

# From Death to Life

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Does God lie? No!  
Does the Bible lie? No!  
Does Satan lie? Yes!

He was a liar from the beginning. Jesus told the Pharisees, "You belong to your father, the devil, and you want to carry out your father's desire. He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

What was his first lie?

God told Adam, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die." (Gen. 2:17).

Satan told Eve, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4).

Did Adam and Eve die? Yes!

Genesis 5 is testimony to the truthfulness of God's Word: "Adam lived 930 years, and then he died" (Gen. 5:5). "Seth lived 912 years, and then he died" (Gen. 5:8). "Enosh lived 905 years, and then he died" (Gen. 5:11). "Kenan lived 910 years, and then he died" (Gen. 5:14) and so on.

Yet many people teach that when you die you don't really die. You just get "recycled".

Even many Christians believe you go on living in another place.

Isn't that what Satan told Eve, "You shall not surely die"?

Paul says, "According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever" (1Thess. 4:14-17).

Whose word will you believe?

*Pastor David Burge*



**FOR GOD IS GOD**

# The Intermediate State



Last issue we began to explore the topic of Death. We concluded that in the Old Testament death is seen as having become a natural part of life because of sin. Then we looked at the place of the dead and came to the understanding that *sheol* is the place where both the godly and ungodly go, and the only hope of deliverance from there lies in God. Finally we investigated what happens to the person at death and determined that we return to dust, just as Genesis 3 says.

## Part Five: Death (2) Extinction or Existence?

There are a few Old Testament passages that suggest some form of continuing existence after death. The key word that seems to imply this is *rephaim* or 'shades' referred to in just four Old Testament books.<sup>1</sup> The original meaning of the term is uncertain.<sup>2</sup> R.F. Schnell suggests the origin of the Hebrew term may well be from the Canaanites, indicating "the persistence among the Hebrews of Canaanite thought-forms."<sup>3</sup> However use of the term *rephaim* does not necessarily mean adoption of the accompanying understanding. Its use in Job is in a highly symbolic passage in which Rahab is also referred to, suggesting no more than poetic imagery. Psalm 88:10 and Proverbs 2:18 and 9:18 can readily be understood like this also. Proverbs 21:16 says, "Whoever wanders from the way of understanding rests in the assembly of the dead (*rephaim*)." The connection of 'whoever wanders' with 'rest' is suggestive of 'sleep' or 'peace', certainly not torment, and fits well with the concept of extinction. Isaiah 14:9 is again highly symbolic with the preceding verse referring to cypresses and cedars speaking!<sup>4</sup> What is more it speaks of the shades

being 'roused', again suggesting the imagery of sleep for the dead. Finally there are two verses in Isaiah 26. Verse 14 very clearly suggests non-existence, "The dead (*rephaim*) do not live; the shades do not rise - because you have punished and destroyed them, and wiped out all memory of them" whereas verse 19 offers hope for those who belong to the LORD - "Your dead shall live, their corpses shall rise ... and the earth will give birth to those long dead (*rephaim*)."<sup>5</sup>

What at least can be established from these references is that the Old Testament is in no way

If death is simply stepping into the next world or going to be with Christ, why would Paul regard it as an enemy needing to be destroyed

certain of existence after the grave and the use of the term *rephaim* may feasibly be understood as symbolic rather than descriptive of the dead.

Further, we again contend that the Scriptures are consistent and never abandon the

Genesis understanding. Warren Prestidge in a chapter entitled 'Human Death' argues powerfully for this.<sup>6</sup> Citing firstly support from Scripture he points out that the belief that we return to dust is affirmed in Job 10:9; Psalm 104:29; Ecclesiastes 3:19-20, and Daniel 12:2<sup>7</sup>; or to the earth, Psalm 90:3; or the ground, Psalm 146:4. That this is an unconscious state is affirmed in the metaphor of sleep - (Deut. 31:16; 1 Kings 1:21; Psalm 13:3; Jeremiah 51:39,57; Dan. 12:2; Job 14:12; Jeremiah 51:39,57)<sup>8</sup> and in the description of death as silence - Ps. 94:17; 115:17). Psalm 115:17 also declares that the dead do not praise the LORD<sup>9</sup>, and, even more explicitly, Ecclesiastes 9:10 states "there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol to which you are going".<sup>10</sup>

Death is seen as a return to the ground (Gen. 3:19) or the pit (Psalm 16:10) or the grave (Psalm 88:5; Gen. 37:35).<sup>11</sup> When humans die, in Hebrew Scriptural thinking, they know nothing (Eccles. 9:5); are unaware of life (Job 14:21); and are unable to remember God (Psalm 6:5). Kent Richards offers at least the minimal view by declaring that "The Hebrew Bible is replete with the idea

that death constitutes silence and that the major characteristic of life is to praise Yahweh."<sup>12</sup>

