

from Jerusalem, as David and his loyal entourage experienced in II Samuel 15.

The answer is Jehovah's "feet"! "Then shall *the LORD* go forth, and fight against those nations, as when he fought in the day of battle. And *his feet* shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the mount of Olives shall *cleave* in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall *remove* toward the north, and half of it toward the south. And ye shall *flee* to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal: yea, ye shall *flee*, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (Zech. 14:3-5).

"Aha!" says the triumphant premillennialist, "This must be literal. *Jesus Christ's physical feet* will touch the Mount of Olives which will divide and form a physical escape route for the Jews!"

The first element in our response is to declare loudly that Jesus Christ has one, and only one, second coming, not several second comings, contrary to premillennialism. Holy Scripture predicts His coming with the glorified saints to the air where those believers who are still living will rise to meet the Lord (I Thess. 4:17).

Second, we point out that the premillennial literalism ignores biblical language and imagery. Here are four biblical texts that speak of God's coming to Mount Sinai: "the LORD descended upon it" (Ex. 19:18), "Sinai itself was moved at the presence of God" (Ps. 68:8), it "melted from before the LORD" (Judg. 5:5) and it "melted like wax at the presence of the LORD" (Ps. 97:5).

The theophany at Mount Sinai became a model for God's coming to help His people, as in Isaiah 64:1-3: "Oh that thou wouldest rend the heavens, that thou wouldest come down, that the mountains might flow down at thy presence, As when the melting fire burneth, the fire causeth the waters to boil, to make thy name known to thine adversaries, that the nations may tremble at thy presence! When thou didst terrible things which we looked not for, thou camest down, the mountains flowed down at thy presence." Three times we read here of Jehovah's "presence" causing awesome things!

Similar language is used of God's coming to Samaria in Micah 1:3-4: "For, behold, the LORD cometh forth out of his place, and will come down, and tread upon the high places of the earth. And the mountains shall be molten under him, and the valleys shall be cleft, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place." Yet the Almighty did not literally "tread" or "trample" upon that city when it fell to the Assyrians in 722 BC. Nor were Samaria's hills physically "*molten* under him" or its "valleys ... *cleft*, as wax before the fire, and as the waters that are poured down a steep place."

Nahum 1:5 states three things which happen at Jehovah's presence: "[1] The mountains *quake* at him, and [2] the hills *melt*, and [3] the earth *is burned* at his presence, yea, the world, and all that dwell therein."

So what does God have to do to cleave the Mount of Olives and create a valley? Only the soles of His feet need to touch it for it to cleave or split under Him! But we have run out of space, so more will be said on this subject next time, DV. *Rev. Stewart*

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Zechariah's Day of the Lord (4)

In the first instalment of "Zechariah's Day of the Lord," we proved that Zechariah 14:1-15 "predicts Christ's bodily return, including events that immediately precede it, and the new heavens and the new earth that it ushers in." The next two issues identified and explained three topics in Zechariah 14:1-15: the plundered city (the equivalent of the great tribulation), the coming God (that is, "that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;" Titus 2:13) and the holy war (which finds its culmination in Christ's destruction of the wicked at His return).

This and subsequent issues of the *News* will treat other themes in Zechariah 14, DV. We begin with the movements of Judah's mountains. Verses 4-5 speak of an earthquake and mountain formation (orogeny), involving the Mount of Olives, which is given this name here for the first time in the Bible (4). Running north-south to the east of Jerusalem, the Mount of Olives was a ridge largely covered with olive trees.

Zechariah 14:4 states that "the mount of Olives shall cleave in the midst thereof toward the east and toward the west, and there shall be a very great valley; and half of the mountain shall remove toward the north, and half of it toward the south." Three things are described as happening to the Mount of Olives. First, it would split east-west. Second, the two halves would then move, with one shifting north and the other south. Third, this would create a valley going east from Jerusalem between the two halves of the (old) Mount of Olives.

What is God's purpose in cleaving the Mount of Olives and creating a valley heading east from Jerusalem? It is to serve the flight of Jehovah's people, a flight like that during the earthquake in King Uzziah day: "ye shall flee to the valley of the mountains; for the valley of the mountains shall reach unto Azal [a place east of Jerusalem that is probably also mentioned in Micah 1:11]: yea, ye shall flee, like as ye fled from before the earthquake in the days of Uzziah king of Judah" (Zech. 14:5; cf. Amos 1:1).

This is a flight from what? If the answer "persecutors" is given, someone might object, "But I thought that Jerusalem was besieged and plundered (Zech. 14:1-2), and that Judah was going to fight its enemies (14)!" However, Zechariah 14 consists of apocalyptic imagery. The point of the passage is that God will preserve His people from their enemies, even at the end of the world when things look darkest (cf. Rev. 12:14-16).

