

Heaven and Hell: Death and Beyond

A look at the biblical material on intermediate and final states

Martin Scott

Contents

Preface	
1. Beliefs periphery to Scripture	1
1.1 Purgatory and Limbo	1
1.2 Universalism	2
2. The nature of humanity	3
2.1 Spirit and/or soul and body	4
2.2 1 Thessalonians 5:23 'spirit, soul and body'	6
2.3 Spiritual and soulish humanity	6
2.4 Immortality of the soul	7
2.5 Summary	8
3. Jesus' resurrection and the believer	8
3.1 Did Jesus descend to sheol / hades?	8
3.2 Christ the Last Adam	11
3.2.1 Resurrection and transformation	11
3.3 Christ the Judge of all	12
4. Final states	13
4.1 For the righteous	13
4.2 For the unrighteous	15
4.2.1 How long is eternal?	15
4.2.2 Eternal destruction: the Old Testament	15
4.2.3 Eternal destruction: between the Testaments	16
4.2.4 Eternal destruction: the New Testament	17
4.2.5 Scriptures appealing to Sodom and Gomorrah	17
4.2.6 Revelation: fire, torment and smoke	18
4.2.7 The lake of fire and Gehenna	19
4.2.8 A final note on 'core texts' for eternal punishment	20
4.3 Conclusions on final states	20
5. What happens to those who have never heard?	21
5.1 Summary and conclusions	22
6. The Intermediate state	23
6.1 Sheol / hades: Old Testament material	23
6.1.1 Sheol and segregation	24
6.1.2 Excursus on Paradise	24
6.1.3 The righteous and the after-life	25
6.1.4 Summary of options	25
6.2 The intermediate state and the New Testament	26
6.2.1 The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)	27
6.2.2 Paul and the intermediate state	28
6.2.3 Other New Testament passages	29
6.3 Conclusions on the intermediate state	31
7. Final conclusions and evangelism	33

Preface

I first wrote this booklet in 1994. This is a slightly amended version. I have made very few changes: it was not intended to be an exhaustive look at the subject then and it does not purport to be so now. Literature is continually coming out on the subject and there are three books that I draw attention to that would be worth considering, although I do not interact specifically with them in this booklet:

N.T. Wright, *The Resurrection and the Son of God*

David Powys, *'Hell': A hard look at a Hard Question*

Robin Parry & Chris Partridge (eds.), *Universal Salvation? The current debate*

The main changes from the 1994 booklet are:

- 1) I add material that looks in more depth at the issue of Jesus preaching to the saints in prison.
- 2) I add some new material on Revelation 14:11 and the reference to the torment that takes place day and night.
- 3) I change the order of the material in the middle part of the booklet. In the original booklet I followed a logic of moving from a discussion on the intermediate state to the issue of the final destinies as this is a chronological way to approach the subject. However, given that the Scriptures focus on the issue of final destinies considerably more than it does on the intermediate state, I changed the order to fit more with the biblical emphasis, hence a discussion of the final destinies for the human race precedes the discussion on the intermediate state.

© Martin Scott
Leatherhead, Surrey, 2007

Heaven and Hell: Death and Beyond

Ironically death is the one certain fact of life. The bible describes it as the last enemy and, even for Christians, death is still an enemy, although its sting has been drawn by Jesus, who on behalf of all people, tasted death. Naturally what is experienced beyond beyond the grave is of interest to us all and the Bible gives us *some* guidance on the matter. However, before we become too enthusiastic about having all our questions answered, we should note that the Bible does not primarily focus on the period between death and resurrection. The focus of Scripture is on the kingdom of God breaking into human affairs and of bodily resurrection in the future – all guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus.

Scripture is not speculative and it focuses us on some clear facts that have eternal relevance. We know that it is this side of death / *parousia*¹ that an opportunity is given to get ready for the coming age. This is the thrust of the New Testament message and is summarised as, 'Today is the day of salvation'. In other words, now is the opportunity to prepare for the coming age, for once the new age has come in all its fullness all opportunity to get ready will have gone.

Given the Bible's focus we should not be surprised that there is more certainty on the biblical material concerning eternal destiny than there is on what takes place following death (known as the intermediate state). Before we look at the key areas it will be helpful to briefly examine teaching that is, at best, on the periphery of biblical truth.

1. Beliefs periphery to Scripture

1.1 Purgatory and Limbo

These are both essentially Roman Catholic doctrines. Purgatory refers to the suffering that all who die at peace within the church, but are not perfect, pass through before arriving at heaven. This period of suffering will vary in degree and is in order to make satisfaction for sins. Matthew 5:25,26 ('given over to the tormentors *until* the debt is paid in full') is used to underpin this position, however it needs to be noted that the overall thrust of biblical teaching denies such a belief.²

According to Roman Catholic theology Limbo is the place where souls of

1. The Greek term *parousia* was used of the arrival of a dignitary at a city. It strictly means 'presence' and was used very early on in New Testament literature as a technical term to describe the return of Jesus.

2. Other Scriptures are used to defend the belief in purgatory, particularly those that refer to the fire of testing of the believer (see, for example, Luke 12:59; 1 Cor. 3:10-15; 5:5, 15:29). However these Scriptures do not refer to a refining process that a believer goes through subsequent to death, but to the judgment all believers will face.

unbaptised infants go. This is founded upon an interpretation of original sin (children are defiled and so guilty) and of infant baptism (this sacrament washes away the defilement) in such a way that unbaptised children are unfit for heaven. Limbo is not taught explicitly in Scripture but becomes a theological necessity for those who interpret original sin and infant baptism in such ways. Given Jesus' attitude to children it is surely better to assume that they are granted entrance to the kingdom of heaven in a unique way (Matt. 18:2,3). On certain issues the Bible might not speak with a loud and clear voice but we can be sure of the mercy of God toward any child that dies.

1.2 Universalism

Purgatory and Limbo are exclusively Roman Catholic doctrines and have no adequate foundation within the Bible. However, when we come to the issue of *Universalism* it needs to be acknowledged that this view in differing forms has had support from theologians of differing schools.³

An appeal can be made to a number of Scriptures. Some texts speak of a universal reconciliation taking place (e.g., Col. 1:20; Ephes. 1:10; 1 Cor. 15:24-28); others such as 1 Tim. 4:10 speak of Jesus' specific, but not exclusive, relationship with believers.⁴ Then there are the universalist texts concerning the death of Jesus for the whole human race, as well as the Adam / Christ passages in Paul.⁵

Universalism, by strict definition, mean that in the end all will be saved, regardless of a person's response to Christ this side of death / *parousia*. The view is summed up by John Hick with the words, 'God will eventually succeed in his purpose of winning all men to himself in faith and love.'⁶ I suggest that the universalist is right to emphasise the will of God for salvation but is wrong to underplay the human response needed for salvation.

Although not strictly called universalism, there are views that propose some form of 'second chance' for those who die. An appeal to 1 Peter 3:18-4:6 as being descriptive of Jesus preaching to those who had died not hearing the Gospel⁷ is taken by some scholars, such as Clark Pinnock, to mean that 'death is the occasion when the unevangelised have an opportunity to make

3. Since writing the original booklet in 1994 I have come across an excellent, and thought-provoking, book that I can wholeheartedly recommend that debates the subject of Universalism. The book is edited by Robin Parry and Chris Partridge and is entitled *Universal Salvation?* (Paternoster Press, 2003).

4. 'He is the Saviour of all people, *especially* those who believe...' This can be compared to Paul's words to Timothy to 'bring... the scrolls, *especially* the parchments' (2 Tim. 4:13). By focusing on the parchments it does mean that the scrolls are to be ignored and rejected. Similarly Jesus is said to be the Saviour of believers in a specific way might not mean that the others are excluded from his salvation.

5. Rom. 5:12-19; 1 Cor. 15:22. The contrast is between Adam as the first human and Christ as the eschatological human. The effect of each is described in equal terms: all... all, many... many.

6. *Evil and the Love of God* (MacMillan, 1977), p. 342.

7. The meaning of this text is hotly disputed and it would be very unwise to build any substantial belief on this text. In a later appendix I will look at this text separately.

a decision about Jesus Christ.’⁸ Others such as C.S. Lewis (tentatively) proposed that there might be an escape from hell for those who had a change of heart.⁹ Others make an appeal to such descriptions as the gates of the New Jerusalem always being open with the kings of the earth bringing their glory and honour to the city (Rev. 21:24ff.),¹⁰ or to the leaves of the tree of life being for the healing of the nations (Rev. 22:2). Although these views are not strictly universalism they do illustrate that the fate of those who have never heard the Gospel is an acute issue to be faced.

There is always value in emphasising a ‘Wideness in God’s Mercy’.¹¹ Neal Punt with some justification has explored the possibility of approaching the theme of salvation from the opposite end of the spectrum to that normally accepted as evangelical. He effectively suggests that ‘all are saved except for those who reject Christ’, rather than, ‘all are lost except for those who accept Christ’. He maintains that all are elect in Christ and only those who do not see fit to acknowledge God will be lost. He argues this from a Calvinistic (and perhaps Barthian) position that all are elect in Christ except for those the Bible explicitly says will be lost.¹²

The strict form of universalism seems to stretch the evidence beyond what it will sustain,¹³ however the key issue of the fate of the unevangelised will be given consideration later.

Having looked at views that might be considered on the periphery of biblical truth we now want to concentrate on the issues that are more central – issues concerning death, the intermediate state and final destiny. By necessity we will have to look at related subjects that will help set parameters on our interpretation of those central issues.

2. The nature of humanity

The Bible reveals the uniqueness of the human race. Humanity is at one the same time intrinsically related to the creation and also uniquely related to the Creator. Humanity and the animal world alike are declared to be living beings

8. Pinnock, *Why is Jesus the Only Way?*, Eternity, Dec. 1976, p.34.

9. *The Great Divorce*, (MacMillan & Co., 1946).

10. This is argued for example by David Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology*, Vol. 2. (Harper, 1979), pp. 224-230.

11. This is the title of Clark Pinnock’s book in which he challenges non-Calvinists to re-examine God’s love for the whole world (Zondervan, 1992).

12. Punt *Unconditional Good News*, p. 30 gives a good summary of his position.

13. The texts in favour of universalism cannot be taken in isolation from other texts. God’s saving purpose has universal scope but people may refuse to enter into that purpose. In Col. 1:19-23, for example, the Colossian believers enter into the reconciliation effected by Christ ‘provided they continue in the faith.’ Universal reconciliation does not, in and of itself, necessarily imply that all will voluntarily submit to Christ. All ultimately confess the Lordship of Christ, but not all do so willingly. Although Paul says that all will acknowledge the Lordship of Jesus, including that which is under the earth (Phil. 2:9f.), when he speaks of ultimate reconciliation he does not include the subterranean sphere (Eph. 1:9f.).

