

Using 1 Corinthians 15:51,52 he argued that it was a mistake to expect the living saints to be immediately taken to heaven in 1878 when the sleeping saints were resurrected. What Paul meant was that the living saints who continued to live and eventually died a natural death would then be instantly resurrected so as not to sleep in death. This novel interpretation explained away why the Bible Students were not "changed" and taken to heaven in 1878. (see *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Divine Purpose*, pages 19,20) Later, the resurrection of those "sleeping in Christ" was moved up to 1918-three and a half years following the new date for the beginning of Christ's invisible presence-October 1914.

It is to be acknowledged that there are different views as to how the prophecy of Matthew 24, Mark 13, and Luke 21, are to be partitioned in their application toward Jewry and the world at large. But regardless of how they are viewed they cannot be rightly interpreted to contradict Jesus plain and emphatic declaration that he would return in judgment at a time the disciples were not in acute expectation. (Matt.24:36,42-44; Mark 13:32-37) Jesus reinforced this still further following his resurrection: "It is not for you to know the times or the dates the Father has set by his own authority." -Acts 1:7, *NIV* Not so! Says the Watchtower Society who claims to know both the times and the date. The "time" is from 1914 and the "date" is within that generation. Are Jehovah's Witnesses in expectation? Do they view the end to be at hand? Of course they do. Theirs, however, is not an expectation born of spiritual wakefulness but rather one excited by the reading of the signs of the times in relation to their speculative dating calculations. They an expectation

born of spiritual wakefulness but (another one excited by the reading of the signs of the times in relation to their speculative dating calculations. They have become captive of the very thing Jesus' words were intended to prevent, namely, people saying, "the time is near." (Luke 21: 8 *NIV*) The Watchtower Society boasts that its "good news" is different from the one that has been historically preached:

"Let the honest-hearted person compare the kind of preaching of the gospel of the Kingdom done by the religious systems of Christendom during all the centuries with that done by Jehovah's Witnesses since the end of World War I in 1918. *They are not one and the same kind.* That of Jehovah's Witnesses is really 'gospel' or 'good news,' as of God's heavenly kingdom that was established by the enthronement of his Son Jesus Christ at the end of the Gentile Times in 1914." *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1981, page 17 (Italics added)

To be sure, it is a different "good news" -something the apostle Paul strongly warned against at Galatians 1:6-9. Since 1935 this different good news has offered a different relationship with God through Jesus Christ than the one preached by the disciples of the first century. It has offered a different hope than the one taught by the apostles of Christ. It has offered a different relationship with God than the one preached in the first century-one that revolves around accepting an organization of men as essential to salvation. It has denied that Jesus Christ acts as mediator between God and all men to millions of Jehovah's Witnesses. No, indeed, the preaching of Jehovah's Witnesses is *not* fulfilling Matthew 24: 14.11. □

A Misapplication of John 11:25,26

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The resurrection hope has comforted the hearts and minds of Christians for nearly two millenniums. It is a sustaining hope that transcends discouragement, trial, persecution and death itself. The convincing knowledge that beyond this life lies an eternity of life has gendered a life of faith only understood by those who share this God-given hope. It was after a lengthy presentation of the details of the Christian resurrection and the certainty of it that Paul concluded: "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." -1 Cor. 15 :58 *NIV*

There is power in this hope to enable Christians to stand firm in their Christian convictions and life of service to the Lord Jesus Christ whom the Father has 'empowered to receive all things. (Col. 1 13-20) On the occasion of the death of Jesus' friend, Lazarus, the resurrection hope was dramatically framed in the conversation between one of Lazarus' sisters and the master: "'Lord,' Martha said to Jesus, 'if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.' Jesus said to her, 'Your brother will rise again.' Martha answered, 'I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.' Jesus said to her, 'I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will

live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?' 'Yes, Lord,' she told him, 'I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world.'" -John 11:21-27 *NIV*

