

Reincarnation Versus Resurrection

"The ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." -- Isaiah 35:10

EVER since the days of Eden, when our first parents were sentenced to death because of their transgression against divine law, men and women have been endeavoring to circumvent the reality of death. They have tried by devious and strange ways to convince themselves that death is not what it seems to be -- not an enemy, as the Bible declares, but a friend which opens up new vistas of life in a world invisible to human eyes and, it is hoped, far superior to life experienced here as humans.

Not all, however, have been sure that the life into which it is claimed humans enter through the "gateway" of death is all that could be desired, or even that it is better than earthly life. One of the theories concerning this is that the "Spirits" of the dead are not too satisfied with their lot, hence are awaiting an opportunity to return to earth. It is claimed that a "departed spirit" is able to do this by entering into the body of an infant, either at the moment of birth, or while still in its mother's womb. This particular no-death theory is known as reincarnation.

Another but much less pleasing version of this theory is known as transmigration. In transmigration the "spirit" does not necessarily become reincarnate in a human body, but seems satisfied to get back to earth even if it has to possess the body of one of the lower animals. The claim is that all animals, even insects, become homes for departed "spirits."

It is the determined desire of the human species to live and to enjoy life on the earth that gives birth to these theories. That death robs us of our friends is too apparent to be denied. A mother, or a father, a sweetheart, or a baby who has died is simply no longer around, so in the reincarnation theory the wish is expressed that they might return, sometime, somewhere, as somebody.

But, at the best, as a hope to take away the sting of death, reincarnation is quite an empty shell. It is claimed that three-quarters of the world's population believe in either reincarnation or transmigration, and yet rare indeed is ever a claim made of a person who actually remembers a former existence. And when this claim is made, the "memory" of a past life is so vague, so indefinite, as to prove that it is actually no more than wishful fancy. If we are all reincarnations of persons who lived before, we know nothing of it. We recognize neither our former selves, nor our associates of other lives. Therefore, so far as the real value is concerned in terms of practical satisfaction and comfort to sustain one in time of bereavement, the theory of reincarnation is worthless.

Hypnotism's "Proofs"

The strongest so-called proofs of reincarnation are those produced by hypnotists. The claim is made that under hypnotic spells many individuals have revealed facts concerning a former existence, facts which, upon investigation, sometimes -- not always -- check out fairly accurately. The question quite naturally is raised as to how a hypnotized person could impart such accurate information concerning someone who lived in the long ago if it were not a reincarnation of that same person, or if, on the other hand, his present body is not merely the home of a "spirit" or "ghost" which has returned to earth to live.

Closely allied with reincarnation as a theory is spiritualism. In spiritualism there is no claim that Smith, Jones, or Brown returns to earth life by inhabiting the body of Olinisky, or Johanson, or Murphy. Spiritualism's claim is that through mediums, and in their séance chambers, they can induce the departed "dead" to come near enough to converse with their friends or relatives.

It is granted -- indeed, it has been proved that both in hypnotism and spiritualism there has been and continues to be much that can be explained in a natural way, The "voices" heard are no doubt sometimes faked; the description of a former life is often too inaccurate to be convincing. At the same time there is much which occurs in the fields of both hypnotism and spiritualism for which the strictly scientific mind has no real answer.

"A Little Lower Than the Angels"

The Bible alone furnishes the only satisfactory explanation of the puzzling phenomena of the séance chamber, and also what occurs in the mind of a person who has surrendered to hypnotism. This explanation is closely allied with what the Bible reveals concerning an order of creation superior to man, known as angels. One of the great truths revealed in the Bible is that there are these high orders of creation, which, in their normal state, are invisible to man. In Hebrews 2:7 we are told that man was created a "little lower than the angels."

In the earthly sphere of life there are various planes of existence, from the lowest shellfish up to man who, in his creation, was given dominion over the lower animals. Since man is a "little lower" than the angels, apparently the angels are the lowest form of life in the spiritual realm. The Apostle Paul, in describing the high exaltation of Christ at the time of his resurrection, says that it was "far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named." (Ephesians 1:21) These "principalities" and "Powers" are doubtless orders of creation above the angels.

This thought, so clearly set forth in the Bible, should not be staggering to faith. After all, the human eye and ear are very limited in what they can see and hear. Science has demonstrated that there are realities all around us which can neither be seen nor heard by humans. The universe is entirely too large, and there are too many things in it which stagger even the imagination of man, and certainly far beyond his understanding, to suppose we are the most intelligent and the very highest of all God's creatures.

