

A Biblical Examination of The Hope We Have in Christ

Death, The Soul, and the Resurrection



Restoring Oneness Apostolic Truth
In the Last Days

Comprehensive Study Guide Series

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V06142026

Preface

This study is part of a larger effort to restore apostolic doctrine to the modern Church.

Over the centuries, many teachings that were once clearly understood by the apostles and the early believers have gradually been replaced, modified, or overshadowed by traditions, theological systems, and assumptions that developed long after the New Testament was written. In many cases, these later teachings have become so widely accepted that they are rarely questioned. Some have even gone so far as to label alternative views as heresy without first examining whether those views are supported by Scripture itself.

The purpose of this study is not to challenge tradition for the sake of being different, nor is it to create controversy where none exists. The purpose is far simpler: to return to the question that should govern every doctrine of the Church.

What do the Scriptures actually teach?

As believers, our loyalty must not be to denominational traditions, theological systems, popular opinion, or long-established assumptions. Our loyalty must be to the Word of God. The apostles repeatedly warned the Church that error would arise, traditions would develop, and truth would often become obscured beneath the teachings of men. Therefore, every doctrine must be tested by Scripture and measured against the teachings of Christ and His apostles.

The doctrine examined in this study concerns one of the most fundamental questions a believer can ask:

What happens when we die?

For many Christians, the answer appears settled. Yet when the Scriptures are examined carefully, a striking pattern emerges. Again and again, Jesus, the apostles, and the prophets direct believers toward the resurrection of the dead, the appearing of Jesus Christ, and the fulfillment of God's promises at His coming. The emphasis found throughout Scripture is often very different from the emphasis commonly found in modern preaching and theology.

It is my conviction that many sincere Christians have inherited views concerning death, the soul, and the afterlife that owe more to later theological development than to the plain teaching of Scripture. This does not mean that those who hold such views are insincere. It simply means that all of us must be willing to place tradition beneath the authority of God's Word.

The goal of this study is not to please men, defend traditions, or preserve popular doctrine. The goal is to pursue apostolic truth wherever it leads. If a doctrine is truly apostolic, it will stand the test of Scripture. If it is not, no amount of tradition can make it true.

It is my belief that the pages which follow present a compelling and comprehensive biblical case that the hope proclaimed by Jesus and His apostles was not immediate translation at death, but

the resurrection of the dead at the coming of Christ. Whether the reader ultimately agrees or disagrees, I encourage every passage to be examined carefully, every assumption to be tested honestly, and every conclusion to be weighed against the Word of God itself.

For in the end, our responsibility is not to defend what has been handed down to us by men.

Our responsibility is to believe what God has revealed.

Chapter 1

The Hope Christ Gave: Resurrection at the Last Day

One of the most important questions a Christian can ask is this:

What is the hope of the believer after death?

Most Christians today answer this question by saying that when a believer dies, he immediately leaves his body and enters heaven in a fully conscious state to be with the Lord. Funeral sermons often focus upon loved ones already enjoying heavenly bliss, walking streets of gold, and experiencing the fullness of God's presence.

Yet when we examine the actual words of Jesus Christ, we discover a different emphasis.

Again and again, Christ directs believers not to the moment of death, but to a future event: **the resurrection at the last day.**

If immediate translation into heaven is the believer's primary hope, one would expect Jesus to repeatedly teach it. Instead, He repeatedly points His followers toward resurrection.

This chapter will examine the words of Christ Himself and the expectations of those who believed Him. We will discover that the consistent hope presented throughout the New Testament is not immediate glorification at death, but resurrection at Christ's coming.

Four Times Jesus Declared the Same Hope

John chapter 6 contains one of the clearest presentations of the believer's future hope found anywhere in Scripture.

In this chapter, Jesus repeatedly speaks concerning those who believe on Him. Remarkably, He repeats the same promise four separate times.

First He says:

"And this is the Father's will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day." (John 6:39)

Again:

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40)

Again:

"No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:44)

And finally:

"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:54)

The repetition cannot be ignored.

Four times Christ points believers toward the same event.

Not once does He say:

"I will take him immediately to heaven when he dies."

Not once does He say:

"When he dies, he shall instantly enter paradise."

Not once does He point believers to death as the fulfillment of their hope.

Instead, Christ continually points believers toward the resurrection at the **last day**.

The obvious question is this:

Martha's Understanding

The importance of this truth becomes even clearer in John chapter 11.

Lazarus has died. His body lies in the tomb. His sisters are grieving.

When Jesus arrives, He speaks to Martha and tells her:

"Thy brother shall rise again." (John 11:23)

Martha immediately responds:

"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 11:24)

Notice carefully what Martha says.

She does not say:

"My brother is already in heaven."

She does not say:

"My brother is already enjoying paradise."

She does not say:

"My brother is alive in the presence of God."

Instead, her hope is fixed upon the resurrection at the last day.

Even more significant is Christ's response.

Jesus does not correct her.

He does not say:

"Martha, you misunderstand. Lazarus is already alive in glory."

He does not redirect her attention away from resurrection and toward immediate heavenly existence.

Instead He declares:

"I am the resurrection, and the life." (John 11:25)

Far from correcting Martha's expectation, Jesus reinforces it.

The entire conversation revolves around resurrection.

This is precisely the same hope Christ emphasized repeatedly in John chapter 6.

Why Did Jesus Not Correct Martha?

This question deserves serious consideration.

If immediate translation into heaven was the actual hope taught by Christ, John chapter 11 provided the perfect opportunity to explain it.

A grieving sister stood before Him mourning the loss of her brother.

If believers enter heaven immediately after death, why not comfort Martha by saying:

"Your brother is already with God."

"Your brother is already enjoying heavenly glory."

"Your brother is not really dead."

Yet Christ says none of these things.

Instead, both Martha and Jesus focus upon resurrection.

The silence is significant.

The doctrine most commonly preached at modern funerals is completely absent from the conversation.

Instead, the discussion centers upon the same hope found throughout the New Testament: resurrection at the last day.

The Christian Hope Is the Resurrection

Why would Jesus repeatedly emphasize resurrection if believers already receive the greatest possible reward immediately upon death?

Those who believe in immediate translation often respond that resurrection still matters because believers eventually receive glorified bodies.

Yet this answer raises another question.

If believers enter heaven immediately at death and consciously enjoy the presence of Christ, has not the greatest possible fulfillment of hope already been received?

What greater blessing could there be than being with the Lord Himself?

