

HEAVEN AND HELL

"He passed on," "He is in a better place," and "God called him home" are common expressions regarding someone who has just died. However commonplace and well-intended these platitudes may be, nonetheless all are unbiblical. No such utterances are found in the Bible because the dead are dead and will remain so until Christ returns and the resurrections come to pass.

The universal assumption that the dead immediately go on to another life is due to a common belief embraced by Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Roman Catholicism. The belief is that all humans are made up of at least two parts: body and soul, or body and spirit. When the body dies, the soul or spirit lives on eternally either in heaven or hell. This doctrine is not based on the accuracy of the Scriptures but rather on Greek philosophy.

The belief is that something within a person gives him the ability to live on eternally. However, the Scriptures quickly refute this right in the beginning of the Bible. God gave man the breath of life making him a living soul.

Genesis 2:7

And the LORD God formed man *of* the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

A living soul does not mean an immortal soul. That which provided immortality for Adam and Eve was not something inside them, but rather separate from them. It was referred to as "the tree of life."

Verse 9

And out of the ground made the LORD God to grow every tree that is pleasant to the sight, and good for food; the tree of life also in the midst of the garden....

When they were expelled from the Garden, God kept them from the tree of life so that they would not live forever in the fallen state.

Genesis 3:24

So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Nothing is said or implied that they would live on after their bodies were dead, quite the contrary. God specifically and clearly stated, "Thou shalt surely die." "Thou" is the person. The whole person would die.

Genesis 2:17

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

According to the Hebrew text, "thou shalt surely die" reads "dying you shalt die." From the day they ate, they began to die and in the end did die. Their spirit or soul did not go to heaven or hell. God told Adam plainly what would happen to him:

Genesis 3:19

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Man was formed from the dust of the ground and when he died he returned to dust. The biological, medical and legal definition of death is the irreversible loss of all functions of the brain, along with the loss of all involuntary mechanisms such as spontaneous breathing, blood pressure, body temperature, and the movement of the heart. When a person takes his last breath, life is gone; he is dead.

The following are some verses which clearly state the destiny of man after death:

Psalms 104:29

Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust.

Psalms 146:4

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Job 10:9

Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and wilt thou bring me into dust again?

Men are just like beasts in that after life is gone, they return to dust. The very day that a person dies, his thoughts perish; and therefore memory ceases to exist.

Psalms 6:5

For in death *there is* no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?

The ability to praise God, to celebrate His goodness and grace, is completely eradicated. To think that the dead are in heaven praising God with the angels is a boldfaced contradiction to the divinely inspired Scriptures.

Psalms 115:17

The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.

Isaiah 38:18

For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.

Perhaps, because the surviving loved ones are so pained by their loss, embracing the lie that the dead are alive seems easier than accepting the obvious. Nonetheless, the Scriptures present confronting truth which causes us to face reality. In the grave there is no work, device, knowledge, or wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 9:10

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.

The “life immediately after death” doctrine makes death seem like a promotion from this hard life to a much better life. “He goes to a better place” is often echoed at funeral homes and grave sides. This false doctrine makes death seem like a welcome friend; however, the Scriptures say it is an enemy.

I Corinthians 15:26

The last enemy *that* shall be destroyed *is* death.

When Jesus spoke with Nicodemus, he said, “And no man hath ascended up to heaven” (John 3:13a). Since then, only Jesus has ascended. Since the Bible provides such irrefutable, compelling evidence that the dead are indeed dead, why do so many believe contrary? Warren Prestidge in his book Life, Death and Destiny provides some explanation:

