

# ***The Truth About Death***

***What the Bible Says Will Happen When You Die***

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The idea of living forever is a popular one. Nobody wants to die. If we could remain healthy, most of us would undoubtedly prefer to go on living well beyond our normal expected lifespan. Woody Allen, popular actor, writer and producer, summed it up quite succinctly when he said, "I don't want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve it by not dying." Most of us would concur.

Yet, this is precisely what Elohim ("God") originally intended for the human race - to live forever! Elohim created man in his own image and put him in a garden where man would have all he needed to live. It wasn't until after man sinned in that garden that Elohim took away from him the ability to live forever:

**And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever" (Genesis 3:22 NIV).**

That man had the potential to live forever is suggested in the above text where Elohim banished man from the garden so that he could no longer "live forever."

In fact, Elohim expressly stated that if man did sin, that he would most assuredly die!:

**And the LORD God commanded the man, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die" (Genesis 2:16, 17 NIV).**

Elohim was not joking. When man did sin, Elohim had to be faithful to His word. So, Elohim removed from Adam the opportunity to prolong his life forever. Some would say that on that very day Adam disobeyed, death was set in motion in him. And for those who see the "day is as a thousand years" principle in play, Adam did indeed die before his "thousand year" day expired.

## **The Lie in the Garden**

Satan would have us believe that in our sinful state we can live forever. In fact, Satan has been deceiving since the beginning. About the devil, Yahusha (Hebrew name of Messiah, a.k.a. "Jesus") preaches,

**He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is not truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar, and the father of lies (John 8:44)**

So the devil speaks his native language when he lies, which means that he is inclined to lie. Satan is predisposed to deception. He is very good at it. His lie in the garden led to the downfall of mankind.

In the beginning, in the garden of Eden, when the first man and woman were still innocent, the devil appeared to Chava (Eve) as a snake. He said to the woman,

**"Did Elohim really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" (Genesis 3:1)**

Satan begins his deception by questioning what Elohim had commanded. As we read above, Elohim had told Adam that when they ate of the fruit of which he told them not to eat, they would surely die. But that old serpent told Eve, **"You will not surely die...for Elohim knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God"** (Genesis 3:4-5).

Incredibly, that first lie amounts to saying that human beings have immortality just like Elohim, whether they obey Elohim or not. This, of course, is not what Elohim said. The man and woman could have partaken of the everlasting life which Elohim offered them if they had remained obedient to his word. They had no inherent immortality in them, but Elohim would have given them access to the tree of life, which would have enabled them to live forever, if they had obeyed his commands.



Elohim alone, and no one else has immortality. Paul told Timothy that **"God...alone is immortal"** (1 Timothy 6:15-16). Elohim's creatures do not have immortal souls. The Scriptures are numerous which bear out this truth. Satan is the source of the insidious lie that when a man dies, a part of him goes on living, while Elohim said, **"you will surely die."** So, the popular teaching that when you die you don't really die, is nothing more than a rehash of the Satanic lie in the garden.

In the New Testament, Paul teaches that fallen man can still have immortality - but not until the resurrection:

**For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."** (1 Corinthians 15:53-54)

Of course, he's writing about the resurrection which occurs at the *parousia* (coming) of Messiah, when he comes with ten thousands of the angels in esteem. At that time, Messiah will call up those who have died in him and then their bodies will come back to life and receive immortality. But those who have died do not live until then.

The prophet Daniel speaks of the dead coming back to life at the coming of Messiah:

**Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 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. (Daniel 12:2-3)**

Daniel describes those who awake to everlasting life as sleeping in the dust of the earth. Their souls are not sitting around Jesus in heaven passing the time. They are asleep in the earth (buried).

## **What Happens When a Being Dies?**

The Bible states quite plainly what happens when a being dies. First, we review how Elohim formed man:

**Yahuwah Elohim formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)**

Man was made from the dirt of the earth. And when Elohim breathed life into him, he became a "living being" or as

some translations put it, "a living soul."