The Bible was not written to reveal details of the spiritual world. Our finite minds could not grasp such information with any degree of accuracy in any case. A dog has a certain degree of intelligence. It is able to sense the pleasures and displeasures of his master toward him. It can be taught certain things. But a dog cannot understand higher mathematics. It cannot enter into the family discussions of Tommy's problems at school, or help plan a birthday party. Certainly a dog cannot learn stenography, or practice law. But because the dog's mind is not capable of reasoning on these higher levels where the human mind is "at home" it does not prove that there is no level of existence or intelligence above that possessed and enjoyed by the dog.

So it is with the planes of existence which are above the human. We cannot understand much about them, but this in no way proves that they do not exist and are not real. While the Bible gives us little direct information concerning angels, it does reveal that they were created in tremendous numbers. One of the numbers mentioned is "ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands." (Revelation 5:11) The names angel and angels appear in the Bible more than 250 times. It is clear from the Bible's uses of these names that the angels are God's

messengers in his dealings with his people here on earth, created to be liaison servants between the spiritual and the material worlds.

This being scripturally true of the angels, the name is used at times, particularly in the Book of Revelation, as a symbol of messengers or servants other than angelic beings. But this does not prove that there are no spiritual beings called angels. Rather the reverse, God would not have used sheep as a symbol of his faithful people, had real sheep with certain characteristics not existed. God created the angels to be his messengers, hence they aptly symbolize any messenger which he may use.

Probably the best known reference to the angels is in the account of the birth of Jesus. Here an angel proclaimed the glad tidings to shepherds on the Judean hills, and suddenly a host of them began "praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." (Luke 2:10-14) What a marvelous assignment this was for these holy messengers of God!

Angels Who Sinned

The angels were created perfect, even as man was created perfect. One of the highly exalted of these spirit creatures was known as Lucifer. He was the first of the heavenly beings to fleet from the course of full obedience to God.* This, seemingly, was about the time of man's creation. He appeared in the Garden of Eden, and spoke to mother Eve through the "serpent." By his lie, "Ye shall not surely die "I he deceived Eve into believing that death would not be the penalty for partaking of the forbidden fruit. So she partook, and influenced Adam also to disobey the divine law.

* See the booklet "Your Adversary the Devil"

Thus, through Adam, sin entered into the world, and death by sin, for the death penalty passed on to his children. But up to this point Lucifer was the only one in the spiritual realm who had disobeyed his Creator. Lucifer did not communicate the result of his sin to his progeny, for in the divine arrangement those in the spirit world do not reproduce their kind. Hence for a time Lucifer remained the lone sinner in his sphere.

However, the Bible tells us of a time when apparently many of the angels transgressed God's law. Jude, verse 6 reads, "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he [God] hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day." 2 Peter 2:4,5 reads, "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [Greek, **tartaroo** meaning to incarcerate], and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto judgment; and spared not the old world, but saved Noah ... a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly."

In these statements by Jude and Peter we are informed that certain angels sinned; that this occurred in the days of Noah, and that their transgression was in not keeping their "first estate," but leaving "their own habitation." We turn back to Genesis, chapter 6, and there we find these points confirmed, with information revealing just what Jude meant by these angels leaving "their own habitation." Verses 1 and 2 of the chapter read, "It came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born unto them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men that they were fair; and they took them wives of all that they chose."

This is recorded as a sin on the part of the "sons of God." God had commanded our first parents to 'multiply and fill the earth.' It was not, therefore, a sin for sons of men to marry the daughters of men. But here we are told that the "sons of God" did this. Adam in his perfection was a human son of God, but he forfeited his sonship when he sinned, and his offspring became "children of wrath." (Ephesians 2:3) It is obvious, then, that the "sons of God" who sinned by marrying the daughters of men, were those mentioned by Jude as the "angels which kept not their first estate," and "left their own habitation."

