

There Is Life After This Earthly Life

'Those who are buried in the earth will awake, some to eternal life and some to shame and eternal contempt' (Daniel 12:2).

'Do not be surprised at this, the time is coming when all those who are buried will hear His voice and they will come out from their graves – those who have done good will come out to the resurrection of life. Those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment' (John 5:28 & 29).

'I saw the dead, great and small standing before the throne and the Books were opened. Another book was opened which is the Book of Life. The dead were judged by what they had done, according to what was written in the books. The sea gave up the dead who were in it. Death and hell gave up the dead in them, and all were judged by what they had done. Death and hell were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death. If anyone's name was not found written in the Book of Life, they were hurled into the lake of fire' (Revelation 20:12 to 15).

'The Son of Man will send out His angels to gather out of His Kingdom all things that cause an offence and all those who do iniquity, and the angels will cast them into the furnace of fire. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Let those who have ears be listening' (Matthew 13:41 to 43).

'There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen, living in luxury every day. At his gate was a destitute man named Lazarus who was a beggar and suffered with dreadful sores that dogs would come and lick. He desired to eat the crumbs that fell from the rich man's table. Lazarus died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell he was in torment. He looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus at his side. The rich man cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame."

Abraham replied, "Son, remember that you in your lifetime received your comfort, and Lazarus received the distresses, but now he is in comfort and you are in anguish. Besides this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed so those who want to pass from here to there may not be able, and no one can pass from there to us."

The man said, "Then father, I beseech you to send him to my father's house for I have five brothers – so he may warn them, lest they too come into this place of torment."

Abraham replied, "They have Moses and the Prophets, let them listen to them."

The man answered, "No Father Abraham, if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent."

Abraham replied, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be persuaded and believe even if someone should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:19 to 31). Both of these men died, but ended up in different places. Lazarus went to Abraham's side, while the rich man went down to a place of torment. The man who had been wealthy had to look up to see Abraham, so obviously he was beneath the place where Abraham is. The two places were divided and no one could pass from one place to the other.

There is a lot of information in these passages of scripture written above. The Bible makes it clear, after this human body of ours dies, it is not the end of us but is just the beginning of our eternal life, with or without God. One thing is absolutely sure – if there has been a conception of a human child, at some point in time, there will be the death of that same person and every person who has ever lived into the age of accountability will face Judgement Day. Children who die under the age of accountability will not face judgement. They are still pure in heart. Most children are disarmingly honest and have a keen sense of bad behaviour committed by older children or adults. It is sad when children go on to copy the sins of the adults. All young children who die go straight to be with the Lord. 'Can I bring him back (to earth) again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me' (2 Samuel 12:23). Jesus said, "Allow the little children and do not forbid them to come to Me, for the Kingdom of Heaven belongs to children like these" (Matthew 19:14).

The Bible says God gives every child His Spirit at conception, before the embryo has seen one full day – that is when the embryo is still an unformed substance, deep within the female reproductive system. 'You did form my inwards parts. You did knit me together in my mother's womb. I will give thanks to You for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful and my soul knows that very well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was being formed in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the womb. Your eyes saw my unformed substance and in Your Book all the days of my life were written before ever they took shape, when as yet there was none of them' (Psalm 139:13 to 16). 'You know not the way of the wind nor how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman' (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

We need to make two things very clear. (1) Humans are not 'evolved' beings. Adam and Eve were created by God, in the image and likeness of God, to fellowship with Him as adult children fellowship with their parents and they were told to multiply and thus the world was filled with created people in the image of God the Father. (2) There is no reincarnation. Nobody comes back to earth for a second chance. 'It is appointed for mankind to die once and after this, their judgment' (Hebrews 9:27). Our life on earth is the one and only opportunity we have to repent and be eternally saved, and accepting Jesus as our Saviour is the one and only way to heaven. Jesus said, "I AM the Way, the Truth and the Life and no one can come to the Father except through Me" (John 14:6).

