

**JOURNEY
TO AND THROUGH
THE SECOND DEATH**

J Philip Scranton



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JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

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Stratton Press Publishing
831 N Tatnall Street Suite M #188,
Wilmington, DE 19801
www.stratton-press.com
1-888-323-7009

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Unless otherwise noted, scripture quotations are from the Concordant Literal New Testament or the Concordant Version of the Old Testament.

ISBN (Paperback): 979-8-88764-244-4

ISBN (Ebook): 979-8-88764-245-1

Printed in the United States of America

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INTRODUCTION



In the life of David is typified the grandest conflict and the most exultant victory the universe shall ever witness. In the weakness and simplicity of youth and the power of faith in God, the shepherd boy defeats the veteran warrior, Goliath, beheading the giant Philistine with his own sword. Some years later, David takes up that sword again, using it in the establishment of his kingdom (1 Sam. 17:51–54, 21:8–9).

Death, the first death, is a power committed to the Adversary. Death is the sword in Satan’s hand by which he enslaves humanity to fear (Heb. 2:14–15). But on Golgotha (which may have received its name as the place where David placed Goliath’s head as a memorial [1 Sam. 17:54]) in the weakness of human flesh and the power of faith in God, Christ crushes the head of the ancient serpent, and since has begun nullifying all the Adversary has done (Gen. 3:15, 1 John 3:8).¹

In John’s vision, the coming Christ has said, “I have the keys of death and of the unseen [hades]” (Rev. 1:18). No faithful Israelite feared Goliath’s sword when it was held fast in King David’s hand. And we need no longer fear death because Christ is conquering it for us.

Death will be under new constraints in the full establishment of our Lord’s kingdom. The difference in character of the one who holds the sword of death is sufficient reason to put away every fear.

REDISCOVERING THE FIRST DEATH



The First Big Question

The most overlooked and most pertinent question in the study of the second death should be the most obvious: “What is the *first* death?” And then “Is the second death a repetition of the first death?” Unless the first death is defined, we can hardly define the second.

Living in an age of which the Bible says Satan is god (2 Cor. 4:4), can we be sure we know what the true God has said about death? Humanity struggles to grasp the full truth in any field of endeavor. In Christianity alone, there are several prominent views on death, all of which claim the Bible as their origin and authority. Many branches of Christianity use the second death to help define the first death. Can we be sure the truth about death has been dropped in our laps?

Mass media vies for a position of influence, broadcasting shows that feature haunted houses, *near-death* experiences, and mediums who communicate with dead people who are depicted as conscious, struggling with decisions and even making choices to determine their destiny. Do we know death?

Dealing with Deception

Death has always been a cloudy issue for humanity. The book of Genesis opens with a death that brings a curse on all humanity. The New Testament opens with a death that removes the curse from humanity. Immediately linked to both of these deaths is the deception of the Adversary. In Genesis the deception was “Ye shall not

surely die” (Gen. 3:4, AV). And in the New Testament, the deception was “His disciples came during the night, and stole him away while we were asleep” (Matt. 28:13, NIV).

The truth about death qualifies the importance of resurrection. The Adversary deceives us about death, and this deception about death causes us to misapprehend the resurrection of Christ and to misunderstand the second death. Christ’s death was for the sins of the world. That fact alone, when fully realized, makes his resurrection the spring of incessant hope and rejoicing.

Unveiling the Resurrection

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an indispensable element of the Gospel. Christ alone has been raised to immortality (1 Tim. 6:15–16). The resurrection marks God’s approval on the work, life, and identity of Christ (Rom. 1:4).

The resurrection of Christ specifies him as the one by whom God will judge all the inhabitants of earth and the one in whom faith should be vested (Acts 17:31).

Christ’s resurrection is the dawning rays of both hope and judgment. The resurrection of Jesus Christ is the verification of the justification of believers (Rom. 4:25) and therefore part of the basis for peace with God in grace (Rom. 5:1–2). The resurrection of Jesus Christ is an astonishing revelation of God’s glory (Rom. 6:4, 8:21, 15:7).

The resurrection of Jesus Christ is a trumpet blast to humanity. It cannot be ignored. Man may try to ignore it. He may say it never happened. He may delay decisions about how he will respond to it. But the great equalizer, death, is coming. And when we realize death is circling *our* house, when we realize it is keeping vigil by *our* bed, then the fact that only one has ever returned from the grave garbed in immortality must be reckoned with.

When our confidence in the flesh fails—and it will fail—only the questions about Jesus are worth answering: “Why did Jesus Christ rise from the dead? What was special about him? How did he escape the clutches of death? What must I do to become like him?” The res-

urrection of Jesus Christ demands a response from every individual who is aware of the reality of death.

Much of the biblical teaching about death prevalent today is based on selections in the Bible in which the primary subject is something other than death. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, the promise to the repentant thief on Golgotha, and the Father's house in John 14 are prime examples. Armed with misunderstandings of these passages, students of the scriptures have forced complying interpretations on other passages where death *is* the primary topic.

What a person believes about death colors and controls what can be believed about resurrection. If a person believes that death is an unconscious condition, then the return of Christ and resurrection are of preeminent importance. These events initiate life and fellowship with God and bring us into glory. Resurrection ends death, liberating us from the clutches of the enemy.

On the other hand, belief that death ushers us into heaven makes the resurrection and presence of Christ matters of only secondary importance that apparently provide some vague enhancement to an already blissful condition. Such beliefs cripple the believer's expectation in Christ's presence in the air and the resurrection. If a believer goes directly to heaven upon dying, then he or she goes without a body. The body remains in the grave, awaiting resurrection and glorification.

Though the spirit returns to God (Luke 23:46), that is no basis to assume it enjoys a conscious existence with him. When Solomon said the spirit returns to God, his next line was "Vanity of vanities... the whole is vanity" (Eccles. 12:8). The spirits of animals return to God too (Ps. 104:29-30), but that does not mean all the animals that have ever died are consciously in God's presence.

If a believer went directly to the presence of Christ at death, then ghosts, who are waiting for bodies, surround the Son of God. But Christ's resurrection was "out from among the dead" (1 Cor. 15:12, 20). Christ has been raised to immortality, a life unique to him. He dwells in light so resplendent and glorious humans cannot behold him, much less have access to him (1 Tim. 6:16). How regret-

table it is that believers honor death, the mortal wound of Satan, as their escort to Christ's presence.

If the lost go directly into torment, they have no body in which to experience pain, and they are sentenced before they are judged. If God torments before he judges or passes sentence, then God is unjust, and the coming of Christ is robbed of much of its import.

Death under the Sun

Was the writer of Ecclesiastes wrong?

All that your hand finds to do, do with your vigor, for there is no doing or devising or knowledge or wisdom in the unseen [*sheol* or grave] where you are going.
(Eccles. 9:10)

He clearly states that death is a condition in which there is no consciousness. Yet we might be swayed to the popular opinion that this is only the viewpoint *under the sun*, if not for the other, numerous supporting testimonies. The psalmists said, "For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the unseen [*sheol*], who shall acclaim You?" (Ps. 6:5); "The dead cannot praise Yah, nor all those descending into stillness" (Ps. 115:17). John wrote, "And no one has ascended into heaven except He Who descends out of heaven, the Son of Mankind Who is in heaven" (John 3:13).

On Pentecost long after Christ's ascension, Peter said, "David did not ascend into the heavens" (Acts 2:34). None of these biblical writers place dead believers in heaven or a condition of consciousness.

When Do We Meet the Lord? (1 Thessalonians 4:13–18)

Now we do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who are reposing, lest you may sorrow according as the rest, also, who have no expectation. For, if we are believing that Jesus died and rose, thus also, those

who are put to repose, will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him. For this we are saying to you by the word of the Lord, that we, the living, who are surviving to the presence of the Lord, should by no means outstrip those who are put to repose, for the Lord Himself will be descending from heaven with a shout of command, with the voice of the Chief Messenger, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ shall be rising first. Thereupon we, the living who are surviving, shall at the same time be snatched away together with them in clouds, to meet the Lord in the air. And thus shall we always be together with the Lord. So that, console one another with these words.”

There are many corrections here in the Concordant Version (CV) that point out fallacies that are founded in the Authorized Version (AV or KJV). Verse 13 clearly states that this context treats the subject of believers who have died. Surviving brothers and sisters need not mourn to the degree or in the same way as those who mourn the loss of loved ones apart from faith in Christ.

Verse 14 is poorly rendered by most English versions. *Sleeping in Jesus* is a poor representation of the original language and thought, and it is suggestive of thoughts foreign to the context. The *in* is actually *through*. Is Paul speaking here of some who have died *through Jesus*? Is he speaking of martyrdom or saying that Christ is responsible for their death? Not at all. The *through* is misplaced. Some believers died, and God, *through Jesus*, will bring them forth!

The phrase *with him* is only *him* in the original. The word *with* is supplied and cannot be construed to mean that the believing dead are *with Christ* in the sense of being in his presence. And the rest of the passage confirms the believing dead do not return from heaven with Christ at his coming.

In verse 15, Paul assures the Thessalonians that the believing dead will not be overlooked or left behind. The living believers will not precede them in meeting Christ. Clearly, the Thessalonians did not think the believing dead are already with Christ; they feared they would be lost if they did not live until Christ’s return!

Verse 16 tells that the first step in the presentation of the body of Christ to their Lord is the raising to life of the believers who have died. No one meets the Lord while being dead.

Verse 17 says that once the dead believers are raised to life, then the living believers shall, *at the same time*, be snatched away together with the resurrected believers *to meet the Lord*. Whether believers die long before the Lord returns or they live until he comes, *they all meet the Lord at the same time*.

Believing that dead believers are with Christ is only a wishful sentiment. Much less is there any truth in the sentiment that they are looking down upon us. Imagine the tremendous changes that would need to take place for them to live in a realm above the earth and be able from such an environment and distance to see and hear us! This would require some sort of glorification at death!

The word translated *same time* means *simultaneous*. This word was used in the parable of the wheat and tares in Matthew 13:29. The tares were not to be pulled or weeded out from among the wheat before the harvest because it would be impossible to remove the one without uprooting the other *at the same time*. The roots of the two plants were so intermeshed that they could not be separated. If one left the soil, the other was going to leave the soil simultaneously.

Believers who have died do not meet the Lord when they die. They do not go to be with him until the resurrection. They will meet the Lord simultaneously with those believers who are alive at Christ's return.

Verse 18 says, "And thus shall we always be together with the Lord." *Thus*, meaning *in this way* or *by these events coming to pass* shall we be together with the Lord. This is the message of hope that is to be used to comfort the bereaved. We are to have faith in the resurrection and to be looking for Christ's return. The resurrection and Christ's return are the things that unite us with him.

The Prerequisite of Glory (1 Corinthians 15:50–55)

Now this I am averring, brethren, that flesh and blood is not able to enjoy an allotment in the kingdom of God, neither is corruption enjoying the allotment of incorruption.

Lo! a secret to you am I telling! We all, indeed, shall not be put to repose, yet we all shall be changed, in an instant, in the twinkle of an eye, at the last trump. For He will be trumpeting, and the dead will be roused incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal put on immortality.

Now, whenever this corruptible should be putting on incorruption and this mortal should be putting on immortality, then shall come to pass the word which is written,
Swallowed up was Death by Victory.

Where, O Death, is your victory?

Where, O Death, is your sting?

This passage supplies further details to the events outlined in 1 Thessalonians 4:13–18. But here, Paul emphasizes the aspect of immortality. Verse 50 makes it unmistakably clear no one enters glory, no one goes to heaven before these bodies of humiliation are changed.

Corruption cannot enjoy the allotment of incorruption. Again, the sequence is the same as in Thessalonians. The dead will be raised in glorified bodies, and the living believers will be changed. With this changing comes our glory. With this changing, we meet Christ. It is this victory over our death and mortality that brings us to Christ.

Paul's Logical Argument on the Resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:12-19, 29-34)

In the fifteenth chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul battles doctrinal error with a fivefold argument concerning the resurrection. There were some people at Corinth saying that there would be no resurrection (15:12). Each of the five theses of the argument is introduced by the phrase “if there is no resurrection” or by an equivalent thought. Speaking of the resurrection, he speaks also of death. And the things Paul says and insinuates regarding death show clearly that it is a condition that is void of consciousness.

- I. “But *if* there be no resurrection of the dead,
 - A. *then* is Christ not risen.
 1. And *if* Christ be not risen,
 - a. *then* is our preaching vain,
 - b. *and* your faith is also vain.
 - B. Yea *and* we are found false witnesses of God because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ, whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not” (vv. 13–15).
- II. “For *if* the dead rise not,
 - A. *then* is not Christ raised.
 1. And *if* Christ be not raised,
 - a. [*then*] your faith is vain,
 - b. [*then*] ye are yet in your sins.
 - B. *Then* they also who are fallen asleep in Christ are perished” (vv. 16–18).
- III. “*If* in this life only we have hope in Christ,
 - A. [*then*] we are of all men most miserable” (verse 19); (verses 20–28 are parenthetical, so are omitted from the outline).
- IV. “Else what shall those be doing who are baptizing? *if* the dead are not being roused...”
 - A. “[*then*] it [baptism] is for the sake of the dead absolutely. Why are they baptizing for their sake?

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- B. [Why suffer persecution?] And why stand we in jeopardy every hour? If after the manner of men, I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what doth it profit me?” (vv. 29–32)
- V. “*If* the dead rise not, [*then*] let us eat and drink for tomorrow we die” (v. 32).
- VI. The conclusion of the matter:
 - A. Be not deceived: Evil company corrupts good morals.
 - B. Awake to righteousness and sin not, for some have not the knowledge of God.
 - C. I speak this to your shame (vv. 33–34 are paraphrased).

(*Note:* [Italic emphasis mine] Quotations are from the Scofield version of the Authorized or King James Version, except for verse 29, which is from the Concordant Version. Those familiar with the difficulties of this verse will appreciate this improved translation. The AV employs the repetitive use of *if* and *then* in such a way that it highlights the flow of thought in Paul’s argument. It is quite helpful here. We have added *then* in brackets where it is understood.)

- I. The first thesis covers verses 13–15. Simply stated, Paul says, “*If* there is no resurrection, *then* (*a*) Christ has not been raised (which has the double result of negating any value in Paul’s preaching and the Corinthian’s faith), and (*b*) Paul would have been a false witness of God.”

In Paul’s *if* statement, the word *dead* is plural. Paul is referring to all the dead, not to the death of Christ alone. If no one will be raised from the dead, then Christ was not raised either, and everything that the believing Corinthians had experienced—the gifts of the spirit, peace with God, fellowship, and communion—was void. All that had happened to the Corinthians since the time Paul had come preaching was undeniably real to them. They had experienced the power of the message and the divine verifications of its truth.

The headship of Christ over humanity is asserted here. As Paul will show later in verses 20–28, Christ’s resurrection is inseparably joined with the resurrection of all humanity. He is the Firstfruit, the Firstborn from among the dead, and the Firstfruit stands for the whole harvest. None of humanity can be raised apart from Christ, and in his resurrection is the divine promise that all humanity will be raised.

Secondly, *if* the dead are not raised, *then* Paul and his associates were false witnesses of God. Is God able to raise the dead? Was God operating in Christ? To question the resurrection and thereby the Gospel of God is to question both the power of God and the Truth of the Gospel. This is the sum of his first thesis of the argument.

- II. “For *if* the dead rise not” (v. 16). Again, Paul follows his *if* statement with two ensuing results: (a) Christ was not raised, leaving the Corinthians without salvation, still in their sins, because justification from sin is proven by Christ’s resurrection (Rom. 4:25). This again refers to the headship of Christ. “For even as, in Adam, all are dying, thus also, in Christ, shall all be vivified” (1 Cor. 15:22).

Christ died for the sins of humanity (John 1:29). All that was lost in Adam’s disobedience is more than recovered in the obedience of Christ (Rom. 5:12–21), and the resurrection of Christ verifies that the sins he bore are resolved—they are resolved now in those who have faith in Christ, and ultimately, they will be resolved for all (Acts 17:30–31; Rom. 1:4, 4:25, 5:2).

The second resulting issue is (b) believers who died have perished. The statement would read, “*If* the dead rise not, *then* believers in Christ who have died have perished.” Of course some will object and say that the statement means that believers would perish in death only if Christ himself were not raised.

Again, the plurality of the word *dead* dismisses that objection. If there is no resurrection of the dead—any dead and all the dead—then believers who have died have perished. What does the word *perished* say about the condition of the dead? It cannot be limited to the body alone because the context includes the resurrection of Christ as well as that of believers.

Perished cannot possibly describe a conscious existence in the presence of Christ regardless of what many claim death to be. And again, humanity's resurrection is inseparably joined with the resurrection of humanity's new Head, Christ.

And what does Paul say prevents believers from being perished? Does he say that since they believed at some time during their lives, believers who have died have not perished? No. Does he say that because believers who *have passed* are with Christ they have not perished? No. He says that apart from the resurrection, believers who have died have perished. Believers who have died are awaiting the resurrection to free them from what would be a *perished condition* if it were not for the resurrection. What is the resurrection for? Its purpose is to give life with a conscious existence to those who do not have it.

- III. "If in this life only we have hope in Christ" (v. 19). This is a variation of Paul's original thesis "If there is no resurrection."

Clearly, his thought is the same. Hope in Christ limited to the present life is the same as having no resurrection. And listen to Paul's result! If there is no resurrection of the dead, believers are the most pitiful group of all humanity!

Why would this be true? It would be true because death would be the end of their existence.

There is no blissful intermediate state for believing souls. Without resurrection, a dead man is no better than a dead dog

or a dead gnat. Only resurrection can bring back to life and consciousness. If believers went through life living for God and expecting Christ to come and glorify them and if there was no resurrection, all their effort and devotion to Christ would be for nothing.

Three times Paul has argued the incumbent consequences if there is no resurrection. He will bring that argument forward twice more, but the very thought of no resurrection is so distressing that he breaks forth into one of the most glorious passages of the Bible. “But now is Christ risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept” (v. 20). And on he goes until he can close with that most glorious and longed for consummation: “that God may be all in all” (v. 28). And ultimately, his discussion of resurrection will conclude with an exclamation of victory, taunting death! “Where, O Death, is your victory? Where, O Death, is your sting? Thanks be to God, Who is giving us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 15:55–57).

Paul’s argument resumes in verse 29.

- IV. Paul’s fourth thesis on the subject relates to baptism and the believer’s daily life and testing of faith. Why would a person who had no hope of escaping the grave be baptized? Remembering the Corinthian controversy over baptism (1:10–17; cf. also 10:2, 12:13), it is easily seen that Paul is trying to bring the importance of the resurrection home to his readers by using examples that were meaningful to them.

Baptism pictures both death and resurrection. What a rebuke it was for Paul to ask the Corinthians this question! It is as if he said, “How can you be boasting that you were baptized by Apollos or baptized by Paul? You are saying there is no resurrection. And if there is no resurrection, then baptism is a picture of nothing and means nothing! What possible reason could

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you have for baptizing if you truly don't believe in resurrection?" (1 Cor. 1:12–15, 15:29)

This he follows with the topic of persecution. Why would one lay down their life for the testimony of Christ, if there is no escape from the grave? Or to rephrase the thought, "It would be stupid to suffer persecution for the name of Christ if there will not be a resurrection! If there is no resurrection, the believers who died at the jaws and claws of beasts in the Ephesian arena were fools! They died for nothing!"

These statements are so strong that two things must be said. First, there is no blessedness in death for the believer or anyone. Death is an enemy, the destruction of which we anticipate with great fervor. Second, the resurrection is misunderstood and belittled today. The resurrection is not prized with the emphasis and glory that it merits.

- V. Paul's fifth thesis brings him to the close of the debate portion of his argument. If the dead will not be raised, eat and drink, for tomorrow you die! If there is no resurrection, take what enjoyment you can from life, for there is nothing in or beyond the grave.

Christ's resurrection is the promise that death will be abolished. Christ's resurrection marks the beginning of the new creation and the eradication of all the acts of the Adversary. Christ's resurrection is our hope and glory!

- VI. Paul concludes his argument with an exhortation to correct the ills of this false teaching. He says three things paraphrased here:
 - a. "Do not be deceived! The result of entertaining such teachings and teachers is corruption, both of faith and conduct."
 - b. "Wake up to the critical importance of the resurrection and do not miss the mark of truth in cor-

recting this false teaching. This error springs from an ignorance of God and His word.”

- c. “I have carried this argument to the full extent it merits. Perhaps you think I am extreme. But my purpose in doing so was to shame and embarrass you into doing what is right. The consequence is far too great for me to take any chance of being misunderstood.”

One more thought should be mentioned regarding this passage. Some will wish to redefine resurrection and say the term can apply to an altered existence in an intermediate state. To be sure, we will be gloriously altered. But it is certain that resurrection must be to a conscious existence in a tangible body, and there will be no conscious tangible body for the dead before resurrection. First Corinthians 15 sets that truth forward in unmistakable terms.

At Home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:1-8)

For we are aware that, if our terrestrial tabernacle house should be demolished, we have a building of God, a house not made by hands, eonian, in the heavens. For in this also we are groaning, longing to be dressed in our habitation which is out of heaven, if so be that, being dressed also, we shall not be found naked. For we also, who are in the tabernacle, are groaning, being burdened, on which we are not wanting to be stripped, but to be dressed, that the mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now He Who produces us for this same longing is God, Who is also giving us the earnest of the spirit. Being, then, courageous always, and aware that, being at home in the body, we are away from home from the Lord (for by faith are we walking, not by perception), yet we

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are encouraged, and are delighting rather to be away from home out of the body and to be at home with the Lord.

Paul makes use of figurative expressions speaking of two homes: one terrestrial and one in the heavens. And he speaks of two bodies, which he contrasts calling one a “terrestrial tabernacle house” and the other “a building of God, a house not made by hands, eonian, in the heavens” (2 Cor. 5:1). Then Paul expands his figures and speaks of these bodies as clothing.

In the earthly tabernacle body, we are burdened and are groaning. But we are *not* wanting to be stripped of the body. Paul is very clear that he does not wish to be found naked, which would be the condition of being without the body or dead.

Far from that, he emphatically declares that he wants to be “dressed” (v. 4). He yearns for the terrestrial body to be swallowed up by life. He desires mortality to be overcome by immortality without ever passing into death.

With this in mind, when verse 8 is read, it is clear that Paul’s desire “to be out of the body and to be at home with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8) is by no means a desire to die. It is a desire to be away from all the burdens and struggles of this life and to be enjoying the glories of the “habitation which is out of heaven” (v. 2). Paul did not believe that death offered any benefit at all. To be dead was to be naked or stripped. The all-too-familiar quotation “to be absent from the body *is to be present* with the Lord” is a misquotation of the Authorized Version. Correctly quoted, it says, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body *and to be present* with the Lord.” There is a world of difference between the words *is* and *and*.

What Is Gain? (Philippians 1:20–24)

In accord with my premonition and expectation, that in nothing shall I be put to shame, but with all boldness, as always, now also, Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether through life or through death. For to me to be living is Christ, and to be dying, gain. Now if it is to be living in

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

“For to me to be living is Christ, and to be dying, gain” (v. 21). This passage is frequently presented as meaning that Paul believed martyrdom would usher him into the bliss of heaven. That view is wrong for several reasons. First, such a view is in disagreement with other statements by Paul as noted previously. Second, Paul is not interested in personal gain. If he lives, he lives to serve Christ. If he dies, he will be a martyr for the cause of Christ, and he expects his death to further the Gospel.

The gain Paul speaks of is gain for the cause of Christ. This thought is consonant with the earlier verses of the chapter, where he expresses his desire to be released from jail so he can evangelize. Yet he is rejoicing that his confinement has generated so much attention to his position that others are evangelizing because of his absence, and the total effect is a larger work than he could accomplish himself if he were free.

Chapter 3 confirms this. Anything that was a personal gain for Paul he counted as a loss for Christ (3:7). Anything that was gain to the person of Paul, he counted as garbage that he might be totally dependent on and invested in Christ (3:8).

The third reason this passage does not mean Paul expected death to bring him *gain* is because his desire is for a completely different solution. Paul clearly says that he will not reveal whether he thinks evangelizing or martyrdom is better. Instead, he is “pressed out of the two” (v. 23). He prefers neither evangelizing nor martyrdom. He prefers “to be together with Christ, for it, rather, is much better” (v. 23). Paul yearns for a third option. He yearns for Christ to return and change him. He yearns to be in the presence of Christ. He echoes the same sentiment here as in 2 Corinthians 5. And he lends no support to the idea that there is any bliss or benefit in death.

In 1 Corinthians 15:32, Paul poses the question, “If I were to be killed by the beasts in the Ephesian arena, ‘what is the benefit to

me, if the dead are not being roused?” Blessedness is dependent on the return of Christ and glorification, not on death.

The God of the Living (Matthew 22:31–32, Mark 12:26–27, Luke 20:37–38)

The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Does this mean these patriarchs must currently be alive? No. In each of these passages it is clearly stated that their *living* is with respect to the resurrection. The patriarchs will be raised, because their God is the living God, and none of his will be endlessly bound by death. There is no insinuation that they are alive before their resurrection.

The Father’s House (John 14:2–3)

In My Father’s house are many abodes; yet if not I would have told you, for I am going to make ready a place for you. And if I should be going and making ready a place for you, I am coming again and I will be taking you along to Myself, that where I am, you also may be.

This passage is frequently read at funerals in such a manner as to suggest that the dead have joined Christ and are now dwelling in a mansion that is part of the Father’s house. Christ used the term *Father’s house* in John 2:16 with reference to the temple in Jerusalem and especially with thoughts of the temple in Ezekiel’s vision, not to a place of heavenly mansions. In the verses quoted Christ said that he would return and take his disciples to himself. Clearly, the disciples should be looking for the return of Christ if they wish to enter an abode that he has prepared for them. Christ said nothing here to insinuate that death would escort them to his presence or God’s temple in heaven.

A Grandstand of Faith? (Hebrews 11:39, 12:1)

What do the words “we...having so vast a cloud of witnesses encompassing us” (12:1) mean? It is true we are a theater to the world around us and to the spiritual beings (1 Cor. 4:9), but this refers to the living observing the example of others while they lived.

In Hebrews, the *cloud* of those who had died in faith were witnesses, not because they were witnessing the living, but because their lives were an example of living in belief of the promises of God. The writer notes in 11:39–40 that the faithful who have died have not entered into the promises, and they will not be perfected apart from the faithful of the believers’ day.

The scriptures and history abound with examples of faithfulness. These examples testify to those who are living that the life of faith can and should be lived in expectation. That is the intent of the passage. Therefore, “putting off every impediment and the popular sin, [we] may be racing with endurance the contest lying before us” (12:1).

The Repentant Malefactor (Luke 23:43)

It is frequently supposed the words of Christ from the cross to the repentant malefactor prove Christ went to paradise or heaven that very day and took the malefactor with him. In the AV, it reads, “Verily I say unto thee, Today shalt thou be with me in paradise.” The CV reads, “Verily, to you am I saying today, with Me shall you be in paradise.”

The difference between the two is significant. In the AV, the time element—today—is associated with paradise. In the CV, the time element is associated with the promise. Christ was saying, “I am promising you today that you will [eventually] be with me in paradise.” Christ was *not* saying, “I am promising you that you will be with me in paradise today.”

How do we prove this position? Christ had yet to spend three days and nights in the grave. On resurrection morning, when the Lord

spoke to Mary in the garden, he said, “Not as yet have I ascended to My Father” (John 20:17).

The book of Revelation places the tree of life in the paradise of God (Rev. 2:7), which has yet to descend from God out of heaven (Rev. 21–22). This places paradise in heaven with God. If Christ did not ascend to the Father until three days after His crucifixion, He could not have been in paradise the day of His crucifixion with the repentant thief.

John also verifies this for us, “No one has ascended into heaven except He Who descends out of heaven, the Son of Mankind Who is in heaven” (John. 3:13). Even now the repentant malefactor has not arrived in paradise. Eventually, he will be there because of Christ’s promise.

We paraphrase that promise here: “Truly, I am saying to you because of what is happening on this day on which I am dying for your sins and those of the entire world, you will be with me in paradise.”

The Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19–31)

It is frequently assumed since both the rich man and Lazarus are said to die, their obvious consciousness in Abraham’s bosom and hades proves the dead are conscious. Yet all the previously mentioned passages, which are vitally concerned with the subject of death, have shown the Bible’s teaching to be contrary to what first may appear to be taught by this passage.

Should this one satirical discourse, the point of which has little to do with literal death, upset the statements of many other passages of scripture? Or instead, should poetic license be allowed the great storyteller if there seems to be a controversy?

And who of those who insist this passage teaches the literal truth about death is willing to apply other statements from it to the upsetting of other biblical teachings? Specifically, who believes and is willing to make verse 25 the basis for future bliss or agony? “Now

Abraham said, ‘Child, be reminded that you got your good things in your life, and Lazarus likewise evil things. Yet now here he is being consoled, yet you are in pain’ (Luke 16:25). Shall the churches teach that the way to future joy is through present poverty and agony? Shall we leave all earthly possessions, quit our jobs, become beggars, and infect ourselves with disease in order to have future happiness?

Neglect is insinuated on the part of the rich man, but where is any evidence of virtue in Lazarus? Perhaps he became a diseased beggar through drunken debauchery. Abraham’s statement in verse 25 does not guarantee otherwise. And when we consider the context, it is easily seen that Christ did not intend for any spiritual virtue to be associated with Lazarus. Lazarus is representative of the publicans and sinners who were entering the kingdom before the Pharisees. Christ did not consider them virtuous, just needy.

Faith is not mentioned with respect to either of the characters in the story, but only hearkening to the law of Moses. The key thoughts that are mentioned regarding the characters of the story, such as Abraham’s bosom, were Pharisaic traditions, not the teaching of the scriptures. The Pharisees continually criticized every detail of Christ’s teaching. In this passage, Christ turns the tables on them, using their own catchphrases and pet views to capture their attention and challenge their thinking. And while faith is not mentioned with reference to the two main characters, it is definitely a qualifying feature for the rich man’s brothers, who yet had opportunity to believe (vv. 29–31).

Is This Passage a Parable?

Some have maintained this passage is a true account and must be understood literally. There is, indeed, much widespread teaching on paradise and hell that stands like an inverted pyramid on a literal interpretation of this passage.

At first glance, it seems to specify “a certain rich man” and “a certain poor man named Lazarus.” But the word used here for *certain* is *any (tis)*, and it is English idiom, not definition, that requires the use of *certain*. This word is commonly used in many parables and

especially in Luke (cf. Matt. 21:33, 22:2; Luke 7:41, 10:30–31, 33, 12:16, 13:6, 14:16, 15:11, 16:1, 19:12, 20:9).

The use of the name *Lazarus* has also been a point of objection to viewing this passage as a fictional rendition. But the twenty-third chapter of Ezekiel uses names in a parable, and the names in that parable have symbolic meanings, like Lazarus, which means *helpless*.

Furthermore, the particular name of Lazarus is too prophetic to be coincidental. The whole passage (chapters 15 and 16) culminates in Christ's final statement: "If Moses and the prophets they are not hearing, neither will they be persuaded if someone should be rising from among the dead" (Luke 16:31). Lazarus was raised from the dead (John 11), and the Pharisees' counsel was that he too should be killed along with Jesus. It is not unlikely that some of the Pharisees listening were among the company of those who were incensed at the raising of Lazarus.

Lazarus' resurrection was the culminating sign of the Lord's ministry, and it did not convince the Jews, just as Jesus prophesies here.

In Luke 15:2, the Pharisees and scribes were grumbling, "This man sinners is receiving, and is eating with them!" They were criticizing Jesus of not being separated from obvious sinners and insinuating his participation in their sin. In 16:14, we are told that the Pharisees who loved money were *deriding* (AV) or *scouting* him. They were mocking and rejecting him as unworthy of any confidence or consideration. In 15:3, we read that Jesus told them *this parable*. So where does the parable end?

If we see the passage as a parable with five parts, it makes a beautifully balanced inversion and progresses from simple parabolic form to satire and gives a fully rounded appraisal of the situation.

- A. The lost sheep
- B. The lost coin
- C. The two sons
- B'. The unjust steward
- A'. The rich man and Lazarus

The first two points focus on the lost and the joy and diligence of the shepherd and woman in searching for the lost. In the first two parts of the parable, the Pharisees are represented from their own viewpoint: They are the ninety-nine righteous persons who need no repentance and the nine coins that had never been lost from the woman's possession. To this point, whatever fault can be associated with the lost falls upon them (the sheep by nature need a shepherd because of their weakness and tendency to wander).

In the central point (C), the Pharisees and scribes and the tax collectors and sinners are numerically balanced; one son represents each group. This is the pivotal point in the overall parable because we see fault on the part of both sons, and we see the love of the father for both sons regardless of their faults.

While the first two parts of the parable had no suggestion of fault for the Pharisees and scribes, the last two parts focus on their greed, temporal expediency, and complacency. They were wise in the world but foolish before God. The tone of the parable changes dramatically in the last two parts. From a position of no guilt at first, the Pharisees and scribes move to descriptions of unscrupulous, self-centered behavior. From the pastoral tone of the grazing meadow, the parable moves to the biting satirical conclusion that the ninety-nine righteous who needed no repentance are really those who have historically ignored the weightier matters of the law while paying lip service to prideful displays of minor details. Being deeply ingrained in this behavior, their repentance was unlikely.

Jesus' Use of Current Ideas and Customs

Rare is the teacher or preacher who speaks without making use of contemporary examples and illustrations. And so it should not surprise us that the Lord Jesus did the same. Most of his parables illustrate this principle showing aspects of the daily life of his time, but there are examples besides the parables also.

The Lord instructed his disciples, "And whoever should not be receiving you, coming out from that city, twitch off even the dust

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from your feet for a testimony against them” (Luke 9:5; see also Mark 6:11, Acts 13:51).

The schools of the scribes taught that the dust of
heathen lands was defiling. They therefore objected
even to bringing plants or herbs from heathen countries,
lest some of the dust should come with them.²

The Lord Jesus used this custom in a new way. The disciples were sent to the cities of their own land and showed by use of this custom that the Israelites who did not accept the message of the kingdom were no better than foreigners who had no covenant relationship with God.

In Mark 7:1–23, further examples are given. The Pharisees and scribes criticized Jesus because his disciples were eating without special washings of their hands. The text tells us that they had many rules both for washing themselves and for washing vessels and even household furnishings. Christ criticized them for being so careful to keep customs that were not part of the covenant law while ignoring basic concepts of the law. Then he gave an example of misusing the concept of making a gift to God (corban) as a means of escape from doing anything to help their own parents. In doing this, they were breaking the commandment to honor their parents.

In Luke 16, we find more uses of current customs by Jesus. Along with the statement that the Pharisees loved money, Jesus told them a slave couldn't serve two masters, and a person can't serve both God and money. These statements come between the parable of the unjust steward and the satire on Lazarus and the rich man. It was clear to the Pharisees that Christ used the rich man to represent them.

The primary things from that current world that Jesus used here were the beliefs taught by the Pharisees about what happens after death. The Pharisees generally held to a belief in the immortality of the soul. As our study has shown thus far, this belief did not come from the scriptures but from the philosophies and religions of surrounding countries and peoples.

Abraham's bosom stands out as a significant feature of this afterlife view. The term is mentioned twice in the parable but nowhere else in Holy Scripture.

Notice there is no reference at all to people of other nations. Often other nations were completely ignored in Jewish teaching on afterlife since they were outside the covenant. Apparently, the rich man was a Jew, which the context suggests to be a Pharisee. The poor beggar was also a Jew, most likely representing the tax collectors and sinners mentioned in 15:1.

The opening scene is set from the viewpoint of the Pharisees and scribes in 15:2. The wealth and poverty of the characters represent their spiritual condition in the eyes of the Pharisees and scribes. The turnabout of their conditions after death represents their true spiritual conditions according to the Lord Jesus.

The word for *bosom* can also be rendered *lap* or *side*. Being *in Abraham's bosom* has long been considered an expression to convey the idea of rest and comfort after the trials of life, much as a weary or frightened child would find comfort in the lap of a parent.

Also, the idea of rest and festivity and perhaps even honor has been suggested from the example of John being next to Christ at the last supper. The custom was to recline on a couch on one elbow, leaving the other hand free for use in eating and drinking. John is mentioned as leaning back in Christ's bosom (John 13:23). This closeness explains how he could ask the Lord who the betrayer was without the others hearing (vv. 24–26).

We are well aware of how quick the Jews were to claim their descent from Abraham (Matt. 3:9; Luke 3:8; John 8:33, 37–41), so it seems most natural that they would develop traditions and teaching about their future conditions, which would include Abraham and look up to him.

In First Temple Judaism, *Sheol* in the Hebrew Old Testament or *Hades* in the *Septuagint* is primarily a place of "silence" to which all humans go. However, during or before the exile to Babylon, ideas of activity of the dead in Sheol began to enter Judaism.

