

The State Of The Dead

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Dear Members of the Endtime Issues Forum:

During the last few days several members of our forum in Korea, Philippines, Japan, Australia, and other parts of the world where the Sabbath arrives a day earlier, have kindly requested that I post my Sabbath School comments before Friday so that they can receive them in time for the preparation of the lesson. In consideration of these legitimate requests I will attempt to post my newsletter earlier in the week.

In view of the importance of this week Sabbath School lesson on the "Condition in Death" (May 15-21), I decided to devote this newsletter exclusively to this important subject. It was my intent to share with you some encouraging experiences about the rediscovery of the Sabbath by church leaders and religious organizations outside North America, as well as to post Part II of the "Endtime Signs of Opposition to God,"-a Bible study we began last week. I decided to postpone the treatment of these topics in order to devote more space to the lesson of this week.

The challenge I am facing is to compress in about 60K a balanced presentation of the Biblical view of death and of the state of the dead. To the analysis of this subject I devoted two chapters (65 pages=200K) of my book IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? For the sake of brevity I will select only the highlights of these two chapters, referring interested readers to the book for further information.

A NOTE OF THANKS

May I take this opportunity to express my heartfelt gratitude to the many of you who have offered IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? to your Sabbath School Classes at 50% discount, that is, for only \$7.50, postpaid, instead of the regular price of \$15.00, for a minimum order of 20 copies. During the past few weeks we have shipped several thousand copies of this timely book and the responses have been very gratifying.

Over 50 scholars of different denominations have already favorably reviewed IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? For example, Prof. Ray Anderson, Dean of the School of Theology at Fuller Theological Seminary, was so impressed by the book that he recommended to his students and invited me to serve as an external examiner for a doctoral dissertation dealing with Biblical anthropology.

Pastor Lonnie Melashenko, Director-Speaker of the Voice of Prophecy, offered IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? nationwide to all the people linked via satellite to Elder Kenneth Cox's crusade HOPE BEYOND 2000. The response was incredible. Over 3500 persons requested a copy. Lonnie told me that the Voice of Prophecy never received so many orders for any book they offered. It is evident that there are many sincere people who are sincerely seeking to know what God has revealed about our human nature and destiny.

In his review of the book, Elder Melashenko wrote: "IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? drops a 'smart bomb' on the devil's munitions dump of aging scud missiles. The book takes aim at evil's masterstroke and Scripturally unmasks Satan's 'old lie' (Gen 3:4) that has been masqueraded as truth ever since Eve stopped to have lunch at the Devil's fruitstand. I highly recommend this book as a handy reference tool. It is not easy reading, but it is well worth the effort. If he is right (and I believe he is) there is an

awful lot at stake both for conscientious Christians and for serious scholars within and without the Christian church."

What inspired me to write this book is the unprecedented fulfillment we are witnessing today of the warning penned by Ellen White over a century ago: "Through the two great errors, the immortality of the soul and Sunday sacredness, Satan will bring the people under his deceptions" (Great Controversy, p. 588). Having spent many years exposing the deception of Sunday sacredness through lectures and publications, I felt the time had come to unmask the equally important popular deception that human beings possess an immortal soul that lives on forever.

This belief in disembodied life after death is spreading today like wild fire around the world, due to such factors as the traditional dualistic view of human nature, the polished image of mediums and psychics, the sophisticated "scientific" research into near-death experiences, and the popular New Age channeling craze with the alleged spirits of the past. The latter is successfully promoted by people like actress Shirley Maclaine. The outcome is that the vast majority of people have come to believe Satan's lie that no matter what they do, they "shall not die" (Gen 3:4) but become like gods by living for ever. This lie has done incalculable damage to Christian beliefs and practices.

As Adventists we cannot afford to passively watch the spreading of the deception of innate immortality that has fostered such heresies as spiritualism, communication with the spirits of the dead, praying for the dead, the intercession of the saints, purgatory, eternal hellfire, the worship of Mary, indulgences, etc. All of these heretical beliefs fall automatically like dominos when we expose the fallacies of conscious life between death and resurrection.

To meet this challenge I devoted most of 1997 to a painstaking investigation of the Biblical teaching on human nature and destiny. My goal in writing IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? has been not only to unmask with compelling Biblical reasoning the popular deception of innate immortality, but also to challenge Christians of all persuasions to recover the Biblical wholistic view of human nature and destiny. The Bible teaches that the body and soul are not detachable components that come apart at death, but an indissoluble unity, created, redeemed, and ultimately restored by God.

SABBATH SCHOOL LESSON: "CONDITION IN DEATH" **May 15-21, 1999**

Our study of the human condition in death is divided in three parts. The first part examines the Biblical understanding of the nature of death. Does the Bible teach that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body? Or, does the Bible teach that death is the termination of life for the whole person, body and soul? In other words, is death according to the Bible the cessation of life for the whole person or the transition to a new form of life for the immortal component of our being?

The second and third parts continues the investigation of the nature of death by focusing on the condition of the dead during the period between death and the resurrection, commonly known as "the intermediate state." The fundamental question we pursue is: Do the dead sleep in an unconscious state until the resurrection morning? Or, Is the soul of the saved experiencing the bliss of paradise, while that of the unsaved writhing in the torment of hell? To find an answer to these questions we examine first the state of the dead in the Old Testament (part 2) and then the state of the dead in the New Testament (part 3).

PART I: THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF DEATH

Throughout human history, people have refused to accept the finality that death brings to life. Death brings an unacceptable, sudden interruption to one's work, plans, and relationships. Though the inscription on many tomb stones often reads "Rest in Peace," the truth of the matter is that most people do not welcome the peaceful rest of the

grave. They would rather be alive and productive. Thus, it is not surprising that the subject of death and afterlife always has been a matter of intense concern and speculation. After all, the death rate is still one per person. Each of us at the appointed time will face the grim reality of death.

