

# WHAT TRANSLATION MEANS TO GOD

By Paul Penno Jr.

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Jonathan Alter, editor of *Newsweek* magazine, was on a panel answering questions put by Katie Couric, “Why do people have such fascination with celebrities? Why do they want to identify with them so? Why do they buy the magazines that publish the pictures taken by the paparazzi?” Jonathan Alter said, “It’s because people no longer have a sense of fascination with God.” Another panelist said, “It’s a revival of the worship of the pagan gods of antiquity, the gods and goddesses who were continually cavorting around and doing the most outlandish things.”

It’s a phenomenal fascination. What is the President doing now in his world tour? What kind of trouble are the starlets into now? The tabloids at the checkout stands are filled with the latest gossip about whose marriage is on the rocks and who is marrying whom next. The intrigue is captivating.

So, I ask again: Is God less competent to get the world’s attention than the British royal family or the Presidential family?

The Bible tells us that in the last days God will command the world’s attention with a message that tells what Jesus Christ is doing and how every human being will relate to Him in either a decisively positive or negative way. And what He is doing is preparing a people to meet Him, to see Him, and not be wiped out by the unprecedented brightness of His coming. Jesus said in the Beatitudes,

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.” Mt. 5:8. Only the pure in heart can see Him, because Hebrews 12:29 says, “Our God is a consuming fire.”

So, as our great High Priest, Jesus is doing something He has never been able to do in all of previous world history—preparing a people for His second coming; not just preparing a people to die—but far greater, preparing a people for translation. Paul says of that day, “Then we which are alive and remain, shall be caught up together with the resurrected people of God, to meet the Lord in the air” (1 Thess. 4:17). That preparation for translation is a great work! It is more worthy of our attention than anything else going on today. And the Good News is that it is indeed gripping the attention of many people all over the world. Has it gotten your attention?

“What is Jesus doing now?” is a question many believers in Him ask. Since He is the Son of God who suffered unspeakable agony on this planet when He was crucified, it seems only fair that He is entitled to a l-o-n-g “vacation” after such a terrible ordeal. He did His duty heroically; now He can rest, and enjoy the plaudits of the heavenly hosts, and the praise of at least some of earth’s inhabitants.

In prayer meeting, a thoughtful young man asked, “What is Jesus doing now?” I responded “Ministering as our High Priest in the Most Holy Place in the heavenly sanctuary.”

“But just *what* is He doing?” I pondered what to say. “Preparing a people for His second coming.”

“Yes, but what is He doing to *accomplish* that?”

“Convicting them of sin, which is the first work of the Holy Spirit.”

“Yes, but what is *different* about that and what He was doing in the Holy Place—the first ‘apartment’ of the heavenly sanctuary?”

“He was preparing people to die “in the Lord,” so they could come up in the first resurrection.”

“But what is He doing in the ‘second’ phase of His ministry?”

“He is preparing a people to stand in the great ‘time of trouble,’ to receive ‘the seal of God’ instead of the ‘mark of the beast,’ and be translated at His coming.”

“But is He doing something different for people now than He has done for people in the past? Is this *fair* to them?”

“He has to be fair to everybody throughout history, yes; but never before has He had a people who were prepared to *appreciate* what He wants to do, and thus to cooperate with Him fully.”

“But weren’t there always some who did that, like Enoch, Elijah, and Moses?”

“Yes, very true, ‘some few in every generation.’ But never a corporate *body* of believers world-wide of ‘every nation, kindred, tongue, and people.’”

“But what is different about what the High Priest does for them now? How does He do this?”

Would you like to have some *bona fide* evidence that the Lord loves you personally and especially? That would be better news than winning the lottery, wouldn’t it? Well, maybe you can find out. Does He chasten you, reprove you? Does He remind you, convict you, of your sins and your weaknesses and

your failures? There’s a special Hebrew word that encompasses all those thoughts found in Psalm 73:14, which might bring great encouragement to you if you can say yes to my questions. The psalmist is praying and he says, “all day long I am chastened every morning.” Listen to his prayer as it is in the GNB: “O God, . . . every morning you have punished me. . . . I tried to think this problem through, but it was too difficult for me until I went into your Temple [sanctuary]. . . . When my thoughts were bitter and my feelings were hurt, I was as stupid as an animal; I did not understand you. Yet . . . you hold me by the hand. You guide me with your instruction and at the end you will receive me with honor. What else do I have in heaven but you? Since I have you, what else do I want on earth?” (vss 14-25).