(Gen. 1:21,24; 2:19 of animals; 2:7 of humanity).¹⁴ Yet it is humanity that is uniquely created in the image of God which is certainly, in some way, tarnished through the fall.¹⁵

2.1 Spirit and / or soul and body

There is often the assumption that the above (and other similar terms) are descriptions of distinct parts of a person and that a person is then the sum of those parts. A person is then assumed to be essentially the total of body and souls (a dyad) or the total of body, soul and spirit (a triad). Whichever of these views is adopted the essence of them is that there is a spiritual 'part' of a person that is independent of the body. In extreme forms this view leads to a despising of the body and a hope for eternal life that is totally other-worldly and bodiless.¹⁶

However it is not possible to take the Hebrew and Greek words for soul (*nephesh* and *psuche*) or for spirit (*ruach* and *pneuma*) or even for body (*basar* and *soma*) and to give each of them a nice, neat definition that holds true in every case. Some examples will help show this:

Nephesh (Heb. 'soul'): can refer to a person as a whole being. This is how it is used of the first human being once God breathed his life into Adam; it is used this way in Gen. 46:18 where sixteen souls (*nephashoth*) simply means sixteen people. It is used to describe animals (Gen. 1:21 etc.) and can even describe a lifeless corpse (Num. 6:2,6; 9:6f). Evidently the word carries a variety of meanings and it is not possible to establish a meaning for the word that would equate to the Greek usage of the term 'soul' as an immaterial part (the real me) of a person that is trapped in their body.

Psuche (Greek 'soul'): normally it refers to 'life' as a whole. Lives (*psuchai*) were in danger (Acts 27:10); Jesus gave his life (*psuche*) for us (Mark 10:45). In Acts when 3000 people were added to the church (Acts 2:41) like describes them as 3000 *psuchai*. Other uses of the term, *psuche*, are to describe the seat of feeling (e.g. Mark 14:34) and to describe true life as opposed to mere existence (Mark 8:34,35).

Overall then the terms used that are at times translated as 'soul' do not lead us to a view of the soul being immortal and capable of independent existence. At this point we need to look at Matthew 10:28 which states, 'Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul (*psuche*) Rather be afraid of the One who can destroy both body and soul in hell.'

14. The Hebrew word translated as living creature / living being is *nephesh*. This word is often translated as 'soul'. Given the biblical usage of the word it is very difficult to insist that this word is referring to an immaterial 'soul' as a distinctive part of the human being. Adam does not receive a human soul through the breath of God – s/he *becomes* a human soul / being. The term *nephesh* describes Adam as whole rather than describing a part of him.

15. After the fall Adam's son, Seth, is formed after the image and likeness of Adam (Gen. 5:3), surely a comment made in contrast to God's original creation of humanity. It is against the creation narratives that we need to understand the references to Jesus as the image of God: he is the eschatological and true human.

16. Generally speaking this was the predominant view expressed in Greek philosophy and writings. This is in contrast, as we will see to the Christian view of *bodily* resurrection.

At first reading this might be seen as implying a separate and independent of the soul from the body.¹⁷ However, it is not the 'soul' that is cast into hell but the person as a whole – described here as 'body and soul'. In the parallel passage in Luke 12:4,5 this is made explicit where the contrast is not made between body and soul but between temporal and eternal destruction. In the context Jesus is calling for a faith that, even if their life was to be physically destroyed through being killed, their inner life could not be destroyed, much as was stated during the Maccabean era of martyrdom, some 200 years before the time of Jesus. This is not to deny the possibility of a bodiless existence, but it simply to say that this is not the thrust of *this* text.

Ruach (Heb. 'spirit'): this term is connected with breath. Once God breathes *ruach* enters Adam and s/he becomes a living being. If *nephesh* tends to refer to humanity as alive, *ruach* has a tendency toward describing a person in activity. It is when God's *ruach* comes upon a person that the person is empowered for a particular activity.

Pneuma (Greek 'spirit'): can be used in the NT in ways that are almost interchangeable with *psuche* (Luke 1:46). It is used of life or vitality (Luke 8:55 – life returns to Jairus' daughter). In Paul the term *pneuma* most often refers to the Holy Spirit. Also through the enabling of the divine Spirit *pneuma* can describe the ability and activity of a human being as they relate to and experience the spiritual dimension. In this sense Paul describes the Christian as *pneumatikos* (spiritual: 1 Cor. 2:13-16).¹⁸

Basar (Heb. 'body' or 'flesh'): the Hebrew word for body (*guph*) is very rare in the OT; this word *basar* means 'meat' and by transfer comes to mean the whole body. It reminds humanity of its link with creation, and so can occasionally be used in contrast to *ruach* (spirit) when it gives the sense of flesh seen as independent human existence, thus being in contrast to spirit as the manifestation of God's power.

Soma (Greek 'body'): this can refer to a corpse (Lk. 17:37), however we need to remember that so could the term *nephesh*) but is often descriptive of the person as a whole. So Matthew 5:29 sates the *soma* being cast into hell; likewise Paul asks the Roman Christians to present their *somata* to God – meaning to present themselves as a whole (Rom. 12:1).

There are other terms used of humanity that we have not looked at such as: heart, flesh, guts, etc. There appears to be a great interchangeability in the biblical terminology; terms are not used with great precision and we would go beyond the evidence if we were to suggest that the words used were precisely describing distinct parts of a person.

A summary from Aimo Nikolainen might be of some help to us. He states, man is an indivisible whole. Seen from different points of view, he is in turn body, flesh and blood, soul, spirit, and heart... They are not parts into which man may be divided. Body is man as concrete being; 'flesh and blood' is a man as a creature distinguished

17. It certainly cannot be taken to describe a belief that the soul is immortal – for both body and soul are *destroyed* in hell!

18. When he describes the resurrection body as *pneumatikos* (1 Cor. 15:46) he does not mean by that term 'non-physical' but a body that is fully energised by the Holy Spirit and therefore equipped to relate fully to the spiritual dimension.

from the Creator; soul is the living human individual; spirit is man having his source in God; heart is man as a whole in action.¹⁹

The overall view of Scripture is that person is not made up of a sum of individual parts but rather that a person is a unified entity. Normal human existence is embodied existence. In the Old Testament there is no conception of significant existence for a person outside of a physical expression. It could be argued that the New Testament does allow for such a possibility but we would need to be careful in making that assumption too soon, as we could be in danger of distancing NT writers from their essentially Hebraic understanding.²⁰

2.2 1 Thessalonians 5:23 ‘spirit, soul and body’

One Scripture that might describe, not only humanity as the sum total of parts, but also one that might be making the distinction between soul and spirit is Paul’s words to the Thessalonians. He asks God to sanctify them totally in spirit, soul and body. However, rather than assume Paul is giving a precise description of the make-up of the human person, it is probably better to assume that is simply listing together near-synonyms to stress totality.²¹

2.3 Spiritual and soulish humanity

We have already touched on the term *pneumatikos* (spiritual). Paul uses this term in contrast to *psuchikos* but it would be wrong to make this mean that Paul viewed people either as spiritual or ‘soulish’ in some non-physical way. Rather he uses the term to describe a person as one who relates to this natural order (*psuchikos*) or to the life of God (*pneumatikos*). So the true believer is *pneumatikos* and is in contact with, and has understanding of, the Spirit of God. This is not true of the *psuchikos* person; such a person is unspiritual (1 Cor. 2:14). Likewise the human body, prior to resurrection, is *psuchikos* as it cannot fully participate in the new order. To participate in the new order a *pneumatikos* body is required – one that is totally energised and brought to life by the Spirit. Paul is not denying the physical nature of the resurrection but he is contrasting the natural dimension of the body before

19. Quoted in Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, 1994, p. 29.

20. Greek thinking was essentially dualistic – body and soul; Hebrew (and biblical) thinking is essentially monistic, with a person as a whole being able to be described in different ways. When considering the after-life it is important that we do not simply buy into the Platonic thought world of the body being but a tomb for the real me – the soul.

21. See on this verse the comments by Best, *The First and Second Epistles to the Thessalonians*, Black, 1972. He comments positively on the suggestion that we have a collection of near-synonyms (similar to Deut. 6:5). The other possibility is that it could be translated as: ‘sanctify your spirit (= self), namely both soul (= life) and body (= the external expression of that life).’ Whatever approach is taken it is unlikely that Paul is departing from his Jewish understanding of viewing a person as an intrinsic unity and giving us here a description of the true make-up of a person. (See also the quote from de Lacey and Turner in the next section).

All of the above is not to deny the practical use of distinguishing the terms in, for example, the realm of counselling, the point being made here is that the terms *as used in Scripture* do not carry precise analysis of distinct parts of the human person.

the resurrection with the transformation that will take place through the Spirit at resurrection.

So Paul does not emphasise human existence as consisting of the sum of different parts. He is essentially in line with the Old Testament. Human life is to be expressed in bodily form. The hope is not to escape from the body to some form of spiritual, bodiless existence, but to express the life of the Spirit in bodily existence – albeit resurrected form.

De Lacey and Turner wisely summarise these points with the following, Paul's terminology is simply too indefinite to permit us safely to dogmatise. If we wish to assert Paul's essential monism, we must also allow for dualist expression at times at least: if we stress the pluriform view, that must not blind us to the overriding unitary nature of Paul's outlook.²²

2.4 Immortality of the soul

The issue we now need to face is the question of immortality. Was humanity created immortal? Does humanity possess a soul that is immortal? This was a Greek view-point and our discussion here will have implications on existence beyond the grave – both before and after the *parousia*.

Greek has three terms to express the concept of immortality: *athanasia* (deathlessness); *aphtharsia* (incorruptibility); and *aphthartos* (incorruptible). None of these terms are ever used with the word 'soul' in Scripture and when applied to humanity they *always* refer to a person's future destiny, *never* to one's present state. For Paul immortality alone belongs to God (1 Tim. 6:16) and is a future gift for believers. Immortality is conditional – it must be granted by God; there is no eternal life except in Christ. Although this does not necessarily mean that unbelievers will be annihilated after death / judgment – it also does open up such a possibility.

Humanity was not created immortal but it does seem that they were created *for* immortality (Gen. 2:17; 3:22-24). It is the grace of God that prevents humanity from eating the tree of life and thus living for ever in an alienated state of sin. To eat of the tree of life (and to live for ever) is a gift for those who have overcome through the death of Jesus (Rev. 2:7; 22:14).²³

In the light of Scripture we have to conclude that the idea of an immortal soul or even of humanity (by nature) being immortal must be firmly rejected. This is a key area to establish for this opens up the possibility of non-existence beyond the grave.²⁴

22. De Lacey & Turner, *Man and his Hope*, p. 40.

23. Whenever the Scriptures use the term 'immortal' or 'incorruptible' of human beings, they always describe the *resurrection body* of the *redeemed*. (Fudge, *op cit*, p. 31, note 47, quoting from Morey.)

24. However, it also needs to be noted that God can keep people 'alive' should he choose to do so. I am simply making the point that there are two possibilities – continued existence or an existence that comes to an end.

2.5 Summary

In all the above discussions on the make-up of the human person I am suggesting that the strong emphasis in Scripture is of the unified nature of the human person. This is not to deny the possibility of a disembodied state, but that the main aspect of understanding is that normal personal existence is in an embodied state. To argue that the 'real me' is my spirit (along the lines of 'I am a spirit-being have a brief human / physical existence') is not found in the pages of Scripture, but within Hellenistic philosophies. Likewise to argue for the immortality of the soul is to go beyond (and to go contrary) the revelation of Scripture.

Once again I state that the possibility of a disembodied state after death and possibility of endless torment for the unbeliever is not ruled out by the above assertions – the point is simply that the teaching of Scripture opens up other possibilities for us to consider.