Today we live in a death-denying culture. People live as if death did not exist. Doctors and hospital personnel generally think that death is something that should not happen. Regardless of how miserable people may feel, they usually respond to "How are you?" with an artificial smile, saying: "Just fine." When we can no longer maintain the facade, we begin to wonder, "What is going to happen to me now?"

Even at the end of life, we tend to deny the reality of death by embalming the dead and using cosmetics to restore the corpse to a natural, healthy look. We dress the dead in suits and gowns as if they were going to a party instead of returning to dust. A special mourning color that has been prevalent in most countries, such as white or black, is gradually disappearing, because people do not want to believe that death is an intrusion that terminates their life.

Sin and Death. To understand the Biblical view of death, we need to go back to the account of creation where death is presented, not as a natural process willed by God, but as something unnatural opposed to God. The Genesis narrative teaches us that death came into the world as a result of sin. God commanded Adam not to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and added the warning: "In the day that you eat of it you shall die" (Gen 2:17). The fact that Adam and Eve did not die on the day of their transgression has led some to conclude that human beings do not actually die because they have a conscious soul that survives the death of the body.

This figurative interpretation can hardly be supported by the text, which, literally translated, reads: "dying you shall die." What God simply meant is that on the day they disobeyed, the dying process would begin. From a state in which it was possible for them not to die (conditional immortality), they passed into a state in which it was impossible for them not to die (unconditional mortality). Prior to the Fall the assurance of immortality was vouchsafed by the tree of life. After the Fall, Adam and Eve no longer had access to the tree of life (Gen 3:22-23) and, consequently, began experiencing the reality of the dying process. In the prophetic vision of the New Earth, the tree of life is found on both sides of the river as a symbol of the gift of eternal life bestowed upon the redeemed (Rev 21:2).

The divine pronouncement found in Genesis 2:17 places a clear connection between human death and the transgression of God's commandment. Thus, life and death in the Bible have religious and ethical significance because they are dependent upon human obedience or disobedience to God. This is a fundamental teaching of the Bible, namely, that death came into this world as a result of human disobedience (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21). This does not diminish the responsibility of the individual for his participation in sin (Ez 18:4, 20). The Bible, however, makes a distinction between the first death, which every human being experiences as a result of Adam's sin (Rom 5:12; 1 Cor 15:21), and the second death experienced after the resurrection (Rev 20:6) as the wages for sins personally committed (Rom 6:23).

Death as the Separation of the Soul from the Body. A major question we need to address at this point is the Biblical view of the nature of death. To be specific: Is death the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body, so that when the body dies the soul lives on? Or, is death the cessation of existence of the whole person, body and soul?

Historically, Christians have been taught that death is the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body, so that the soul survives the body in a disembodied state. For example, the newly released *Catechism of the Catholic Church* states: "By death the soul is separated from the body, but in the resurrection God will give incorruptible life to our body, transformed by reunion with our soul." Augustus Strong

defines death in similar terms in his well-known *Systematic Theology*: "Physical death is the separation of the soul from the body. We distinguish it from spiritual death, or the separation of the soul from God."

This historical view of death as the separation of the soul from the body has come under a massive attack by many modern scholars. A few examples suffice to illustrate this point. Lutheran theologian Paul Althaus writes: "Death is more than a departure of the soul from the body. The person, body and soul, is involved in death. . . . The Christian faith knows nothing about an immortality of the personality. . . . It knows only an awakening from real death through the power of God. There is existence after death only by an awakening of the resurrection of the whole person."

Althaus argues that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul does not do justice to the seriousness of death, since the soul passes through death unscathed. Moreover, the notion that a person can be totally happy and blessed without the body denies the significance of the body and empties the resurrection of its meaning. If believers are already blessed in heaven and the wicked are already tormented in hell, why is the final judgment still necessary? Althaus concludes that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul rips apart what belongs together: the body and the soul, the destiny of the individual and that of the world.

In his monograph *Life after Death*, Taito Kantonen makes this pointed statement: "The Christian view of death is in full accord with the view of natural science as far as the latter goes. When we die we are really dead. Our hopes and desires cannot change this fact. Man does not differ from the rest of creation by having a soul that cannot die."

Even the liberal *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, in its article on death explicitly states: "The 'departure' of the nephesh [soul] must be viewed as a figure of speech, for it does not continue to exist independently of the body, but dies with it (Num 31:19; Jud 16:30; Ez 13:19). No Biblical text authorizes the statement that the 'soul' is separated from the body at the moment of death. The *ruach* 'spirit' which makes man a living being (cf. Gen 2:7), and which he loses at death, is not, properly speaking, an anthropological reality, but a gift of God which returns to him at the time of death (Eccl 12:7)."

This challenge of modern scholarship to the traditional view of death as the separation of the soul from the body has been long overdue. It is hard to believe that for most of its history, Christianity by and large has held to a view of human death and destiny which has been largely influenced by Greek thought, rather than by the teachings of Scripture. What is even more surprising is that no amount of Biblical scholarship will change the traditional belief held by most churches on the intermediate state. The reason is simple. While individual scholars can and will change their doctrinal views without suffering devastating consequences, the same is not true for well-established churches.

A church that introduces radical changes in its historical doctrinal beliefs undermines the faith of its members and thus the stability of the institution. A case in point is the Worldwide Church of God which lost over half of its members when doctrinal changes were introduced by its leaders early in 1995. The high cost of rectifying denominational religious beliefs should not deter Bible-believing Christians who are committed, not to preserve traditional beliefs for tradition's sake, but to constantly seek for a fuller understanding of the teachings of Word of God on issues relevant to their lives.