The question arises as to how angels, or spirit beings, invisible to man, could marry the "daughters of men." The Bible gives us the answer. It reveals that in serving as the messengers of God to men, the angels had the power to materialize or assume human bodies. This enabled them to converse with humans on a more normal basis. While the angels did not always thus materialize when delivering God's messages, they sometimes did. One of these occasions was when three of them appeared to Abraham in human form. This is referred to in Hebrews 13:2 where we read, "Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares." -- Genesis 18:1-3

The use of this ability to materialize in human form was proper when done in carrying out missions for the Lord, but a sin when the aim was an excursion into lust by marrying the "daughters of men," It was thus that the angels "left their own habitation," not temporarily on a mission for God, but to live as humans, with the main purpose being to enjoy the lusts of the flesh. The result of this illicit relationship was that "when the sons of God came in unto the daughters of men, and they bare children to them, the same became mighty men which were of old, men of renown." -- Genesis 6:4

These "men of renown" are also referred to as "giants." We are told that the earth "was filled with violence." It is reasonable to conclude that this hybrid offspring of the angels contributed much to the sorry plight of the world which led to its destruction in the Flood. But the Flood did not destroy these fallen angels. Having merely assumed bodies of flesh, they had the ability to dematerialize, which they did. Doubtless they thought to enjoy the same freedom of action and powers which were theirs before they "left their own habitation," but in this they were mistaken, for as Jude and Peter inform us, they were thereafter restrained in "chains of darkness," incarcerated in **tartaroo**.

Apparently the holy angels enjoy freedom of movement throughout God's great universe, whereas these unholy angels, having left their own habitation to dwell on earth as men, are now restricted to the earth and its atmosphere. Just how much of their other original powers they have since been able to exercise, the Bible does not reveal. Since the angels were created to serve as God's messengers to his human creation, they must have been endowed with power to read the minds of men. Since in their normal state they are invisible to human eyes, and mighty in their exercise of power, they can surely shape circumstances in a manner to wield a mighty influence among men.

With the holy angels this is good, for they use their powers to serve God's people, to protect them, and to encourage them in the ways of righteousness. But with the fallen angels, whatever power they are still permitted to exercise, we may be sure it is turned in the direction of deception and unrighteousness. Some may ask why an all-powerful God would allow them to operate at all. The answer is he same as it is with respect to the permission of all evil. God, in his wisdom, knows that only through the permission of evil along all lines will men and angels learn the terrible results of disobedience to his laws.

Activity of Fallen Angels

The "angels which kept not their first estate" have, since the Flood, been active in a continuous course of opposition to God. But their activity has been under restraint in "chains of darkness." No longer able to materialize as they did when they married the daughters of men, they have endeavored to invade the minds of humans in order that they might speak and act through their bodies. They were particularly active in Jesus' day, and we have numerous accounts of miracles in which the Master cast out these demons -- for such they are -- from poor unfortunates who, in their weakness, had been invaded by them.

Throughout the ages since the Flood, wherever there have been manifestations of the occult, we can be sure that the fallen angels have been nearby and participating. In the Jewish dispensation Israel was plagued by witches and necromancers -- the ancient titles of spiritualists. In the Law given by Moses the practice of these occult professions was punishable by death, so baneful did the Lord consider their influence upon his people.

Evidences of their activity appear from time to time on the pages of history. About 1893 they began to manifest themselves through what came to be known as spiritualism, and today they are enjoying a more accepted contact with human minds through hypnotism. In both spiritualism and hypnotism it is essential for the "subject" to surrender to the practitioner. Powerful though they are, the fallen angels cannot invade the minds of those who do not surrender to them.

Probably in very few instances do "subjects" realize that in allowing themselves to be hypnotized, they are permitting the fallen angels to use their minds. Hypnotists themselves do not realize this. They suppose that by their bewitching eyes, or the repetition of certain phrases in a monotone voice, they mesmerize their "subjects." All they really do is to fully relax the mind of the unsuspecting victim, which permits the demons to more completely take control.

The Brain Mechanism

Normally all the thoughts contained in the human brain have been implanted there by impressions received through the five senses. The brain of a newborn baby is a complete blank. The first things it sees, bears, smells, tastes, and touches create impressions, and thoughts begin to take form. But the brain at this tender age is too "soft" to retain with any degree of clearness those early impressions. These first thoughts are largely "erased" as the brain matures. Not until the age of about five does the child begin to remember with any degree of permanence.

After reaching adulthood, the normal person is quite incapable of recalling any of those early thoughts. It is illogical and unscientific to "oppose that under hypnosis those babyhood impressions become active and reveal the early experiences of that person. How can a staring eye and monotone sentences put the truly active part of a person's brain to sleep and at the same time bring to life the so-called "subconscious"? However, persons under hypnosis have revealed incidents of their childhood of which they had no knowledge at all before being hypnotized. The Bible's answer to this unscientific phenomenon is the only one that is completely satisfactory. The "fallen angels" are able to read and interpret those well nigh "erased" impressions on the brain, and, speaking through the otherwise paralyzed lips of the subject, reveal those infant thoughts.

