

# Life after Death, God's gift or man's wishful thinking?

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## A most important question

- Life isn't easy and contrary to what some say, becoming a Christian does not mean life will be easy, prosperous, and free from troubles.
- Quite the contrary, we may have more testing, trials, and challenges than we can imagine. Because of that, the Apostle Paul said:
- ***If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable 1 Corinthians 15:19***
- But he went on to share that because of Christ's death and resurrection, this life is not all there is and that those who have trusted Christ for salvation are assured of an eternity with Him.

## But the question comes up....

- Did people always believe that?
- We've been studying the Old Testament and some people say that people back then didn't believe in a real life after death.
- They say they only had a vague view of a shadowy existence in Sheol, some vague nether world and that the idea of life after death was man's invention over time starting with vague ideas and developing through the Old Testament.

## That is disturbing.....

- As I shared at the start of this podcast, in my personal pilgrimage to an assurance of my belief in Jesus as Savior and the truth of the Bible to tell me about it, I studied history because I thought if something is true, it should be true for all time.
- What I learned about the Bible and faith verified that. Please take time to listen to the podcast series, ***Truth and History, why we can trust the Bible at [www.bible805.com](http://www.bible805.com)***, for a detailed discussion of that topic. My conclusion was that I could trust the Bible.....
- So when I heard the claim: ***"People in the Old Testament really didn't believe in life after death"***

## That greatly upset me because

- I believe that is God is true and trustworthy, that He does not change.
- And though much revelation is progressive, in that we understand things more and more as we go through Biblical history, the core beliefs, (for example the Old Testament prophesied about the Messiah, but we don't meet the Messiah, Jesus, personally until the New Testament) for something as important as bodily resurrection, it seemed to me it ought to be clearly taught from the first to the

last of the Bible.

- In a minute, I'll tell you my conclusion after extensive study on this topic and then we'll go back and look at false beliefs, where they come from and what the Bible and respected commentators have to say about the topic.

## Conclusion

- From the earliest pages of Genesis through the Old Testament and to the closing of the book of Revelation, the Bible clearly and unequivocally teaches the reality of bodily resurrection.
- So where did the incorrect views come from and why do I affirm the Bible teaches otherwise?
- .....let's find out.....

## Where incorrect views come from

- It's very similar to when Jesus was on earth and he was arguing with the Sadducees who did not believe in the resurrection, in the midst of that exchange, he challenged them by saying, "You are in error because you do not know the Scriptures or the power of God. <sup>30</sup>At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven.<sup>31</sup> But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, <sup>32</sup>'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead but of the living." Matt. 22:29 Thus affirming the resurrection....
- Just like in Jesus' day when the Sadducees did not believe in a bodily resurrection, so too, those who do not believe in it today, as I've studied seem to come to that view from these 3 sources
- Unexamined acceptance of a particular (and faulty) scholarly view based on non-canonical texts (not the Bible) or simply unproven, but often repeated assumptions
- Not reading the original, declarative and definitive documents about this issue, e.g. the Old Testament itself
- Not reading the views of well-respected Biblical scholars who support the view of extensive Biblical documentation of an OT view of life after death

## Summary of the false viewpoint

- What one book said:  
"Most of the scholarly world agrees that there is no concept of immortality of life after death in the Old Testament."<sup>11</sup> With these words, George

Mendenhall summarizes the consensus of critical academics regarding the afterlife in the Hebrew Bible. Even many Jewish thinkers deny an afterlife. (the scholars he quotes are from a secular, world-religions viewpoint)

- For instance in a 1991 interview, Jewish professor Yeshayahu Leibowitz said,
- *Death has no significance... only life matters... In the entire Torah there is not the slightest suggestion that anything happens after death. All the ideas and theories articulated on the subject of a world to come and the resurrection of the dead have no relationship to religious faith. It is sheer folklore. After you die, you simply do not exist.*<sup>[2]</sup>
- Critics of the Bible argue that the concept of the afterlife was an evolutionary development: God didn't slowly *reveal* the subject of Heaven; instead, the Jewish people slowly *invented* it over time.
- <http://www.evidenceunseen.com/bible-difficulties-2/ot-difficulties/psalms-song-of-songs/did-the-ancient-jews-believe-in-life-after-death/>
- The views here so misleading.... "most of the scholarly world" simply not true—secular scholars
- Jewish view as you'll see the OT has far more than "not the slightest" suggestion
- And Jewish people did not invent the idea—God revealed it—and not slowly