“According to Plato, the soul (in his dialogue *Phaedo*), or the rational soul (in *Timaeus*), is quite separable from the body and is innately immortal or imperishable (e.g. *Phaedo* 105-106, *Timaeus* 41-45). Only the “soul” is the real person (*Alcibiades I*, 129-130) and the soul is our share in the eternal, divine reality. Death is “the separation of soul and body” (*Phaedo* 64), or “the release of the soul from the chains of the body” (*Phaedo* 67). Souls undergo “judgment” after death (*Phaedo* 107). Salvation is by the cultivation of wisdom and virtue, above all through philosophy. Unpurified souls must undergo various forms of suffering and further reincarnations, even sometimes as animals, until purified (e.g. *Phaedo* 81-2, *Republic* 608-620). Under the immense influence of Greek philosophy, disseminated throughout the Mediterranean and the Near East following the conquests of Alexander the Great, some non-biblical Jewish writings of the period before Christ accepted the soul’s immortality (e.g. *The Wisdom of Solomon* 2:21-3:9) Under the same influence, the doctrine eventually prevailed in Christian tradition. It was entrenched as Catholic dogma by the Fifth Lateran Council (1512-1517 A.D.) and, although the Protestant reformer Martin Luther ridiculed the dogma and many radical Christian groups opposed it, ‘from Calvin onwards it was assumed in post-Reformation Protestantism to be a part of Christian doctrine.’”

A sad testimony is ours if our beliefs about death and eternal life are founded upon the intellect of Plato rather than God’s Holy Word. We must search the Scriptures to formulate our beliefs.

That King David will be in the Kingdom of God and live again is apparent from both the Old and New Testaments. Also, it is clear that currently he is dead and in the grave.

Acts 2:29, 34

Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

For David is not ascended into the heavens...

David's present state is referred to as sleep.

I Kings 2:10

So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David.

Acts 13:36

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.

Jesus told his disciples when Lazarus died that he was sleeping, meaning he was dead. They did not understand, so he said it plainly.

John 11:11-14

These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

The dead are referred to as sleeping because, as in normal sleep, there is a temporary cessation of all consciousness. When we sleep at night, all of our involuntary functions such as breathing, blood pressure, and heart movement slow down considerably. In death, these functions stop. The most important similarity is that both are temporary. In the morning we get up; when Christ returns the dead are also awakened.

I Thessalonians 4:13-15

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive *and* remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

Everyone who has died, with the exception of Jesus Christ, remains in the grave asleep until he or she is awakened when Christ returns.

Daniel 12:2

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.

Let us summarize before we move on. The dead are dead! The Scriptures do not ever talk about the immortality or incorruptibility of the soul or spirit apart from the whole man. The popular phrase "the immortality of the soul" is not a biblical one. Every time that immortality or incorruptibility is used, it is referring to the whole person in a future state at the resurrection.

HEAVEN

With Abraham, God begins to unfold the promise of His future Kingdom. The original promise was, "Unto thy seed will I give this land" (Genesis 12:7). As Abraham's relationship with God grew, so did the promises and God's commitment to fulfill them. When Abraham journeyed into Canaan, he was told by God, "...Unto thy seed have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river, the river Euphrates" (Genesis 15:18).

To Abraham's son Isaac and grandson Jacob, the promised land continued to increase. In the New Testament, we see the promise extended to include the whole world. "...For the promise that he should be the heir of the world..." (Romans 4:13).

All the prophets spoke emphatically and frequently about the coming of the Messiah and the inheritance of a new regenerated earth. Not one record in the Hebrew text speaks about anyone's ascending into heaven and living there eternally. Israel's hope was always the coming of the Messiah who would rule on earth with them. The promise was that the new earth would be similar to the one God originally created with Adam and Eve.

Psalms 37:9, 11, 22, 29, 34

...but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth.

...the meek shall inherit the earth...

For *such as be* blessed of him shall inherit the earth...

The righteous shall inherit the land...

...keep his way, and he shall exalt thee to inherit the land...

Our Redeemer, Jesus of Nazareth, the Christ, preached and taught the Kingdom of God. Its central theme was the believer's inheriting the earth with Christ the King. Christ is not his name but his title. "Christ" is Messiah, meaning anointed King of earth. He will rule God's Kingdom on earth. He said, "Blessed *are* the meek: for they shall inherit the earth." The parables focus on the Kingdom with emphasis on the earth. His response to the believing malefactor who was crucified with him was that he would see him in Paradise. Paradise is on earth, not in heaven. On the day of his ascension, his disciples asked if it were time to restore the Kingdom to Israel.

When the apostle Paul experienced extreme tribulation and persecution, God gave him a vision of the future which is recorded in II Corinthians 12:1-4. The hope presented was not of heaven but rather of paradise on earth." Paul taught that the promises given to Abraham about the future are the same promises given to us Christians today.