But when a human dies, he will return to the earth from which he was made. When the humans sinned, Elohim promised them that they would return to the dust of the ground:

**By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return. (Genesis 3:19)**

This simple to understand concept of what constitutes death is repeated numerous times throughout the Scriptures. The Psalmist describes death as returning to the dust of the ground:

**When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust. (Psalm 104:29)**

And again,

**You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." (Psalm 90:3)**

David pleads with Elohim about his own life. For David, his death would be a returning to the dust of the ground and nothing more:

**What gain is there in my destruction, in my going down into the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it proclaim your faithfulness? (Psalm 30:9)**

Surely, David and the other writers of the Psalms recognized that death is the cessation of life. There is nothing for the dead after death. They simply return to dust.

The Bible elsewhere plainly states that the dead have none of the characteristics and traits of conscious life. Those who are dead have no knowledge:

**For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing (Ecclesiastes 9:5).**

It should not be a surprise that the dead know nothing. Just as before a human is born he doesn't exist, after he dies he doesn't exist. He is dead. Gone. No life. No thoughts. No praising of Elohim. Nothing.

A few verses later, Ecclesiastes further elaborates on the state of the dead:

**In the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:10).**

Dead people do not think, they do not plan, they do not work, they have no knowledge or wisdom. And they have no emotion:

**Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished (Ecclesiastes 9:6)**

They have no thoughts:

**His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish (Psalms 146:4, KJV).**

The dead, even the righteous dead, are unable to give praise to their Creator:

**For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot sing your praise; those who go down to the pit cannot hope for your faithfulness. The living, the living - they praise you (Psalms 28:18,19).**

**It is not the dead who praise the Lord (Psalms 115:17).**

Furthermore, there is no memory in death:

**No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave? (Psalms 6:5).**

With the death of the body comes the end of conscious thought and personality. The mind no longer functions in death. Death brings the entire end of the person. The soul does not leave the body after death as many contemporaries mistakenly believe and teach. But Elohim's Word is true when he clearly told the first couple that they would surely die. When a person dies, his whole being dies - his body, mind and soul. He is gone. He is no more.

## **Does the Soul Go On Living After the Death of the Body?**

Satan, the deceiver, would have men believe that the death of the body is not the end of the life of the individual; that the real essence of life - that is, the soul - keeps on living after the body dies. But the Word of Elohim instructs its readers of something quite different.

This popular notion that the soul of a man is eternal is easily refuted by Scripture. When Elohim made the first man, he "**breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and he became a living soul (Hebrew, *nephesh chayah*)**" (Genesis 2:7). *Chayah* is the Hebrew word translated "life" or "living." And the Hebrew word translated *soul* is נֶפֶשׁ (pronounced *nephesh*). There is no other Hebrew word translated *soul*. *Nephesh* is translated by many words into English, such as, *soul, living being, life, self, person, desire, appetite, emotion, and passion*. It is *that which breathes, the breathing substance or being*. The body is a soul when it is breathing and living.

So you see, the soul only exists where there is breath in a living body. When Elohim created Adam, he formed his body out of the dust of the earth. But Adam didn't become a living soul until Elohim breathed into his nostrils. Thus a *nephesh* (a soul) is a living, breathing being with a body.

Even the beasts of the field have "souls." This same word, *nephesh*, is used of animals in the creation account and elsewhere.

**And Elohim said, "Let the water teem with living creatures (Hebrew, *nephesh chayah*), and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the sky." (Genesis 1:20)**

And

**And Elohim said, "Let the land produce living creatures (Hebrew, *nephesh chayah*) according to their kinds: (Genesis 1:24)**

And again,

**Now Yahuwah Elohim had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature (Hebrew, *nephesh chayah*), that was its name. (Genesis 2:19)**

In a living being, whether human, animal or fish, the body is the physical part of that being, but the *nephesh* refers to that being as breathing - the conscious, functioning, vibrant aspect of the life in the body. A body can be either living or dead, but the living body is also called a *nephesh*. Thus, when the body dies, the *nephesh* is dead, too. The *nephesh* does not exist without the body. So, as we saw in the citations above, when the being is dead, that being has no thoughts, no emotion, no knowledge, no memory, no consciousness.