Secondly Prestidge turns for further support to several noted scholars: Karl Barth wrote "...death means the radical negation of life and therefore of human existence."<sup>13</sup> Emil Brunner puts it like this: "Not my body dies: I die."<sup>14</sup> E. Jungel also agrees, writing that, "The person who is dying does not return home to God: he returns to the dust from which he is created."<sup>15</sup> Finally Helmut Thielicke says, "...the total person is extinguished in death."<sup>16</sup>

### Death in Paul's Letters.

This is the base from which Paul builds. He, too, refers to our being of 'dust' (1 Cor. 15:47-49) and he, too, uses 'to sleep' (1 Cor 7:39; 11:30; 15:6,18,20,51; 1 Thess. 4:13,14,15) as a metaphor for death. (It is noteworthy that his use of 'sleep' coincides with his discussions on resurrection and the *parousia*, as does Daniel, cited above.) Harris suggests that the Greek usually means 'fall asleep' and that "only in reference to physical sleep need the verb mean 'be asleep.'"<sup>17</sup> But Paul makes no mention of any other state after death and apart from Philippians 1:21,23 and 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 (which we will address later), which seem to imply immediate presence with Christ after death, Paul never refers to the dead as being anything other than dead or asleep.<sup>18</sup> In his book, *Raised Immortal*, Harris argues that in Paul "*koimasthai*... is basically if not exclusively punctiliar in meaning."<sup>19</sup> That is, Paul is talking about the 'act of dying' rather than the 'state of the

dead.' But then Harris can only offer tentative support for his theory. He notes that Paul "may not consciously have employed it (sleep) to describe the intermediate state as such,"<sup>20</sup> and in the notes writes, "a punctiliar sense is probable in 1 Cor. 7:39; 15:6,18,20,51: 1 Thess. 4:14-15."<sup>21</sup> We suggest that in light of there being no strong reasons given for this reading, it is preferable to understand 'sleep' as the **state** of the dead, as the numerous references in the First Testament and the Gospels support.<sup>22</sup> Cullman agrees saying that sleep, "like the 'repose' in Rev. 14:13 refers to the *condition* of the dead before the *Parousia*."<sup>23</sup>

Dr David Stewart in a private letter to the author writes this: *Murray Harris quotes the verb koimasqai to be punctiliar in meaning i.e. "to fall asleep". This may commonly be true, but the important thing, it seems to me, is to note the tense and mood where it occurs. Where it is present tense, as in 1 Cor 11:30, 1 Thess 4:4:13, I think it must have the sense "to be asleep". Where it is aorist, it is almost certainly punctiliar in meaning, e.g. 1 Cor. 7:39, 1 Cor 15:6,18, 1 Thess 4:14,15. The future in 1 Cor 15:51 could be either, but I think the context is quite unequivocal - it means "will be asleep". The most interesting tense is the perfect in 1 Cor 15:20 - a past act, the result of which continues on - i.e. those who have fallen asleep, and therefore are now asleep.*

Further, in the place where comfort for those concerned about the fate of the dead in Christ is offered Paul offers no hint of a belief in them being

already in 'heaven', but rather that they would be resurrected (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18).

This growing hope of resurrection (Job 14:10-12; Dan. 12:2) which reaches its climax in Christ is most satisfactorily understood against the background of death being a total end to life. Moule confirms this, maintaining that Paul is consistent in his extant writings in holding that "it is not that the soul escapes from the body's prison (still less that, by initiation, the transformation is already complete), but that an entire person, a *swma*, dies, and the same person is raised to life."<sup>24</sup> Kistemaker further points to the link between 'sleep' and resurrection (awakening),<sup>25</sup> a sleep that only God can rouse us from.

Paul understands death as God's judgment upon us rather more than as a 'natural' part of life (Rom. 5:12; 6:23).<sup>26</sup> For Paul "the bondage to sin and the bondage to death go together."<sup>27</sup> It is in this regard that Keck points to another fundamental point of Paul's thinking. "Man's deepest problem is not substance but sin, death is the pay-off (Rom. 6:23), not the cause."<sup>28</sup>

This "pay-off" or judgment is reversible through resurrection for those who believe (1 Cor 15:20-22, 1 Thess 4 :16). To quote again from John Hick,

*St. Paul is the chief biblical expositor of the idea of resurrection of the body. His basic conception ... is ... when someone has died he is, apart from any divine special action, extinct. A human being is by nature mortal and subject to annihilation at death but in fact God, by an act of sovereign*

power, either sometimes or always resurrects or reconstitutes or recreates him ....<sup>29</sup>