Why then does Paul say:

"And have hope toward God... that there shall be a resurrection of the dead." (Acts 24:15)

Paul explicitly identifies the resurrection as the believer's hope.

Yet under the doctrine of immediate translation, believers receive Christ at death.

They enter glory at death.

They enjoy the presence of the Lord at death.

They receive the reward of the righteous at death.

If all of this is already true, then the hope cannot be Christ, for Christ has already been received.

What remains is the body.

Thus it follows that Christ was never the object of hope at all. The resurrection body becomes the object of hope.

The believer is not hoping to be with Christ. He is already with Christ.

The believer is not hoping to enter glory. He is already in glory.

The believer is not hoping to receive his reward. He has already received it.

The only thing left to hope for is the resurrection of the body.

Yet Paul does not present the resurrection as the recovery of a body after the fulfillment of hope.

He presents the resurrection itself as the hope.

That distinction is profound.

The New Testament consistently presents resurrection as the fulfillment of hope, the victory over death, and the completion of God's redemptive purpose.

This makes far better sense if believers are awaiting that hope rather than having already received the greatest blessings of redemption at death.

The apostles do not teach believers to look forward to death.

They teach believers to look forward to resurrection.

The Church is not waiting for death.

The Church is waiting for Christ.

Chapter 2

Who Is Being Raised?

In the previous chapter we saw that Jesus repeatedly directed believers to the resurrection at the last day.

Four times in John chapter 6 He made the same promise:

"I will raise him up at the last day."

We also saw that Martha shared this same expectation when she declared concerning Lazarus:

"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Before moving further, we must pause and consider a question that is rarely asked:

Who exactly is being raised?

The answer may seem obvious, yet it exposes one of the greatest tensions in the popular doctrine of immediate translation.

Most Christians today believe that when a believer dies, the real person immediately leaves the body and enters heaven in a conscious state. The body remains behind in the grave while the soul enjoys the presence of Christ.

According to this view, the resurrection is not really the restoration of the believer. Rather, it is the future reunion of a soul already living in heaven with a body left behind on earth.

But is this how Jesus describes resurrection?

Is this how Martha describes resurrection?

Is this how the apostles describe resurrection?

The language of Scripture deserves careful examination.

The Language of Christ

In John chapter 6, Jesus repeatedly speaks concerning those who believe on Him.

Four times He says:

"I will raise him up at the last day."

Notice carefully what Jesus does not say.

He does not say:

"I will reunite his body with him at the last day."

He does not say:

"I will bring his soul back from heaven and attach it to his body."

He does not say:

"I will resurrect his remains."

He does not say:

"I will raise his body."

Jesus speaks of the person being raised.

The object of resurrection is not a corpse.

The object of resurrection is not physical remains.

The object of resurrection is the believer himself.

The man who believes is the man who is raised.

The woman who believes is the woman who is raised.

The child who believes is the child who is raised.

The individual Christ saves is the individual Christ raises.

The language is direct, personal, and unmistakable:

"I will raise him."

The emphasis falls upon the believer himself.

The Question Immediate Translation Must Answer

This creates an important question.

If believers are already consciously alive in heaven immediately after death, what exactly is being raised at the last day?

The common answer is that only the body is being raised.

The real person has supposedly been alive in heaven all along.

The resurrection therefore becomes the reunion of a body with a soul that never truly experienced death.

Yet this explanation is remarkably absent from the resurrection passages themselves.

Jesus never explains resurrection this way.

Instead He repeatedly speaks of the believer himself being raised.

The natural reading of Christ's words is straightforward.

The believer dies.

The believer remains in death.

The believer is raised by Christ at the last day.

This is precisely how Jesus presents the matter throughout John chapter 6.

Martha's Understanding

The same pattern appears in John chapter 11.

Lazarus has died.

His body has been in the grave four days.

Martha is grieving.

Jesus says:

"Thy brother shall rise again."

Notice again what Jesus does not say.

He does not say:

"Thy brother is already alive in heaven."

He does not say:

"Thy brother's soul is presently enjoying paradise."

He does not say:

"Only his body remains in the tomb."

Instead He says:

"Thy brother shall rise again."

Martha immediately responds:

"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

Notice her language.

She does not say:

"His body shall rise again."

She says:

"He shall rise again."

The subject is Lazarus himself.

The person.

The man.

The brother she loved.

The one who died.

Both Jesus and Martha speak as though Lazarus himself is awaiting resurrection.

The discussion is not about a soul already enjoying heaven while a body waits in the grave.

The discussion is about Lazarus.

The resurrection of Lazarus.

The restoration of Lazarus.

The raising of Lazarus.

This is exactly the same hope Christ proclaimed in John chapter 6.

Resurrection Is Not Presented as a Reunion

The popular doctrine often portrays resurrection as a reunion between two separated parts.

The soul supposedly departs to heaven.

The body remains in the grave.

Thousands of years later the two are reunited.

Yet this is not how the New Testament normally describes resurrection.

Instead, Scripture repeatedly speaks of the dead themselves being raised.

Jesus says:

"I will raise him."

Martha says:

"He shall rise again."

Paul says:

"The dead in Christ shall rise first."

The focus remains on the believer.

The person.

The individual whom death has claimed.

Death has taken a man.

Christ restores that man.

Death has taken a woman.

Christ restores that woman.

Death has taken a child.

Christ restores that child.

The resurrection is consistently presented as God's answer to death itself.

It is not merely the recovery of a body.

It is the restoration of the person.

Paul's Comfort to the Church

This same emphasis appears in Paul's letter to the Thessalonians.

Members of the church were grieving because fellow believers had died.

If immediate conscious existence in heaven were the primary apostolic hope, this was the perfect opportunity for Paul to explain it.

Yet notice where Paul directs their attention.

"Them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

And then:

"The dead in Christ shall rise first."

Paul does not comfort the church by saying:

"Their souls are already enjoying heaven."

He does not say:

"Do not grieve because they are already experiencing their reward."

Instead, he points believers to Christ's return.

The comfort rests upon resurrection.

The dead believers themselves will rise.

The dead believers themselves will meet the Lord.

The dead believers themselves will participate in Christ's victory over death.

The focus is not upon what the dead are supposedly doing now.

The focus is upon what Christ will do when He returns.

Why Resurrection Matters

This issue reaches far beyond a debate over words.

It strikes at the heart of Christian hope.

If believers are already fully alive, fully conscious, fully joyful, fully present with Christ, and lacking nothing after death, then resurrection becomes difficult to explain.

What remains unfinished?

What remains unconquered?