The writings of the prophet Ezekiel almost single-handedly refute the erroneous notion that the soul goes on living after the death of the body. Elohim says through Ezekiel the prophet that

**For every living soul (Hebrew, *nephesh*) is mine, the life (Hebrew, *nephesh*) of the father as well as the life (Hebrew, *nephesh*) of the son-- both alike belong to me. The soul (Hebrew, *nephesh*) who sins is the one who will die. (18:4)**

Here, the *soul* - the living essence of a man - and *not just the body*, will die on account of his sin. This refrain is repeated again, later:

**The soul (Hebrew, *nephesh*) who sins is the one who will die. (vs. 20)**

When we come to the New Testament, we find only one Greek word that corresponds to *nephesh*. That word is *yuch*, (pronounced *psukay*). The *BDAG Lexicon* breaks down this word:

- 1.life on earth in its animating aspect making bodily function possible**
  - a. (*breath of*) *life, life-principle, soul*, of animals
  - b. the condition of being alive, *earthly life, life* itself
- 2.seat and center of the inner human life in its many and varied aspects, *soul***
- 3.an entity w. personhood, *person***

In other words, *psukay* exactly corresponds to the Hebrew *nephesh*. A soul is the living, breathing being with personality traits of thought, emotion, memory, etc.

After Greek thought, the Christian theologians try to expand the meaning of *psukay* to include the possibility of life outside of the body. Thus, they concoct the view that the soul goes on living after the body dies. But this is patently outside the meaning of the Hebrew and the Greek terminology. It is very clear from the original language words that the *soul* is simply the body of a being in a living, breathing, conscious state. The *soul* is nothing more than this. When the body dies, it is the soul that dies, and the lifeless body can no longer sustain itself, and so it decays and returns to dust.

## Death Compared to Sleep - An Appropriate Metaphor

Death is described by the writers of Scripture as a "sleep."

**...if I have done evil to him who is at peace with me or without cause have robbed my foe-- then let my enemy pursue and overtake me; let him trample my life to the ground and make me sleep in the dust. (Psalm 7:4-5)**

**Look on me and answer, Yahuwah my Elohim. Give light to my eyes, or I will sleep in death; (Psalm 13:3)**

**You sweep men away in the sleep of death; (Psalm 90:5)**

**Valiant men lie plundered, they sleep their last sleep; not one of the warriors can lift his hands. (Psalm 76:5)**

About the retribution of death Yahuwah repays the wicked, the prophet says,

**I will make her officials and wise men drunk, her governors, officers and warriors as well; they will sleep forever and not awake," declares the King, whose name is Yahuwah Almighty. (Jeremiah 51:57)**

This metaphor of death as a sleep is appropriate for several reasons. When a person falls asleep, he is no longer aware of his environment. The sounds around him are silenced, the light is no longer seen. During most of the time of sleep, a person's awareness and consciousness is shut down. With the exception of the periods of dreaming, the sleeping person has no thoughts, no memory, no knowledge, etc. He is unconscious. The thinking, creative part of the mind turns off to rest. Only the vital functions of the living body remain in operation during sleep.

Death is much like sleep in a number of ways, as we have already seen. At first glance, a body sleeping looks like a dead body. The sleeper is virtually still just as a dead body is still. But in death, the vital bodily functions also cease to operate. And in death, the sleeper does not wake back up.

When we come to the New Testament, the metaphor of sleep is used of death, too. Messiah Yahusha spoke of Lazarus' (Hebrew *El'azar*) death as a sleep:

**After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend El'azar has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." His disciples replied, "Master, if he sleeps, he will get better." Yahusha had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly, "El'azar is dead..." (4th Gospel 11:11-14)**

When Stephen was stoned and dying, the Bible says he fell asleep:

**Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Master, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep. (Acts 7:60)**

And David fell asleep in death:

**For when David had served Elohim's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep; he**



**was buried with his fathers and his body decayed. (Acts 13:36)**

And Paul uses the metaphor of *sleep* to describe those who have died several times such as in 1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6,18,20. But most remember this metaphor as he uses it in his letter to the Thessalonians:

**Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Yahusha died and rose again and so we believe that Elohim will bring with Yahusha those who have fallen asleep in him. According to Yahuwah's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Master, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:13-15)**

Those who have fallen asleep are the followers of Messiah who have died and are awaiting the resurrection. The use of the metaphor of "falling asleep" seems to be a gentler and more hopeful way of speaking of death.

Because of the biblical usage of the metaphor of sleep to describe death, some folks use the term "soul sleep" to represent the state of the dead. This term provokes the anger of other Christian groups who believe that the soul lives on after the body. Thus, the proponents of "soul sleep" are criticized and ridiculed. But, in fact, "soul sleep" pretty accurately describes the state of the dead!