This view of death as extinction also offers a compelling explanation of why Paul understands death as the last enemy (1 Cor 15:26). If death for the believer is simply stepping into the next world, or going to be with Christ, then why would Paul regard it as an enemy needing to be destroyed, albeit an enemy already defeated? Oscar Cullmann points to Jesus cry of anguish in Mark 15:34 as indicative that Jesus was “in the hands of God’s great enemy.”<sup>30</sup> If death for Jesus didn’t involve the end of his being what was there to be so afraid of? If his soul was simply going to pass on to the next life, in which he would be back to being with God, then he had nothing to fear. Instead, knowing death was the end he realized the enormity of separation from God imposed by death, he rightly was “deeply distressed and troubled” (Mark 14:33). Cullmann further points out that Jesus “cannot obtain this victory (over death) by simply living on as an immortal soul, thus fundamentally *not* dying. He can conquer death only by actually dying.”<sup>31</sup>

This total dependency on God is evident in Paul in that “to him it is all important that the new life of the risen Lord should be understood wholly as a gift on the basis of a new creative act of God. Hence not even a germ is to be found in man.”<sup>32</sup>

There is one more aspect of ‘death’ that Paul develops and that is that death is “a cosmological power at work, a

power of ‘this age’.”<sup>33</sup> This is most evident in Paul’s designation of death as an enemy needing to be defeated (1 Cor. 15:26,54). In fact “death (in all its forms) marks the radical discontinuity between ‘this age’ and ‘the age to come’ between human beings and God.”<sup>34</sup> This too appears to be a development of the First Testament personification of death as mentioned earlier.

### Conclusion.

Paul did not part from the First Testament understanding of death as an end to meaningful existence, if not existence itself. Thus he likens it to sleep because there is no consciousness of ‘life’ or ‘time’ in sleep. But Paul does not despair. His hope is not in survival but in resurrection, which we will examine next.

<sup>1</sup> Job 26:5; Psalms 88:10; Proverbs 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Isaiah 14:9; 26:14,19. Other references to rephaim concern a place (the Valley of Rephaim) or a race of people (the Rephaim) e.g. Genesis 14:5; Deuteronomy 2:11,20; 3:13; Joshua 15:8; 18:6; 2 Samuel 5:18,22; 23:13; 1 Chronicles 11:15; 14:9.

<sup>2</sup> P.K. McCarter, “Shades” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 4 Q-Z, Edited by Geoffrey Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, Revised Edition, 1988) 440.

<sup>3</sup> R.F. Schnell, “Rephaim” *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* Vol. 4 R-Z (New York/Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962) 35.

<sup>4</sup> Isaiah 14:8 “The cypresses exult over you, the cedars of Lebanon, saying, “Since you were laid low, no one comes to cut us down.”

<sup>5</sup> The verbs of hope in this verse - will live, will rise, will give birth - are all indicative of something yet to be rather than the present state.

<sup>6</sup> W. Prestidge, *Life, Death and Destiny* (Auckland: Resurrection Publishing, 1998)

<sup>7</sup> To which list we add Job 34:15; 40:13; Psalm 22:29; Ecclesiastes 12:7.

<sup>8</sup> Note also ‘rest’ in Job 3:13,17,26 and Dan. 12:13

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Psalm 88:10; Isaiah 28:18.

<sup>10</sup> Prestidge, 12

<sup>11</sup> All these terms are more widely attested than the single mention we make of them here.

<sup>12</sup> Kent H. Richards, “Death” in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 2, 108-110, at 110.

<sup>13</sup> K. Barth, *Church Dogmatics III/2* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, trans. 1975) 625. Quoted in Prestidge, 12.

<sup>14</sup> E. Brunner, *Eternal Hope*. (London: Lutterworth, trans 1954) 102. Quoted in Prestidge, 12.

<sup>15</sup> E. Jungel, *Death*. (Edinburgh: Saint Andrew Press, trans. 1975) 77. Quoted in Prestidge, 12.

<sup>16</sup> H. Thielicke, *Living with Death* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, trans. 1983) 37. Quoted in Prestidge, 12-13.

<sup>17</sup> Murray Harris, “Intermediate State.” *New Dictionary of Theology*. (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988) 339-40, at 339.

<sup>18</sup> The references to all the times Paul mentions death, or being dead are too numerous to mention but there are no references (as far as we are aware) to ‘life’ before the resurrection, unless one counts 2 Cor. 5 and Phil. 1 which we discuss later and contend are not talking about the ‘time’ between death and resurrection.

<sup>19</sup> Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 135.

<sup>20</sup> Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 135 (emphasis added).

<sup>21</sup> Harris, *Raised Immortal*, 260 (emphasis added).

<sup>22</sup> Some First Testament references have been cited earlier. Gospel references include Mark 5:39; John 11:11-13.

<sup>23</sup> Cullman, 39.

<sup>24</sup> Moule, “Dualism,” 116. Cf. Bilaniuk, 463.

<sup>25</sup> Kistemaker, 532

<sup>26</sup> Romans 5:12 Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death came through sin, and so death spread to all because all have sinned. Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin is death.