#### Where did this idea come from?

As you'll soon see, it did not come at all from actually reading the primary text—the OT

- Italics and red print mine, to emphasize sources. (read first without them)
- Another Professor puts it this way:
- Prior to the Second Temple period, *both Jewish and Greek thought* were dominated by the idea that people went to the same space after death and lived a shadowy existence. In the Hebrew Bible this space is called Sheol, and in *Greek texts like The Odyssey it is called Hades*. ....
- By the Second Temple period, *apocalyptic literature* had configured separate spaces for persons both before and after the final judgment, based upon different types of earthly behavior. The final judgment, or day of judgment, refers to a future date on which all of the dead will be raised, souls will be reunited with bodies, and all people and nations will be judged by God. *1 Enoch 22 (not even accepted for the Apocrypha)* for instance, describes four containers that souls inhabit while they await judgment, each with amenities that befit a person's behavior on earth. This pre-sorting of souls was not random but prefigured one's ultimate destination after the last judgment. Similarly, in *4*

*Ezra 7* readers are confronted with "two ways," one that is wide and easy and leads to destruction and another that is narrow and difficult and leads to paradise. ( by Meghan Henning is assistant professor of Christian origins at the University of Dayton)

- <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/en/people/related-articles/views-on-the-afterlife-in-the-time-of-jesus>
- Problems here – using Greek thought as a proof of what Jewish thought (as clearly described in the OT) is
- The apocalyptic literature, Enoch and 4 Ezra not canonical, historical, or accurate in any way other than as fanciful stories

#### Summary of source for view of no belief in Life after death in OT

- Just like someone saying (as one reviewer did) that "Harry Potter is Satanic witchcraft" .... from people who disapprove of fantasy generally.
- Not based on serious study (or as you will see even on reading the actual texts) but...
- Based on opinions only of primarily secular scholars based on non-canonical, fanciful texts
- NO basis for it in what the Bible, the primary historical source document actually says (which we will get to in a minute)

Let's start with Genesis and go through the OT to see what it actually says

- (referring to passages in Daniel and Isaiah affirming the resurrection)

Nevertheless, it is amazing to see how many learned men and women will deny even these two texts and argue that the Old Testament teaches virtually nothing about resurrection or life after death.

The truth of the matter is that ancient peoples were more attuned to the subject of life after death than moderns suspect. The peoples of the ancient Near East wrote at length about what life was like after one left this earth. One need only consult such representative pieces as the Gilgamesh Epic, The Descent of Ishtar into the Netherworld, the Book of the Dead and the Pyramid Texts. Indeed, the whole economy of Egypt was geared to the cult of the dead, for all who wished a part in the next life had to be buried around the pyramid of the Pharaoh. What these Egyptians could expect in that afterlife was depicted in the scenes on the walls of their mortuaries: eating, drinking, singing and all the joys of this life. Each joy, of course, would be magnified and still enjoyed through a body.

By the time Abraham arrived in Egypt, such concepts had been emblazoned on their walls in hieroglyphics, murals and models made of clay, to make sure no one missed the point. Life after death was not a modern

doctrine developed by an educated society that began to think more abstractly about itself and its times. Instead it was an ancient hunger that existed in the hearts of humanity long before the patriarchs, prophets and kings of the Old Testament began to function.

- Kaiser Jr., Walter C.. *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 104). Society of Biblical Literature. Kindle Edition.

Let's now look at specific passages

- Some with commentary from "Hard Sayings"
- Some my comments
- Overall, simply important to READ the BOOK
- What does it actually say?