## **The Teaching of Psalm 49 About Death**

Psalm 49 speaks very plainly about the fate of all mankind. He speaks of the proverb or riddle of the topic of death:

**For the director of music. Of the Sons of Korah. A psalm. Hear this, all you peoples; listen, all who live in this world, both low and high, rich and poor alike: My mouth will speak words of wisdom; the utterance from my heart will give understanding. I will turn my ear to a proverb; with the harp I will expound my riddle: (verses 1-4)**

The question of what happens when people die has always been a riddle, because no one has been there and come back (except for Messiah). So, the sons of Korah are about to give us some understanding about what happens to all humans "who live in this world" when they die:

**Why should I fear when evil days come, when wicked deceivers surround me-- those who trust in their wealth and boast of their great riches? No man can redeem the life of another or give to Elohim a ransom for him-- the ransom for a life is costly, no payment is ever enough-- that he should live on forever and not see decay. For all can see that wise men die; the foolish and the senseless alike perish and leave their wealth to others. Their tombs will remain their houses forever, their dwellings for endless generations, though they had named lands after themselves. But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish. This is the fate of those who trust in themselves, and of their followers, who approve their sayings. Selah (vs. 5-13)**

It's plain to the writer that the foolish and the senseless alike perish, and their tombs will be their dwelling place forever. This means that everyone dies and is placed in the ground - this is where the wicked will forever be. The

kicker is the next statement that man perishes like the beasts. In other words, when man dies, that's it for him. He is no more, because his flesh decays and turns back into the dirt from which he came. Just like the animals who return to the ground and are no more when they die, humans return to the ground and are no more when they die.

But the Psalmist makes a distinction between the wicked and the righteous. What he just described for all mankind, he explains that "**this is the fate of those who trust in themselves.**" The wicked ones are like the beasts in that once they die, they are no more forever. And he summarized the fate of those who don't know Elohim:

**Like sheep they are destined for the grave, and death will feed on them. The upright will rule over them in the morning; their forms will decay in the grave, far from their princely mansions. (vs. 14)**

But then this son of Korah describes a different fate for those who love Elohim, such as the writer himself:

**But Elohim will redeem my life from the grave; he will surely take me to himself. Selah (vs. 15)**

The righteous ones will be redeemed from the grave. Death is not the final end of the righteous one. There is more for him. Though the writer does not discuss the time frame of this redemption from the grave, other Scriptures, especially Paul in the New Testament, pinpoint the time of the redemption of the body as at the time of the resurrection of the righteous dead at the coming of Messiah (more discussion of that below).

Then the Psalmist one more time goes on to talk about the fate of the disobedient:

**Do not be overawed when a man grows rich, when the splendor of his house increases; for he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendor will not descend with him. Though while he lived he counted himself blessed-- and men praise you when you prosper-- he will join the generation of his fathers, who will never see the light [of life]. A man who has riches without understanding is like the beasts that perish. (vs. 16-20)**

For the wicked one - his wealth, his glory and all that was his to boast about - leave him as he goes down to the grave alone. There he remains and will never see the light again (probably meaning that he will never live again). And in summary, the writer reminds the righteous one that those without understanding - meaning those who don't know Elohim - are like the beasts. Their souls don't live forever in punishment. They perish. And that is the end of them.

## **The Reception of the Lie by the Church**

Heinous is that lie which says that the soul of a human being lives on somewhere after the death of the body; that, in fact, when you sin you shall not surely die. Satan told that lie in the garden and he continues to tell it today. He has even cleverly adapted that lie to the minds of the Bible believing community by distorting several key passages of Holy Writ.

The lie has been made palatable to New Testament believers by an emotional appeal at the death of a believer to the Christian hope of being with Jesus. The saint, Satan asserts, is not really dead, but rather his soul is very much alive in the presence of Jesus in heaven. And many sincere, unsuspecting people are swallowing this lie - hook, line and sinker.

Yet, all debate should be ended with the simple statement made by the Master about who has ascended into heaven:

**No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-- the Son of Man. (4th Gospel [John] 3:13)**

That's it! Plain and simple. No one has ever gone into heaven except for the Messiah. Since Messiah came from heaven, it should not surprise us that he would ascend back into heaven. But listen carefully to what he is teaching us here: no one has ever gone into heaven.