3. Jesus' resurrection and the believer

'Jesus has risen' is one of the central tenets of the Christian faith. It is more than a minor belief for the resurrection is central for the future hope of the believer. (We should note that the claim for Jesus was not that he was alive in the sense of 'life after death', but that God had raised him physically from the dead.) Christ's resurrection is the basis on which we can have hope for a future resurrection (1 Cor. 15:20-24) and in some ways his resurrection is the pattern for the believer's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:48,49): although there might also be some differences. As far as a resurrection of the unbeliever is concerned Paul has nothing to say in his letters. Although they too will be raised it would be wrong to assume that their resurrection is going to be of the same order to that of the believer.

This section is not going to be a full look at the resurrection of Jesus but will seek to examine key areas that have direct relevance for our discussion on intermediate and final states for humanity.

3.1 Did Jesus descend to *sheol* / *hades*?

Fudge maintains that Jesus went to *sheol*, the place of the departed. This is part of his overall argument that all go to *sheol* with the righteous dead being buried in the hope of being raised from *sheol*.²⁵ In Acts 2:24-31 Peter quotes David's words in Psalm 16. There David expressed his hope that God will not abandon him to *sheol*; this could mean that his hope was that God would not leave him in *sheol* but would resurrect him from there on the last day, but it seems better to take it as an expression of his hope that his future was secure. The same applies with the application of these Scriptures to Jesus by Peter. It could simply mean that God did not abandon Jesus in the realm of the dead without necessarily implying that Jesus descended to *sheol* as a place.

25. Fudge, *op cit*, p. 44.

In the Apostles' Creed we have the statement that 'he descended *into Hades*'. The first occurrence of this clause is evidently in the Fourth Formula of Sirmium (359AD) and originally it meant nothing more than Jesus truly died. Rufinus, the presbyter of Aquileia, said the phrase explained an old doctrine (that Jesus died) rather than adding a new one (that he descended and went to *hades*).²⁶

The statements in 1 Peter (3:18-20; 4:6) are less than straightforward (just check out the commentaries!). If it refers to Christ making proclamation to the inhabitants of *hades* (although the term *hades* is not used: the term used is 'spirits in prison') it is not easy to decide who these spirits are and what the proclamation consisted of. The term 'spirits' do not usually refer to humans who have died and so it could well be a proclamation of Christ's cosmic victory to the fallen angelic forces.²⁷ If however 1 Peter 4:6 refers to the same event it might be possible to suggest that there was a proclamation (this time the verb used for proclamation is *euangelizo*: to proclaim good news) to the generation that died in the flood in order that *they* might have a genuine second chance given the uniqueness of their situation.²⁸ However, it is possible to take the two passages as referring to two different situations: the first being a proclamation of victory to the demonic realm (given the parallels between 2 Peter 2:4 and Jude 6) and the second situation simply stating that the Gospel is the basis on which judgment takes place.²⁹ This is certainly a reasonable explanation.

The excursus that follows is an exploration of the chiasmic structure of the passage under discussion.

Excursus: a chiasmic structure within 1 Peter 3:16-4:6

These verses are in the context of a call to suffer for doing good, and it is well possible to see this section as a chiasmus (an inverted parallel structure) as follows:

26. See Fudge, *op cit*, p. 143, note 35.

27. Jude 6 speaks of angels being kept in chains; 2 Peter 2:4 speaks of angels committed to chains of deepest darkness. It says that Jesus proclaimed, rather than preached the Gospel to them (*kerussein* not *euangelizo*). If this is the case then we would not necessarily have to take these verses as meaning that Jesus literally went to *hades* but that the impact of his death was known to all - similar to Col. 1:15 etc. Further the term *pneumata* (spirits) is never used without qualification of departed human spirits. (Heb. 12:23 uses the term of departed human beings but qualifies the use by saying that they are 'the spirits of the righteous made perfect'); unqualified the word is used of supernatural beings, good and evil (Lk. 10:20; Heb. 1:4).

28. This is the suggestion of David Pawson, *The Road to Hell*, pp. 140-5. It raises the question of a second chance for all who find themselves in a unique situation of not having been able to respond to the Gospel due to being overtaken by a sudden catastrophe.

29. We note that the term 'the dead' has already been used in verse 5. God is the judge of all, the living and the dead. Verse 6 then might be stating that the Gospel has been preached (past tense) to those who are *now* dead and they will be judged by their response to it while they were alive (*thus they will be judged in the flesh just as everyone is judged*).

- A Your slanderers will be ashamed (3:16)
- B So suffer, although innocent, in God's will (3:17)
- C For Christ himself suffered for the unjust (3:18)
- D He then triumphed over hostile spirits (3:19)
- E Noah was saved through water (3:20)
- E' You are saved through the waters of baptism (3:20)
- D' Christ triumphed over hostile spirits (3:22)
- C' For Christ suffered (4:1)
- B' So suffer in the will of God (4:2)
- A' Your slanderers will be ashamed (4:3-5)

If this is the main structure then it becomes clear that the proclamation is one of victory over the spirit world, with 4:6 making the point that it is the Gospel that it is the true means of judgment. If we are to live in the Spirit we can afford to be judged (and even wrongly judged) in the flesh. Under this interpretation this verse would not be talking of a proclamation to the dead, but that it *had been* proclaimed to those who are *now* dead. They had the Gospel proclaimed to them while they were alive and were judged while alive ('judged in the flesh') but that through the Gospel they live in the Spirit.

End of excursus

Ephesians 4:9, 10 have also been taken to mean that Christ descended into *hades*, the lower parts of the earth. However, the contrast is between heaven and earth (an ascent to heaven and a descent to the earth) and not heaven and *hades*. It is perfectly feasible to take the phrase 'the lower parts of the earth' to be 'the lower parts, that is the earth'.³⁰

In conclusion then there is not reason to suppose that Christ literally descended to *hades* as suggested by Fudge and others. But there is every reason to suppose that there was a proclamation to the demonic powers of Christ's cosmic victory. The language itself could well be figurative or Christ may well have made the proclamation in person in spirit (1 Peter 3:19). Having disarmed principalities and powers Christ went victoriously to Paradise – perhaps from there he made a journey to the place (?) where the angelic powers were kept in prison. We need thought to be careful not to read more into the language used in these portions of Scripture than was intended.

To the extent that it is correct to speak of an intermediate state for Christ (after death and pre-resurrection) we would probably have to suggest a disembodied state in Paradise (with perhaps a journey to proclaim his victory as discussed above). If this is so then this would give some backing for the concept of some form of disembodied state in Paradise with Christ for the believer post-death and pre-resurrection.

30. See Lincoln, *Paradise Now and Not Yet*, pp. 155-162.

3.2 Christ the Last Adam

The comparison and contrast of Adam and Christ are explicit, and at times implicit, within Paul. He clearly sees Christ as the 'last Adam', the eschatological human being. This is an important theme that affects the life of the believer and is a key with regard to the believer's destiny. The first Adam became a living soul and had a body appropriate to that quality of life; the last Adam has a different quality of life and as life-giver has a different order of body (1 Cor. 15:49). Christ became a life-giving Spirit through the resurrection (in 1 Cor. 15:22 Paul says it is on the basis of his resurrection that he brings life to all).³¹ Paul holds that a transformation took place for Christ at the resurrection: it is as resurrected humanity that he pours out the Spirit (Acts 2:32,33). Christ as human is at the right hand of the Father – the mediator between God and humanity *is* human.³²

Paul is not simply speaking of two human individuals, but is speaking of contrasting orders of existence that have bodily expression.³³ The resurrection transforms the order of existence for Christ (he becomes life-giving Spirit; he becomes heavenly)³⁴ and likewise for believers in two stages: they receive (now) the Spirit of Jesus who is the guarantee of (future) bodily redemption. Christ does not restore humanity to its original condition, rather he brings humanity to the destiny that had been in view since the creation.

The resurrection and subsequent exaltation of Christ accomplishes a new unity between heaven and earth. Christ is exalted with a heavenly body, but it is as a human that he is in heaven. In Christ the two spheres of existence are brought together: he is the heavenly human. He is truly the first-fruits of the ultimate harvest of cosmic reconciliation (Ephes. 1:10).

3.2.1 Resurrection and transformation

Resurrection for the believer is guaranteed by the resurrection of Jesus and his resurrection becomes the prototype for the believer's (1 Cor. 15:9; Rom. 8:29; Phil. 3:21). The transformation that took place for Christ is the

31. See also Rom. 1:4.

32. Prior to the resurrection Christ comes in the likeness of sinful flesh (Rom. 8:3), in the form of Adamic humanity (Phil. 2:8). (By using the term Adamic humanity I am making no comment on the issue of original sin.) After the resurrection he becomes the last Adam: the first-born of a new order of humanity. Yet he remains human, transforming and bringing to consummation God's purpose for humanity.

33. Lincoln, *op cit*, p. 44. Note that Paul uses the neuter in verse 46 (*to pneumatikon* and *to psuchikon*), thus indicating that he is not referring to two human individuals but to two orders of existence (spiritual and natural). By the term spiritual we must not understand this to mean non-material or non-physical, but that it is a way of describing a bodily existence that is fully energised by the Spirit.

34. 1 Cor. 15:45,47. Lincoln, *ibid*, is very helpful in showing that Paul is not suggesting that Christ is the man from heaven in the sense of location (as in the Incarnation), but that he has *become* qualitatively, through the resurrection, the man from heaven (p. 46). This is clear from verse 48 where we read that believers are also termed heavenly – this does not mean that they have come from heaven but that they share the life of heaven: now in part and at the resurrection in fullness.

transformation that will take place for the believer. What cannot be insisted upon is that the body that is placed in the grave is the one that will be resurrected (as was the case for Jesus); what must be insisted upon is that the resurrection life is bodily and that there is a continuity between the embodied life now and the embodied life then (*I die; I am raised to embodied existence*).

At the *parousia* believers who have died will experience resurrection and those who are alive at his coming transformation. This is what Paul lays out in 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 and 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17. In Philippians 3:21 he focuses on the transformation but it is clear that he expects the same experience of being conformed to the glorious bodily image of Jesus to take place for all believers: those alive at his appearing and those who have died.

As noted above there is both continuity and discontinuity in the resurrection. Paul does not teach a resurrection of the flesh (as some subsequent writers were to do) so it is unlikely that the expectation is of the body that is in the grave being literally the body that is raised. So we can say that 'the resurrection signifies not the reanimation of corpses but the transformation of the whole person into the image of Christ by the indwelling Spirit, in spite of the intervention of death',³⁵ and the writer (Harris) has suggested that the phrase 'resurrection of the person' is least open to objection. And by this phrase we have to understand that personality is normally expressed in an embodied state.

Believers will either be raised (for those who have died) or they will be transformed (those still alive) at the *parousia*. In this respect the resurrection of Jesus can be seen as unique for, in his case, the body that was placed in the tomb is also the body that was raised. His resurrection is both strictly a resurrection and a transformation, thus being a pattern for all believers whether alive at his coming or not.

Jesus resurrection is a pattern for the believer but we cannot argue that it is the pattern for the unbeliever.³⁶ The New Testament teaches a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous but does not lead us to believe that they are of the same order. The most we can say about the unbeliever is that *they* are raised to life to face God. The nature of that (bodily) resurrection is unspecified. To state that they are raised immortal is to go beyond what the Scriptures speak of.