During the Second Temple period (roughly 500 BCE–70 CE), the concept of a Bosom of Abraham first occurs in Jewish papyri that refer to the “Bosom of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.” This reflects the belief of Jewish martyrs who died expecting that “after our death in this fashion Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob will receive us and all our forefathers will praise us” (4 Macc. 13:17). Other early Jewish works adapt the Greek mythical picture of *hades* to identify the righteous dead as being separated from unrighteous in the fires by a river or chasm.³

Further details, such as the employment of messengers (angels) to carry Lazarus to Abraham’s bosom, can also be seen as developments of these traditions in other non-biblical, rabbinical writings. The book of Enoch includes a supposed tour of the center of the earth where four hollow places of *hades* were defined—two for righteous dead and two for the unrighteous dead. In another passage in Enoch, the center of the earth had two hollow places identified as paradise and Gehenna.⁴ Notice here the geographical change for the location of Gehenna and its interchangeability with *hades*.

When all these historical traditions are considered, it becomes clear that Christ was using these non-biblical traditions of the Pharisees and scribes against them. They knew these were their own teachings and beliefs. Christ used them to catch their attention, denounce their hateful behavior, and set the crucial idea of the resurrection before them. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, but the scribes and Pharisees did, making the point of the discourse appropriate for them.

Luke’s Theme

One of the primary themes in Luke is the contrast between those who are *near* and those who are *far off*. This theme springs up early in the book where the people are seen *outside* praying while the priest had *entered* (1:9–10). The theme flows throughout the book and closes with the scene of the disciples continually praising and

blessing God *in the sanctuary* (24:53). This theme is especially relevant in Luke 15 and 16. Chapter 15 (the sheep, coins, and sons) manifests the Father's joy in receiving those who are afar off into his bosom. Chapter 16 speaks of the obligations (stewardship, marriage, and wealth) violated by those who should have been near.

In the story of the father with two sons, the younger son represents the sinners and tax collectors. He squanders all his inheritance in a *far country*, but owning his worthless condition, he returns, and *still being far away*, he is seen and received joyfully by his father. The father fondly embraces him and kissed him (much like Lazarus being in Abraham's bosom). The elder son, who had the right to all the father's possessions and had been *near* all along, came *near* at the time of the prodigal's return but was self-righteously offended and would *not enter*.

The story line is very much the same with Lazarus and the rich man as in the father with two sons. Abraham is the father of both, just as he is the father of the Pharisees and the publicans and sinners.

Wealth and prosperity was a sign of divine blessing in the era of Israel's covenant. The royal purple and priestly cambric, worn by the rich man, are symbols of Israel as a reigning nation of priests. That will be their position when the promise to Abraham to be a blessing to all nations is fulfilled.

Lazarus' poverty and ulcers are a symbol of the publicans' and sinners' uncleanness and social standing. The rich man was "daily making merry splendidly" (v. 19) with Pharisaic indifference while Lazarus was *outside the gate*, wishing only for scraps of what lay within. The word *psichion*, scraps, is only used in two contexts—here (Luke 16:21) and in the healing of the Syrophenician woman's child (Matt. 15:27, Mark 7:28). In both cases, the scraps are symbolic of the remnants or crumbs of Israel's blessings as God's chosen. Lazarus is blessed to come *near* into the very bosom of Abraham, but the rich man finds himself *outside* of blessing with an impassable chasm between.

Like the lepers of chapter 17, the tax collector and Bartimaeus of chapter 18 and Zacchaeus of chapter 19, Lazarus was *outside* or *afar off*. Like the Pharisees of chapter 15, who would not enter the

house; the Pharisee of chapter 18, who prayed toward himself; the rich young man, who went away sorrowful; and the murmurers of chapter 19 who were disgruntled at Jesus' entry into Zacchaeus' house, the rich man was ultimately the one left outside.

Interpretation of the Satire

One of the primary differences between this discourse and many of the parables that Christ gave is the time period to which it applies. Like the wheat and tares, this story applies to the first era of the kingdom while many others are concerned with the time when Israel's prominence will be seen. Since the rejection of Christ by Israel, believing Jews have rested in the bosom of faith, not yet receiving the promises but waiting for them.

The passing of generations makes the setting of hades appropriate. Israel's covenant is broken, and the temple is gone. The nation as a whole has been tormented in the fires of anti-Semitism. Disbelief, even "if someone should be rising from the dead" (16:31), has doomed the rich man and his brethren. Israel's future reception back into God's favor will be "life from among the dead" (Rom. 11:15).

This national death is figurative, just as the death in the parable is figurative. In God's purpose, the covenant with Israel had to be broken in order to do away with the law so that grace could reign. Now individuals, both of the nations and Israel, are being given faith apart from law.

Old Testament Prophecy and This Satire

There are two passages in the Old Testament that should be read and compared to the rich man and Lazarus. They are Deuteronomy 32:10–26 and Jeremiah 5:27–29. These passages have remarkable similarities and support the interpretation given here.

Dives is Latin for *wealthy* and is commonly given as the name of the rich man. We suggest a different name—*Jeshurun*. *Jeshurun* is a poetic name for Israel meaning *upright one*. It occurs in the Deuteronomy passage, which is also known as the song of Moses.

Jeshurun grew fat and forsook his God. Like the obese Eli, who did not correct or control his sons, Israel luxuriated in the benefits of God and became distracted by the surrounding world. In jealous anger, God gave them over to the nations.

For a fire, it will be kindled by My anger, and it shall glow unto the unseen [*sheol*] beneath; it shall devour the earth [or land] and its crop, and it shall set aflame the foundations of the mountains.

(Deut. 32:22)

This prophecy found repeated fulfillment in the calamities, which befell unfaithful Israel at the hands of the nations.

The larger context for the Jeremiah passage is all chapters 5 and 6. Jeremiah is told to condemn Israel and especially Jerusalem for their corruption. The punishment receives numerous descriptions, including fire, and was fulfilled by the Babylonian captivity.

Therefore thus says the LORD, the God of hosts...I am making my words in your mouth a fire, and this people wood, and the fire shall devour them. Behold, I am bringing upon you a nation from afar...Like a basket full of birds, their houses are full of treachery; therefore they have become great and rich, they have grown fat and sleek. They know no bounds in deeds of wickedness; they judge not with justice the cause of the fatherless, to make it prosper, and they do not defend the rights of the needy. Shall I not punish them for these things? says the LORD, and shall I not avenge myself on a nation such as this?

(Jer. 5:14–15, 27–29, RSV)

Clearly, these passages have many similarities and lay a foundation for the Lord's discourse against the Pharisees and scribes. Christ himself is the great summation of all spiritual wealth. Israel held that wealth typically but lost it with the rejection of Christ.

In Israel's rejection of him, all these passages find their greatest fulfillment. The death of a nation is represented in these passages—a death that leaves them as a valley full of dry bones yet a nation

to be raised or *reborn* later. It is a death like that of the prodigal: “your brother was dead and revives, and was lost and was found” (Luke 15:32).

Why is it that five brothers would end up in torment? They would not believe either the testimony of the scriptures or the sign of resurrection. Why is it that the Jews have been persecuted throughout the world? Because they received not the testimony of the oracles of God, which were committed to them, neither did they believe the sign of the prophet Jonah—the resurrection of Christ.

Therefore, the birthright was lost by those who failed to exercise it in the character of the true Elder Brother. The blessing was passed to those who are sons of Abraham only by faith.

Death and Faith

The Hebrew word *aron* means a *chest* or *box*. The first use of this word in the Bible is in Genesis 50:26, where it says that Joseph was placed in a *coffin* in Egypt. The next 135 plus occurrences of this word are translated *ark* (AV) and refer to the *ark* or *coffer* of the covenant that contained the stone tablets called the Ten Commandments. This is a different word than that used for Noah’s ark.

Why did God introduce this word, which almost exclusively refers to the symbol of his covenant relation to Israel and the very seat of his communication with them by first using it to refer to Joseph’s coffin? Curious too is the similarity between the way a coffin is carried and the way God designed the coffer of the covenant to be carried.

The first five words of the book of Genesis are “in the beginning God created,” and the last five words are “in a coffin in Egypt (AV).” By noting these words, emphasis was laid upon the ruin brought by sin and death. But the emphasis of Joseph’s words, as he looked death in the eyes, was quite different.

I am about to die; yet Elohim, He shall take note, yea take note of you. He will bring you up from this land to the land about which Elohim swore to our forefathers, to Abraham,

Isaac, and Jacob. Then Joseph adjured the sons of Israel, saying, When Elohim shall take note, yea take note of you, then you will bring up my bones with you from here.
(Gen. 50:24–25)

Joseph's outlook was one of faith. With unshakeable confidence, he assured them that God would come to them and bring them into the land of promise. And with resolute determination, he required of them a solemn promise to take his body with them. The carrying of Joseph's coffin to Canaan was a testimony to faith in God's promise.

How important were Joseph's faith and the oath he required of the sons of Israel to their deliverance? How much of the unity of the people and their commitment to leave did God instill in them through the passing down from generation to generation of one man's faith?

Throughout the wearisome years of slavery, how many times around an evening fire did someone speak of Joseph's promise that God would come for them and take them into a new land? And how many young ears heard and believed that God would someday come and deliver them? When the days finally came, how many hundreds thought, We must take the coffin of Joseph with us?

When Moses led the children of Israel out of Egypt, they took Joseph's coffin with them (Exod. 13:19). Pallbearers were part of the procession through the wilderness. Pallbearers walked through the desert night guided by the light of a pillar of fire. Pallbearers walked through the heat of the day under the shade of a pillar of cloud. Pallbearers walked through the Red Sea and out on the other side, where Pharaoh and his chariots could not follow. Well, maybe they put the coffin in a wagon. But allow me to cast a picture in your mind.

But before they reached Canaan at Mount Sinai, another set of bearers were designated to carry the symbol of God's promise and covenant with the nation. And in the coffer, these bearers bore would be placed the stone tablets, the golden pot of manna, and the rod of Aaron that budded—the things that represent Christ, his faith, his death, and his resurrection in the perfect fulfillment of the law.

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Joseph had become the lawgiver and ruler of Egypt, having highest authority in the empire next to Pharaoh. He had made Egypt to become the house of bread that fed the world during a seven-year famine. (Christ was born in Bethlehem, which means “house of bread.”) In a typical sense, Joseph had been raised from the dead twice—once when he was pulled up out of the pit or cistern where his brothers had thrown him and a second time when he was delivered from the prison dungeon.

It is not at all difficult to see Joseph as a wonderful representation or type of Christ. And the similarity between the coffer of the covenant and the coffin of Joseph is also easy to see. And how amazingly similar are the bones of Joseph in a coffin when we think of all his life represented to the contents of the coffer of the covenant.

The lid of the coffer, sometimes called the mercy seat, is the location where the blood of the sin offering is placed, and it is the place from which God spoke and communed with his people. Jacob saw the blood on Joseph’s garment and said it was an experience that would stay with him all his life. God saw the blood of Christ on the celestial mercy seat, and it will affect all the deathless Deity does as long as he exists.

God stands on the faith and death of Christ, and from that ground, he communes with us and guides us and rules us. Christ’s death and faith are our shelter and our redemption.

Death—relentless, unyielding, implacable death—is the measuring stick of faith. The children of Israel carried with them the coffin of a national savior and the coffer of the covenant, showing a belief that could not be cancelled by death. The great missionary Paul said,

In everything, being afflicted, but not distressed; perplexed, but not despairing; persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not perishing—always carrying about in the body the deadening of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our body. For we who are living are ever being given up to death because of Jesus, that the life of Jesus may be manifested in our mortal flesh.

(2 Cor. 4:8–11)

By faith, we carry the death and resurrection of Christ with us as the enabling power to live in assurance of God's promises. Death demands despair and surrender, but we meet it with faith and perseverance.

The Faith of Jesus Christ

In Galatians 3:23–25, Paul made a strong and peculiar statement. Paul called the coming of Jesus Christ *the coming of faith*. Certainly, there was faith before Christ came in the flesh. Hebrews 11 makes it abundantly clear that many have lived and died in faith. Yet by expressing his thoughts this way, Paul helps us realize that the faith of Jesus Christ was of a monumentally different purity and composition than our faith. Christ's faith was so far superior that the display of his faith may be spoken of as *the coming of faith*.

Furthermore, the display of the faith of Jesus Christ became the pivotal point for a change in the way God deals with mankind in the accomplishment of his purpose. Christ's faith is indivisibly linked with the revelation of the Son of God, which is also the revelation of God as Father. Now in grace, we are living by faith, which is of the Son of God (Gal. 2:20). Now there are no legal requirements for a relationship to God by covenant, but we are *graced* to become his sons (Gal. 4:1–7). The Galatians, who were being told they should keep the law and were tempted to do so, needed to realize that God was dealing with them through faith alone.

How was this great faith displayed? Certainly, in all that Christ did and said throughout his life, he displayed his faith. Yet there was one pivotal event that sorely tested the mettle of his faith to reveal any possible flaw. This testing was finalized in Gethsemane and on the cross.

Many people struggle endlessly, worrying that something they have done places them beyond the reach of God's acceptance. But on Jesus Christ was laid the sin of the whole world (John 1:29), not simply the sin of a single life. He was made to be sin "for our sakes that we may be becoming God's righteousness in Him" (2 Cor. 5:21). And when the sin of the world had settled down upon him and when

God had forsaken him in the darkness, he faced death. He faced the end of his existence! Unless the God who had made him sin for our sakes and unless the God who forsook him in the darkness chose to raise him back to life, his existence would cease eternally.

Christ so thoroughly realized the character and purpose and power and love of his God and Father that even after his unfathomable separation from God on the cross, his faith still claimed, “Father, into Thy hands am I committing My spirit” (Luke 23:46).

In speaking these words, Christ was quoting Psalm 31:5, and he stopped in the middle of the verse. He couldn’t yet speak the next line with his lips, but without a doubt, he was shouting the next line from the bottom of his heart: “You have ransomed me, O Yahweh, El of faithfulness!” At the moment of his death, this was Christ’s thought and faith.

If we believe death is a blissful condition enjoyed in the presence of God, we will fail to grasp the magnitude of the faith and sacrifice of Christ. Furthermore, we will fail to grasp the importance of faith in our own lives. Faith and expectation in Christ’s return and our resurrection at his command are the indestructible strands fashioned from the faithfulness of God, which secure us in the heart of oblivion and transport us to the crystal pavement upon which the throne of God is founded.

Conclusion on the First Death

The dead are oblivious to any feeling, either pleasant or painful. There is no consciousness or awareness of the passing of time or of anything in death. Other than relief from the struggle and release from a mortal body, there is no benefit in dying for those who have run their race. Death provides them nothing.

Death is the enemy that tears us from the land of the living, grieving our loved ones. Apart from the resurrection, death would be the end of our existence. And yet it is good that God has designed death this way. Death is a means of accumulating humanity so that it may step forward in huge grandiose strides in God’s purpose.

Many, many generations of believers will be raised simultaneously and meet the Lord together. Whether they have been in the grave for a day or for a thousand years, to the consciousness of them all, it will seem as if the moment of dying was the same with the moment of rising from death. The delay between each one's death and Christ's coming will seem nonexistent to all. What a marvelous way to bring all the generations together into the light of life, releasing them from the grip of the enemy.

The resurrection of Christ is monumental! It is the victory in which we will all participate. It is the promise of our own raising. And it is the revelation of the sons of God! As easily as our hands pass through the air, with such ease the powerful hands of the resurrection of Christ will reach into the dust of the earth and raise up the millions of humanity. Adam, Eve, and every last one of their children will see life again because of the resurrection of Christ Jesus!

Our faith is to be exercised by focusing on Christ. For him, we wait.

He alone is our Deliverer. As he died, looking to his Father to bring him back into existence, so we look to him as we face death. Our existence, our life, depends upon him. His return will save us out of the life of this world or out of oblivion. Our faith should grapple with that reality.

THE SEARCH FOR THE SECOND DEATH



Questions

There are not many passages in the Bible that mention the second death by name. And those naming the second death are only little concerned with defining its features. Because of this, many questions regarding the second death arise—questions that can only be answered by a study of many different but related passages.

It becomes apparent that one great question over all must be answered first: “Is the second death a repetition of the first death, or is it something else?” The answer to this question must be verifiable.

Is the second death the same thing as hell or hades? Is it the same thing as Gehenna, the same as Tartarus? If it is not the same as one or some of these, how is it different?

The AV translates *hades*, *Gehenna*, and *Tartarus* all as *hell*. Are there three hells? Is the second death hell number four?

Is the second death only mentioned in the book of Revelation? If it is, has too much importance been given to something from a dark and difficult portion of the Bible?

Is the second death literally death—is it the same as the first death? And is the lake of fire literally a lake of fire?

In studying the first death, it has been shown that death is a state in which there is no conscious existence. If the lake of fire is literal fire, then the second death must be literal death since casting a person into fire will kill them.

But the passages referring to the second death do not speak of it causing anyone to die, but instead it causes torment that continues for extended periods of time.

Why do those cast there not quickly die? What keeps them alive? A person will die in a number of days without water. An environment of fire would drastically increase dehydration. What keeps people alive? Are there water fountains in the lake of fire?

Literal fire will destroy body tissue. If people are to live for extended time in literal fire, they must be healing as quickly as they are being burned, or else they will quickly die, and the lake of fire will, in effect, become an enormous crematorium.

Does literal fire have the capability of tormenting spiritual beings such as Satan? How is he tormented in the lake of fire?

Literal fire also raises questions with time periods. Fire is a chemical reaction in which substances change—fuel is burned and ash or something which cannot be burned remains. How is the fuel supply maintained?

A literal fire large enough to engulf millions of people could be the size of a flaming planet. Will such a spectacle be part of the new earth?

Judgment at the great white throne is according to works or acts. No two people are alike on such a scale. How can people be thrown into a fire and all endure different torment? Are there *hot spots* and *cooler spots* in the fire?

Is the second death a figurative expression? If it is figurative, what does it signify? If the second death is figurative, are the pain and torment real? How are figurative expressions to be understood? Why would God use figurative expressions and not speak plainly about something so serious that will affect so many people?

Who is consigned to the lake of fire? Is it people, spirits, Satan, beasts? If it is people, is it only the most extremely wicked people who are consigned there? If the lake of fire is such a terrible punishment, why are some said to be there during both the thousand years and the age following?

Satan is not cast there until the thousand-year period is over and after he leads a great revolt! Is Satan's torment shorter or less severe

than that of the ones he deceived? Why do some others appear to be there longer than he?

The lake of fire is in existence during the thousand years and also in the age following. But the lake of fire is not named the second death until after the millennium and not until the great white throne judgment is reached. Does the lake of fire change at the time of the great white throne judgment? Is something about it different in one age than it is in the other?

Why does the Bible speak of being injured by the second death but doesn't speak of dying the second death?

Different ages have been mentioned in the questions above. How do they figure into this problem?

We hope to answer these questions and more to the readers' satisfaction.

The readers may wonder why time is given to the specifics of some issues. We will be targeting viewpoints and teachings primarily of three groups: (1) annihilationists, (2) universalists who claim the second death to be a repetition of the first death, and (3) those who believe in endless torment of the unbelieving, especially those who describe it as nothing less than torture. Our study of this subject has convinced us that none of these views are tenable or supported by a thorough study of the Scriptures.

Biblical Time Periods

The Eons of the Eons

In the following pages, references will be made to *the eons of the eons*. The book of Revelation uses this phrase repeatedly. Since this phrase defines the time period for torment in the lake of fire, it is essential to understand what it means.

Most English versions erroneously render this phrase *forever and ever*. Bryant Rotherham's *Emphasized Bible*, Robert Young's *Young's Literal Translation of the Bible*, the *Concordant Literal New Testament*, some editions of *Weymouth New Testament*, *The Emphatic Diaglott*,

and *A Translation: The New Testament* by David Bentley Hart are among the more well-known versions that use *age* or *eon* rather than *ever*. The *American Standard Version* (1901) gives the rendering of *age* in the margins as a replacement for *forever*.

The Greek word in question is *aion*, and it clearly does not bear the meaning of endlessness. The versions that translate *aion* as *ever* or *forever and ever* also frequently translate this word as *world* (about 38 out of 105 times), not to mention other less frequent renderings such as *evermore*, *course*, *eternal*, and *ages* (these examples are all from the AV).

The translators used additional words such as *world* because consistent use of *forever* would have resulted in many contradictions. For example, “The harvest is the end of the *world*” (Matt. 13:39, AV). Consistent translation would have read, “The harvest is the end of *forever*.” But *forever* cannot have an end! (Five times Matthew says this word *forever* (*aion*) has an end; see also 13:40, 49; 24:3; 28:20.) There is obviously a translation problem here.

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, it mentions, “the ends of the world” (AV). It is difficult to imagine a world having more than one end. Not only the word for *end* is plural, but the word for *world* is plural also.

Paul is not speaking here of several worlds ending. He is speaking of the consummations or completions of multiple ages in God’s plan and purpose. So the scriptures show by the simple use of singulars and plurals that the word *aion* cannot mean more than an age or eon. Singular eons are said to end, and plural eons are said to have ends.

The more recent English versions generally replace the use of *world* for this Greek word with *age*. This is correct and helpful to understanding individual passages, but they continue using the term *forever and ever* in other passages, preventing a correct understanding of the intended meaning of the Bible in many contexts.

This practice hides the fact that God’s plan of redemption is being worked out in a succession of ages. The overall impact of such inconsistency is confusion to the serious student and misrepresentation of scriptural teaching. This confusion is not limited to the read-

ing of individual passages. The concept of eternity inserted in place of ages or eons has also played extensive havoc with the eschatological views formed and expressed by the majority of biblical scholars.

The extrabiblical insertion of the idea of eternity has resulted in the wholly additional concepts of *intermediate states* and *eternal states* where no such thought was intended. And the truth of God's plan of redemption through progressive ages is eclipsed.

The thoughtful reader should well ask the question, "If forever means *endless*, then what does forever *and* ever mean?" Endlessness is an adopted philosophical idea that is foreign to this word's use in the Bible. Consistency in translation would eliminate the renderings *forever and ever*.

In addition to causing contradictions, there is a major problem with singulars and plurals. The phrase commonly translated *forever* is used to render two phrases: *for the age* and *for the ages*. Can there be more than one *forever*? More than one *eternity*? More than one concept of time without beginning or end? And the phrase usually translated *forever and ever* is used to render three Greek phrases: *for the age of the age*, *for the age of the ages*, and *for the ages of the ages*. This failure to distinguish singulars and plurals shows a lack of belief in the inspiration of the scriptures, an ignorance of God's plan and purpose, and a failure in translation.

The reason this phrase occurs frequently in Revelation is because that book is primarily concerned with events of the two coming eons—the kingdom ages. Isaiah, Peter, and John all spoke of the new heaven and earth and understood it to be a part of the kingdom. And so it is. But it occurs in a different eon from the millennium. Many millenarians think of the millennial age as being the final aspect of things before the commencement of a *final* or *eternal state*. It is helpful to realize that the duration of the kingdom spans more than two ages. From the cross to the millennial eon is a portion of an eon in which we have a spiritual aspect of the kingdom. In this period of time, Christ is head over all but only to the church. The next age will be the eon including the thousand years when the spirit of God will be poured out, and Israel will be born anew. The third eon of the

kingdom will come in after the great white throne judgment with the new heaven and new earth.

In the impending eon, Christ is figured as the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and it is an eon of strict rule in justice and righteousness. The millennium is included in the impending eon. The eon following the millennial eon is the *eon of the eons*. It is the one in which the final stages of God's great plan for creation reach their consummation. In that eon, Christ is figured as the Lamb, and reconciliation is the major theme. That will be when all come under Christ's headship.

The phrase "eons of the eons" refers to the two greatest eons of all the eons. These eons are the impending eon (containing the thousand years or millennium) and the final eon (known as the *eon of the eons* [Eph. 3:21])—the greatest eon of all. The great white throne judgment occurs after the thousand years but near the end of the impending eon. These two eons are divided by the passing away of the present heaven and earth and the coming of the new heaven and earth.

This phrase "the eons of the eons" follows a form of Hebrew expression, which is used with many words. The King of kings is the greatest king of all kings, having authority over all. The holies of holies are the two most holy places (Heb. 9:25). They are holier than any other place inside or outside the camp. They are holier than the altar and laver and everything in the outer court. The Song of Songs is the greatest song of all, extolling the merits of love—something that is of far greater value than all of one's possessions, something that is strong as death.

The eons of the eons are the greatest eons of all because in them, God's purpose comes to full fruition. In the eons of the eons, the earth will see true justice. In these eons, judgment on humanity is completed. In them, death becomes limited and is finally abolished. In these final eons, glory to God continually increases. And in these eons, the consummation of vivification (when all are made immortal) is reached, and God becomes All in all, Everything in everyone.

The prevailing views on eschatology today are largely bogus. They are built on illegitimate ideas of eternity while the Bible speaks of ages. They are founded on inconsistency and mistranslation.

Kingdom Eons

Grasping the scope of the kingdom may be easier when considering it from the viewpoint of three different periods of time. The kingdom can easily be divided into three eras, which all occur in different eons, simply by noting the presence or absence and the exercise of authority by Christ and Satan.

The first era occurs in the present eon. It is outlined in the parable of the wheat and tares (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43). The householder who sowed good seed is the Son of Man, Christ. The field is the world. The tares or darnel are the sons of the wicked one. The tares are sown among the good seed by the Adversary, Satan. This shows the Adversary still to be at large in the world during this era of the kingdom.

Other parables indicate an absence of the householder after the sowing of the seed (cf. Matt. 25:1–30—the delayed bridegroom and the traveling lord of the slaves; see also Luke 19:11–27). This era of the kingdom closes an eon because Christ said the harvest at which the tares and wheat are separated was the conclusion of the eon (Matt. 13:39 not the end of the world nor the end of forever).

The harvest/judgment is the same as the glory throne judgment and occurs after the tribulation. This harvest judgment cannot be the same as the great white throne judgment because Satan is present during the eon preceding it. The era for the calling out of the church runs along the same lines, but it was a secret not revealed previously. Because of this, we expect a turning of Israel to Christ at the end of this eon to fulfill the parabolic prophecies.

During the coming eon, Satan will be absent from world affairs for a thousand years because he will be locked up in the *bottomless pit* or *submerged chaos* (Rev. 20:1–3). Christ will be ruling the world through the church in the heavenly realm and through reborn Israel on the earth.

This will be the time when the spirit of God is poured out upon Israel, and they will be discipling the nations of the world according to the commission in Matthew 28. This will be the time or rule with

the iron rod—swift justice carried out for failure to follow the law going forth from Zion.

Following the eon containing the thousand years is the eon of the new heaven and earth, when Christ rules as the Lamb on the great white throne with his Father.

During that eon of the kingdom, Satan, who was loosed from his imprisonment and led a revolt at the end of the millennium, will be cast into the lake of fire (Rev. 20:10). So Satan is clearly shown to be in three different spheres during these three ages: (1) the world—the prince of the power of the air, now operating in the sons of stubbornness; (2) the bottomless pit, where the dragon is cast—the dragon representing not only the Adversary but also the spiritual powers under his rule; and (3) the lake of fire.

The locale of Christ's presence may not be as clear, but definite distinctions can be made—both in his bodily presence and in his exercise of authority in rule during these eras. Currently, he rules in the hearts of those who believe in him. He is Head over all things now but only to the church, which is his body. In the coming age, he will rule with a rod of iron and through a born-again Israel on earth. Finally, he will rule as the Lamb in the final eon. The variations in presence and exercise of authority are all part of God's progressive plan of redemption through a course of eons—eons that the translations *eternal* and *forever* have hidden from us.

These three ages of the kingdom are parallel to the three periods of David's reign. Each of three periods of David's reign commenced with an anointing for kingship.

The first period began with the anointing by Samuel and was characterized by persecution from Saul. The body of Christ and the future reborn Israel share the remaining portion of this eon for the time of their calling, and they share a similar course of experience. As David was the rejected outcast king, his followers went to the cave of Adullam to be with him and follow him.

So also, Israel, as a nation, is now an outcast people who have been persecuted and will eventually revive the kingdom in a wilderness area before it can be established. And Israelites, who believe in Christ, are outcasts from their nation. The body of Christ was estab-

lished in persecution and eventually will go astray before Christ's return to assemble his body.

The second period of David's reign began with his anointing at Hebron over the tribe of Judah, which parallels Christ's rule over and through reborn Israel in the coming millennial age.

The third period of rule began with David's anointing at Jerusalem over a more unified kingdom after Zion finally fell into the hands of Israel.

The time of the final anointing parallels the kingdom age on the new heaven and earth with the dragon cast into the lake of fire, chastisement, during that final eon. We can see the final age as bringing the final correction of the spiritual realm.

Eternal or Eonian?

The word *aion* also has an adjective derived from it: *aionios*. This word is frequently translated *eternal* in the common versions as in the phrases *life eternal* and *everlasting punishment* (Matt. 25:46, AV).

But the meaning of the adjective does not go beyond the meaning of the noun from which it is derived. Something that is yearly pertains to a year. Something that is monthly pertains to a month. And something that is eonian pertains to an eon. Something that is eternal pertains to eternity, and the concept of eternity is in the scriptures only as a result of inaccurate translation.

The eons are the largest time segments discussed in the Bible. Endless conditions are expressed with a negative. When we read that "death will be *no more*," we speak of an endless condition without death (Rev. 21:4).

The saved will be raised to *eonian life*, not *eternal life*. Does this mean that at some future time, they could die? No. Paul makes it clear that when the saved are changed, they will become immortal (1 Cor. 15:53–54).

What then is the significance of the term *eonian life*? Jesus said, "Now it is eonian life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Him Whom Thou dost commission, Jesus Christ" (John

17:3). The Lord Jesus spoke these words shortly before his betrayal and crucifixion.

The crucifixion, resurrection, and ascension of Christ are the greatest revelation of God and his love. Those who see the love of God in Christ trust in God and will be raised to participate in the kingdom—that is when they will be enjoying *eonian life*.

The term *eonian life* speaks of the *life of the eons*, referring to the kingdom eons. The saved are blessed, not only to be recipients of immortality but also to participate in the kingdom in the coming ages.

They will be alive during the kingdom eons. Some of them will reign in the kingdom. All of them will be blessed to see all the wrong; and corrupt systems of this world judged and corrected; and disease, suffering, and sorrow will be eliminated. This is the significance of what is generally called *eternal life*.

Eonian life is a fuller and richer expression because it carries with it the thoughts of all that will transpire during the kingdom eons, when God's purpose is being completed. The expression *eternal life* by comparison is nearly bankrupt. It only means *endless life* (lacking part of the definition of eonian). Even when the churches attach the idea of *endless bliss* to *eternal life*, they still leave us in a nebulous fog transported to an undefinable heaven with undefinable bliss while many of mankind are still dead and/or suffering. And how can we have bliss if some of us are suffering or missing?

Aion and Aionios Twice in One Sentence

“And these shall go away into *everlasting* punishment; but the righteous into life *eternal*” (Matt. 25:46, AV).

Augustine popularized an argument that is based on this verse and that was made in support of the opinion that *aionios* meant *endless* or *eternal*. *Aionios* is used twice here in the same sentence, rendered *everlasting* once and *eternal* once. Simply stated, the argument is this: The same word is used to describe the life of the righteous that is used to describe the punishment of the wicked. Therefore, the life of the righteous and the punishment of the wicked must be of

equal duration. And since the righteous will never die, then the punishment of the unbelieving must never end.⁵ This argument sounds reasonable, and the word *aionios* is a time-related word, but it does not bear the meaning of endlessness as we will show.

Others, like E. B. Pusey, have come behind Augustine with the intention of adding some teeth to his argument. Pusey especially accuses universalists of ascribing different meanings to *aionios* in its repeated usage in this passage. Granted, some universalists may have done this or insinuated it, but that is not our position.

Pusey said,

The argument is not merely from language. It has a moral and religious aspect. Any ordinary writer, who drew a contrast between two things, would, if he wished to be understood, use the self-same word in the self-same sense. He would avoid ambiguity. If he did not, we should count him ignorant of language, or if it were intentional, dishonest. I asked, "In what matter of this world would you trust one who, in any matter of this world, should use the self-same word in two distinct senses in the self-same sentence, without giving any hint that he was so doing? In none. Find any case in which you would trust a man, who did so in the things of men, and then ascribe it to your God in the things of God. I could not trust man. I could not believe it of my God."⁶

Augustine's argument has been a well-ridden horse wherever the controversy on these words has been voiced. In principle, Augustine and company would usually be correct in this assumption. However, they err in taking for granted that *aionios* means *eternal*, and *aion* means *ever*. *Aion* is an *age*, and *aionios* means *pertaining to an age*.

Would that Augustine, Pusey, and their unnumbered disciples would answer one question: "If a word must retain the same meaning when used twice in the same sentence (and in this particular case, we wholeheartedly agree it should), then why is no one fervently condemning the inconsistent translations of these very same words where they are used twice in the same sentence in other passages"?

Augustine, Pusey, their followers, and the translators of many versions have not performed the due diligence that is demanded by so important a doctrine. Consistency in the following passages could have led to correction of the renderings in Matthew 25:46.

Romans 16:25–26

Now to him that is of power to stablish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the *world* [*aionios*] *began*, but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the *everlasting* [*aionios*] God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith.

(AV; italic emphasis mine)

In these verses, the word *Aionios* is used twice in the same sentence, and neither of the two words used to translate it can be used in both occurrences without turning the sentence into nonsense.

If *world* is changed to *everlasting* or *eternal* for consistency, then there is a secret that is kept eternally but now is made manifest—an obvious contradiction. If *everlasting* is changed to *world* for consistency, then the God of the gospel is the *world god*. But currently, Satan is the god of this age and the kingdoms of this world (2 Cor. 4:4, Matt. 4:8–9).

The scriptures do not call the true God the *world god*, and the word obviously doesn't mean *world* anyway. All the translations more modern than the AV are moving away from the use of *world* for *aionios*. In truth, the passage speaks of Paul's gospel, which contains secrets hidden during previous eons—"times eonian," which the eonian God has now brought to light.

Understanding *aionios* to possess its meaning of *pertaining to an age* or *eon* is the only consistent way to make sense of the passage. And to speak of God as being *the eonian God* no more limits his existence than speaking of the *God of Abraham* limits him to being the God of only one man.

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

God is the eonian God because he designed the eons in which his purpose would be fulfilled, and his love and truth revealed. To call God the eonian God is especially fitting here because of the eons referred to in the context and because new truth is being revealed. *Eonian* is the true meaning of *aionios* and should be applied both here and in Matthew 25:46.

Titus 1:2

In hope of *eternal* [*aionios*] life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the *world* [*aionios*] began.
(AV italic emphasis mine)

If eternal were the consistent rendering here, God would have promised eternal life before eternity began. No question of the duration of God's existence is intended here, but how can anything be promised prior to a time period that has no beginning? By definition, nothing can be done before eternity.

If both uses of the word were translated *world*, the passage would say that before the world began, God promised *world life*. What is *world life*? The animals have *world life*! Plants have *world life*. They are part of the world system in which we live. This expression tells nothing of the life of the saved.

God promised eonian life—the special life of the kingdom eons in Christ before eonian times. This makes sense, and this is consistent with a meaning that the scriptures clearly attribute to this word.

So there are three sentences in the New Testament that have the word *aionios* used twice in them, but only one of them can use *eternal* for both occurrences without making a self-contradicting statement. Why did Augustine not use the other two sentences to prove his axiom? If he had, he would have seen that *eternal* is not a viable definition for *aionios*.

Galatians 1:4–5

Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil *world* [*aion*], according to the will

of God and our Father, to whom be glory for *ever and ever* [*aion / aion*]. Amen. (AV; italic emphasis mine)

Here, the double use of the noun rather than the adjective in a single sentence is demonstrated. With consistent translation and the meaning of *ever*, Christ's saving work was to deliver believers from the present evil *forever* or *present evil eternity*. Will there be no end to evil? Was Christ's death in vain?

On the other hand, if *world* is used in both cases, what is the meaning of glory to God *for the worlds of the worlds*?

Ephesians 3:9–11 gives another sentence with *aion* used twice, and the meanings are rendered differently in the AV. And 1 Timothy 6:17–19 provides a sentence in which both *aion* and *aionios* are used with conflicting meanings. The correct translation of these words is critical if one is to grasp the purpose of God in any significant depth.

Augustine's argument is built on one thought about one sentence while ignoring five other sentences that could have illuminated his error.

Those who use Matthew 25:46 to support the idea of endless torment need to do their homework and explain these other passages.

Realizing that the eons in God's purpose are not endless will open the door to a greater understanding of that purpose. And consistent translation of these terms will open panoramic new vistas of God's workings. The correct translation of these words will also help to eradicate the abusive myths of endless torment and annihilation for the lost.

Augustine's and Pusey's Arguments Ludicrous

Because Pusey's restatement of Augustine's argument has been widely and repeatedly used, we should not leave this section behind without further mention of *the use of one word twice in the same sentence*. In his book, E. B. Pusey discussed the phrase, "*that God may be all in all*" in an effort to discredit comments by F. W. Farrar in his book *Eternal Hope*. The word *all* occurs twice in a sentence in this phrase, and its meaning is clearly different each time it is used.

