

Life after Death—God’s gift or man’s wishful thinking?

How the Old Testament answers this important question

Your Notes

Why ask this question?

- Reality is that life isn’t easy and contrary to what some say, becoming a Christian does not mean you will be 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 know the New Testament is very clear about a belief in life after death after the resurrection of Jesus.
- But, what about in the Old Testament?
- Some say that people back then didn’t believe in a real life after death at that time.
- They say people only had a 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.

When I heard that, it deeply disturbed me....

- One of my core beliefs in my personal pilgrimage to an assurance of Jesus as Savior and the truth of the Bible to tell me about it, was the belief that if something is true, ***it should be true for all time.***
- What I learned about the history of the Bible verified that. Please take time to listen to the podcasts and look the videos and other material on this topic at www.bible805.com, for a detailed exploration of why we can trust the truth of the Bible.
- So, when I heard the claim: ***“People in the Old Testament really didn’t believe in life after death.”***

I was upset 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, for example the Old Testament prophesied about the Messiah, but we don’t personally meet the Messiah, Jesus, until the New Testament.
- It seemed to me that the core beliefs, for something as important as bodily resurrection that this truth ought to be clearly taught from the first to the last of the Bible.
- My conclusion after extensive study is that the Bible does clearly teach this truth from first to last.

Not only is truth consistent, but so are false beliefs

- Our situation today is 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. ³⁰ At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. ³¹ But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, ³² ‘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
- In saying this Jesus affirmed the resurrection, going back to the founder of the Jewish faith, Abraham to prove it.

Why did the Sadducees believe this?

- The common scholarly consensus is that they did not believe in the Resurrection because they only accepted the first 5 books of the Bible, the Torah.
- Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy
- Some go on to say that these books don’t teach there is a resurrection from the dead.
- One obvious example is the story of Enoch who “walked with God” and one day God simply took him to be with Him, somehow they ignore that passage.

Their behavior determined their theology

- While we can’t judge hearts, their behavior (of the Sadducees) seemed to determine their theology.
- While a belief in life after death can be comforting and hopeful, there is also the reality of accountability if we know we will face God one day and be judged for what we did in this life.
- If you don’t believe in that, if you believe this life is all there is, you will most likely live very differently than if you believe you will give an account one day for how you live.
- And that is precisely what we see in the Sadducees who were known for their wealth, power, and political connections, not for the God-centered or caring-for-others actions of their lives.

Regardless of the source of their beliefs

- If it was to justify their lifestyle or simply what they accepted because it was what their fellow Sadducees believed—
- A denial of life after death is what they believed and held to.
- Jesus very clearly told them they were wrong because they didn’t base their beliefs on the clear teaching of scripture.
- It’s the same with people today.

Where incorrect beliefs come from

Those who do not believe that the Old Testament clearly affirms the resurrection today, regardless of lifestyle reasons, seem to come to this view from these sources:

- Unexamined acceptance of a faulty scholarly view based on non-canonical texts (not the Bible) that are disproved by well-respected Biblical scholars who support the view of extensive Biblical documentation of an OT view of life after death.
- ***Most important of all, simply not reading the original, declarative,***

and definitive documents about this issue, in the Old Testament itself.

- As Jesus said, then and now they don't know the scriptures—and because of that will come to incorrect conclusions.
- Like many things we've studied we won't spend our time in this lesson tracking down all the incorrect beliefs and why they are false, we'll look at the simple reality of the extensive teaching on life after death that we see in the Old Testament and so, let's get started on that!

What the Old Testament says about the belief in life after death

- What follows is a selection of verses, as there are many, many more, but I selected ones spanning much of the history of the Old Testament.
- We will start with Job, arguably the earliest written book in the Bible (see the lessons on ***“Genesis and Job, answers to the big questions of life”*** for documentation on the dating of Job).
- We will then go through Psalms and 2 prophets, Isaiah who lived before the Babylonian captivity, and then Daniel who lived during and slightly after it.
- Again, though much more could be quoted, this is a good representative collection of quotes spanning most of Old Testament history.

Beginning with Job, prior to 1400 BC

- This is one of the most familiar passages on life after death in the Old Testament; it is also most likely one of the earliest.
- It is familiar because many have heard the refrain from the Messiah.
- *I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand on the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God.*
Job 19:25-27
- The passage is wonderful as it is, but let's look at it more closely.