3.3 Christ the Judge of all

All people will be judged at the *parousia* and this will be carried out through a human being. The one appointed by God to carry out this judgment is Jesus

35. Harris, *Resurrection and Immortality: Eight Theses*, Themelios 1, 1976, p. 51.

36. This is the fundamental mistake that both Pawson (*op cit*, pp. 34f) and Blanchard, *whatever Happened to Hell?*, pp. 68f., make. The body of the believer can be said to be immortal once resurrected but this cannot be said of the unbeliever. In both writings it appears that (false) appeal is to enable the writers to believe in eternal punishing without resorting to the unbiblical doctrine of the immortality of the soul. In rejecting the Greek philosophical view they adopt the equally unbiblical view of the immortality of the resurrected body of the unbeliever!

and so this eschatological event is known as the coming before the judgment seat of Christ. Although certain writers have tried to distinguish between a judgment for believers (2 Cor. 5:10), a judgment for the nations / Gentiles (Matt. 25:31-46) and a judgment for the unrighteous (Rev. 20:11-15), it is best to take these as variant ways of speaking of the one day of judgment (Acts 17:31; Rom. 2:5-11, 16).³⁷

4. Final States

Following on from judgment there are rewards and punishment: there is a heaven to be gained and a hell to be shunned. This has often been talked of as 'going to heaven' and of 'burning in hell' - both being accepted as ongoing experiences that have no ending. One is the fate of those who are 'in Christ' and other other the fate of those who have rejected the mercy of God as offered in Christ. In this section I will look at the teaching of Scripture so that the heaven to be gained and the hell to be shunned is illuminated in the light of what the Scriptures say. This will then lead to the next section where I will by necessity look at the fate of those who have never heard the Gospel of Jesus.

4.1 For the righteous

The reward for the righteous is to enter into something that had been prepared for them from the beginning as humanity's destiny (Matt. 25:34). It is the fulfilment of the biblical imagery that we read in the opening chapters Genesis: harmony and unity. Paul describes it as the summarising of all things (heavenly and earthly) in Christ (Eph. 1:10) so that God might be all in all (1 Cor. 15:28).³⁸

Consistently in Scripture heaven and earth are linked: both by way of comparison and of contrast. Genesis begins with the creation of heaven and earth; Jesus taught us to pray that the order of heaven would come to earth; the last book of the Bible speaks of a new heaven and a new earth. Creation and consummation are inextricably linked. Creation begins with a couple, consummation shows us a multitude that no-one could number; creation has a tree in a garden, consummation presents us with the tree of life bearing fruit throughout the year set in the midst of a magnificent city, which is itself set in the midst of a renewed creation; in the creation narratives God visited his people in the evening, but in the closing pages of Scripture God makes his home with redeemed humanity for ever. Creation indicates where God is taking his creation and his people – and the fulfilment is far beyond the inaugural work. Yet the two are related for God has always had a plan for his creation. Paul states as much in Romans 8:20,21 when he speaks of a groaning creation waiting for its redemption. Creation's future is not one of

37. See Travis, *The Problem of Judgment*, p. 54.

38. Lincoln, *op cit*, states, 'In this way creation and the age to come, protology and eschatology are correlated, the former pointing forward to the latter... It brings that person to the goal for humanity that God intended but humanity before Christ never reached.'

destruction but of regeneration.³⁹

The age to come is presented as taking place on earth with God 'moving' address to be with humanity, rather than vice-versa (Rev. 21:3,10). Paul says we are waiting for a Saviour to come from heaven (Phil. 3:20). This coming from heaven does not indicate the withdrawal from this world but the fullness of the age to come with its transformed heaven and earth.⁴⁰ In this new order redeemed humanity will fulfil all that Adamic humanity failed to achieve and they will be used to being God's order to creation (Heb. 2:5). eschatological humanity in resurrected state will reign on the earth (Rev. 5:10). The future is not one of 'going to heaven' but of participating in the heaven that comes to earth. The final amalgamation of heaven and earth is the glory that will 'cover the earth as the waters cover the sea.'⁴¹

The final scene of Scripture is that of the unification of heaven and earth and the complete obliteration of the power and presence of evil (shown to us by the symbolic statement of John that 'there was no more sea' (Rev. 21:1) – the sea being symbolic of the unruly part of creation). This will be the fulfilment of the purpose of God in creation. This is the end and also perhaps the beginning of a new release of creative energy and ability.

There is nothing in either Old or New Testament that would lead us to suppose that the age to come is 'other-worldly' in the sense of being away from the earth. Even Paul's words that those who are alive at the coming of Jesus will be caught up to meet him in the air (1 Thess. 4:16,17) do not lead us to believe that the future destiny for the believer will be heavenly for Paul uses a phrase *eis apantesin* (to meet). This was a phrase associated with the official visit of a ruling dignitary to a city, when the populace would go out of the city to meet the ruler and then return in triumphant procession escorting the ruler back to the city.⁴² The destination was the city – Paul's readers would have understood the final destination for the saints with their Lord to be the earth not the sky.⁴³ The witness of Scripture is that Christ will return with his saints and set up his everlasting kingdom on earth. The heaven to be gained is to participate in the rule of Christ; we can only prepare for it this side of death / *parousia*.⁴⁴

39. Jesus uses the word *palingenesia* (rebirth) of the coming age (Matt. 19:28). Rev. 21:1 and 2 Pet. 3:13 speak of a new heaven and a new earth as being a new order of heaven and earth. (The Greek word here is *kainos* not *neos*: *kainos* speaks of a new order, *neos* speaks of something new (young) that has not been present before) The Peter passage can be read as indicating a destruction of the current creation but it is far better to take it as using apocalyptic language, so speaking of the purifying fire through which this works must pass to be renewed. (This reading is also confirmed when a comparison is made with verse 6 of the same chapter where we read that this world has already been destroyed through the flood in the days of Noah.) That purification was partial and in order to judge sin; the eschatological fire will be complete and to rid the world of sin.

40. Lincoln, *op cit*, p. 189.

41. See Lincoln, *op cit*, p. 188.

42. Lincoln, *op cit*, p. 188.

43. It is also questionable whether Paul intended or his readers would have understood that there was any thought of literally going up in order to come down. Even if they did perceive this the final destination in view is the earth.

4.2 For the unrighteous

What then is the hell to be shunned? It is spoken of as fire and as outer darkness. Both of which need to be taken metaphorically rather than as literal descriptions, since fire and darkness are mutually exclusive.

4.2.1 How long is eternal?

Both heaven and hell-fire are called eternal (those concepts are also described as eternal life and eternal death). The Greek word *aionios* is usually translated as eternal or everlasting. It is an adjective derived from the noun *aion* (age) and simply means 'of the age' or 'age-long'. In the contexts of future destinies it is speaking of life or death that is in relationship to the age to come. Used in that context the adjective essentially carries a *qualitative* meaning: it speaks of life and death that are qualitatively different from the life and death experienced in this age. However, to simply reduce it to a qualitative meaning (what kind of life and death?) without a quantitative sense (how long is this life and death?) would be to stop short of its full meaning, for it would seem that the word also carries a 'forever' sense.

Given the above statements and applying them to the phrase 'eternal death' we conclude that it is referring to an order of death that is related to the age to come and is that it is forever. Such a conclusion, however, does not help us decide what the nature of that death consists of, for 'death' could carry with the idea of unending separation from God or, it could mean that after the 'second death' there is never again the possibility of life. 'Eternal' could refer to a process that never comes to an end or to the permanent results of a process. It is to the Scriptures that we now need to turn to take our considerations further.

4.2.2 Eternal destruction: the Old Testament

Although we do not look to the Old Testament to provide the definitive statements on the fate of the wicked there are some key scriptures that we need to look at.⁴⁵ Many Scriptures speak of destruction, perishing or dying all of which could (and are) interpreted in different ways. Such texts are inconclusive.⁴⁶ There are, however, a small number of texts that require closer examination.

Genesis 19:24-29. These verses describe the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah and are referred to in the New Testament as a historical

44. Tom Wright's small Grove Booklet, *New Heavens New Earth*, although a short booklet it does an admirable job in showing the Christian hope as being one of the amalgamation of heaven and earth, the fulfilment of God's creation project.

45. For a fuller discussion I recommend Fudge, *op cit*, ch. 6.

46. The Flood narratives speak of 'wiping humankind from the face of the earth', 'putting to an end all people', 'destroying all life under heaven', etc., with only life in the ark surviving. Such words do not necessarily mean eternal annihilation – the words might simply mean that the earthly existence of human lives come to an end but that they continue beyond death. In that sense many of the texts are inconclusive.

demonstration of divine judgment. It is from this narrative that we gain the imagery of 'fire and brimstone' (modern English: sulphur, Gen. 19:24) and the story is clearly illustrative of divine (and eternal) judgment. Another image that appears in the story is the result of the fire:

Abraham went out early in the morning to the place where he had stood before the Lord; and he looked toward Sodom and Gomorrah and toward the land of the Plain and saw the smoke of the land going up like the smoke of a furnace.

The fire destroyed all that went into it, the results were eternal with smoke rising up as the lasting evidence that the fire had fulfilled its purpose. The New Testament uses these texts as illustrative of eternal punishment (e.g., Jude 7) and we would expect that using such an illustration meant that they too understood eternal punishment as eventual non-existence. If they had an alternative view-point we would expect them to note that in the case of the wicked they will not totally destroyed but live forever in torment. As we will see there are no such qualifying clauses added.

Isaiah 33:10-14. Again we face a picture of total destruction with phrases such as: fire that consumes; burned to lime; thorns cut down and burned in the fire. Although this might all be poetic language it still leaves us considering a fire that totally consumes rather than one that perpetually torments.

Isaiah 66:24. This is again a key verse that clearly lies behind some of the New Testament verse and concepts:

And they shall look at the dead bodes of the people who have rebelled against me; for their worm shall not die, their fire shall not be quenched, and they shall be an abhorrence to all flesh.

The context is eschatological (see the reference to 'new heavens and new earth' in v. 22) and although the language *could* be simply poetic, if it is saying anything concrete about the future fate of the wicked it speaks of total destruction and non-existence. The fire is unquenchable, meaning that it consumes whatever is put in it (Ezek. 20:47f.; Amos 5:5f.; Matt. 3:12). The final scene in Isaiah is one of total shame not of continual pain and torment.

Malachi 4:1-6 presents the imagery of the fire again. This fire also burns up everything leaving the wicked simply as ashes to be trodden underfoot.

It is possible that the Old Testament imagery of the all-consuming fire is used in the New Testament as descriptive of a hell-fire that torments forever, but we will have to be sure that such a meaning is brought to bear upon the Old Testament texts by those writers. If not then the plain meaning of those texts is of a fire that cannot be quenched and destroys everything that enters it.⁴⁷

4.2.3 *Eternal destruction: between the testaments*

There is a diversity of belief reflected in these writings and for a more details examination I suggest that Fudge, *The Fire that Consumes*, chapters 7-9 is

47. The argument here is not as to whether God is able to have a fire that does not consume (as seen in the burning bush experience) or whether God could keep sinners alive forever in a state of torment. The discussion is simply on what the Bible seems to indicate.

consulted. Judith 16:17 is perhaps the only clear reference to a concept of unending conscious torment: 'and they shall weep and feel pain for ever.' Fudge comments on the Judith passage and then brings a conclusion on the wider body of inter-testamental literature with these words: 'This expectation is clearly present, but it is not the general one. On the other hand, the total, irreversible destruction of the godless was clearly anticipated by some Jews by the first century.'⁴⁸

4.2.4 *Eternal punishment: the New Testament*

'Fire', 'destruction', 'death', and such words all tend to speak of eventual extinction when taken at face value.⁴⁹ Even a writer such as Pawson (who holds to eternal torment) states that 'when biblical language and imagery are first read, the immediate impression is that life is extinguished in hell.'⁵⁰ Such an impression can only be overturned by explicit teaching of Scripture that would lead us to re-interpret the impression given through those words. Pawson himself proceeds to re-interpret those words saying that 'theology cannot live on terminology alone.'⁵¹ In order, then, to believe in an eternal hell of conscious ongoing torment we would need to find significant biblical evidence that causes us to re-interpret the plain meaning attached to the words and imagery used.

