. 11:41). Such lines of argument take us nowhere here

However, more significant than the shortcomings of the semantic observation of Moo and France is the argument against this interpretation that may be made from the context of this saying of Jesus.⁵ The suggestion that Noah's being taken away from the scene of judgement is what Jesus has in mind finds no support here. Who was it of which Jesus said, "as in those days before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day Noah entered the ark"? Whoever it is, it seems only reasonable to assume that this group is the same "they" in the very next verse, "they knew nothing until the flood came and swept (lit, took) them all away." The taking away applies to those who were eating and drinking, ignorant of the fate that was about to befall ("they knew nothing") them while Noah on the other hand entered the ark. This is certainly not Noah who was taken.

Ardent advocate of dispensationalism, John Walvoord, concedes that, *Because at the rapture believers will be taken out of the world, some have*

*confused this with the rapture of the church. Here, however, the situation is the reverse. The one who is left, is left to enter the kingdom: the one who is taken, is taken in judgement. This is in keeping with the illustration of the time of Noah when the ones taken away are the unbelievers. The word for "shall be taken" in verses 40-41 uses the same word found in John 19:16, where Christ was taken away to the judgment of the cross.*⁶

While not accepting the eschatological framework in which Walvoord presents this judgement event (he presents it as occurring after a future rapture and tribulation, and preceding a millennial reign of Christ on earth prior to the last great battle of good and evil — also on earth), and while his lexical analysis is open to some fairly obvious questioning⁷, it is instructive to note that while Walvoord

There is no basis for making the unqualified term 'take' have a qualified meaning of 'take to be with God' in and of itself.

does believe in the "rapture" of the church, he is compelled to not find it here due to the context of judgement. Some suggest that the nature of each of the fates ("taken" or "let") is really not important, and that separation and watchfulness are the only things that matter here. F.W. Beare for

example offers the following suggestion:

*"Taken" and "left" — the two verbs mean only that the two meet different fates: it is not clear which is the better destiny — to be "taken" or to be left. In any case, the theme of an all-encompassing destruction, as in the flood, is not sustained [emphasis added].*⁸

But this is almost bewildering. The flood is used as the prototype for this very event. Luke has, "Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man" (Lk. 17:26). In fact, the parallel saying of Jesus in Luke 17:26-28, 34-35 strongly confirms the interpretation being offered here.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so also will it be in the days of the Son of Man. People were eating, drinking, marrying and being given in marriage up to the day Noah entered the ark. Then the flood came and destroyed them all.

It was the same in the days of Lot. People were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building. But the day Lot left Sodom, fire and sulphur rained down from heaven and destroyed them all.

It will be just like this on the day the Son of Man is revealed...

I tell you, on that night there will be two in one bed; one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding meal together; one will be taken and the other left.

For Matthew's "took them all away," Luke is more explicit with "destroyed them all." He repeats the saying to describe the fate of those in Sodom. The use of "just as it was," "so it will be," "it was the same" and finally "it will be just like this" leads one to think that Luke is trying to drive a point home. Beare's brief comment that "the theme of an all encompassing destruction, as in the flood, is not sustained" is itself not sustained, and cries out for a defense that is never offered. Ellis' inference from these Texts in Matthew and Luke seems to be reasonable: "The unrepentant unbelievers on the day of judgment, i.e. at the coming of the Son of Man, will be like those drowned in the flood, and those burned up at Sodom."⁶

Larry Dixon's treatment of this text is fairly representative of the defenders of eternal torment surveyed here: He does not treat it at all. Under the heading of "Ready for His Return," Dixon notes: *Matthew 24:36-51 records Jesus' teaching about being ready for His second coming. Jesus uses three images to describe the conditions of His return. First, he portrays His return as a parallel to the destructive and devastating flood of Noah's day (vv. 36-41). Secondly, he compares His coming to the rude breaking and entering of a cat burglar (vv. 42-44). Thirdly, Jesus states that His coming will be like a master who returns from a trip, greatly*

*surprising one of his wicked, unoccupied servants.*¹⁰

Dixon goes on to quote from the parable of the wicked servant, followed by the parable of the ten virgins (Matt 25:1-13) and the parable of the talents, all in an effort to argue that the doctrine of eternal torment can be found in them, followed by the centrepiece of traditional exegesis on this topic, the sheep and the goats of Matthew 25:31-46. But Matthew 24:36-41 has slipped under the proverbial carpet. Surely after noting the "parallel to the destructive and devastating flood of Noah's day" Dixon must see the simple way it might lend itself to a view of final punishment that contradicts his own. If he does see it, his omission of this text from his exegesis is telling. If he does not, his exegetical objectivity is seriously impugned. The two works perhaps held in highest regard as definitive statements of Protestant traditionalism by William Shedd and Harry Buis omit the passage from their survey of New Testament teaching on final punishment altogether. In the absence of strong argument to the contrary, a *prima facie* reading of this text seems to support the interpretation offered here.