<sup>27</sup> Keck, 72. Cf. W. Beider, “qanatoj.” In *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* Vol. 2 eḡ - oḡwnion, 129-33, at 130, “According to Paul, death has entered the world as a personified power, has penetrated to all humanity like an epidemic ... has established a domain of sovereignty ... in which in its turn came to power ... among humankind.”

<sup>28</sup> Keck, 75

<sup>29</sup> Hick, 278-9

<sup>30</sup> Cullmann, 17

<sup>31</sup> Cullmann, 18

<sup>32</sup> Schweizer, 650.

<sup>33</sup> de Boer, 138.

<sup>34</sup> de Boer, 140.

## Polish Penpal

A young Christian lady from Poland has written requesting English speaking penpals Her name is Maria Widz and she is 27 years old.

Her address is:

23-302 Godziszow, 151  
Poland

# Hell - A Hot Topic

Part One of an address given by Dr Edward Fudge during his visit to New Zealand.  
Remuera Baptist - 13.08.00

I came from a church background that believed the traditional majority view about hell, that it is unending conscious torment. I never really heard anybody teach the views that we'll be setting out tonight until after I had written the book *The Fire That Consumes* and had no idea that I'd ever change my ideas on the subject. I thought one way to talk about this tonight would be to say some of the surprises I found in researching the topic which led me to change my mind.

It might be of some interest to give a little background for the writing of the book *The Fire That Consumes*. I'll try and be brief about it because there's another meeting some of you are paying to go to later at which I'm supposed to be telling you all about it, so I can't give away all the details tonight for free!

Basically in the mid 1970's an Australian publisher by the name of Robert Brinsmead had a theological journal published in California called *Present Truth*, and later changed the name to *Verdict* magazine, in which he was in particular setting out the doctrines of the Reformation of justification by grace through faith. I read the paper with a great deal of interest and profit - it was much help for my reading.

About that time in the mid 70's I'd been invited to give a talk to a Christian college in Missouri in the United States on the subject of final punishment and I didn't have any ideas other than the traditional understanding of

it at the time but I wanted to say something that might be provocative, in the good sense of the word. So I looked through the New Testament and made a list of all the passages which mentioned the final destiny of the saved and the lost in the same verse, just to see what the contrast might be. There are 12 or 13 of those passages. So this little paper I gave at the college consisted mostly of those 12 or 13 passages.

Somebody said why don't I send a copy into *Christianity Today* and I did, and they published it. This fellow in Australia saw it and he had been looking for somebody to research the subject of final punishment and help him decide whether he should reject his background of what's called 'conditional immortality'. He decided from my article that I might be a fair minded person who didn't come from his background, and that was what he was looking for, so he invited me to do a year long research project on the subject. I was eager to research, I loved to study, I needed the money, so I said O.K., I'd do it.

About halfway through the study I began to find much biblical material that went against what I had always believed and I began to almost panic and to think "I don't know where this is going! It's a little scary." But by that time I was so far involved in this research I had to finish the project.

By the time I had finished the project I had come to the conclusion that I must change my

own understanding from what I had always believed to the view sometimes called Conditional Immortality, which basically means that we are not immortal by nature, nor is every person made immortal in the resurrection, but those that are saved will be made deathless or immortal in the resurrection and live forever with God. Whereas those who reject God's mercy in this life will be raised, but not immortal, to face the second death in the lake of fire and brimstone. So that was the view I came to hold and ended up writing the book which set out what I had discovered in this research. I say that in order to say this is not some axe I have to grind, it's not some agenda I carry, not some long held wish that I always wanted to come to some different conclusion. I was just doing research and found material which led me to change my mind.

I would sum this up like this:  
**Three or Four Surprises from a Study of Hell.**

The traditional material which has been commonly available through the centuries and to today usually says the following:

1. It's generally held by the majority of Christians since the Second Century most likely and certainly since the Fifth Century that the OT doesn't say hardly anything about the end of the wicked.

2. During the time between the Testaments there came to be a commonly held uniform Jewish belief that the wicked will be

raised and made immortal to suffer eternal conscious torment and that when we read Jesus' words we should assume that understanding because that's what all the Jews generally believed.

3. It's commonly said that the New Testament teaching especially from Jesus, but also from others, about final punishment, requires us to understand, that the only possible explanation that the wicked will be made eternally immortal to live forever in conscious torment - that God will keep people alive forever just to torture them forever in punishment for their sins on earth.

4. It was commonly said and thought that only heretics and coffee groups and weird fringe people have ever said anything else, and that all the great church leaders through the centuries have uniformly taught the traditional majority view.

What happened as I got into the study was I found that everyone of these assumptions that were commonly said proved to be not founded on the evidence and that in fact the materials I was digging out said something to the contrary. So what I would like to do tonight is quickly tell you enough to maybe wet your appetite and maybe encourage you to buy the book (*The Fire That Consumes*) or the smaller book released this year (*Two Views of Hell*) or another excellent book by Warren Prestidge (*Life, Death and Destiny*) on the same subject.