As you know, it was on this occasion that the Lord proceeded to raise Lazarus to life—a dramatic demonstration that he was, indeed, "the resurrection." Jesus' words that "'He who believes in me will live, even though he dies," seems readily understandable. The one who holds the keys of death and hades has total control over these captors of the human family. (Matt. 16:18; Rev. 1:18) However, the expression "'and whoever lives and believes in me will never die," presents considerable more food for thought. It should be noted that Jesus not only said he was "the resurrection" but also "the life." Earlier in John's gospel, Jesus spoke of himself as "the bread of life:" "I am the bread of life. Your forefathers ate the manna in the desert, yet they died. But here is the bread that comes down from heaven, which a man may eat and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever. This bread is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world." -John 6:48-51 *NIV*

Humans must eat and drink to sustain life. By the metaphorical use of "water" and "bread" Jesus clearly taught that to be nourished for everlasting life one must feed upon him. We feed upon him by putting faith in him. (John 6:35-40) Those thus sustained by faith will never "go hungry" again nor will they ever be "thirsty" again as respects reconciliation to God and everlasting life. It might be noted here that the sense of fullness will occupy the heart and mind of those truly nourished by Christ. Such ones will not feel that they are lacking in some way. Religiously speaking, they will feel full—not hungry for some other spiritual diet. Those who feed on this divinely provided nourishment will not die as other men die. "Most truly I say to you, He that hears my word and believes him that sent me has everlasting life, and he does not come into judgment but has passed over from death to life." -John 5:24 *NW*

It all rests clearly upon faith in Jesus Christ. "Most truly I say to you, if anyone observes my word, he will never see death at all." John 8:51, *NW*. It could hardly be stated more clearly. The faithful Christian *possesses life* because the Son of God, by his sacrifice, has "abolished death but has shed light upon life and incorruption through the good news." 2 Tim. 1:10, *NW*. Christians are not living in the shadow of death but

rather the light of life. (1 John 1:7) Be it noted that this guarantee of life is offered to "anyone" who "eats of this bread." It is not limited to just an elite few. This heavenly "bread" (manna) is offered for the "life of the world."

The Watchtower Society, by the way it applies John 11:25,26 in its doctrinal scheme of things, tends to muddy the clear teaching presented in the Scriptures. It also presents an inappropriate application of this promise in connection with those whom they call the "other sheep." They make a primary application of John 11:25,26 toward those whom they call "the anointed, . . . , an elite group that consists of only 144,000 drawn from mankind during the Christian age. This, according to Watchtower dogma, represents the total number of all the redeemed ones as a result of nearly two millenniums of preaching the good news to date. At present about 9,000 Jehovah's Witnesses claim to be of this elite group. All other Witnesses—about 2.7 million of them—claim to be "other sheep. . . ,

In answer to the question regarding what Jesus meant when he said that those who put faith in him would never die (John 11:26), they had this to say:

"Then what death is it that they would 'never see ...after all'? They would never 'see' or experience 'second death.' They would not die *forever* as would some. (Luke 12:4,5; Rev.21:8) As stated in Revelation 20:6 regarding those who would be with Christ in heaven: 'Over these the second death has no authority.' -*The Watchtower*, March 1, 1967, page 160 (Italics in original)

The same article, in the next paragraph, proceeds to make an application of John 11:26 to those "other sheep" whom they say will physically survive the end of the world and continue to live on in the flesh without ever having to die: "While Jesus did not specifically have in mind persons living at the end of this system of things who might survive Armageddon, it is true that some alive now will never experience a fleshly death. But even *those with earthly hopes* (the so-called "other sheep"] who live through Armageddon will have to prove faithful throughout the millennium and the final test *before* they actually 'come to life' or receive the grant of everlasting life.-Rev.20:5." (Italics added)

You'll note in the above that in order to receive the right or "grant of everlasting life" on earth in the flesh the Armageddon survivors will have to prove themselves faithful for more than a thousand years into

the future! So the notion that these Armageddon survivors "will never experience a fleshly death," is put in a very 'iffy' context. Another class of believers that receive this same 'iffy' promise of everlasting life is the pre-Christian servants of Almighty God. The writer of Hebrews discusses them at length in the eleventh chapter of Hebrews. The subject of this chapter is that of faith in God and the writer uses the exploits of these faithful servants of the most high God to encourage the brothers to put up a hard fight for the faith. What the possession of faith enabled these person to do are highlighted in this chapter and I would encourage the reader to carefully read the entire chapter in this regard. I will quote only a portion of that chapter here:

" And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, who through faith conquered kingdom, administered justice, and gained what was promised;. who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again.

Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned, they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-the world was not worthy of them . . . These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect." - Hebrews 11:32-38,39,40 NIV

There is little wonder why the writer of Hebrews drew attention to these faithful pre-Christian servants of God as an example and stimulus to Christian faithfulness. When we consider that these heroics were performed in the shadow of the realities-without the benefit of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ who "abolished death and shed light upon life and incorruption through the good news," their example becomes even more remarkable. Despite this, Watchtower teaching has it that it was not good enough for them to warrant everlasting life. No, they must come forth from the grave to a further test of faithfulness sometime after Armageddon. and continue faithful to the end of the thousand-year reign of Jesus

Christ and the final attack by Satan and his hordes after the thousand years is ended. Concerning such ones they write:

"By keeping their names written on the 'scroll of life' through their continued godly faith and obedience they will be gradually lifted up to human perfection. Finally they will be given the prize of everlasting life in human perfection on our earth transformed into a paradise. They will not be 'hurled into the lake of fire,' that is to say, into the 'second death.' Since they are persons of faith to begin with at their resurrection, they should all the more easily make progress toward human perfection then." -*The Watchtower*, February 15, 1965, page 105.

The ancient pre-Christian servants of God have already abundantly demonstrated their faith and are viewed as righteous by God. But as matters are presented above it could go either way for them as they must prove themselves all through the period of the thousand years that they live before receiving life in the flesh. This would make, according to Watchtower teaching, the attaining of life on earth considerably more difficult than attaining immortal life in heaven. While Christians are granted life now for faithfully accepting Jesus Christ those who are to receive a lesser reward, according to Watchtower teaching, must prove faithful during two lifetimes and the latter one being the equivalent, in time, to many lifetimes. This would, in effect, make God very partial in his dealings with his earthly servants.

The way the Society applies the concluding verse of Hebrews 11 they inject a thought that would not otherwise come to mind from just the reading the text. Speaking of his contemporaries the writer says "God foresaw something better for us, in order that they might not be made perfect apart from us. " -Heb.11:40b MV The "something better," they say, is resurrection to immortality which the pre-Christian servants of God do not receive and even the life they do receive will not be attained "apart from us," meaning that they are necessary to these in the attaining of life. This is not what is being said in this verse.

As stated before, the pre-Christian servants of God lived in the shadow of the reality. This matter is addressed in verse 13 of this chapter: "In faith all these died, although they did not get the fulfillment of the promises, but they saw them afar off and welcomed them and publicly declared that they were

strangers and temporary residents in the land." There was a promise of deliverance from sin and death but until the coming of Christ there could be no fulfillment (completion, reality) of that promise. But with the coming of Christ the time came for the promise to be fulfilled. As Jesus said to the crowds: "'For I tell you the truth, many prophets and righteous men longed to see what you see but did not see it, and to hear what you hear but did not hear it.'" -Matthew 13: 17 *MV* It appears that the "something better" for Christ's disciples was the blessed privilege of living at the time these promises became realities. This privilege carried with it a corresponding responsibility to act responsively to the good news. (Heb.2:1-3) But there is not the slightest suggestion that the Christian inheritance was to be superior to these older servants of God. Now, however, that the promises had become realities, all men of faithfulness could realize the fulfillment of the promise together. One commentary puts it this way:

"There is here the answer to an implied objection, that the faith of these suffering heroes was all in vain, seeing they did not receive the fulfillment of the promises. But, the writer says, this is a wrong inference, the truth being that God has merely deferred their reward in order that they may enter along with us of a later age upon the realization of the promised inheritance. They are waiting for us so that the whole number of the faithful may be perfected together. " -*A Commentary n the Holy Bible* by J.R. Dummelow. page 1027.