Romans 4:16

Therefore *it is* of faith, that *it might be* by grace; to the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

Galatians 3:6-9, 29

Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.

Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, *saying*, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

And if ye *be* Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

The Book of Revelation, the conclusion of the written Word, clearly and concisely states our future destiny.

Revelation 5:10

And hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth.

Revelation 11:15

And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become *the kingdoms* of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

The only human who will ascend into heaven already has ascended and will remain until God sends him back. He will descend from heaven, the dead will be raised, and those alive will meet him in the clouds.

I Thessalonians 4:16-18

For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:

Then 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.
Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

After we meet him in the clouds, we all will return to earth to reign with him forever.

Upon first consideration of these truths, they may be shocking and disturbing since they contradict the commonly accepted beliefs. What should be much more upsetting is the enormous lack of honest biblical study. If learning that the dead do not immediately go to heaven and that no one is going to go to heaven is unsettling, then search the Scriptures and see if these things are so (Acts 17:11).

HELL

If the righteous do not ascend into heaven but rather inherit the earth, then what happens to the unrighteous? We have previously seen that there will be a resurrection when Christ returns. Actually, there will be two resurrections: the first immediately upon Christ's return and the second 1000 years later. The first will be for the just, and the second for the unjust.

John 5:28 and 29

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; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil,
unto the resurrection of damnation.

The case has already been stated that the dead do not ascend into heaven or descend into hell. However, we have not established what happens to the resurrected unjust.

God told Adam that the consequence for his disobedience would be death.

Genesis 2:17

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

The ultimate penalty for sin is death. "In the day" is a judicial phrase indicating not the time of death but its inevitability in the event of sin. Throughout the Bible the result of sin is death, and the alternative to eternal life is death and annihilation.

Deuteronomy 30:15

See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The Hebrew word "*sheol*" and the corresponding Greek word "*hades*" are often wrongly translated "hell." They should be translated as grave or gravedom.

David spoke of his death and, at the same time, prophesied regarding the Lord.

Psalms 16:10 and 11

For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*sheol* - grave]; neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Thou wilt show me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore.

Acts 2:25-27

For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*hades* - grave], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Neither David or Jesus went to hell, nor will they. Both went to the grave. The final state of the wicked is defined and described in a variety of ways, but all of these amount, in the end, to the same thing — rejection by God, death and extinction

forever. However, the common doctrine is that the evil one's destiny is a place of eternal hellfire. Webster's Dictionary defines hell as "the place where fallen angels (devils) live, and to which sinners and unbelievers go after death for torment and eternal punishment." Many seem to believe that Satan is the ruler of hell and that its location is under the earth. Yet, there is no such place as this described in the Bible.

The Scriptures say of Satan that he currently is "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). His location is not beneath earth in hell but rather in high places according to Ephesians 6:12: "We wrestle against ... spiritual wickedness in high places."

The Apostle John was given revelation regarding the future destiny of the devil as is recorded in the Book of Revelation. In the future, he will be cast down.

Revelation 12:7-10

And there was war in heaven: Michael and his angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought and his angels,

And prevailed not; neither was their place found any more in heaven.

And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world: he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.

And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ: for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.

The "hell" that Webster's Dictionary described and that so many embrace today has primarily evolved from Greek mythology beginning around 600 B.C. The Greeks had a three-story universe. The top story was heaven; the middle was earth; and the bottom story was the underworld. A god named Hades ruled the kingdom of the dead, which had the same name. The kingdom of the dead was believed to be beneath the earth. The ancient Romans preserved without change almost all the myths about Hades and his kingdom, but they called the god Pluto. Our traditions about Satan as the ruler of hell emanate from this mythology! When the Greek word "Hades" is used in the Scriptures, it means the grave.

When Jesus taught he referred to hell fire. Perhaps this is the cause of some misunderstanding. The correct understanding of what he meant can be gained from studying the Old Testament (as is true regarding much of what our Lord taught).

Molech was a false Egyptian deity that the children of Israel were commanded not to worship. The worship of Molech included the burning alive of infant children.