Every human person has a body, soul and a Spirit. The soul is the area of human emotion and sin. We know when the body dies, it is buried, cremated or lost at sea, but according to the Bible, one day every human body will rise (be resurrected) from the grave, from ashes or from the sea, to be judged. Some will receive heavenly rewards and some will receive shame and damnation. This Bible study is about what happens to us in between death and resurrection. Some people have been dead for thousands of years but resurrection is in the future. This topic can be very confusing. There are several names for the places where the spirit of the individual dead go. On God's side there is heaven, paradise, Abraham's side, the Kingdom of Heaven and the Kingdom of God. On the dark side there is hell, sheol, hades, gehenna, the furnace or the lake of fire.

What is important to note, is the Lord God has shown us the truth of this matter through the scriptures, gradually and progressively as the spiritual events in the world changes mankind's standing with God. From close fellowship with God before the fall, to the separation of God and mankind after the fall, onto the redemption of mankind through the blood of Jesus, then onto two distinctly different and final destinations; heaven with God or the lake of fire with the devil. There was the time or phase before Noah; the phase between Noah and Abraham; the phase after Abraham and before the Law of Moses; the phase after the Law and before Jesus; the phase after Jesus came (this present age); and there will be the phase after Jesus returns and before the burning and total destruction of this earth (2 Peter 3:7 then 10 to 13). According to the scriptures, with every earthly event, came a new phase in the spiritual realm too.

God planned to redeem mankind before He created the world so He knew Adam was going to bring the world into disrepair (Genesis 3:15; 1 Peter 1:19 to 21), or redemption would not have been necessary. The Lord God knew every person who was going to be born, from Adam until the last child ever to be born on this earth, and the names of all those who have or will be redeemed, are all recorded in God's Book of Life since the foundation of the world (Revelation 13:8). When people knowingly sin and reject God, their names are blotted out of the Book of Life (Exodus 32:33; Psalm 69:28). God knows all who will repent and receive salvation through the blood of Jesus, and their names are not blotted out of the Book of Life (Revelation 3:5). The salvation message was kept a secret for thousands of years, and not even the angels or the Prophets understood it (1 Peter 1:12).

When Abel was murdered by his brother Cain, God said the earth opened its mouth to receive his blood (Genesis 4:10 & 11). During the time phases from Adam to Jacob, the scriptures say Adam and his descendants died (Genesis 5:5 onwards), except for Abraham. God told Abraham he would go to his fathers in peace (Genesis 15:15) and when he died, it was written Abraham's spirit was released and he was gathered to his people (Genesis 25:8). It was Jacob who first said he would 'sleep with his fathers' (Genesis 47:30). It was the Lord who told Moses he would 'sleep with his fathers' (Deuteronomy 31:16). After that, from Genesis to Malachi, it was written when a person died, they were going to 'sleep with their fathers' or biological ancestors.

Abraham was declared righteous by the Lord Himself and was the epitome of a righteous man. By this we can safely assume, every righteous person will be received to the same place where Abraham is. This place has been called Abraham's side – a place beside Abraham. It is also called paradise. Abraham's spirit was released into this place. The righteous are sometimes carried to this place by angels. Jacob was sent to this place. It is written he 'slept with his fathers', and it is also written he is alive in heaven with Abraham and Isaac (Matthew 22:32). Many redeemed people will sit with them in the Kingdom of Heaven (Matthew 8:11). God is God of the living, and people who are sleeping or dead do not sit down together so clearly, these three prophets are eternally alive and fully awake. Until Jesus came to earth, nobody had ever gone to up into heaven, but Jesus Himself came down from heaven and has His home in heaven (John 3:13), so how was it Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were already awake and sitting together in the Kingdom of Heaven? At what point in time did Abraham and other righteous people rouse from their 'sleep' to sit together in heaven? Jesus' baptism seemed to be the event that opened the way into God's presence and heaven. When Jesus told the story about the rich man and Lazarus, Abraham was already in heaven and Lazarus joined him.