Pusey presents and stresses his idea that this phrase is a special idiom. Obviously, his purpose in doing so was to make it appear he would not be contradicting himself later when he stated his argument that God could not possibly mean for a word to be used twice in the same sentence with different meanings. But what do we find in the scriptures?

The Lord Jesus said without any hint or warning (as Pusey requires), "Let the *dead* bury their *dead*" (Matt. 8:22, AV). The word *dead* cannot have the same meaning in both of these uses. According to Pusey, the Lord Jesus was dishonest or ignorant of the proper use of language for saying this.

"Thou art Peter [*rock*], and upon this *rock* I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18, AV). Denominations and commentaries have raged for centuries over the meanings of *rock* in this verse. Is the Catholic view that Peter is the rock the church is built on correct? Or is the Protestant view that Peter's confession that Jesus is the Son of God the rock the church is built on?

"How can *Satan* cast out *Satan*?" (Mark 3:23). The Lord Jesus began a parable with this statement. When we study the context and the parable, we discover that the first occurrence of the word *Satan* refers not to Satan himself but to Beelzebub the prince of the demons, and the second occurrence of *Satan* refers to a lesser demon.

"For whosoever will save *his life* shall *lose* it; and whosoever will *lose his life* for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 16:25, AV). Does the phrase "lose his life" mean the same thing in both cases? No.

At the end of the parable of the laborers hired to work in the vineyard at different hours of the day, we read, "So the *last* shall be *first*, and the *first last*" (Matt. 20:16, AV). The words *first* and *last* both change meanings in the sentence. According to the parable we find that the *last-hired* were *paid-first* and the *first-hired* were *paid-last*.

Do you remember when the Lord asked the Pharisees whose son the Messiah would be? He's "the son of David," they answered. "Well then," replied Jesus, "if He is David's son, why does David call Him his Lord?" Then he quoted the scripture, "The *LORD* said unto my *Lord*, Sit thou on my right hand, till I make thine enemies thy footstool" (Matt. 22:44, AV).

Here are two uses of the word *Lord* in the same sentence, and one refers to Yahweh and one to the Messiah. (This example is different because it is a Greek translation of Hebrew, and in Hebrew, there are two words given as *Lord*; but in Greek, it is one word used twice. But to the Hebrews, *Yahweh* was also *Adonai* and is so called many times, so it resulted in the same problem.) It seems that Christ was fond of using this kind of repetition to make his hearers think. But to Pusey, it is dishonesty, which must cancel his faith in God.

Do not work for the *food* which is perishing, but
for the *food* which is remaining for life eonian.
(John 6:27; italics mine)

Moses gave you not that *bread* from heaven; but my
Father giveth you the true *bread* from heaven.
(John 6:32, AV; italics mine)

More examples can be found, especially if we move to contexts of multiple sentences and paragraphs.

Destroy this *temple*, and in three days I will raise
it up...Forty and six years was this *temple* in
building, and wilt thou rear it up in three days?
(John 2:19–20, AV; italics mine)

Except a man be *born* again...How can a man be
born when he is old?...except a man be *born* of water
and of the Spirit...That which is *born* of the flesh is
flesh; and that which is *born* of the Spirit is Spirit.
(John 3:3–6; italics mine)

Whosoever *drinketh* of this *water* shall *thirst* again; but
whosoever *drinketh* of the *water* that I shall give him
shall never *thirst*, but the *water* that I shall give him shall
become a well of *water* springing up into everlasting life.
(John 4:13–14, AV; italics mine)

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Some translations render this passage in one sentence, others in two. *Thirst* and *drink* occur twice with two meanings, and water occurs four times with two meanings.

Master *eat*...I have food to *eat* that ye know not of.
(John 4:31–32; italics mine)

1. So neither Pusey nor Augustine examined the scriptures closely enough to look at other sentences where the same word, *aionios* or *aion*, was used twice in a sentence even though they showed no hesitation to claim that as the basis for their axiom.
2. Nor did Pusey, when seeking to strengthen the argument, investigate other sentences in which any word was used twice in a sentence, except for his effort to explain away one sentence on which Farrar's comments were based.
3. But they failed even further by ignoring passages that teach the ultimate reconciliation of all, passages that also use the same word or phrase twice in a single sentence, and passages in which the second use of the word or phrase "does mean the same as the first."

For even as, in Adam, *all* are dying, thus
also, in Christ, shall *all* be vivified.
(1 Cor. 15:22; italic mine)

All who die through Adam will be vivified,
receive immortality through Christ.

Consequently, then, as it was through one offense *for all mankind* for condemnation, thus also it is through one just award *for all mankind* for life's justifying.
(Rom. 5:18; italic mine)

For even as, through the disobedience of the one man, *the many* were constituted sinners, thus also, through the obedience of the One, *the many* shall be constituted just.
(Rom. 5:19; italic mine)

A righteousness of God through Jesus Christ's faith, *for all*,
and *on all* who are believing, for there is no distinction,
for all sinned and are wanting of the glory of God.
(Rom. 3:22–23; italic mine)

Wherefore, also, God highly exalts Him, and graces Him
with the name that is above *every name*, that in the name
of Jesus *every knee* should be bowing, *celestial and terrestrial*
and subterranean, and *every tongue* should be acclaiming
that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God, the Father.
(Phil. 2:9–11; see also 1 Cor. 12:3; italics mine)

Are there any names above the name of Jesus? If it is higher than
every other name, then there can be no limitation on the knees that
bow before him and the tongues that confess him as their Lord. The
phrase “celestial and terrestrial and subterranean” is an emphatic and
explanatory expansion of the word *every*.

So Augustine and Pusey, believing these passages do not teach
universal reconciliation, are guilty of their own accusation against
those believing in universal reconciliation. Pusey accused universal-
ists of claiming two different meanings for *aionios* in Matthew 25:46.
But Pusey himself would define the repeated words in the passages
shown above differently in order to claim that they do not teach the
reconciliation of all. Both uses of *aionios* in Matthew 25:46 have the
same meaning, *eonian*, in reference to different things: one to the life
of the saved and one to the chastisement of the wicked.

Our purpose has been to show that Augustine's and Pusey's
arguments are superficial and useless on more than one level. When
Augustine and Pusey supported the teaching of endless torment with
their argument, they effectually denied their own premise because
their premise applied to other passages proves the ultimate salvation
of all. By his own standard, Pusey pronounced himself dishonest or
ignorant of the use of language and claimed he cannot believe what
God has said.

Still, myriads of deceived Bible teachers follow them in lemminglike obedience, falling off the same cliff of misunderstanding and shallow scholarship into a deep sea of ignorance.

4. Also, Matthew 25:31–46 is talking about the judgments on nations imposed at the beginning of the millennium, not the judgments upon individuals pronounced later at the great white throne.

Neither Augustine nor Pusey made a literal interpretation of the context. This is a problem for all who believe *eternal* and *forever and ever* are correct translations. They are unable to distinguish different judgments that occur in the course of God's purpose, and they are tremendously hindered in efforts to lay out a biblical eschatology.

As a final note, Pusey's criticism of Farrar's book title *Eternal Hope* shows another fallacy of his viewpoint: "*Eternal hope* must be a hope which never receives its accomplishment; ever longing; ever stretching on; never attaining."⁷

Why is it that Pusey can criticize Farrar's title but never makes mention or criticism or explanation of the term *eternal purpose* (AV) in Ephesians 3:11? God's purpose, mentioned in Ephesians 3, is of far greater importance than the title of a man's book.

Pusey's definition of *eternal purpose*, by comparison, would be a purpose or goal of God that he has always had but shall never accomplish even though the verse says that *now* the celestial beings are reaching the goal of understanding the manifold wisdom of God through the display of the church. But this wisdom was a secret hidden from the eons: to Pusey—*hidden through eternity* in God. Pusey would certainly say that God's purpose is being fulfilled now and will reach completion, but we fault him for his numerous definitions of *eternity*.

This eternal purpose of God is evidently something which had no beginning but comes to an end. The eternal life of believers has a beginning but no end. And yet his definition of *absolute eternity* in speaking of God's existence is something with neither beginning nor end. This inconsistent butchery of definitions to suit the presupposi-

tions of the preacher is ridiculous and unacceptable. He holds three different definitions for a single word and changes its meaning at his own discretion. For him, God's word is something to manipulate at his own impulse, not something to revere and study. His practice is what he said God would never do.

The Scope of Salvation

The study of the second death will lead us into the final time periods of the ages when God's purpose of salvation in Christ is completed. To understand our place in that course of events, we need to realize the purpose of our salvation in the overall view of God's purpose.

The teachings of endless torment and endless separation from God by annihilation fall with the correct translation of *aion* and *aionios*. Eventually, when God's purpose of the eons is concluded, *all* humanity and spirits will be at peace and unity with God (Col. 1:20, Phil 2:9–11).

This raises questions: What then is the Gospel for? What is the purpose of belief? Why should we try to share our faith with others?

Believers today do not possess the only salvation, but they do possess a *special* salvation. "We rely on the living God, Who is the Saviour of all mankind, *especially* of believers" (1 Tim. 4:10).

When God clothed Adam and Eve in Eden, he made a sacrifice for all humanity. Granted, at that time, humanity only included two, but he included both the deceived and the one who chose to be disobedient. And his promise was that their Seed would inflict a crushing blow on the head of the one that brought about their death.

While many details are withheld from our record of that event, we understand that the Son of God, the Seed, came to annul all the acts of the Adversary (1 John 3:8). This includes the act that brought death to all humanity. Christ will reverse that curse for all.

The theme of deliverance through the promised seed resurfaced in Abraham. This childless man with a barren wife became a father of nations. His seed would be a blessing to all. His seed would be as the

dust of the earth (Gen. 13:16) as the stars of heaven and as the sand on the seashore (Gen. 22:17).

When God made a covenant with Israel at Mount Sinai, he said they would be “a kingdom of priests, and a holy nation” (Exod. 19:6). It became clear that the seed through which God would destroy the works of the Adversary would not be limited to the single individual, his Son. There would be more who would serve under the authority of the Son.

When God entrusted a ministry to the apostle Paul, he revealed that in the final time periods of his saving purpose, there would be an administration that would bring the entire universe under the headship of Christ and that this administration would include both those of the heavens and those on the earth (Eph. 1:9–11, Col. 1:18–20). For this reason, the citizenship of the body of Christ is in the heavens (Phil. 3:20–21).

In the coming eon, we expect a reborn Israel to carry on this ministry on the earth while the body of Christ is employed in a similar ministry in the celestial realm. Those saved today have a special salvation, and in the future, it will be realized that it is not the only salvation.

This administration, including both an earthly kingdom (reborn Israel) and a heavenly body (the church), will fulfill what eonian life is—immortality during the two coming eons. Eonian life will be experienced by living and participating in the grand finale of God’s plan of redemption through his kingdom headed up by Christ. Our search to define the second death will show what *eonian punishment* is.

The Lord Jesus said, “Now it is eonian life that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Him Whom Thou dost commission, Jesus Christ” (John 17:3). Faith or belief that Christ is the Son of God sent by the Father and submission to his Lordship is the way into this life. Most of those in the kingdom will enter this life by resurrection and glorification. Participating in the kingdom will be how eonian life is experienced.

Torment

Torment for the Eons of the Eons

The following three passages have a bearing on the second death that must be taken into account. We wish to establish two points: (1) There is torment during both of the final eons that is figuratively described as fire. What that torment will actually be remains to be shown. (2) People are alive in this condition that is called torment.

While we oppose the teaching of endless torment, it is clear that there are conditions described as torment associated with some of the judgments of God, but it is not endless.

If anyone is worshiping the wild beast...he shall
be tormented in fire and sulfur...and the fumes of
their torment are ascending for the eons of the eons.

And they are having no rest day and night.

(Rev. 14:9–11)

Notice that the fumes of their torment ascend. As long as the fumes are ascending, they are being tormented. The phrase “they are having no rest day and night” makes it clear that the reference is not to smoke or fumes that remain long after a conflagration has ended (as some have suggested). This torment is current and occurring during at least a portion of both of the final eons.

The description “anyone...worshiping the wild beast” refers to people, and the people are obviously not dead. Those worshiping the wild beast are among the nations that persecute the renewed Israel and those with faith in the Lamb.

And her smoke is ascending for the eons of the eons.

(Rev. 19:3)

As much as she glorifies herself and indulges, so much
torment and mourning be giving her.... And the kings
of the earth, who commit prostitution and indulge with

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her, will be lamenting and grieving over her whenever they may be observing the smoke of her conflagration, standing afar off because of the fear of her torment.
(Rev. 18:7, 9–10)

Those people who make up the great prostitute endure torment during at least a portion of both of the final eons. Notice that the torment is proportional to their acts: “As much as she glorifies herself and indulges, so much torment and mourning be giving her.” This shows the torment is a judgment deserved.

And the Adversary who is deceiving them was cast into the lake of fire and sulfur, where the wild beast and where the false prophet are also. And they shall be tormented day and night for the eons of the eons.
(Rev. 20:10)

According to these passages and their contexts, those worshiping the wild beast and its image, those getting the emblem of the beast, the great prostitute, the capital city, and political center of the beast—all the people of whom she consists, the wild beast, all the people of the kingdoms of which it consists, and the false prophet all the people of whom it consists—are subject to torment during the final two eons. The chastisement identified here as torment will be on those involved in the false worship and the world economic/political system operating under Satan.

All three passages above mention *the eons of the eons*—both of the coming ages. During the first of those ages—the eon containing the one thousand years—the judgment is on nations as nations (Matt. 25:31–46). The leaders and those involved in the political systems of those nations, we expect to see placed under more severe measures than the average citizens.

The nations responsible for persecuting God’s people, we expect to be under sanctions and tribute, and probably conscripted labor. This will affect the nation at large and will occur during the one thousand years.

The great white throne, following the one thousand years, will be the judgment of individuals according to the works of their life. The sentence of judgment there will be what is correct for each life. The lake of fire is the figure for judgment in John's visions which sums up all the adverse judging of the two final eons.

This wording "for the eons of the eons" does not require that every individual involved be tormented for the entire duration of both eons. What it does require is that the torment endures for at least a portion of both of the final eons.

Some will be born during the one thousand years and live through the great white throne judgment. Some will die during the one thousand years and be raised to judgment at the great white throne and so forth. So the duration of judgments varies.

If the lake of fire, the second death, was literal death caused by literal fire, it could hardly be described as torment for the eons of the eons. People cannot live long enough in literal fire to merit a term that describes such a long period of time. And a dead person cannot be tormented. The theories of annihilation and execution in the lake of fire deny the truth taught in the passages above. All the unbelieving will be alive at some time during the eons of the eons but not necessarily for the duration of both eons.

Worse even than the teachings of annihilation and execution, the teaching of endless torment in a conscious death in literal fire has even less foundation. The biblical sense of torment will be examined shortly and found to be something quite different from this widely held view that can hardly be called anything less than torture. The capacity for torment proves life, and that the second death is not literal death.

Revelation 20:15 stands in notable contrast with the three passages above: "And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire." This statement is made with reference to the great white throne. The notable feature is that no duration of time is mentioned with regard to those cast into the lake of fire at the great white throne judgment. Because it is so consistently present in the other verses, it might be expected that the phrase "tormented for the eon" would be attached here, indicating some

duration following the great white throne judgment. The absence of the phrase may indicate that for some at the great white throne the sentence served may be quite brief. Since that judgment relates to all who were not designated before in grace, it is expected that there will be considerable variation in both length and severity of sentences passed there.

There is an interesting change that takes place in the description of the *book of life*. The CV interlinear calls this a *scrollet* because the diminutive form of *scroll* is used in 13:8, 17:8; and 20:12.⁸ The idea of this word is that this was a smaller scroll. But after the great white throne judgment, the *book of life* is called a *scroll*, the standard form of the word (Rev. 20:15), as if it had grown in size during the great white throne judgment. This appears to be a hint that the judgment is not as universally negative as many suppose. Many may receive life there (see also Rom. 2:6–10).

Another issue must be mentioned here. In Revelation 20:13, the CV says of the great white throne judgment, “And they were condemned, each in accord with their acts.” The overwhelming majority of translations read that they were *judged* rather than *condemned*. The difference is whether a manuscript (Sinaitic) had *kat* prefixed to the word *judge*, changing *judge* to *down-judge*.

Condemned fits well with A. E. Knoch’s interpretation of this portion of the book and his view that the lake of fire is a nearly instantaneous execution of all not chosen beforehand. But textual evidence is minimal. Perhaps a larger problem here is that this view cuts the act of judgment short, changing it from actual judgment to simply the pronouncement of a sentence.

In his commentary on Revelation, Bullinger says, “The Sinaitic MS reads *condemned* instead of *judged*, but the latter word implies the former, if this is ‘the resurrection of condemnation’ *spoken of in other scriptures*” (emphasis mine). But we would like to know what these *other scriptures* are. Does he mean Daniel’s statement: “From those sleeping in the soil of the ground many shall awake, these to eonian life and these to reproach for eonian repulsion” (CV)? The AV has “some [will awake] to shame and everlasting contempt.” Or perhaps it is the statement by the Lord referring to Daniel’s:

for the hour is coming, in which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth: they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.
(John 5:28–29, AV)

The resurrection to damnation of the AV is corrected in the CV to “a resurrection of judging.” Putting both of these together, we have a judging taking place in which some will receive a sentence of repulsion in that eon, but it is not everlasting. It is very difficult to accept Bullinger’s assessment of condemnation. Apparently, he falls back on an inconsistent translation in the AV. It seems likely he meant it to coincide with his view of annihilation. His characteristic thoroughness seems lacking here.

The Timing of Eonian Torment

The division of the final eons is marked by the passing away of the present heaven and earth in fire. Does the great white throne judgment occur before during or after this event?

John does not go into detail discussing this conflagration, but Peter supplies information (2 Pet. 3). John’s emphasis is on different matters. Two different verses in the Revelation could be suggested as possibly connected to this event, which is a judgment on man’s works and a cleansing from them.

“And I perceived a great white throne, and Him Who is sitting upon it, from Whose face earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them” (Rev. 20:11). Some have remarked that the fleeing of heaven and earth may refer to Peter’s description of a great conflagration. The writer understands this verse to mean the appearing of the throne and the One sitting upon it are so dreadful and awe-inspiring that those of the earth and the spiritual beings of the celestial regions would all vainly seek for a place to hide from the impending judgment.

“And I perceived a new heaven and a new earth, for the former heaven and the former earth pass away, and the sea is no more” (Rev.

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21:1). The writer believes that here John refers to Peter's description of a conflagration of heaven and earth with the simple phrase "pass away." This view is supported by the order in which John relates the vision. Follow the various scenes of the vision, noting the phrase, "And I perceived" (Rev. 20:4, 11–12; 21:1–2).

Also notice that in the scene of the great white throne, "the sea gives up the dead in it" (20:13). But on the new earth, "the sea is no more" (21:1). Evidently the great white throne judgment will occur during the final era of the millennial eon. It appears the judgment must begin while this present earth is standing for the sea to give up the dead that are in it, assuming here that the reference to the sea is literal. If this reference to the sea refers to the sea as the masses of humanity out of which the beast arose, this also would change after the great white throne judgment.

There is another comment that insinuates the time of the great conflagration during this event "earth and the works in it shall be found" (2 Pet. 3:10). This suggests that the conflagration of the earth is itself a judgment upon the works of humanity on this planet. The time of the great white throne judgment is when humanity's acts are judged. It seems fitting that these judgments occur at the same time. Probably it is better said that the conflagration is one aspect of the great white throne judgment.

This order of events dictates understanding the second death as figurative. If the great white throne judgment occurred during the millennial eon and if the second death were literal death, then all those not receiving life at the great white throne would be dead during the final eon. This would mean that no one would suffer torment or affliction during the final eon because only the righteous would be alive. Then the scriptures that mention torment for the eons of the eons would be violated.

Furthermore, what would the servants of God who were a kingdom of priests do during the final eon? Over whom would they reign? For whom would they act as mediators toward God? The dead? Would we make God's nation of priests necromancers?

It might be suggested that this torment during a plural number of eons refers to torment during the climax of the present eon, in the

tribulation era, and then during the millennial eon. But that suggestion falls on its face. This current eon is described by the scriptures as the “present wicked eon” (Gal. 1:4) and an eon of which Satan is god (2 Cor. 4:4). It cannot be viewed as one of the *eons of the eons*.

The eons of the eons are the most glorious of all the eons. If the current eon were named one of the eons of the eons, then the basis would be laid for Manasseh to be termed king of kings, the tower of Babel to be termed holy of holies, and apathetic Ecclesiastes to be termed Song of Songs.

Torment Defined

What is the nature of the torment that will be endured during the eons of the eons? The fire and sulfur suggest that it will be intense and thorough. A perusal of the biblical usage of the word *torment* will be helpful in grasping its scope.

And they bring to Him all who have an illness, those with various diseases and *pressing torments*, also demoniacs and epileptics and paralytics, and He cures them.
(Matt. 4:24; italics mine)

Lord, my boy is prostrate in the house, a paralytic, *dreadfully tormented*. [The amount of pain a paralytic could feel is questionable. The reference may be to mental anguish as much as to physical.]
(Matt. 8:6; italics mine)

The ship was in the middle of the sea, and He was alone on the land. And perceiving them *tormented in rowing, for the wind was contrary to them*.
(Mark 6:47–48; italics mine)

Now *the ship was...being tormented by the billows*, for the wind was contrary. [Though this usage is obviously figurative, it is still descriptive and helpful.]
(Matt. 14:24; italics mine)

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Lot, harried by the behavior of the dissolute in their wantonness (for the just man dwelling among them, in observing and hearing from day to day, *tormented his just soul by their lawless acts*).
(2 Pet. 2:7–8; italics mine)

Locusts...and license was granted them as the scorpions of the earth have license. And it was granted to them, not that they should be killing them, but that *they shall be tormented five months; and their torment is as the torment of a scorpion, whenever it should be striking a man*.
(Rev. 9:3, 5; italics mine)

And, being pregnant, she is crying, travailing and tormented to be bringing forth.
(Rev. 12:2; italics mine)

These examples show torment, not only in the sense of physical pain but also in conviction of the conscience, mental anguish, frustration, strain, physical exhaustion, depression, and finally, as the physical pain and suffering the mother endures in giving birth. These different kinds of torment may be included in the chastisement upon the unbelieving (except giving birth). In none of these biblical examples do we find literal fire as a source of torment, nor do we see the equivalent of torture. The proper aspects of torment will make up the chastisement of each individual as he or she grows in subjection to God.

There is one further passage needing comment:

And, being indignant, his lord gives him up to the tormentors till he may pay all he is owing him. “Thus shall My heavenly Father also be doing to you, if each one should not be pardoning his brother, from your hearts.”
(Matt. 18:34–35, AV)

It was the practice in many countries to torment or even torture debtors in order to extract money from their family and friends. But

when we look in the biblical law, we find that God provided for debtors to sell themselves into slavery to pay off debts. But this slavery officially ended every seven years unless the debtor himself chose to continue the slavery for life.

This leaves us with quite a contrast to the parable in what God requires. Is it service to repay a debt? Or is it more than that? And according to the parable, it is more than that when one refuses to forgive smaller infractions against his own debtors. Again, all this is in the context of living people in the kingdom, not in the great white throne judgment.

Fumes of Torment

Reference has been made to “fumes of their torment” (Rev. 14:11), and “the smoke of her conflagration” (Rev. 18: 9).

There are some interesting parallels to these phrases: “incenses, which are the prayers of the saints” (Rev. 5:8; see also Rev. 8:3–4), and “then the priest will cause the whole to fume on the altar. It is an ascent offering, a fire offering of fragrant odor to Yahweh” (Lev. 1:9).

We expect the fumes of incense and the smell of meats and juices cooking over the fire to be much more pleasant than the fumes and smoke of torment. Smoke burns the eyes, and fumes given off by torment are not likely to be pleasant (cf. Isa. 65:5). Yet there is a similarity in the description of these things that should not pass by unnoticed. They all ascend to God, and they come as the result of trials, which are represented by fire.

Since they originate in trials, they represent the experiences that are needed to bring about a realization of the truth. This shows the beneficial purpose inherent in all God’s judgments, and it shows he takes pleasure in some of his creatures’ trials while other trials are not pleasant to him, though perhaps needful.

This illustration also shows how thoroughly the figurative use of fire permeates the scriptures. It is fully bound up in the primal thought of sacrifice. However, we should not think that fire is a required aspect for fumes or fragrance. In Ephesian 5:2, the sacrifice of Christ was a fragrant odor to God; and in Philippians 4:18, Paul

calls the monetary gift he received from Epaphroditus a fragrant odor and an acceptable sacrifice.

Sulfur – Brimstone

The association of sulfur (*brimstone*—Middle English “to burn” + stone) with the lake of fire should not be overlooked. When sulfur is burned, sulfur dioxide is produced. Sulfur dioxide is a nauseating, suffocating gas. The gas is easily liquefied and can be used as a bleaching agent and disinfectant.

In ancient times, ceremonial purifications were made using sulfur. The basic idea here is cleansing.

Was the Cross Enough?

Some who understand the second death to be literal death make the great white throne simply a place where a verdict is pronounced, and execution is immediately carried out. But if the lake of fire is understood figuratively, it can indeed be a condition in which the judged live under various degrees of servitude and hardship. The judgment will be suited to each individual because it is made according to their acts. A figurative lake of fire allows for an experience of evil in which the truth can be realized.

Some argue against the second death being figurative, saying it suggests a means of salvation other than the sufferings of Christ. Such a thought is immeasurably removed from the writer’s position. Call to remembrance that it is graciously granted to believers to suffer for Christ’s sake (Phil. 1:29).

Paul suffered intensely (Phil. 1:30, 2 Cor. 11:21–33) and even spoke of his sufferings as “filling up...in His [Christ’s] stead, the deficiencies of the afflictions of Christ” for the sake of the church (Col. 1:24). Paul adamantly declares that believers are “complete in Him” (Col. 2:10). Yet he also speaks of participating in Christ’s sufferings, conforming to Christ’s death, and of being a libation—a complementary gift added to the work of Christ (Phil. 3:10, 2 Tim. 4:6, Phil. 2:17).

The work of Christ on the cross has removed the offense and distance from God toward man. But that is not the limit of God's workings in his purpose to become All in all. Judgment is still needed to remove the enmities and wounds between man and man, between man and self, and from man toward God. When God's plan is accomplished, man will be at peace with God, at peace with his fellow man, and at peace with himself.

The judgment at the great white throne is designed to finish this work. Truly, this great and feared judgment is a work of mercy and grace by our loving Father. It will bring so many to completion. Possibly this is best understood in the light of 1 Timothy 2:4: "God wills that all mankind be saved and come into a realization of the truth." Christ is "a correspondent Ransom for all" (1 Tim. 2:6). Nothing is lacking in his sacrifice to save all. Yet the additional purpose of God's will is that all come into a realization of the truth. God has determined that realization is to be gained by means of experience and suffering.

We believe that Christ was a perfect man, yet we read of his being perfected through his sufferings (Heb. 5:8–9). This perfection then was not the correction of any flaw, but it was the perfection of completion that comes with realization.

In taking on humanity, Christ's realization of mankind's frail condition and needs was completed. Likewise, we may be saved, but even while we are saved, we fall short of what we must become. A believer's salvation can be expressed as the lordship of Christ in their life. Yet throughout his lifetime, the believer comes to realize new areas of his life that must be submitted to Christ.

The believer's subjection to Christ is not instantaneously complete. It grows and develops with the believer. And so it is with those of the second death. Their ransom has been paid in full, but God will not be satisfied until they come to a realization of the truth to enable them to embrace God and love him and be one with him. The greater one's realization of the truth, the greater also is the truth's impact on his or her life. If those in the second death are in a living, mortal condition, their experiences, and sufferings will have a cleans-

ing effect on their conduct as those experiences and sufferings bring them to a greater realization of the truth.

We have seen the scriptures do speak of torment being associated with God's judgments. Still, many are staggered by the Bible's descriptive figures and the references to fire. Let's make a comparison of the biblical description of Israel's sojourn and slavery in Egypt with the lake of fire in John's vision.

"But the Lord hath taken you, and brought you forth out of the iron furnace, even out of Egypt, to be unto him a people of inheritance" (Deut. 4:20; 1 Kings 8:51; Jer. 11:4, AV). "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10, AV).

The CV renders *furnace* as *crucible*. If Israel's slavery in Egypt, making bricks and letting the sun dry them, is called an iron furnace and a refining process. Would it be so strange for the judgment of unbelievers to be called a lake of fire? And would it be so different for that judgment to actually be physical servitude and restriction?

Death: A Teacher?

And instructing is Yahweh Elohim the human, saying,

"From every tree of the garden, you are to eat, yea, eat. Yet from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, you are not to be eating from it, for in the day you eat from it, to die shall you be dying..."

And unclosing are their eyes, they two, and knowing are they that they are naked. And sewing are they fig leaves and making for themselves girdle skirts.

(Gen. 2:16, 17; 3:7)

Death was the consequence of disobedience to God's instruction (Rom. 5:12). It was not immediate death but mortality or separation from the tree of life—either of which would result in death.

What is meant by the *unclosing* or *opening* of the eyes? Remembering that this was a tree of knowledge, closed eyes would be figurative for ignorance. Adam and Eve could certainly see things around them, and Adam's naming of the animals presupposes intel-

ligence and perception, but in the arena of good and evil, they were ignorant and unskilled. The opening of their eyes was a realization of their need of righteousness and of their offensiveness to God because of their disobedience.

Apart from the knowledge of good and evil, man has no love of the truth, no awe of the glorious perfection of God, and no appreciation for his situation no matter how pleasant. With the knowledge of evil and realization of offending God, man is being prepared for a realization of the love that overcomes all evil and forgives every offense. Death, though strict and ruthless, is an excellent teacher, and it is, in the long run, beneficial to man.

Death's didactic method has two aspects. First of these is in the process of mortality. The daily devitalizing effects of death divest mankind of all confidence in the flesh. The second aspect, dying, looms up continually before man, intimidating him and reminding him of his weakness.

What greater incentive could man have to turn to God? It could hardly be thought strange that the second death would also have such a teaching ministry.

And if the condition of mortality and the realization of death are divinely used teachers, may not those who have never yet had opportunity to contemplate those lessons be taught by them? It is not the unsaved who occupy the thought here, but those who die as infants.

God could judge them at the great white throne, return them to the grave (if that were the second death), and raise them at the consummation. But how are those who have never lived outside the womb to be judged? What is to be judged? What acts or deeds have they committed which qualify them for judgment?

It is irrelevant to say their *sinful nature* or the *latent sin* within them is judged. The Bible clearly says that the great white throne judgment is according to works or acts. Strictly speaking, sin is not the issue. "Now where no law is, neither is there transgression" (Rom. 4:15). On what grounds would God's judgment be based? What realization of good and evil do they possess that could give them an appreciation of righteousness and holiness and love?

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

Here are two untenable suppositions: (1) that God can judge the deeds and acts of those who have never consciously done anything, and (2) that such a judgment could prepare individuals for the appreciation of truth, love, righteousness, holiness, or any other virtue. Such a course is foreign to God's method and purpose.

Was the very purpose of Eden not to teach humanity of its needs by the experience of good and evil and to ultimately bless them thereby? God's will includes both salvation *and* realization of the truth (1 Tim. 2:3–6). It is apparent that God intends this realization to be the result of the experiences of mortality and of his judgments.

Those whose eyes never beheld the light outside the womb still have much to learn. It is often asked if those who died as infants will be raised as infants or adults. We know of no place where the scriptures answer that question. But there is no apparent need for the infants to be raised as infants rather than adults. The world is even now filled with adults who have yet to learn the lessons of childhood.

The real issue is not the physical maturity of those dying as infants. The issue is whether God will supernaturally endow millions with a realization of the truth, or if they will experience things of consequence themselves. If God were to supernaturally endow them with knowledge and experience, one is left pondering why humanity and the spiritual realm were not thus endowed at the time of their creation.

If creation is benefited through the long and tedious presence of evil, why should this large segment of humanity be deprived of its benefit? These thoughts again support the view that the second death is figurative. It is a living condition of mortality in which humanity learns many valuable lessons at and after the great white throne judgment.

If the objection is raised "Death is an enemy! How can such an important teaching ministry be accredited to an enemy of humanity?" We reply that death is also a judgment of God.

The ordinances of Yahweh are truth; they are righteous
altogether: coveted more than gold, and more than much

glittering gold, and sweeter than honey and syrup of the combs. Moreover, Your servant is being warned by them.
(Ps. 19:9–11)

The cursing of the ground that accompanied death, and all the trials that follow with it are for humanity's sake (Gen. 3:17).

Fire: Literal or Figurative

Because the lake of fire is definitive of the second death, the nature of the lake of fire must be determined.

The lake of fire is known prior to the great white throne judgment, existing throughout the thousand years. Yet the lake of fire is not called “the second death” until the time of the great white throne judgment after the millennium. Does the great white throne judgment cause a change in the lake of fire? What will the lake of fire be during the millennium? A brief overview of the use of fire throughout the scriptures will provide a basis for understanding what is meant in these final pages of the Bible.

Literal Fire

Fire is mentioned in the scriptures in a wide variety of usage. Literal fire has issued forth at different times in extraordinary fashion. Fire and sulfur rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19:24, Luke 17:29). Aaron's sons, Nadab and Abihu, were consumed by fire when fuming incense with “alien fire” (Lev. 10:2). At Israel's complaining, the fire of Yahweh consumed many on the outskirts of the camp (Num. 11:1–2); fire from Yahweh consumed 250 people in Korah's rebellion (Num. 16:35, Ps. 106:18).

In 2 Kings 1, Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume two groups of fifty soldiers, who came to take him to the king. In none of these occurrences mentioned were the lives of the individuals extended so that they might exist to be tormented longer in the flames. Obviously, literal fire kills. Fire fell from heaven on Elijah's sacrifice and altar (1 Kings 1:9–15), on the altar of David at Ornan's

threshing floor (1 Chron. 21:26), upon the sacrifice at Solomon's dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 7:1–3), and upon Job's sheep and shepherds (Job 1:16). There are other instances when it is insinuated that God issued fire, particularly on sacrifices.

Also, there are many occurrences of the word *fire* where it refers to the fire upon an altar of sacrifice or the fire that accompanied the sacking of a city. There is little, if any, controversy over such passages, but considerable confusion remains where fire is used as a descriptive term when referring to divine judgments.

Figurative Fire

Figurative uses of *fire* are actually more numerous in the Bible than the literal. The Bible frequently mentions fire in relationship to God. The messenger of Yahweh appeared in the burning bush (Exod. 3:2), but since the bush was not consumed by the fire, apparently, the heat associated with literal fire was absent. The pillar of fire by night marked God's presence and protection over Israel and the presence and leadership of his messenger (Exod. 13:21–22, 14:19, 24, 23:20, 40:38; Num. 9:15–16, 14:14; Deut. 1:3; Neh. 9:12, 19; Ps. 105:39, 121:6).

Because of these many references, it is not surprising the author of Hebrews wrote, "Our God is a consuming fire" (Heb. 12:29). Is fire that changes to cloud and then changes back to fire the same literal fire we know, or are we meant to understand things about God that may be represented by the characteristics of fire?

Even though these two examples were visible to humans as literal fire, certain characteristics of fire appear to have been suspended, raising questions regarding its literal reality. For instance, what was the fuel for these fires?

In Deuteronomy 9:3, Moses said that Yahweh was going before Israel, exterminating the Canaanites like a consuming fire. But the books of Joshua and Judges record no such fire if it must be understood literally. Instead, God gave them military victories.

In Judges 9, fire from Abimelech and fire from the men of Shechem were to consume each other. The fire from Abimelech was

his military campaigns against Shechem. The fire from the men of Shechem materialized in a piece of millstone thrown from a window in the city wall by a woman mortally injuring Abimelech. Perhaps this fire is best understood as the heat of their anger.

In Isaiah 19:19–21, people are described as fuel for the fire, but the context shows the fire to be a civil war.

In Isaiah 47:14, the astrologers and seers of Babylon are as straw to be consumed by the fire.

In Jeremiah 15:14, the fire that would burn upon Israel was the Babylonian captivity. Also, in Jeremiah, military overthrows of Moab, Ammon, and Syria were referred to as fire (48:44–46, 49:2, 27).

In Lamentations 4:11, the fire that Yahweh kindled in Zion, which devoured its foundations, was the destruction by Babylon. And the fire that devoured the king of Tyre was also the Babylonian army (Ezek. 28:18, Zech. 9:4).

In Joel 1:19–20, the fire is the heat and drought accompanying a locust plague. In Joel 2:3, 5, the locust plague itself is described as fire since both consume everything in their paths, leaving nothing but bare stalks.