Why does Jesus repeatedly point believers toward the last day?

Why does Martha place her hope in resurrection?

Why do the apostles constantly direct believers toward Christ's coming?

Why is resurrection presented as the great victory over death?

The New Testament never treats resurrection as a minor event.

It is not portrayed as a future upgrade to an existence already fully enjoyed.

It is presented as the moment when death itself is finally defeated.

The language of Jesus, Martha, and the apostles consistently presents the believer as the object of resurrection. This naturally leads to another question. If the believer awaits resurrection at the last day, what is the condition of the dead while they wait?

Chapter 3

We Shall Be Like Him

One of the greatest promises in all of Scripture is found in the words of John:

"Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is." (1 John 3:2)

This verse answers one of the most important questions in the entire discussion.

When do believers become like Christ?

John's answer is simple:

"When he shall appear."

Not when we die.

Not when we leave the body.

Not when we supposedly enter heaven.

When He appears.

That distinction is critical.

Christ Is Already Glorified

Jesus Christ today is not a disembodied spirit.

He is the risen Lord.

He possesses a glorified body.

He has conquered death.

He has already experienced resurrection.

After His resurrection Jesus declared:

"A spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have." (Luke 24:39)

Christ is complete.

Christ is glorified.

Christ is immortal.

This is the pattern set before every believer.

Paul writes:

"Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body."
(Philippians 3:21)

The goal of redemption is not merely survival after death.

The goal of redemption is conformity to Christ.

If We Are Already With Christ, Why Are We Not Like Him?

This raises an obvious question.

If believers enter heaven immediately after death, are they already like Christ?

Christ possesses a glorified body.

Believers do not.

Christ has conquered death.

Believers have not yet been raised.

Christ possesses immortality.

Believers have not yet put on immortality.

Christ has already experienced resurrection.

Believers are still awaiting resurrection.

So in what sense are they like Him?

John does not say:

"When we die, we shall be like Him."

He says:

"When he shall appear, we shall be like him."

The transformation remains future.

The fulfillment remains future.

The glorification remains future.

What Is Heaven Like Without a Body?

The doctrine of immediate translation raises a question that is rarely asked.

What exactly is heaven like without a body?

Scripture teaches that man was created in the image of God.

We recognize one another through that image.

We communicate through that image.

We interact through that image.

Even God repeatedly revealed Himself through an image.

He walked with Adam and Eve in the garden.

He appeared to Abraham.

He appeared to Jacob.

He appeared in the fiery furnace.

Ultimately, the invisible God revealed Himself through Jesus Christ.

Why?

Because persons relate to persons.

Recognition requires identity.

Communication requires manifestation.

Interaction requires presence.

Yet according to the doctrine of immediate translation, believers spend years, centuries, or even millennia in heaven without any body at all.

What exactly are they?

How do they recognize one another?

How do they interact?

What do they see?

The Bible never presents disembodied existence as the believer's ultimate hope.

It points believers toward resurrection.

Toward glorification.

Toward immortality.

Toward becoming like Christ.

The Resurrection Completes Redemption

Paul writes:

"For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality." (1 Corinthians 15:53)

Notice that immortality is not described as something already possessed.

It is something believers put on.

It is future.

It is connected to resurrection.

Without resurrection, death remains unconquered.

Without resurrection, glorification remains incomplete.

Without resurrection, believers have not yet become like Christ.

This is why the apostles place such emphasis upon Christ's appearing.

The appearing of Christ is not merely the end of history.

It is the moment when believers receive what has been promised.

The dead are raised.

The mortal puts on immortality.

The corruptible puts on incorruption.

And the people of God become like the risen Christ.

Only then can it truly be said:

"We shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is."

If believers become like Christ at His appearing rather than at death, another question naturally follows:

When does the salvation of the soul itself occur?

Chapter 4

The Salvation of Your Souls

Introduction

Few passages in Scripture strike more directly at the doctrine of immediate translation than the words of the Apostle Peter.

The reason is simple.

Most discussions concerning life after death eventually return to the body.

The body is raised.

The body is glorified.

The body receives immortality.

The common response is that the soul has already entered heaven and merely awaits reunion with the body.

Peter does not discuss the body.

Peter discusses the soul.

And what he says is profound.

The End of Your Faith

Peter writes:

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls." (1 Peter 1:9)

Notice the language.

Peter speaks of:

"the end of your faith."

The word "end" carries the idea of completion, fulfillment, culmination, and final attainment.

Peter is not describing the beginning of faith.

He is describing where faith ultimately arrives.

He is describing the goal.

The destination.

The fulfillment.

And what is that fulfillment?

"The salvation of your souls."

When Does This Occur?

The context answers the question.

Just two verses earlier Peter writes:

"Might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:7)

Then only a few verses later he writes:

"Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:13)

The entire passage points forward to the same event.

The appearing of Jesus Christ.

The revelation of Jesus Christ.

The return of Jesus Christ.

Peter's eyes are fixed firmly upon the future.

Not the Salvation of the Body

At this point an important observation must be made.

Peter does not say:

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your bodies."

He says:

"The salvation of your souls."

This distinction is critical.

The common explanation given by proponents of immediate translation is that the soul is already saved and in heaven while the body awaits resurrection.

Yet Peter places the salvation of the soul itself at the appearing of Christ.

Not the body.

The soul.

If Peter is speaking accurately, then the soul cannot already possess the completed salvation that immediate translation claims.

Peter places that salvation at a future event.

The revelation of Jesus Christ.

Hope, Faith, and Salvation

What makes this passage even more remarkable is the concentration of language found within it.

Peter speaks of:

Faith.

Hope.

Salvation.

And he places all three at the appearing of Christ.

The end of faith.

The salvation of the soul.

The grace yet to be brought.

All future.

All connected to Christ's appearing.

This is entirely consistent with everything we have already seen throughout this study.

Jesus pointed believers to the resurrection at the last day.

Paul identified the resurrection as the believer's hope.

John declared:

"When he shall appear, we shall be like him."

And now Peter places the salvation of the soul itself at Christ's appearing.

The apostles are speaking with one voice.

A Serious Difficulty

This creates a serious difficulty for the doctrine of immediate translation.

If believers enter heaven immediately at death and consciously enjoy the presence of Christ, then the soul has already attained the very thing Peter says is received at Christ's appearing.

The soul is already in glory.

The soul is already with Christ.

The soul is already enjoying heavenly reward.

The soul is already experiencing the presence of God.

Yet Peter says:

"Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls."

Not at death.