Accordingly, the doctrine which teaches that the soul of the believer goes to heaven at the death of his body finds no direct scriptural support and flatly contradicts the teachings of the Master. In the biblical record, the only ones who ever ascend into heaven do so in their body! For example, Messiah Yahusha ascended into heaven in his body:

**When he had led them out to the vicinity of Bethany, he lifted his hands and blessed them. While he was blessing them, he left them and was taken up into heaven (Luke 24:50-51).**

And the two witnesses of Revelation are to be taken up bodily into heaven:

**But after the three and a half days a breath of life from God entered them, and they stood on their feet and terror struck those who saw them. Then they heard a loud voice from heaven saying to them, "Come up here." And they went up to heaven in a cloud, while their enemies looked on (Revelation 11:11-12).**

Popular, indeed, is this belief that the souls of those Christians who have died are now in heaven with Jesus awaiting the resurrection when they will be united again with their body. But the Scriptural teaching, adhered to by only a few, that the soul does not go on living after death, is very *unpopular*. In fact, many who claim that their own doctrines are based on the authority of the Bible consider this teaching to be heresy. Some even question the salvation experience of those who hold to this belief that death is the very real end of the wicked!

Little known is that many notables of the past believed the Bible-Truth that *the dead really are dead*. Walter Martin points out that

many noted Christians of the past believed in conditional immortality, among them Martin Luther, William Tyndale, and John Wycliffe, all of whom were competent Greek scholars. Luther even stated that he could not support the doctrine of immortality of the soul, which he called one of the "endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals." (*The Kingdom of the Cults* (Bethany: Minneapolis, 1985), p.447)

But, as Martin also correctly assessed, mere human opinion should not determine for us which view is the correct one to hold. Our sole authority on truth is the Scriptures. These alone dictate truth.

As we have already begun to see, the Scriptures are amply clear that the Christian does not ascend into heaven when he dies. Proponents of the view that the soul lives on after death appeal to Paul's alleged teaching that to be absent from the body is to be at home (in heaven) with the Lord. But, as we shall now see, Paul is not suggesting at all that the believer goes straight to heaven at death. Just as some distorted Paul's writings in the first century of the Christian era, others today twist his words to say something he never intended to say (see 2 Peter 3:16).

## The Righteous Dead Awake To Life at the Resurrection

The popular teaching floating around Christian circles these days is that when the believer dies, his soul immediately goes to heaven to be in the presence of Jesus, while his body decays in the grave. At Christian funerals, we are supposed to be happy, not sad, because our dead loved one is "with Jesus." Very exciting, isn't it? Then at the resurrection, they believe, the souls of all these dead believers in heaven are reunited with their bodies.

Unfortunately, that popular Christian belief is not true. According to the Bible, when will the "dead in Messiah" be with Jesus? - when they die or at the resurrection of the righteous dead? To find this answer we begin with the prophet Daniel who was speaking about the end of the age when he said that

**at that time your people - everyone whose name is found written in the book - will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life... (Daniel 12:1-2).**

Without a doubt, the prophet was describing the end-time resurrection which takes place at Messiah's post-tribulation *parousia* (coming). That some of those sleeping in the dust awake to everlasting life presupposes that they will not be experiencing everlasting life until they awake from their "sleep." Up to that time, they are dead!

The prophecies of Revelation depict that same resurrection scene. John testifies that in a vision he

**saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God.... They came to life and reigned with Messiah a thousand years.... This is the first resurrection (Revelation 20:4-5).**

We have already belabored the point that the Scriptures teach that the death of the body is the death of the whole person. John's vision supports this analysis. He affirmed that the souls of the sleeping (dead) followers of Messiah, not just their bodies, come to life at the first resurrection.

Paul's writings are in perfect harmony with the teaching of these other passages. For Paul, the faithful one will be "with Jesus," not at the believer's death, but at Messiah's coming. This is the comfort the apostle offered to the grieving Thessalonian believers with regard to their "sleeping" loved ones. If the dead Christians were in heaven with Yahusha then the Thessalonians would have had no reason to grieve, because those "sleeping" ones would not have really been dead. And if they were in heaven with Jesus, Paul would surely have comforted the grieving ones with an explanation of how wonderful things were for their "sleeping" loved ones in heaven.