I list below some of the New Testament imagery and descriptions of the fate of the wicked: 'the chaff he will burn with unquenchable fire' (Matt. 3:12); 'destroy both body and soul in hell' (Matt. 10:28); 'suffer the punishment of eternal destruction' (2 Thess. 1:9); 'reap corruption' (Gal. 6:8); 'fire that will consume the adversaries' (Heb 12:29). Other Scriptures could be added but the above simply indicate that the language, if taken at face value, speaks of eventual non-existence for the wicked.

There are specific Scriptures that directly address the issue of eternal destruction that need individual attention. These are the texts that will help clarify what is taught in the New Testament. It is to these that I turn out attention now.

4.2.5 *Scriptures that appeal to Sodom and Gomorrah by way of example*

There are two passages that appeal directly to the story of Sodom and

48. Fudge, *op cit*, p. 77.

49. Of course this might not be the meaning attached to these words. Certainly such words as 'destroy' and 'destruction' can carry meanings other than total extinction. We have to decide in the contexts what meaning is intended by such words. To insist that the word 'eternal' qualifies death to make it mean non-ending torment (or a continual living death) is to totally miss the point. It is the words 'death' and 'life' that describe the nature of this age-long existence (or non-existence). We cannot automatically make eternal death to mean eternal life in hell. It might mean that but the plain meaning of the word is of a death (non-existence) that is for ever.

50. Pawson, *op cit*, p. 36.

51. Pawson, *ibid*, p. 37.

Gomorrah – 2 Peter 2:1-21 and Jude 4-7. Peter states that the fire that consumed the inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah, turned them to ashes and condemned them to extinction. He says that their experience is an example of the judgment coming to the ungodly (verse 6). Jude is perhaps even more explicit when he states that this judgment is to ‘serve as an example by undergoing a punishment of eternal fire’ (verse 7). He seems to state that the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah was eternal fire. This fits well with what we have suggested thus far: the fire is unquenchable and unstoppable; it will consume all; the effects will be eternal. Jude then helps define the meaning of eternal fire: the fire does not burn for ever but the effects are irreversible.

4.2.6 Revelation: fire, torment and smoke

The Sodom and Gomorrah imagery is also clearly behind some of the language in the book of Revelation (see Rev. 14:9,10; 18:9,18; 19:3). In Revelation 14:10,11 it speaks of torment by fire and sulphur with the smoke of its torment going up forever and ever. There is no more graphic way of describing the results of this fire. The language is poetic and borrows from the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative where it too speaks of fire and sulphur, with Abraham looking out in the morning and seeing all that remained was the smoke rising from the consumed city. (I will return, in due course, to the phrase ‘there is no rest day or night’.)

In Revelation 20:10 there is a description of the devil being thrown into the lake of fire where he will be tormented day and night forever and ever. The verse certainly leaves open the possibility that the devil might experience ongoing conscious torment (NB: this is not just the smoke of his torment that raises as we have it in 14:11). If this is so it does not necessarily mean that ongoing torment is therefore also the experience of those who reject Christ; ongoing torment might be the unique experience for the devil. If the beasts who are also tormented night and day are institutional systems, rather than individuals, we would be entitled to take this verse as highly symbolic since institutions cannot suffer conscious torment. Perhaps there is no easy answer to John’s words here. The book is apocalyptic in nature and it could be that the language speaks of the permanent eradication of evil. The phrase ‘day and night’ used here in and in 14:11 is in the Greek genitive case, indicating not length of duration (forever: day and night) but the kind of torment (it does not relent, there is no change from day to night). This then would not necessarily mean that it is without end but that there is no rest *while* it takes place.⁵² In the strongest possible terms John is saying that this will go on until it accomplishes its task – there will be no turning back. Even if we conclude that it does not come to an end we are only left with a statement regarding the devil and the two beasts; no statement is made of

52. The same use of the genitive ‘day and night’ is used of the living creatures praising God (4:8); of the martyrs serving (7:15); of Satan accusing (12:10). The action is not limited to the daytime of the night-time. It speaks of relentlessness rather than of duration of time. Satan’s accusations, for example, come to an end, but are relentless while they last. See *Fudge, op cit*, p. 189f.; Dana & Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (MacMillan, 1955), p. 77; Greenlee, *A Concise Grammar of New Testament Greek* (Eerdmans, 1958), pp. 29, 32f.

everlasting torment being directed toward the unbeliever.⁵³

Ralph Bowles had a perceptive article in *The Evangelical Quarterly* that specifically looked at Revelation 14:11.⁵⁴ The salient points from the article are as follows:

1) Isaiah 34:8-17 (an oracle against Edom) is strongly alluded to with the same three elements being found there: fire and sulphur, a quenchless judgment night and day, and a smoke that goes up for ever.

2) John changes the order to fire and sulphur, smoke ascending for ever, and then no rest day or night. Bowles makes the suggestion that this is due to an 'inverted parallelistic structure' - usually termed a chiasmus. He notes it as follows:

A if anyone worships the beast and its image, and receives a mark... (v. 9)

B he shall also drink the wine of God's wrath poured unmixed... (10a)

C he shall be tormented with fire and sulphur in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb (10b)

C' and the smoke of their torment goes up for ever and ever (11a)

B' and they shall have no rest, day and night (11b)

A' these worshippers of the beast and its image, and whoever receives the mark of its name (11c)

Under such structures the climax of the unit is found in the centre (the tormenting destructive fire of God). The final element in the judgment then is the smoke that rises after the judgment (as in Isaiah 34: 9,10). The climactic element then is of a tormenting judgment that destroys utterly, thus indicating that while this takes place there is 'no rest, day or night'. Using this structure the time issue of 'day and night' occur before the final destruction.

Bowles suggests the illustration in modern warfare language of intense bombing day and night where there is no break *until* it obliterates the enemy. If Bowles is correct then he is able to bring the Revelation passage in harmony with the Isaiah 34 passage, and take away its power as a proof-text on everlasting torment.

4.2.7 *The Lake of fire and Gehenna*

Gehenna (commonly translated as 'hell') is the valley of Hinnom outside

53. The view I am putting forward of eventual extinction in the fire that consumes totally is commonly called annihilation. However, that is not a wholly accurate term. Strictly speaking annihilationism teaches that after death there is nothing. Conditional immortality (the more accurate term) teaches that there will be a resurrection of the unrighteous, that they will be judged and punished. Those who hold this view are called conditionalists for they do not believe that the soul is immortal but as a result of the punishment the person will be annihilated - they will exist no more (normally thought to be after a period of torment that is proportional to their sins).

54. 'Does Revelation 14:11 Teach Etemal Torment? Examining a Proof-text on Hell', *EQ Vol. LXXXIII / No. 1*, Jan. 2001.

Jerusalem. It was the symbol for the judgment of God and might have been the garbage dump for the city.⁵⁵ It was soon used as a name for the final destiny of the unrighteous. The term 'lake of fire' is unique to John but virtually all scholars take it to stand for the same ultimate destiny that is elsewhere known as Gehenna.

Into Gehenna is thrown even death itself (Rev. 20:14). This is the final victory for death will then be no more (Rev. 21:4; cf. Is. 25:7f.; 1 Cor. 15:26). The glorious picture John gives is of the end of death, with death itself being annihilated through being thrown into the all-consuming fire of Gehenna. Then God will be all in all.

The lake of fire is in fact the 'second death' (Rev. 21:8). The lake of fire is the symbol, the second death is the reality. Again the plain meaning of Scripture is to suggest just as there is a higher and permanent form of life so there is a deeper and permanent form of death. After the higher form of life there is no more death (Rev. 21:4), and so after the second death there is no more life.

If all evil is not ultimately destroyed and removed from God's creation we are left with an eternal cosmic dualism which is difficult to resolve with the convictions that 'God will be all in all'. Evil is present in the creation narratives (though contained and subdued) but in the closing chapters of Revelation evil is no more.

4.2.8 A final note on 'core texts' for eternal punishment

The doctrine of eternal (ongoing) punishment eventually comes to rest on four core texts. Matthew 18:34,35, Mark 9:43-48, Revelation 14:10,11 and Revelation 20:10. What seems clear from the above texts is that the case for eternal punishment is not that clear! The Matthew 18 passage is a parable relating to unforgiveness; the Mark 9 passage is a clear warning about being cast into hell with the quote from Isaiah 66:24 added – 'where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched'. In the Isaianic passages the end result is of the destruction of the ones punished not their ongoing existence. And in the case of the Revelation passages the evidence is not totally clear-cut either. Hence my statement above that the case for eternal punishment is not that clear. Given that the natural reading of the language used of eternal punishment seems to point to destruction and the end of existence, I suggest that the controlling understanding of ongoing conscious torment ought to be considerably relaxed.

4.3 Conclusion on final states

The righteous in their resurrected bodies inhabit the transformed cosmos, with the presence of God pervading everything. The reconciling work that Christ began finds its conclusion as all things are summed up in him.

The unrighteous, having been judged, are condemned to outer darkness which leads to eventual extinction. Figuratively speaking, all that remains is

55. Travis, *I believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, p. 197, has challenged the popular view that Gehenna was used as the rubbish tip for Jerusalem in the time of Jesus.

'the smoke of their torment'. They experience the second death after which there is no life. Possibly the devil suffers ongoing torment for ever.

In speaking of the righteous we are left with an important question as to the fate of those who have never heard the Gospel of Jesus Christ. This is the next issue we consider, before finally turning to the issue of the intermediate state.

5. What happens to those who have never heard?

Two preliminary statements can be made. First God, as Judge, will be seen to do what is right (Gen. 18:25; and Romans chapters 1 and 2 seem to indicate that the judgment will be made according to the light people have received); second no-one is saved because of their own goodness (Rom. 3:10-23). To ask if a 'good' Muslim will be saved is to miss the point somewhat. A different question, all-together, is to ask if it is possible for someone who has followed another faith to find themselves saved, and, if so, on what basis?