Hebrews 12:6-8 picks up on this insight, saying: “Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom He receiveth. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? If ye be without chastisement, . . . then are ye bastards, and not sons.” In other words, the Lord is talking about *discipline*. He is not punishing you in the sense of making you suffer for your sins, to pay a debt; that’s the Hindu idea of *karma*. No, He is training you to stand in the time of trouble, to be a member of His parliament, of His cabinet, to sit with Him on His throne (Rev. 3:21). And all that is the practical result of His work in the Most Holy Apartment, in the cleansing of the sanctuary—preparing a people for translation. His

chastening is an evidence of His special love. Accept it!

The Book of Hebrews does not reveal Him as on furlough; He is working 24 hours a day, 365 days a year “continually” as our great High Priest—a full time job for the infinite Son of God. And the Holy Spirit is the grand, authentic “vicar of Christ” who is ministering constantly to millions and billions of human beings who long for salvation. If the Queen of England or the President of the U.S. deserves a full-time physician on duty, Christ as infinite High Priest is the full time Physician of our souls on duty to minister to every one who has faith in Him, giving His full attention as though there were not another “patient.”

Being our High Priest is hard work. The heavenly sanctuary is the Pentagon war-time strategy staging area for finishing the great controversy with Satan.

Hebrews zeroes in on the two-phase ministry of that heavenly High Priest as symbolized by the two apartments in the earthly sanctuary prototype (Heb 9:1-14). As there was an annual “day of atonement” (*Yom Kippur*) in the “earthly” Hebrew sanctuary, so there must be a cosmic or antitypical Day of Atonement in the heavenly sanctuary.

The ancient *Yom Kippur* symbolized the removal of all the sins of Israel from the sanctuary where they had been recorded, and their expulsion as so much garbage. Each earthly day of atonement resulted in a full or complete “atonement” for Israel, all sins blotted out and a total reconciliation with God, the scapegoat symbolizing Satan forever banished from the camp of Israel.

Since the heavenly high priestly ministry is the grand antitype, what is the difference between Christ’s first-apartment ministry and His second-apartment ministry? Hebrews 9 makes it clear: “It is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment” (vs. 28); this gives us a glimpse of His first-apartment ministry—preparing people to die, ready for “the judgment.” This has been His ministry in most of the nearly 2000 years since His sacrifice. And let’s be clear all those millions of believers who have gone into their graves since time immemorial must remain in their moldering graves until Christ is successful in preparing a people for translation at His second coming. Writes the apostle, but “unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation” (Heb. 9:29). His cosmic Day of Atonement ministry is concentrated on preparing a people for translation at His second coming. But what about those who die during this time? In the ancient service, the first-apartment ministry continued through the final day of atonement; so it is today. But we must not forget or frustrate Christ’s primary goal for today—preparing a people for translation!

The common idea is that our Lord is a Construction Contractor building palaces or “mansions” for those who arrive in heaven (a childish reading of Jn. 14:2). But “preparing a place for you” is a far bigger idea than a celestial construction activity. Hebrews 9 and 10 describe His High Priestly ministry as cleansing the hearts of His people, “putting away sin,” “purging the conscience,” preparing a people to “receive the

promise of eternal inheritance,” “purifying” hearts and minds and lips, to “make the comers thereunto perfect,” to render obsolete any “conscience” or “remembrance of sins,” to “take away sins,” to “perfect forever them that are sanctified,” to write His “laws into their hearts . . . [which are] sprinkled from an evil conscience,” to “provoke [motivate] unto love and good works,” to “believe to the saving of the soul.” Big job! First, He naturally wants His people to understand why what He is doing and is so incomparably important, and second, He would appreciate our cooperation because He can accomplish nothing without it. Not that you in any sense become your co-savior as the Pope wants to elevate Mary to become (cooperation doesn’t save you!), but cooperation means you stop interposing a rebellious will to counteract what He is seeking constantly to do for you!

In other words, through His Vicar (the Holy Spirit) Christ as High Priest is constantly pressing upon His people the conviction of sin buried deeper than they had imagined it to be; and when the conviction is welcomed and the sin is gladly surrendered and put away, the heart is more closely reconciled to Him. This process is called “atonement,” or becoming at-one-with God. In Romans 5:11 it is “receiving the atonement” or “reconciliation.” Thus the cleansing of the heavenly sanctuary is a “final atonement.”