Malachi 3:2–4 speaks of the sons of Levi passing through the refiner's fire to be cleansed so they might acceptably offer sacrifice to God. This echoes the statute of the law that was given for cleansing—all metal implements were to “pass through fire.” Utensils that could not withstand the flame were to be cleansed “by the water of impurity” (Num. 31:20–23). Probably, this passage was in the back of Paul's mind when he spoke of purging and purifying oneself in order to be a utensil for honor (2 Tim. 2:20–21).

The purging and purifying processes have always been closely related to fire. It is notable that those who believe in torment in literal fire for the lost often use many of the figurative passages above to support their position, but at the same time, they understand passages that speak of the chosen, like Malachi 3, figuratively.

Fire as Judgment from a Throne

In the following passage, Isaiah uses strong poetic language to describe Yahweh's judgment on Assyria:

Behold, the name of the LORD cometh from far, burning with his anger, and the burden of it is heavy; his lips are full of indignation, and his tongue like a devouring fire. And his breath, like an overflowing stream, shall reach to the midst of the neck, to sift the nations with the sieve of vanity.... And the LORD shall cause his glorious voice to be heard, and shall show the lighting down of his arm, with the indignation of his anger, and with the flame of a devouring fire, with scattering, and tempest, and hailstones. For through the voice of the LORD shall the Assyrian be beaten down, who smote with a rod. And in every place where the grounded staff shall pass, which the LORD shall lay upon him...and in battles of shaking will he fight with it. For Topheth is ordained of old; yea, for the king it is prepared; he hath made it deep and large. The pile of it is fire and much wood; the breath of the LORD, like a stream of brimstone, doth kindle it.
(Isa. 30:27–28, 30–33, AV)

There are two points in this passage that call the book of Revelation to mind: (1) There is the mention of fire and the stream of brimstone which reminds us of the lake of fire, and (2) there is the mention of the LORD's lips, tongue, and breath, which reminds us of the blade issuing from the mouth of the Rider on the white horse who was called Faithful and True (Rev. 19:11–16). But the way in which this prophecy was fulfilled may come as a surprise.

Yahweh sent one of his angels to the camp of the Assyrians to stop them. The next morning, 185,000 troops lay dead. They were not burned up with fire and brimstone or blown away by a storm or beaten to death with hailstones. They were just dead. The king of Assyria, who had threatened to destroy Hezekiah, returned home in shame and was killed by his sons.

Daniel presents another scene for us:

I beheld till the thrones were placed and the Ancient of days did sit, whose garment was white as snow, and the hair of his head like pure wool; his throne was like the fiery flame, and his wheels as burning fire. A fiery stream issued from before him...the judgment was set, and the books were opened. I beheld then because of the voice of the great words which the horn spoke; I beheld even till the beast was slain, and its body destroyed, and given to the burning flame. As for the rest of the beasts, they had their dominion taken away, yet their lives were prolonged for a season and time.
(Dan. 7:9–12, AV)

Several things are of note here. The description of the Ancient of days is similar to the description of Christ in Revelation 1. There is a judgment taking place, and he has a notable throne.

Similar to this is the great white throne judgment. In Daniel, a fiery stream issued forth from him and his throne, and the judgment at the great white throne ended for many in the lake of fire. The little horn (king) speaking great things was killed, but most of the nations continued to live for a time. At Christ's return, the opposing armies are killed, but the nations continue to live under eonian chastisement.

But here again, there is no evidence of anyone being killed or tormented in literal fire. A beast was burned up, but the beast was a figurative representation of a kingdom. There is a different but similar scenario in Revelation 19 where two beasts are thrown into the lake of fire. We are going to continue the thought of descriptive judgments but will do so now with a contrast.

And he shows me a river of water of life, resplendent as crystal, issuing out of the throne of God and the Lambkin. In the center of its square, and on either side of the river, is the log of life, producing twelve fruits, rendering its fruit in accord with each month. And the leaves of the log are for the cure of the nations.
(Rev. 22:1–2, CV)

In Isaiah, Yahweh's judgment on Assyria was like brimstone. In Daniel, a fiery stream issued from the throne of the ancient of days.

And in Revelation 20, the lake of fire is associated with the great white throne judgment. But the judgments and rule from the great white throne change. Instead of a stream of fire, we see a stream of the water of life!

After the corrective judgments are made, we come to the new heaven and earth, the New Jerusalem descends, and an edict comes from the throne declaring that God has come to live with humanity and that death and misery will be no more. Then the One sitting on the throne declares that he is making all things new. Soon we see life issuing out of the throne of God and the Lamb. The throne no longer issues adverse judgments. The rule on the new earth is a rule that gives life and healing. This change will become clearer as we progress through the study.

The New Testament (NT) also exhibits figurative uses of fire similar to those of the prophets. In Matthew and Luke, a baptism of fire, a severe and trying judgment, is said to precede entrance to the kingdom. Those who are not termed *grain* to be garnered into the barn (kingdom) are termed *chaff*, and they receive a severe sentence of judgment, are burned up with “unquenchable fire.”

The chaff represents the unbelieving Jews who do not enter any of the kingdom blessings but are left outside with the unbelieving nations. The chaff Jews are no more cast into literal fire than the grain Jews are piled up in a literal barn and eaten during the winter or buried alive as seed in the spring. It is the vivid power of the figure that is important and lends strength to the expression.

Fire is also said to burn up the unacceptable works of believers (1 Cor. 3). We understand what fire does to wood, hay, and straw—total destruction. We also know what it does to gold, silver, and stone—nothing unless it refines the gold and silver making them better. Fire is a vivid figure for judgment.

Kingdom Issues

Kingdom Fire

There are various expressions about fire that relate to the eras of the kingdom. There is *Gehenna* fire, parabolic fire such as the *furnace of fire*, the *eonian fire* associated with the glory throne judgment, and the *lake of fire*. And all these expressions find their fulfillment at least in part before the time of the great white throne judgment. Each is worthy of separate consideration, and each needs to have separate and specific definition.

The Fiery Hell

Where did the fiery hell come from? How did it originate? It is the product of inconsistent translation.

The translation of the Bible into a language becomes the foundation for the ideas, making up a *theology* in that language. When the second death was given a prominent place in defining the first death and when the word for *grave*, the word for *the place where the bodies of executed criminals were cremated*, and the word for *the place of confinement of spiritual beings* were all translated by the same word *hell*, the English-speaking world was provided with the building blocks of the doctrine of a fiery hell. The following paragraphs strive to provide brief but biblical definitions for these critical terms.

Hades

Hades is generally considered to be the Greek (NT) equivalent of *sheol*, which is the Hebrew or Old Testament (OT) word that is translated as *hell* or *grave*. Both of these words are rendered as *hell* and *grave*. *Hades* is a compound of *not* and *to see*. It is the *unseen*. The Middle English word *helle* from which *hell* is derived means *to cover* or *conceal* as the dead are covered in the grave.¹⁰ To *helle* potatoes was to put them in a pit in the ground for storage and to prevent freezing. To *helle* a house was to cover it with siding. *Grave* is the better

rendering of both *hades* and *sheol*. There is no fire associated with the Middle English *helle*.

Two key differences are apparent between what the Bible says about *hades* and the lake of fire. First, *hades* is used with reference to those who are dead. But it is the living who are cast into the lake of fire. Second, those cast into the lake of fire experience torment. But the study of the first death has shown that those who are dead, those in *hades* are not conscious of anything and thus are incapable of being tormented. *Hades* should not be confused with the lake of fire.

Fire *is* associated with *hades* and *sheol* but only in figurative or parabolic contexts. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus is the prime example of this in the Greek scriptures. The song of Moses is a prime example in the Hebrew writings (Deut. 32:22), and it should be studied as a parallel passage with the parable in Luke. Literal fire is not associated with *hades* or *sheol*. This issue has been covered in our first section “Rediscovering the First Death.”

Gehenna

The *valley of Hinnom* or *Gehenna*, just outside of Jerusalem, is the place where the bodies of executed criminals will be burned in public disgrace during the millennial portion of the kingdom.

And it shall come to pass that, from one new moon to another, and from one sabbath to another, shall all flesh come to worship before me, saith the Lord. And they shall go forth, and look upon *the carcasses of the men* that have transgressed against me; for their worm shall not die neither shall their fire be quenched; and they shall be an abhorrence unto all flesh.

(Isa. 66:23–24, AV; emphasis mine)

The fire in *Gehenna* is clearly literal. Christ gave extensive warning regarding it in Matthew 5, describing the fire and worms that exist there for the consumption of dead bodies. The millennium is described as a time of strict justice and the exercise of capital punishment—a practice not employed frequently enough today.

Christ's use of the term *Gehenna* was an easy way to express the ideas of capital punishment and shameful disgrace all in one word. But no one is cast into Gehenna until they are dead. The wild beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire *living*, and they remain alive there, being tormented the duration of their confinement (Rev. 19:20, 20:10). There is no torment in Gehenna. These differences are too great for the lake of fire and Gehenna to be understood as different terms for the same thing. And John never uses the term Gehenna.

Associated with Gehenna is the "unextinguished fire where their worm is not deceasing and the fire is not going out" (Mark 9:44, 46, 48).

Here, some have thought to find proof of endless torment but have only found inexplicable contradictions. The fires are kept burning to cleanse the area of the rotting corpses of executed criminals. The worms are not fireproof worms with eternal life. They are simply a seemingly endless reproduction of maggots. This means that the fire is not so intense that flies cannot light, lay eggs, hatch young, and continue their life cycle.

Gehenna is a literal garbage dump with literal dead bodies, literal fire, and literal flies and maggots. It was a horrible disgrace to the Jews for a body not to be buried but rather to be treated as garbage. That is the shame attached to Gehenna.

Tartarus

Tartarus is mentioned in 2 Peter 2:4 as a place of confinement for angels or messengers that had sinned. No fire is mentioned in connection with Tartarus. The confinement there is said to be in "chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment" (AV). There is no reason to identify Tartarus with the lake of fire or the second death. It is only mentioned here because it is also translated as *hell* in some English versions. The variation of words rendered hell is a witness to the liberties exercised by many translators and the lack of understanding surrounding this topic.

Eonian Fire and the Glory Throne Judgment

The glory throne judgment described in Matthew 25:31–46 initiates the thousand-year era of the kingdom by designating the level of privilege or chastening to be enjoyed or endured by the various nations. It should be noted this is a judgment of nations as nations and not of individuals (v. 31).

As the basis for judgment is the treatment of the Lord's brethren, the Jews, during the previous eras, it is clear that this judgment is distinct from the great white throne. This judgment appears to be a worldwide correction of the nations for the anti-Semitism of the past two millennia.

The judgment of the wicked nations receives two descriptions: (1) "the fire eonian, made ready for the Adversary and his messengers" (v. 41), and (2) "chastening eonian" (v. 46). These two descriptions must define one and the same thing. It is clear that this eonian fire cannot be literal fire. First, being *eonian* fire, it endures throughout the millennium. Second, any fire continually burning that long would consume to ashes those nations placed in it, and no chastening can be inflicted on those who are dead and thus unconscious.

It is difficult too to perceive how a nation, not only the mass of people but also its whole political system, could be chastened in literal fire. How could there possibly be any justice in such an event? Will all people of a nation be sentenced to identical punishment?

The sensible and biblical conclusion is that this passage is speaking of literal chastening which is figuratively described as fire. This chastening will take many forms. The nations will pay tribute to the royal nation Israel. Not only gold and silver will be brought but also incense, timber, and whatever natural resources the nations may have.

The nations will rebuild the cities of Israel and will be the laborers and servants of the Jews. The Israelites will be a kingdom of priests, ruling over the nations (Isa. 60–61). Justice will be swift and harsh with capital punishment inflicted regularly (Zech. 14:16–19, Isa. 66:23–24, Matt. 5:22).

Truly, it would be much better to enter the joyful possession of eonian life in the kingdom, being maimed or lame, than to have wholeness and health but to be subject to harsh rule and judgments and to lose the blessings (Matt. 5:29–30, 18:1–9; Mark 9:42–48). The nations could not fulfill the many prophetic passages that speak of their servitude in the kingdom if they were confined to burning torment in literal fire.

The Furnace of Fire

The Bible supplies a number of examples where expressions like *furnace of fire* are used. The bondage of Israel during their sojourn in Egypt is one such example. Egypt is referred to as an *iron crucible* (CV; *furnace* in the AV [Deut. 4:20, 1 Kings 8:51, Jer. 11:4]). Israel's sufferings in Egyptian slavery were actually for her benefit. "Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10, AV). The *fire* of the furnace was actually the slavery of Egypt's brickyard.

The Lord's parables furnish a couple more examples of this term: the dragnet and the parable of the tares (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43, 47–51). The good are gathered into the kingdom, while the wicked are cast into the furnace of fire.

This is not a sentence of capital punishment because those cast into the furnace wail and gnash their teeth.

This reaction suggests anguish and suffering, as well as remorse for losses they brought upon themselves. It suggests a keen awareness of what might have been had they been faithful and righteous. The furnace of fire is like the eonian fire of the glory throne judgment. That eonian fire is literally a chastening, similarly, this furnace is described as a loss that befalls those of the Jewish nation that are judged unsuitable for the kingdom.

The Lake of Fire

The closing chapters of the Revelation 19–22 show the lake of fire to be in existence during both the thousand years and during the

age following: the eon of the eons, when the new heaven and earth come into existence. The duration of the lake of fire clearly refutes any attempt to identify it as the conflagration of the present heaven and earth.

The beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire when Satan is imprisoned for the thousand years (19:20–20:3).

After the end of the thousand years, Satan is loosed to initiate a revolt and then is cast into the lake of fire (20:10), and from the great white throne, a portion of humanity is cast into the lake of fire (20:11–15, 21:8, 22:14–15). The lake of fire is not termed *the second death* until the time of the great white throne judgment.

Since the lake of fire is extant during the thousand years, scriptures that deal with judgments during the kingdom eras, particularly those judgments which are described as fire, may shed light on the lake of fire.

Three such groups of passages have been mentioned previously: (1) Gehenna fire, (2) eonian fire, chastening in connection with the glory throne judgment, and (3) the furnace of fire.

Gehenna fire is clearly distinct from the lake of fire because Gehenna fire is literal fire for the consumption of dead bodies while the lake of fire is a condition in which beings are consciously tormented.

The lake of fire then has common ground with both the furnace of fire and eonian fire. All this trio occur during the eras of the kingdom, and all three are conditions of affliction. Unless some clear distinctions can be presented to give these three fiery descriptions separate identities, it would be most natural to assume that they are all descriptions of the same thing. This is especially likely because the groups consigned to these fiery conditions are the same. They are the opposers of Christ and his kingdom.

The Punishments of the Parables

During his earthly ministry, the Lord spoke a number of parables that pertain to the kingdom. The punishments of the parables are grossly misunderstood when they are said to refer to a *hell* with literal fire and unspeakable torment. But to what do they refer?

Hades

Hades occurs as a punishment in the parables only once—in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus. The application that follows from this parable, as mentioned previously, relates to national Israel in the current era suffering the fires of anti-Semitism. There is no fire or literal torment in hades. Christ's portrayal of it in the parable was figurative to match teachings of the Pharisees, who were present when he spoke the parable. As the context of Luke's account shows, the rich man and Lazarus both represent large groups of people. It is a nation that dies, not individuals. This parable is different from the others following because it refers to Israel during the interim time before Christ returns. The other parables relate to later eras of the kingdom.

Outer Darkness

Outer darkness is the opposite of *inner light*. Is the inner light not that of what Isaiah prophesied?

Arise! Become resplendent! For your light has come, and the glory of Yahweh, it is radiant upon you. For behold, the darkness, it shall cover the earth, and murkiness the folk, Yet Yahweh shall be radiant upon you, and His glory, it shall be seen over you. And nations will go to your light, and kings to the brightness of your radiance.
(Isa. 60:1–3)

John also spoke of the inner light,

And the nations shall be walking by means of its light, and the kings of the earth are carrying their glory into it. And its portals should under no circumstances be locked by day; for there shall be no night there.
(Rev. 21:24–25)

From these passages, it is clear that *outer darkness* means being locked outside of the blessedness of the kingdom while others freely enter in (Matt. 8:12, 22:13, 25:30). And surely this outer darkness is a condition in which people consciously exist; otherwise, their remorse would not be described as *wailing and gnashing of teeth*.

Cut Asunder

Cut asunder and appointed his part with the hypocrites (Matt. 24:45–51, Luke 12:41–46) is another condemnation referring to loss of kingdom privilege. There are numerous passages in the Pentateuch in which a violator of law or someone who had become unclean was to be cut off from the nation of Israel or cut off from the congregation. In these instances, the person was considered an alien and had no part with the nation in their current relationship to Yahweh or in the future kingdom. It does not imply that he/she was killed. He/She had lost access to the tabernacle, sacrifices, and ceremonies of the law. This parabolic phrase “cut asunder” is comparable to that condition. The hypocrites are not allowed into the blessedness of kingdom citizenship. They are outside. Those of Israel who are alive during the times of the kingdom but are not allowed to be citizens of the kingdom are *cut asunder*.

Wailing and Gnashing of Teeth

Wailing and gnashing of teeth is an expression depicting one who has suffered an unutterable loss. Imagine those Jews who were devout in their religion (but not from the heart) and were expecting their Messiah to come. Generation after generation of Jews had come and gone. Finally, the Messiah came but was not recognized nor accepted for who he was. When he returns, few will be ready. Think of the feelings of those chosen people when they stand outside, observing the glorious splendor in which they could have participated. They were always told the kingdom would come, and to some degree, they believed it. But when it finally came with glory far

surpassing anything they imagined, they found themselves left out. Surely, they will wail and gnash their teeth in anguish over their loss.

The Furnace of Fire

The parables of the dragnet and the tares were mentioned previously under the heading of “Kingdom Fire” (Matt. 13:24–30, 36–43, 47–51). (See that section for further details.) As with the chastisements listed above, it is a condition of chastening in full consciousness.

To Whom Do the Parables Apply?

Do the parables the Lord spoke apply to the people who heard them? Will those unbelieving Jews of the first century be cast into outer darkness, or must these passages only be applied to those living at the time of the Lord’s return?

In the Revelation, we read of only the faithful being raised at the commencement of the thousand years. The unbelieving Jews of past centuries are dead during the millennium. Here is the issue: unbelieving Jews who have long since died will be raised at the great white throne, but if the second death were literal death, they would die again without ever really seeing the kingdom from the outside looking in. So it must be asked when will they ever witness the kingdom’s glory? When will they be cast outside or be cut asunder or wail and gnash their teeth? The parables call for these things to be experienced during the kingdom.

These parables apply *especially* to that generation to whom they were spoken. The only feasible time for that generation to witness the kingdom glory will be following the great white throne judgment.

Since they must be alive at that time, the second death must be figurative. Otherwise, the only possible time they could witness any event of the kingdom would be during the time their judgment is pronounced at the great white throne.

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

Sentences of judgment are not carried out before the judge's bench, especially if the duration of the sentence spans a considerable portion of time such as years.

The second death itself is the sentence of judgment. If it were not, why would anyone be cast into it? If the cross has conciliated God to man and if judgment takes place to correct all the wrongs of one's life, why, after all that is accomplished, should anyone be killed? If the judgment of those at the great white throne was completed there (which it is not), then the only thing remaining for them would be to be vivified, made immortal. They would not receive their judgment at the throne, be fully made right with God, and then be executed. The second death must be the sentence issued at the great white throne.

Further light on these thoughts is shone by a passage in Luke, where the Lord addresses his comments directly to his listeners:

Then should *you* be beginning to say, "*We* ate and drank *in your sight*, and *in our squares* you teach!"

He also will be declaring: "I am saying to *you*,
I am not acquainted with *you*! Whence are *you*?
Withdraw from me, all workers of injustice!"

There will be lamentation and gnashing of teeth, *whenever you should be seeing* Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, yet *you* cast outside. And they will be arriving from east and west and from north and south and will be made to recline in the kingdom of God.

(Luke 13:26–29; emphasis mine)

When will the unbelieving Jews of the first century see Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom? They will be dead during the thousand years. Is the era of the second death not the most probable time? Is there any other time they could view kingdom citizens, enjoying its benefits while they were left out? And does this not open a window into a broader understanding of the second death?

It stands to reason that the expressions *cut asunder*, *cast into outer darkness*, *wailing and gnashing of teeth*, and other expressions used by Christ in the parables are all descriptive of the conditions

many will enter after the great white throne judgment. One would expect then that such phrases are synonymous with *the second death*. And then it would be found that the scriptures actually have a considerable amount to say about the second death.

These passages of scripture and our thoughts about them are also important because they verify the timeline we present for the kingdom. Those unbelievers will not be raised until the great white throne judgment, which takes place at the end of the millennium. They will behold the full and greatest glory of the kingdom during the eon following that judgment on the new heaven and earth, when the New Jerusalem descends from God out of heaven.

Later in that eon, they will be reconciled to God, and their knees will bow, and tongues will confess, "Jesus is Lord." But before they reach reconciliation, they will wail and gnash their teeth because they missed out on the most glorious events of human history. They were cut asunder and appointed their place among the playacting hypocrites. And it will be all the worse because they themselves saw the Christ with their own eyes and heard him speak with their own ears. They witnessed miracles! Yet they turned their backs on the greatest joys of human history.

Identities

Defining the identities of the characters in John's vision is vital to understanding what the lake of fire and the second death are.

Four major questions confront us: (1) Are the beast and false prophet human or spiritual beings? (2) Are the beast and false prophet individual beings, or are they representations of large groups of beings? (3) Can spiritual beings be tormented in literal fire? (4) Are the beast and false prophet superhuman or supernatural beings?

If the beast and false prophet are human beings, then the lake of fire must be figurative. Humans couldn't be "tormented day and night for the eons of the eons" in literal fire (Rev. 20:10). Literal fire would cause death, and then torment would end long before any period of time approaching *the eons of the eons* could pass.

It has been suggested by Bullinger (annihilation), Knoch (universalism with the second death being execution to unconscious death), R. H. Charles, J. A. Seiss (endless torment), and other commentators that the beast and false prophet are *superhuman* or *supernatural*.

These *supernatural* beings are generally defined as Antichrist, but this designation is given by some to the beast from the sea and by others to the beast from the land.

The term *superhuman* begs for more explicit definition. If it means two humans possessed by evil spirits, the problem remains that the human bodies would be consumed by literal fire. If the spirits possessing them were able to protect them from the heat as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego were protected, then there would be no torment. Perhaps the term means these beings are strictly spiritual. But the Holy Scripture says the wild beast has a number, 666, and that this is a human number or the number of a man (13:18).

So why do so many commentaries begin in chapter 13 by telling us these beasts are *superhuman*? (R. H. Charles sees Antichrist as the Roman Empire.)

The annihilationists need to do this, or they would be contradicting their view of death—so also any who hold the view that death is an unconscious state.

For the larger group who believe in immortality of the soul and consciousness in death, the supernatural viewpoint is optional but can be used to explain the miracles performed by the beasts.

In general, all the commentators make correlations between these beasts and the beasts of Daniel's visions, but they do not interpret the beasts the same way the scriptures interpret the beasts of Daniel's visions.

This *superhuman explanation* betrays the thought process behind it. So many commentators either make the beasts single individuals or just the figurehead of a system that the true identities of the beasts are lost. We will discuss these identities shortly and show how the commentators fail to follow the scripture's example of interpreting visions of this nature.

Spiritual Beings and Fire

The messenger of Yahweh was seen by Moses as a flame in a bush. Moses was attracted to this spectacle because the bush was not consumed by the flame. The messenger of Yahweh had apparently assumed the form of a flame of fire without the heat. The angel of the Lord who led the Israelites through the wilderness was seen as a pillar of fire every night, but we do not know if these flames produced heat (Exod. 13:21–22, 14:19–20; Deut. 1:33; Ps. 78:14, 105:39, 121:5–6; etc.).

The messenger to Samson's parents ascended into heaven in the flame on the altar. This is clearly literal fire (Judg. 13:20).

God's messenger walked with Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the furnace, protecting them from the heat (Dan. 3:19–25).

Also, spiritual messengers are called "flames of fire" (Ps. 104:4, Heb. 1:7).

There is absolutely no implication these spiritual beings were experiencing torment when they appeared at these times in fire.

The false prophet has power to use and control fire, calling it down from heaven into the earth (Rev. 13:13), apparently in imitation of Elijah (2 Kings 1:9–14). And fire descends from God at the end of one thousand years to devour those surrounding the citadel of the saints.

In Revelation 19:7, the angel who calls the birds of the heavens to the great feast is said to be standing "in the sun." Perhaps those who insist on a literal lake of fire would care to explain how, in the same vision, the angel could literally be standing in the sun. And if this spiritual being can literally stand in the sun without torment, we cannot imagine any fire kindled on earth that would torment the beast and false prophet if, as many claim, they also are spiritual beings, or Satan as well for that matter.

While these passages may not be deemed proof positive that spirits cannot be tormented by literal fire, they certainly raise significant doubt. So much so that the burden for proof lies upon those who would insist spiritual beings can indeed be tormented in literal fire.

In fact, the spirits seem rather to have a great dread of being confined to water (Luke 8:31; see also Rev. 20:1–3), a substance quite different from fire. The bondage of spirits is apparently more intensive in the darkness of gloom than it is in the burning brightness of fire (2 Pet. 2:4, Jude 6).

A second question to be asked regarding spiritual beings and the lake of fire is this: Can spiritual beings die? If the second death is literal death, would it not be reasonable to assume that it is death for all who are cast there? When the Sadducees questioned Christ regarding the resurrection, Christ said, “For *neither can they still be dying*, for they are equal to messengers, and are the sons of God, being sons of the resurrection (Luke 20:36).

Christ was “made some bit inferior to messengers...so that, in the grace of God, He should be tasting *death* for the sake of everyone” (Heb. 2:9). Christ left his existence as a spiritual being to live as a human being in flesh.

These passages show that spiritual beings, such as messengers (angels in the AV), cannot die. The lake of fire then cannot be death to them. And if somehow it was, it apparently would be their first death, not their second. This raises doubt whether or not the lake of fire could actually be literal death for anyone.

Still, another question must be considered. If the beast and false prophet are spiritual beings, why are they cast into the lake of fire while Satan is confined to the submerged chaos/abyss or the AV’s bottomless pit? Why are they segregated? Why are there two different kinds of confinement for beings of the same nature if indeed they are the same? Or do the seven-headed beast and the false prophet beast represent beings much different from those who are represented by the dragon?

The Adversary and His Messengers

After the great climactic battle of the tribulation era, the wild beast and false prophet are cast into the lake of fire burning with sulfur (Rev. 19:20). This clearly is the same lake of fire into which the Adversary will be cast after his thousand-year incarceration in the

submerged chaos. Let us pose a question: “Are the Adversary and his messengers, for whom eonian fire is prepared according to Matthew 25:41, the same as the dragon and his messengers, who are all consigned to the lake of fire in the closing chapters of Revelation (Rev. 12:7, 19:20, 20:10)?”

If the context for determining the identity of the Adversary and his messengers is restricted to Matthew 25:31–46, where nations are being judged, an argument has been put forward for defining the identity in question as an adversarial nation and its emissaries.

However, the question then arises: Why does the King not say, “Go from Me, *you cursed*, into the fire eonian *made ready for you?*” Instead, he says: “Go from Me, you cursed, into the fire eonian, *made ready for the Adversary and his messengers*” (v. 41).

In the context, the King speaks directly to those at his left, the goat nations, and he addresses them as *you*. Clearly, the context is introducing additional characters at this point—Satan and his messengers.

Also, considering the history of Israel, there has been a considerable number of adversarial nations. Anti-Semitism has flourished around the globe. If adversarial nation were the intended interpretation, the term *Adversary* should be plural. Even within the time of the tribulation, it is not a single nation that persecutes the Jews but rather a global confederation which John sees as a beast.

When the context is broadened to include the whole book of Matthew, Satan becomes the prime candidate for the Adversary mentioned. The kingdoms of the world, which have been persecuting the Jews, are under his authority (Matt. 4:8–9, Luke 4:6). The wild beast is described in Revelation as having seven heads and ten horns (13:1)—a description that matches that of the great dragon in heaven (12:3), who is the Adversary and Satan (12:6). The political system that will be persecuting the saints during the tribulation is the embodiment of the spiritual powers warring in the celestial realm.

Obviously, there is no substantial reason for thinking that the Adversary and his messengers mentioned in Matthew 25, who will go into eonian fire, are any different from Satan and his messengers (Rev. 12:7–10) who will be cast into the lake of fire.

And since the eonian fire is not literal fire but rather a description of chastisement (cf. vv. 41, 46), the lake of fire also is not literal fire but a condition of chastisement. The eonian fire, the lake of fire, was prepared for those who are not harmed by literal fire. Certainly, the lake of fire is not meant to be understood literally.

The Wild Beast

The Greek word *therion* occurs more than thirty-five times in the book of Revelation, and it is translated *wild beast* in the Concordant Version. The first occurrence is in Revelation 6:8 and refers to non-domestic animals of the earth, predators in particular. All other uses of this word in Revelation refer to two wild beasts that are not real animals but are figurative characters in John's vision.

In Revelation 13:11, a wild beast comes up out of the land. After its introduction there, this beast is referred to as the *false prophet*. All other occurrences of *wild beast* refer to the wild beast that came up out of the sea (Rev. 13:1).

There is also mention of a scarlet wild beast upon which the great prostitute was seated (Rev. 17:3–4). Apparently, this is another description of the wild beast that came up out of the sea because it too has seven heads and ten horns (cf. vv. 3, 7). The mention of color does not appear to be a distinction sufficient enough to assume this is a different creature or character in the vision. The dragon is called the *red dragon* only once, but John identifies it with Satan both where color is mentioned and not mentioned. And scarlet is a color similar to the dragon's red.

The similarity of the wild beast to the beasts of Daniel's vision is so striking it hardly needs to be pointed out (cf. Dan. 7:3–7 and Rev. 13:1–2). Like the beasts of Daniel, *this wild beast is a political system of power* (Dan. 7:17). In Daniel's vision, various traits characterize the beasts, representing different kingdoms that arise over the course of time. When the Adversary is cast down into the earth, his time is short. All aspects of his rule are combined into one beast. All aspects of his rule are in full display at once. His work in the current eon is preparatory for these events.

The wild beast is said to ascend out of the submerged chaos or abyss (11:7), and later is seen rising up out of the sea (13:1). The sea is typical of the nations. “These waters which you perceived, where the prostitute is sitting, are peoples and throngs and nations and languages” (Rev. 17:15). This description of the beast identifies it as the Adversary’s rule embodied by human governments. This wild beast has ten horns with ten diadems and seven heads, and it receives authority over every tribe and people and language and nation (13:7).

The seven heads are seven mountains where the woman is sitting on them and they are seven kings.... And the ten horns...are ten kings.... These have one opinion, and they are giving their power and authority to the wild beast.... And the ten horns...give their kingdom to the wild beast.
(Rev. 17:9–17)

There is no mistaking that the wild beast is a political system of multinational power. It is a confederation of kingdoms of people, and it is allied with a religious commercial system—the beast that comes out of the land.

In Revelation 17:8–11, the term *wild beast* may appear to be applied to the individual king who wields the power of the beast. However, it would be a mistake to make the beast an individual from this point forward and then also on that foundation to say the beast is an individual Antichrist. David is said to have built Zion from Millo, roundabout and inward (2 Sam. 5:9). But this does not mean that David performed any of the labor of building. The actions of a king are carried out by the kingdom. Such also is the situation with the wild beast.

In Revelation 17:8, the context returns us to chapter 13, where the beast ascends out of the sea or submerged chaos. It appears that the time when the beast is submerged in the sea is a time when the *mountain aspect* (v. 9) of the kingdom metaphor is not dominant.

When it comes to power, its king is the focal figure for the beast. But that does not mean that the king, rather than the kingdom, is the beast. If it was the purpose to speak of the king individually, he would not be referred to as a beast.

Beasts are used in the visions to represent organized kingdoms or confederations, just as they are in Daniel. This subject will be treated further when we consider “The Interpretation of Visions.”

The False Prophet

The word *pseudo-prophet* or *false prophet* occurs three times in Revelation.

In Revelation 19:20, it is shown to be a descriptive name for the wild beast that came up out of the land (cf. 13:12–14).

And the wild beast is arrested, and with it the
false prophet who does the signs in its sight, by
which he deceives those getting the emblem of the
wild beast, and those worshipping its image.

The term *false prophet* is descriptive of the character of its office, and it also distinguishes this beast from the wild beast that came up out of the sea. Since this actor in the vision is introduced as a beast (13:11–17), it is also a system of authority or political organization of some kind. Since it has two horns and horns are used to represent kings and the power of kingdoms, there is reason to expect a duality in its leadership.

Notice the things accomplished by the second wild beast. It enforces the worship of the first wild beast throughout the earth (13:12), and it causes all—small and great, rich and poor, slave and free—to receive the mark of the first wild beast on their right hand or forehead. By means of this marking, it regulates commerce on a global scale (13:16–17).

While the false prophet exhibits supernatural characteristics, it seems reasonable that most of its feats will be accomplished and enforced by something resembling a Gestapo-like police force. Like the beast out of the sea, it is motivated and empowered by Satan’s authority.

Entertain the question again: “Why are the wild beast and false prophet segregated from the dragon (Satan’s spirit kingdom) during the thousand years? Why do they receive different types of con-

finement?” If it is remembered that the beast and false prophet are systems involving masses of humanity, the answer is obvious. They are different kinds of beings, and they are on different plateaus in God’s purpose.

H. B. Swete, in his commentary on Revelation, says, “Since two of the three subjects of the *basanismos* represent systems and not persons, it is safer to regard them as belonging to the scenery of the vision rather than to its eschatological teaching.”¹¹ (*Basanismos* is *torment*, and yet we are showing that even the dragon represents a conglomerate of beings and not just Satan alone. But they are spiritual rather than human.)

God’s purpose for humanity in the coming age will be to free it from the influence of Satan and his kingdom for a thousand years. So they will be locked in the abyss. During the millennial era, the political rulers of this world will be sons of the resurrection filled with the spirit of God. There will be no corruption in politics. Justice will be meted out swiftly and accurately. Mankind’s excuse that things would have been better if only man could have good government and be freed from the corruption of dishonesty and vice in leadership will be tested. But after a thousand years of ideal government, Satan will be loosed, and the mass of humanity will be quickly whipped into a frenzy of rebellion against God. The wild beast and false prophet are segregated from Satan because they are composed of humans, not spirits.

The Great Prostitute

Babylon: The Great Prostitute	Jerusalem: The Bride
“And one from among the seven messengers who have the seven bowls” (17:1).	“And one of the seven Messengers who have the seven bowls” (21:9).
“Came, and he speaks with me, saying...” (17:1).	“Came, and he speaks with me, saying...” (21:9).
“Hither! I shall be showing you the sentence of the great prostitute who is sitting on many waters” (17:1).	“Hither! I shall be showing you the bride, the wife of the Lambkin” (21:9).

<p>“And he carries me away, in spirit, into a wilderness...” (17:3).</p>	<p>“And he carries me away, in spirit, on a mountain, huge and high...” (21:10).</p>
<p>“And I perceived a woman sitting on a scarlet wild beast replete with names of blasphemy” (17:3).</p>	<p>“And he shows me the holy city, Jerusalem, as it is descending out of heaven from God” (21:10).</p>

These bits of text beg the reader of John’s prophecy to compare and contrast the characters of the visions. Such lengthy repetition of details is not common in the scriptures. The reader will be well-repaid to search out more details in this comparison and also between other characters of the visions that contrast good and evil.

Standing in sharp contrast to the Bride, the New Jerusalem, is “Babylon the Great, the mother of prostitutes and the abominations of the earth” (Rev. 17:5) and “the great city which has a kingdom over the kings of the earth” (17:18). This woman rides upon the wild beast that is described as “scarlet...replete with names of blasphemy, and having seven heads and ten horns” (Rev. 17:4, 12:3, 13:1, etc.). The prostitute sits upon many waters, which are “peoples and throngs and nations and languages” (Rev. 17:1, 15). The prostitute is said to be a city, Babylon (Rev. 18:10), which is located where the seven heads or seven kings of the wild beast are seated (Rev. 17:9). She is also called *Sodom* and *Egypt* (Rev. 11:8). She makes the merchants, the traffickers or *Canaanites*, rich. Their wares include everything from gold, silver, and precious stones to grain, livestock, and even human souls (Rev. 18:11–13).

The New Jerusalem, the Bride, is the capital of God’s kingdom and comes down from heaven. In contrast, the great prostitute is the capital of the beast empire, Satan’s empire, which appears to be centered in the current Jerusalem. Thus, the leaders of the sea and land beasts would conduct business there and probably reside there from time to time. In fact, it would make sense that some of the people making up the beast figure in the vision could actually also be members of the great prostitute figure.

The prostitute has worldwide influence in commerce and religion. The fate that befalls her is representative of what befalls the

entire system and, to some degree, all those who are a part of that system. While there will be the structure of a city, the city is the people.