Death as Cessation of Life. When we search the Bible for a description of the nature of death, we find many clear statements that need little or no interpretation. In the first place, Scripture describes death as a return to the elements from which man originally was made. In pronouncing sentence upon Adam after his disobedience, God said: "In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for . . . you are dust and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). This graphic statement tells us that death is not the separation of the soul from the body, but the termination of one's life, which

results in the decay and decomposition of the body. "Since man is created of perishable matter, his natural condition is mortality (Gen 3:19)."

A study of the words "to die," "death," and "dead" in Hebrew and Greek reveals that death is perceived in the Bible as the deprivation or cessation of life. The ordinary Hebrew word meaning "to die" is *muth*, which occurs in the Old Testament over 800 times. In the vast majority of cases, *muth* is used in the simple sense of the death of men and animals. There is no hint in its usage of any distinction between the two. A clear example is found in Ecclesiastes 3:19, which says: "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other."

More revealing is the use of the Hebrew noun *maveth* which is used about 150 times and is generally translated "death." From the use of *maveth* in the Old Testament, we learn three important things about the nature of death.

First, there is no remembrance of the Lord in death: "For in death [*maveth*] there is no remembrance of thee; in *Sheol* who can give thee praise" (Ps 6:5). The reason for no remembrance in death is simply because the thinking process stops when the body with its brain dies. "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that day his thoughts perish" (Ps 146:4). Since at death the "thoughts perish," it is evident there is no conscious soul that survives the death of the body.

Second, no praise of God is possible in death or in the grave. "What profit is there in my death [*maveth*], if I go down to the Pit? Will the dust praise thee? Will it tell of thy faithfulness?" (Ps 30:9). By comparing death with dust, the Psalmist clearly shows that there is no consciousness in death because dust cannot think. What a contrast with the "noisy" popular vision of the afterlife where the saints praise God in Heaven and the wicked cry in agony in Hell!

Third, death is described as a "sleep." "Consider and answer me, O Lord my God; lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death" (Ps 13:3). This characterization of death as "sleep" occurs frequently in the Old and New Testaments because it fittingly represents the state of unconsciousness in death. Shortly we examine the significance of the "sleep" metaphor for understanding the nature of death.

In several places, *maveth* [death] is used with reference to the second death. "As I live, says the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live" (Ez 33:11; cf. 18:23, 32). Here "the death of the wicked" is evidently not the natural death that every person experiences, but the death inflicted by God at the End on impenitent sinners. None of the literal descriptions or figurative references to death in the Old Testament suggests the conscious survival of the soul or spirit apart from the body. Death is the cessation of life for the total person.

New Testament References to Death. The New Testament references to "death," a term rendered by the Greek *thanatos*, are not as informative regarding the nature of death as those found in the Old Testament. The reason is partly due to the fact that in the Old Testament many of the references to death are found in the poetic or wisdom books like Psalms, Job, and Ecclesiastes. This kind of literature is absent in the New Testament. More important is the fact that death is seen in the New Testament from the perspective of Christ's victory over death. This is a dominant theme in the New Testament which conditions the Christian view of death.

Through His victory over death, Christ has neutralized the sting of death (1Cor 15:55); He has abolished death (2 Tim 1:10); He has overcome the devil who had power over death (Heb 2:14). The believer can face physical death with the confidence that Christ has swallowed up death in victory and will awaken the sleeping saints at His coming (1 Cor 15:51-56).

Death as Sleep. In both the Old and New Testaments, death is often described as "sleep." Before attempting to explain the reason for the Biblical use of the metaphor of

"sleep" for death, let us look at a few examples. In the Old Testament, three Hebrew words meaning "sleep" are used to describe death.

The most common word, *shachav*, is used in the frequently occurring expression so-and-so "slept with his fathers" (Gen 28:11; Deut 31:16; 2 Sam 7:12; 1 Kings 2:10). Beginning with its initial application to Moses ("Behold, you are about to sleep with your fathers" - Deut 31:16), and then to David ("Thou shalt sleep with thy fathers" - 2 Sam 7:12, KJV), and Job ("Now I shall sleep in the dust" - Job 7:21, KJV), we find this beautiful euphemism for death running like an unbroken thread all through the Old and New Testaments, ending with Peter's statement that "the fathers fell asleep" (2 Pet 3:4).

Death is described as sleep in the New Testament more frequently than in the Old. The reason may be that the hope of the resurrection, which is clarified and strengthened by Christ's resurrection, gives new meaning to the sleep of death from which believers will awaken at Christ's coming. As Christ slept in the tomb prior to His resurrection, so believers sleep in the grave while awaiting their resurrection.

Speaking figuratively of Lazarus' death, Jesus said: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep [*kekoimetai*], but I go to awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11). When Jesus perceived that He was misunderstood, He "told them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead'" (John 11:14). Then Jesus hastened to reassure Martha: "Your brother will rise again" (John 11:23).

This episode is significant, first of all, because Jesus plainly describes death as "sleep" from which the dead will awaken at the sound of His voice. Lazarus' condition in death was similar to a sleep from which one awakens. Christ said: "I go to awake him out of sleep" (John 11:11). The Lord carried out His promise by going to the tomb to awaken Lazarus by calling: "'Lazarus, come out.' And the dead man came out" (John 11:43-44).

Lazarus' experience is significant because he spent four days in the grave. This was not a near-death experience, but a real death experience. If, as popularly believed, the soul at death leaves the body and goes to heaven, then Lazarus would have had an amazing after-life experience to share about the four days he would have spent in paradise. The religious leaders and the people would have done all in their power to elicit from Lazarus as much information as possible about the after-life, especially since this topic was hotly debated among the Sadducees and Pharisees (Matt 22:23, 28; Mark 12:18, 23; Luke 20:27, 33).