The only Man Who has been able to stand beside God in heaven is Jesus, Who is perfect, sinless, spotless and without blemish. The rest of mankind had to wait until Jesus came to provide atonement of sin by His blood. The blood of goats and bulls could not atone for sin (Hebrews 10:4). Though God declared several people righteous, they could not enter His presence because their sin was unpunished. Because sin cannot exist in the presence of the Lord, people who had not yet experienced atonement could not dwell in heaven. It was only when God sent Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood, did the heavens open to receive the ancient, righteous people. 'God set forth Jesus to be an atoning sacrifice through faith in His blood, for a demonstration of His righteousness through the passing over of prior sins' (Romans 3:25). The spiritual cleansing in the waters of baptism is the public proof of our commitment to God, so when Jesus was baptised, He opened the way for the righteous to become holy, wiping away all prior sin so they could live in the presence of God. When Jesus was baptised, the heavens were opened to receive the righteous. 'When Jesus was baptised, He went up immediately from the water and behold, the heavens were opened' (Matthew 3:16). 'Stephen, being full of the Holy Spirit looked up into heaven and saw the glory of God and Jesus standing on the right hand of God and said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!"' (Acts 7:55 & 56). Jesus opened the door for the righteous to ascend into heaven as foretold by the prophets. The righteous people were transferred from their waiting place, the realm of the dead, into heaven.

'You have ascended on high. You have led away the captives. You have received gifts from men, yes the rebellious also (forgiven and redeemed) so the Lord God might dwell with them' (Psalm 68:18). 'When He ascended on high He led the captives away and gave gifts to men. What can this mean, He ascended? He had previously descended from heaven into the depths of the earth. He Who descended is the same as He Who also ascended high above all the heavens so He might fill all places (Ephesians 4:8 to 10). Jesus overcame sin and death for all mankind. While He walked the earth, He was constantly helping others overcome death by healing the sick and raising the dead. When Jesus was resurrected He was given a new glorious body that looked exactly like His earthly body, complete with scars left over from His crucifixion (Luke 24:39 & 40). Righteous people will be given their glorious new bodies at the first resurrection (Philippians 3:21), but in the meantime, if we die we can experience heaven. When the thief repented who was crucified beside Jesus, He said the thief would be with Him in paradise that day (Luke 23:43). Jesus did not say the thief would 'sleep'. We know the thief went to paradise that day, but Jesus did not go to paradise that day, He went straight down to hell to preach to the dead. Paradise, heaven, the Kingdom of God has now become the place where God lives with His redeemed people. By 'filling all places', Jesus has taken control of the whole sphere of mankind, from heaven all the way down to hell. All dead people used to go to the waiting place known as sheol, hell or hades. It was considered an unearthly prison for spirits of the dead, and when Jesus rose from the dead and received His new Spiritual body, He went down into that place for three days to preach. Jesus said, 'The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' (Matthew 12:40). He preached to all the people who had died over the centuries to give them a chance of salvation so they could live with God in the spirit. 'He was made alive in the Spirit in which He went and preached to the spirits in prison (in hell)' (1 Peter 3:19). 'They will have to give an account to Him Who is ready to judge the living and the dead. This is why the Gospel was preached even to the dead, though judged in human bodies as men are, they might live in the spirit as God does' (1 Peter 4:5 & 6). Jesus gave the disciples and all disciples after them, including genuine believers today, the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven – which is the Gospel (Matthew 16:19), then He later said to John, "I was dead and now am alive for evermore and I have the keys of death and hades" (Revelation 1:18). There is no other way into heaven. There is only the Gospel message spoken by Jesus, and that is the 'key' into heaven, so while Jesus was still on earth, He opened the way to heaven with the 'keys' of the Gospel.