These "fallen angels," have lived throughout the centuries, doubtless have considerable knowledge of individuals of former generations. Thus, when the hypnotist is not satisfied to "age-regress" the subject to infancy, and begins seeking information concerning a supposed former life, the "fallen angels" are usually quite willing and ready to co-operate further, sometimes

causing the subject to mumble a rather plausible sketch of what the hypnotist is led to believe was a former existence of his subject.

But let us remember, as we have learned, that these "fallen angels" are under restraint. They do not enjoy the full and free use of their abilities as they once did. For this reason, and in order to piece together as complete a life sketch of a former "incarnation" as possible, they frequently mention details which do not check out accurately. On the other hand, many details they reveal are accurate, which for many, makes the case of reincarnation a strong one. And this is just what the Devil, the archdeceiver of mankind, is endeavoring to accomplish, He wants the people to believe that there is no death, and the reincarnation theory is merely one of his deceptions.

The Dead Will Return

Truth is consistent and reasonable. When death stares us in the face, and we see the lifeless form of a friend in the casket, we are merely endeavoring to deceive ourselves when we say that that person is more alive than ever. As much as our hearts may desire to deny the realities of death, it is only by acknowledging the truthfulness of the Bible's teachings that "the wages of sin IS death," that we will ever arrive at a comforting solution to this problem which has plagued mankind throughout all the centuries of human existence.

In our text, and in many other promises of the Bible, we are assured that the dead will return, not reincarnate in the body of another person, but through restoration to life by a direct intervention of divine power. The "ransomed" of the Lord are to return, our text declares. They are to return, not because it is a natural event in a cycle of reincarnations, but rather because they have been "ransomed."

The penalty of death which fell upon our first parents was real, and would have been lasting but for the fact that divine love provided for man's redemption through Jesus, who came to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. So real is death, and so lasting would it have been but for the redemption provided in Christ Jesus, the apostle says that even Christians who have fallen "asleep" in Christ are "perished" unless there is a resurrection of the dead. -- 1 Corinthians 15:16-18

In John 3:16 we read, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." Even those who in this life believe on Jesus, fall asleep in death; but they have not "perished," because they are to be awakened from the sleep of death. Besides, the Bible gives us the wonderful assurance that those who do not have a full fair opportunity in this life to believe will be raised from the sleep of death to be given such an opportunity. In other words, the opportunity to believe on Christ is not limited to the present life.

In 1 Timothy 2:3-6 the Apostle Paul informs us that it is God's will that "all" shall be "saved" and come to a "knowledge of the truth." This is not a reference to eternal salvation, which is based upon a knowledge and acceptance of the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. "Saved," as Paul uses the expression in this text, refers to an awakening from the sleep of death. More than nine-tenths of the human family have gone into death without knowing anything about Jesus and God's redeeming grace through him. But they have not "perished" in the sense of being dead forever. They are to be restored to life, to "return" in order that they might receive a knowledge of the truth.

And what is the great truth which will then be presented to these millions who have died without a saving knowledge of their Redeemer? Paul explains: "For there is one God, and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified [made known to all] in due time." When awakened from the sleep of death the world will learn that Jesus gave himself a "ransom" for them. If they accept this provision of divine grace and obey God's law, they will live forever.

All mankind, therefore, are included in the statement, "the ransomed of the Lord" who are to return from death, as promised in our text. In being restored to life by divine power they are to "come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads." "Zion" is one of the symbolic names used in the promises of God to identify the kingdom of Christ when fully established in the earth. In returning from death, the ransomed of the Lord will look to the agencies of the messianic kingdom for guidance and continued blessings. If obedient, they will obtain those blessings, for the text states, "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

"With What Bodies Do They Come?"

All the various "no death" theories rule out the Bible's teachings concerning the resurrection of the dead. If no one really dies, then there are no dead to be resurrected. But when we accept the Bible's teachings that death is the penalty for sin, and that there is no hope of life beyond the grave at all except through a resurrection of the dead, then it is but natural to inquire concerning the details of the resurrection. Thinkers in Paul's day did the same, and he expresses their question thus: "But some man will say, How are the dead raised up? and with what bodies do they come?" -- 1 Corinthians 15:35

Paul answers this question, saying, "That which thou sowest is not quickened except it die: and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain; ... but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body." (1 Corinthians 15:36-38) Two great truths are set forth in this passage. One is the fact, as we have previously stated, that there must be death in order for there to be a resurrection of the dead -- "That which thou sowest [in death] is not quickened [made alive], except it die." It would seem that even in Paul's day there were those who denied the reality of death.

