

There Is Life After This Earthly Life

'Many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake; some to eternal life and some to shame and eternal abhorrence. The teachers (of the Gospel) and those who are wise will shine like the heavens forever, and those who turn many to righteousness will shine like the stars forever and ever' (Daniel 12:2 & 3).

'Do not be surprised at this, for 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, and those who have done evil will be raised for judgement' (John 5:28 & 29).

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

'The righteous will shine forth like the sun in the Kingdom of their Father. Let him who has ears be listening' (Matthew 13:43).

'There was a certain rich man who clothed himself in purple and fine linen. He feasted and made merry in splendour every day. At his gate there was a destitute man named Lazarus who was a beggar and suffered with sores. He desired to be satisfied with what fell from the rich man's table. Dogs came and licked his sores. It occurred that Lazarus died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried and in Hades he was in torment. He lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far away, and 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."

But Abraham said, "Child, 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; and besides this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed so that those who want to pass from here to there may not be able, and no one can pass from there to us."

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

But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them."

But the man answered, "No Father Abraham, but 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 in these passages of scripture written above. The Bible makes it clear that 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 within the following 120 or so years, there will be a death of that same person. The Bible says God gives every child His Spirit within hours of conception; literally before the embryo has seen one full day – that is when the embryo is still an unformed substance, deep within the uterus. 'For You did form my inwards parts; You did knit me together in my mother's womb. I will praise You for the wonder of my birth! Wonderful are Your works, and that my soul knows well. My frame was not hidden from You when I was being formed in secret; intricately and curiously wrought 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). 'As you know not what is the way of the wind, or how the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a pregnant woman' (Ecclesiastes 11:5).

We have established that every human person has a body and a Spirit. 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 and 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 far in the future. This topic can be very confusing. There are several names for the places where the Spirit of the individual dead go; heaven, paradise, Abraham's side, the Kingdom of heaven, the Kingdom of God, and on the dark side there is hell, sheol, hades, gehenna, the furnace or the lake of fire.

What is important to note, is that 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 3:10 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 would have known 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 (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 (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 had opened its mouth to receive his blood (Genesis 4:10 & 11). During the time phases from Adam to Jacob, the scriptures say simply that 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 that when a person died, they were going to 'sleep with their fathers'.

Abraham was declared righteous by the Lord Himself, and was the epitome of a righteous man. By this we can safely assume that 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 were 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 that he is alive with Abraham and Isaac (Matthew 22:32). Many redeemed people will sit with them at the table 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 at a table, so clearly, these three prophets are eternally alive and well 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 that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were already alive in the Kingdom of heaven? The only Man Who has been able to stand beside God in heaven is Jesus, Who is perfect, sinless, spotless and without blemish (Hebrews 4:15). The rest of mankind had to wait until atonement by the blood of Jesus through faith. 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 experienced atonement could not dwell in heaven. It was only when God sent Jesus as a sacrifice of atonement through faith in His blood (Romans 3:25), then Jesus made the way for the righteous to become holy, wiping away all sin so they could live in the presence of God.

What was the event that opened the way into God's presence and heaven? Jesus overcame sin and death for all mankind. While He walked the earth, He was constantly helping others to overcome death by healing the sick and raising the dead. Jesus opened the door for the righteous to ascend into heaven as foretold by the prophets. 'You have ascended on high. You have led away the captives. You have received gifts from men, yes the rebellious also (forgiven and redeemed), that the Lord God might dwell there with them' (Psalm 68:18) ... 'It is said, 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, that He might 'fill all places' (Ephesians 4:8 to 10). The righteous people were transferred from their waiting place, the realm of the dead and disembodied spirits, to heaven. Jesus was given a new glorious body that looked exactly like His earthly body, complete with scars left over from His crucifixion (Luke 24:39). People will be given their glorious new bodies at the resurrection, but in the meantime, we can experience heaven. When Stephen was murdered, he saw the heavens were now opened to receive the righteous (Acts 7:55, 56 & 59). 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. Jesus said two things that denote He overcame death, plus He opened the way for us. He 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 – then the righteous people like Abraham, Job and Daniel were at some point, transferred to heaven.

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 beyond the power of man to explain' (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 are now located. On Judgement Day they will receive their glorious new bodies and their long awaited rewards for serving God faithfully.

When the thief repented who was crucified beside Jesus, He said the thief would be with Him in paradise (Luke 23:43). We know that the thief went to paradise, but Jesus didn't go to paradise that day, He went straight down to hell to preach the message of salvation to the dead. All dead people used to go to the waiting place known as sheol. 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. 'For Jesus the Messiah died for sins, once for all, the Righteous for the unrighteous, that He might bring us to God. In His human body He was put to death, but He was made alive in the Spirit in which He went and preached to

the spirits in prison; those who long before, in the days of Noah had been disobedient' (1 Peter 3:18 to 20). 'They will have to give an account to Him Who is ready to judge the living and the dead; for this is why the Gospel was preached even to the dead, that though judged in human bodies as men are, they might live in the spirit as God does' (1 Peter 4:5 & 6). Jesus said, 'The Son of Man will be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth' (Matthew 12:40).

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 that was capable of dying puts on freedom from death, then shall the scripture be fulfilled that says: "He will swallow up death in victory" (Isaiah 25:8) ... O death, where are your plagues? O hades, where is your destruction? (Hosea 13:14) ... Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting? Now sin brought the sting of death and sin has its power through disobedience to the Law' (1 Corinthians 15:54 to 56). 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). Job said; 'I know that my Redeemer lives ... after this body has been destroyed, even without my flesh I shall see God. I will see Him for myself ... my eyes will behold Him, and not as a Stranger. My heart pines inside 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 into sheol while they were still alive, and then they perished (Numbers 16:33). Sheol is a place where God reveals His wrath. 'For 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 as part of His creation. The people who are there, although without human bodies can feel pain, torment, sorrow, regret, remorse, thirst, a desire for relief, 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 will 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. What may surprise some people, is that the fallen angels are already there too. 'God did not spare angels that 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 his 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 (Revelation 20:10 to 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; Mark 14:62). 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). The 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. 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; the place where God will dwell with us. 'Behold, God is with mankind; He will live among them. They shall be His people and He shall be their God' (Revelation 21:3).

Amen and God bless you.

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