The Dragon and Satan

Many students of the scriptures would be surprised by the statement: “John did not see Satan in his visions recorded in Revelation.” John mentions Satan more than once. But it is very likely that this statement is still true. John saw a dragon with seven heads and ten horns. And sometimes John saw the dragon as a serpent or spoke of the dragon as a serpent (Rev. 12:15–16). John identifies the dragon as Satan for his readers (Rev. 12:9, 20:2). If John had seen Satan as an individual, spiritual being, he could simply have referred to him as Satan. But by identifying the dragon as Satan, it is clear that John saw the dragon in his visions.

This raises an important question: “Why did Satan appear in the vision as a dragon?” The similarities between the wild beast that came up out of the sea and the dragon are obvious. Both have seven heads and ten horns. The heads and horns of the wild beast represent kings and kingdoms in humanity. It would be most natural that there is a similar representation in the spiritual realm by the figure of the dragon. Evidently the figure of the dragon is used to include all the spiritual beings who are part of the Adversary’s structure of authority and power.

If the forgoing supposition is true, then the incarceration of the dragon in the submerged chaos also includes the confinement of all evil spirits for that period of time. Where will all the demons be during the time of Satan’s imprisonment? Will only Satan be confined but not the evil spirits he rules over? Will only the material realm of Satan’s kingdom be restrained and not the spiritual realm also?

The term *Satan*, which means “an Adversary,” has sometimes been used as a generic term for evil spirits. “And if the Satan is casting out the Satan, he is parted against himself. How, then, shall his kingdom stand?” (Matt. 12:26). This statement was made by Christ in response to the accusation that he was casting out demons by Beelzebub, the chief of the demons. It is most reasonable that all

evil spirits will be restrained during the thousand-year period. The purpose for the dragon's restraint is to prevent it from deceiving the nations (Rev. 20:3). This is a cause for which the underlings are as guilty as Satan himself.

In Mark 5:1–13, a man is said to be possessed of an unclean spirit. Inquiring of his name, it became evident that the man was possessed by a legion of demons. In Luke's account, this legion requested that they not be consigned to the submerged chaos (Luke 8:31). In Matthew's account, the legion asked if Christ had come to torment them "before the season" (Matt. 8:29). This indicates that they have an expectation of such incarceration, and they clearly fear an impending time of torment. It is most likely that the demonic forces empowering the beast, and false prophet will go to the submerged chaos/bottomless pit with Satan while all the humans who make up the beast systems will go to eonian chastening figuratively termed the lake of fire.

It may well be that these events recorded in the accounts of Christ's life actually foreshadow what John is seeing in his visions.

Israel, in a future attempted revival of the kingdom, actually becomes the home of satanic power. Christ comes and defeats the powers of evil, and the man, Israel, becomes sound of mind and body and becomes the means of the nations' acceptance of Christ when he returns.

The Interpretation of Visions

The larger part of the book of Revelation is the recording of visions seen by John. The things John saw in the visions represent actual things and events, but this does not mean that the things he saw were actually the events that will transpire. John's visions were filled with representative characters.

Who are the actors in the visions? There are beasts, the woman who gave birth to the male child, the great prostitute, the red dragon, the bride, riders on horses, powerful angels, and others. John adds explanatory comments, showing that many of the actors in the vision

represent large groups of people. This is what helps us identify the actors and understand the vision.

When some calamity befalls one of the actors in the vision, it must be understood that all those individuals who will make up what the figurative actor represents are affected by the calamity. But the way in which individuals are affected need not be identical to the calamity as it is described in the vision.

The Interpretation of Daniel's Visions

The example of another vision should clarify this point, and it will help to show how inconsistent the varied interpretations of John's visions have been.

In a vision, Daniel saw a beast that resembled a bear. This beast was told to devour much flesh (Dan. 7:5). This beast is often understood to be a representation of the Medo-Persian Empire and is noted as such in some study Bibles. (There are differing interpretations given, and the purpose here is not to endorse any particular view. We are only presenting a common widely accepted interpretation as an example.) The devouring of much flesh was fulfilled by the spread of the empire represented by the bear through the empire's military and political campaigns. The passage neither says nor implies that anyone or anything was actually eaten by a bear.

There were three ribs in the bear's mouth. These have been interpreted as representing the kingdoms of Lydia, Babylonia, and Egypt, which the Medes and Persians conquered. But again, no one in Lydia, Babylonia, or Egypt is believed to have been eaten by a bear to fulfill this vision. Neither did a swarm of bears, covering the landscape, move through these kingdoms eating everyone, enabling the Medes and Persians to come in and possess the land. Please bear with us, though this certainly seems ridiculous. But if people interpreted this vision as literally as they do the book of Revelation, something like these examples could be taken as a prophecy to come true. Daniel saw a bear with meat in its mouth. This vision was fulfilled by military conquests.

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

In another vision (chapter 8), Daniel saw a goat trample a ram. This represented the Grecian Empire defeating the Medo-Persian Empire.

The ram which thou sawest, having two horns, these are the kings of Media and Persia. And the rough goat is the king of Grecia [Greece], and the great horn that is between his eyes is the first king. Now that being broken, whereas four stood up for it, four kingdoms shall stand up out of the nation, but not in its power.
(Dan. 8:20–22, AV)

No one expects for a moment this passage will be interpreted to mean a ram was actually trampled to death by a goat, nor does this vision mean any people were trampled to death by goats when Alexander led the Greeks to victory over the Medes and Persians. This was a symbolic vision. Daniel is the only one who ever saw the fight between the goat and the ram. Daniel is the only one who saw the lion with eagles' wings, the bear with ribs in its mouth, the four-headed leopard with four wings, or the diverse beast with ten horns (unless it was the same beast that John saw). The people who lived during the times when this vision was fulfilled did not see any of these beasts. They saw the kingdoms and the military and political campaigns of which the beasts were figures.

Notice the quotation from Daniel: "The rough goat is the king of Greece." Here, the king is mentioned as representing the kingdom. This is obvious since the context goes on to say that the goat's horn represents the first king. And when the first horn was broken off and replaced by four horns, it represented the division of the Greek empire into four kingdoms.

So also, the king, who is leader of the wild beast empire, may be referred to and represent the whole beast system. But that does not mean that an individual king of the beast nations becomes the beast, and from that point on, John only sees this one king or only refers to that one individual person. The beast remains the whole kingdom.

Comparing Visions

Keeping the interpretation of Daniel's visions in mind, we would like to make some comparisons between it and John's vision.

Daniel beheld the four winds of the heaven striving upon the sea (Dan. 7:2–3), and John beheld the dragon standing on the sea-shore, evidently exerting its influence or creative powers upon the waters. Apparently, this represents spiritual forces moving upon the volatile masses of humanity. Daniel saw four beasts come up out of the sea (Dan. 7:4–7).

The beast John saw came up out of the sea and had features like all Daniel's beasts. There were features of the lion, bear, and leopard, a sum total of seven heads; and there were ten horns (cf. Dan. 7:4–7 with Rev. 13:1–2). Notice also that this beast is in the image of the dragon (cf. Rev. 12:3).

Having noted these similarities in the visions, we would like to consider John's vision recorded in Revelation 19:11–20:3. The first scene of the vision is a description of Christ with the armies of heaven.

The Scene of Christ's Appearance

And I perceived heaven open, and lo! a white horse. And He Who is sitting on it is called "Faithful and True," and in righteousness is He judging and battling. Now His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems, having names written of which no one except Himself is aware, and He is clothed in a cloak dipped in blood, and His name is called "The Word of God." And the armies in heaven, dressed in cambric, white and clean, followed Him on white horses. And out of His mouth a sharp blade is issuing, that with it He should be smiting the nations. And He will be shepherding them with an iron club. And He is treading the wine trough of the fury of the indignation of God, the Almighty. And on His cloak and on His thigh He has a name written: 'King of kings and Lord of lords.'"

(Rev. 19:11–16)

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Christ's eyes are described as "a flame of fire" (v. 12). His cloak is dipped in blood, and a sharp blade is issuing out of his mouth (vv. 13–15). What is meant by the blade issuing from his mouth? Are we to assume that this will be the actual appearance of Christ when he returns? Are we to assume that when Christ was glorified his tongue became a sword? Certainly not! But what does this mean?

In Acts, chapter 5 is an example of a sword issuing from Peter's mouth twice. Ananias and Sapphira wanted to enjoy the fellowship and community living of the church, but they also wanted to keep back a nest egg for themselves. They sold their property and gave a sum to the church under the guise that the whole amount was given but kept part back secretly. Peter perceived something was false and asked Ananias about the amount. Ananias confirmed the whole was given. Peter told Ananias that he had not lied to men but to God. Ananias fell down dead. Later Sapphira came in, and Peter asked her regarding the amount. She too confirmed the partial gift was the full amount. Peter told her the feet of those who had carried out her dead husband were at the door, and they would carry her out as well. Sapphira fell down dead. There was no visible blade, but Peter's words were lethal to Ananias and Sapphira.

There is also a typical prophecy of this battle in John's vision given in John's account of Christ's life (John 18:1–7). An armed squad led by Judas came to apprehend Christ in Gethsemane. He asked who they were seeking. They answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." When Jesus said, "I am He," they all fell down backward to the ground as if they had been struck down. This was a typical fulfillment of Psalm 2 and Revelation 19.

Isaiah said,

And there shall come forth a rod out of the stem of
Jesse, and a Branch shall grow out of his roots...and He
shall smite the earth with the rod of His mouth, and
with the breath of His lips shall He slay the wicked.

(Isa. 11:1–4, AV)

Jesus Christ our Lord stood outside Lazarus' tomb and commanded, "Lazarus! Hither! Out!" (John 11:43). He is the one who

will return with a shout of command to open the graves of those in Christ who have died. And by his word, they will be resurrected and made immortal. When John saw Christ in his vision in the first chapter of Revelation, Christ said, “I have the keys of death and of the unseen [hades]” (v. 18). To have the keys of something is to have authority over it. Upon his return, Christ will exercise the authority of death. It will be no more difficult for him to speak a word and whisk away the life of every soldier assembled against him than it will be for him to shout the command that brings his chosen ones up from the graves to life.

There will be no blade flashing and slashing through the hordes of that great army. They will simply fall dead at the command of Christ. The blade issuing from his mouth is figurative, but it is very real.

Are there horses in heaven? The vision is of heaven open and Christ and the hosts of heaven on white horses. How do the horses travel through space? On what do their hooves find traction? After his resurrection, Christ could pass through walls into closed rooms. He could disappear from one location and reappear in another. What need does he have of a horse? John saw white horses in the vision, but we are not meant to understand them literally. They are part of a portrayal of royal military might.

The Scene of the Angel in the Sun

And I perceived another messenger, standing in the sun.
And he cries with a loud voice, saying to all the birds which
are flying in mid-heaven, “Hither! Be gathered for the great
dinner of God, that you may be eating the flesh of kings,
and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of the strong, and the
flesh of horses and of those sitting on them, and the flesh
of all freemen as well as slaves, and of small and of great.”

(Rev. 19:17–18)

What is the purpose of the birds? When David fought Goliath, Goliath called to David to come to him, and he would give his body to the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field. David’s response

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was that God would give him the victory, he would behead Goliath, and he would give Goliath's corpse and those of the Philistine army to the birds of the heavens and the beasts of the field.

Goliath and the Philistine army would become dung on the surface of the ground. This is a way of saying that they were impotent against God, and their purpose and effort would come to utter shame. Being deprived even of the simple dignity of burial, the stench of their death would mock their aspiration to overcome God's people.

The same idea is presented in the death of Jezebel:

Archaeological discoveries have revealed that her name in Tyre was actually Izebul, which meant, "Where is the Prince?" *Prince* meaning, Ba'al, the prince of gods in Canaan. In the Bible, Izebul is named Jezebel, which is a slurring wordplay on the Hebrew word for "dung [*zebel*]" [2 Kings 9:36–37]. In 2 Kings 9:37, it reduces that worldly powerful queen to pathos with a double entendre of caustic scorn. "And the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say 'This is Jezebel.'"¹²

The land of Israel is located on what may be the most heavily traveled migratory path in the world, connecting Africa with Europe and Asia. If this battle actually takes place as the vision describes, there could be a literal fulfillment of this scene as a witness to the world of Christ's power. Spiritual powers affecting the sunlight (the angel standing in the sun) could trigger a migration to coincide with the battle.

The Scene of the Battle

And I perceived the wild beast and the kings of the earth and their armies, gathered to do battle with Him Who is sitting on the horse and with His army. And the wild beast is arrested, and with it the false prophet who does the signs in its sight, by which he deceives those getting the emblem of the wild beast, and those worshipping its image. Living, the two were cast into the lake of fire burning with

sulphur. And the rest were killed with the blade which is coming out of the mouth of Him Who is sitting on the horse. And all the birds are satisfied with their flesh.

(Rev. 19:19–21)

The battle scene is surprisingly short in consideration of the chapters previous that have been leading up to it. But chapters 20 and 21 go on to show that this great victory is but another step up in a continuing ascension to a glorious state.

What things in this scene do we expect to be literal? The presence of Christ with the hosts of heaven is literal, though their actual appearance may not match the description of the vision. Vast armies and the birds to consume their bodies may also be literal. Also, the beast nations who have mustered the world's armies will be present, though John sees them as wild animals rather than nations.

This scene is a showcase of the authority of Christ. The arrest and incarceration of the beast and false prophet show that the greatest powers and authorities in all the kingdoms of humanity must bow to Christ. The immediate slaughter of massive armies shows that he indeed possesses the keys of death and hades. The gathering of numberless flocks of birds shows his control over nature and the animal kingdom. And the first three verses of chapter 20, the next scene, show power over the Adversary, Satan, and all evil spirits.

To understand these things more thoroughly, we need to contemplate three things: (1) what John saw, (2) what the things John saw mean, and (3) what the difference is between what he saw and what will actually happen.

What Did John See?

What did John see? John saw a blade issue forth from the Rider's mouth, which struck the armies, probably with just a single blow killing them all. He saw an angel standing in the sun, calling birds to gather and consume the flesh of a great slaughter. And he saw a beast with seven heads and ten horns seized and thrown into a lake of fire. Then the other beast with horns like a lamb's horns and a voice like the dragon's was seized and thrown into the lake of fire with the first

beast. There, these two animals writhe in anguish in the flames; they were tormented. Unable to remove themselves from the lake, they remained there during the coming eras of the kingdom.

That is what John saw. John did not see nations of peoples cast into a lake of fire, neither did he see two superhuman individuals cast into a lake of fire. At this time, previous to the great white throne judgment, John did not see any people cast into the lake of fire, just two wild beasts. This description follows the example of Daniel's visions.

The armies died, but the beast and false prophet were cast into the lake of fire living, and they remained alive there. The armies that died were from the nations of the world that were not part of the beast, though they were subject to its influence (Rev. 16:12–16). This explains why they were killed, but the nations that make up the beasts will live on under chastisement. Their opposition to God's witnesses earned them a more severe chastisement.

To our knowledge, the apostle John is the only human who has ever seen the lake of fire. And unless it is in God's purpose for someone else to see this vision, John is the only one who ever will see a literal lake of fire. John saw two strange animals thrown into this lake. But again, unless God shows this vision to someone else, no one but John will ever see these beasts.

What *will* be seen during the tribulation that transitions this world to the next age and during the thousand years? Those living then will see a political organization of nations assembled, which will seek to exterminate the saints. But it will be a political organization, not a strange looking animal/wild beast. And what is portrayed by the lake of fire? And what is the lake of fire? It is the judgment of God upon the nations participating in the satanically inspired rebellion. It is the servitude to which they will be subjected.

We have shown that fire is an excellent figure to portray judgment—only those things the fire cannot destroy remain after a conflagration. And only those things that are good and right remain after God's judgment. The nations of people making up the beast will be under tribute and conscripted labor to rectify their previous actions.

The Identities in the Lake of Fire

John saw the seven-headed ten-horned beast and the beast with horns like a lamb and voice like the dragon's thrown into a lake of fire. Some may object that the language of Revelation 19:20 sounds as if it is speaking of two individuals rather than two political conglomerates. How is it determined that two individual figureheads are not the ones in view?

Verse 20 says that "the two were cast into the lake of fire." There is nothing here to determine an answer for the question. The words *the two* can just as easily describe two beasts or two individuals. The context of Revelation 19:11 through 20:3 (and the extended context as well) strongly favors the interpretation of two beasts. The description of Christ is figurative. Satan and his messengers are seen as a dragon. The beasts are simply much more in character with the context than two individual figureheads.

To introduce two literal beings at this point would be inconsistent. And yet that is how many *commentators* explain it to go along with their views of endless torment and their disbelief in God's eonian plan as opposed to their concept of eternity. But such an interpretation completely ignores the scriptural example of Daniel's visions and how they should be understood.

The Wild Beast

The word *living* in verse 20 adds essential information to the context. First, it confirms that the lake of fire is figurative. The armies literally died at the spoken command of the Rider on the white horse. In contrast with this, the beasts not only are cast into the lake of fire, but they also continue living there for long periods of time.

Potentially, John could have seen the beasts cast into the fire and consumed there by the flames similar to a scene in Daniel (Dan. 7:11). But these beasts remain alive in this fire throughout the thousand years and into the age following.

This corresponds precisely with what happens to the nations that make up the beast. They are chastised during those periods of time.

Those who worshiped the beast and received its mark are a part of the corporate whole that is the beast. They will be tormented “in fire and sulphur” and “the fumes of their torment are ascending for the eons of the eons” (Rev. 14:9–11). This is the same description of torment and the same time frame applied to the beast and false prophet. The great prostitute, the capital city of the beast empire, is also a conglomerate of many people. Her torment is described with the same terms of chronology (Rev. 19:3).

The “sheep and goats” passage (Matthew 25:31–46) is one of the most definitive on this subject. In the section on “Identities,” it was shown that the *Adversary and his messengers* is a term that refers to “Satan and his messengers.” These are cast out of heaven (Rev. 12:7–9) into the earth. Thereupon, they took form by possessing the beast and false prophet figures (Rev. 12:17–13:15; cf. Matt. 12:43–45).

The “eonian fire” of Matthew 25:41 is literally “eonian chastening” (Matt. 25:46). *Chastening* is the preferred and more accurate translation. *Punishment* is a poor rendering of the Greek *kolasis*. Since the lake of fire is the *eonian fire* into which the Adversary and his messengers will be cast, it stands to reason that it is *the eonian fire made ready* for them (Matt. 25:41). The passage in Matthew tells us that nations of people go into this chastisement. The casting of the beast and false prophet into the lake of fire is actually a visionary depiction of the glory throne judgment in Matthew 25.

For all practical purposes, it becomes immaterial whether the beast and false prophet seen in the vision were seen as beasts or individuals. The nations who will make up the political system known as the beast will go into the chastening prepared for Satan, the beast, and the false prophet. We find the political system of the beast in the lake of fire regardless of how *the two* of Revelation 19:20 is interpreted. Still, if we are to understand what John saw and what his vision means, we need to realize that he saw beasts cast into the fire. The section on “Identities” also dealt with the question of whether or not it was possible for spiritual beings to be tormented in literal fire. The conclusion of that discussion was *no*, spiritual beings cannot be tormented by literal fire.

Some commentators hold that the two individual figureheads of the beast and false prophet are *superhuman* (a non-biblical identification) and can therefore endure the flames (Seiss, Bullinger, Knoch, and numerous others). However, the term *superhuman* is left largely undefined.

One has said that the performance of miracles and the statement that the beast died and came back to life (Rev. 17:8–11) verifies that it is superhuman. But the apostles and others performed miracles. Lazarus and others were raised from the dead. None of these have been called *superhuman*. The scriptures speak of two kinds of bodies: (1) bodies of flesh—dependent upon this soil and atmosphere, and (2) bodies celestial (1 Cor. 15:45–49). The body of flesh dies in literal fire, bringing torment quickly to an end. The celestial body cannot be touched by literal fire.

The term *superhuman* is only a fabrication used to elude a predicament. It solves nothing. However, the term *superhuman* points a finger at one of the chief causes behind misunderstandings of the lake of fire. People traditionally think of individuals being cast into the lake of fire. The false teaching of torment in literal fire has been around so long that the context of the book is overlooked, and it is forgotten that John was actually seeing figurative representations as he viewed the vision.

He or It?

The strong tendency to understand the beast and false prophet to be individual, personal beings, rather than conglomerate beasts is subjective interpretation rather than objective conclusion based on what John has written. In the appendix “The Second Death and Issues of Language,” additional reasons are given showing why the process of translation from Greek to English blurs the distinction between beasts and humans. See the section entitled “*He or It?*”

The False Prophet

Revelation 19:20 is the only passage that tells us the false prophet and the wild beast that came up out of the land are the same. The first occurrence of the term *false prophet* is in Revelation 16:13. There, John beheld the dragon, the wild beast, and the false prophet beast. Coming out of their mouths were unclean spirits. These demonic spirits resembled frogs. Their task was to mobilize the armies of earth against the Rider on the white horse. Thus, it is at the command and authority of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet beast that the armies assemble.

Since the scene in chapter 19 is the great battle when all these armies were gathered, it would be proper to recall this scene of the dragon, wild beast, and another beast called the false prophet with frog demons coming out of their mouths when contemplating their consignment to the lake of fire. The three who are seen calling the armies of earth together in chapter 16 are the same three who are cast into the lake of fire and the submerged chaos in chapters 19 and 20. Realizing this will help provide a correct image in our minds of what John saw.

John identifies the false prophet at the time it is thrown into the lake of fire. The description by which he identifies it is the same description of its actions that was given when it was introduced as a wild beast coming up out of the land (13:11–12). This confirms that what John perceived in the vision was two wild beasts being thrown into a lake of fire, not two individual people.

What Will Be Seen During the Kingdom Eras?

As noted, only John has seen these wild beasts as beasts. It is possible the image that will be made and worshiped during the tribulation may resemble what John saw (Rev. 13:14–15), but there is no reason to expect that anyone besides John will ever see these beasts in the form in which he saw them. Likewise, no one will see a literal lake of fire.

Since the lake of fire is figurative, the questions arise: “What will be the literal fulfillment of the lake of fire? What will the people who are living during those eras see?” There are many literal prophecies referring to this time, a sampling of which follows:

And the sons of foreigners shall build up thy walls, and their kings shall minister unto thee.... Therefore, thy gates shall be open continually; they shall not be shut day nor night, that men may bring unto thee the forces of the nations, and that their kings may be brought. For the nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted.... The sons also of those who afflicted thee shall come bending unto thee, and all they that despised thee shall bow themselves down at the soles of thy feet;... And foreigners shall stand and feed your flocks, and the sons of the alien shall be your plowmen and your vinedressers. But ye shall be named the Priests of the Lord; men shall call you the Ministers of our God; ye shall eat the riches of the nations, and in their glory shall ye boast yourselves.
(Isa. 60:10–14, 61:5–6, AV)

And it shall be that whoever will not come up of all the families of the earth unto Jerusalem to worship the King, the Lord of hosts, even upon them shall be no rain.
(Zech. 14:17, AV)

During the thousand years, the world will see the nations living in servitude and subjection to a spiritually renewed Israel. The severity of hardship endured by each nation will be according to its judgment at the glory throne (Matt. 25:31–46). The torment will be such things as labor, slavery, remorse, and shame.

The Iron Furnace and the Lake of Fire

The subjugation of the nations to Israel will be the literal fulfillment of the lake of fire. This name, the lake of fire, is a fitting designation for the subjection of the nations when it is compared with the name given to Israel’s former slavery. “As for you, Yahweh took you,

and He brought you forth from the iron crucible [“iron furnace,” AV], from Egypt, to become His as a people of allotment” (Deut. 4:20; cf. 1 Kings 8:51, Jer. 11:4, Isa. 48:10 “furnace of affliction”).

No one believes that Israel was literally in an iron furnace or crucible in Egypt. The holocaust of World War II was a different case. But *iron crucible* is the term that God used to describe Israel’s torment in the brickyards of Egypt.

The idea of the *iron furnace/crucible* is that of refining. The persecution and slavery of Egypt prepared them to break with Egypt and leave it. They were too satisfied in Egypt even under servitude and even after leaving they wanted to return.

There was no furnace or crucible. The bricks were dried in the sun. If *iron furnace* is a suitable term to describe the slavery and affliction of Israel in Egypt, is *lake of fire* too unusual a term to describe the slavery and subjection of the nations during Israel’s reign of strict righteousness? Certainly not!

The Vision Continued

At the end of the thousand years and after
the dragon has led the revolt, he is
cast into the lake of fire and sulphur, where the wild
beast and where the false prophet are also. And they shall
be tormented day and night for the eons of the eons.
(Rev. 20:10)

This verse shows Satan and his kingdom being placed “where the wild beast and where the false prophet are also.” The place the beast and false prophet occupied during the millennium is the same place they occupy during the eon following. And it is the same place to which Satan goes—a place in which he too will become subject to God through Christ.

Because the place is the same for the beast and false prophet during both eons, the clear insinuation is that there is no significant change in the lake of fire at the end of the millennium or during the final eon. At least there is no change in it as relative to the beast,

false prophet, and Satan. It receives the same description relative to both eons.

Will there be any mitigation in the lake of fire when it is designated *the second death* at the great white throne? That will depend on the character of rule that issues from the great white throne.

The Great White Throne

The Generations of the Eon of the Eons

“To Him be glory in the ecclesia and in Christ Jesus for all the generations of the eon of the eons! Amen!” (Eph. 3:21) The time period here referred to is the final eon—“the eon of the eons.” This will be the final eon of God’s kingdom purpose when Christ, completing the kingdom, will abdicate his throne and give the completed kingdom back to the Father.

Who or what are the generations spoken of in the final eon? Is the word *generations* here simply an expression of time? Are these generations the generations of people of past ages? Or are these generations people who will be born during the final eon? The scriptures provide limited light, but an opinion will be ventured.

Generation may be used to designate the period of time in which the cycle of human life—birth, growth, maturing, and reproduction—takes place. But it is difficult to see how this sense would relate to the rest of the sentence. God will indeed be glorified through the church and Christ, but this glory will issue from the service for which he has made them competent, not from any physical, developmental changes that take place in people during the final eon. In the eon of the eons, both Christ and the church will have long been perfected. And the members of the church expect to be transformed and receive their perfect celestial body in an instant, not during a generation of development.

Certainly, the glory spoken of here is that ever-increasing glory that is associated with the “heading up of all in Christ” (Eph. 1:10). Christ is already the Head of the body, the church (Col. 1:18). And

when the body is glorified with him, that headship will be complete in the members of the body. But there still remains, in the eon of the eons, multitudes—both on the earth and in the heavens in whom Christ will be becoming First (Col. 1:18–20). This includes all not yet subject to his headship at that time.

The context of Ephesians 3 incorporates such thoughts as the gospel of the untraceable riches of Christ, the Father of every kindred in the heavens and on earth, the transcendent love of Christ, becoming completed for the entire complement of God, and the glorification of God through his chosen ones in the culmination of *his* eonian plan.

Bearing these thoughts in mind, it is difficult to think of these generations as being anything other than those still needing their reconciliation to God to be completed during the final eon. Therefore, it is suggested that the generations of the eon of the eons are the generations of humanity that have been born upon the earth up until the time of the great white throne judgment.

There is something very final about that judgment, and it marks a distinct change in God's dealings with humanity. Only one such judgment is revealed in the scriptures, and it is for the myriads of humanity, except those called out early as recipients of special grace. If more people were to be born during the final eon, it seems likely that another such judgment would await them. We are unaware of any such judgment after the great white throne.

Another alternative could be that the judgment of the great white throne would be continuous throughout the final eon until no more of humanity were born and brought to a full realization of the truth in Christ. The saved who are resurrected no longer marry. The scriptures do not specifically state the bodily condition of those who are resurrected to the great white throne judgment, though it seems clear they are not immortal. It is probable that a large number of humanity will come, living to the great white throne, but the overwhelming majority there will have been resurrected. Is there any basis for thinking that procreation would continue after resurrection? We think not.

Man's commission at creation included the populating of the earth. It seems reasonable that this commission will have been completed before the great white throne judgment takes place. Indeed, it seems proper for such a judgment to be waiting for the completion of that commission. From that time forward, the work of reconciliation to God becomes the prime imperative. Each individual who has come into being will come into true knowledge of God.

Of what judgment did Christ speak in the following passages?

Then He begins to reproach the cities in which most of His powerful deeds occurred, for they do not repent. 'Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the powerful deeds which are occurring in you occurred in Tyre and Sidon, long ago they would repent, sitting in sackcloth and ashes. Moreover, I am saying to you, for Tyre and Sidon shall it be more tolerable in the day of judging than for you.

And you, Capernaum! Not to heaven shall you be exalted! To the unseen [hades] shall you subside, for if the powerful deeds which are occurring in you had occurred in Sodom, it might remain unto today. Moreover, I am saying to you that for the land of Sodom shall it be more tolerable in the day of judging than for you.

(Matt. 11:20–24)

Men, Ninevites, will be rising in the judging with this *generation* and will be condemning it, for they repent at the heralding of Jonah, and lo! more than Jonah is here! "The queen of the south will be roused in the judging with this *generation* and will be condemning it, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and lo! more than Solomon is here!

(Matt. 12:41–42; italics mine)

The nations are judged as nations at the glory throne judgment before the millennium (Matt. 25:31 ff.), but we read of no race-wide resurrection at that time. Since most of those referred to in the passages above are unbelieving, these passages evidently refer to the great white throne judgment.

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Some, such as the queen of the south and the repentant Ninevites, had faith. Apparently, they will receive life at the great white throne. What of the people of faith from Adam to Abraham who had no expectation of the kingdom? Are they to be incorporated into the body of Christ and raised with them? Possibly, but of the body of Christ, it is said that their citizenship is inherent in the heavens. They are designated for a particular location. Neither will those from Adam to Abraham seem to fit into a place as part of reborn Israel.

How explicit can we be in defining those of the former resurrection (Rev. 20:4–5)? It seems that if a group of chosen ones lives nearer to the end times, the length of time before their resurrection is decreased. Also, their revelation is more detailed, their selection more specific, their opportunity in the flesh more restricted, and their security surer. The following outline briefly presents these thoughts:

Mankind from Adam—Both believing and unbelieving
Jews from Abraham—The faithful and obedient
The body of Christ—Called out in Paul's ministry

Resurrected first to be with Christ in celestial realm
Resurrected at the beginning of millennium after tribulation
Resurrected at the great white throne judgment

These thoughts are only a suggestion. If they are correct, they may give us some further insight into the parable of the workers hired at different hours of the day to work in the vineyard. The first would be last and the last first.

Generation is an outstanding word in the passages above from Matthew. As well as judgment upon an individual's deeds, the scriptures introduce the idea of judgment related to the context of the time and conditions in which one lived. Those with greater light and opportunity are seen as being judged by those who lived in darker circumstances.

This is most important to realize because it clarifies the fact that judgment takes into account different influences on the individual's

life. Should not the climactic eon of God's eonian purpose bring special light of the truth to every generation of the various nations?

In the word *generation* (Eph. 3:21) inheres something that is an intrinsic part of everyone's life. Each generation of humanity has its own dreams, problems, hopes, and fears. Each generation of humanity experiences its own political, social, and economic conditions of blessing, trial, or tragedy. And for every generation, the issues of their day make significant impact on their lives and actions. Issues confronting some generations are not even dreamed of by other generations.

Shall these innumerable and unutterably diverse aspects of life, which are so indelibly etched in the being and character of all, be nothing more than memories and matters for retrospective discussion after the consummation? Or shall there be a time when all generations will be convened and made to realize their strengths and shortcomings? Shall there not be a time when all generations will live under knowledge of God, good government, sound economy, and proper social standards?

Think of what this will mean to the untold generations that have ebbed and flowed with no knowledge of God's love in Christ. If such a time is to come and it appears that this is a fitting description of the final eon, it will afford every individual the opportunity to grasp the knowledge of both good and evil through their own experience. God will become all in all of all generations.

The Great White Throne

And I perceived a great white throne, and Him
Who is sitting upon it, from Whose face earth and
heaven fled, and no place was found for them.

And I perceived the dead, the great and the
small, standing before the throne.

(Rev. 20:11–12)

With one accord, humanity marches to the grave. With one accord in ranks that stretch from horizon to horizon, in wealth and squalor, in understanding and ignorance, in hope and despair, in fury

and in peace on bright sunny mornings and in the depths of the night, humanity marches into the dust.

But at the appearance of the great white throne, the dust will give up Adam and every last one of his race. The simple fact that this resurrection will take place is a sign of good things to come. Along the way, many find faith, and they rest in the expectation of resurrection to immortality. But why are the rest raised? If as many creeds affirm they are not to be the recipients of any blessing, why not leave them sleeping in the dust? What remains to be fulfilled? The souls that have sinned have died (Ezek. 18:4, 20; Job 36:14). The law's authority over a man is only for the duration of his life (Rom. 7:1). It requires nothing more than death. Does the God who finds no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezek. 18:32, 33:11) yet desire or require anything other than to have his creation united with himself?

Those who believe that the lost dead suffer endlessly and consciously from the moment of death insinuate that a harsh sentence of judgment is already set and in process. This belief requires no resurrection in a body to have a conscious existence. For them, the great white throne is redundant if not senseless and useless. Those who believe in annihilation, if they believe the unsaved are raised, would have them raised from death to be finally and officially executed. This course of events also shows an obvious lack of purpose and love. If the lost and wicked are to have no part in life from that point on, why resurrect them? If their condition is not to be changed, why judge them? Nay, if their condition is not to be *improved*, why judge them?

Is judgment not for the purpose of making things right? Is it right to be at enmity? Is it right to suffer endlessly? Is it right to be tormented without cause? But worse than the purposelessness of these views are the maligning caricatures they sketch of God. These views escort one within the inner courts of the human temple and reveal there the image of God graven in the heart and mind by the beliefs and experiences of life. Who is the god worshiped there? Is it the God who gave his only begotten to redeem the world? Or is it one like Moloch, who required the children if the parents were to

escape? Or is it one who in insatiable fury would torture the majority of creation in order to allow a few to escape?

The Character of the Judge

God is for order. When the time of the great white throne judgment comes, God's creation will have been chaotic and void of fruit long enough. All is going to be set in order. All is going to be set right. What the character of God is truly defines what *right* is. And the true character of God has never been more fully revealed than when he gave his Son for all on the cross. At that point, God tore open the curtain as if to say, "Now! For the first time, you are clearly beholding me! See one who is bearing the sin and shame of the world, and you are seeing me!"

It matters not that ten men of different opinions stand with the same Bible in their hands. What matters is the truth that the Bible teaches. What matters are the graces of faith and revelation and the image of God that realization of the truth carves in hearts and minds.

Resurrection to the great white throne is a siren of grace. Law will have been fulfilled. Sin will have run its course. Good and evil will have been tasted—indeed, tasted, consumed, and digested. But even though humanity's course of humiliation is run, God is not finished with his creation! Resurrection to correction is the rallying trumpet blast of hope and expectation. No matter how severe the needful chastening be (Rom. 2:9), the condition that is extant when God makes things right must be better than the condition previous. The great white throne is a door of love and grace, and the scriptures bear this out.

What Will Happen in Judgment?

"And I perceived a great white throne, and Him Who is sitting upon it, from Whose face earth and heaven fled, and no place was found for them" (Rev. 20:11).

Notice the great fear mentioned here: All the intelligent creatures of heaven and earth would vainly try to flee and hide from the

awe-inspiring dread of the one sitting on the throne. This fear is not the momentary flush from being startled, but the deep dread of the inescapable consequence of standing before the Creator.

There are some in Christendom who confess to believe that man's free will has the ultimate sovereignty, and that there are some of humanity who will never bow before the Creator. Such a view shows no realization of what happens in judgment. The inescapable terror that John describes here speaks volumes to the contrary (cf. 6:14–17).

There will be no unbelievers, no atheists, after the great white throne judgment. Everyone will know that the one on the throne who judges them is the glorified Christ, who died for their sake and was raised by the Father to this position of power and glory. Everyone will give account of every idle word in their life (Matt. 12:36). They will know that God knows their every thought and deed, and their judgment will be for the correction of those things. They will see angels judged and believers glorified. The people at the great white throne will know that they have died and that they have been raised back to life for judgment. And they will know that their judgment is just.

I expect that many will welcome their judgment, realizing that it is part of their way to peace and unity with their Creator. Any thought of a judgment that is impotent to accomplish radical change is a thought that is unworthy of God's judgment. Judgment without realization is not divine judgment.

The Throne

The word *throne* (*thronos* in Greek) occurs more often in the book of Revelation than in all other New Testament books combined. There is reference to the throne of God, the throne of Satan, thrones in heaven and thrones on earth, the throne of the wild beast, and the thrones of the saints.

The great white throne mentioned in Revelation 20:11 is distinguished from the thrones of faithful saints mentioned in verse 4 of the same chapter. It is only called the *great white throne* once, and in

following references, it is simply called *the* throne or given other designations. The appearance of this great white throne in John's vision provides a visible tangible image to help us grasp the character of the divine authority that is being exercised. It is not just a white piece of furniture that is in view.