There are different answers given to the destiny of the unevangelised, partly dependent on one's starting premises. Those who the unevangelised are lost hold strongly to the Scriptures that state that salvation is through Jesus alone (Jn. 14:6; etc.). All who receive Christ will be saved, is the clear message of the Gospel, but it is questionable if the Scriptures can be pushed to say that all who have not (knowingly) received Christ are lost.⁵⁶ One of the issues is to decide what it means 'to call upon the name of the Lord' (Rom. 10:13). Does it mean that person has to have heard of Jesus and to call upon his name, having been previously informed of the Gospel message? To push the basis of salvation that far would appear to present difficulties with other Scriptures. In the Old Testament we such individuals as Melchizedek, Job, Jethro, and others who appear to have some knowledge of God, although they themselves are outside the covenant people of God. Peter says that 'in every nation the one who fears him and does what is right, is welcome to him' (Acts 10:34-35), perhaps indicating that God does work outside of the covenant people.⁵⁷ This has led some to speak of 'believers' as those who are unevangelised but have thrown themselves on the mercy of God, and 'Christians' as those believers who have thrown themselves on the mercy of God as revealed specifically in Jesus.⁵⁸

Salvation can only come through Jesus and faith in the mercy of God. It cannot come through 'good works' (and within the so-called 'New Perspective' on Paul it is maintained that even Jews did not believe in salvation by good works / keeping the Law). We can be reasonably clear that

56. Sanders, *Is belief in Christ necessary for Salvation?*, on p. 247 says, There is one sure way of salvation and that is to accept Christ. But these verses do not logically rule out other ways that Christ may save. The most that can be said from the biblical data is: All who accept Christ will be saved', and 'Some who do not receive Christ will be lost.'

57. Was Cornelius already 'saved' (or perhaps better, was he 'safe') before he heard of Jesus – and this seems to be the point of Peter's statement. Is it therefore that he became a *Christian* believer after responding to Peter's message.

58. Sanders, *op cit*, p. 253.

1) those who receive Christ receive salvation; and 2) for those who reject the mercy of God that they have rejected the salvation he offers, thus they do not participate in the life of God as it will be expressed in the age to come. However, the above two categories ('those who receive Christ' and 'those who reject the mercy of God') do not necessarily cover all of humanity. What is left open is the fate of those who occupy the middle ground: such as those who have never heard specifically of Jesus but throw themselves on the mercy of God rather than trust in any righteousness they might possess. Such people are surely in the same category as the Old Testament saints who were saved through Christ, even though they did not know him nor receive him in the same way as New Testament saints.⁵⁹ If there are those who are unevangelised, but have thrown themselves on the mercy of God, they will respond to Jesus when they hear of him (the situation with Cornelius seems to be a good example illustrating this). Hearing of Jesus though is more than being told a set of facts about him, it is being informed in such a way that Jesus himself is heard and therefore encountered.⁶⁰

To hold to such a view is not to deny that salvation is only through Christ, nor is it a denial of the need to proclaim the good news. It is simply to define what that means for different categories of people. Travis sums it up as:

Salvation is only possible because someone has been open to the grace of God and to the work of the Holy Spirit in their lives, even though they have not necessarily named the name of Christ.⁶¹

5.1 Summary and conclusions

1. Salvation is only through Christ. There is no other way to the Father. What this means for different categories of people is not necessarily the same for each category. (Some of the different categories are: those who have heard the Gospel; children; those who die in infancy; those with severe mental disabilities; the unevangelised.)

2. For those who have heard the Gospel (and have 'heard' Jesus) they need to receive him in order to be saved.

3. For those who have not heard the Gospel the issue is of responding to the light that they have already received. They need to trust in a God of

59. Paul states that for Christians and for Old Testament saints the issue is of believing in the God *who* raised Jesus from the dead (Rom. 4:24). It does not say that it is a belief in the resurrection, but a belief in the God of the resurrection that is essential to salvation. For someone who has never heard of Jesus and the resurrection (an Old Testament saint, for example) it is the God of mercy that must be trusted for salvation.

60. This seems to be Paul's argument in Rom. 9:30-32. Those who rejected Jesus did so because they had already perverted the mercy of God within the context of the Old Covenant. Those who had hearts after God (e.g., David) would have received Christ had they met him. I also maintain that it is not simply hearing about Jesus, but actually hearing *him*. The Greek verb 'to hear' uses a genitive after the verb when it is referring to hearing a person; it uses the accusative when it is simply to hear a sound. Rom. 10:14 uses the genitive after the verb to hear thus it can – and probably should be – translated as to 'hear him' rather than to 'hear of him'. How Jesus is presented is important; the Gospel is more than facts – it is the presentation of a Person.

61. Travis, *The problem of judgment*, p. 56.

mercy. If they have made a response to the light they have received they will also make a response to the greater light of Jesus once they are exposed to that light.

4. For those who have rejected the lesser light they need to hear the Gospel and see Jesus, for there might be those who have rejected the lesser light that will respond to the wonderful grace of God as revealed in the face of Jesus Christ.

5. In all this there is scope to explore the line that Punt takes where he suggests it is those who have rejected Christ that will be condemned.⁶² What it means to reject Christ could be different for each person.

6. How God judges each person is an area where we can trust him. We do not need to posit the idea of a 'second chance' for those who are unevangelised.

7. By accepting the views outlined above we are not led to then leave the unevangelised untouched. If there are those who are saved without hearing of Jesus, there will be many more who will respond by hearing the Gospel. If any have responded to a God of mercy, the Gospel will explain the nature of saving faith more fully.⁶³ If any have not responded they will be given the challenge to seek the face of God.

6. The intermediate state

This expression is not used in the Bible but normally refers to the condition of those who die. It is 'intermediate' because it lies between two fixed points: death and resurrection; and it is 'intermediate' because it is not a final state. The ultimate destiny of humanity is not fixed until resurrection bodies are received – an event which it would appear only takes place at the *parousia* of our Lord.⁶⁴ In the Old Testament we find the word *sheol* as the place / state of those who have died. In the New Testament the equivalent term is *hades*.

As we approach this section we have to remind ourselves that the biblical writers do not have a great focus on what happens after death. They focus on God's rule now, and on the day when that rule is fully established: this being accomplished at resurrection. This being true for both Old and New Testament writers. We will therefore have to be content to have some vague rather than definitive answers.

6.1 *Sheol / hades: Old Testament material*

It would be wrong to say that *sheol* is a description for what is commonly-

62. Punt, *Unconditional Good News*.

63. The promise of the Gospel is not to know God, but to know who this God is. Jesus is the way to the *Father*, not simply to God. It is to come into an intimate familial relationship with the God of all creation.

64. It is not an event that takes place to each individual at the point of death. It is a corporate event for all believers at the time of his return. It is marking the shift for his body (the church) as a sign in all creation, hence it occurs simultaneously to the corporate people of God.

called hell. The place where those who die go to is known as *sheol*. Many times *sheol* can be, and is, translated simply as 'the grave'. However, it would be wrong to assume that this all it means for, by extension, it describes the place / state of the departed (at the very least of the ungodly).⁶⁵

Those who go to *sheol* are said to exist as shades (*rephaim*).⁶⁶ The picture given is of an existence that is a travesty of real life. They are alive but only a shadow of their former selves. It is possible that this description of the departed is not to be taken literally but that figurative language is being used, the dead being personified simply for dramatic purposes.⁶⁷ Other passages on death speak of destruction, extinction, the lamp of the wicked being put out, their memory being cut off and the person being consumed at death (e.g., Deut. 29:20; Ps. 37:35,36; 69:28; Prov. 2:21; 10:25; 12:7; Is. 1:28; 5:24,25). Such imagery, if taken literally, speak clearly to non-existence after death. It is therefore difficult to be dogmatic about the condition of those who have died and are in *sheol*. Two possibilities arise: there is a shadowy existence beyond the grave or there is non-existence beyond the grave (until the day of judgment).⁶⁸

6.1.1 *Sheol and segregation*

A popular suggestion is of segregation within *sheol* so that there are two compartments within *sheol* – one for the righteous (often called Paradise) and one for the unrighteous. In 1 Enoch 22:1-14 there are in fact four compartments: one for the righteous, one for the wicked who have escaped punishment in this life, one for the martyred righteous and one for the wicked who have been punished in this life. Although the book of 1 Enoch has an influence on some of the writers of the New Testament there is no substantial evidence that they ever thought of *sheol* as having two or more compartments.⁶⁹

6.1.2 *Excursus on Paradise*

The word *Paradise* is almost certainly a Persian word taken up into both Hebrew and Greek, originally it referred to a park or a garden. It is used in the Septuagint (a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures undertaken by Jews, often abbreviated to LXX) to refer to the garden of Eden. In the inter-testamental literature it became a term for the resting place of the righteous

65. That the righteous also go to *sheol* might be indicated by a number of Scriptures. Jacob expects to go down to *sheol* (Gen. 37:35; 42:38; 44:29,31); David viewed *sheol* as his resting place (Ps. 49:15). However, if the above Scriptures are simply referring to the grave then the obvious is being stated – that they will die.

66. Job 26:5; Ps. 88:10; Prov. 2:18; 9:18; 21:16; Is. 14:9; 26:19 all refer to those in *sheol* as *rephaim*.

67. See Fudge, *op cit*, p. 45.

68. Later we will look at another possibility for the righteous (see the section *The righteous and the after-life*).

69. See Alexander, *The Old Testament view of life after death*, pp. 43-44.

(1 Enoch 60:8; 61:12) and also of the ultimate resting place (2 Enoch 8-9)

It does not appear that the New Testament writers thought of Paradise as a compartment within *sheol*. Paul spoke of the immediate presence of God (the third heaven)⁷⁰ as Paradise (2 Cor. 12:1-5). Also in Revelation 2:7 the tree of life is said to be in the paradise of God. Given the clear allusions to the garden of Eden it seems that Paradise is used to describe humanity's resting place in God. This then could apply to the intermediate or the final state but it probably best not to see it as a distinct section within *sheol*.

6.1.3 *The righteous and the after-life*

Another issue that is not easy to resolve is that of the righteous and the intermediate state. Do they also go to *sheol*? There certainly are Scriptures that would indicate this but there are also texts that might lead us in another direction all-together. The experience of Enoch and of Elijah suggest that they, at least, did not descend into *sheol* but were taken to God directly (Gen. 5:24; 2 Kings 2: 1-18). Clearly too there is an expectation that the wrongs in this life will be put right in the life to come (e.g. Ps. 49). Given that the concept of bodily resurrection is not too clearly defined in the earlier books of the Old Testament this leaves us with the possibility of an expectation that the righteous will have a different experience than the unrighteous immediately following death.

The options then are that the righteous also go to *sheol* and are raised from there at the resurrection; or that they go to *sheol* but remain in fellowship with God, yet still awaiting the resurrection. For the righteous death is described as 'being gathered to one's people'⁷¹ indicating at least a measure of optimism that, even in death, communion with God will not be broken.

6.1.4 *Summary of options*

Given the Old Testament material and some of the ambiguity I will attempt to give some possible options.

1. All those who die descend to *sheol*. If this consists of consciousness then the experience for the righteous and the unrighteous is different with the righteous awaiting the resurrection from the dead.

2. Only the unrighteous go down to *sheol* and the righteous maintain communion with God.

70. The inter-testamental literature spoke of a number of different heavens. Some writers spoke of two, some of three, some of seven, some of ten, and in 3 Enoch 48:1 there are 955 heavens above the seventh heaven. Lincoln comments that it is most likely that Paul has simply taken over the term 'third heaven' as a variant description for Paradise. In this case it would be beside the point to attempt to ascertain on the basis of this verse how many heavens Paul actually thought there were. (*Paradise Now and Not Yet*, p. 79.)