But Lazarus had nothing to share about life after death, because during the four days he spent in the tomb he slept the unconscious sleep of death. What is true of Lazarus is also true of six other persons who were raised from the dead: The widow's son (1 Kings 17:17-24); the Shunammite's son (2 Kings 4:18-37); the widow's son at Nain (Luke 7:11-15); the daughter of Jairus (Luke 8:41, 42, 49-56); Tabitha (Acts 9:36-41); and Eutychus (Acts 20:9-12). Each of these persons came out of death as if it were out of a profound sleep, with the same feeling and individuality, but with no afterlife experience to share.

There are no indications that the soul of Lazarus, or of the other six persons raised from the dead, had gone to heaven. None of them had a "heavenly experience" to share. The reason being that none of them had ascended to heaven. This is confirmed by Peter's reference to David in his speech on the day of Pentecost: "Brethren, I may say to you confidently of the patriarch David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is still with us to this day" (Acts 2:29). Some could argue that what was in the grave was David's body, not his soul which had gone to heaven. But this interpretation is negated by Peter's explicit words: "For David did not ascend into the heavens" (Acts 2:34). The Knox translation renders it, "David never went up to heaven."

Paul and the Sleeping Saints. In the two great chapters on the resurrection in 1 Thessalonians 4 and 1 Corinthians 15, Paul repeatedly speaks of those who have fallen "asleep" in Christ (1 Thess 4:13, 14, 15; 1 Cor 15:6, 18, 20). In writing to the

Thessalonians, who were grieving over their loved ones who had fallen asleep before experiencing the coming of Christ, Paul reassures them that as God raised Jesus from the dead, so He will through Christ "bring with him those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess 4:14). Some maintain that Paul is here speaking of disembodied souls, which allegedly ascended to heaven at death and which will return with Christ when He descends to this earth at His return.

This interpretation ignores three major things. First, the Bible nowhere teaches that the soul at death ascends to heaven. Second, in the context, Paul is not speaking of immortal souls but of "those who are asleep" (1 Thess 4:13; cf. v. 14) and of "the dead in Christ" (1 Thess 4:16). "The dead in Christ will rise first" from their graves (1 Thess 4:16) and will not descend from heaven. There is no hint that the bodies rise from the graves and the souls descend from heaven to be reunited with the bodies. Such a dualistic notion is foreign to the Bible.

Third, if Paul really believed that "the dead in Christ" were not really dead in the grave but alive in heaven as disembodied souls, he would have capitalized on their blissful condition in heaven to explain to the Thessalonians that their grieving was senseless. Why should they grieve for their loved ones if they were already enjoying the bliss of heaven? The reason Paul did not give such an encouragement is obviously because he knew that sleeping saints were not in heaven but in their graves.

This conclusion is supported by the assurance Paul gave to his readers that living Christians would not meet Christ at His coming before those who had fallen asleep. "We who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, shall not precede those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thess 4:15). The reason is that "the dead in Christ will rise first; then we who are alive, who are left, shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air" (1 Thess 4:16-17).

The fact that the living saints will meet with Christ at the same time as the sleeping saints indicates that the latter have not yet been united with Christ in heaven. If the souls of the sleeping saints were already enjoying fellowship with Christ in heaven and were to descend with Christ to earth at His second Advent, then obviously they would have an unmistakable priority over the living saints. But Paul clearly rejects this misconception because both sleeping and living believers are awaiting their longed-for union with the Savior; a union which both will experience at the same time on the day of Christ's coming. If believers met Christ in heaven at death, there would be no need for the Lord to return to this earth.

The Significance of the "Sleep" Metaphor. The popular use of the "sleep" metaphor to describe the state of the dead in Christ raises the question of its implications for the nature of death. Specifically, why is this metaphor used and what insights can we legitimately derive from it about the nature of death? There are three major reasons for the use of the "sleep" metaphor in the Bible.

First, there is a similarity between the "sleep" of the dead and the "sleep" of the living. Both are characterized by a condition of unconsciousness and inactivity which is interrupted by an awakening. Thus, the "sleep" metaphor fittingly represents the unconscious state of the dead and their awakening on the day of Christ's return.

A second reason for the use of the "sleep" metaphor is suggested by the fact that it is a hope-inspiring figure of speech to represent death. It implies the assurance of a later awakening. As a person goes to sleep at night in the hope of awakening in the morning, so the believer falls asleep in the Lord in the assurance of being awakened by Christ on resurrection morning. When we hear or say that a person is dead, we automatically think that there is no more hope of bringing him/her back to life. But when we say that a person is sleeping in the Lord, we express the hope for his or her restoration to life on the day of the resurrection.

A third reason for the use of the "sleep" metaphor is suggested by the fact that there is no consciousness of the elapse of time in sleep. Thus, the metaphor provides a fitting representation of the unconscious state of the deceased between death and resurrection. They have no awareness of the passing of time.

Summing up, the "sleep" metaphor used in the Bible implies a state of unconsciousness that will last until the awakening at the resurrection. It is worth noting that in 1 Corinthians 15 sixteen times Paul uses the verb *egeiro*, which literally means "to wake up" from sleep. The reiterated contrast between sleeping and awakening is impressive. The Bible uses the term "sleep" frequently because it enshrines a vital truth, namely, the dead who sleep in Christ are unconscious of any lapse of time until their resurrection. The believer who dies in Christ falls asleep and rests unconscious, until he awakes when Christ calls him back to life at His coming.

Conclusion. The traditional and popular belief that death is not the cessation of life for the whole person, but the separation of the immortal soul from the mortal body can be traced back to Satan's lie, "You shall not die" (Gen 3:4). This lie has lived on in different forms throughout human history until our time. Our only protection against the popular misconception of death is through a clear understanding of what the Bible teaches on the nature of death.