At Christ's appearing.

The tension is difficult to avoid.

The Hope Problem

Peter continues:

"Hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 1:13)

Notice that hope remains fixed upon a future event.

This creates another profound question.

If believers enter heaven immediately at death, consciously enjoying the presence of Christ, has not the greatest possible reward already been received?

What greater blessing could there be than being with the Lord Himself?

Why then does Paul say:

"And have hope toward God... that there shall be a resurrection of the dead." (Acts 24:15)

The difficulty is that resurrection is explicitly called the believer's hope.

Yet under the doctrine of immediate translation, believers receive Christ at death.

They enter glory at death.

They enjoy the presence of the Lord at death.

They receive the reward of the righteous at death.

If all of this is already true, then the hope cannot be Christ, for Christ has already been received.

What remains is the body.

Thus it follows that the resurrection body becomes the object of hope.

The believer is not hoping to be with Christ.

He is already with Christ.

The believer is not hoping to enter glory.

He is already in glory.

The believer is not hoping to receive his reward.

He has already received it.

The only thing left to hope for is the resurrection of the body.

Yet Paul identifies the resurrection itself as the hope.

Peter identifies the salvation of the soul as future.

This creates a profound tension that the doctrine of immediate translation struggles to resolve.

The Grand Consistency of Scripture

The beauty of this passage is how naturally it harmonizes with everything we have already studied.

Jesus pointed believers to the resurrection at the last day.

Martha expected the resurrection at the last day.

Believers become like Christ when He appears.

The dead are described as sleeping.

The dead await resurrection.

And now Peter places the salvation of the soul itself at the appearing of Christ.

The message remains remarkably consistent.

Not death.

Not an intermediate state.

Not immediate translation.

The appearing of Christ.

The revelation of Christ.

The resurrection of the dead.

The fulfillment of hope.

The end of faith.

The salvation of the soul.

All roads lead to the same destination.

The return of Jesus Christ.

If Peter places the salvation of the soul at Christ's appearing, what then should we make of the many passages that describe the dead as sleeping while they await His return?

Chapter 5

Death Is Called Sleep

Having established that Christ repeatedly pointed believers to the resurrection at the last day, and that believers become like Him at His appearing, we must now examine one of the Bible's most consistent descriptions of death.

How does Scripture describe the condition of those who have died?

The answer may surprise many readers.

Again and again, both the Old and New Testaments describe death as **sleep**.

This language appears so frequently that it cannot be dismissed as an occasional figure of speech.

Jesus used it.

The apostles used it.

The prophets used it.

The question is not whether the Bible calls death sleep.

The question is why.

Jesus Called Death Sleep

One of the clearest examples appears in the account of Lazarus.

Jesus told His disciples:

"Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John 11:11)

The disciples misunderstood Him.

They assumed He was speaking of ordinary rest.

Therefore Jesus explained plainly:

"Lazarus is dead." (John 11:14)

Notice what happened.

Jesus first called death sleep.

Then He explained that Lazarus was dead.

Christ Himself establishes the connection.

Death is compared to sleep because the dead await an awakening.

Just as a sleeping man does not know the passing of hours, the dead await the voice that will awaken them.

For Lazarus, that awakening came after four days.

For the rest of humanity, it comes at the resurrection.

Sleep and Resurrection Belong Together

The Bible repeatedly joins these two ideas.

Sleep is followed by awakening.

Death is followed by resurrection.

Daniel wrote:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake." (Daniel 12:2)

Notice the sequence.

They sleep.

Then they awake.

The awakening is the resurrection.

The language is straightforward.

The dead are not described as living consciously elsewhere while their bodies sleep in the earth.

The people themselves are said to be sleeping in the dust until they awake.

This perfectly agrees with the words of Jesus concerning the resurrection at the last day.

Daniel's Resurrection Hope

Long before Martha declared:

"I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day,"

Daniel had already described that very hope.

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." (Daniel 12:2)

This passage deserves careful consideration.

Notice what Daniel does not describe.

He does not describe souls already living in heaven.

He does not describe souls already enjoying paradise.

He does not describe souls already receiving reward or punishment.

Instead, he describes people sleeping in the dust of the earth.

Then they awake.

Then they receive everlasting life or everlasting contempt.

The sequence is simple.

Sleep.

Awakening.

Reward.

Daniel presents no conscious intermediate state between death and resurrection.

The dead are not described as living elsewhere while awaiting a future reunion with their bodies.

They are sleeping in the dust.

And it is these same individuals who awake.

This is remarkably consistent with the language of Jesus concerning Lazarus.

It is remarkably consistent with Martha's expectation of a future resurrection.

And it is remarkably consistent with the teaching of the apostles.

The dead sleep.

The dead awake.

The dead are raised.

The hope of Daniel is the same hope proclaimed throughout the New Testament: the resurrection of the dead at the appointed time of God.

The Apostles Used the Same Language

The apostles continued using the language Christ used.

When Stephen was martyred, Scripture records:

"He fell asleep." (Acts 7:60)

Notice that Scripture does not say Stephen went immediately to his reward.

It says he fell asleep.

Paul repeatedly uses the same language.

In discussing resurrection he writes:

"Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." (1 Corinthians 15:18)

Again:

"But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept." (1 Corinthians 15:20)

And again:

"We which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." (1 Thessalonians 4:15)

Throughout his writings, Paul consistently describes deceased believers as sleeping.

The terminology is not accidental.

It is the normal apostolic description of death.

Why Sleep?

Some argue that sleep simply describes the appearance of the body.

But that explanation creates difficulties.

When Jesus spoke of Lazarus sleeping, He was speaking of Lazarus.

Not merely Lazarus' body.

Likewise, Daniel says:

"Them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake."

He does not say their bodies sleep.

He says they sleep.

The same pattern appears throughout Scripture.

The person is described as sleeping.

The person is described as awakening.

The person is described as rising.

This language fits naturally with everything we have already seen.

Jesus promised:

"I will raise him up at the last day."

Martha declared:

"He shall rise again."

The object of resurrection is the person.

Therefore it is the person who is described as sleeping until the resurrection.

Sleep Explains the Resurrection Hope

The language of sleep also explains why the apostles placed such emphasis upon resurrection.

If believers are already fully awake, fully conscious, fully glorified, and fully enjoying heaven, then the repeated descriptions of death as sleep become difficult to understand.

Why call it sleep?

Why speak of awakening?

Why speak of rising?

Why speak of waiting for Christ's appearing?

The language makes perfect sense if death is an unconscious state awaiting resurrection.

