

The Life After This One

Introduction. We live in a Universe bound by time. The only way we can know anything about the realm that exists beyond this one is if God reveals it. God has graciously given answers to our questions about life after death.

Sadly, we have all attended funeral or spoken to people and found that the end of the world and the afterlife are doctrinal playgrounds where much falsehood is spread. We need to know about the life to come so we are the ones we teach can be prepared.

I. The Human Spirit Does Not Cease Existing When The Body Dies

A. The Bible teaches that our existence, consciousness, and personality continues beyond death.

1. Old Testament teaching.

a) Although the Hebrew word for "soul" is used in more than one way in the Old Testament, it is still clear that human beings are more than merely living bodies (Psalm 90:10; Ecclesiastes 12:7).

b) God is a God of the living (Exodus 3:6; cp. Luke 20:37-38). Samuel had not ceased to exist (1 Samuel 28:5-19). David would go to where his baby's spirit was (2 Samuel 12:23).

2. New Testament teaching.

a) In the New Testament this spiritual part of a person (sometimes called "soul" or "spirit") is repeatedly affirmed (Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 12:9; James 2:26; cp. Acts 9:39; 2 Peter 1:12-15).

b) The thief on the cross (Luke 23:43).

(1) "Paradise" was a park or forest where wild beasts were kept for hunting. It also indicated a pleasure park. It was used in the LXX for the Garden of Eden; in the New Testament it described the celestial paradise (2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7).

(2) Jesus was talking about something besides the thief being with Him in Heaven after the judgment because He said "Today". On the other hand, if Jesus were only talking about the thief's body being buried like Jesus' body, then this was true of the other thief as well.

c) Several passages show that the soul and spirit survives death with our individuality and personality intact (2 Corinthians 5:1-9; Philippians 1:21-24; Revelation 6:9-11). In other words, the spirits of the deceased do not merge into an impersonal "blob" of consciousness.

- B. Some try prove there is no existence or consciousness after death by misusing statements like Ecclesiastes 9:5.
 - 1. One problem is that this ignores numerous other biblical statements proving that existence and consciousness continues.
 - 2. A basic mistake is that it overlooks the fact that Ecclesiastes is referring to "life under the sun" (a phrase repeated 27 times in the book).
 - 3. Instead of saying that deceased people absolutely know nothing (or ceased to exist), Ecclesiastes 9:5 is saying "the dead do not know what going on in this life ('under the sun')" — it is a qualified statement limited by context.

II. The Intermediate State Before Judgment

- A. The Hebrew word "Sheol" is used to refer to an intermediate state.
 - 1. This is one area where KJV is not helpful because it sometimes translates "Sheol" as Hell which we associate with the place of eternal punishment after judgment. This is why most later versions transliterate "Sheol".
 - 2. One especially helpful Bible statement about this subject is Psalm 16:10. It is a tremendous help that the passage is quoted and explained in Acts 2:27, 31.
 - 3. "Sheol" is where the spirit and soul goes when the body goes to the grave. The spirit and soul awaits the resurrection in "Sheol".
- B. The place in the New Testament that gives the most information about an intermediate state is Luke 16:19-31.
 - 1. Three points to remember.
 - a) Although the KJV translates "Hades" as "Hell" (v. 23), Jesus is not talking about after judgment, but a time prior to it because the rich man's living brothers were continuing their everyday lives.
 - b) It not called a "parable" and there is no compelling reason to think the rich man and Lazarus were not real men who lived, died, and experienced what was described.
 - c) Even if it was parable, it does not mean it is inaccurate about life after death — it only means it is using those facts to teach an additional lesson.
 - 2. "'Abraham's bosom" and "hell".
 - a) "Abraham's bosom" is an idiom. It represented the heavenly abode, with the implication of close interpersonal relations.
 - (1) According to ancient Jewish tradition, the end of the age would be characterized by a heavenly feast enjoyed by the righteous (Luke 13:28-29; 22:29-30).

- (2) This would be presided over by Abraham, and therefore to go to "Abraham's bosom" would be equivalent to being an honored guest at this celestial banquet.
- b) Just as "Abraham's bosom" is analogous to "Paradise" (Luke 23:43), which is the abode of the righteous dead, "place of torment" in v. 28 is analogous to "Hell" (2 Peter 2:4) which is the place of the wicked dead.
3. Jesus describes the spirits of both the saved and the lost as conscious.
- a) So when the Bible sometimes speaks of the dead as "asleep," it is speaking of death from the standpoint of the body's appearance.
- b) But in the unseen state, called "Hades," the spirit's consciousness, individuality, personality, and ability to reason and remember continues.

III. What Will Happen When Jesus Returns

- A. There will be a resurrection in which God will reunite men's souls and bodies and then change them into resurrected bodies (John 5:28-29; 1 Corinthians 15:12-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). If we wonder how bodies that have decayed can be restored, remember that God can do whatever He wants (Philippians 3:20-21).
- B. After this resurrection there will be a universal judgment with Christ as our judge (Matthew 25:31-32, 46; Acts 17:30-31; Romans 14:10-12; 2 Corinthians 5:10; Revelation 20:11-15).
1. The punishment of the rich man before the judgment in Luke 16 was not premature because the judgment is not to determine guilt but to pronounce guilt (cp. 2 Peter 2:9).
2. The final judgment will not be a trial to learn whether we should be saved or condemned — He knows that now. Hebrews 9:27 is not saying judgment occurs immediately at death, but that judgment will assuredly follow death.

Conclusion. An anonymous writer said, "Death used to be an executioner, but the gospel has made it just a gardener." Please remember that a person can know all this and still be lost. We not only need know what the future holds, but we need be prepared for it by obeying the gospel.

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