Leviticus 18:21

And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through *the fire* to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I *am* the LORD.

Solomon built an high place for Molech during the latter part of his reign (1 Kings 11:7). Many years later, Josiah tried to eliminate the worship of Molech which apparently had become intertwined among the Israelites.

II Kings 23:10

And he defiled Topheth [the burning stove where babies were cremated alive], which *is* in the valley of the children of Hinnom, that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Molech.

Jeremiah speaks of God's utter disgust about Israel's worship of Baal and Molech.

Jeremiah 32:35

And they built the high places of Baal, which *are* in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through *the fire* unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin.

Due to the worship of Molech and other abominable acts, Israel and Judah were then taken captive by the Assyrians and Babylonians respectively.

The place where Molech was worshipped and the children were burned was the Valley of Hinnom. It was a deep narrow ravine next to the city of Jerusalem. After the Babylonian exile, in order to show their abhorrence of this location, they made it a city dump where they burned refuse. The fires in the valley continually burned. The Jews associated this valley with two

ideas: 1) that of idolatrous practices and the suffering of the victims that had been sacrificed and 2) that of filth and corruption.

The Valley of Hinnom then became to most a symbol of the abode of the wicked. They expressed “hell” or the place of the damned by this word. In doing this, there was not one iota of understanding that the person burned eternally. Rather, the person died and, like the sacrificed children and rubbish, he was annihilated and turned to ashes. The Greek word “Gehenna” is the corresponding word to the Hebrew “Hinnom.” By the time of Jesus Christ, the word had evolved to denote only hell, the place of future punishment.

When Jesus spoke of hell fire (Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15, 33; Mark 9:43, 45, 47; and Luke 12:5), he was not referring to a place of eternal torture, but rather of Gehenna which implied everlasting separation from God, death and annihilation. His teachings were a reflection of his understanding of the lake of fire which was spoken of in the Book of Revelation. The lake of fire is for the beast, false prophet, and those that receive the mark of the beast.

Revelation 19:20

And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshiped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone.

The devil, gravedom, and those not written in the Book of Life will be cast into the lake of fire.

Revelation 20:10, 12-15

And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are....

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [Hades, grave] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

And death and hell [grave] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

The book of Jude provides insight regarding eternal fire as it is compared to Sodom and Gomorrha.

Jude 1:7

Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

Sodom and Gomorrha are held up throughout the Scriptures as a type for God’s final judgment. Fire and brimstone totally obliterated these locations with all of their inhabitants. The destruction was so complete that to this day no one is certain where these cities were. Eternal fire does not mean that the person burns in hell eternally, but rather that the effects are everlasting — separation from God, death, and annihilation.

The lake of fire spoken of in Revelation must not be a literal lake of fire because it has the ability to destroy spirit beings, death, and the grave. Similar to Sodom and Gomorrha, the lake of fire represents everlasting, irreversible destruction. The result of it will be the complete elimination of the beast, false prophet, those with the mark of the beast, the devil, death, gravedom, and those not written in the Book of Life. These beings and things will not live on in the age to come.

The words "eternal" and "everlasting" are both translated from the Greek word *aionios*. *Aionios* means ages. Eternal life could be translated "ages' life" or "life in the age to come." "Eternal damnation" or "eternal fire" could be better translated damnation in the age to come or fire in the age to come.

In God’s future Kingdom, all evil will be completely and absolutely gone forever. There will not be some remote corner preserved eternally where evil and the evil ones will continuously burn.

Revelation 20:14 sums up the lake of fire as the second death. We have already established in the beginning of this study that death really means death. The significant difference of the second death is that it is not reversible.

In conclusion, the summary of this study is that the Bible never speaks about the immortality of the soul or spirit. The dead

are not alive, rather in the absolute but temporary state called sleep. When Christ returns, the dead will be resurrected. The just will be given eternal life which will be enjoyed on earth. We do not live eternally in heaven. The unjust will also be resurrected and judged for everlasting damnation. Eternal hellfire with Satan as the king is mythology and not biblical truth. The evil ones will be thrown into the lake of fire which is the second death, irreversible separation from God, death, and total annihilation.