When Paul was on earth, he had such an extraordinary experience he did not know if he was in his human body or was taken out of his body for a short time. Many genuine born-again believers have experienced the same thing. 'I know a man, a believer in Jesus, who fourteen years ago ... was caught up to the third heaven, and I know this man ... was taken up into paradise and heard utterances impossible for a man to utter' (2 Corinthians 12:2 to 4). For there to be a third heaven, there has to be a first and a second. The third heaven is where God dwells. That place is paradise. It is the throne room of the Kingdom of God, also called the Kingdom of Heaven. It is where the genuine, righteous people who have died are now located, sitting together. On Judgement Day they will receive their glorious new bodies and their long awaited rewards for serving God faithfully. The throne room is where the ancient righteous Jewish elders, the angels and cherubim worship God (Revelation 19:4).

Death has no fear or sting when people walk with God sincerely and faithfully. 'When this perishable body puts on the imperishable, and this mortal body has put on immortality, will the scripture be fulfilled that says, "Death is swallowed up in victory. Death, where is your sting? Hades, where is your victory?"' (1 Corinthians 15:54 & 55). Jesus overcame death and those who believe in Him are not afraid of dying for when it comes, it will be a wonderful thing for us and is precious in the sight of God. 'Precious in the sight of the Lord is the

death of His people' (Psalm 116:15) because that is the time when we are fully reconciled with God the Father forever. Job said, "I know my Redeemer lives. He will stand on the earth. After this body has been destroyed, then I will see God. I will see Him for myself. My eyes will behold Him and not as a Stranger. My heart pines within me" (Job 19:25 to 27). Job was so excited about seeing his Redeemer face to face, it made him pine. In our time, we would describe that feeling as 'butterflies in the tummy' or homesick for a place we have never been; a deep, expectant, awesome excitement. Sadly, when death comes to the non-believer, it is a terrible thing.

There were some offenders who went down to sheol while they were still alive, and then they perished (Numbers 16:33). Sheol or hell is a place where God reveals His wrath. 'A fire is kindled by My anger and it burns to the lowest of sheol' (Deuteronomy 32:22). It is a place that is far away from earth and even further away from heaven. It has gates and its inmates suffer torment. It is under the jurisdiction of God and is subject to Him. The people who are there, although without human bodies can feel pain, torment, sorrow, regret, remorse, thirst, a desire for relief and concern for family, so therefore they would still have a sense of love for others, they are aware of their surroundings and know they will never get out. Jesus said hypocrites and wicked people would never be able to escape the penalty to be suffered in that place (Matthew 23:33). It is a waiting place for the dead, and the wicked will be there until Judgement Day when they will be raised for judgement and damnation. The fallen angels are already there awaiting judgement. 'God did not spare angels who sinned but cast them into hell, delivering them to be kept there in pits of gloom until the judgement' (2 Peter 2:4). 'The angels who did not keep their own domain but abandoned their proper dwelling place, God has reserved in eternal chains under the thick gloom of utter darkness until the judgement' (Jude 1:6). The lake of fire was not created for mankind, it was created for the devil and the fallen angels (Matthew 25:41). After the wicked angels and people have been judged, they will be hurled, tossed or thrown into the furnace, otherwise known as the lake of fire. That is the final destination of hell, death, hades, wicked humans, wicked angels and the devil himself and they will be tormented day and night forever (Revelation 20:10, 14 & 15; 21:8).

Jesus is now sitting at the right hand of the Father and one day we will all see Him there (Matthew 26:64). The Old Testament said people died. The New Testament says we will be absent from the body and at home with the Lord (2 Corinthians 5:8). Righteous believers are seated with Jesus in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). All these scriptures line up as one verse leads to another in progressive revelation, as world events change the spiritual destination for mankind. There is spiritual life after this earthly life, with God or cut off from God. Every person ever born will live forever. Those who reject God will be cut off from Him and sent to the lake of fire for eternity where they will be forever with the fallen angels, the devil, the false prophet and the beast. Those who accept Jesus as our Saviour will live in the presence of God, Jesus and the holy angels forever. We can through in-depth Bible study, have a solid understanding of the different places recorded in the scriptures, where people go after death, right up until we join all the redeemed who have gone before us in the place where God will dwell with us. 'Behold, God is with mankind and He will dwell among them. They will be His people and God Himself will be their God' (Revelation 21:3).

Amen and God bless you.

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