This view of matters squares with what Jesus had previously said about the place of these pre-Christian witnesses in relation to the kingdom of heaven; "But I tell you that many from eastern parts and western parts will come and recline at the table with Abraham and Isaac and Jacob in the kingdom of the heavens. " - Matt. 8: 11 *NW*. While the Scriptures speak of a new heavens and a new earth, the kingdom of God or the kingdom of the heavens is never partitioned so as to suggest that some will inherit an earthly kingdom while others will inherit a heavenly kingdom. (2 Peter 3: 13) Such partitioning is done by men who have decided how they think it will be and have injected this partitioning so that when those whom they instruct read about the kingdom in the Bible they automatically-mentally insert earthly or heavenly in their reading. The inheritance is everlasting life in God's kingdom and that is where, I think, the focus should be. Whatever dimensions that kingdom encompasses remains to be seen.

As was noted earlier in this discussion the Watchtower Society has made an oblique application of John 11:25,26 to those who they call the "other sheep." But they have acknowledged at other times that Jesus was limiting his remarks about everlasting life to those they call the "anointed"-the 144,000. Note how this is emphasized in the following statement from *The Watchtower*: "The paramount importance of this kingdom is seen in the emphasis that God put on it in the Bible. It was the chief subject of Jesus' preaching. (Matt. 4:23) Also, it is to the spirit-anointed Christians who will rule in that kingdom that most of the Christian Greek Scriptures is directed, including the promises of everlasting life. For instance, the apostle John wrote in 1 John 2:25; 'This is the promised thing that he himself promised us, the life everlasting.' Did he mean everlasting life on earth, or immortal life in heaven? ., John was speaking to Christians who had been anointed with holy spirit and called to heavenly life. A similar promise of eternal life is found in Jesus' statement: 'Most truly I say to you, If anyone observes my word, he will never see death at all.' (John 8:51; 6:51,58; 11:25,26; 12:25) Christ obviously did not mean that the faithful apostles and others who soon would be anointed with holy spirit would never grow old or die ... Then how would such ones 'never see death at am' In that by being faithful until death they would never be harmed by the second death, as borne out by Revelation 2: 10,11." -*The Watchtower*, June 15, 1974, pages 376,377. (Emphasis added)

If, as the Watchtower Society acknowledges in the above quotation, the promises of everlasting life-including John 11 :25,26-find application in "spirit-anointed Christians" by what authority or by what rule of biblical exegesis do they take such promises out of context and apply them to another class of believers not even addressed in these verses? Even the presence of such a class of believers is unknown except to the Watchtower Society. Even an oblique application goes beyond what the Scriptures say. In recent years, however, the Society has emboldened itself to go beyond an indirect application to a direct application. In an article appearing in *The Watchtower* titled: "Millions Get Ready for Uninterrupted Life of Earth," they had this to say:

"For millions now alive it would be most timely to call to mind the words of Jesus Christ to Martha of Bethany: 'I am the resurrection and the life. He that exercises faith in me, even though he dies will come to life; and everyone that is living and exercises faith in me will never die at all.' It is indeed thrilling for those

millions who seek unending life in a righteous world to perceive that *it is now* that Jesus' words apply when he said: 'And everyone that is living and exercises faith in me will never die at all.'" - *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1983, page 13. A few pages later in this same discussion they repeat the above promise under a subheading: "Getting Ready for Uninterrupted Life:" "So, then [based on preceding arguments] the statement can now be made with confidence and with due foresight, '*Millions now alive will never die off our earth.*' Here it is again most fitting to call to mind Jesus' startling words: 'I am the resurrection and the life; and everyone that is living and exercises faith in me will never die at all.' --John 11 :25,26 " -Page 17. (Italics added)