The grand purpose of God is moving forward, and great changes are about to take place. The last enemies are being brought into subjection. Instead of rule by the lion of Judah, the reign of the Lambkin is about to commence—a lamb that rules! That concept is completely foreign to the thinking of the current age.

A throne is a symbol for authority and power, and it is the source from which rule issues. A kingdom has only one throne. From this throne, decisions issue forth affecting legal, political, military, civil, and religious issues. Yet if many people were asked what the purpose of the great white throne is, the average answer would probably be that it is for the judgment of unbelieving humanity.

That answer is only partial. It is quite true that the judgment of the unbelieving of humanity will take place there. But are we to think that once this judgment is pronounced the great white throne disappears or is replaced by another throne? It is not called a *dais* or judgment seat. It is a throne, and it should not surprise us to find that the scope of its purpose is much broader than only judgment at resurrection.

The Throne Is White

The throne is *white*! By its traditions and claims, Christianity has draped the great white throne in the dismal black grave clothes of mourning. They have made it the seat of hopelessness and despair—the seat of fury and incomprehensible woe. But God says that this throne is white, and it is white. It is light, not darkness.

White is a color associated with righteousness. “If your sins become like scarlet, as snow shall they be white. If they are reddened as crimson, as wool shall they become” (Isa. 1:18, CV). The great prostitute is clothed in cambric and purple and scarlet, but to the

bride, it is granted to be clothed in clean resplendent cambric, which is the just awards of the saints.

Those who come out of the great tribulation have rinsed their robes and whitened them in the blood of the Lamb, and the armies of heaven are dressed in clean white cambric (Rev. 18:16, 19:8, 7:14, 19:14). “Expiate me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; rinse me, and I shall be whiter than snow” (Ps. 51:7)!

The throne is white! All will be set right. The righteousness of God will be served. The issue of all things will be what is right. A simple dependence upon the character of God is sufficient to sweep away all the teachings and theories of humanity. The judgment will not be slack in any detail, but there can be no fear regarding the outcome.

The Throne Is Great

The throne is great because of the majesty of the one who is seated upon it.

And I perceived a great white throne, and Him
Who is sitting upon it, from Whose face earth and
heaven fled, and no place was found for them.
(Rev. 20:11)

Here sits the glorified Christ, the Son of God. He is described as having eyes like fire and feet like bronze and a voice like many waters and out of his mouth issues a sharp two-edged blade, and his face shines like the sun (Rev. 1:14–16). And he sits on the throne representing his Father, the God of all creation.

Yet it seems that God is seated there as well. God is “the Judge of all” (Heb. 12:23). Along with this thought consider also that “neither is the Father judging anyone, but has given all judging to the Son, that all may be honoring the Son, according as they are honoring the Father” (John 5:22). And yet just before Christ spoke these words, he said,

The Son cannot be doing anything of Himself if
it is not what He should be observing the Father

doing, for whatever He may be doing, this the Son also is doing likewise. For the Father is fond of the Son and is showing Him all that He is doing.
(John 5:19–20)

Christ expressed this or a similar thought in a very simple manner in Revelation 3:21 when he said, “The one who is conquering, to him will I be granting to be seated with Me on My throne as I, also, conquer, and am seated with My Father on His throne.” Simply put, the conquering ones will be in unity with Christ and share in his authority as Christ is in unity with the Father and shares in his authority.

Since Revelation 20:11 speaks of the manifest terror of both humanity and the spiritual realm at the appearance of this throne, it is eminently important that we grasp the supremacy of the one sitting on the throne. The unity of the Father and Son is flawless. The Son may be seen on the throne by those who denied and disbelieved and murdered him. Yet he is there as the representative of his Father, and he may be looked upon as God. However well or poorly we understand these things, one fact remains true: no greater authority exists than the authority who will be seated on the throne, and the time will have come for all to give answer to him. The throne is great because he who sits upon it is great.

The throne is great because of the scope of its authority. All those of heaven and earth are convened before it. Never before has the universe witnessed a judgment of such magnitude. Hades will be emptied. All humanity from Adam forward (except those called before in grace) will be brought to give account. The innumerable throngs of heaven will stand there. The sheer number of beings present there will stagger the mind.

The throne is great because of what it accomplishes. The works of humanity will be judged, corrected, and set right. The minds of humanity will be brought to a greater realization of the truth. The political philosophies and ideals of humanity will be proven. And every religious system will be revealed. All these aspects of human life

have parallel aspects to life in the spiritual realm. The spiritual beings will have a similar judgment appropriate for them.

In addition, it appears that by this throne comes the judgment by which all the physical works and evidence of humanity on earth, as well as those of the spiritual beings in the heavens, will pass through the fire of judgment. And here is the throne that brings an end to death. This throne is great!

The judgment of this throne is great. We do not know if Adam and Eve lived for days or weeks or years before that one solitary act of disobedience brought the judgment of death upon the whole human race. Some have suggested it was only minutes or hours. Only two out of the billions of humanity were present there, yet all humanity was judged there. When Christ became flesh, he underwent a trial by the Adversary in the wilderness. He was on the verge of starvation, and the trials and testing he underwent were much more severe than that of Adam, yet there are many parallels between them.

But Christ's testing and the proving of his faith were not limited to one test in the wilderness. His entire life was a test, consummating in the cross—the most severe trial of all. He proved himself faithful. His was the second testing of humanity, and he passed the test. And now he is designated by his Father as the judge. And he who was faithful through an entire lifetime convenes judgment for all concerning the works and deeds of their lifetimes. And so all humanity that was plunged into a judgment of death for a sin they did not participate in will have a judge to rectify all the wrongs of their lives, and he is a judge who walked where they walked. The throne is great because of the judgment made there.

The Great White Throne Judgment

And the scrolls were opened...and the dead were
judged by that which is written in the scrolls in
accord with their acts...and they were condemned
[judged], each in accord with their acts.

(Rev. 20:12–13)

The word *condemned* used here by the CV comes from a variance in Greek texts. Some manuscripts have *krino* or *judged*, and some have *kata-krino* or *down-judged* or *condemned*. Most English translations follow the use of *judged* rather than *condemned*, favoring *judged* as the original reading.

In the context of Romans 3:1–20 *condemned* would seem to be in place, but where the context is about to announce the first decree from the great white throne. “Death will be no more. . . for the former things pass away” (Rev. 21:4). Condemnation is out of place.

Acts are the basis of judgment at the great white throne. Notice specifically that there is no mention of judgment according to sins. Sin is directional. It is the missing of God’s mark, and it was resolved at Golgotha. Deeds and acts are the outworking of beliefs and codes. They are the outworking of character and emotion. They are the embodiment of human passions. Deeds and acts show us what people’s standards are. They show what is inside the human.

The great white throne judgment is the time when every individual, except for those chosen before in grace, will have all their own personal views, beliefs, and understandings brought to the divine touchstone of truth. All that is wrong will become apparent. All that is right will become apparent. The enlightenment shining forth at the great white throne will be of a far greater magnitude than humanity has ever known. The great white throne judgment is illumination, and the sentence that follows is the means of realization.

There has always been light—the light of nature, the light of conscience, the light of the Jewish nation, the light of the church, the brilliant beacon of Golgotha. But all these were lights in the darkness—lights that could be and to some degree have been hidden under bushels. Each human microcosm has had glimmers and rays of illumination. Some have been so enlightened they became luminaries. But the great white throne judgment will be a time when the vast innumerable throngs of beings, both human and spirit will all be so immeasurably enlightened that it will affect a tremendous illumination of the macrocosm.

In 2 Peter 3:10–13, Peter says that the “earth and the *works* [Greek: *ergon*] in it shall be found.” This happens when the heavens

pass by with a booming noise, and the elements are dissolved by combustion. Not only are the acts [*ergon*] of one's life judged, but the physical works of humanity will also pass through the fire. The skyscrapers, the bridges, the hydroelectric dams, the landfills brimming with glass, vinyl, newsprint, plastics, disposable diapers, and all sorts of the works of humanity shall all be dissolved by combustion. Since this is identified as a judgment upon works, it would be appropriate for it to occur in conjunction with the judgment upon the works of people's lives.

In fact, this may provide a key for understanding the events of that day more clearly.

How are those judged at the great white throne transported to the new earth? This is not so much a problem for those believing that endless conscious torment in the lake of fire is the judgment pronounced at the great white throne. They usually present the lake of fire removed some distance from the bliss of the new earth. But that view is unscriptural. Those judged at the great white throne will be on the new earth. The leaves of the tree of life are for their healing, not for those who are already immortal. People judged at the great white throne will make up the nations that continue to learn subjection until all are finally headed up in Christ.

It seems the great white throne judgment takes place relative to the present earth. The passage speaks of the sea giving up the dead in it, but on the new earth, there is no sea. If these references to the sea are literal, it seems possible the judgment may transpire on some plane above the earth—a plane of existence maintained by the authority of the throne. If we become captivated by the logistics of these things, we will miss the point.

The vision is showing that the entire creation is standing on the ground of judgment and that the new creation rests upon the just judging of God. While humanity's deeds and works are judged, they will also be witnessing the passing away of earth in fire. All man's works that cannot pass judgment will be burned. For the celestial beings, the same situation is described. They are judged personally, and the heavens, their realm, passes away to be replaced by new. As

all this transpires, there is one great common element that links the new heaven and earth with the old, and that link is this throne.

As was noted previously, this throne is called the great white throne only in Revelation 20:11. In verse 12, it is mentioned again, but it is simply called *the throne*. And it must be this same throne, which is in view and from which decrees come forth, while John is beholding the new heaven and earth coming into being and while the New Jerusalem is descending. While John is seeing the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God, he hears a decree from the throne. What throne? The throne of the context is the great white throne.

There is no evidence to support the thought that this might be some different throne that is already in the New Jerusalem as it descends. Instead this throne takes its place in that new city after it comes to earth (Rev. 22:3). And it is by the authority of this throne that humanity is transported from the old earth to the new one. It was previously noted that the great white throne is shared by the Father and the Son. This agrees with what is found on the new earth. The first two references to this throne on the new earth mention both God and the Son (21:3, 5). And the two remaining references to the throne call it “the throne of God and the Lambkin” (22:1, 3). There is only one throne in view from Revelation 20:11 through the end of the book.

So the great white throne is introduced as the seat from which humanity and spirits are judged and from which the judgment upon this planet and the heavens issues forth. And as these judgments are completed, the first recorded decree from the great white throne issues forth.

Lo! the tabernacle of God is with mankind, and He will be tabernacling with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them. And He will be brushing away every tear from their eyes. And death will be no more, nor mourning, nor clamor, nor misery; they will be no more, for the former things passed away.... Lo! New am I making all!

(Rev. 21:3–5)

The same great white throne from which all the dead are judged is the throne that continues on through the final eon and from which the rule that issues forth is described as “a river of water of life, resplendent as crystal.” How can the throne from which the decree comes forth “Death will be no more!” be the bench of execution that so many have made it? This throne has been so poorly understood.

Death and Hades

And I perceived the dead, the great and the small,
 standing before the throne. And scrolls were opened.
 And another scroll was opened which is the scroll
 of life. And the dead were judged by that which was
 written in the scrolls in accord with their acts.

(Rev. 20:12)

John’s use of the word *dead* here is curious because he doesn’t speak of resurrection until the next verse. There is more than one way in which this may be understood. It is common for John to run with the flow of the vision and then to back up and give more details. In chapter 21:2, he perceives the New Jerusalem descending out of heaven from God. Later he elaborates on the New Jerusalem in great detail. This flashback presentation could be the explanation for John seeing the dead before the resurrection is mentioned. In the supernaturally given vision, he might even know who they were if he had not seen them raised yet. Verses 13–15 would then be explanatory of verse 12.

It is also possible that the word *dead* may be used figuratively here. It could refer to those living on the current earth who go directly to the great white throne judgment without dying first. If that is the case, then the unbelievers of the millennium may be judged before the resurrection to judgment occurs. It may be assumed that those granted eonian life will be all around at the judgment, though they are not judged there themselves. The term could be a figurative antithesis to distinguish between those having eonian life and those who do not.

And the sea gives up the dead in it, and death and the unseen give up the dead in them. And they were condemned [judged], each in accord with their acts. And death and the unseen were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death—the lake of fire. And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire.
(Rev. 20:13–15)

The first sentence of this quotation seems redundant. Why is the sea mentioned separately from death and hades? It is possible that John is not referring here to the oceans or any geographical sea of the earth. If by *the sea*, John is referring to *the sea as he perceived it in chapter 13*, this could refer to the volatile mass of humanity out of which the beast arose. Then the meaning could be that people from the kingdoms that made up the beast and died before the time of the judgment were raised at that time.

Death and *hades* are nearly synonymous with thoughts of the *grave* and *entombment*, though death is related more to the aspect of dying, and hades to the idea of the receptacle or location of the dead. The redundancy of thought may provide emphasis that none are overlooked. None will be left out. A lack of proper burial can in no way hamper or limit the power of God to call back all who have died. All life is of the spirit of God. To think that any of the billions of humanity could be missed or forgotten or overlooked is as unthinkable as accusing God that he could lose part of himself.

Death and the unseen (*hades*), as well as the sea, are personified in this sentence. They are spoken of as *giving up their prisoners*. This personification is reminiscent of other passages such as 1 Corinthians 15, where death is referred to as an enemy (v. 26)—an enemy that the scriptures taunt as they glory in the resurrection (vv. 54–57). In Romans 6:9, it says, “Death is lording it over Him no longer.” Now that Christ is risen. But the personification of death and hades may aid the understanding of these statements more than would normally be expected from figures of speech. John was beholding a vision. What was he seeing? Death and the unseen are actors in John’s vision that have appeared before.

In Revelation 6:8, death is seen as a rider on a greenish horse who goes about slaying one fourth of humanity. And the unseen followed him, perhaps as a second rider on another greenish horse—his description is not given. John saw death as a grim reaper riding about slaying multitudes of mankind, and hades followed behind, evidently collecting the dead.

We are not told exactly what John perceived at this point in the vision, but as we consider the vision in the context of the book, it is most likely that John beheld two riders on greenish horses, death and hades, cast into a lake of fire. This scenario would be in keeping with the vision as a whole. The important thing to grasp is the literal reality portrayed by the vision.

Nearly all pagan religions name gods or demons who are stationed over the realm of the dead. If this practice were the result of God assigning spiritual beings over this aspect of creation or the result of Satan making such assignments in his kingdom, then these riders on greenish horses could also represent those spiritual powers.

According to some doctrinal beliefs, something is missing in this passage. Those who define Gehenna as a place of conscious torment should wonder why it is missing in this passage. The text seems to wish to assure us that all the dead are present at this judgment. Not only are we told that both death and hades are emptied, but even the sea is mentioned. If Gehenna were a receptacle for the wicked where they continued to exist in torments, then why is it overlooked here and not emptied for judgment?

In fact, John never even mentions Gehenna, not in any of his writings. Its omission here confirms the definition we have assigned to it earlier: Gehenna is the garbage dump where the bodies of dead criminals were burned in disgrace (Isa. 66:23–24).

Defining Texts on the Second Death

The casting of death and the unseen into the lake of fire should not be understood as meaning *all those in the realm of death* or *all those in the realm of hades* were cast into the lake of fire. Clearly, that is *not* the intended meaning. Death and the unseen had just been

emptied by the resurrection to judgment. They are void of humanity when they are cast into the lake of fire. And in the order in which John relates the vision, death and hades are cast into the lake of fire before the people not written in the book of life are cast there.

The order in which John relates these events of the vision is critical, and it raises another question. If the second death were a repetition of the first death, then why are death and the unseen cast into the lake of fire? Instead, we should expect a command to come from the throne.

Death! Prepare yourself! Prepare to slay the majority of this
vast multitude! Hades! Open wide your mouth! Prepare
to swallow up millions! Show your insatiable hunger!
(cf. Prov. 30:15–16)

If not this, we would expect John to behold a new rider on a greenish horse and a new character for hades following him. But death and hades do not take the roles they have played previously through the ages. A better conclusion is that the casting of death and hades into the lake of fire changes them. The lake of fire doesn't change; it is a visionary representation of divine judgment, but death and hades change.

Death and the unseen are not living entities to be brought into subjection. Their being cast into the place of subjugation, therefore must mean that the process and condition of death and hades will be placed under a new measure of control. No longer will death be allowed to run its full course. It will be restricted.

This thought is in full agreement with the first recorded decree from the great white throne. "Death will be no more...new am I making all!" (Rev. 21:3–5).

The presence of the tree of life and the water of life ensure that those not yet blessed with immortality will be sustained until the sentence of their judgment is completed and they are vivified (Rev. 22:1–2). Mortality, the last vestige of death, will continue into the final eon of God's purpose, but it will not be allowed to find its consummation in death.

Also, there is no mention of a second hades. This in itself should assure us of two things: (1) that the first death and second death are not the same and (2) that death has reached another step in its eventual abolition. The descriptions of those in the judgment pictured as a lake of fire exhibit conscious existence. Our study of the first death has shown the necessity of the hadean or unseen state with literal death. Without a second hades, the teaching of annihilation is bankrupt.

The timing of John's definition of the second death is important. There are four mentions of the second death in Revelation, and two of them define the second death as the lake of fire. This is the first of the two (20:14, 21:8). As soon as he sees the figures representing death and hades cast into the lake of fire, immediately, he defines the lake of fire as the second death. This shows that the first death is passing a key point in being eliminated (1 Cor. 15:26) and that mortality, the final vestige of death, is all that remains.

In the second passage of definition, the second death is placed in contrast to a good relationship with God.

- A1 "To him who is thirsting I shall be giving of the spring of the water of life gratuitously.
 B1 He who is conquering shall be enjoying this allotment,
 C1 and I shall be a God to him and he shall be a son to Me.
 A2 Yet the timid, and unbelievers, and the abominable, and murderers, and paramours, and enchanter, and idolaters, and all the false—
 B2 their part is in the lake burning with fire and sulphur,
 C2 which is the second death" (Rev. 21:6b–8).

In A1 and A2, those who thirst and receive the water of life are contrasted with unbelieving sinners. Those conquering (B1) by faith in the blood of the Lamb shall be enjoying *this* (plural) *allotment*, which refers back to the blessings of the edict from the throne. The conquerors enjoying the *allotment* are in contrast with those (B2)

whose *part* is in the lake of fire. The final contrast (C1 and C2) is concerned with different relationships to God. The conquering ones are sons of God. Those who didn't thirst for the water of life but rather for the fleshly descriptions of sins are in the second death.

Contextually we find the second death to be defined as a change from the first death and the entrance into a state of being under divine judgment—a state that will eventually change.

An *allotment* is a possession like a piece of land or a position of authority from which the tenant can receive profit and benefit. A *part* is a nondescript segment of something. This passage in Revelation 21 is not the only place where *allotments* (or *lots*) and *parts* are contrasted with each other. Matthew 24:45–51 and Luke 12:41–46 both relate parabolic examples of faithful and unfaithful slaves. In both passages, the unfaithful servant is cut asunder and appointed a *part* among the unfaithful and hypocrites. This is in contrast to being given authority over the household.

The word *part* in these passages carries a negative connotation. In Revelation 21:6–8, the same contrast is made. The overcomers enjoy the *allotment* of the water of life and sonship to God while the others have their *part* in the lake of fire, which is the second death. In both cases, a division is made. Some receive an *allotment*, others have their *part*. In the parables, the unpleasant *part* was to be experienced at the same time as the *allotment* was to be enjoyed. The same holds true with eonian life and the second death.

Cast into the Lake of Fire

“And if anyone was not found written in the scroll of life, he was cast into the lake of fire” (Rev. 20:15).

What is missing here? What might be expected in this verse that does not appear? The advocates of endless torment are quick to add the time duration of verse 10, where the Adversary is cast into the lake of fire where the beast and false prophet are. “And they shall be tormented day and night for the eons of the eons” (cf. 14:11 and 19:3). The AV inaccurately translates that time as “forever and ever.”

One reason that time frame is missing is because the first of those two eons will then be past. John's very next words are that he beheld a new heaven and earth. The millennial eon closes with the great white throne judgment. But why is there no mention of "torment for the eon" or "torment for the eon of the eons"? The great white throne brings about a change in the vision.

Previously, the beast and false prophet, which represent large political systems and groups of humanity, were in view. Those beasts, as a collective whole, may be seen as being tormented for the eons. But with the judgment of individuals according to their individual works in view, the length and severity of torment will vary greatly. It is no longer appropriate to speak of their judgment in the terms applied to an evil collective whole. And the strong likelihood remains that some will receive life at the great white throne.

Also, the duration of time between the great white throne judgment and the appearance of the new heaven and earth is not mentioned. It appears that the pronouncements of the judge are completed during the millennial eon while the sentences of many judgments will extend into the eon of the new heaven and earth.

The Solution to the Riddle

We have given answer to several questions which clung to the name *second death*.

John saw a lake of fire in his vision, and when death and hades are cast into the lake of fire, the lake of fire becomes the second death. The lake of fire is the description of judgments that endure throughout the thousand years or millennium. During that period of time, it is referred to only as the lake of fire, not as the second death. The beasts were cast into the lake of fire at the commencement of the thousand years. The beasts are a figurative representation for the coalition of nations who were opposed to God and alive on the earth from the time of Jacob's trouble. The lake of fire is a pictorial or visionary representation of the glory throne judgment of the nations and the eonian chastisement they receive during the millennium (Matt. 25:31–46).

A key element in understanding why the lake of fire is not called the second death at first resides in the fact that two distinct time periods and two distinct judgments in God's purpose are in view. The first is the millennial eon, which takes us from the time of the glory throne judgment to the great white throne judgment. The second is the eon of the new heavens and new earth, which takes us from the great white throne judgment through the abolition of death and the subjection of all to Christ.

The literal future fulfillment of the lake of fire will be living under the sentence of a judgment—some measure of hardship and learning subjection to Christ. That aspect does not change from one eon to the next. However, there are changes that take place and distinguish these two final eons from each other.

1. The millennial eon will be a time of strict justice, but the final eon will be a time of reconciliation. This is typified by the rule of the Lion versus the rule of the Lamb.
2. During the millennial eon, many in the lake of fire will die as is evidenced by the presence of Gehenna in the teachings of Christ and some of the prophets. There the bodies of executed criminals will be disposed. But during the eon of the new heaven and earth, mortality will not be consummated in death. The lives of all mortals will be sustained by the beneficent rule of their subjector. "Death will be no more" (Rev. 21:4)!
3. During the millennial eon, the only ones alive on earth who have been resurrected will be God's chosen ones. The thoughts of *second life* and *second death* go together. The chosen ones cannot be harmed by the second death (Rev. 2:11).
4. During the eon of the new heaven and earth, a large percentage of the people on earth will have been resurrected to the great white throne judgment. They will be living a mortal life for the *second* time. This is a significant part of the reason for the term *second death*. Their

mortal condition will be all that remains of death, since death and hades have been cast into the lake of fire.

When Adam was disobedient and sinned, all humanity was judged under his headship, and the judgment brought death upon all (Rom. 5:12). God's chosen ones are judged a second time, at the dais of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10) under his headship. At the great white throne, the remainder of humanity, who have not yet been judged under the headship of Christ, will be brought to judgment under humanity's new head.

Since the great white throne judgment finishes the *second* race-wide judgment of humanity, the term *second* is especially suitable to the condition which follows. Death was the first judgment passed upon disobedience, shame, and unrighteousness in Eden, under Adam's headship. Then it was a mortal condition that consummated in death with the loss of access to the tree of life. Under the headship of Christ, those whose deeds are judged as disobedient, shameful, and unrighteous will also live in a mortal condition, but it will not be consummated in death. As they learn subjection to the new head of humanity, they will become identified with him in his death and resurrection.

Under the headship of Christ, death and condemnation will be abolished and replaced with life's justifying (Rom. 5:18–19). "The first man, Adam, 'became a living soul'; the last Adam a vivifying Spirit" (1 Cor. 15:45). Ultimately, all will be made immortal.

Life accompanies submission to Christ's headship. Involved here are some very significant seconds: *second man*, *second life*, *second judgment*, and *second headship*. *Second death* is a natural term to describe the condition of those who are not yet blessed with immortality. Those who are not in the second death condition at that time are in a second-life condition—immortality. Second death is a good term for this contrast, and mortality is the perfect contrast for immortality.

Enemies

Consider for a moment the contents of the lake of fire. It holds the beast, the false prophet, Satan, the spirit beings subject to Satan,

death and hades, and anyone not written in the scroll of life. (The last group may seem redundant since the beast and false prophet are made up of people not written in the scroll of life.)

The first six mentioned are all obviously enemies of humanity. It has been shown that the literal fulfillment of the lake of fire that John saw in the vision will be a condition of subjugation to Christ and his chosen ones. This is what the apostle Paul speaks of in 1 Corinthians 15, when he says that “He must be reigning until He should be placing all His enemies under His feet. The last enemy is being abolished: death” (1 Cor. 15: 25–26). Death and hades are the last of these six enemies cast into the lake of fire. The theme of the subjection of Christ’s enemies, quoted from Psalm 110, echoes throughout the New Testament (Matt. 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:43; Acts 2:35; 1 Cor. 15:25; Heb. 1:13, 10:13; and repeatedly throughout Revelation). Obviously, the Adversary qualifies as an enemy (Matt. 13:39, Luke 10:19). Death, the last enemy, is seen in the vision being cast into the lake of fire sometime after the Adversary.

As well as being enemies of Christ, everything in the lake of fire may be viewed as an enemy of humanity at large. It is easy to see the Adversary and his messengers as enemies. It is also easy to see death and the unseen as enemies of humanity. But how do the faithless of humanity fit such a description?

Again, with respect to the lake of fire, it is the acts of humanity—the acts of the flesh—that are in view. Humanity’s acts are certainly among humanity’s enemies. Humanity is controlled by its own actions.

How often does one fail to do what should be done because some previous action created prohibitive circumstances? How often does one fail to do what is best because the actions of another change his disposition? Rather than controlling our actions and doing what is right, our actions and the actions of others often control us.

The reign of Christ will end the tyranny of the flesh. From this point of view, we boldly say the purpose of the lake of fire is to rid humanity of its enemies by placing them all under the feet of the representative man, Christ.

Evidently, this is the view that is intended to be taken on this passage. As was noted earlier, there will be some at the great white throne judgment who will receive life. Some such as the queen of the south and the repentant Ninevites would be among them (Matt. 12:41–42). They are not numbered among humanity's enemies.

The Glory of the Lake of Fire

The intent of the scriptures is that we should glory in the lake of fire. This statement would probably shock many who hold traditional views. If the lake of fire is seen as a place in which vast numbers of individuals suffer unspeakable torment in literal flames, we cannot glory in it. But if John's vision is seen for what it is, we may truly rejoice in it.

In the vision, John was seeing the full and final expression and embodiment of Satan's power and authority in the political and social systems of earth. The lake of fire is where these systems, the incarnation of the lie, are consumed by the truth of God.

The vision shows all Christ's enemies being placed under his feet. The vision shows death being conquered and abolished. The vision shows all the acts of the flesh being judged. This is the prerequisite to life in the spirit for all. Viewed in this way, the judgment of the lake of fire is part of the great victory of Christ over evil for which every faithful heart has yearned.

Nations and generations of individuals will indeed be placed under the difficulty and burden of subjection to righteous rule. But in this state of subjugation, whatever torment there may be in the experience of each individual will be what is needed to burn out the structure of the lie that the realization of the truth might be fully founded and built up and become a bulwark for faith in God.

The New Heaven and New Earth

The repetition of the words *heaven* and *earth* and the labeling of each one as *new* and *former* in the first verse of chapter 21 creates a momentary pause in the vision that is demanded by the awe-inspir-

ing events that take place. The former heaven and earth pass away in fire (2 Pet. 3:7, 10–13). This is a great eonian transition. Everything will be different from what it was before. Politics will be replaced with the knowledge of God. All strife and conflict, every cause of grief, all that is false will be eliminated. In Genesis, man was driven from the garden of God; but in the new heaven and on the new earth, God will dwell with mankind.

We should note that there are those who do not understand the coming of the new heavens and earth as a universal and complete destruction of the current existence. Peter Leithart in *The Promise of His Appearing: An Exposition of Second Peter* is one such voice.¹³ In his defense of Preterism, he understands some uses of “heaven and earth” to be an expression for the political system of the world.

Other commentators define similar language in Haggai 2:6–7 and 20–22, as descriptive of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem, similar interpretations are given for such passages as Matthew 24:29–30 and Revelation 12:6–17.

This mode of interpretation seems to be an extension of the thought of the sun ruling the day and the moon ruling the night. The idea is more of an upset in the reigning powers rather than a physical destruction of earth and heaven.

There is also some question about what should be understood by “the elements [*stoichea*] shall be dissolved by combustion” (2 Pet. 3:10, CV). Michael Heiser and Brian Godawa have created considerable literature in which they understand this word to be capable of representing the spiritual realm at least in some NT passages. Support for this view is found in some of the translations in the Revised Standard Version (RSV), New Revised Standard Version (NRSV), and the English Standard Version (ESV).

In fairness to this view, we would say that the same person can experience both a baptism of water and a baptism of fire. The earth, which was swaddled in a cover of clouds, somewhat like the Christ child (Job 38:9, Luke 2:12), also has undergone a baptism of water in the flood and, according to Peter, is looking forward to a baptism of fire. In these coming judgments, will the current heavens and earth pass out of existence to be replaced by new? Or will they

be cleansed from their present condition and renewed like a human being glorified?

The fact that this occurs between the millennial eon, and the final eon gives it a setting of moving from the divine government of the millennium to the divine government upon the new earth. This is a different transition than is described in the passages noted above.

The Sea Is No More

The sea stands alone in contrast here (Rev. 21:1). The *new heaven* and *new earth* are accented by parallel contrast with *former heaven* and *former earth*.

What is the import of the absence of the sea? Though we are not sure, we will venture some thoughts. This may be a contrast with earth's conditions during previous eons when sin, death, and ruin were part of the norm. The earth was overflowed with water in the opening of Genesis and also during Noah's flood. These conditions were the results of judgment upon sin. God set bounds to hold back the sea's proud waves of destruction (Job 38:8–11), providing a habitable place for humanity.

From this viewpoint, the absence of the sea suggests the idea that no longer is there a chance of passing under an overwhelming judgment and that death and ruin will have no place on the new earth. This agrees with the decree from the great white throne (vv. 3–5).

In some instances, the *sea* (*thalassa*) and the *submerged chaos/bottomless pit* or *abyss* (*abussos*) seem to be interchangeable terms. The wild beast ascends out of the sea (Rev. 13:1) and also is said to ascend out of the abyss (Rev. 11:7, 17:8). The abyss is where the demon-locusts are locked (Rev. 9:1–3). Some think this is the same as Tartarus (2 Pet. 2:4). While the abyss may appear to be a prison for spiritual beings, at other times it seems to refer to the oceans or to subterranean waters (Gen. 1:2, 7:11, 8:2; Exod. 15:5; Ps. 104:6; etc.).

Yet in other instances, it occurs as a symbolic term for death as in Romans 10:7: "Who will be descending into the submerged chaos [*abussos*]? That is, to be leading Christ up from among the

dead.” The Hebrew thought behind these expressions may have been that the measure of descent is the measure of separation from God, thereby expressing a higher degree of alienation from him than life on the land. The expression “lower parts of the earth” (Eph. 4:9; Ezek. 3:14, 16, 18, 32:18, 24; Ps. 88:4–7; cf. also Jonah 2:2–7), though requiring no thought of water, is a similar expression, which may also suggest death. The seas simply form in the lowest parts of the earth because of gravity.

The point here is that the sea is linked to the ideas of death, condemnation, and separation from God. The sea, in a personified sense, will be no more because those conditions symbolically suggested by it will be no more.

The sea may also be seen as a feature of this earth that is subject to the power of the air. The winds of the atmosphere can move upon the water and whip it up into treacherous billowing waves. Examples of this may be found in Mark 4:37, Luke 8:23, Acts 27, Jonah 1:4, and in Daniel 7:2, which is part of Daniel’s vision where the beasts came up out of the sea.

Wind and *spirit* are the same word in the biblical languages. Thus, the wind may be viewed as a spiritual force moving waters, and waters are sometimes typical of the nations of the earth. Examples where raging nations are spoken of as billows of the sea are not uncommon (Jer. 51:42; Ps. 65:7, 89:9–10; Ezek. 26:3–5; etc.).

The thousand years end with the Adversary inciting the nations into a billowing wave of rebellion to overflow the citadel of the saints (Rev. 20:7–9). Revelation mentions the sea as representing both the great bodies of water and as the place from which Satan could raise a vast following. We see the vast variety of marine life as a revelation of God’s glory in creation, and we do not expect that display of his wisdom and glory to vanish. We do not know if John’s perception of the sea in chapter 13 matches the absence of the sea mentioned here. But we know at present the spiritual realm leads humanity around as if it has a ring in its nose.

From the perspective of these thoughts, the absence of the sea in Revelation 21:1 suggests that this characteristic of humanity will be stilled. Because of the judgment upon spiritual beings, they will

no longer affect humanity in a negative way. Those of humanity who are perfected are no longer lower than the angels/messengers. Indeed, the body of Christ will be judging messengers (1 Cor. 6:3). And in becoming sons of God, humanity will be equal with the messengers (Luke 20:36) at least in some ways.

During the final eon with a new heaven and a new earth, the creation will “be freed from the slavery of corruption into the glorious freedom of the children of God” (Rom. 8:21). All the things mentioned in Revelation 21:1–4 are those things for which “the entire creation is groaning and travailing” (Rom. 8:22). It is a great liberation that is coming.

The Great White Throne Pictured in the Old Testament

The Old Testament presents a portrait or cameo of the great white throne. Solomon built a throne—the likes of which had never been seen in any kingdom. We read in 2 Chronicles 9:17–19 (see also 1 Kings 10:18–20),

The king also made a great ivory throne and overlaid it with pure gold. The throne had six steps and a footrest of gold, kept bolted to the throne, also armrests on this side and on that side of the place of the seat, and two lions standing beside the armrests. Twelve lions were standing there on the six steps, on this side and on that side; such a thing had not been made for any other kingdom.

Let’s notice some things about this throne. First, it was made of ivory. Ivory is white. Second, it was overlaid with pure gold. The word for *pure* is often translated *clean*, and it was used frequently to speak of sacrifices and things that were ceremonially clean and presentable to God. It was also used to describe pure water and, in that context, could even be translated *clear*. The book of Revelation speaks of pure gold that was clear as crystal—clear as glass. Probably in Solomon’s day, the gold-plated throne was gold-colored. But the word used can suggest the idea of clearness or transparency. And the wording of the OT doesn’t contradict the idea of transparency. A

white throne overlaid with crystal clear gold would still be white. The ivory is an emphasized aspect of the throne.

Another common characteristic is the greatness of this throne. *Great* is part of the description of the thrones in both the NT and OT. And the OT says there was none approaching its greatness in any other kingdom. There has never been and will never be a kingdom on earth that will match the greatness of God's kingdom when it comes on earth.

In the NT, the great white throne is the seat of rule and judgment for the entire earth and even for all generations since creation. And since it is the throne of both God and the Lamb, it will rule over even the celestial realm. A river of the water of life issues from this throne, showing that its rule brings life. The OT calls it a *great ivory throne*.

The footstool was permanently attached to the chair portion of the throne. The CV says the footstool was *kept bolted* to the throne. In Isaiah 66:1, Yahweh says: "The heavens are My throne, And the earth My footstool; Where then is the house that you shall build for Me" (see also Matt. 5:34–35)? Could we find a more beautiful and picturesque way to represent the union of heaven and earth than to say God's throne was bolted to his footstool? This is what the exercise of the authority of the great white throne does. It unites heaven and earth. The first recorded words from the great white throne testify exactly that

Lo! the tabernacle of God is with mankind, and He
will be tabernacling with them, and they will be His
peoples, and God Himself will be with them.

(Rev. 21:3)

Heaven and earth will be bolted together by God's presence in humanity. The great white throne will be the seat of rule during the eon of the eons. During that great final eon, the administration of the complement of the eras will be exercised and completed. All will be brought under the headship of Christ (Eph. 1:10). God will be

glorified in the church or body of Christ and in Christ Jesus for all the generations of the eon of the eons (Eph. 3:21).

This throne/footstool combination was adorned with fourteen lions. Evidently the lions were carved in the ivory from which the throne and footstool were made. The lions, no doubt, represent the kingly rule through the promised seed of the tribe of Judah. Christ is called both the Lion and the Lamb. If the twelve lions mentioned with the steps were part of the footstool, they may represent Christ reigning on earth through a reborn Israel known for its twelve tribes.

The armrests are the place where the hands and arms of the king are poised. The armrests represent his administrative power that will bring all under Christ's headship (Eph. 1:10). One of the two lions at the armrests could represent the body of Christ through whom Christ rules in the heavens, and the other could represent reborn Israel through whom he rules the earth, all in one united administration.