Sleep is temporary.

Sleep is not permanent.

Sleep has an awakening.

Likewise, death is not the end.

The dead will hear His voice.

The dead will awake.

The dead will rise.

The Great Awakening

Jesus declared:

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

And shall come forth." (John 5:28-29)

Notice where the dead are located.

Not in heaven.

Not in paradise.

Not in glory.

Jesus says they are in the graves.

And what are they waiting for?

His voice.

The same pattern appears once again.

Death.

Sleep.

Awakening.

Resurrection.

The grave is not the believer's final destination.

Neither is death the believer's final condition.

The grave is a temporary resting place awaiting the command of Christ.

One day His voice will sound.

The sleeping saints will awaken.

The dead in Christ shall rise.

And the promise repeated throughout the New Testament will finally be fulfilled:

"I will raise him up at the last day."

If the dead are described as sleeping until the resurrection, another question naturally arises.

What does Scripture say about the awareness, knowledge, and activity of those who have died?

Chapter 6

The Dead Know Not Anything

In the previous chapter we saw that Scripture repeatedly describes death as sleep.

The dead sleep.

The dead await awakening.

The dead await resurrection.

This naturally leads to another question:

What is the condition of the dead while they wait?

Are the dead conscious?

Are they observing events on earth?

Are they actively participating in heavenly life?

Or do the Scriptures describe a different condition altogether?

To answer this question, we must allow the Bible to speak for itself.

Remarkably, the Scriptures repeatedly describe death as a state in which thought, knowledge, activity, and awareness have ceased until God calls the dead from the grave.

The Dead Know Not Anything

Perhaps the most direct statement in Scripture is found in Ecclesiastes.

"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing." (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

The language is simple.

The living know.

The dead do not.

Solomon does not say the dead know more than the living.

He does not say the dead possess greater understanding.

He says:

"The dead know not any thing."

The verse continues:

"Neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten."

Whether one agrees with every conclusion drawn from Ecclesiastes or not, the language itself is difficult to reconcile with the idea that the dead are consciously living, learning, observing, and interacting elsewhere.

Their Love, Hatred, and Envy Have Perished

The passage continues:

"Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished." (Ecclesiastes 9:6)

Notice what has ceased.

Their emotions.

Their passions.

Their earthly concerns.

The dead are not described as watching the affairs of men.

They are not described as monitoring their descendants.

They are not described as participating in earthly events.

Instead, Scripture says these things have perished.

The life they once knew has come to an end.

They await the resurrection.

There Is No Work, Knowledge, or Wisdom in the Grave

Solomon continues:

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest." (Ecclesiastes 9:10)

Again the language is striking.

No work.

No device.

No knowledge.

No wisdom.

If the dead are consciously active elsewhere, this statement becomes difficult to explain.

The grave is presented as a place of inactivity.

A place of silence.

A place of waiting.

A place from which only God can awaken the dead.

When a Man Dies, His Thoughts Perish

The psalmist provides another important witness.

"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psalm 146:4)

Notice the sequence.

A man dies.

He returns to the earth.

His thoughts perish.

This is not the language we would expect if the dead immediately entered a state of heightened consciousness.

The psalmist does not describe expanded awareness.

He describes the cessation of thought.

Death brings an end to the activities and awareness of earthly life.

The next conscious moment comes when God calls the dead from their graves.

The Dead Do Not Praise the Lord

Another psalm declares:

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence." (Psalm 115:17)

Notice how death is described.

Silence.

Not activity.

Not conversation.

Not observation.

Silence.

The psalmist contrasts the living who praise God with the dead who have gone down into silence.

This language fits naturally with the biblical picture we have seen thus far.

The dead sleep.

The dead rest.

The dead await resurrection.

Job's Testimony

Job likewise speaks of death as a waiting period.

He asks:

"If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14)

Then he answers:

"All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come."

Job does not speak of entering heavenly glory immediately.

He speaks of waiting.

Waiting for what?

The change.

The resurrection.

The day when God would call and Job would answer.

Job's hope was not death.

Job's hope was resurrection.

Why This Matters

These passages are often dismissed because they come from the Old Testament.

Yet they agree perfectly with everything we have already seen.

Jesus repeatedly promised resurrection at the last day.

Martha expected resurrection at the last day.

The apostles comforted believers with resurrection at Christ's coming.

The dead are called asleep.

Now we find the dead described as lacking knowledge, activity, and awareness until God awakens them.

Taken together, these passages form a remarkably consistent picture.

Death is not presented as a transition into fuller consciousness.

Death is presented as a state awaiting resurrection.

The Weight of the Evidence

Any single passage might be debated.

But the cumulative testimony is difficult to ignore.

The dead know not anything.

Their thoughts perish.

There is no work, knowledge, or wisdom in the grave.

The dead do not praise the Lord.

The dead are asleep.

The dead await awakening.

The dead await resurrection.

These are not isolated statements scattered randomly throughout Scripture.

They form a consistent pattern stretching from the Old Testament into the teachings of Christ and the apostles.

The Bible repeatedly points believers away from death and toward resurrection.

Away from the grave and toward Christ's appearing.

Away from the present state of death and toward the day when the dead shall hear His voice and come forth.

If the biblical testimony concerning death appears so consistent, why do many Christians believe the dead are already conscious in heaven?

To answer that question, we must now examine the passages most often used to support that belief.

Chapter 7

Answering the Objections

Thus far, we have examined the passages that directly address the believer's hope, the resurrection, the language of sleep, and the condition of the dead.

A consistent picture has emerged.

Jesus repeatedly pointed believers to the resurrection at the last day.

Martha expected the resurrection at the last day.

The apostles comforted grieving believers with the resurrection at Christ's coming.

The dead are described as sleeping.

The dead are described as awaiting resurrection.

The dead are described as lacking knowledge, activity, and awareness.

Yet there are several passages commonly cited as proof that believers remain consciously alive after death.

Before examining these passages, an important principle should be established.

Difficult passages should be interpreted in light of clear passages—not the other way around.

If dozens of passages point toward resurrection as the believer's hope, then a handful of disputed texts should not overturn the plain testimony of Scripture.

With that in mind, let us examine the most common objections.

One Resurrection at the Last Day

Before examining individual passages commonly cited against this study, another important issue must be addressed.

Many modern prophetic systems divide the resurrection into multiple events separated by years, dispensations, or even a thousand years.

One resurrection is proposed for the Church.

Another for Israel.

Another for tribulation saints.

Another at the end of the millennium.