I told Warren I was especially interested when I received the book back in America and I saw the picture of him smiling on the back. It's sometimes a rare thing to find scholars that smile!

Anyway, back to the surprises. The first surprise was that the Old Testament says a great deal about the end of the wicked and I'll sum that up under two or three headings tonight.

First of all in the Wisdom literature - Psalms, Proverbs, and so forth - there are many statements which say that those who do right and serve God will end up blessed and will prosper and living with God's favour, whereas those who do wrong will be cut off, or will perish, or will be as though they had never been, and things like that. Yet that's not what we see when we look around us. We see wicked people prospering and they die wealthy and live comfortably. Then we see some people who serve God dying very poor and sad deaths and sometimes put to death for their faith.

So I want to give three examples from Psalms, out of many others which could be found, which led me to say there must be something more in the future about this divine retribution and equalizing of things - it's not what we see now - and whatever this 'something more' is, is what these verses are talking about.

#### **Psalm 34.**

This is a Psalm which Peter probably had open before him as he was writing his first epistle, because he quotes from it twice (1 Peter 2:3; 3:10-12). So this is a Psalm which has New Testament approval - a Psalm which Peter applies to Christians for our consideration and it's a Psalm which talks about a divine retribution which we do not see happening in this world and therefore must happen at the end of the world in the age to come.

v15 "The eyes of the LORD are towards the righteous and his ears are open to their cry."

v16 "The face of the LORD is against evil doers to cut off the memory of them from the earth."

v19 "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the LORD delivers him from them all."

v21 "Evil shall slay the wicked and those who hate the righteous will be condemned."

So David said, those who don't serve God, those who reject God, will be cut off from the earth and they will be slain and condemned. That's not what we see now, and so if this is a true statement it must be something that will happen later. This doesn't prove the case, but it's just a little thought here of the Old Testament saying something about the end of the wicked.

#### **Psalm 37**

This is a Psalm quoted by the Lord in Matthew 5:5. This is a Psalm that also has Christian approval, which of course all the Psalms do, but this one specifically was quoted by Jesus. Listen to what it says happens to the wicked.

v7 Rest in the Lord and wait patiently for Him

v9 Evildoers will be cut off but those who wait for the Lord will inherit the land. Yet a little while and the wicked man will be no more. You will look carefully for his place and he will not be there, but the humble shall inherit the land

v12 The wicked plots against the righteous and gnashes at him with his teeth.

v18 The Lord knows the days of the blameless, their inheritance will be forever

v20 The wicked will perish and the enemies of the Lord will be

Cont'd on page 11

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## ADVENT CHRISTIAN MISSIONS NEW ZEALAND

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With regret we have to inform readers that Ernie & Helen Schache will not be proceeding to India as missionaries with Advent Christian Missions.

Our prayer since Beryl Ching retired from India five years ago has been that new workers would come forward from NZ, and we were rejoicing when the Schaches recently offered themselves for service wherever the Lord led.

Ernie and Helen have been involved in mission support activities for many years including service on the Board of Advent Christian Missions (NZ), and then lately their commitment and devotion to our Lord drew them to seek service on the foreign field. With Helen's health problems seemingly under control, their application resulted in acceptance by the NZ and USA Boards, with November 2000 becoming the target date to proceed to

India.



Unfortunately, Helen's cancer has suddenly returned to the extent that it is now life-threatening, and consequently the Schaches are unable to proceed to India.

Their change of plans has come as a matter of great sorrow and deep disappointment, but their

faith in the Lord is strong and they are facing the future realistically. They have sold their business and home, and will soon shift to a suitable unit in West Auckland.

We are very thankful for the many who had stated their intention to support Ernie & Helen as they went to India, but now we are asking for your prayers for them as they adjust to new circumstances in the coming months.

Please also pray for Earl & Martha Wright from USA who are Advent Christian missionaries returning to India this month after furlough, and who were looking forward to the arrival of the Schaches to work with them.

Rob Carr

like the pastures -they vanish, like smoke they vanish away.

v22 Those blessed by God will inherit the land but those cursed by Him will be cut off.

v28 The seed of the wicked will be cut off.

v34 Wait for the Lord, keep His way, he will exalt you to inherit the land and when the wicked are cut off you will see it.

v37 The man of peace will have posterity; but transgressors will be altogether destroyed. The posterity of the wicked will be cut.

Yet we look around and we don't see this happening. This is not what occurs in this world always or even frequently. But David says that is what will happen. So if it doesn't happen now and if it's true that it will happen, it must be something that will happen in the judgment of the Lord at the end of the world or in the age to come. I just add this to the material, something to think about. How is this fulfilled if not now? It must say something about the end time yet to come.