Solomon's Reign and the Great White Throne

It is not without design that Solomon built his famed great white throne. The first three kings of Israel and events in their reigns represent the three eons of the kingdom. It is easy to miss this correspondence today because of the kingdom delay brought on by the rejection of Christ. With his rejection, the apostle Paul was called to begin a ministry kept secret in previous ages, a ministry to bring in a full complement of people from the nations.

But the kingdom in which Israel is prominent will start up again before this eon ends. And it will be a *new* start.

Therefore, behold, the days are coming, averring is Yahweh, when it shall not be said any longer, As Yahweh lives, Who brought the sons of Israel up from the land of Egypt, but rather, As Yahweh lives, Who brought the sons of Israel up from the land of the north and from all the lands where He had driven them away. For I will restore them onto their ground which I gave to their fathers.

(Jer. 16:14–15, cf. Zech. 10:5–10)

This shows a new beginning for Israel that is clearly distinguished from the exodus from Egypt. The next verse in Jeremiah says, “Behold I shall send for many fishermen, averring is Yahweh, and they will fish for them [the scattered Israelites]” (16:16).

It is difficult to think that Christ did not have this verse in mind when he said to the Galilean fishermen, “I will make you fishers of men” (Matt. 4:19, Luke 5:10). If Christ had not been rejected, there could have been a great regathering of Israel led by his disciples, beginning at Pentecost and followed by establishment of the kingdom, fulfilling Matthew’s commission (28:18–20).

If such a case had happened, the dispersion from which Israel would have been regathered to fulfill Jeremiah’s prophecy would have been the Babylonian captivity. But since Christ was rejected, the future regathering will be from the dispersion beginning in AD 70—a dispersion wider than that associated with Babylon.

Similarly, if such a case had happened, John the Baptist would have fulfilled the prophecies about the return of Elijah (Matt. 17:9–13, etc.), but now we are probably looking for Elijah himself to return and bring revival to Israel. If such a case had happened, the triumphal entry into Jerusalem could have been Israel’s reception of their Messiah (Ps. 118:22–28, Zech. 9:9).

In the past, Israel cried, “His blood be on us, and on our children!” claiming responsibility for his death. In the future, Israel will cry, “His blood be on us and on our children!” claiming his sacrifice as the atonement for their sins. All these events have now become foreshadowings of what is yet to occur at Christ’s return.

In the last days before the crucifixion of Christ, he left the temple and the continual opposition he faced there. As they were going, the disciples asked him about the buildings, and it is not unlikely that their questions were concerned with OT prophecies about the temple. Jesus told them the current temple would be utterly destroyed. From the Mount of Olives, looking across the valley to the temple mount, Peter, James, and John asked him further questions about the timing of these events, the sign of his coming, and the end of this eon (Matt. 24, Mark 13; cf. also Luke 21, a prophecy with additional content).

Remembering Matthew 13's parables about the kingdom, we see a division at the end of this eon represented by the separating of the wheat and tares. Also, at that time, there will be false Christs coming to Israel with miraculous signs and wonders so convincing they would even deceive the elect, if that were possible (Matt. 24:21–25, Rev. 13:13–15).

So we see this eon ending with a Jewish kingdom reestablished, but it will be a kingdom deeply tainted with the sons of the wicked one. There are significant similarities between these events to come and what took place in the reign of Saul. Saul started his kingship with events that seemed to promise success. That start even included prophesying by Saul that somewhat resembled a Pentecost. But it was later seen that Saul was more concerned to please himself and the people than he was to please God. Saul's repeated confession "I have sinned" (1 Sam. 15:24, 30, 24:17, 26:21) shows this: a confession he shared with Pharaoh (Exod. 9:27, 10:16), which shows the inability to fulfill the law. Saul's name meaning *asked* is basically the same as *sheol*, and the reign of law is a reign of death (cf. Prov. 30:15–16).

Samuel anointed David (David means "beloved"; cf. Mark 1:11, etc.), and God's Spirit came upon him, and an evil spirit came upon Saul. Saul began trying to kill David and was persecuting any who openly supported him. So like in the days of our Lord, Israel's leadership took a sharp turn from what seemed to be good to being fully evil. David would have to overcome Saul's regime in the establishment of the kingdom under his reign (cf. Luke 19:11–27).

Similar to this is the overcoming of the 144,000. Because the man of lawlessness is seen in the temple of God, demonstrating himself to be God, we understand the apostasy spoken of there to identify a sharp change in the leadership of Israel's coming kingdom at the end of this age like there was in Saul's reign (2 Thess. 2).

This passage also speaks of the working of great deceiving miracles by the power of Satan and the man of lawlessness being destroyed by the brightness of Christ's coming (cf. Matt. 24:24–27). The Jews did not "receive the love of the truth for their salvation. And therefore, God will be sending them an operation of deception, for them to believe the falsehood" (2 Thess. 2:10–11). All this will

prove out who are truly of faith and who are not. We have noted that only one use of the word *arnion* (lambkin) in Revelation does not apply to Christ. We suggest the purpose of this is to help us identify a false Christ.

And I perceived another wild beast ascending
out of the land, and it had two horns *like* a
lambkin's and it spoke *as* a dragon.
(Rev. 13:11; emphasis mine)

Our emphasis on *like* is intended to highlight this idea, and the fact that this beast speaks *as* the dragon finishes the picture. This is the introduction of the false prophet.

In Saul's reign, the tabernacle worship and priesthood disintegrate. Our current parallel age is one ending in religious corruption, Jacob's trouble, a misled Israelite kingdom, the Antichrist (instead of Christ), the coming of Christ and rebirth of Israel, and the harvest judgment of the wheat and tares. Saul could never conquer all Israel's enemies, and a well-intentioned Israelite kingdom will not bring world peace apart from Christ. We see Saul's reign as typically representing all these things.

David's reign began with the recognition of his previous divine anointing and a second anointing as king over Judah. It progressed with his battling and conquering Israel's enemies in the surrounding countries. It brought peace and the restoration of true worship of God.

In comparison, the millennial eon will begin with the recognition of Christ's previous divine anointing at his baptism and his true kingship over a renewed Israel by virtue of his resurrection. It will continue with the subjection of the world powers which had persecuted the saints and with the worship of the true God.

But David was not allowed to build the temple of God because he was a man of blood. So also, the millennial reign does not achieve the final status of the kingdom because its character is that of strict righteousness, not reconciliation.

The millennium ends with the release of Satan and the gathering of hordes to surround the citadel of the saints, but this rebellion

is summarily vanquished when fire falls from heaven to consume the rebels.

As a parallel, between David's and Solomon's reigns, there was an attempted coup d'état by Adonijah, which he was trying to establish with his coronation at Zoheleth (meaning *serpent*). Solomon was quickly anointed, and the coup was quashed.

This surrounding of the citadel in Revelation seems to allude also to other passages of scripture. There is the contrast with Luke 21:20, where Christ speaks of Jerusalem being surrounded when Rome destroyed the temple. If Christ had been accepted as Messiah, the Roman invasion could have failed.

The same is true of the transition from the ministry of Elijah to that of Elisha. That transition also marked a change in character. It came when King Ahaziah sent a captain and his fifty soldiers to retrieve Elijah. When the soldiers had surrounded Elijah on his hilltop and given him orders to come to the king, Elijah called down fire from heaven to consume them. This happened twice.

The third captain and his fifty prostrated before Elijah and pleaded for his lenience and that he respond to the wounded king. Elijah responded, but the unbelieving king still died.

Solomon's reign followed with great demonstrations of his wisdom in judgment, his wisdom in building the temple, and in unprecedented prosperity (1 Kings 3:16–28). All the surrounding countries sought pacts of peaceful relationship to Israel. They recognized that Israel's worship of Yahweh was truly significant, and they blessed Yahweh for blessing Israel.

In comparison, the eon of the new heaven and earth will witness the wisdom of Christ in his judgments at the great white throne and establishing worldwide peace and prosperity. The nations of the world will walk according to the light of the New Jerusalem, and they will bring their glory to it. As the eon progresses, all in heaven and earth will become united under the headship of Christ, and God will become all in all. The footstool, earth, will become securely bolted to the throne, heaven. The eons of the kingdom show God's definite design and wisdom. Our current eon displays man's inability to fulfill the law and please God.

Only in God's grace does mankind have hope. The millennial eon will show humanity that no amount of good government—the reign by a nation on whom God's spirit will be poured out—no amount of swift, strict justice, no amount of uncorrupt politics can actually cure man's ills. As soon as Satan is released, the world follows him in revolt. But the millennial eon is not simply a display for the negatives of man's condition. Much evangelizing will be done.

Just as David subdued enemies and collected vast stores of wealth and materials for the temple of which God had given him a vision, the world will be prepared for the personal judgment of every human being and the correction of all wrongs. The great white throne will lead up to a new era of peace on the new earth and in the new heavens. Creation will be renewed as God becomes all in all.

The Edict from the Great White Throne

In 20:11, John saw *a* great white throne. He only calls this throne the *great white* throne once. After that, he calls it *the* throne. The definite article specifies a particular throne and points us back to his previous description “the great white throne.”

In verse 12, the dead all stand before *the* throne, which is the great white throne. In 21:3, John hears a voice coming out of *the* throne. Which throne? The great white throne. That is the throne of the context.

We must pause here a moment to speak of a difference that will be seen between the AV or KJV and almost all other translations. The AV says, “I heard a great voice *out of heaven*” (v. 3, the NKJV follows the KJV). The majority of versions read something like this: “I hear a loud voice *out of the throne*” (v. 3, CV). The manuscript evidence is very strong for “out of the throne.” In the Greek text, it is very easy to see the similarity between the phrases of verses 2 and 3.

Verse 2 speaks of the New Jerusalem coming down from God “out of the heavens.” It would be very easy for a copyist to mistakenly interchange the two phrases “out of the heavens” and “out of the throne.” If we transliterated the phrases, one would be *ek tou ouranou*, and the other would be *ek tou thronou*.

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

The *th-* in *throne* represents a *theta*, which has a rounded shape, more closely resembling the *omicron* of *ouranou*. There is no significant controversy that “out of the throne” is the correct reading. But this correction brings with it a tremendous enlightenment regarding the nature of the great white throne. Notice then this first recorded decree that comes forth from the great white throne:

Lo! the tabernacle of God is with mankind, and He will be tabernacling with them, and they will be His peoples, and God Himself will be with them. And He will be brushing away every tear from their eyes. And death will be no more, nor mourning, nor clamor, nor misery; they will be no more, for the former things passed away. And He Who is sitting on the throne said, “Lo! New am I making all!”
(Rev. 21:3–5)

The first thing that this decree tells us is that heaven and earth are going to be united. God will be with mankind! The edict does *not* claim that God will be tabernacling with the saints or Israel or the bride or the church or the body of Christ. It does not even claim that God will be tabernacling with the overcomers! *God will be tabernacling with mankind!*

Through most of the book of Revelation, the faithful ones, the overcomers or conquerors, receive the notice, due to the theme of the book. But here, the prospect is looking forward to what will be accomplished in that final eon. God will be with humanity, and there will be no more chance of being driven from God’s presence as Adam and Eve were from Eden. The expression of God being *with* humanity is repeated three times, emphasizing the final goal that will be reached, and that God *himself* ensures its accomplishment.

Returning to the decree from the great white throne, we see that “death will be no more!” What a joyful statement! But what if it were true that the lake of fire was literal and caused literal death? This would be an utterly ludicrous statement if a majority of mankind had just been executed by their consignment to the lake of fire!

If everyone or a large percentage of those at the great white throne had just died, then death would still be pervading the human

race! And if only one single person died from execution at the great white throne, this statement would be false. Death continues to exist at this time, but only in the mortality of those judged.

Notice then the next statement: “nor mourning.” Now we need to think of this statement from a different perspective. At this future time, we understand that humanity can be divided into two groups: (1) those who have been made immortal (glorified believers) and (2) those who are judged at the great white throne (mortals).

Mourning is what is done when someone dies. If everyone who was cast into the lake of fire died, then there should be no one left alive of humanity who is not immortal. If that was the case, then this statement is ridiculous and redundant. But if the lake of fire is figurative for judgment and chastening and all those cast there are living mortals, then this is a tremendously wonderful statement.

This statement tells us that mortality will no longer be consummated in death. It tells us that immortality will swallow up mortality for myriads of people. Those who are still mortal will be kept alive until such time as they are glorified. These decrees from the great white throne are full of joy and promise.

The following outline is this first decree from the great white throne.

And I hear a loud voice out of the throne saying,
Lo! The tabernacle of God is with mankind
And He will be tabernacling with them,
And they will be His peoples,
And God Himself will be with them.
And He will be brushing away every tear
from their eyes.
And death will be *no* more,
Nor mourning,
Nor clamor,
Nor misery; they will be *no* more, for the former things
passed away...

And He Who is sitting on the throne said,
Lo! New am I making all!

(Rev. 21:3–5, CV)

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

There are ten statements in this decree, and they come to us in a balanced form. These words are both prefixed and suffixed with a statement that they are words from the throne. Both the second and last statements begin with the command “Lo!” or “Look! Behold! See!” Something important is transpiring—take notice! God is being joined to mankind, and all is being made new.

There are five positive statements about the relationship of God to humanity and what he will be doing for them. Following them are five negative statements, assuring us that the calamities and tragedies that plagued the first creation will never affect the new creation. The five *and*'s represent the Greek *kai*, and the two *no*'s and the three *nor*'s all represent the Greek *ou*. This structural balance adds emphasis to the decree. These are ten divine statements concerning the new creation.

If we were to turn back to Genesis 1, we would find there iterated through the course of the creation week, ten divine fiats, or commandments of creation. “And God said, Let there be light...And God said, Let the waters...” (Gen. 1:3, 6, 9, AV). Ten times we find the words “And God said...”

The Bible also speaks of the redemption of Israel from slavery in Egypt as God's creation of that nation (Isa. 43:1, 7 and many other passages). And in God's creation of Israel as a nation at Mount Sinai, he gave them Ten Commandments in their covenant of law. We say this to make it clear that the first decree we have from the great white throne is a decree of creation, life, and hope. It is a decree that abolishes despair. God creates through redemption as well as through command.

In Genesis the divine fiats were simply prefaced with the words, “And God said.” But in Revelation the words come from the throne of the one from whose face heaven and earth fled. The words come from the great white throne with the command to “Look!” and listen to the fiats of the new creation.

In the book of Deuteronomy, the covenant God made with Israel came with a set of blessings and curses. But the ten statements of the new creation are all dependent on God, not on human obedience, and they are all positive in their effect upon humanity.

When we see this relationship between Genesis and Revelation emphasized in the ten divine statements, we are better able to understand the significance of the coming statement: “I have become the Alpha and the Omega, the Origin and the Consummation” (21:6).

In chapter 19, the name of the Rider on the horse was called the Word of God. In John 1, the Word is related to the tenfold “and God said” of Genesis 1. The glorified Christ functions for us as Creator and the Renewer of creation. He is the Finisher also (Heb. 12:2). He is sharing the throne with the Father, and he is the Initiator and Fulfiller of God’s plan and purpose.

The Holy City, New Jerusalem

“And I perceived the holy city, new Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

The nation that had been a harlot and divorced from God in the Hebrew prophecies is now renewed and experiencing the joy of a virgin bride. Hannah’s song is fulfilled in its relation to the nation of Israel. Rachel’s *son of sorrow*, born at Bethlehem with her death, has endured the tribulation and become *son of the right hand* (Gen. 35:16–19). Benoni has become Benjamin.

In the days of David, the citadel of Zion was captured, and the city of Jerusalem built up. Here in John’s vision the citadel of the saints was surrounded, but the protection of God was manifested (Rev. 20:7–10), and now New Jerusalem is established in unprecedented glory.

Is the New Jerusalem a glorious city built of gold and precious stones? Many say it is. Is the New Jerusalem a people, the bride? The Bible says it is. Is the New Jerusalem both a glorified people and the structure of a city in which the structure matches the glorified characteristics of the people? We believe the third question merits the answer, yes. Preeminently in view are the people, the saints.

Still, Jerusalem is the choice figure to express all the things associated with these people, and the city’s glorious description is some-

thing to be seen as a picturesque description of the glorified people. “It has been said that if blood were indelible, Old Jerusalem would be red, all red.”¹⁴ But *Jerusalem* means “the occupation or possession of peace.” The city has never lived up to that name and will not do so until it comes on the new earth and each citizen possesses the peace of God.

Jerusalem stands as a figure for many generations of Jews—many lives of faith. It ties them all together. The epicenter of the service of the saints will be the holy, royal city, New Jerusalem. The people are “a kingdom and a priesthood for our God, and they shall be reigning on the earth” (Rev. 1:6, 5:10).

Reigning or *rule* presupposes alienation or insubjection in the social realm. Priesthood presupposes alienation from and insubjection to God. The New Jerusalem is the reborn Israel, functioning as mediators between God and the estranged of humanity. The Jewish nation will fulfill the promise to Abraham in a way additional to the sacrifice of Christ—administrating his headship. Through the mediation of Abraham’s seed, all families of the earth will be blessed (Gen. 12:3).

Perfection is not reached with the coming of the new heaven and new earth. Perfection will be reached through the completion of the reign of Christ. Christ must reign *until* all enemies are placed under his feet (1 Cor. 15:25). When Christ finally becomes the Head of all, then delegated authority will all be nullified, having become obsolete (1 Cor. 15:24). The bride, the New Jerusalem of John’s vision, is exercising delegated authority by reigning and performing the ministry of priests. Thus, as long as the saints are administrating the affairs of the kingdom, the second death still holds many. Death is the last enemy, and it will be abolished (1 Cor. 15:26), but that abolition will not be complete until the last one held in the second death has been made immortal. The second death continues to exist on the new earth, and the second death is the reason for the ministry of the kingdom of priests. When the second death ceases to exist, there will no longer be a need for rule or for priests.

The Wall

God chose Israel “to belong to Him as a special people above all the peoples who are on the surface of the ground” (Deut. 14:2). Because God chose them to be a special people to him, Israel was given restrictions—the law and covenants—that made them separate from the world in many ways. Israel’s separation from the world is still emphasized in the twenty-first chapter of Revelation, but it has taken on a whole new character. In the description of the New Jerusalem, its wall is mentioned six times (Rev. 21:12, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19). Walls separate. When Paul spoke of the unity of the new humanity, he said that the dividing wall was razed (Eph. 2:14). But John’s vision does not reach far enough into the future to show the ultimate outcome of all that Paul revealed. It is, however, the next closest step, because of the nature of this wall.

This wall is different because it has open gates of access in every direction, and that access is never closed (Rev. 21:12–14, 25). This wall is different because its twelve foundations are not named for the fathers of the nation that lives there, but the foundations bear the names of the apostles of the one who is the greatest Revelation of God that humanity has ever been given (Rev. 21:14).

This wall is different because it is transparent, made of crystal-line jasper (Rev. 21:11, 18). Jasper is essentially quartz. It is found in many colors—red, green, brown, black. Organic elements within the quartz give it these colors. As long as these colors remain in the jasper, it is opaque. The light cannot pass through it. But the jasper of the walls of the bride have had all the colorings of the previous life purified and removed. The strength and purpose and motives of this mighty wall are all clear as crystal. Quartz crystal is glorified jasper. The New Jerusalem is glorified people.

Understanding the Final Chapters

Who is allowed to drink from the river of water of life and partake of the log, or tree of life? Do only those who were believers or were awarded life at the great white throne judgment partake of this water? Are those in the second death allowed to drink of these blessings? It is very easy to misunderstand these final chapters, because John's viewpoint changes repeatedly. He changes freely from narrating the vision to describing things about the vision and relating it to his readers. Many commentators of the past couple of centuries have thought the last chapters of Revelation were fragments of John's visions that were out of place, because the final chapters did not seem to have a natural, chronological flow.¹⁵ It is this changing of perspective and a failure to deal with the truth on the decree from the great white throne that causes the confusion. By following the narrative closely, we will be able to see the shifts.

And He Who is sitting on the throne said, "Lo! New am I making all!" And He is saying, "Write, for these sayings are faithful and true." And He said to me, "I have become the Alpha and the Omega, the Origin and the Consummation.

To him who is thirsting I shall be giving of the spring of the water of life gratuitously. He who is conquering shall be enjoying this allotment, and I shall be a God to him and he shall be a son to Me. Yet the timid, and unbelievers, and the abominable, and murderers, and paramours, and enchanters, and idolaters, and all the false—their part is in the lake burning with fire and sulphur, which is the second death.

(Rev. 21:5–8)

Upon the first reading of these verses, one receives the impression that the water of life is only for those of faith. But closer examination shows the access to be much broader.

In verse 5, the perspective changes from viewing John's vision to hearing the glorified Christ speak from the throne to John and the people living in the day that John had the vision. In verses 9 through 21, John returns to viewing the vision of the New Jerusalem.

Notice then in verses 6 and 7, a twofold description of those who will definitely enjoy these blessings: (1) they were thirsting, and (2) they would be conquering. This does not describe what their condition will be when the New Jerusalem arrives. It describes their condition and actions of faith in the days when they lived by faith and were told of these blessings in John's prophecy.

Notice also that their thirst was slacked from a spring of the water of life, not a river. The faithful ones thirsted in the days of their lives on this old earth when they heard the prophecy of John's vision, and they conquered in the days when they were being persecuted. When the New Jerusalem comes, they will not thirst, and they will not need to conquer because the battle will already be won, and righteousness and peace will already be established. Their thirst is satisfied, and their access will be free and unrestricted.

Similarly, those who are "timid, and unbelievers, and the abominable" fit these descriptions in the times prior to the great white throne judgment. On the new earth, those who are described here have been resurrected from the dead to stand before the great white throne. God has judged them and pronounced their sentence. They are not yet perfected, but they have been through experiences too traumatic to think that their behavior will remain unchanged.

And a temple I did not perceive in it, for the Lord
God almighty is its temple, and the Lambkin. And
the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon,
that they should be appearing in it, for the glory of
God illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lambkin.

And the nations shall be walking by means of its light,
and the kings of the earth are carrying their glory into it.
And its portals should under no circumstances be locked
by day; for there shall be no night there. And they shall be
carrying the glory and the honor of the nations into it, and
under no circumstances may anything contaminating, or
one who is making an abomination and a lie be entering
into it, except those written in the Lambkin's scroll of life.

(Rev. 21:22-27)

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“The nations shall be walking by means of its light.” That is, the nations shall be walking in accordance with the light of God’s glory as it was manifested through the Lambkin. Clearly, this means that they will walk in an orderly way, pleasing to God. They do not yet have access within the city, but their behavior is vastly improved and under control.

There is an interesting comparison to be made here with John’s gospel. There, John the Baptist was a voice and a lamp, but Jesus was the Word and the Light. The voice touches the ear, but the Word enters the mind. The lamp burns in a world of darkness, but the Light of Truth is the realization of life. Here, God is the Light, and Jesus is the Lamp. This may show us a deepening of our realization of things when we are glorified.

Similarly, in Matthew Jesus spoke of letting our lights shine before men so that those seeing their light would glorify the Father in heaven. And a city set on a hill, like the New Jerusalem, cannot be hidden (Matt. 5:14–16).

And he shows me a river of water of life, resplendent
as crystal, issuing out of the throne of God and the
Lambkin. In the center of its square, and on either side
of the river, is the log of life, producing twelve fruits,
rendering its fruit in accord with each month. And
the leaves of the log are for the cure of the nations.
And there shall be no more any doom, and the throne of
God and of the Lambkin shall be in it. And His slaves shall
be offering divine service to Him. And they shall be seeing
His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. And
night shall be no more, and they have no need of lamplight
and sunlight, for the Lord God shall be illuminating them.
And they shall be reigning for the eons of the eons.
(Rev. 22:1–5; cf. Ps. 46)

In verse 1, the water of life now is manifested as a river, issuing from the throne of God and the Lambkin. It is no longer a spring, as it was when revealed to those who believed on the old earth, and who conquered then through the blood of the Lambkin. It is no longer

the little spring of which Jesus told the woman at the well. Since the river issues from the throne, rule is in view. And the rule is the river. And the rule flows out to the world, like the river of Eden in Genesis 2. It watered the garden and flowed out and became four rivers.

The river is for the world. Those outside are the ones who need it. God's slaves are serving him (v. 3). His slaves are kings and priests (1 Pet. 2:9; Rev. 1:6, 5:10, 20:4, 6, 22:5), reigning with Christ. The bride, New Jerusalem, is the people who are reigning. The water of life is their allotment (21:7). As their allotment, it is their tenancy; they work it. It is not something they possess only for their own satisfaction. The river of life is what they do as they reign and minister as priests.

The Spirit of God is within them, they had thirsted before, and now out of their hearts flow rivers of living water (John 7:37). They are the dwelling of God, and God's life flows out through them to those in need. They are seated with Christ in his throne. The throne of God is within them and rule flows out of them.

They are kings because they rule over those who are not yet fully subject to God. They are priests because they function in a mediatory capacity to complete reconciliation to God. This is their allotment.

In Ezekiel's temple, a river flowed out from the temple from the same area where in Solomon's temple, there was a sea, a huge cast bronze laver, the base of which was made of twelve bronze oxen. Three oxen faced north, three south, three east and three west. This showed the effects of the laver going out to the world in all four directions. Ezekiel was taken a thousand cubits out along the river and its depth was to the ankles. A thousand cubits further and it was up to Ezekiel's knees. At a thousand cubits more it was to his waist. At another thousand cubits it was a rushing river that could not be passed over. The river grows as it goes. How does it do that?

If this river is the same as that in Revelation, it is the rule of the administration that will head up all in the Christ (Eph. 1:10). The Lord Jesus said, "If anyone should be thirsting, let him come to Me and drink. He who is believing in Me, according as the scripture said, out of his bowels shall gush rivers of living water" (John 7:37-38). From the thirsty shall flow a river.

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

This is how a river can grow as it goes. It needs not have tributaries. It only needs the thirsty to be satisfied, and they multiply and become the river itself.

The spirit of God within us can generate these rivers. The satisfied heart becomes a gushing spring, and the larger the number of satisfied hearts the larger the flow of the river.

And it will come to pass in the latter days, the Mount of the House of Yahweh shall be established on the summit of the mountains, and it shall be lifted up above the hills, and all the nations will *stream* unto it. Many peoples will come and say: Come, and let us ascend to the mount of Yahweh, to the house of the Elohim of Jacob; and He shall direct us out of His ways, so that we may indeed walk in His paths. For from Zion shall *go forth* the law, and the word of Yahweh from Jerusalem. He will judge between the nations and arbitrate for the many peoples. They will pound their swords into mattocks, and their spears into pruners; Nation shall not lift sword against nation, nor shall they learn war any more.

(Isa. 2:2–4, emphasis mine)

Each man will sit under his vine and under his fig tree,
and there will be nothing causing them to tremble.

For the mouth of Yahweh of hosts has spoken.

(Mic. 4:4)

These prophecies of Isaiah and Micah carry an interesting reversal of terms that align with both John's vision and the garden in Eden. In Genesis 2:10, the original words say that the river in Eden *went forth* from the garden. It didn't *flow forth* from the garden; it just *forthed* or *went out*.

In these prophecies, the law and the word of Yahweh *forth* or *go forth* from Jerusalem. But as the Word of God goes forth, the people *flow* or *stream* to Jerusalem to worship and learn. The people *river* to Jerusalem! This is just one more of many strands that tie God's purpose and plan of the ages together from beginning to end.

The square of the city was mentioned a few verses before: "the square of the city is gold, clear as translucent glass" (Rev. 21:21). The

square of the city is the place of commerce and social interaction, the marketplace of the city. It is not the idea of superfluous wealth, so often attributed to the highly celebrated “streets of gold,” but it is the thought of true purified motives, divine motives, in the hearts of all the citizens. In social interaction, there are no hidden agendas, no ulterior motives, no deceptive practices.

There is the simplicity and honesty of children combined with the love and concern of mature adults. This is one reason why entrance to the city is still limited, not yet have all been brought to that unity with God. Access to the city does not represent membership in the most prestigious of clubs with inestimable wealth. Access to the city represents the highest plane of intimacy and openness with God.

There is no temple there because the Lord God Almighty is there and is the temple, and the Lambkin with him (Rev. 21:22). Those who minister the rule and life of God to others are the ones with access to the city. They are taking out to the world of humanity what they enjoy within.

The things inside the city are needed by those outside the city. The leaves are for the cure or healing of the nations. The divine service that God’s slaves offer to him is to serve like the Lambkin did. As kings and priests to the world, they administer the blessings of the city of light to those outside.

“The throne of God and the Lambkin shall be in it” (v. 3). This marks a change. John perceived a great white throne (Rev. 20:11). It was *a* throne, not *the* throne. But in the five following occurrences of the word throne, it is *the* throne, showing that it refers back to the great white throne (20:12; 21:3, 5; 22:1, 3). Christ said, “The one who is conquering, to him will I be granting to be seated with Me on My throne as I also conquer and am seated with My Father on His throne” (Rev. 3:21). Humanity was judged at the great white throne apart from the city of New Jerusalem. But subsequently, the throne takes its place in the city.

This defines the city, the bride, as the seat of God’s authority and rule and the seat of most sacred holiness. This is described as a

final stage of the fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham. The seat of authority is not owned by God and the Lambkin only but is shared with all those who make up the bride. All families of the earth will be blessed through the rule and ministry of God's chosen ones.

Notice the things said about God's slaves. They shall be offering divine service to Him, they shall be seeing His face, His name shall be on their foreheads, the Lord God shall be illuminating them, they shall be reigning for the eons of the eons.

"And they shall be reigning for the eons of the eons" (Rev. 22:5). With this statement, it can be seen that John's perspective changes again. He does not only speak of the condition of things on the new earth. He includes also the millennial eon previous to that time—*the eons of the eons*. This is followed by a statement of the truth of the things prophesied in these visions, and then he says, "Happy is he who is keeping the sayings of the prophecy of this scroll" (Rev. 22:7). The time element has reverted to John's day and is no longer in the future eons. This brings us again to a context that is often confused because of the time frame we may try to place it in.

Happy are those who are rinsing their robes, that it
will be their license to the log of life, and they may be
entering the portals into the city. Outside are curs, and
enchanters, and paramours, and murderers, and idolaters,
and everyone fabricating and fondling falsehood.

(Rev. 22:14–15)

In Exodus 19:10, when the people were preparing to enter covenant with God, they first had to rinse their robes. This rinsing of robes takes place in John's day or the current day in which one hears of Christ and believes. Similarly, those who are labeled curs, enchanters, idolaters, murderers, etc., are guilty of those things in life previous to the great white throne. This passage is *not* saying that those sins are being committed on the new earth outside of the city. The nations at that time will walk according to the light of the city.

The Headship of Christ

The Administration of the Complement of the Eras

“In accord with His delight...to have an administration of the complement of the eras, to head up all in the Christ—both that in the heavens and that on the earth” (Eph. 1:9–10).

It is God’s delight to make those whom he has called in grace part of an administration. This administration will function during the complement of the eras. That is, it will function during the final eras which complete or fill up the remaining time periods in the eons. These eras begin with the present and will cover the times of the millennium, the great white throne judgment, the coming of the new heavens and earth, and whatever eras remain until the consummation, when all are made immortal through Christ. Currently, this function is being carried out through the expansion of the gospel. Reborn Israel will be the element of this administration on the earth in coming eras, and the body of Christ, whose “realm is inherent in the heavens” (Phil. 3:20), will be the element of this administration located there.

The eons of the eons are the final two eons revealed in the scriptures. As these eons progress through their various eras, the glory poured out at the feet of Christ and wafting up to the Father will continually increase. A hiker, traveling through the forest to a great waterfall, becomes aware, almost subconsciously, of a low and distant sound. As he draws closer to the fall, the sound of breaking water becomes louder and louder. Finally, standing at the foot of the fall, the crescendo has swelled to a deafening roar that vibrates the very air the hiker breathes. Like the sound of a great waterfall, the glory to Christ and the Father will continually increase through the course of the final eons, until every being is singing in full-hearted praise, and the entire creation resonates with joy and exhilaration.

The scriptures are clear that this is an apt appraisal of the final outcome. For this to be true, the number of humanity becoming reconciled to God must be increasing throughout the remaining time periods before the consummation. But if the second death were

literal death, no such progression in glory would be possible. If all who did not receive eonian life at the great white throne were dead, no one would be reconciled to God during the final eon! If all who were not judged for life at the great white throne were literally dead, the kingdom of priests would be on holiday for the eon of the eons. There would be none to receive ministry.

If the second death is figurative, then all those entering it from the great white throne will live under subjection, but in circumstances that lead to the glorious liberty of the children of God (Rom. 8:19–22). As their judgment is fulfilled in each day and each experience, they will be coming to a greater realization of the truth, and their honor and praise of God will continually grow till it reaches completion in their vivification. A figurative understanding of the second death accords well with the concept of the glory of God and Christ continually increasing through the course of the final eras. And a figurative understanding of the second death accords well with the scriptural teachings that all will be subjected to Christ and come under his Headship.

Paul and John on Eschatology

Paul sheds more light on the final eon and its outcome than any other writer in the Greek scriptures (see 1 Cor. 15:20–28, Eph. 1–3, etc.). Yet in some ways, his revelations are more difficult to grasp (not that John's are easy). Paul speaks with expressions deep and powerful and complex, challenging the mind. John speaks in figures and images that carry the heart aloft but sometimes leave the understanding behind. We need them both. We need both the inspiration and the depth of understanding. We need both the exhilaration that is felt when standing on the pinnacle of the structure, and we also need the master builder's foundation.

John: Rule in the Final Eon

Not only will Israel be the head of the nations (Deut. 28:13), but also Israelites will probably be designated as heads of the for-

eign nations and will administrate over the personnel responsible for the rule in each nation. The nations will be carrying their glory and honor into the New Jerusalem (Rev. 21:26), but it is only those who are written in the Lamb's scroll of life that will be entering the city.

Even the closing verses of John's vision emphasize Israel's enjoyment of the blessings to the neglect of the blessing that will flow through Israel's ministry. This accords with the theme of the book "be faithful through trial because victory is coming." This does not mean that the blessings are limited to Israel and the faithful. They will be the dispensers. But their current trials and the theme of the book call for the blessings of the chosen ones to be emphasized.

There are four outstanding figures in the closing verses of Revelation that speak volumes about rule on the new earth during the final eon. They are the Lambkin, the light, the river, and the log of life. Notice that all four of these refer to rule.

The Lambkin and Rule

The Concordant Version uses the term *lambkin* for *arnion*. *Amnos* is the usual word for *lamb* (as in John 1:29, Acts 8:32, etc.). *Arnion* is the diminutive form, emphasizing the idea of smallness, or in this case of the lamb, it carries the idea of harmlessness to a further degree. *Arnion* occurs only once in the Bible besides in the book of Revelation (John 21:15). In Revelation it occurs twenty-nine times, twenty-eight of which refer to the Lord.

Lambkin is a good translation to carry the emphasis of the original language into English, but, in the context of the book, it sometimes takes on the character of an oxymoron by today's standards. It is the Lion of the tribe of Judah that conquers to open the scroll and loose its seven seals, but he is seen as the Lambkin when he opens it (Rev. 5:5–9). The indignation, or wrath of the Lambkin is mentioned in 6:16. Those worshiping the wild beast and its image will be tormented in the sight of the Lambkin (Rev. 14:9–10). The Lambkin will battle with and conquer the nations that make up the beast (Rev. 17:13–14). Clearly the Lambkin does things that are not usually associated with the character of a lamb. But there is also the

emphasis upon the blood and sacrifice of the Lambkin (Rev. 5:12, 12:11), by virtue of which there exists *the Lambkin's scroll of life* (Rev. 13:8, 21:27).

The seeming contradiction disappears in Revelation 12:11, where those who overcome are said to conquer by the blood of the Lambkin and through the word of their testimony. It is clearly the power of God, operating through the sacrifice of Christ that wins the victory. The figure of the Lambkin is a constant reminder that the source of power and strength is not in Christ himself but in the Father.

In the days of Samuel, Israel repented and sought to return to God. Samuel offered “one milk-fed lambkin” (1 Sam. 7:9, CV), as a whole burnt offering. While he was making the sacrifice, the Philistines were advancing to battle Israel, and God caused thundering over the Philistines that was so loud it shook their confidence, and they fled before the Israelites. The Israelites recaptured their cities and enjoyed a long respite from Philistine oppression. This is an example of the power of God manifested through weakness, which is dedicated to him.

The rule of the final eon issues from “the throne of God and the Lambkin” (Rev. 22:1, 3). This is the rule of God in which the sacrifice of his Son is preminent. Every aspect of rule is relative to the sacrifice of Christ. The rule of the final eon is based upon the greatest revelation of the love of God. There can be no fear with regard to this rule or its outcome.

The Light and Rule

And the city has no need of the sun nor of the moon,
 that they should be appearing in it, for the glory of
 God illuminates it, and its lamp is the Lambkin.
 And the nations shall be walking by means of its light,
 and the kings of the earth are carrying their glory into
 it. And its portals should under no circumstances be
 locked by day; for there shall be no night there.