Yet throughout the teachings of Jesus and the apostles, such distinctions are remarkably absent.

The burden of proof rests upon those who divide the resurrection into multiple events, for Christ repeatedly spoke of the resurrection in singular terms.

Again and again He pointed believers to:

"the last day."

Not one of many resurrection days.

Not a series of resurrection events.

The last day.

This becomes especially significant when we consider the scope of those included in Christ's promise.

Jesus speaks of:

"All which he hath given me..." (John 6:39)

"Every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him..." (John 6:40)

"No man can come to me..." (John 6:44)

"Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood..." (John 6:54)

These categories encompass all believers.

Yet every category receives the same promise:

"I will raise him up at the last day."

The promise never changes.

The timing never changes.

The resurrection never changes.

Christ does not place one group at one resurrection and another group at a different resurrection.

He gathers every believer into the same event:

"The last day."

This becomes even more significant when compared with Christ's words elsewhere:

"The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice,

And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (John 5:28-29)

Notice that both groups are raised in the same hour.

The righteous are raised.

The wicked are raised.

The emphasis is not upon multiple resurrections separated by long periods of time.

The emphasis is upon one climactic resurrection at the appointed time of God.

This is entirely consistent with Martha's expectation of "the resurrection at the last day."

It is entirely consistent with Daniel's prophecy that those who sleep in the dust shall awake, some to everlasting life and some to everlasting contempt.

And it is entirely consistent with the repeated promise of Christ:

"I will raise him up at the last day."

Before examining specific passages often cited in support of immediate translation, another assumption must be addressed. Modern prophecy systems frequently divide the resurrection into multiple events separated by years, dispensations, or even a millennium. Yet Jesus repeatedly gathered all believers into the same promise: "I will raise him up at the last day." The burden of proof therefore rests upon those who would divide what Christ repeatedly united.

The Thief on the Cross

One of the most frequently cited passages is Jesus' statement to the thief:

"Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)

Many assume this means the thief entered paradise that very day.

However, several questions immediately arise.

First, where was Jesus that day?

Jesus died and was placed in the tomb.

After His resurrection He told Mary:

"Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." (John 20:17)

If Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father three days later, in what sense did both He and the thief enter paradise on the day of the crucifixion?

Second, the original Greek manuscripts contained no punctuation.

The statement can be understood as:

"Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise."

The emphasis falls upon when the promise was made, not when it would be fulfilled.

Either way, the passage does not overturn the many texts placing the believer's hope at the resurrection.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

Another commonly cited passage is the account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16.

Many treat this account as a literal description of the state of the dead.

However, several difficulties arise.

The story contains obvious symbolic elements.

The rich man speaks across a great gulf.

A drop of water supposedly relieves torment in flame.

Abraham serves as the central figure receiving the dead.

Most importantly, if interpreted literally, the passage creates conflicts with numerous clear teachings concerning resurrection and judgment.

The context indicates that Jesus is delivering a lesson concerning repentance, unbelief, and the rejection of divine revelation.

The climax of the story is not the condition of the dead.

The climax is Abraham's statement:

"If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead."

The focus is unbelief, not a detailed map of the afterlife.

Absent From the Body

Paul writes:

"Absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8)

This passage is often presented as proof of immediate conscious existence after death.

Yet the surrounding context deserves careful attention.

Paul is discussing mortality and immortality.

He writes:

"Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life." (2 Corinthians 5:4)

Notice Paul's desire.

He does not long to be unclothed.

He longs to be clothed upon.

He longs for transformation.

He longs for immortality.

The entire discussion points toward resurrection life rather than permanent disembodied existence.

Paul's hope remains exactly where it has always been: in the transformation God will provide.

To Depart and Be With Christ

Paul also writes:

"Having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better." (Philippians 1:23)

At first glance this appears straightforward.

Yet Paul says nothing about the amount of time between departure and being with Christ.

From the believer's perspective, death closes the eyes and resurrection opens them.

The next conscious moment is the presence of Christ.

Paul is not constructing a doctrine of the intermediate state.

He is expressing his confidence that his future is with Christ.

This agrees perfectly with the resurrection hope taught elsewhere throughout his writings.

The Souls Under the Altar

In Revelation, John sees:

"The souls of them that were slain for the word of God." (Revelation 6:9)

These souls are described as crying out for justice.

Some interpret this as proof of conscious existence after death.

Yet Revelation is filled with symbols.

Even if one chooses to interpret the passage literally, another important observation remains.

After the souls cry out for justice, Scripture says:

"And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season..." (Revelation 6:11)

Notice that the martyrs are still waiting.

They have not yet received the final fulfillment of God's promises.

They have not yet reached the end of God's redemptive plan.

They are told to rest and wait until God's appointed time.

This is significant because it harmonizes with the broader testimony of Scripture.

Martha was waiting for the resurrection.

The apostles were waiting for the resurrection.

The dead are described as sleeping while awaiting resurrection.

Even the martyrs in Revelation are portrayed as waiting for a future fulfillment.

Thus, even if this passage is interpreted as conscious activity, it still does not overturn the repeated New Testament emphasis upon resurrection as the believer's ultimate hope.

The passage ends not with fulfillment, but with waiting.

The Weight of Scripture

When all of these passages are examined, something important becomes clear.

None of them directly state:

"The dead are conscious in heaven awaiting reunion with their bodies."

That conclusion must be inferred.

By contrast, the passages we have already studied speak directly.

Jesus promised resurrection at the last day.

Martha expected resurrection at the last day.

Believers become like Christ when He appears.

The dead are called asleep.

The dead know not anything.

The dead await resurrection.

The difference is significant.

One set of passages speaks plainly and repeatedly.

The other requires assumptions, interpretations, and inferences.

The safest approach is to allow the clear passages to establish doctrine and interpret the difficult passages in harmony with them.

The Central Question Remains

Even after every objection has been considered, the central question remains unchanged.

Why does Jesus repeatedly point believers to the resurrection at the last day?

Why does Martha place her hope in the resurrection?

Why do the apostles comfort believers with the resurrection?

Why does Scripture describe death as sleep?

Why does Scripture repeatedly connect immortality, glorification, and victory over death with Christ's appearing?

The answers remain exactly where they have been throughout this study.

The Christian hope is resurrection.

The Christian hope is transformation.

The Christian hope is becoming like Christ.

The Christian hope is hearing His voice and coming forth from the grave.

That hope stands at the center of apostolic Christianity.