So the presupposition that the Old Testament doesn't say anything about the end of the wicked is not true at all. It says much about the end of the wicked. It doesn't ever say anything about 'hell' using that word. The word 'gehenna' which is translated 'hell' in the English Bible is not even found in the Greek translation of the Old Testament. In fact it's not found in most of the New Testament. It only occurs 12 times in the New Testament. One of those is in James which says "The tongue is set on fire by hell." It only occurs eleven times in the whole Bible talking about final punishment. Seven of those are in Matthew, the

other four are in Mark and Luke in parallel passages. So if you didn't start with the Gospel that is written about Jesus talking to Jews in Jerusalem you would not even ever hear the word hell in connection with the punishment of the wicked, as you read the Bible.

This is really quite a startling thought because if we ask Christian people "What happens to the wicked?" everybody immediately will say, "They go to hell." Well that's true, it does say that. But the interesting thing is that it only says that eleven times and they're all in the book of Matthew or the four other parallels.

If you read John's Gospel you never hear the word 'hell'. If you read Acts you never hear the word 'hell', If you read any of Paul's epistles you never hear the word 'hell' or *Gehenna*. James, Peter, Jude, or John's epistles you never hear the word 'hell'. Because the word 'hell' translates this word *Gehenna* which is a very real place. It's a literal physical place south of Jerusalem - a deep valley gorge which was used in Bible times as a city dump. A place where they throw refuse and burn it. When I was a kid we used to go to the city dump and shoot rats sometimes just for sport. It's a nasty place to go. It stinks. There are dead animals rotting there and there are maggots crawling around and it's a smoldering fire that's just consuming whatever is there. That's what *Gehenna* was, outside Jerusalem.

In the Jewish period between the Testaments there came to be the idea that what happens in *Gehenna* will be the final destiny of those who are not God's

people, who oppose God. That's the background of the word when Jesus says in Matthew 10:28, "God is able to destroy both body and soul in *Gehenna*." This is what it's talking about in Mark when Jesus speaks about the worm that dies not and the fire that is not quenched. The fire in *Gehenna* never went out. It just keeps smoldering, even if it rains, which it doesn't do much around Jerusalem, but if it did it's just wet on top and smolders underneath and after a while it comes up again. What it does is keep consuming.

The question is, if you have organic material in *Gehenna* such as a dead animal or a dead enemy soldier in times of battle, which will consume him first - the fire or the worm? One or the other will get him and there will be nothing left when it's all over except smoke or ashes or dirt. So this is what *Gehenna* was. The thing I'm saying is it's interesting to me that whereas we automatically use the term hell to talk about the end of the wicked the Bible writers as a whole do not normally even use that word. They talk in other language such as we've been seeing in Psalms - that the wicked will be cut off; the wicked will be no more; the wicked will be altogether destroyed; and so forth. This is the way it is usually talked about and the word 'hell' has it's very special limited usage found in a very tiny portion of Scripture, altogether true, but not at all the most common usage or the regular way of describing it.

One other psalm we'll look at, **Psalm 58**, an imprecatory psalm, in which David rather than taking personal vengeance against evil doers puts

them in God's hands and asks God to deal with them. He expresses all of his feelings about what they deserve but he's turning them over to God to pass judgment, not doing it himself. He says of these wicked people, from verses 6-11:

O God, shatter their teeth in their mouth; Break out the fangs of the young lions, O LORD. Let them flow away like water that runs off; *When* he aims his arrows, let them be as headless shafts. *Let them be* as a snail which melts away as it goes along, *Like* the miscarriages of a woman which never see the sun. Before your pots can feel *the fire of thorns* He will sweep them away with a whirlwind, the green and the burning alike. The righteous will rejoice when he sees the vengeance; He will wash his feet in the blood of the wicked. And men will say,

"Surely there is a reward for the righteous; Surely there is a God who judges on earth!"

Now you see David pictures what he believes the wicked deserve. He says this is what he anticipates and he asks God to bring it about - that they will be like water that flows away; like a snail that melts; like a miscarriage; let God sweep them away with a whirlwind; let the righteous wash their feet in the blood of the wicked.

When David imagined what God would do to the wicked these are the kinds of terms he used. He never says let them burn eternally and never be able to die but continue to live forever in torment. And yet if that's what God intended we might wonder whether David would have suggested something like

that at least one time.

Now again what he pictures here doesn't happen now. If it's true and if it ever will happen, it will happen, as he says at the end of this Psalm, when God judges the earth and the righteous say, "Surely there is reward for the righteous," because they see the wicked slain; their blood washing the streets; they are gone; they are no more, and so forth, like smoke that disappears.