But Paul says nothing of the sort. The hope he holds out is in the future coming of Messiah and its corresponding resurrection of the just. The apostle describes how Yahusha will first raise the sleeping saints to life and then he will "catch up" the living saints together with the resurrected saints to **"meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever"** (1 Thessalonians 4:17). Those who are "dead in Christ" can not now be with Yahusha in heaven because, according to Paul, they will **"meet the Lord in the air"** at his *parousia* (coming). Only at that point in time when they meet their Lord in the air at his coming will the dead in Messiah be with their Lord.

To put it another way, how could Paul have accurately stated that those asleep in Messiah will meet the Master in the air if they had already been enjoying his presence in heaven? Clearly then, the popular theory that the Christian goes to be with Jesus at death and the teaching of Paul about death are mutually exclusive views. So in light of the above considerations, I submit to the reader that 1 Thessalonians 4 assumes the Old Testament teaching that the righteous who have died are not now in heaven, but are asleep in the grave awaiting the resurrection.

That this is Paul's understanding of the state of the righteous dead is confirmed by plain statements in his discussion of the resurrection in 1 Corinthians 15. With respect to the time of the resurrection, Paul teaches us that

**When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54).**

Just because believers are "in Christ" does not mean that they now possess practical immortality. Immortality will be given to believers at the resurrection, according to Paul.

It is adequately clear, then, from Paul's uncomplicated teaching about the hope believers have for their sleeping loved ones in 1 Thessalonians 4 and in 1 Corinthians 15 that at the resurrection at Messiah's *coming*, all faithful followers of Yahusha, living and dead, will meet the Lord to be with him forever. By keeping in mind this overview of Paul's teaching about when the faithful will be with Messiah, some of the more difficult statements of the apostle can now be understood.

## **"At Home With The Lord"**

One such "hard-to-understand" teaching of Paul is found in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 where he writes about his preference to be away from his body and at home with the Lord, instead. The full text is as follows:

**Now we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from Elohim, an eternal house in heaven, not built by human hands. Meanwhile we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked. For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. Now it is Elohim who has made us for this very purpose and has given us the Spirit as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come. Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Master. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Master. So we make it our goal to please him, whether we are at home in the body or away from it. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body, whether good or bad. (2 Corinthians 5:1-10)**

Christians typically interpret his statement where he explains that he "**would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord**" as suggesting that when you die you are immediately in the presence of Jesus.

When this isolated statement is read in its context, however, it is quite simple to harmonize it with the apostle's other writings. Chapter 5:1-10 is steeped in allusions to the resurrection. In it, Paul is comparing two different tents; the one we live in, which is the "earthly tent," and the eternal house, which is "in heaven." The question we must ask of the text and which we must investigate is, "When will we inhabit that 'eternal house'? At death or at the resurrection?"

The key to discovering the true answer to that question is in the metaphoric language Paul utilizes. Paul introduces the topic by discussing our "**longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling,**" the result of which is "**so that what**

**is mortal may be swallowed up by life"** (5:3-4). These two metaphors, the metaphor of being clothed and the metaphor of the mortal being swallowed up, are reminiscent of the passage in 1 Corinthians 15:54 which was discussed in the previous section, in which Paul describes the resurrection of believers at Messiah's coming. One can hardly read through 2 Corinthians 5 without realizing that Paul is talking about the hope of the resurrection at Messiah's coming when all believers will be "**clothed with immortality**" and "**death will be swallowed up in victory**," because Paul uses the very same two metaphors in 2 Corinthians 5 as he did in 1 Corinthians 15 when he is describing that same resurrection event.

Furthermore, Paul alludes to the resurrection when he points out that we have the Holy Spirit "**as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come**" (5:5). In Ephesians 1:14, Paul notes that the Holy Spirit is "**a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession.**" And clearly, redemption will be complete and our inheritance will be gained at Messiah's coming and the resurrection of the saints, not at the believer's death.