#### **Enoch, from *Hard Sayings*....**

- The earliest biblical mention of the possibility of a mortal's inhabiting the immortal realms of deity can be found in Genesis 5:24. There we are told that a man named Enoch lived 365 years, all the while "walking with God." Suddenly, "he was no more, because God took him away."
- After 365 years of intimacy with the Almighty, suddenly the Lord "took" Enoch. What can it mean that he "took" him? The Hebrew root for the verb to take is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament. However, in two contexts—this Genesis 5 passage and the account of Elijah's assumption into heaven in 2 Kings 2:3, 10–11—it refers to a snatching of a person's body up to heaven. that he "took" him? The Hebrew root for the verb to take is used over a thousand times in the Old Testament. However, in two contexts—this Genesis 5 passage and the account of Elijah's assumption into heaven in 2 Kings 2:3, 10–11—it refers to a snatching of a person's body up to heaven.
- Psalm 73:23–25 makes a similar contrast between the wicked and the righteous. Once again there is faith that reaches beyond this life, and it centers on this verb to take (Hebrew *laqah*). Says the psalmist, "You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory" (Ps 73:24). Accordingly, it can be argued on very strong linguistic and conceptual grounds that the "taking" of a person from this earth implies that mortals are capable of inhabiting immortal realms. For the believer in Yahweh in Old Testament times, death did not end it all. There was life after death, and that life was to be in the presence of the living God.
- Such a view of an immediate access into the presence of God would also close down all speculation on any kind of intermediate state, receptacle or location as unscriptural. To say that Old Testament believers stayed in a separate compartment in Sheol or in a kind of purgatory runs

directly counter to the fact that God snatched Enoch and Elijah away "to himself."

Kaiser Jr., Walter C.. *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 105). Society of Biblical Literature. Kindle Edition.

#### **Abraham**

- Here ***Hard Sayings*** is referring to misunderstanding of "gathered to people and Sheol"
- Genesis 25:8 Then Abraham breathed his last and died at a good old age, an old man and full of years; and he was gathered to his people.
- In the Old Testament, those who have already died are regarded as still existing. The event of being "gathered to one's people" is always distinguished from the act of burial, which is described separately (Gen 25:8–9; 35:29; 49:29, 31, 33). In many cases only one ancestor was in the tomb (1 Kings 11:43; 22:40) or none at all (Deut 31:16; 1 Kings 2:10; 16:28; 2 Kings 21:18), so that being "gathered to one's people" could not mean being laid in the family sepulcher.
- Readers of the text should not infer something special from the use of Sheol in some of these texts. In every one of the sixty-five instances of Sheol in the Old Testament, it refers simply to "the grave," not to the shadowy region of the netherworld. The writer of the book of Hebrews in the New Testament supports the notion that the patriarchs expected an afterlife:
- Heb: 11: All these people [from Abel to Abraham] were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth. People who say such things show that they are looking for a country of their own. If they had been thinking of the country they had left, they would have had opportunity to return. Instead, they were longing for a better country—a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has prepared a city for them. (Heb 11:13–16)
- Here is a clear testimony that through faith these early participants in the promises of God were fully expecting to enjoy life after death. While the full revelation of the life hereafter and the resurrection of the body awaited a later unveiling in the Old and New Testaments, the common assertion that the Old Testament saint knew nothing at all about such a possibility is an error caused by preconceptions. In Genesis 17:8 Abraham was given a promise by God: "The whole land of Canaan, where you are now an alien, I will give as an everlasting possession to you and your descendants after you." The rabbis reasoned that since Abraham never actually

enjoyed the fulfillment of this promise, he would be raised from the dead to possess the land.

- Kaiser Jr., Walter C.. *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 128). Society of Biblical Literature. Kindle Edition.

### Side note on forbidding necromancy

- Other evidences of the belief of a real life after death are afforded by the stern warnings from Mosaic times about any dabbling in necromancy, the cult of contacting the dead. What harm would there have been in fooling around with something that had no reality? Already in the middle of the second millennium B.C., the Israelites knew the afterlife was real, and thus they were warned not to be involved in any contacting of individuals who had passed beyond this world.

Kaiser Jr., Walter C.. *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (p. 129). Society of Biblical Literature. Kindle Edition.

### • Job 14:14-15

- <sup>14</sup> If someone dies, will they live again?  
All the days of my hard service  
I will wait for my renewal to come.  
(*chaliyphah—a change of garments, a renewal*)
- <sup>15</sup> You will call and I will answer you;  
you will long for the creature your hands have made.