What causes the earthquake and orogeny or mountain movement, this east-west tear through the Mount of Olives, with one half heading north and the other going south? That is, what power is at work to form a valley so that God's people can flee? This question is significant because the Mount of Olives is a formidable barrier to swift flight east

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The Intermediate State

I have received two questions from readers of the *News* concerning the intermediate state, that is, the state of believers between their deaths and the resurrection of their bodies. Both concern the difficulty of understanding how the soul, parted from the body, can live without the body.

This is not an easy question to answer, for we know so little both of the mighty works of God and the life we will live outside of the body in heaven. We should also remember that the question applies to the wicked, as well as the righteous, although their end is hell.

The question has been faced since early in the church's history. Calvin wrote a book against "soul sleep" in which he denied the view that the soul at death enters a state of unconsciousness. One Dutch theologian proposed the idea that the souls of the elect live out of and through the body of the exalted Christ before the resurrection of their bodies. Other theories have also been offered.

In Reformed churches, the denial of soul sleep is a confessional matter. "What comfort doth the 'resurrection of the body' afford thee? That not only *my soul after this life shall be immediately taken up to Christ its Head*; but also, that this my body, being raised by the power of Christ, shall be reunited with my soul, and be made like unto the glorious body of Christ" (*Heidelberg Catechism*, Q. & A. 57).

This is clearly biblical teaching. In Luke 23, the thief nailed alongside Jesus' cross asked to be remembered by Christ when He came into His kingdom (42). The Lord responded, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (43).

Some Roman Catholics, in the interests of defending the horrible doctrine of purgatory, claim that a comma should be placed after the words "To day," as do the cults. The meaning then would be that Jesus' words to the thief merely meant that He spoke these words "To day," that is, the day on which He died on the cross and was talking to the thief, as if the verse were: "Today I say to you, 'You shall be with me in paradise.'" That is a forced interpretation that the text will not allow. The truth is that Jesus promised the repentant thief that, on the very day they were hanging on their respective crosses and would presently die, they will be together in heaven.

Other proof can be found in Revelation 6:9-10. When the fifth seal is opened, John saw the "souls" of the martyrs crying out, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" The point here is that the souls of God's people are already in heaven and even ask how long it will be before Christ comes to destroy the wicked.

A problem arises with the resurrection of those Jesus brought forth from the grave: the daughter of Jairus, the son of the widow of Nain and, most notably, Lazarus. Where were their souls after they died and before Jesus raised them?

It seems impossible that these three were recalled from heaven itself. That would have been a most terrifying experience for these three people. They would have to have been brought back from their blissful life in glory, where they sinned no more, to a world of

pain and bitterness, only to have to face death once again.

My dogmatics professor in seminary thought that he could not explain the question in any other way than that God prepared a special place for their souls in which place they remained unconscious until Jesus called them back to this life. But he acknowledged, as we all do, that the ways of an infinite God are unknowable and beyond comprehension.

One more problem remains and the awareness of it may go a long way to explaining the issue of the intermediate state. The simple fact of the matter is that we have very little understanding of what heaven is like. We know only what the Bible reveals to us, and Scripture's revelation of heaven is always by means of figures, analogies and symbolic language.

God reveals heaven to us in language that is not always literal because He desires to keep the knowledge of heaven from us, perhaps so that He may surprise us with its glory when we arrive there. Scripture speaks of heaven in such, sometimes mysterious, language because heaven is so completely different from what we know here on earth that no earthly language can be created to describe it. Paul states that, when he was taken up into the third heaven, he heard "unspeakable words" (II Cor. 12:4), by which he means that there were no words in any human language that could describe what he heard: the words of heaven being too "heavenly."

People have many misconceptions about heaven. Some think it will be the place where they can continuously do what they like best here on earth: play golf or whatever. Others look forward to seeing loved ones who have died before them, thinking that their interactions with them will largely be the same as before. Yet they forget that all earthly relationships shall come to an end, and our heavenly relationship will be to Christ and our spiritual family in the perfected kingdom of God.

When we do finally enter glory two things will be outstandingly wonderful: we shall see our Saviour face to face and our depravity will be no more. We will, I am sure, be like the Queen of Sheba who fainted when she saw the glory of Solomon and his Jerusalem, exclaiming, "the half was not told me" (I Kings 10:7).

When we come to heaven and see it in all its glory, we will do one thing and one thing only: praise the God who through Christ has done so wondrously. Now already there are times when heaven touches earth and the result is a miracle: marvellous things take place. All the glorious records of those times are in the Scriptures to spur us on to faithfulness. The greatest miracle of all is the crucifixion and resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God incarnate.

Let us live expecting unexpected wonders in Christ in the world to come, as we pray, "Come, Lord Jesus, come quickly."

Prof. Hanko

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