71. Gen. 25:8,17; 35:29; 49:33; Num. 27:13; 31:2; Deut. 32:50. A similar expression is 'to be gathered to one's fathers' (Judg. 2:10; 2 Kings 22:20; 2 Chron. 34:28). This is not a synonym for burial for Jacob is gathered to his people several months before he is buried (Gen. 50:1-13).

3. We leave open the possibility of non-existence for the unrighteous post-death, and perhaps even leave that possibility open for the righteous too.

The vagueness of the summary reflects in some way the fact that the Old Testament is focused far more toward the ultimate inbreaking of the kingdom of God than what happens the other side of death. This is also the focus for the New Testament writers. This might leave us with unanswered questions, but what is clear is that the righteous are to look forward to the hope of resurrection.⁷²

6.2 The intermediate state and the New Testament

An examination of the material might not wholly satisfy us for the New Testament has its eye firmly focused on the *final* future destiny of humanity rather than on the interesting question of what happens after death.⁷³ It might be helpful to outline some of the possible options before we look at various texts:

1. At death believers receive their resurrection bodies. The only difficulty with this view is that resurrection seems to be linked consistently to the *parousia*, rather than to death.⁷⁴

2. That there is an intermediate state when the believer is disembodied but present with the Lord.⁷⁵ This state being far better than life prior to death, yet falling short of the ultimate destiny of resurrection.

72. Resurrection in the OT is fundamentally a national hope. The resurrection of national Israel to its glory through the coming of God's rule was looked forward to. It appears that increasingly a belief that the righteous dead would not miss out on this event caused a focus to develop on personal resurrection. The hope was that when national restoration took place that the righteous dead would not miss out, but would be raised to participate in it. This hope is best expressed in Daniel 12:2, 'multitudes of those asleep in the dust of the earth will awake, some to everlasting life...' It is also possible to read the verse as expressing a resurrection of the unrighteous for it goes on to say, 'others to shame and everlasting contempt.' However, if this is so this would then be the only reference to such a resurrection in the OT. Perhaps it is better to understand it as 'some to everlasting life, others (who do not awake) to shame and everlasting contempt.' So the issue of a resurrection of the unrighteous in this verse depends on whether the understanding is of the 'others' awake or stay 'asleep'. Given that the emphasis is on the nation it seems more likely that the latter interpretation is the more viable. (See Alexander, *The Old Testament view of death*, p. 46 and footnote 38, and Bruce, *Paul Apostle of the Free Spirit*, p. 301; on the issue of national restoration and resurrection see Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, ch. 10.)

73. This can be illustrated with Paul's answer to the Thessalonian church as to what happens to those who have died (1 Thess. 4:13-18). He does not answer it with a 'they are with the Lord and heaven is a better place', but he re-assures them that when the kingdom comes (future) those who have died in Christ will be raised *then* to participate in it.

74. It is possible to argue that resurrection occurs at death but immortality is given at the *parousia* (see Harris, *The New Testament view of life after death*, p. 48; and in *Raised Immortal: the Relation between Resurrection and Immortality in New Testament teaching* (Eerdmans, 1983). C.F.D. Moule takes a similar approach when he argues that the resurrection body is superimposed upon mortal existence at *parousia* while it is exchanged for mortal existence at death (see article by L.J. Kreitzer *Intermediate State*, Dictionary of Paul (IVP, 1993)). At the *parousia* mortality will finally be clothed with immortality, the perishable with the imperishable (1 Cor. 15:52,54); what is mortal will be swallowed up by life (2 Cor. 5:4).

Jesus' words that God is the God of the living and not the dead (Matt. 22:32; Luke 20:37f.) could be applied to either of the above two possibilities, but is more easily applied to the second option. 'To him all are alive' probably indicates conscious existence but it would be unlikely that this existence was in a resurrected state for the statement is prior to the resurrection of Jesus – he being the first-born of all creation. (Even if we took a two-stage approach of resurrection at death and immortality at *parousia* the fact that this is before Jesus' own resurrection is a strong argument that the state of those who have died but are alive is not embodied.)

3. At death conscious existence ends and the believer awaits the *parousia* and resurrection. The strength of this view is that justice is done to the language surrounding the resurrection (particularly that of being raised *out of the dead*).⁷⁶ The weakness though is that the New Testament speaks of being present with the Lord though absent from the body. It could be argued that such language is merely an expression of ultimate hope, but it would be more difficult to press Jesus' words to the dying thief to carry that meaning ('Today you will be with me in Paradise'). It seems that the expression to be 'present with the Lord' as a result of death actually refers to a conscious experience at that time.

4. A variation on the last two options would be of some form of soul-sleep with the believer undergoing pleasant, restful experiences (akin perhaps to our experience of pleasant dreams?).

The above four possibilities have been applied to the believer but what about the fate of the unbeliever? One option that we must immediately rule out is that they go to hell. Hell is only populated following the final judgment (Matt. 25:31-36). This then leaves again two possibilities: non-existence beyond the grave, or a waiting period (in *hades*) which might, or might not, include a measure of suffering. Given the interest of the New Testament on final destinies it should not surprise us that it is as difficult to come to firm conclusions regarding the intermediate state. To conclude this section we need to look at a key passage in Luke (the rich man and Lazarus), then at the teachings of Paul, and finally at some other New Testament passages.

6.2.1 *The rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31)*

There are two options open to us as we approach an interpretation of this passage. Firstly, that it is accurately describing the situation all encounter after death, or secondly, that Jesus is using a parable to get across specific points. Even if it is the latter this might still mean that Jesus was endorsing what was being spoken of about the post-death experience.⁷⁷ (If this story is accurately describing the fate of those who die we would only, strictly

75. Paul describes an experience he had when he was taken up to the third heaven. In this experience he was unaware if he was in or out of the body. This indicates the possibility of conscious existence out of the body (2 Cor. 12:1-10).

76. In our English translations we speak of the resurrection from the dead making it sound as if a realm is being spoken of. In Greek it is resurrection *out of the dead ones* – giving the idea of being raised up from among the corpses. Such language is applied to the righteous – they will be raised up out from the dead ones. When a general resurrection is spoken of it is simply described as resurrection *of the dead*.

speaking, take it to describe the intermediate fates of pre-Christian Jews.)

It is better to take it as a parable because there seems to one key area where the story contradicts the remainder of Scripture: namely that punishment and rewards always follow the final judgment not death. The story being used was common to the Jews of Jesus' day,⁷⁸ but Jesus uses the story and puts a twist to it. He says, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' The point of the story is to unmask the unbelief, cynicism and love of money that characterised the Pharisees (Luke 16:14,15 gives us this context). They have everything but there will come a great reversal. They had wealth and they also believed that they had Moses and the Prophets; Jesus point was that they have not understood Moses and the Prophets and that this will be evidenced when he rises from the dead but they remain in their unbelief.

In conclusion with regard to this story we would be wise to use it as giving teaching on the intermediate state *only if* it were confirmed explicitly elsewhere. Given that it is not confirmed elsewhere it is best to see it as a story that Jesus used and adapted for his own purposes.

6.2.2 Paul and the intermediate state

In 1 Corinthians 15 Paul is focused on the resurrection in such a way that he does not even discuss the intermediate state so this passage has no significant bearing on the current discussions.

In his second letter to Corinth there is a discussion about a post-death experience (ch. 5). Some have suggested that there is a marked change in Paul between 1 Corinthians 15 and 2 Corinthians 5. The suggestion is that by the time of the second letter Paul believes that immediately following death the final state is entered into (making it effectively a bodiless and 'spiritual' experience). Others have suggested he teaches in 2 Corinthians that the resurrection body is received at death.⁷⁹ It is best to see the two chapters as addressing two different concerns. In 1 Corinthians he is addressing those who are claiming that they have already arrived at fullness (an over-realised eschatology). He responds to that erroneous perspective by stating that full redemption will not occur this side of death / *parousia*. In 2 Corinthians his focus is very different. He states that even in the face of death (4:14) that our

77. This would be the view of Hoekema, *The Bible and the Future*, pp. 100-101. He holds that there is punishment in the intermediate state prior to the final judgment. A contrasting view from Plummer is quoted approvingly in Geldenhuys, *Commentary on the Gospel of Luke* (Eerdmans, 1975). He says that 'The details of the picture are taken from Jewish beliefs as to the condition of souls in Sheol, and must not be understood as confirming those beliefs' (p. 428).

78. Fudge quotes Gressmann as citing a Greek parallel from a first-century Egyptian papyrus; Gressmann also states that there were at least seven versions of the story in Jewish literature (Fudge, *op cit*, p. 126).

79. The use of the present tense *echomen* (we have: 2 Cor. 5:1) does not necessarily indicate the immediate possession of the resurrection body. Rather it might indicate that Paul was so assured of his possession of the resurrection body after the *parousia* that he could speak of it as present. Further Paul says that *if* this earthly tent is destroyed, not *when...* (See Lincoln, *op cit*, pp. 64-65 for an extended discussion of these points.)

hope is not deterred. Every experience (and even death) is one step nearer out ultimate goal. The experience beyond this life is better not worse, although it is still not the best – that awaits the consummation through (completed) resurrection⁸⁰ at the *parousia*.

In Philippians 1:21-24 Paul expresses his dilemma – should he stay and bear more fruit or should he depart and be with Christ. He clearly sees death as the means to experience Christ in even greater measure (he says, ‘it will be better by far’ in verse 23). Yet this is not (completed) resurrection for again he firmly places the experience of (completed) resurrection at the *parousia* (3:20,21). His language and the context surely indicates that he believes in some form of intermediate state that is ‘better by far’ and yet not the ultimate.⁸¹

So it would appear that Paul believed in conscious existence beyond the grave for the believer (‘with Christ’, Phil. 1:23; ‘with the Lord’, 2 Cor. 5:8).⁸² Some have argued that this is in an embodied state (resurrection).⁸³ While this is possible if we allow for some form of two-stage resurrection, otherwise since the the resurrection is consistently placed at the *parousia* and not at death, some form of disembodied state is implied. The above only covers the situation with the believer. With regard to the unbeliever there are possibilities of: a conscious experience outside of Christ (with suffering or otherwise), or an experience of non-existence.

6.2.3 Other New Testament passages

Revelation 6:9-11 describes a heavenly scene of the martyrs who have been slain. Given the nature of apocalyptic language we would not be wide to press this verse too far. But if it is indicating anything about life after death for the believer it describes a place of peace and conscious fellowship with God. The use of the term *soul* only indicates a bodiless existence if we deny other possible meanings to the word *psuche* at this point. If it is bodiless the reference to the white robe would have to be purely symbolic.

2 Peter 2:9 says that ‘the Lord knows how to rescue godly men from

80. I have used the term (completed) resurrection at this point, not as a technical term, but to indicate an openness to the possibility of a two-stage resurrection.

81. If Paul thought the believer experienced non-existence after death, prior to the resurrection, it is hard to see in what sense he could be hard pressed to know whether he should choose to live or die. If such were the case he would be forced to choose to live for as long as possible so as the maximum fruit could be produced.

82. The dead who are believers are called ‘the dead in Christ’ (1 Thess. 4:16). The term (*hoi nekroi en Christo*) does not mean the dead who died in Christ, but the dead who are in Christ. Even death cannot remove the Christian from her/his incorporation in Christ (Rom. 8:38-39). Christians who are dead and those who are alive are equally ‘in Christ’ - they differ simply in degree of proximity.