- <sup>Job: 19: 25</sup> I know that my redeemer lives,  
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.  
<sup>26</sup> And after my skin (basar) has been destroyed,  
yet in my flesh (basar) I will see God;  
<sup>27</sup> I myself will see him  
with my own eyes—I, and not another.  
How my heart yearns within me!

- Because sometimes people forgot or downplayed, they knew....

### Saul and David

- **Saul, just before his death 1 Samuel 28**
- Calling up Samuel, who tells him that he and his sons would be with him, Samuel after his death the next day
- Side note this passage is significant for those who die by suicide—they are not abandoned by God
- **David's child who died**
- <sup>2 Sam 12:21</sup> His attendants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"
- <sup>22</sup> He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me and let the child live.' <sup>23</sup> But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

### Psalms—many passages

- In contrast to the death of the wicked:

- Ps. 49:15 But God will redeem me from the realm of the dead;  
he will surely take me to himself.
- Again, in contrast to the wicked who often seem to do so well in life
- Ps. 73 Yet I am always with you;  
you hold me by my right hand.  
<sup>24</sup> You guide me with your counsel,  
and afterward you will take me into glory.  
<sup>25</sup> Whom have I in heaven but you?  
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.  
<sup>26</sup> My flesh and my heart may fail,  
but God is the strength of my heart  
and my portion forever.

### More in Psalms

- Ps. 15: 5 Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup;  
you make my lot secure.  
<sup>6</sup> The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places;  
surely I have a delightful inheritance.  
<sup>7</sup> I will praise the Lord, who counsels me;  
even at night my heart instructs me.  
<sup>8</sup> I keep my eyes always on the Lord.  
With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.
- <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices;  
my body also will rest secure,  
<sup>10</sup> because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead,  
nor will you let your faithful one see decay.  
<sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life;  
you will fill me with joy in your presence,  
with eternal pleasures at your right hand.
- Ps 23
- The Lord is my shepherd.....though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil.....and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

### Isaiah's testimony (written 739 and 681 B.C)

- Isa: 25:7-8 On this mountain he will destroy  
the shroud that enfolds all peoples,  
the sheet that covers all nations;  
<sup>8</sup> he will swallow up death forever.  
The Sovereign Lord will wipe away the tears  
from all faces;  
he will remove his people's disgrace  
from all the earth.  
The Lord has spoken.
- Isa. 26:19 But your dead will live, Lord;  
their bodies will rise—  
let those who dwell in the dust  
wake up and shout for joy—

your dew is like the dew of the morning;  
the earth will give birth to her dead.

### Daniel

- Daniel 12:2 Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. <sup>3</sup>Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.
- The true path to “stardom”

### Some final thoughts, totally subjective

- Beyond the obvious message of the text if only read.....It only makes sense
- God created people—and in paradise walked with them.
- But sin broke that created close relationship.
- But not God’s love.
- And that love is often described as “an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3)
- You’ll see that love demonstrated again and again as we go through the Bible—in the Old Testament as well as the New. (side comment, one more misconception about the OT, that God is an angry God in it—again can only be said by people who have not read it, as you will discover).
- In the end of humanities story:
- “A new heaven and a new earth,” . . . . . <sup>3</sup>And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. <sup>4</sup>‘He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death’ or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”—once again our God walking among and with his people.
- The story hasn’t changed from the Old Testament stories of Enoch, David, Daniel and many others to the New Testament thief on the cross who Jesus promised, “today” would be with him in Paradise.
- For some reason, our Creator loves us and wants to be with us forever.
- John 3:16 sums it up: For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.
- Eternal, real, physical and bodily resurrected LIFE for people in the Old Testament, New Testament, and for all of us who trust him.
- Once again, I cannot understand it, but am thankful for it and praying for any of you who might be listening and who by any chance might not know the astounding, eternal, undeserved love of God that you would open your heart to him and come to

walk with him in life, through death and forever.

### • Questions

- Go around the group and share what is a favorite movie or current TV show of yours.
- Had you thought about or heard the idea that people in the Old Testament didn’t believe in life after death?
- Where did you get that idea?
- Why is it that some scholars believe it?
- What does the Bible actually say about it?
- How can what OT people believed about life after death comfort us today?