Beyond the obvious belief of the statement

What I found as I dug into the Hebrew of the text, it was even more exciting than I anticipated. Here is the verse in context, with a focus on one Hebrew word, “basar”:

Job: 19: 25 I know that my redeemer lives,
and that in the end he will stand on the earth.

²⁶ And after my skin (*ôr*) has been destroyed,
yet in my flesh (*basar*) I will see God;

²⁷ I myself will see him
with my own eyes—I, and not another.
How my heart yearns within me! Job 19:25-27

- **Hebrew word for skin (*ôr*) means precisely the same as the English word, the living skin of a living being.** In the next verse “in my flesh” Job doesn't suddenly become a ghost because he uses the word “*basar*” and here is the expanded definition from **Gesenius' Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon** goes on: *“the exterior skin, and metaphorically the human race....used of the flesh of the living body...the whole body.”*
- They are similar words with the same meaning—living and after death—alive with skin on.
- Here is another use of “*basar*” is the same word used in Gen 2:23, where Adam says, “And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh (*basar*) of my flesh (*basar*): she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man.
- **Job uses the same word “basar” after death to describe his existence.**

- This is no vague, ill-formed view of the afterlife, no hazy, ghostly existence, but a life as tangible and real as his life is now, where Job affirms he will see his God in HIS FLESH.

One more from Job

- ^{Job 14:14} **If someone dies, will they live again?**

All the days of my hard service

I will wait for my renewal (chaliyphah) to come.

- Renewal is the Hebrew word *chaliyphah*—meaning a change of garments.
- It reminded me of Apostle Paul, 2 Cor. 5:1-2 (NLT) *For we know that when this tent we live in now is taken down—when we die and leave these bodies—we will have wonderful new bodies in heaven, homes that will be ours forevermore, made for us by God himself and not by human hands. How weary we grow of our present bodies. That is why we look forward eagerly to the day when we shall have heavenly bodies that we shall put on like new clothes.*
- In both, we see a consistent belief of God's people throughout the Biblical record not of death as an extinction, but of as "change of garments" in Job and a "putting on of new clothes" in Paul's terms, in which the soul will reside forever.
- Back to the Old Testament....

Saul and David

- **Moving along in biblical history, close to 1,000 BC**
- **Just before his death, in 1 Samuel 28** Saul sins by calling up Samuel who had died and Samuel tells him that he, Saul and his and his sons would be with him, Samuel, after Saul's death the next day—a clear statement of shared belief of life after death.
- The battle went badly, Saul's sons were killed and rather than be captured, Saul falls on his sword and commits suicide.
- In addition to affirming life after death, this passage is significant for those who die by suicide—they are not abandoned by God—Samuel told Saul that after his suicide he would be where he was—with God.
- Also, this passage is reassuring for those who do not die well, who die in despair and sin—they will be with God.

As C.S. Lewis said.....

- ***"We shall of course be very muddy and tattered children by the time we reach home. But the bathrooms are all ready, the towels put out, and the clean clothes in the airing board."***
- No matter how we leave, we will be welcomed home.

Later, when David's child with Bathsheba died

- ^{2 Sam 12:21} 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!"
- ²² He (David) 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.' ²³ 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."
- David is very clear in his belief in life after death.
- Here also an assurance that infants too young to make a personal decision to follow Jesus have safely gone home to heaven.

In Psalms—many passages

- That affirm God as our guide in life and death.
- Ps. 73 (Psalm of Asaph)
- ²³*Yet I am always with you;
you hold me by my right hand.*
²⁴***You guide me with your counsel,
and afterward you will take me into glory.***
²⁵*Whom have I in heaven but you?
And earth has nothing I desire besides you.*
²⁶*My flesh and my heart may fail,
but God is the strength of my heart
and my portion forever.*

More in Psalms

- In contrast to the death of the wicked:
- Ps. 49:15 (sons of Korah)
***But God will redeem me from the power of death;
for he will receive me.***

Psalm 23, some selected verses

- *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.*
- Wonderful assurance not only that we will get through terrifying times, but that ultimately, we will be with our God forever.