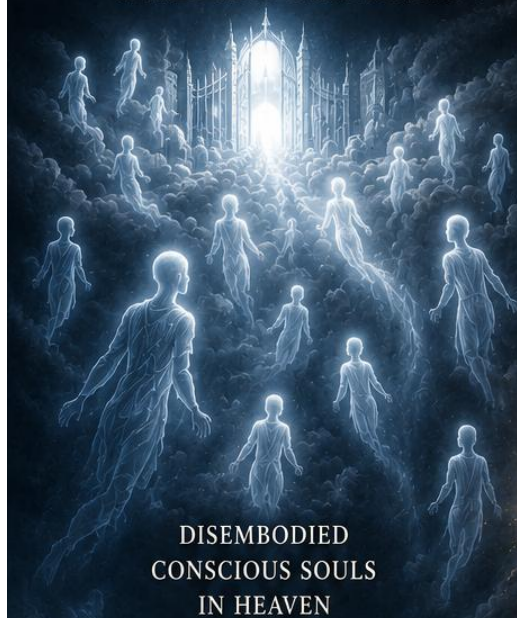
If resurrection was the hope proclaimed by Christ and His apostles, how did much of Christianity come to embrace a different understanding of death and the afterlife?

To answer that question, we must briefly examine the historical development of the doctrine of immediate translation.

THE CHRISTIAN HOPE

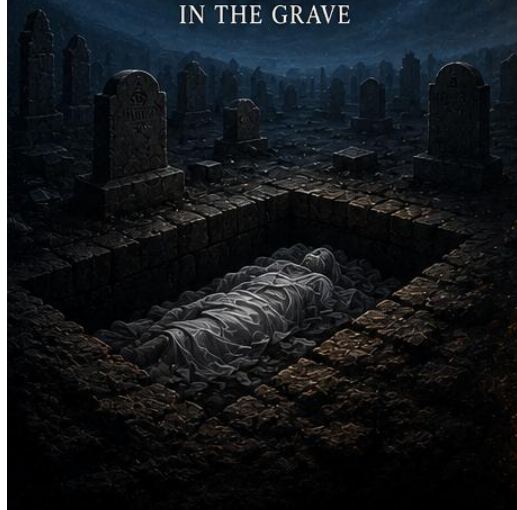
DEATH, THE SOUL, AND THE RESURRECTION

THE TRADITIONAL VIEW
IMMEDIATE TRANSLATION



DISEMBODIED
CONSCIOUS SOULS
IN HEAVEN

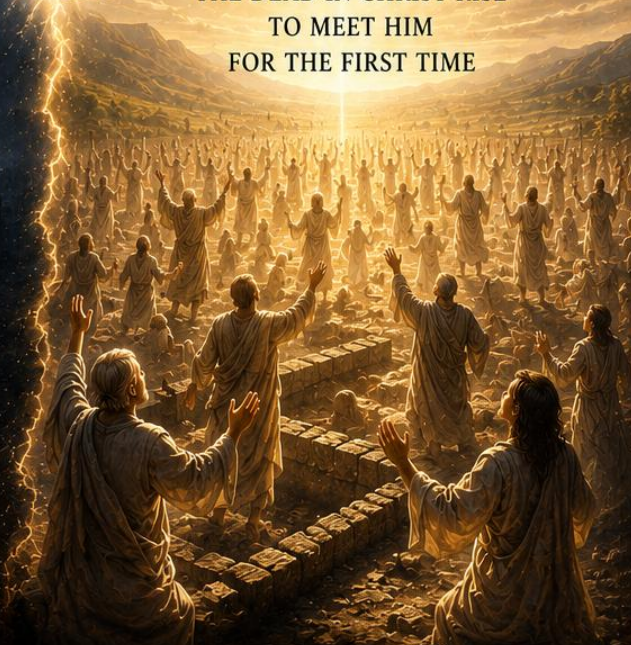
BODIES LEFT
IN THE GRAVE



THE BIBLICAL HOPE
THE RESURRECTION

VS.

THE LORD COMES
THE DEAD IN CHRIST RISE
TO MEET HIM
FOR THE FIRST TIME



OUR HOPE IS NOT IN DEATH.
OUR HOPE IS IN THE RESURRECTION.

"I will raise him up at the last day." — JOHN 6:40

Chapter 8

How the Emphasis Changed

Throughout this study we have examined the teachings of Jesus, the expectations of Martha, the writings of the apostles, the language of sleep, the condition of the dead, and the passages most commonly cited in support of immediate translation.

A consistent pattern has emerged.

Jesus pointed believers to the resurrection at the last day.

Martha expected the resurrection at the last day.

Paul identified the resurrection as the believer's hope.

Peter placed the salvation of the soul at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Again and again, the apostles directed believers toward the future coming of Christ and the resurrection of the dead.

This raises an important question.

If the New Testament places such overwhelming emphasis upon resurrection, how did so much of Christianity come to place its emphasis elsewhere?

The issue is not whether Christians continued to believe in resurrection.

Most did.

The issue is where the emphasis shifted.

The Apostolic Emphasis

The earliest Christian preaching was resurrection-centered.

When the apostles preached Christ, they preached His resurrection.

When they preached hope, they preached resurrection.

When they comforted grieving believers, they pointed them toward resurrection.

Paul declared:

"And have hope toward God... that there shall be a resurrection of the dead." (Acts 24:15)

The resurrection was not a secondary doctrine.

It stood at the very center of apostolic Christianity.

The believer's eyes were fixed upon the coming of Christ.

The resurrection of the dead.

The redemption of the body.

The salvation of the soul.

The appearing of Jesus Christ.

A Shift in Focus

Over time, the focus gradually changed.

The question was no longer primarily:

"When will the dead be raised?"

The question became:

"What happens immediately after death?"

This distinction is critical.

The apostles consistently directed believers toward a future event.

Later theology increasingly focused upon an intermediate state.

As attention shifted toward what the soul was doing immediately after death, the resurrection slowly moved into the background.

The doctrine itself remained.

The emphasis changed.

The Influence of Greek Thought

As Christianity spread throughout the Greek-speaking world, it encountered philosophical ideas that differed from the Hebrew view of man.

The Hebrew Scriptures present man as a unified being.

God formed man from the dust.

God breathed into him the breath of life.

Man became a living soul.

The emphasis is upon the whole person.

Many Greek philosophers approached the subject differently.

The body was often viewed as temporary.

The soul was viewed as the true self.

The highest goal was frequently described as the soul's release from the body.

Over time, these ideas influenced discussions concerning death and the afterlife.