We have found that both the Old and New Testaments clearly teach that death is the extinction of life for the whole person. There is no remembrance or consciousness in death (Ps 8:5; 146:4; 30:9; 115:17; Ecc 9:5). There is no independent existence of the spirit or soul apart from the body. Death is the loss of the total being and not merely the loss of well-being. The whole person rests in the grave in a state of unconsciousness characterized in the Bible as "sleep." The "awakening" will take place at Christ's coming when He will call back to life the sleeping saints.

PART II: THE STATE OF THE DEAD IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

A major challenge to the conclusion that death in the Bible is the cessation of life for the whole person-comes from unwarranted interpretations given to two words used in the Bible to describe the dwelling place of the dead. The two words are **sheol** in the Old Testament and **hades** in the New Testament. These terms often are interpreted to represent the place where disembodied souls continue to exist after the death and the place of punishment of the ungodly (hell). Thus, it is imperative for us to study the Biblical meaning and usage of these two terms .

Translations and Interpretations of Sheol. The Hebrew word *sheol* occurs 65 times in the Old Testament and is translated variously as "grave," "hell," "pit," or "death." These variant translations make it difficult for the English reader to understand the basic meaning of sheol. For example, The King James Version (KJV) renders sheol "grave" 31 times, "hell" 31 times, and "pit" 3 times. This means that readers of the KJV are often led to believe that the Old Testament teaches the existence of hell where the wicked are tormented for their sins.

For example, in the KJV, Psalm 16:10 reads: "For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell." An uninformed reader will assume that the text means, "For thou wilt not leave my soul to be tormented in hell." Such a reading is an obvious misinterpretation of the text which simply says, as rendered in the RSV, "For thou does not give me up to *Sheol*," that is, the grave. The Psalmist here expresses confidence that God would not abandon him in the grave. In fact, this is the way the text is applied in Acts 2:27 to Christ, who was not left in the grave by the Father. The text has nothing to say about hell.

To avoid such misleading interpretations, the Revised Standard Version and The New American Standard Bible simply transliterate the Hebrew word into English letters as *sheol*. The New International Version usually translates it as "grave" (occasionally as "death"), with a footnote "*sheol*." This translation accurately reflects the basic meaning of sheol as the grave or, even better, the collective realm of the dead.

Different translations often reflect the different theological convictions of the translators. For example, the translators of the KJV believed that at death the righteous go to Heaven and the wicked to hell. Consequently, they translated *sheol* "grave" when referring to the righteous, whose bodies rested in the grave, and "hell" when referring to the wicked whose souls are supposedly tormented in hell.

The interpretation of *sheol* as the dwelling place of souls (rather than the resting place of the body in the grave) or the place of punishment for the wicked, known as hell, do not stand up under the light of the Biblical usage of *sheol*. The term denotes a place where the dead are at rest.

Sheol is located deep beneath the surface of the earth, because it is often mentioned in connection with heaven to denote the uttermost limits of the universe. *Sheol* is the deepest place in the universe, just as the heaven is the highest. Amos describes the inescapable wrath of God in these terms: "Though they dig into *Sheol*, from there shall my hand take them; though they climb up to heaven, from there I will bring them down" (Amos 9:2-3). Similarly, the Psalmist exclaims: "Whither shall I go from thy Spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, thou art there! If I make my bed in *Sheol*, thou art there!" (Ps 139:7-8; cf. Job 11:7-9).

Being situated beneath the earth, the dead reach *sheol* by "going down," a euphemism for being buried in the earth. Thus, when Jacob was informed of the death of his son Joseph, he said: "I shall go down to *Sheol* to my son mourning" (Gen 37:35). Perhaps the clearest example of the location of *sheol* beneath the earth is the account of the punishment of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who had revolted against the authority of Moses. "The ground under them split asunder; and the earth opened its mouth and swallowed them up, with their household and all the men that belonged to Korah and all their goods. So they and all that belonged to them went down alive to *Sheol*; and the earth closed over them" (Num 16:31-33). This episode clearly shows that the whole person, and not just the soul, goes down to *sheol*, to the realm of the dead.

The Condition of the Dead in *Sheol*. Since death is the cessation of life and vitality, the state of the dead in *sheol* is described in terms antithetical to the concept of life on earth. Life means vitality and activity; death means weakness and inactivity. This is true for all, the righteous and the wicked. "One fate comes to all, to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean" (Eccl 9:2). They all go to the same place, *sheol*, the realm of the dead.

The wise man offers a graphic description of the condition of the dead in *sheol*: "There is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in *Sheol*, to which you are going" (Eccl 9:10). It is evident that *sheol*, the realm of the dead, is the place of unconscious non-existence. "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward; but the memory of them is lost. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and they have no more for ever any share in all that is done under the sun" (Eccl 9:5-6). The main argument here is that death puts an abrupt end to all activity "under the sun," and what follows death is *sheol*, the realm of the dead where there is a state of inactivity, without knowledge or consciousness. Such a state is best described as "sleep."

The Dead Sleep in *Sheol* until the End. "A man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake, or be roused out of his sleep" (Job 14:12). "Till the heavens are no more" is possibly an allusion to the coming of the Lord at the end of time to resurrect the saints. In all his trials, Job never gave up his hope of seeing the Lord even after the decay of his body. "For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth; and after my skin is destroyed, this I know that in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!" (Job 19:25-27; NKJV).

In summation, the condition of the dead in sheol, the realm of the dead, is one of unconsciousness, inactivity, a rest or sleep that will continue until the day of the resurrection. None of the texts we have examined suggests that *sheol* is the place of punishment for the ungodly (hell) or a place of conscious existence for the souls or spirits of the dead. No souls are in *sheol* simply because in the Old Testament the soul does not survive the death of the body. As N. H. Snaith flatly states it: "A dead body, whether of man, or bird, or beast is without *nephesh* [soul]. In *sheol*, the abode of the dead, there is no *nephesh* [soul]."