Have you heard about the two men who never had a funeral? Their friends never had a death notice. No one ever said goodbye—Enoch and Elijah. In 6000 years of history with untold billions of

people, the Bible tells of only two who have been spared death: Enoch, and Elijah. Even the divine Son of God had to die. Of the first we read: “By faith Enoch was translated so that he did not see death, ‘and was not found because God had translated him’ [Gen. 5:24]; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God” (Heb. 11:5). How did he “please God”? We have this simple word: “And Enoch walked with God; and he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:24). His walk with God was totally unselfish ministry to his fellow men. His last day on earth was like his first in heaven; he was at home with heaven’s companionship.

Five thousand years ago when the wickedness on the earth was like it is today, Enoch lived, a man who was undefiled in his conscience before God. He was acquainted with the wickedness of the cities of that day, he would visit them, but he did not live among them. Burdened by the reality that God would not spare those wicked inhabitants forever, he warned them of God’s coming judgments, and pleaded with them to turn from their wicked ways. He prophesied saying, “Behold the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.” Jude 14, 15. While this man lived and spoke this warning to the people of that day, it is also given for our “admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come” 1 Cor. 10:11.

This man Enoch lived with God in such a way that he “walked with God” (Gen. 5:22). He lived differently than the people of that day. He must have realized that the business, the striving for riches, the love of pleasure, the seeking of interests that only please ones self, would never give him the opportunity to live in such a way that he would be able to walk with God. He chose a quieter life, away from the clamors of the city and society where he could be alone with God. No doubt he was not idle he sustained himself by honest labor. Yet he found there solitude where he could walk with God. His life was so in harmony with the ways of Heaven, his conscience so cleansed by faith in Christ Jesus that “he walked with God” such a way that one day “he was not, for God took him” (Gen. 5:24).

Paul says there will be a multitude like him translated without seeing death when Jesus returns in the clouds of heaven (1 Thess. 4:16, 17). They are not monks holed up in a monastery in the desert; they are living in the midst of earth’s multitudes, loving people as Christ loves them.

The only other person so translated was “the prophet Elijah”. Elijah also was “not,” for God “took” him with a whirlwind of a chariot of fire (2 Kings 2:11). We never get a sight of Enoch again, but we do meet Elijah on the mount of transfiguration when he appeared with Jesus in glory (Matt. 17:3). Moses also was there, but he had died and experienced a special resurrection (Jude 9). So, Moses represents the vast hope of sleeping saints who will be raised in the first resurrection when Jesus comes again; and Elijah and Enoch represent the living people

who will never experience the “sleep” that the Bible says is the first death. Amazing!

God promised He will send us Elijah “before the great and terrible day of the Lord” (Mal. 4:5, 6). But why does He send Elijah rather than Enoch? Obviously, to do again what Elijah did in Ahab’s Israel long ago: to “turn again” the hearts of His people. The new “Elijah” will plead with them, “We implore you on Christ’s behalf, be reconciled to God” (2 Cor. 5:20); and if we’re reconciled to God by the blood of Christ, we will be reconciled to one another “in Him.” Elijah’s message will be “Christ and Him crucified” (1 Cor. 2:1, 2)—the most glorious proclamation of the full truth of the gospel heard by the world since Pentecost.

Then, Elijah will also “behead” the modern “prophets of Baal” after it is clear that they refuse to repent. You remember at Mt. Carmel, after the 450 devotees of Satan’s Baal worship stubbornly refused to repent even after the fire fell on the mountain, Elijah reluctantly ordered their destruction because they were a poison to the world (1 Kings 18:38-40). A wise writer speaking of the coming crisis said, “Frequent will be the apostasies of men who have occupied responsible positions.” “The great issue so near at hand will weed out those whom God has not appointed, and He will have a pure, true, sanctified ministry prepared for the latter rain.” “Elijah,” ancient or modern, is only good news.

“The grave” was never God’s ideal for those whom He has created. The Bible holds out what it calls “the blessed hope,” not merely of a resurrection for

all who believe, but for translation without seeing death, for those who prepare to meet the Life-Giver when He returns. There comes “the voice of the archangel, . . . with the trump of God; and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then [and here’s the message for us now] we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).

You don’t hear much about it, but it’s clearly a part of Bible teaching: God’s people who are ready will be translated without seeing death at the second coming of Jesus.

To some, that Bible doctrine sounds too close to fanaticism for comfortable discussion. Actually, it’s no more difficult for God to translate His people without their dying than it will be for Him to resurrect the dead ones from their graves—at the second coming. This is the essence of “the blessed hope” that is cherished by those who believe in the second coming (Tit. 2:13). Paul makes clear that when Jesus returns there will be a people “who are alive and remain [who] shall be caught up together with [those resurrected from the grave] to meet the Lord in the air [and] . . . always be with the Lord” (1 Thess. 4:17).