Part Two Next Issue...

(Notes)

¹ I intentionally avoid using the term "Old Testament" for two reasons. Firstly, the New Testament is also very old, and secondly, calling it the "old" one makes it sound obsolete, as though it has somehow gone out of date. This at least is the impression I get from the way the term is sometimes used (e.g. "but that is in the Old Testament ..."). Here it will be

referred to as the First Testament, the Hebrew Scriptures, or simply Scripture, because when the New Testament was being written, the First Testament, to the writers of the New, was simply Scripture.

² We might put this somewhat more bluntly: it is better to use inspired Scripture to interpret Scripture than it is to attempt to use uninspired writing. Obviously fairly conservative assumptions are being made here about the inspiration and authority of Scripture.

³ Douglas Moo, "Posttribulation Rapture Position," Ben Chapman (ed.), *The Rapture: Pre-, Mid- or Post-Tribulation?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 196.

⁴ R. T. France, Matthew, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1985), 348.

⁵ This argument is made only in passing (in no more than 13 words) by Robert H. Mounce, *Matthew*, New International Biblical Commentary (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1985), 229.

⁶ John F. Walvoord, *Matthew: Thy Kingdom Come* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1974), 193-194.

⁷ Walvoord's use of the term 'taken' in reference to Christ being taken to the cross is both unnecessary and unhelpful. The same word (ἀρραβάζω) could also be used for example to refer to taking the baby Jesus away to rescue Him (Matt 2:13), to John's taking of Peter, James and Jesus to the Mount of Transfiguration (Mark 9:2), or to the eucharistic tradition that Paul 'received' from the Lord (1 Cor. 1:23). The word could just as easily be used of a man who 'takes' his wife out to dinner. It is no more decisive than the English term 'take.' The meaning of 'taken' in judgment rather than 'taken' in salvation arises not from any intrinsic meaning of ἀρραβάζω, but rather from the context, where those who are taken are likened to the unbelieving world that was 'taken' away in the flood.

⁸ Francis Wright Beare, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1981), 474-475.

⁹ E. Earl Ellis, "Testament Teaching on Hell," in K.E. Browner and M.V. Elliot (eds), *The Reader Must Understand: Eschatology in Bible and Theology* (Leicester: Apollon (InterVarsity), 1997), 213.

¹⁰ Larry Dixon, *The Other Side of the Good News: Confronting the Contemporary Challenges to Jesus' Teaching on Hell* (Wheaton: Bridgepoint, 1992), 127. The title of this book is clearly an example of the most blatant kind of question-begging. This writer has yet to find an annihilationist who argues:

- 1.) Jesus taught eternal torment
- 2.) Jesus' teaching about hell is wrong and must be challenged
- 3.) Therefore, eternal torment must be challenged.

Obviously evangelical annihilationists such as Edward Fudge, John Stott and John Wenham (all of whom Dixon cites as being among those who have taken part in this "contemporary challenge") do not seek to challenge the teaching of Jesus, they simply differ with Dixon as to what Jesus (and the Biblical writers) actually taught about hell.

Correspondence ⁷

Greetings to you in the most wonderful name of Our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Thank you for your amazing 'CONDITIONAL IMMORTALITY' magazine that you are able to supply us from time to time, which actually has proved very instrumental in our Advential Christian Doctrine. Please be assured that we are always encouraged by this kind of weapon of our Lord.

I am sure you will be wondering to whom I am, please allow me to introduce myself on behalf of the Advent Christian Church in Kenya. I am Simeon Rianga Omwobo, I am saved, the Lord Jesus is my Personal Saviour. The end of 2001 has marked a steady growth to the work of the Advent Christian Church here in Kenya. This must be accepted as from the Lord. The servants of God here still continue to preach the gospel in and out season. We have actually been enabled to continue our work in different departments of the church undisturbed. We have cause actually to thank our Mighty King the Most High God, for all His goodness; wherefore He has sufficiently cared for us and provided for our spiritual and temporal needs. Though in great difficulty the Lord really has enabled us to carry on the work of the gospel, to the unreached. This brethren commands the prayers of the Lord's people. One may not fail to see the NEED for ASSISTANCE. Our denomination is always seeking from Heaven the resource to maintain its witness and to send their witness where actually it has not reached. Pray with us brethren. I hope this finds you all well brethren, thank you for accepting our acquaintance with you and hope to see this in the next issue of 'From Death to Life magazine.' We very much covet for your prayers. We very much look forward to hearing from you.