The focus increasingly moved from the resurrection of the person to the condition of the soul apart from the body.

The Resurrection Moved Into the Background

This shift produced a remarkable result.

Most Christians continued to profess belief in resurrection.

Yet in practice, resurrection became less important.

Funeral sermons increasingly focused upon where the soul had gone.

The language of resurrection became secondary.

The language of immediate heavenly reward became primary.

Yet when we return to the New Testament, we find the opposite emphasis.

Jesus repeatedly pointed believers toward the resurrection at the last day.

Paul repeatedly pointed believers toward Christ's coming.

Peter repeatedly pointed believers toward the appearing of Christ.

The apostles consistently placed fulfillment in the future.

The modern emphasis often places fulfillment at death.

That is a significant difference.

The Problem of Purgatory

Once conscious existence after death became widely accepted, additional questions naturally followed.

If souls remain conscious after death, where are they?

What condition are they in?

Can that condition change?

Can they be helped?

Over time, these questions contributed to the development of the doctrine of purgatory.

The focus continued moving away from resurrection and toward the state of departed souls.

The question was no longer:

"When will the dead be raised?"

The question became:

"What is happening to them right now?"

The farther this emphasis moved from resurrection, the more room there was for speculation concerning the intermediate state.

The doctrine of purgatory also created an obvious opportunity for monetization, as people could be persuaded to pay for masses, prayers, and other religious services in the hope of helping loved ones escape or shorten their time in purgatory.

Which Emphasis Is Biblical?

This chapter is not intended to attack individuals or question the sincerity of those who hold different views.

The question is much simpler.

Which emphasis do we find in Scripture?

When Jesus discussed the future of believers, He pointed them toward resurrection.

When Martha discussed Lazarus, she pointed toward resurrection.

When Paul discussed hope, he pointed toward resurrection.

When Peter discussed the salvation of the soul, he pointed toward the appearing of Christ.

The consistent emphasis of Scripture is remarkably clear.

Not death.

Not an intermediate state.

Not immediate translation.

The coming of Christ.

The appearing of Christ.

The resurrection of the dead.

The fulfillment of hope.

The completion of redemption.

The salvation of the soul.

The apostles consistently pointed believers forward.

The question every reader must answer is whether modern theology places its emphasis in the same place.

If the apostles placed the believer's hope at the resurrection, the appearing of Christ, and the salvation of the soul, what should that mean for Christians today?

Chapter 9

The Resurrection Hope Restored

Throughout this study we have examined the words of Christ, the teachings of the apostles, the condition of the dead, the language of sleep, the salvation of the soul, and the passages commonly cited in support of immediate translation.

The purpose has never been to defend a tradition or attack a tradition.

The purpose has been to answer a single question:

What did Jesus and His apostles identify as the believer's hope?

Again and again, the answer has been the same.

Resurrection.

Not death.

Not an intermediate state.

Resurrection.

The Great Consistency of Scripture

One of the most remarkable discoveries of this study is how consistently Scripture speaks.

Jesus pointed believers to the resurrection at the last day.

Martha expected the resurrection at the last day.

Paul identified the resurrection as the believer's hope.

Peter placed the salvation of the soul at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

John declared that believers would become like Christ when He appears.

Daniel saw those who slept in the dust awaken to everlasting life.

Though separated by centuries, prophets, apostles, and Christ Himself all point toward the same future event.

The resurrection of the dead.

The Last Enemy

The modern view often treats death as the believer's deliverer.

The New Testament does not.

Paul writes:

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." (1 Corinthians 15:26)

Death is not the believer's hope.

Death is not the believer's victory.

Death is the enemy Christ came to destroy.

That victory reaches its climax at the resurrection.

This is why Paul triumphantly declares:

"O death, where is thy sting?

O grave, where is thy victory?"

Those words are not spoken in the context of death.

They are spoken in the context of resurrection.

The grave is defeated.

Death is defeated.

The believer stands victorious because Christ has raised the dead.

The Day We Await

One day the voice of Christ will sound.

The graves will be opened.

The sleeping saints will awaken.

The dead in Christ shall rise.

The mortal shall put on immortality.

The corruptible shall put on incorruption.

The salvation of the soul shall be complete.

Faith shall become sight.

Hope shall become reality.

Death shall be swallowed up in victory.

And believers shall stand before Christ transformed into His likeness forever.

That day is not death.

That day is resurrection.

That day is the appearing of Jesus Christ.

That day is the fulfillment of the Christian hope.

The resurrection hope is not a minor doctrine hidden in a few isolated passages.

It stands at the very center of the biblical story.

The prophets looked toward it.

The apostles preached it.

The Church anticipated it.

And Christ Himself promised it.

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40)

Final Remarks

This study has not attempted to answer every question concerning death and the state of the dead.

Rather, it has sought to answer a simpler question:

What did Jesus and His apostles identify as the believer's hope?

Again and again, the answer has been the same.

Jesus pointed believers to the resurrection at the last day.

Martha pointed to the resurrection at the last day.

Paul identified the resurrection as the believer's hope.

Peter placed the salvation of the soul at the appearing of Jesus Christ.

John declared that believers would become like Christ when He appears.

The dead are described as sleeping while they await His voice.

The cumulative testimony of Scripture is difficult to ignore.

Throughout this study, the evidence has consistently pointed in the same direction.

Toward the coming of Christ.

Toward the appearing of Christ.

Toward the resurrection of the dead.

Toward the fulfillment of hope.

Toward the completion of redemption.

If believers enter heaven immediately at death, consciously enjoying the presence of Christ, then many of the New Testament's strongest statements concerning hope, resurrection, glorification, and the salvation of the soul become difficult to explain.

The doctrine of immediate translation may be possible only by interpreting a handful of difficult passages in a particular way.

The resurrection hope, however, arises naturally from the plain reading of Christ, Martha, Paul, Peter, John, Daniel, and the prophets.

The issue is not whether believers will ultimately be with Christ.

The issue is when and how Scripture says that promise is fulfilled.

After examining the testimony of Scripture as a whole, it becomes difficult to escape the conclusion that the apostles consistently placed that fulfillment at the coming of Christ, the resurrection of the dead, and the appearing of Jesus Christ.

Whatever conclusions the reader ultimately reaches, one fact remains clear:

The New Testament places overwhelming emphasis upon resurrection.

Not death.

Not an intermediate state.

Not immediate translation.

Resurrection.

And it is fitting that the final word belongs to Jesus Himself:

"And this is the will of him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up at the last day." (John 6:40)