83. See Harris, *The New Testament view of life after death*, p. 48 and endnote 16. It is possible to see tow stages to resurrection: embodied existence at death and immortal resurrected bodily experience at *parousia*. (Also see footnote 74 above.) Against the idea that the intermediate state is an embodied one is Paul’s words, ‘to be absent from the body and present with the Lord’. He does not say that death was to be absent from *this* body but that it was to be absent from *the* body, probably indicating a disembodied state.

trials and to hold the unrighteous for the day of judgement, **while continuing their punishment.**' Hoekema states that this is 'perhaps the clearest New Testament passage dealing with the state of the ungodly dead during the intermediate state.'⁸⁴ Although Fudge maintains that the passage is referring to the punishment of angels⁸⁵ and therefore it says nothing regarding the punishment of humans this cannot be sustained. A closer reading of the passage shows that Peter is using the angelic judgment (and other examples) as illustrative of God's dealings with humans (the whole context of the chapter is of judgement on false teachers). Is Peter then describing the intermediate state and ongoing punishment being the experience for the unbeliever?

This is not the only in which the verse can be taken as the footnote in the NIV suggests ('the Lord knows how to... hold the unrighteous for punishment until the day of judgment'). Calvin understood it in this way, taking the sense as proleptic, so interpreting it to mean that the unrighteous are being kept *now* for a judgement that is *future*.⁸⁶ It is also possible to take the verse to apply to punishment taking place, in the present, prior to death (the Greek taken as: 'the Lord knows... how to keep the unrighteous being punished [now: present tense] until the day of judgment'). This would mean that although judgment is future the ungodly are now under judgment. If this is the right interpretation then it makes sense of the parallel where the ungodly are delivered (now) by the power of God, so even when the experience of deliverance or judgment is future it is ours now in Christ. Taken this way there is no need to assume it is referring to punishment during the intermediate state.

Certainly the verse by itself is insufficient to be taken as meaning that the ungodly suffer in the intermediate state, although this cannot be ruled out.

Matthew 27:52-53. Matthew gives an account of a remarkable event that took place when Jesus died. Many saints who had died came to life. This resurrection was either of the order of Lazarus (strictly speaking a resuscitation, for he died again later) or it was of the order of Jesus (who rose never to die again). It is not easy to decide and it has led some to see the story as purely symbolic or theological.⁸⁷ The language itself suggest that the event is of resurrection not of resuscitation, and given that this was of 'many' saints it seems likely that a number had been dead for some time, thus again suggesting that we are looking at true resurrection taking place.

There are two objections to the understanding of this event as being resurrection. First, this would cease to make Jesus the firstborn from the dead, and secondly, this event would be a clear exception to resurrection at the *parousia*.⁸⁸

84. Hoekema, *op cit*, pp. 101-102.

85. Fudge, *op cit*, p. 178.

86. See Green, *2 Peter and Jude*, Tyndale Commentary series, NP 1968, p. 103.

87. R.T. France, *Matthew*, Tyndale N.T. Commentary, 1985, p. 400.

88. Summed up by Pawson, *op cit*, p. 119.

If this is an exception it could, of course, lend weight to the possibility of receiving resurrection bodies at death, and it could be argued that there was no longer any *theological* reason why this could not take place.⁸⁹ I believe that a careful reading of Matthew (although he does not lay out a strict chronology) shows that he is careful with his language to indicate that these saints do not rise *before* Christ. A translation of the Greek runs as follows:

And the tombs were opened and many bodies of many saints who were sleeping were raised; and having gone out of their tombs **after** his resurrection they went into the holy city and were seen by many.

So when translated we can see that the first verse of the passage simply states the fact of resurrection, while the second verse (verse 53) Matthew makes sure we understand the timing of their resurrection. Their resurrection does not precede that of Christ's, but occurs after his.

The scene that Matthew presents us with then is of open tombs and the exposure of corpses in various stages of decomposition. This would have been a major problem for the Jews as any contact with the dead would have meant defilement over the Passover period. Yet after the Sabbath God not only raises Jesus but, with him, raises a company of saints who had died, thus indicating that the hope of the Old Testament was being fulfilled in Jesus: the new age had begun, the end had come.

It is possible to see here a fulfilment of the Jewish firstfruit festival (Lev. 23:9-14). On the day after the Sabbath a *sheaf* consisting of the first grain that is harvested was to be waved before the Lord. Jesus had already proclaimed that 'unless a grain of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds' (Jn. 12:24). With the death and burial of Jesus the grain of wheat had fallen into the ground; by the time of his resurrection there was already evidence that the seed was not alone as a whole *sheaf* is presented to the Lord.

The story at least points to the fact that resurrection has already begun (if not in experience, then at least theologically). Another challenge to our thinking is the corporate concept that was common to Jewish thinking. The new humanity is in Jesus. He, as the head, sums up that new humanity in himself and in that sense they would have been troubled by the (possibly) conflicting ideas of Jesus being raised as an individual and of a company of saints being raised.

6.3 Conclusions on the intermediate state

At the beginning of this paper we remarked that the Bible gives some guidance on the issue of what happens after death. Caution also needs to be applied given that our experience of time either side of the grave could well be a factor. So with those cautions what conclusions can now be brought

89. There might, of course, be a theological point that we have not yet understood that could be an objection. Lincoln, *op cit*, suggests that heaven is still involved in the tension of the 'already' but 'not yet' (e.g., Paul says that there are still enemy powers in the heavens - Eph. 6:10ff.). For this reason the experience of the believer who dies will remain incomplete until the *parousia* (p. 173). Even if there were no theological objection to the believer receiving the resurrection body at death there might still be *exegetical* reasons.

forth?

1. The experience after death is different for the believer and the unbeliever

It might have been possible to conclude that the experience for believer and unbeliever alike would be the same, with both groups going to *sheol*, but the Old Testament exceptions (Enoch, Elijah, and possibly Moses); the statements such as 'going to be with one's people'; the lack of evidence for a segregated *sheol*; all point us in a different direction. New Testament expressions that believers sleep but that unbelievers die, Jesus statement to the dying thief; Paul's discussions of being absent from the body and present with the Lord – all these push us to believe that the experience for the two groups is different.

2. The unbeliever enters non-existence beyond the grave.

If the unbeliever has an existence beyond the grave it is at best a shadowy existence ('the shades'). Also we cannot totally rule out the possibility that they undergo punishment (2 Pet. 2:9). However, given that the Bible describes death as the fate for the unbeliever and does not give a firm indication of after-life, the simplest conclusion is that of non-existence on death (the soul not being immortal), prior to a resurrection for judgment.⁹⁰

3. The believer enjoys conscious fellowship with the Lord in (probably) disembodied form.

The testimony of Scripture ('to him all are alive'; 'absent from the body, present with the Lord'; etc.) indicates a conscious experience for the believer. Although the resurrection is tied to the *parousia* there is the possibility of understanding resurrection as taking place in two 'stages': at death the person being raised up in bodily form and the final transformation of that body taking place later at the *parousia*. If the soul cannot have independent existence apart from bodily expression then something akin to this must take place, if there is to be conscious existence beyond the grave. Again there are other possibilities that cannot be ruled out: particularly that of 'soul-sleep'. Overall, though, the weight of evidence seems to lie with the view of some form of disembodied existence with the Lord in heaven during this intermediate stage.

Given the biblical material it would be difficult to go beyond the above conclusions, which simply highlights that the intermediate state is not a main focus for the biblical writers. As has been discovered it is when we consider what the Bible says on final destinies that we find that we have much more to go on. This informs us that any experience after death, but prior to *parousia* /

90. Finger states on those who die outside of Christ that 'they are simply dead; unconscious, decaying, gone', and that 'there is little warrant for regarding them as other than under death's dominion, unconscious and decaying (or at most, subsisting as shadows).' (*Christian Theology*, Vol. 1, pp. 139, 141.)

judgement is simply a temporary stopping point en route.

7. Evangelism and future destinies

Only in this life is there an opportunity to respond to God and to determine one's future destiny. Any who do not respond will miss out on the whole reason as to why they were created.⁹¹ Here then is the motivation for evangelism. It is love for people: if we do not reach them before death / *parousia* they will miss out for all of eternity. Hell is a reality but our task is to lead people to Christ so as they no longer miss out on the reason for living – they discover their divine purpose, the reason for their life. By receiving Christ they are saved from their *sins* (Matt. 1:21; note the emphasis on being saved from sin, not from *hell*). Any who do not respond will perish.

We proclaim that Jesus is risen, thus affirming both life in the here and now and holding out hope for the restoration of all things. As we journey in community we model something of what life will be like when he returns to reconcile all things.

We have a Gospel that we do not need to be embarrassed by. There is hope because of God's mercy for this life and the life to come. We look forward to the coming of Jesus who will bring to an end this evil age and usher in a new age that will surpass anything we can imagine at this point of time. In the meantime we are to seek to drag as many people along so as they are ready to meet God face to face. We can be assured that our God will deal with all with both justice and mercy. As we wait we work and long for his coming, the consummation of all things.

Maranatha.

91. Walter Wink translates 1 Tim. 1:15 as 'Christ Jesus came in the System to save those who have missed the point of living.' (*Engaging the Powers*, Fortress 1992, p. 57.)

Core Bibliography

- Alexander, Desmond *The Old Testament view of life after death*, Themelios Vol. 11.2
- Blanchard, John *Whatever Happened to Hell?*, Evangelical Press, 1993
- Brown, Colin (ed.) *Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, Vol. 2 Paternoster Press, 1976, article on 'Hell'; Vol. 3, 1978, articles on 'Punishment' and 'Resurrection'
- Bruce, F.F. *Apostle of the Free Spirit*, Paternoster Press, (revised edition 1980, ch. 27.
- Crockett, William and James Sigoundas *Through No Fault of Their Own?*, Baker, 1991
- Finger, Thomas *Christian Theology*, Vol. 1, Herald Press, 1985, chs. 7-9
- Forster, Roger *Eternal Destiny Heaven and Hell*, Ichthus Christian Fellowship, undated
- Fudge, Edward *The Fire that Consumes*, Paternoster Press, 1994
- Harris, Murray *The New Testament view of life after death*, Themelios Vol. 11.2
- Hawthorne, Gerald, Ralph Martin & Daniel Reid (eds.) *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, IVP, 1993, articles on 'Immortality', 'Intermediates state', 'Heaven', 'Resurrection', 'Life and Death', and 'Universalism'
- Hoekema, Anthony *The Bible and the Future*, Paternoster Press, 1978
- Krauss, Norman *God our Savior*, Herald Press, 1991, ch. 7.
- de Lacey, Douglas & Max Turner *Man and his Hope*, Unpublished paper, 1976
- Ladd, George *The Last Things*, Eerdmans, 1978
- Lincoln, Andrew *Paradise Now and Not Yet*, Baker, 1991
- Pawson, David *The Road to Hell*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1992
- Punt, Neal *Unconditional Good News*, Eerdmans, 1980
- Sanders, James *Is Belief in Christ necessary for Salvation*, Evangelical Quarterly, Vol. LX/no. 3
- Travis, Stephen *I Believe in the Second Coming of Jesus*, Hodder & Stoughton, 1982
- Travis, Stephen *The Problem of Judgment*, Themelios Vol. 11.2
- Williams, David *The Promise of His Coming*, Lancer, 1990
- Wright, N.T. *The New Testament and the people of God*, Fortress / SPCK, 1992