The other truth here set forth is that the body we sow in death is not the body which will be restored in the resurrection. By this statement Paul robs many theologians of the only apparent way of harmonizing their no-death theories with the Bible's teachings of the resurrection; for, say they, while the "immortal soul" does not die, it is the dead body which is to be resurrected. Certain creeds state it this way: "I believe in the resurrection of the body."

But Paul does not agree with this, for he says, "Thou sowest not [in death] that body which shall be." In our English versions of the Bible the Pronoun "it" is used to describe that which is to be restored to life in the resurrection. This "it" is not a so-called "immortal soul," for if it were, it could not die, and Paul insists that there has to be death in order to have a resurrection of the dead. Neither is the "it" the body, for as we have seen, the body sown in death is not the body to be restored in the resurrection.

The matter is not a complex one. The "it" simply refers to one's personality, a personality which has developed from infancy through all the years of life. It has its foundations in the brain. As we have seen, from earliest infancy impressions begin to be relayed to the brain through our five senses. The sum total of these determines what a person is -- his characteristics, his likes, his loves, his fears, etc. John Smith is what he is because millions of thought impressions have

reached his brain and been retained there. Heredity to some degree determines what use a person may make of his thoughts, but essentially a person is governed largely by the thoughts which throughout life are communicated to his brain through sight, hearing, smell, taste and touch -- nature's microphones.

To use an illustration, a human brain is an intricate recording machine. Throughout life an individual can "play back" almost any part of that recording he may choose by means of a "playback needle" we call the memory. These "playbacks" may be merely a source of personal enjoyment -- or of sorrow, if the thoughts be unpleasant -- or they may be given expression through the lips. Truly, as the Bible says, man "is fearfully and wonderfully made." -- Psalm 139:14

In the recording industry it is common practice to transfer the impressions from one record to another. In the making of a master "stamping" record for use in producing copies in great quantities, the original recording is completely destroyed in the process of transfer. But while the original record or body is destroyed, the singing voice, the orchestral music, or whatever the recording may have been, is preserved and given another "body." Actually, it is the same recording. The particles of material which formed the original disc on which the recording was made were of little importance as compared with the impressions which were made in the disc's grooves.

We are told that a human body undergoes a complete change of substance every eighteen months. A person sixty years old, therefore, has had forty different bodies so far as the material composing them is concerned. But his mind continued to develop without interruption, being transferred from one set of body cells to another as provided by the Creator in designing the working of "nature." It is a miracle, of course. All life is a miracle. We know that these things happen, but we cannot explain how.

And it will be another miracle when, because the body which now "houses" the mind dies, this "life recording" is later given a new body in which to function. It is this that will be done by divine power in the resurrection. As in the transfer of music from one disc to another, the original "body" is "destroyed," so the human body is "sown" in death, and as Paul explains, the life recording, which is the real personality, will be given a body suitable to it, and in keeping with the divine plan.

But what happens to the mind between death and the resurrection? The Bible describes it as "sleeping." Actually, it is retained in the divine memory. This, too, is beyond our comprehension, but not nearly so much so as the illogical theory that life continues without a body. We sometimes hear of individuals who have "photographic minds," meaning that they "see" and remember much that is missed by the average mind. Certainly the great Creator who, as the Bible says, knows the number of the stars, and has given them all names, will have no difficulty with the resources available to him, preserving the identity of all the millions who have died, and restoring them to life in the resurrection. It is just this that the Creator of all life has promised to do!

Natural and Spiritual

Paul explains that God will give "it" a body as it pleases him, "and to every seed his own body" -- one, that is, appropriate to the "it," the personality which was sown in death. Paul explains that there will be both natural and spiritual bodies in the resurrection -- "terrestrial" and "celestial." Paul is addressing his epistle to the followers of Jesus, and much that he has to say on the subject pertains to the spiritual resurrection, because this is what has been promised to faithful Christians.

From the time Christians begin to follow in Jesus' footsteps, their minds are being influenced by the spiritual, the heavenly, promises of the Bible. They are invited to set their affections "on things above." (Colossians 3:1-3) Their minds are renewed by the directives and promises of the Bible. (Romans 12:2) These are the ones who, through "patient continuance in well-doing, seek for glory and honor and immortality." (Romans 2:7) This heavenly hope is held out only to the footstep followers of Jesus. In the resurrection these receive their reward, the "celestial" body which has been promised. Through development they became spiritually-minded, and in the resurrection they receive a body appropriate to their new personality.