An important note on the previous Psalms

- These various passages in Psalms by various authors (Sons of Korah, Asaph), show that a belief in life after death was not solely the belief of one person, David, who was a man after God's own heart.
- We tend to think of Psalms as private, devotional material and that can be true, but historically they were more.
- These groups (sons of Korah) and leader (Asaph) were leaders of public worship and the songs reflective of the beliefs of God's people worth celebrating in public worship.
- It was not just the view of a few super-godly people that there was life after death, but of the community of Israel, sung and celebrated together.

Now from a later prophet—Isaiah's testimony (written between 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;
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.*
- The book of Isaiah has many, many more passages about life after death and the coming eternal kingdom of God. Read it and be encouraged.

Daniel, one of first captives taken in the Babylonian captivity in 605 BC

- He lived to see the return of the people to Israel

- *Side note: the biblical story of Daniel starts when he was a teenager and continues until he was mostly likely in his mid-80s. The story of Daniel in the lion's den happened when he was in his early 80s—a reminder that at any age God can challenge us and use us for his purposes.*
- Near the end of his life, he prophesized about the end times and as part of that states:
- Daniel 12:2 *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. ³ 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”

Based on the written record, “the Scriptures” Jesus referred to

- The assurance of life after death, of conscious, physical resurrection is a consistent and clear message of the Old Testament if you read it.
- The consistency of this belief makes sense when we look at the overall biblical narrative that started when God created people to live forever and a paradise to walk with them.
- But sin broke that created close relationship.
- But it did not break God's love, often described as “an everlasting love” (Jer. 31:3).
- You'll see that love demonstrated again and if you read through the Bible—in the Old Testament as well as the New Testament wherein God's love was fully demonstrated with Jesus' death on the cross and resurrection.
- And because of that—not only are we resurrected, but....

In the end of humanity's story, we find

- *“A new heaven and a new earth,” ³ 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. ⁴ ‘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 (Rev. 21:1-3).”*
- Once again, our God walking among and with his people.
- The story hasn't changed from the Old Testament stories of Job, 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, (the Bible calls it Grace but that is a concept almost impossible to wrap our minds around) our Creator loves us and wants to be with us forever.

We are not a throwaway creation

- The God who created us went to extraordinary efforts to redeem us from the consequence of walking away from Him—from eternal death.
- 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.*
- God gives eternal, real, physical and bodily resurrected LIFE for people in the Old Testament, New Testament, and for all of us who trust Jesus as Savior.
- We have the assurance that we will not be blotted out or condemned to a vague ghostly wandering after this life, but that once again we will walk with our God forever.

DISCUSSION GUIDE for

Life after Death—God's Gift or Man's Wishful Thinking?

Brief Lesson Summary

This lesson demonstrates that the Old Testament consistently teaches the reality of life after death and bodily resurrection. Beginning with Job and continuing through Samuel, David, the Psalms, Isaiah, and Daniel, the lesson shows that God's people looked forward to a real future with Him. Jesus affirmed these Scriptures when He corrected the Sadducees, and the lesson concludes that the hope of eternal life is a consistent message from Genesis to Revelation through God's unchanging character and the saving work of Jesus Christ.

Ice-breaker Question

What has most influenced your understanding of what happens after death?

Discussion Questions for a Group; Journal Questions for Individual Study

1. Why does the author believe it is important that the Bible teaches the same truth about life after death from the Old Testament through the New Testament?
2. Jesus told the Sadducees they did not know the Bible or the power of God. What lessons can we learn from His response?
3. Which Old Testament example in this lesson—Job, Saul and Samuel, David, the Psalms, Isaiah, or Daniel—most strengthens your confidence in the reality of eternal life? Explain why.
4. How does believing that we will one day stand before God affect the way we make decisions and live today?
5. What comfort do you find in the lesson's emphasis that God welcomes His people home and that death is not the end for those who trust Him?

6. After studying this lesson, how would you answer someone who says the Old Testament does not teach bodily resurrection or eternal life?

Life Application Suggestions, consider and respond

- Read one of the Old Testament passages from this lesson again and thank God for His unchanging promises.
- Encourage someone who is grieving by sharing one of the passages that gives hope beyond death.
- Evaluate whether your daily priorities reflect the reality that this life is not all there is.
- Pray for opportunities to explain the hope of eternal life through Jesus Christ using the Old Testament as well as the New Testament.

Prayer Focus

Thank God for His unchanging truth and His promise of eternal life. Pray for confidence in His Word, courage to share this hope with others, and a growing desire to live each day in light of eternity.