*Yours in Christ
Simeon*

Ed. Thanks Simeon for your letter and we will certainly pray with and for you as you continue to serve our Lord Jesus Christ. We invite our readers to join with Simeon and the work being done in Kenya, through prayer and any other assistance that may be needed. His email address is adv.c.kenya@westernet.co.ke

To Whom it May Concern

Having lost my first born son, I'm seeking questions about the afterlife. I'm most interested in your subscription, *From Death to Life*. As you mentioned on your website, if one cannot afford it, it's free. Therefore, could you please subscribe me.
My name and address:

Sylvia
USA

Thanking you in advance,
SB

PS —your website is wonderful and very informative. Keep up the good work!

Hello there.

Nice work that you are doing. I cannot think of anything that hurts Christianity more than preaching everlasting torment. It is good to see that you are doing your part to try and rid the world of this terrible belief.

I started a book on the subject, in my spare time, over seven years ago. It looks like I will never get a book published, but I put it on a website. Here is my work in progress: <http://www.wordonly.com>

Can you tell me more about your organization? Does it extend to the United States? More specifically, do you have any affiliation in western Washington State?

God bless;
Gary

Comments, critiques and suggestions concerning the magazine or the website are most welcome.

Email: respub@world-net.co.nz

Postal: The Editor

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Other News



Please Pray For Dr Edward Fudge

From an email to the editor (with permission to print it here!)

This is a prayer concern about my health. About 4 months ago I started having a tremor in my right leg, which then spread also to the left leg. I saw a neurologist, who sent me for a brain scan, which eliminated a stroke or brain tumor. The neurologist sent me to the top neurological doctor at Baylor College of Medicine here in Houston, who specializes in neurological disorders and especially tremors.



I saw him (Dr. Jankovic) this past Thursday. After very extensive neurological exam and much conversation with many questions covering my whole life so far, he told me he is quite confident that I have the early stage of a mild form of Parkinson's Disease. He is encouraging me to believe that it is progressing very slowly and that I probably will not face serious physical disability for a good many years, if ever. He also started me on a medication for PD, and said if the medicine (over the next several weeks while building up dosage) stops the tremors, that will confirm the diagnosis.

PD is incurable and progressive, but differs greatly with different people, and the symptoms are treatable by medication. God is the Great Physician and he is our real and constant hope and source of every good thing. I am blessed in so many ways, and anticipate a good quality of life for the foreseeable future (especially if the medicine stops the leg tremors). I will appreciate your prayers for God's healing

mercies, strength, hope, peace and grace to glorify him in all things.

Please feel free to share this with anyone else whose prayers you might wish to solicit.

Edward

ADVENT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS NEW ZEALAND



Report on
ADVENT
CHRISTIAN
MISSIONS NEW
ZEALAND

Work Team #8 to
ORO BIBLE
COLLEGE Dec. 29
2001 - Jan. 19 2002

It was an early wake up call for all the team members, as we had to meet at the airport at 4.15am.

This work team was the sixth to travel to Oro Bible College under the auspices of ACMNZ to undertake short-term service in a building related capacity.

We were met at the Cagayan Airport by Jeff and Rhonda Walsh and their sons, Ben and Isaac and some of the Filipinos. It was a pleasure to work with them and to have them join us on several occasions.

It was the first time that members of the Team had come from two

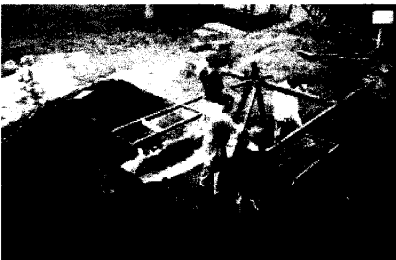
nations to serve in a third. Some of the team had never met any other members until their arrival at OBC. This could have made the dynamics of the team quite



The Team from the US & NZ

difficult but by God's grace all members related to each other extremely well right from the outset.

Team Members were
From New Zealand: Grant Aldridge -Team Leader, Paul Look - Project Leader, Alan &



Men at Work

Sharlene Bolton, Eamon Sullivan, Scott Tremaine and from USA Russell Carle — Chaplain, Pat Forbes, Dan Hatch, Josh Spoelstra.

The set Task was to complete as much of the remaining work on the Faculty Housing as possible in the allotted time with the goal of having at least one unit occupied before we departed.

Work tasks included:

Carpentry, block laying, plastering, grouting of tiles, painting and the inevitable sifting sand and digging and for Sharlene, cooking and looking after the inner man. Meals were of an excellent standard and plentifully supplied. We must also thank

the three Filipinas who assisted. Inday, Vivian and Mrs Jomo, without whom Sharlene's job would have been impossible.

The Team and the Walsh family had the opportunity to travel to Claveria for the

middle Sunday. Dan Hatch gave the address at the morning service and the Team was invited to join the family and friends of one of the