(Rev. 21:23–25)

What is the light mentioned in these verses? Light is used extensively in the Bible as a figure for other things—knowledge, truth, wisdom, godliness. Here, we are told that the nations “shall be walking by means of its light,” by means of the light of the holy city, New Jerusalem. It is the light of the bride, the people.

The light here is rule. It controls how the nations behave—how they walk. The nations will walk according to the truth. The rule existing at that time will ensure that they do. The office of the people of New Jerusalem is also in the function of priests. Therefore, the knowledge of God is inherently part of this light.

Guidance comes to mind as an apt description of this rule. Light enables one to see and thereby guides one’s course. And certainly, this light goes beyond guidance too.

The nations are said to carry their glory into this city. This means that they are bringing the things to it that manifest the giving of honor to God. Honoring God can only truly be done where there is a realization of truth. So the rule of this light is such that it imparts the knowledge of the truth to those who are ruled by it.

The River and Rule

And he shows me a river of water of life, resplendent
as crystal, issuing out of the throne of God and
the Lambkin. In the center of its square, and on
either side of the river, is the log of life.

(Rev. 22:1–2)

The river issues from the throne of God and the Lambkin. Since the source of the river is the throne, the river is a description of the rule during the final eon. The river is *water of life*. The rule of the final eon is a rule that brings life to all under its authority. Those who are under the authority of this rule are all those from the great white throne judgment. Some of those received life and are enjoying the blessings of such a glorious rule. Many from that judgment will go to the lake of fire, the second death. They will be learning subjection to Christ under a government that will refresh them from the trial of

their subjugation and that will slack the thirst caused by the second death with life—resplendent, clear as crystal, water of life.

The rule that issues from the throne of God and the Lambkin is so described with such terms of beauty and refreshment and renewal that it is certainly a rule that would cause one to say, “It is a good thing to be alive!” Such a statement would come from the lips of those who came from the grave, after experiencing every manner of *life* that could have been described as anything but life. On both sides of the river is the log or tree of life. We are intended to see the river and trees as parts of a single picture—aspects of one rule.

The Log of Life and Rule

In the center of its square, and on either side of
the river, is the log of life, producing twelve fruits,
rendering its fruit in accord with each month. And
the leaves of the log are for the cure of the nations.

(Rev. 22:2)

The word that the CV renders *log* here is *xulon*, which means *wood*. *Xulon* is used to designate such things as the cross on which Christ was crucified—wood as a building material (1 Cor. 3:12), the *stocks* in which Paul’s feet were fastened in prison (Acts 16:24), staves or clubs (Matt. 26:47), and other wooden articles. *Dendron* is the biblical word for *tree*. It is used frequently in reference to living trees.

The beautiful figure employed here is that of resurrection life. The wood was dead but is alive again and is a source of continual sustenance. The previous life was cut off and now is replaced by one of superior vitality. “Then a Twig will come forth from the set slip of Jesse, and a Scion, it shall be fruitful from his roots” (Isa. 11:1). The house of David was long cut off. The nation of Israel was figuratively dead and scattered among the nations, but the kingdom will be resurrected under Christ, the Lamb.

Where is such a tree that can produce twelve fruits? Where is such a tree that produces fruit every month? Where is a tree that also produces leaves that have healing power? All of this must refer to the

resurrection life of Christ provided for all on the deadwood of the cross of Golgotha—the deadwood of crucified flesh.

Aaron was designated as chief priest, and the tribe of Levi confirmed as the priestly tribe by God's miracle performed on Aaron's staff of wood. The staff of each of the heads of the twelve tribes was taken, and their name was written on it. Aaron represented Levi. Moses placed all the staves in the tabernacle before God. The next day, all the staves were the same as before except Aaron's. It had buds and blossoms and almond fruit (Num. 17).

The resurrection confirms the headship of Christ. But he is not just the Head of a tribe or nation; he is the Head of the race, replacing Adam in that position (1 Cor. 15:20–24; Rom. 5:12–21; Eph. 1:9–10, 22–23; 1 Cor. 11:3; etc.). As Head of all, he is the source of life for all.

The log of life is stamped with the number twelve, the number of rule, in two ways. It produces twelve fruits, and it produces them in twelve months. Months are a lunar designation. The moon, the lesser light, was for the rule of darkness or night (Gen. 1:5, 16). So the thought of rule is associated with the log of life. Emphasized here especially is the thought of the rule of those who have not yet fully come into the light. Those who are still in some shade of darkness need the healing of the leaves and the sustaining fruit of life, yet this is a temporary need. This too is insinuated when we are told there is no night there. The lesser light for those in darkness is giving way to the greater light. This speaks especially of those of the second death who are not yet fully subject to Christ. They do not yet realize him as their Head.

The log of life is in the center of the square of the New Jerusalem, as well as on either side of the river. This location identifies it with the central purpose of the city and of the rule that issues from the city. That purpose is to give life. So while these blessings are specifically promised to those faithful ones undergoing persecution, there can be no doubt that those persecuted ones will take on the character and mission of their Head, who is described as the Lambkin, the life-giving sacrifice.

The simple presence of those needing the cure provided by the leaves is another confirmation that those of the second death are not literally dead. And the thought of healing shows that all the needs of every individual will be met. Subjecting to God and reconciling to him are the only aspects of the ministry of his servants.

Universal Subjection to Christ's Headship

Wherefore, also, God highly exalts Him, and graces Him with the name that is above every name, that in the name of Jesus every knee should be bowing, celestial and terrestrial and subterranean, and every tongue should be acclaiming that Jesus Christ is Lord, for the glory of God the Father.
(Phil. 2:9–11)

How does this grand climax of the eons come about? Is this passage speaking of a final time when the last ones of humanity and the spiritual beings come to a realization of the truth and offer their heartfelt devotion and allegiance to Christ? Yes, that will happen, and that time will surely come and fulfill this scripture. But may it also be looking beyond that to a first ever assembly of all rational beings bowing in unison before the Lord Jesus and acclaiming his lordship over them? We are clearly told this will occur. What a cause for celebration!

It seems almost paradoxical that Christ should rule until all are subjected to him, yet when he reaches that goal, he will cease ruling, abdicate his throne, and hand back to his Father a completed and unified creation and kingdom. So when Christ is finally and fully Lord of all, he stops being Lord. And a grand and glorious event, which seems very much like a coronation ceremony, leads into an abdication of the throne.

At the great white throne, we noted that popular view which tends to make it the great white dais or judgment seat. Indeed, judgment will be meted out. But we saw that the great white throne was indeed a throne because decrees come forth from it, and rule flows from it during the final eon. All the governing and political aspects that would be expected from such a throne will indeed issue forth.

But when Christ becomes Lord of all, then the need for rule will cease to exist, and all delegated offices of rule and authority will be abolished. Perhaps *then* the great white throne will become a great white dais.

Every rational creature will voice their judgment that the Son of God is worthy to rule all. Then the Son of God will remove all the diadems of authority from his brow and place them at the Father's feet. And the Father will pass his final act of judgment as he announces that the work of his Son is *very good*. And every heart watching will know what is going to happen. Every eye will see the Son and rejoice to see him honored. But every heart will know that he will not hold on to that glorious honor because he has already laid it all aside once before.

The authority given to faithful believers will also become obsolete, and all delegated authority, and powers will be nullified (1 Cor. 15:24). There will be a brotherhood of the children of God, and Christ will be the firstborn among many brethren (Rom. 8:29).

Conclusion on the Second Death

Death is the cessation of life. The first death is a condition in which there is no consciousness. There is no sensation, no awareness of the passing of time, no awareness of anything in the first death.

But the second death is announced in John's vision as a condition in which there is consciousness and torment. And this torment extends for long periods of time. There must be a significant difference between the first death and the second death.

What is the lake of fire? The lake of fire was part of a scene in a vision received by the apostle John. This lake of fire was the place of incarceration and chastisement for grotesque creatures that represented world-dominating political systems in the vision and for personified figures for death and hades. When Christ returns in glory and power, he will bring all the political systems of this world to their knees. They will be subjected to the rule of the reborn, priestly nation of Israel. There will be a worldwide reign of strict justice and righteousness.

The servitude and chastisement to which the nations will be subject during this reign is the literal reality that was figuratively shown as a lake of fire in John's vision. The prophets tell us that the nations will be servants of the new Israel.

The lake of fire—the second death—is not literal death. John's vision of the lake of fire was a visionary representation of eonian chastening that was prepared for Satan and his messengers. We have determined there is no reason to expect that spiritual beings could be tormented by literal fire.

The millennial period of strict rule is a display that humanity cannot live in peace apart from receiving the spirit of God. Even righteous government is insufficient to cure the ills of the world. Satan will be loosed at the end of the millennium and will immediately bring humanity to war with Christ and the saints. These forces will be summarily vanquished. Then will come the era of the great white throne judgment and the new heaven and earth.

The rule of righteousness will continue on in the new earth so that those who died previously may receive its benefits and teaching. But the character of the rule will change. Christ, the sovereign, will not be known as the Lion of the tribe of Judah but rather as the Lambkin—the reconciling sacrifice. Since the rule over the unbelieving and wicked on the earth during the millennium was seen by John in the vision as a lake of fire, that description is carried over in the vision to rule on the new earth also. All those judged in need at the great white throne enter the baptism of perfect rule and subjection that brings them to the realization of truth that cleanses their lives.

Yet the rule of that final eon changes so dramatically that it must also be described as a river of the water of life. While it has aspects of torment and hardship, still it brings life and satisfaction. Healing is provided for all. Christ's reign in the order of Melchizedek completes both righteousness and peace until all are made immortal and until there is no longer any need for rule.

Finally, all will be given immortality, and death, even the lingering condition of mortality, will be abolished. All will realize the truth. Then God will be all in all. Rule and positions of authority will become obsolete. We will all be sons of God in equality.

We find then that the misunderstanding of a prophet's vision misrepresented the awesome cleansing judgments of God as the gruesome results of anger and frustration as if God could not accomplish his purpose. And we find that the scriptures actually have a great deal to say about the second death. Many of the parables spoken by the Lord refer to that condition, though they do not call it by that name. He came speaking of life and death and of eonian life and the second death.

The second death is a figurative expression that contrasts the existence of those judged at the great white throne with the eonian life of the chosen.

APPENDIX



The Second Death and Issues of Language

Understanding John's Presentation

To be the recipient of visions through divine revelation is rare. There is no handbook, other than details preserved in the Bible, to aid in the understanding of these visions. Yet some helpful deductions may be made. It appears that John viewed the entire vision before writing anything. For example, the second death is mentioned very early in the book (Rev. 2:11), though it is not seen or mentioned as part of the vision until the twentieth chapter.

After seeing the vision in its entirety with divine inspiration and total recall, John wrote what he had seen and been instructed to write.

John uses the word *perceive* (*eidon*) when he relates the vision. He grasped all these things mentally. His perception was not limited to visual observance only. He also mentions the time elements, which involve ages, though his perception of these things may have been completed in days or hours or even moments (cf. Luke 4:5). This aspect of timing and duration is helpful in determining whether the lake of fire ever changes.

John freely supplies details as the vision progresses, often anticipating things that will be happening later in the vision. This feature

is also very common in John's account of the gospel. If one follows the red-letter editions carefully, it will be found that some of the red type is also explanatory and is probably supplied by John rather than being the words of Christ himself.

The visions of Revelation are filled with detailed contrasts and picturesque descriptions which hold much teaching if the time is taken to compare and contrast them.

Metaphors and the Second Death

"This is the second death—the lake of fire" (Rev. 20:14). This definition of the second death is expressed in the form of a metaphor. A metaphor is a figure of speech in which one thing is said to be another. A metaphor is not intended to be literally true. It is intended to communicate a thought in an effective way by comparing similar features of different things.

Christ said, "I am the Door" (John 10:9). This metaphor vividly communicates the thought that Christ is the way or means by which man enters life. The thought of this metaphor is clear, even though the statement is not literally true nor intended to be understood as such. But in the case of the second death, the metaphor is cloudy to many, being shaded by preconceived notions about death, which hinder an objective assessment of the figure.

Metaphors have been at the heart of great controversies. Another metaphor "This is my body, broken for your sakes" (1 Cor. 11:24) has been misinterpreted to establish the doctrine for transubstantiation. The same incorrect approach that has fueled bitter controversy over the body of Christ has been applied more widely to the metaphor of the second death to interpret it as an eternal death in conscious agony.

Must the Nouns of a Metaphor Be Understood Literally?

E. W. Bullinger, in his renowned work *Figures of Speech Used in The Bible* wrote, "The two nouns [of a metaphor]...are always to

be taken in their absolutely literal sense, or else no one can tell what they mean.”¹⁶

The intent of this statement is clear. It is by the realization of literal things and their characteristics that we have the basis for understanding the figure. Bullinger’s remark is a blanket statement that is true in intent and method, but there are cases that take exception to the rule. And even when the nouns are understood literally, the metaphor as a whole is not restricted in meaning to the meanings of the literal nouns.

Jesus said to his disciples, “You are the light of the world” (Matt. 5:14). As light brings life and awareness of things to the world, so the disciples, through their conduct and communication bring true life and realization of the truth to the world of humans. But Jesus was not saying that the disciples were the sun. The conduct and communications of the disciples were not literal light.

The metaphor of the second death raises a challenge that Bullinger’s definition cannot meet. Other than the apostle John, not one of humanity has ever seen a literal lake of fire. Not one of humanity has ever witnessed or experienced the second death. Humanity has no experiential knowledge base to understand these terms literally. All that is available for the understanding of these terms is the literal meaning of the nouns and the context of the scriptures. Does this mean the metaphor is beyond comprehension? No.

A writer may not intend the nouns of his metaphors to be understood in “their absolutely literal sense.” Figurative expressions may be sufficiently common and well understood to be used in place of a literal expression as part of a metaphor. Does an author not have license to use figurative expressions for one or both of the elements of a metaphor if he deems such use the most effective means of conveying his thoughts? Is it inconceivable that a writer could use figurative expressions in a metaphor as a means of defining a figure? Granted, the use of figurative ideas in metaphors is less frequent, but the scriptures do provide such examples.

In this double metaphor, Christ defined his terms, and then he stated a metaphor, which, literally, is a contradiction!

The lamp of the body is your eye. If then, your eye should be single, your whole body will be luminous. Yet if your eye should be wicked, your whole body will be dark. *If, then, the light that is in you is darkness, how dense is the darkness!* (Matt. 6:22–23; emphasis mine to highlight metaphor)

Notice especially in this metaphor “the light...is darkness” that neither of the nouns should be understood literally. Christ was not speaking of literal light or literal darkness. This metaphor speaks of the contrast between life lived according to a realization of the truth and life lived according to the desires of the flesh. If both of the nouns of this metaphor were understood in their literal sense, the metaphor would be nonsense. Christ made a most attention-grabbing statement by doing this.

Notice how John freely amplifies the second element of the following metaphor to further define his figure: “These waters...are peoples and throngs and nations and languages” (Rev. 17:15). By doing this, he magnifies our understanding of what he means by *waters* from a national scale to a global scale. In this multiple metaphor, the nouns are used as expanding synonyms for each other.

Here is a triple metaphor in which all the nouns are used figuratively: “The seven heads are seven mountains...and they are seven kings” (Rev. 17:9). The seven heads are literally seven heads of a beast, which John saw in the vision.

Are these seven heads literally seven mountains? And are these seven heads also literally seven kings? Even the kings are not literal. John saw a beast, which represented a political system that was a confederation of kingdoms. The kings stand figuratively for their kingdoms. This is a case where three figures are used to explain each other.

Revelation also speaks of two witnesses that are two olive trees and two lampstands, and yet fire issues out of their mouths. Do trees and lampstands have literal mouths? Besides this, much is said about them, which seems to define them as humans (Rev. 11:3–4).

The context of the book must be the determining factor for defining such phrases. *We cannot rewrite the grammatical rules and customs of ancient Hebrew and Greek literature to conform to what we might consider correct English.*

Discovering the Points of Agreement in Metaphors

The metaphor actually calls for a comparison of similar aspects of the elements of the metaphor. It does not, for even a moment, suggest that the two are identical. Bullinger clarifies further,

The Representation referred to in the figure may not lie upon the surface, and may not be at all apparent in the language itself. It may be in the uses of the thing represented, or in the effects which it produces. In this case the *Metaphor* often comes as a surprise, by the discovery of a point in which two apparently unrelated objects have some point in which they really agree.¹⁷

The key to understanding the metaphor defining the second death is to discover what aspects of the objects are similar. How is the lake of fire like the second death? At this point, the reader does come back to the literal meaning of nouns even if they are used figuratively to come to the understanding of the figure as a whole. In this case, it is necessary to look for the common thread shared by three literal things: lake, fire, and death.

The thoughts that come to mind when thinking of a lake are quite different from those associated with fire. But suppose for the moment that fire could actually be contained in a lake without changing its properties. What are the associations or features of lake and of fire that can remain? By combining lake and fire, many natural thoughts are immediately eliminated. Any thoughts of fish or boats or drinking or refreshment are dismissed.

But other thoughts do remain. Things may be placed or thrown into a fire or into a lake. And this is a point of agreement required by the context (Rev. 19:20, 20:14). A lake could be a place for washing or cleansing, and fire also is an agent for cleansing. In the law, utensils were to be purified with fire, and those utensils that could not endure fire were to be cleansed with the water of purification (Num. 31:20–23).

Where then is the common ground shared by lake and fire with death? Death is often referred to as a receptacle for humanity. The

translation of *sheol* and *hades* as *grave* and sometimes *pit* testifies to this. Like fire, *sheol* is never satisfied, or filled full (Prov. 27:20, 30:16; Hab. 2:5). To be placed or thrown into the grave is synonymous with dying. This thought holds the similarity of death to lake and fire.

The association of death with burial also carries the thought of cleansing. Burial allows decomposition to be completed without making the land unclean. Burial brings corruption to an end. Without burial the land is polluted, and stench and disease are rampant. Any contact with a dead person or even the bone of a dead person made one unclean and required special cleansing (Num. 19).

The Mosaic Law even required the burial of human waste (Deut. 23:13), showing burial as a means of cleansing or maintaining cleanliness. As far as the law is concerned, death is the end of sin and its uncleanness (Rom. 6:7 ff.)

And so fire, lake, and death all have aspects of agreement as something into which things can be placed or thrown and as something that has properties of cleansing associated with it.

But the scriptures also supply a precedent that is greater than these correlations. Or perhaps it is better said that the scriptures supply a precedent that is built upon these correlations. That precedent is baptism. There is baptism by water, baptism by fire (figuratively), and burial by baptism into the death of Christ (Rom. 6:4, etc.) These baptisms are all relative to changes in life that are characterized by the death of the flesh and its desires and a newness of life characterized by holiness and spirituality.

All these baptisms are related to judgments. Water baptism was a figurative judgment on the life of the flesh. Fire baptism was a preparatory judgment for the kingdom. As a burial, baptism shows identity with Christ in his death, which was a judgment on the body of flesh and for sin.

These features of baptisms are what those judged at the great white throne, who enter the second death, need. They will be resurrected for the manifesting and judging of their works. The judging of their works will bring a realization of the truth. This is God's will (1 Tim. 2:4). And the desired result of these things is a renewing of life.

JOURNEY TO AND THROUGH THE SECOND DEATH

If the objection is raised that these thoughts exchange punishment for renewing, remember that the second death is a judgment of God, and it is for the purpose of setting things right.

Remember also that frequently the scriptures are more concerned to express things vividly and powerfully than to comply with all the specifics of English theological etiquette. For example, Acts 22:16 says, "Rise, be baptized, and bathe off your sins, invoking His name." Water cannot wash away sins. Anyone who prizes the precious blood and the sufferings of Christ will come to realize that this text is not teaching that washing in water removes the guilt of sins even though many have taught salvation in baptism. Still, the scriptures make use of simple vivid pictures to communicate deep truth. It is understood that a change of mind and heart accompanied this baptism.

Part of the reluctance to see these figures for what they are stems from the presupposition that the first death seals human destiny. What we actually find in the scriptures instead is that death seals the opportunity for participation in the kingdom and eonian life (not eternal life). Many refuse to consider that the lake of fire could be a preparation for something else. It is wrongly assumed that it must be a final destiny. The mistranslation of *aion* and *aionios* continues to proliferate this idea that death seals destiny.

The failure to realize that judgment is for the purpose of correction is also a hindrance to recognizing God's purpose in the second death. If the wicked were to remain wicked and unbelieving endlessly, there could be no purpose for the great white throne judgment. Why would they be corrected if they and their condition are not to be changed? Unless the condition of those at the great white throne is to be improved, this grand event in the redemptive purpose of God is pointless.

Many believe that God is in control of all things. Would this control include the life situations of the unbelieving and wicked? If judgment is not for their correction and improvement, it could only be to satisfy the wrath of God who ultimately is responsible for the course of their lives. The thought that God would judge and condemn simply to vent his rage, and without benefiting his creatures

gives a false representation of the God who is bringing all to a realization of the truth.

He or It?

- (1) John speaks of Antichrist in some of his writings. The Antichrist is usually identified with the “man of lawlessness” or “the son of destruction” (2 Thess. 2:3) and identities in Daniel. These personal and human identities have also been associated with the beast and false prophet in Revelation by numerous commentators even from the early days of the Church. It may well be true that Antichrist is to be identified with the beasts of Revelation. There is no intention here to endorse or discredit any such interpretations. But neither of the beasts should be classified as a single, individual personality. In fact, the word *Antichrist* never occurs in Revelation.

John’s view of matters in the vision is on a much broader scope. Individual kings are sometimes mentioned but only when their actions of leadership characterize the actions of the beast or their kingdom. But the beasts are conglomerate systems that represent people and nations as a unit that is dominated by Satan, and John always sees them as beasts, not as individual people. And as we have seen in Daniel, beasts in these visions are used to represent groups such as kingdoms or empires. Familiarity of a reader with popular views of Antichrist and the following three reasons can make it a simple matter to leap from the identity of beast to a person *without due cause*.

- (2) To the English mind, *dragons*, *serpents*, and wild *beasts* are things. The pronoun that would represent them is neither *he* nor *she*. The English pronoun to represent

these creatures is *it*. Often gender in English is represented by pronouns. The word *smile* has no gender of its own. But *her smile* is a feminine smile, and *his smile* is a masculine smile. But in Greek, words have a designated gender. The Greek word for *truth* (*aletheia*) is feminine in gender, but we do not think of truth as a feminine being. We would say, “The truth, it will stand,” not “The truth, she will stand” as the Greeks would have expressed the thought. The Greek words for *dragon* (*drakon*) and *serpent* (*ophis*) are masculine without regard for whether the creature in view is a male or female animal or represents a male or female being. The Greek word for *beast* (*therion*) is neuter, regardless of the sex of the animal to which it may refer.

This raises a translation problem. The *dragon* and *serpent* will call for a masculine reference because of their Greek gender. But in English, they are considered neuter. When the Greek gender is observed in translation, it presents these words as masculine, suggesting in some cases that the serpent or dragon is *he*, a man or male creature.

- (3) *False prophet* is a designation given to the second wild beast of Revelation 13. This term occurs only three times in Revelation, and it is the context of the final occurrence that verifies that the false prophet is the same as the beast from the land (cf. Rev. 13:12 and 19:20).

The term *pseudo-prophet* or *false prophet* is masculine in gender. Technically, this would make the rendering of its pronoun *he* in English. But the false prophet, in John’s vision is still a beast, an *it*. The reader needs to be aware that *he*, when used of the false prophet, is equivalent to *it* in English by virtue of the context.

A similar situation occurs with the dragon. John did not see Satan, the Adversary, as a personal being in the vision. He is seen as a dragon or serpent. That is why John adds the explanatory identification, informing his readers that the dragon he sees in the vision represents Satan (Rev. 12:9, 20:2). But the popular English versions translate the pronoun for dragon as *he* rather than *it*.

In Revelation 20:3, *he* and *him* are correctly used according to Greek gender, where their antecedent is serpent or Adversary or Satan. But even there, it is the dragon that John sees in the vision. Contextually the pronoun *it* would be less misleading. The average English reader may not be aware of these issues and the subtle influence they have on his thoughts and interpretation of the scriptures.

- (4) The English language has no plural neuter pronoun for the third person. The word *its* is the possessive of *it*. The word *it's* is the contraction of *it is*. There is no spelling left to provide us with a plural of *it*, so the English defaults to *they* or *them* for a plural of the neuter.

When *they* or *them* is used in place of a plural *it* in Greek, the usage suggests to the English mind that people are being spoken of. When both beasts are mentioned, the English pronoun used is *they* or *them* simply because there is no other word to use.

If English was to refer to both beasts and maintain the correct gender, it would have to say *the beasts* rather than *they*. And to do so would not be a technically correct translation of the Greek even though it would be a more accurate translation of the text for the English reader.

In the NASB, the antecedent pronouns for these terms are translated by the pronouns *he, his, him, who, whose, they,* and *them* seventy-six times in chapters 12 to 20 in Revelation. The NIV does the same thing seventy-one times in the same passage of scripture. The KJV (AV) does the same thing sixty-seven times in the same passage.

Since the beast, the second beast (called the false prophet), and the dragon are designated by masculine personal pronouns, some seventy plus times in the scriptures leading up to the lake of fire, is it any wonder the reader loses sight of the vision as John saw it?

The RSV consistently refers to the dragon as *he*, etc., but it consistently refers to the beasts as *it*. The Today's English Version (TEV) and the New World Translation (NWT) tend to follow the approach of the RSV. The NWT differs in that it also translates the antecedent pronouns for *dragon* with *it* except where the context explains the relationship of the dragon to Satan. The ESV also comes in much lower in the use of masculine pronouns, using *it* much more frequently. The CV retains the correct gender of the pronouns as required by the Greek text, but as we have said, this is misleading.

So in simple terms, the beast, the false prophet beast, and the dragon are repeatedly called by personal pronouns that support and suggest the false assumption that they are men or human individuals. They should be called *the beasts* and *the dragon* or *it* whether the text uses those gender-specific words or not because that is what John saw.

The Definite Article

Lazarus died twice, but he did not die the second death. He died *a* second death. There are four occurrences of the term *the second death* (Rev. 2:11, 20:6, 14, 21:8). In each of these occurrences, the definite article is part of the term. It is *the* second death, not *a* second death.

The definite article signifies that something is distinctive when it is used with *second*. If the definite article is lacking, it would be more likely that the death mentioned should be understood as a repetition or continuation of the first death.

Christ prayed in Gethsemane “*a* second time” (Matt. 26:42). The second prayer was essentially the same as the first. In fact, Mark’s account reads, “And again, coming away, He prays, saying the same words” (Mark 14:39).

In Acts 10:13–15, Peter heard a voice “*a* second time.” Here, the emphasis is not on the actual thought of the words spoken, but simply that the voice that spoke to Peter answered his response. But in contrast, a man with two sons spoke “to *the* second” (Matt. 21:30) as distinguished from the first. Joseph was made known to his brothers “in *the* second time” (Acts 7:13) as distinct from the first time that he saw them in Egypt.

The presence of the definite article is not a *proof positive* that the first and second deaths are different, but it insinuates that they are distinct. Without the definite article, the possibility would be strengthened that the second death could possibly be just *another death* of the same kind.

Outside the City

And he is saying to me, “You should not be sealing the sayings of the prophecy of this scroll, for the era is near. Let the injurer injure still; and let the filthy one be filthy still; and let the just one do righteousness still; and let the holy one be hallowed still.

“Lo! I am coming swiftly, and My wage is with Me, to pay each one as his work is. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the First and the Last, the Origin and the Consummation.

Happy are those who are rinsing their robes, that it will be their license to the log of life, and they may be entering the portals into the city. Outside are curs, and enchanters, and paramours and murderers, and idolaters, and everyone fabricating and fondling falsehood.”

(Rev. 22:10–15)

It has been suggested that this listing of sinners outside the city (New Jerusalem) presents the city as a solitary island of righteousness in a sea of sin. Further, the solution to this dilemma is to be found

in the Greek word *exo*, which is said to mean “left out altogether” or “outside in the grave or cemetery” rather than just *outside* the city. This view is an effort to harmonize this passage with a particular view. It comes from a confusion and mixing of the conditions of John’s day.

The Lord’s closing words to John here convey a sense of urgency. John’s audience is to realize that when the events of this prophecy begin to transpire, they will happen so swiftly that none will find opportunity to make amends or repent for past behavior. The events of the day will whisk them away. Those living in John’s day or any day were to *rinse their robes* immediately and live a holy life. Only by doing so could they be sure of having access to the city.

Further, the Greek word *exo* is used at least eight times to indicate *outside* with reference to a city (Mark 1:45, 11:19; Luke 4:29; Acts 7:58, 14:19, 16:13, 21:5; Rev. 22:15). Those who do not rinse their robes are outside. The outside demanded by the context is outside the New Jerusalem.

The context reads, “*Entering the portals into the city. Outside are curs...*” If those who do not rinse their robes are outside the New Jerusalem, they must be alive on earth during the final eon. This indicates that the second death must be understood figuratively.

Even if the curs, enchanters, paramours, etc., are indeed outside of the city, there is no reason to envision the city as a lone oasis in a wilderness of corruption. Just as those who enter the city are the ones who rinse their robes in John’s day, so also, those who are outside the city are curs, enchanters, paramours, etc., in John’s day.

At the time of the New Jerusalem, these sinners will have been resurrected, judged, and tremendously enlightened at the great white throne, and they will have stood before Christ their judge. Furthermore, they will be under the rule of a reborn Israel. It is unthinkable that such dynamic and traumatic experiences as death, resurrection, the great white throne judgment, a new earth, and rule by a vivified godly nation would have no significant effect on a sinner’s behavior.

Granted, they are not yet perfected. But man seeks the darkness for the performance of his evil deeds, and the New Jerusalem is a

glistening city of light and glory where the darkness of night never falls. From this city fares forth the light of truth that will enlighten and guide the whole world. Furthermore, it is written that “the nations will walk according to this light” (Rev. 21:24). The final age is one in which darkness will decrease as light continually increases and brightens.

Injured by the Second Death

The following phrases are descriptive of death as it relates to humanity’s experience, and they serve as an example of biblical idiom.

- 1) “Let him de cease in death” (Matt. 15:4, Mark 7:10).
- 2) “Signifying by what death he was about to be dying” (John 12:33, 18:32).
- 3) “Her children shall I be killing with death” (Rev. 2:23).

In contrast with these, it is not written that anyone *dies* the second death or is *killed* with the second death. But in a passage where such a phrase could be employed, something much different is used. “The one who is conquering may under no circumstances *be injured* by the second death” (Rev. 2:11).

The passage does not read, “The one who is conquering may under no circumstances be dying the second death.” Neither does it read, “The one who is conquering may under no circumstances be killed by the second death.” But if the first and second deaths were identical, such a statement could certainly be used.

The word *injure* in the New Testament is used with reference both to physical wounds (Acts 7:24, 26–27, etc.) and to the violation of one’s rights (Matt. 20:13, Acts 25:10). To suppose that *injure* means *to kill* or *to cause death* is to stretch the word’s meaning beyond its scope. The more viable conclusion is that the second death is figurative while the first death is literal.

Eonian Life and the Second Death

The opposite of life is death.

For the usual intent, this statement is true enough. It would be difficult to find two other words that express such vivid, deep, and meaningful contrasts as life and death. But it needs to be remembered that eonian life is not the only life of the kingdom eons. Multitudes of unbelievers will enter the millennial kingdom eon through the tribulation and still possess the same mortality in which they lived before that phase of the kingdom began. They are not said to have eonian life even though they will live and die during that kingdom eon.

All the dead will be raised to life at the great white throne during the kingdom eons, but it is not said that those who are cast into the lake of fire have eonian life even though they will be alive during at least one of the kingdom eons. It is believers in Christ since the time of the cross and those of faith from previous eras that will have eonian life beginning with their resurrection. Since the life of the faithful in the kingdom is labeled eonian *life*, it would not be an unnatural figure to label the existence of the unbelieving and wicked as *death* of some sort. And since eonian life is not an absolute term (because other life coexists with it), neither must its contrasting figurative term be absolute. Eonian life and the second death are contrasting terms.

“Verily, verily, I am saying to you that he who is hearing My word and believing Him Who sends Me, has life eonian and...has proceeded out of death into life” (John 5:24). “We are aware that we have proceeded out of death into life, for we are loving our brethren” (1 John 3:14).

The first passage is a quotation from Christ; the second is an application by John. John uses the term *eonian life* more frequently than any other NT writer, and he employs these contrasts of life and death. And it is John who sets before us the term *the second death*.

These passages are only true when understood in their intended sense. The believer has passed the point in life after which he is sure of enjoying eonian life. But he does not yet experience that life. Even though he experiences a change in attitude, which is reflected in his

behavior, he does not yet experience eonian life. Only in spirit, not in fullness, can one experience the life of an eon while that eon is still future.

At present, only the firstfruits of expectation can be enjoyed. The believers at the time of the Lord's speaking had not yet been resurrected out of death. They had not proceeded out of death in any literal sense. Regarding their future, they would be resurrected from among the dead to enjoy eonian life. Christ's words about proceeding out of death into life are just as proleptic as Paul's words when he said we are seated among the celestials in Christ.

Why do Christ and John employ such language? Life and death are basic and familiar to humanity. They provide a powerful and lucid display of the contrast between life with God and life apart from God. Not only is it proper that such a vivid contrast should be employed, but also humanity's dulled perception of truth necessitates that the strongest terms possible be used. The power of the figure is justified by the importance of the issue.

NOTES



1. Hidden Pictures in the Old Testament, by Ada R. Habershon, (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1982), 145. "...it is supposed that the name given to this hill was gradually changed from Galgoliath to Golgatha, the place of a skull..."
2. Manners and Customs of the Bible, by James M. Freeman, (Logos International, Plainfield, New Jersey, 1972), 346.
3. <https://www.wikipedia.org>, "Bosom of Abraham." 7. Genesis 37:36, Psalm 88:13, Psalm 154:17, Ecclesiastes 9:10 etc. 8. Jewish Encyclopedia "Sheol" (<http://jewishencyclopedia.com/view.jsp?letter=S&artid=614#ixzz0ZYdkHemK>) 9. F. Preisigke, Sammelbuch Griechischer Urkunden aus Aegypten (Scrapbook Greek documents from Egypt) 2034:11 10. James H. Charlesworth, "4 Maccabees 13:7," The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha. Doubleday (1983).
4. *The Zondervon Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, Vol. 3, "Hades," (Zondervon, Grand Rapids, MI, 1976), 7.
5. The Nicene and Post Nicene Fathers, First Series, Vol. II, The City of God, by St. Augustine, Book XXI, chapter 23, (Eerdman's Publishing, Grand Rapids, MI, 1979), 468.
6. What Is Of Faith As To Everlasting Punishment?: In Reply to Dr. Farrar's Challenge in His "Eternal Hope," 1879 by E. B. Pusey; second ed., (James Parker & Co.; Rivingtons, England, Nabu Public Domain Reprints, 1880), 44–45.
7. *Ibid.*, 26.
8. Concordant Greek Text, (Concordant Publishing Concern, Canyon Country, CA 91351, 4th ed., 1975), 730.

9. Commentary on Revelation, by E. W. Bullinger, (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI 49501, 1984), 643.
10. Oxford Concise Dictionary of English Etymology, Oxford University Press (2003).
11. Commentary on Revelation, by Henry Barclay Swete, (Kregel Publications, Grand Rapids, MI, 1977), 270.
12. God Against the gods; Storytelling, Imagination and Apologetics in the Bible, by Brian Godawa, (Embedded Pictures Publishing, Los Angeles, CA, 2016), 21–22.
13. The Promise of His Appearing: An Exposition of Second Peter by Peter J. Leithart, (Canon Press, Moscow, ID), 2004.
14. Jerusalem, The Tragedy and the Triumph, Charles Gulston, (Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, MI), 23.
15. The International Critical Commentary, Revelation Vol. 2, R. H. Charles, (T. & T. Clark, Edinburgh), 144, ff.
16. Figures of Speech Used in the Bible, E. W. Bullinger, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI 1978, 736.
17. *Ibid.*, 736.

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ABOUT THE COVER



If we looked for an artist's depiction of the lake of fire, history could inundate us with an abundance of scenes where multitudes of humanity were agonizing in flames. But if we carefully read John's Revelation, and ignore Christianity's adopted traditions, we would likely see something more akin to the cover of this book. John saw a beast with seven heads and ten horns—to some degree resembling the seven-headed dragon—thrown into a lake of fire. Along with it, a beast that came up out of the land having two horns was also thrown into the fire. One thousand years later a seven-headed dragon was thrown in with them, and also a rider on a pale or greenish horse named Death, and another nondescript figure named Hades. All this happens before we read of any individual people being thrown into the lake of fire. That is what John saw—but what does it mean?

Apparently traditions provide more fertile ground for imagination than the scriptures. All we could assemble here were images of a seven-headed dragon and an artist's conception of the Greek god Pan. Pan has similarities to the false prophet. But perhaps you get the picture.