Those familiar with Watchtower teaching know that the generation of 1914 is supposed to see the end of the present system of things and that since 1935 God has been calling out from among mankind a class of Christians different from the one that Jesus and the apostles addressed themselves to. These also are given a different hope of life based on a relationship to God foreign to the one explained in the Christian writings. They are not considered sons of God but only "friends" of God with the prospect or potential of *becoming* sons of God. It is denied that Christ Jesus serves as their mediator. (see *Aid to Bible Understanding*, page 1130) They are the "millions now alive (that) will never die off our earth. " That is what they are being told "with confidence and due foresight." Notwithstanding, *The Watchtower* promise, some from among these millions are dying all the time. So while it sounds like a sure hope as it is stated in *The Watchtower* it is just so much rhetoric.

A former generation of *Watchtower* followers were also told "Millions Now Living Will Never Die," in a booklet published by the Watchtower Society in 1920. At that time the target date was 1925. Needless, to say, that *confident* expectation led to serious disappointment. More recently, 1975 was pointed to as an "appropriate" time for the millennial reign of Jesus Christ to begin. It would be "most fitting" for God to so act at that time. (see *Life Everlasting-in Freedom of the Sons of God*, page 30)

How does God view those who take his sacred Word and apply its precious promises to schemes of their own design? How does he view men who take his holy name and attach their schemes to it that lead to error and disappointment? How does God view those who whip people into religious activity based on wrong

premises and wrong promises? An interesting judgment on those who would dare do such things is to be found in one of the Watchtower Society's own books which says the following: "'Therefore here I am against the prophets,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'the ones who are stealing away my words, each one from his companion.' 'Here I am against the prophets,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'the ones who are employing their tongue that they may utter forth, " An utterance!'" 'Here I am against the prophets of false dreams,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'who relate them and cause my people to wander about because of their falsehoods and because of their boasting.' But I myself did not send them or command them. So they will by no means benefit this people,' is the utterance of Jehovah.-Jeremiah 23:30-32."

"Stealing Jehovah's words from one's companion is a serious matter. How do we do this? Do we steal Jehovah's words from the prophet when we quote the words of the one whom He inspired to say them? No, for we give due credit to the inspired prophet whose words we are quoting for our support of for proof of a teaching. We refer people to the Bible book, chapter and verse from which we quote. We do not do like the false prophets in Jeremiah's day. These prophets would take the prophesy of the man whom Jehovah inspired to utter the prophecy and then would palm this prophecy off as being their own. And, of course, when they enlarged upon this prophecy that they had stolen, they would not have divine guidance in doing so. This would result in their not explaining it correctly or in making unauthorized additions of their own or adulterating, distorting, watering down the prophecy. In this way they would use the purloined prophecy to their own selfish ends."

"They put on an appearance of being a prophet by saying, as if under inspiration: 'An utterance!' Then they really steal the name of Jehovah by attaching it to their own 'utterance' to which it does not belong. They dream up false dreams for the future so as to influence the people against Jehovah's true mouthpieces. Because of their false dreams and their boasting regarding the future, they cause the people to go astray religiously and spiritually and leave them unprepared for the real things to come. Jehovah did not send them or command them, for which reason they have no right to steal God's name from its rightful place and use it for their deceptive purposes. Such thieves benefit no one." -*Paradise Restored to Mankind- By Theocracy*, 1972, pages 212,213.

A simple review of the history of the Watchtower Society demonstrates where they must be placed in relation to God's true prophets and those who steal Jehovah's word and apply them to their own schemes. Their own publications clearly document many such prophetic failures. There's no need to embellish the record. (Deut. 18: 20-22) As regards the promise of everlasting life as stated by Jesus at John 11: 25,26 it

must be accepted in the context in which it is found. It is the only safe and sure application that can be made of it. Attaching that promise to manmade time feature calculations which lead to changing the historical gospel and presenting it in a new gospel can only lead to disappointment and leave people unprepared for the real thing. □