Here again the Bible takes us beyond what the human mind is able to comprehend. The Apostle John wrote, "It doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him [Christ]; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:1-3) Paul wrote, "Now I know in part." (1 Corinthians 13:12) However, the fact that we cannot understand thoughts that are so "high," need not weaken our faith in the promises of God pertaining to the Christian's hope of a resurrection to heavenly life with a "celestial" body.

Further, concerning the followers of Jesus, Paul explains, "As we have borne the image of the earthy, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly. Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God." (1 Corinthians 15:49,50) Thus we see that one of the purposes of exalting the followers of Jesus to a heavenly estate is that they might "inherit the kingdom of God." They are exalted to this high position in order that they might live and reign with Christ in that kingdom which is to destroy all the enemies of God and of righteousness, even death itself. -- vs. 25,26

Continuing to discuss the resurrection, Paul writes, "There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." (vs. 44) In verses 45 and 46 he reminds us that the "first man Adam," who was created a "living soul," was "natural," that is, he possessed a "terrestrial" body. Then, in verse 48 he continues to explain, "As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly." This is simply Paul's way of explaining that, in the resurrection, while some will have heavenly bodies, the remainder will be given earthly bodies just like Adam possessed, and just like the entire human race now possesses.

The Scriptures reveal that those who do attain to a heavenly estate in the resurrection will be the exception. This is not God's design for the whole world. The vast majority who die are wholly unfitted for spiritual existence. Their interests throughout the present life have been centered entirely in earthly things. Therefore, in the resurrection, these will be given natural, or earthly bodies, through which their re-awakened minds will find a natural and fully suitable means of expression.

Since the Bible uses sleep as an illustration of death, we may suppose that in the instant of being awakened from death a person's thoughts will connect with what he was thinking about when he died. He will instantly recognize himself and his friends. And how wonderful this will be! The returning dead will not be trying to communicate with their friends through mediums. No, they will all be here in reality -- not as ghosts, not as the reincarnation of a former personality -- but just as they were before they died. They will have been sleeping in death, and now will know that they were dead: that they were not inhabiting some mythical place such as purgatory, or limbo; and were not floating through space waiting for an opportunity to slip into the body of a newborn infant.

Alive again, they will, however, find conditions throughout the world greatly changed. Satan, the great deceiver will then be bound, eventually to be destroyed. His cohorts in deceit, the "fallen angels," will also be fully restrained, and unless they reform will ultimately also suffer the "wages of sin," which is death. Then the agencies of Christ's kingdom will be in control of all human affairs, and the true knowledge of God will be filling the earth everywhere.

Each one returning from death into this new environment will have a full opportunity to know of the provision for everlasting life made for him through the "ransom" provided by Jesus. Those who accept this provision and obey the laws of the kingdom will find themselves being restored to perfection of body and mind, as enjoyed by Adam before he sinned. If they do not conform, they will be cut off in death, never to be awakened again. -- Acts 3:23

"When?"

As we begin to understand the glorious prospect which the Bible sets before mankind, it is but natural to wonder when such a wonderful time is coming to this poor benighted and suffering world. Paul gives us a general answer to this question. He describes the heavenly resurrection of faithful Christians saying, "This mortal must put on immortality." Then he adds, "When ... this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, ... O death, where is thy sting?"

The "saying" that is "written" is one of the glorious promises descriptive of the blessings to be showered upon mankind through the agencies of Christ's kingdom. It is recorded in Isaiah 25:6-9 and Hosea 13:14. This promise describes a time of blessing when death will be destroyed, and when tears will be wiped from all faces. It is the time of Christ's kingdom, the kingdom which is to reign until even death is destroyed. So Paul says that this great boon is to reach humanity "when this mortal shall have put on immortality."

The work of the present age in the divine plan has been the selection and preparation of those who are to live and reign with Christ immortal, divine beings. There is much in the Bible to assure us that this work is nearly completed, and that very soon the last one called and found worthy of this highly exalted position "shall have put on immortality." "Then," as Paul explains, the promises of God to mankind in general will begin to be fulfilled.

And when God's promises are completely fulfilled, the entire earth will be one vast paradise of peace and joy and life. It will be then, as our text declares, that the "ransomed of the Lord shall return, and come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads: they shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away." Then the human desire to live will be realized, gloriously realized, in unending life in the earthly home which God created for his human children.