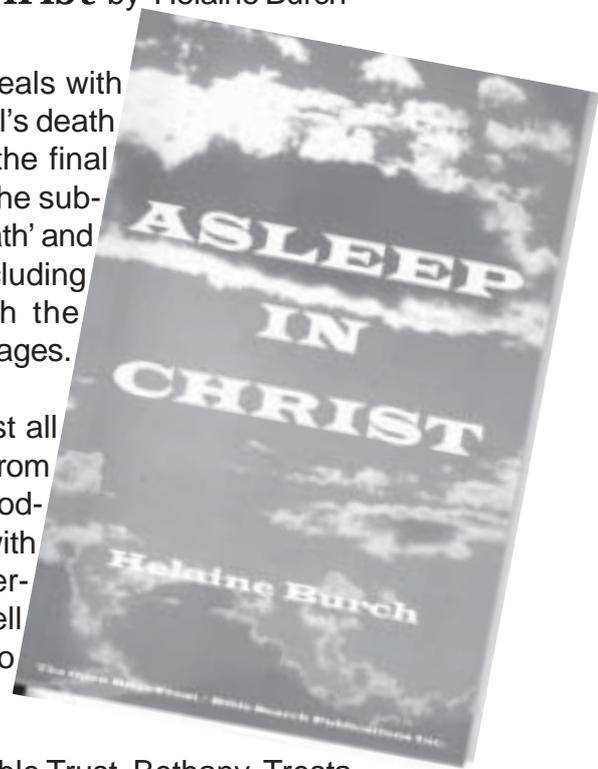
You can find dozens of passages like this in Psalms and Proverbs and other places in the Old Testament but I thought three were enough to give us the idea.

**Part Two will be in the next issue.**

## Book Review: *Asleep in Christ* by Helaine Burch

As can be guessed from the title this book deals with the 'intermediate state' - between an individual's death and the return of Christ - but it also covers the final state of the wicked. The author approaches the subject in a methodical manner beginning with 'death' and finishing with the 'lake of fire' and some concluding comments. The two appendices deal with the Richman and Lazarus and some problem passages.

The style is very readable except that almost all Scripture references, and there are many, are from the KJV, distancing the biblical text from the modern reader. The book is aimed at the layman with very few other references or footnotes. Nevertheless the message is clear, logical and well presented, suitable as a good introduction to the subject.



*Asleep in Christ* is available from The Open Bible Trust, Bethany, Treston, Shetland ZE2 9LT, Great Britain OR Bible Search Publications, 4800 South Calhoun Road, New Berlin, WI 53151, USA. The cost is GB£7.50 or US\$15.00 (plus postage and packaging, probably). 133 pages incl. appendices.

## Book Review

### ***Two Views of Hell: A Biblical and Theological Dialogue***

By Edward William Fudge and Robert A. Peterson.

This book was published by InterVarsity Press this year not long before Edward Fudge came to New Zealand. By giving equal space to the conditionalist and traditionalist understandings of hell IVP have granted 'our' interpretation long overdue recognition as at least a viable, biblical alternative. We congratulate the publishers and authors for this significant step.

As the subtitle suggests the book takes the format of a dialogue, with Edward Fudge presenting the conditionalist case first, followed by a response by Robert Peterson, then the traditionalist case is presented with the book concluding with a response by Fudge.

This book will serve the conditionalist cause well not only because of the strength of the biblical arguments but also because of the grace and humility with which Fudge writes. Sadly this cannot always be said for Peterson who begins his response to Fudge with an emotive description of his students reacting to *The Fire That Consumes* with "physical symptoms including headaches and churning stomachs." On occasion he gets perilously close to a personal attack as much as discussing the doctrines involved. He does concede however that in many 'other' matters of biblical interpretation Fudge is competent and sound.

The major weakness of Peterson's portion is however his failure to present a solid biblical case for the traditionalist view. He opens with an appeal to 11 theologians from Tertullian in 208AD through to Millard Erickson in 1985. He points to their diversity in time and background; their significance in Church History and their agreement on the doctrine of everlasting, conscious torment for the unsaved. He concludes "This consensus leads us to ask an important question: Is it possible that these eleven figures are wrong on the topic debated in this book? It is possible but highly unlikely! In fact, I cannot think of even *one* doctrinal issue in which they *all* are in error." (p127, emphasis original) While we cannot dismiss church history lightly, and certainly not these particular men, it is an unfortunate place to start. The real issue is not whether these men agreed but whether they were biblical. Incidentally Robert Peterson himself appears to disagree with the eleven on a related matter. I would think, without actually researching it, that most, if not all eleven taught hell as a place of literal punishment by fire. Peterson writes "I understand hellfire figuratively rather than literally" (p147). If these eleven are 'wrong' on this surely they might just be wrong on another aspect also.