The Medium of Endor. The preceding discussion of *sheol* provides a fitting background for discussing the only full description to be found in the Bible of communicating with a spirit in *sheol*. In brief, this is the story. When Saul failed to receive guidance for the future from God through the channels of dreams, Urim, and the prophets (1 Sam 28:6), he sought out in desperation a woman medium at Endor, to call up for him the spirit of the deceased Samuel (1 Sam 28:7).

Disguising himself to avoid recognition, Saul came to the woman by night and asked her to bring up the deceased prophet and to elicit information for him (1 Sam 28:8). When she demurred on the ground of the royal ban against necromancy (1 Sam 28:3), Saul swore that no harm would come to her and insisted that she bring up Samuel (1 Sam 28:9-10). She obeyed and said to Saul: "I see a god [elohim] coming up out of the earth" (1 Sam 28:13). She described to Saul what she saw, namely, an old man "wrapped in a robe" (1 Sam 28:14).

From the medium's description, Saul concluded that it was Samuel and proceeded to ask him what he should do in the face of impending defeat by the Philistines. The spirit, impersonating Samuel, first chided Saul for disquieting him when the Lord had departed from the king. Then he prophesied against Saul as from the Lord. Grimly, the spirit foretold Saul's doom: "Tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me" (1 Sam 28:19; 1 Chron 10:13-14). Then the spirit returned to where he had come from.

Many Christians find in this story one of the clearest Biblical proofs of the survival of the soul at death. The attempts to utilize the "ghostly" appearance of "Samuel" at the beck and call of a medium to prove the conscious existence of disembodied souls after death ignore five important considerations.

First, it ignores the definite teaching of Scripture on the nature of man and the nature of death which we have already examined thoroughly. The Biblical wholistic view of human nature envisages the cessation of life for the whole person at death and, thus precludes the conscious existence of disembodied souls.

Second, it ignores the solemn warning against consulting "familiar spirits" (Lev 19:31; Is 8:19), a transgression that was punished by death (Lev 20:6, 27). In fact, Saul himself died because "he was unfaithful to the Lord . . . and also consulted a medium, seeking guidance, and did not seek guidance from the Lord" (1 Chron 10:13-14). The reason the death penalty was inflicted for consulting "familiar spirits" is that these were "evil spirits," or fallen angels impersonating the dead. God hardly could have prescribed the death penalty for communicating with the spirits of deceased loved ones if such spirits existed and if such a communication were possible. There is no moral reason for God to outlaw on the pain of death, the human desire to communicate with deceased loved ones.

Third, such an interpretation assumes that the Lord would speak to Saul by a medium, a practice He had outlawed on the pain of death, after He had refused to communicate with Saul by legitimate means (1 Sam 28:6). A communication from Samuel, speaking as a prophet, indirectly would be a communication from God. Yet the Bible expressly states that the Lord refused to communicate with Saul (1 Sam 28:6).

Fourth, it ignores the fantastic difficulty of supposing that a spirit from the dead could appear as "an old man . . . wrapped in a robe" (1 Sam 28:14). If the spirits of the

dead were disembodied souls, they obviously would not need to be wrapped around with clothes.

Fifth, it ignores the implications of the grim prediction "Tomorrow you and your son shall be with me" (1 Sam 28:19). Where was this rendezvous to take place between the king and the simulator of Samuel? Was it in *sheol*? If that were true, it would mean that God's prophets and apostate kings share the same living quarters after death.

Reflections such as these give us reason to believe that the séance which occurred at Endor does not support in any way the notion of conscious existence for disembodied souls after death. It is evident that it was not the spirit of Samuel that communicated with Saul. Most likely, a demon impersonated the dead Samuel, as happens in many séances today.

The Scriptures reveal that Satan and his angels have the ability to change their appearance and to communicate with human beings (see Matt 4:1-11; 2 Cor 11:13,14). The story of the "ghostly" appearance of Samuel at Endor tells us very little about conscious existence after death, but it does reveal a great deal about the clever deceptions of Satan. It shows us that Satan has been very successful in promoting the lie, "You will not die," by using sophisticated means such as the impersonation of the dead by his evil spirits.

Conclusion. Our study of the Hebrew word for "the realm of the dead-*sheol*" shows that none of the texts we have examined suggests that *sheol* is the place of punishment for the ungodly (hell) or a place of conscious existence for the souls or spirits of the dead. The realm of the dead is one of unconsciousness, inactivity, and sleep that continues until the day of the resurrection.

PART III: THE STATE OF THE DEAD IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

The New Testament says very little about the state of the dead during the intermediate period between their falling asleep and their awakening on the day of the resurrection. Our major source of information are the 11 references to *hades* (which is the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol*) and 5 passages commonly cited in support of the belief in the conscious existence of the soul after death. The 5 passages are: (1) Luke 16:19-31, where we find the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus; (2) Luke 23:42-43, which reports the conversation between Jesus and the thief on the cross; (3) Philippians 1:23, where Paul speaks of his "desire to depart and be with Christ"; (4) 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, where Paul uses the imagery of the earthly/heavenly houses and of the unclothed/clothed conditions to express his desire to "be away from the body and at home with the Lord" (2 Cor 5:8); and (5) Revelation 6:9-11 which mentions the souls of the martyrs! under the altar crying to God to avenge their blood. All these passages are examined at length in IMMORTALITY OR RESURRECTION? but for the sake of brevity we will consider only the meaning of *Hades* and the parable of the rich Man and Lazarus.

The Meaning and Nature of *Hades*. The Greek word *hades* came into Biblical use when the translators of the Septuagint chose it to render the Hebrew *sheol*. The problem is that *hades* was used in the Greek world in a vastly different way than *sheol*. While *sheol* in the Old Testament is the realm of the dead, who are in an unconscious state, *hades* in Greek mythology is the underworld, where the conscious souls of the dead are divided in two major regions, one a place of torment and the other of blessedness.

