

LIFE AFTER DEATH

By Denver Cheddie

Deep within every human soul, there is an in-built desire to know the future. The prominence of astrology and the occult, as well as the growing popularity of horoscopes and Ouija boards testify to this fact. Even in Christian circles, there is an ever-increasing tendency towards the prophetic. The question of life after death is one which every one must answer. Some, using the Ostrich technique^[1], just ignore it hoping it would go away, while others choose to believe in man made theories such as reincarnation to lessen the impact of the life after death issue. But what does the Bible have to say about life after death?

What It Does Not Say

Reincarnation. Nowhere in the Bible does it teach that after death, one's spirit leaves one's body and inhabits another. Although some would insist that Jesus taught reincarnation, a sensible study of scripture indicates otherwise. They claim that Elijah's spirit inhabited John the Baptist's body (Luke 1:17). What the Bible teaches, however, is that the anointing of the Spirit on John's life was the same as Elijah's. Besides Elijah never died, how could he be reincarnated?

Soul Sleep. The Bible does not teach that the soul is unconscious between physical death and the resurrection, as some believe^[2].

- The rich man in Luke 16:19-31 was certainly not unconscious in hell, and neither was Lazarus in Abraham's bosom.
- Jesus promised the thief on the cross that immediately after death, he would be in paradise (Luke 23:43).
- Moses was dead (Deuteronomy 34:5), yet he appeared with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:3). He was not unconscious.
- Paul's hope was that after death, he would be with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23).
- In Matthew 23:32, Jesus makes a very interesting statement. He was arguing with the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection. They asked him a question concerning the resurrection just to test him, and he answered it. Then he threw something back for them. Referring to when God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, God said, "I **am** the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob". Jesus then commented that God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. This clearly implies that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were not dead at the time God appeared to Moses. Yes their bodies were dead, but their souls were very much alive.

The figurative expression *sleep* used in the Bible always refers to the body and not the soul^[3]. The body dies and returns to the dust whereas the soul remains conscious and alive, but where?

Before Calvary

It was a common Jewish belief that after death, all disembodied spirits went to Sheol/Hades in the center of the earth. They believed that Hades was a 2-compartment abode consisting of a torture chamber for the unrighteous, and a place of bliss, *paradise*, for the righteous^[4]. Jesus seemed to have identified with that belief when He gave the story of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). The rich man went to Hades, and Lazarus to Abraham's bosom – which any Jew would have interpreted as paradise – and both were separated by an insurmountable gulf.

There are some who interpret the scriptures differently and conclude that the righteous souls went straight to heaven. But my question is, "On what Basis?" Jesus said, "**no one comes to the Father, but by me**" (**John 14:6 RSV**). Without the shed blood of Jesus, they had no basis for entering heaven to be with God. They had to remain in paradise until the fullness of time had come.

Where Did Jesus Go?

Immediately after Jesus died, His body was placed in a tomb and left there for 3 days, but His Soul went to Hades (Acts 2:27,31) in the center of the earth (Matthew 12:40). On the cross Jesus revealed that He was going to the paradise section of Hades (Luke 23:43) and not the torment section as some think^[5]. In Matthew 12:40 Jesus predicted that He was going to be in the heart of the earth for 3 days. This could not have referred to His body

because ancient tombs were not 6 feet under as they are today. He could have only been speaking of His Soul.

There is evidence that Jesus did not ascend to heaven during those 3 days but instead remained in paradise all the while. On Resurrection Sunday He did not permit Mary to touch Him because He had not as yet ascended to the Father but was on His way there (John 20:17). Afterwards He allowed the disciples to touch Him (John 20:27). It is clear that He only ascended to heaven after the resurrection and not before^[6].

During the 3 days in paradise, the Bible reveals^[7] that He disarmed principalities and powers (Colossians 2:15), proclaimed victory over His enemies (1 Peter 3:18,19), and released the righteous saints from paradise (Ephesians 4:8). After His resurrection, most of them went to heaven with Him while some were raised to live again (Matthew 27:52,53).

The unrighteous dead in the torture chamber remained in Hades where they still are to this day.

But Now...

Since Jesus' blood has already been shed, believers who die today go straight to heaven to be with God (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23).

Paradise is no longer located at the center of the earth but in the 3rd heaven (2 Corinthians 12:2). Paul comforted the Thessalonians by assuring them that their saved loved ones who had died were with Jesus (1 Thessalonians 4:14). The unbelieving dead still go to Hades as before to await final judgement.

At the rapture the bodies of the dead in Christ are raised up incorruptible (1 Corinthians 15:52). They are reunited with their spirits and so shall they ever be with the Lord. The same fate awaits the tribulation saints (Revelation 20:4). All the righteous saints reign with Christ as kings and priests during the Millenium. After the 1000 years, the unrighteous dead will be released from Hades (Revelation 20:13) to stand before the Great White Throne for official sentencing. From there they are cast - *body and soul* (Matthew 10:28) - into the lake of fire or eternal hell.

...Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. The second death has no power over them... (Revelation 20:6 NIV).

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^[1] The Ostrich buries its head in the sand whenever faced with a difficult situation hoping that the problem would solve itself. As if you didn't already know that.

^[2] Among those who hold this doctrine are the Jehovah's Witnesses and the Seven-Day Adventists.

^[3] Finis Dake, *Dake's Annotated Reference Bible* (Lawrenceville: Dake Bible Sales, 1982): 620, 881 (OT). Man is made up of a material part, *body*, and an immaterial part, *spirit and soul*. In this article, the words *spirit* and *soul* are used interchangeably although slight differences in meaning and purpose do exist.

^[4] Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary, New Testament* (Chattanooga: AMG Publishers, 1994): 81.

^[5] Hank Hanegraaf, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene: Harvest House Publishers, 1993): 163-173.

^[6] This is not the same ascension as the one which took place after 40 days. This is the one alluded to in Hebrews 1:3 which took place between John 20:17 and 20:27.

^[7] This is my personal interpretation of these verses of scripture, although there exist other possible interpretations.