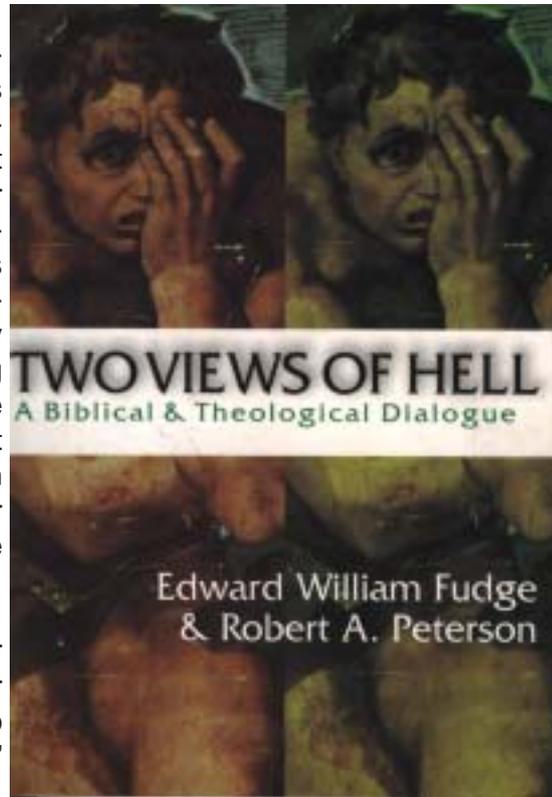
In his second chapter Peterson turns to Scripture but again rather than present a strong biblical case for eternal conscious torment he seems to be more focused on trying to disprove conditionalism, or more particularly *The Fire That Consumes*. In fact through-out the book his case seemingly revolves around one point which he repeats no less than 10 times! (pp103, 107, 109, 110, 111, 120, 139, 142, 145, 168). Peterson's argument involves a link between Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:10. His reasoning goes like this: Matthew 25:41 records Jesus saying to "those at his left hand ... 'Depart from me into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.'" Revelation 20:10 says, "The devil ... was thrown into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet were, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever." Therefore, according to Peterson, it is clear that unsaved humans will be tormented forever. But even if we were to take Rev. 20:10 literally Peterson's case remains unproved. Yes, they will all be thrown into the same lake (which of course Peterson doesn't believe is literal) but there is no indication that human beings will be tormented forever and ever, they could just as easily be destroyed. Their shared fate is being thrown into the fire, not eternal torment.

Another point that Peterson labours (pp 94-95; 122-123; 150-152; 160; 165) is that 'separation' from God (2 Thess. 1:9; Matthew 25:41) doesn't mean total separation (because that would necessarily involve annihilation, as Peterson acknowledges on p152). Instead it means being "separated from

the presence of his joy, not from his omnipresence.” (p95) This involves the necessity of Christ being (eternally?) present in hell. Peterson writes, “Although not many Christians conceive of Christ’s being present in hell, he is there.” (p160, based on Rev. 14:10). No wonder not many Christians conceive of this, it is but one example of the traditionalist position robbing God of ultimate and final victory (1 Cor 15:28) and turning him into some sort of monster who must keep his victims alive in order to torture them.

One point emerging from Peterson’s work is the necessity for both ‘sides’ of the debate to come to terms with the grounds for literal vs figurative interpretation. From my bias (which I freely acknowledge) it appears that Peterson takes a considerable number of scriptures and statements figuratively, while insisting on a relatively literal understanding of passages such as ‘The Richman and Lazarus’ (p172) and criticizing Fudge of taking some passages too literally (e.g. p133 regarding Isaiah 66, and p156 regarding Jude 7 and 2 Peter 2:6). I am not saying that the conditionalist side doesn’t do similarly at times, just that it is an area needing further investigation as both sides could be accused of taking things literally or figuratively to suit, rather than on a more objective basis.

Overall this book makes a strong case for conditionalism and as one friend commented after reading it, “If this is the best the traditionalists can do then we (conditionalists) have nothing to worry about.”

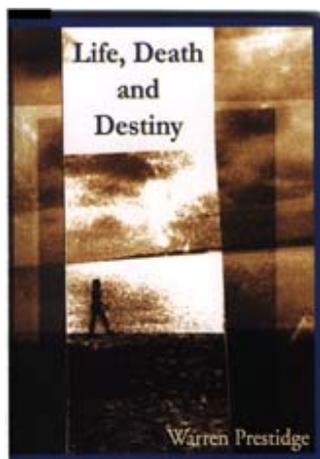


Two minor points need to be noted. The Scripture index at the back of the book appears to be out by one page number ((i.e. if the index refers to say p120, try looking for it on p121). The second point is that Fudge makes a couple of mistakes, which he freely acknowledges and will amend in the next edition. These are: p22, referring to Socrates as Plato’s student (it should be the other way around) and p45, where he indicates two occurrences of the Hebrew word for punishment by death are 1 Sam. 25:31 and Ezekiel 21:15. Actually they don’t have the word and the references he supplies instead is from the Apocryphal writing in the Greek Old Testament (LXX), Wisdom of Solomon 19:4 and 2 Maccabees 4:38.

*Two Views of Hell* is 208 pages and is available from Resurrection Publishing for \$35 incl p&p within New Zealand

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