This Greek conception of *hades* influenced Hellenistic Jews, during the intertestamental period, to adopt the belief in the immortality of the soul and the idea of a spatial separation in the underworld between the righteous and the godless. The souls of the righteous proceeded immediately after death to heavenly felicity, there to await the resurrection, while the souls of the godless went to a place of torment in *hades*. The popular acceptance of this scenario is reflected in the Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus to be examined shortly.

This view of hades as a place of torment for the wicked eventually entered into the Christian Church and influenced even Bible translators. It is noteworthy that the word *hades*, which occurs 11 times in the New Testament, is translated in the KJV 10 times as "hell" and 1 time as "grave." The RSV transliterates the word as "*Hades*." The translation of *hades* as "hell" is inaccurate and misleading, because, with the exception of Luke 16:23, the term refers to the grave or the realm of the dead, not to a place of punishment. The latter is designated as *gehenna*, a term which also occurs 11 times in the New Testament and is rightly translated "hell," since it refers to the lake of fire, the place of doom for the lost. *Hades*, on the other hand, is used in the New Testament as the standing equivalent of *sheol*, the realm of the dead or the grave.

Jesus and Hades. In the Gospels, Jesus refers to *hades* three times. In Matthew 11:23, where He upbraids Capernaum, saying: "And you, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades" (cf. Luke 10:15). Here *hades*, like *sheol* in the Old Testament (Amos 9:2-3; Job 11:7-9), denotes the deepest place in the universe, just as the heaven is the highest. This means that Capernaum will be humiliated by being brought down to the realm of the dead, the deepest place in the universe.

The second use of *hades* in the teaching of Jesus occurs in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:23) to be examined shortly. The third use is found in Matthew 16:18, where Jesus expresses His confidence that "the gates of Hades shall not prevail" against His church. The meaning of the phrase "the gates of Hades" is illuminated by the use of the same expression in the Old Testament and Jewish literature (3 Macc 5:51; Wis. of Sol 16:13) as a synonym for death. For example, Job asks rhetorically: "Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness?" (Job 38:17; cf. Is 38:18). The underworld was pictured as enclosed with cliffs, where the dead were locked in. Thus, what Jesus meant by "the gates of Hades" is that death shall not prevail against His church, obviously because He had gained the victory over death.

Like all the dead, Jesus went to *hades*, that is, to the grave, but unlike the rest He was victorious over death. "For thou wilt not abandon my soul to *Hades*, nor let thy Holy One see corruption" (Acts 2:27; cf. 2:31). Here *hades* is the grave where Christ's body rested for only three days and, consequently, did not "see corruption," the decay process resulting from a prolonged interment. Because of His victory over death, *hades*-the grave is a defeated enemy. Thus, Paul exclaims: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave [*hades*] where is thy victory?" (1 Cor 15:55, KJV). Here *hades* is correctly translated "grave" in the KJV since it is in parallel with death.

Christ now holds the keys to "death and *Hades*" (Rev 1:18), He has power over death and the grave. This enables Him to unlock the graves and call forth the saints to everlasting life at His coming. In all these passages, *hades* is consistently associated with death, because it is the resting place of the dead, the grave. The same is true in Revelation 6:8, where the pale horse has a rider whose name "was Death, and *Hades* followed him." The reason "*Hades*" follows "Death" is obviously because *hades*, as the grave, receives the dead.

At the end of the millennium, "Death and *Hades*" will give up their dead (Rev 20:13) and "then Death and *Hades* were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire" (Rev 20:14). These two verses are significant. First, because they tell us that eventually *hades* will give up the dead, which indicates again that *hades* is the realm of the dead. Second, they inform us that at the End, *hades* itself will be thrown into the lake of fire. By means of this colorful imagery, the Bible reassures us that at the End, both death and the grave will be eliminated. This will be the death of death, or as Revelation puts it, "the second death."

This brief survey of the use of *hades* in the New Testament clearly shows that its meaning and usage is consistent with that of *sheol* in the Old Testament. Both terms denote the grave or the realm of the dead and not the place of punishment of the ungodly.³⁹

The Rich Man and Lazarus. The word *hades* also occurs in the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus, but with a different meaning. While in the 10 references we have just examined *hades* refers to the grave or the realm of the dead, in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus it denotes the place of punishment for the ungodly (Luke 16:23). The reason for this exceptional use will be explained shortly. Obviously, dualists make great use of this parable to support the notion of the conscious existence of disembodied souls during the intermediate state (Luke 16:19-31). Because of the importance attached to this parable, we need to examine it closely.

First, let us look at the main points of the story. Lazarus and the rich man both die. Their situations in life are now reversed after their death. For when Lazarus died, he "was carried by angels to Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22), whereas the rich man was taken to *hades* where he was tormented by scorching flames (Luke 16:23). Although a great gulf separated them, the rich man could see Lazarus in Abraham's bosom. So he pleaded with Abraham to send Lazarus on two errands: first, to "send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool his tongue" (Luke 16:24) and second, to send Lazarus to warn his family members to repent lest they experience the same punishment.

Abraham denied both requests for two reasons. The first, because there was a great chasm that made it impossible for Lazarus to cross over to help him (Luke 16:26); the second, because if his family members did "not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced if some one should rise from the dead" (Luke 16:31).

Before looking at the parable, we need to remember that contrary to an allegory like *Pilgrim's Progress*, where every detail counts, the details of a parable do not necessarily have any significance in themselves, except as "props" for the story. A parable is designed to teach a fundamental truth, and the details do not have a literal meaning, unless the context indicates otherwise. Out of this principle another grows, namely, only the fundamental teaching of a parable, confirmed by the general tenor of Scripture, may be legitimately used for defining doctrine.