Is this blessed hope something imminent? Or is it no longer so? We hear much talk about the “new millennium” into which we have now entered, which phrase implies we have now entered into a new long period of time. “Occupy till I come” (Lk. 19:13) is a command of Jesus that suggests for many the implication that if we are wise we should be

planning for a new millennium of peace and prosperity here on this sin-cursed earth. It’s a very sensitive issue. Suppose you do have a long retirement ahead of you, a long life to live before Jesus returns the second time? Suppose He further delays His return beyond the current “blessed hopes” of His people? Shouldn’t you invest here wisely?

No wonder Paul calls this “the blessed hope.” Talk about “heraldry and “pomp.” Don’t miss that demonstration!

But we err if we think of it as “our blessed hope,” as though our reward were what is important. It’s the blessed hope of the Lord Jesus Christ Himself. The One who wants Him to come soon is He Himself. Not only does He long for “the marriage of the Lamb” to take place with His Bride “making herself ready” (Rev. 19:8, 9). His heart yearns for all in the world who are in agony. He cannot “rest” even if the holy Sabbath comes for us.

“Why must the last generation become totally surrendered in order to be translated? Why can previous generations in the first resurrection enter heaven without the experience of total victory over sin required of those who will be translated?”

“Required” implies something that requires further balance in the thought of preparation. A bridegroom doesn’t *require* the surrender of his bride; he wins it. The marriage of the Lamb does not take place because God rigidly demands a self-sacrificial devotion that is finally forced; overcoming “even as [Christ] overcame” is a joyous character development that takes place as faith grows to a

heart-union with the divine Bridegroom. It's not a point-of-the-gun "requirement." It is the fruit of justification by faith at last clearly understood.

Why is the last generation the "*firstfruits* unto God and to the Lamb" (Rev 14:4)? Sounds backward! It is a generation, a corporate body, not merely a handful of individuals, the some few of every age. Christ must have a Bride, a corporate body of believers, the first to demonstrate that the overcoming that Christ accomplished in His life, human beings who have a mature faith can "copy" (though never equal). They will "reflect" His character, like so many broken scraps of worthless mirror not shining on their own, but each perfectly reflecting another facet of His righteous character like a huge diamond. This corporate body judges all previous generations.

Satan's charge for 6000 years has been that it is impossible for human beings with a fallen, sinful nature to overcome sin truly (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 24). He claims he has invented something (sin) that proves that God is wrong. Judged by the dismal record of Laodicea, it *appears* that he has won the argument. The fact that the Son of God overcame and "condemned sin in the flesh" is not the final issue, although popular "Reformationism" would love to consider it so—thus excusing "us" from overcoming truly (Luther can malign the Jews, drink his beer on his death-bed, and still be in God's kingdom).

But something else is needed. Christ's victory was indeed a set-back for Satan, and proved him wrong to the heavenly universe; but Satan's charge still

stands so far as *the human race* is concerned: "It's impossible for us to obey . . ." (*idem*). The reason the 1888 message is so vigorously opposed is because of its teaching of the possibility, yes certainty, that God will have a people who overcome fully. There will be a demonstration of Christ's righteousness in sinful flesh.

"The honor of God" is involved in the character-perfection of His people. If they at last support Satan's charge, He will be forever embarrassed.

God loves all the vast hosts of redeemed who still "sleep in Jesus." He longs to bring them from the tomb. But they must remain there as prisoners until the first resurrection (the Bible does not teach natural immortality; saints do not go to heaven at death). But that in turn cannot take place until the second coming of Jesus (no angel can resurrect the dead). But He dares not come so long as there is cherished or unknown sin still in the characters of His people, else His coming should "consume" them. Hence God's love for "the dead in Christ" requires that a living last generation overcome totally, for otherwise He is stymied. (Again, popular "Reformationism" denies this, but it does not understand the Day of Atonement cleansing of the sanctuary).

"He that is dead is freed from sin" (Romans 6:7), and no saint will come up in the resurrection still in captivity to it. All such slavery to sin is left in the grave. But apparently the 144,000, the last generation, so appreciate "the blood of the Lamb," so clearly comprehend the length, breadth, depth, and height of *agape*, that self is truly "crucified with

Christ.” They have died to sin, and as a corporate body are the *firstfruits* to demonstrate it.

The truest fellowship with Christ is heart sympathy with Him in His concerns, as a bride who truly loves her husband is caught up with his concerns. Now she lives for him, one with him because she loves him. Is it possible that a world church can grow up to be so mature in relationship with the Son of God? All around the world there are those who hear the insistent call from Heaven. May He give us grace to respond!