The Problems of a Literal Interpretation. Those who interpret the parable as a literal representation of the state of the saved and unsaved after death are faced with insurmountable problems. If the narrative is an actual description of the intermediate state, then it must be true in fact and consistent in detail. But if the parable is figurative, then only the moral truth to be conveyed need concern us. A literal interpretation of the narrative breaks down under the weight of its own absurdities and contradictions, as becomes apparent under scrutiny.

Contenders for literalism suppose that the rich man and Lazarus were disembodied spirits, destitute of bodies. Yet the rich man is described as having "eyes" that see and a "tongue" that speaks, as well as seeking relief from the "finger" of Lazarus—all real body parts. They are portrayed as existing physically, despite the fact that the rich man's body was duly buried in the grave. Was his body carried away into *hades* together with his soul by mistake?

A gulf separates Lazarus in Heaven (Abraham's bosom) from the rich man in *hades*. The gulf is too wide for anyone to cross and yet narrow enough to permit them to converse. Taken literally, this means that Heaven and Hell are within geographical speaking and seeing distance from each other so that saints and sinners eternally can see and communicate with one another. Ponder for a moment the case of parents in Heaven seeing their children agonizing in *hades* for all eternity. Would not such a sight destroy the very joy and peace of Heaven? It is unthinkable that the saved will see and converse with their unsaved loved ones for all eternity across a dividing gulf.

A literal interpretation of the parable contradicts some fundamental Biblical truths. If the narrative is literal, then Lazarus received his reward and the rich man his punishment, immediately after death and before the judgment day. But the Bible clearly teaches that the rewards and punishments, as well as the separation between the saved and the unsaved will take place on the day of Christ's coming: "When the Son of man comes in

his glory, . . . and before him will be gathered all the nations, and he will separate them one from another" (Matt 25:31-32). "Behold, I am coming soon, bringing my recompense, to repay everyone for what he has done" (Rev 22:12). Paul expected to receive "the crown of righteousness" on the day of Christ's appearing (2 Tim 4:8).

A literal interpretation of the parable also contradicts the uniform testimony of the Old and New Testaments that the dead, both righteous and ungodly, lie silent and unconscious in death until the resurrection day (Eccl 9:5-6; Job 14:12-15, 20, 21; Ps 6:5; 115:17). A literal interpretation also contradicts the consistent use of *hades* in the New Testament to denote the grave or the realm of the dead, not a place of punishment. We have found that in 10 of its 11 occurrences, *hades* is explicitly connected with death and the grave. The exceptional use of *hades* in this parable as a fiery place of torment (Luke 16:24) derives not from Scripture, but from current Jewish beliefs influenced by Greek mythology.

Especially revealing is the "Discourse to the Greeks Concerning Hades," written by Josephus, the famous Jewish historian who lived during New Testament times (died about A. D. 100). His discourse parallels very closely the narrative of the rich man and Lazarus. In both accounts we have the two regions that separate the righteous from the ungodly, the bosom of Abraham as the abode of the righteous, a great gulf that cannot be crossed, and the inhabitants of one region who can see those of the other region.

Josephus' description of *hades* is not unique. Similar descriptions can be found in other Jewish literature. What this means is that Jesus capitalized on the popular understanding of the condition of the dead in *hades*, not to endorse such views, but to drive home the importance of heeding in this present life the teachings of Moses and the prophets because this determines bliss or misery in the world to come.

Jesus' Use of Current Beliefs. At this juncture, it may be proper to ask, "Why did Jesus tell a parable based on current beliefs that do not accurately represent truth as set forth elsewhere in the Scripture and in His own teachings?" The answer is that Jesus met people on their own ground, capitalizing on what was familiar to them to teach them vital truths. Many of His hearers had come to believe in a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection, though such a belief is foreign to Scripture. This erroneous belief was adopted during the intertestamental period as part of the process of Hellenization of Judaism and had become a part of Judaism by the time of Jesus.

In this parable, Jesus made use of a popular belief, not to endorse it, but to impress upon the minds of His hearers an important spiritual lesson. It should be noted that even in the preceding parable of the Dishonest Steward (Luke 16:1-12), Jesus uses a story that does not accurately represent Biblical truth. Nowhere, does the Bible endorse the practice of a dishonest administrator who reduces to half the outstanding debts of creditors in order to get some personal benefits from such creditors. The lesson of the parable is to "make friends for yourselves" (Luke 16:9), not to teach dishonest business practices.

Conclusion. Both the Old and New Testaments consistently teach that the state of the dead is one of unconsciousness, inactivity, and sleep that will continue until the day of the resurrection.

Our analysis of the usage of the word *sheol* in the Old Testament and of *hades* in the New Testament has shown that both terms denote the grave or the realm of the dead and not the place of punishment for the ungodly. There is no bliss or punishment immediately after death, but an unconscious rest until resurrection morning.

The notion of the intermediate state in which the souls of the saved enjoy the bliss of Paradise, while those of the unsaved suffer the torments of hell derives not from Scripture, but from Greek dualism. It is most unfortunate that during much of its history, Christianity by and large has been influenced by the Greek dualistic view of human nature, according to which the body is mortal and the soul immortal. The acceptance of this

deadly heresy has conditioned the interpretation of Scripture and given rise to a host of other heresies such as Purgatory, eternal torment in hell, prayer for the dead, intercession of the saints, indulgences, and etherial view of paradise.

It is encouraging to know that today many scholars of all religious persuasions are launching a massive attack against the traditional dualistic view of human nature and some of its related heresies. We can only hope that these endeavors will contribute to recovering the Biblical wholistic view of human nature and destiny, and thus dispel the spiritual darkness perpetrated by centuries of superstitious beliefs.

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