And following the several hints pointing to the resurrection - the "**being clothed with the heavenly body**," the "**mortal being swallowed up in immortality**" and "**the Spirit guaranteeing what is to come**," Paul then explicitly tells us when this hope of his finds fulfillment. Paul concludes that when Yahusha comes, "**we must all appear before the judgment seat of Messiah, that each one may receive what is due him for the things done while in the body**" (2 Corinthians 5:10). The judgment which announces our eternal reward for what takes place in our bodies occurs after the resurrection. That is the time frame in which Paul will be "**at home with the Lord.**"

In view, then, of the heavy flavoring of "coming of Messiah" imagery and vocabulary in 2 Corinthians 5:1-10, we conclude that Paul's desire is for his resurrection at arrival of the day of Messiah's return. His preference "**to be away from the body and at home with the Lord**" (vs.8) is not to be understood as a desire for death, but as a longing for the arrival of Messiah at His coming, when at the judgment seat of Christ, Paul will finally be away from his mortal body (**living in his resurrected body**) and at home with the Lord ("**and so we will be with the Lord forever**" - 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

## **"To Depart and Be With Christ"**

A second difficult "state of the dead" passage which most contemporary Christian interpreters twist and distort is Philippians 1:23 in which the writer confesses his "**desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better.**" Here is the full text so that we can understand the whole context of Paul's desire:

**I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Messiah will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Messiah and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Messiah, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith, so that through my being with you again your joy in Messiah Yahusha will overflow on account of me. (Philippians 1:20-26)**

This expression of Paul of his desire "**to depart and be with Messiah**" is thought by many Christians to suggest that at his "departing" at his death, he will immediately be in the presence of Jesus.

Again though, his other writings clearly delineate that Paul's expectation to "be with Messiah" would be fulfilled at Yahusha's coming when all Elohim's elect are gathered to meet the Lord in the air when he comes in the clouds to be with him forever. Therefore we are compelled to interpret this passage to harmonize with the other Scriptures which describe when the disciples will be with the Master.

The contextual clue in the text of Philippians 1:20-26 which will help the interpreter understand Paul's intended meaning is found in verse 20. Paul says, "**I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage....**" Paul's resolve to feel no shame is linguistically rooted in other Scripture passages which have a "coming of Messiah" context.

First, Daniel the prophet depicts the time of the resurrection:

**But at that time your people-- everyone whose name is found written in the book-- will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. 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. But you, Daniel, close up and seal the words of the scroll until the time of the end. Many will go here and there to increase knowledge.**" (Daniel 12 1-4)

At the time of the end, when "your people" "will be delivered" - which is the time of Messiah's coming - multitudes will awake from the dust. Some will awaken to everlasting life, while others awaken to "**shame and everlasting contempt.**" This mention of "**shame**" refers to the wicked and their fate.

Messiah Yahusha, picking up on the words of Daniel's prophesy, described the resurrection event to his disciples: "**If anyone is ashamed of me and my words, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his glory and in the glory of the Father and of the holy angels**" (Luke 9:26). John likewise writes about the time of Messiah's coming where he says, "**and now, dear children, continue in him, so that when he appears we may be confident and unashamed before him at his coming**" (1 John 2:28).

It seems evident, then, that Paul's ambition to continue unashamedly to preach the gospel is motivated by his desire to be confident and unashamed before Messiah at his coming. And his commitment to serve Messiah would be unwavering in the face of death. If confronted with the decision to live and serve Messiah or to die for Messiah, Paul is not sure which he would choose. He desires to depart in death for Messiah's sake and to be with Yahusha, but he knows he is still needed and is accordingly convinced he will remain alive to help the saints in Philippi.

The rub of the passage, though, is in coming to grips with Paul's intended meaning of the phrase, "**to depart and to be with Messiah.**" Because of our previous understanding of when Paul expected all believers to be with Messiah, and because of the "coming of Messiah" connection of the word *ashamed*, we conclude that the apostle must have had the coming of Yahusha in mind when he expressed his desire to depart and be with Messiah.

For Paul, "departing" and "being with Messiah" are closely linked, not because at death he would go to heaven, but because at death, the next conscious moment for him would be at Messiah's coming and the resurrection of believers. Death and resurrection are only a moment apart from the vantage point of the dead, because there is no sense of the passing of time in death, just as in sleep hours fly by as though only a moment has passed.

An illustration may aid us in understanding Paul's language. I may express my desire to depart (from my home in Ohio) and to be with my relatives (who live in California). But my desire to depart and be with them does not mean that upon my departing I am instantaneously there with them. In fact, there is a long interval of time before I will actually be with them (especially if I decided to walk the trip). In the same way, Paul's desire to depart and be with Messiah are separated by a long interval of time. But the "departing" leads to the "being with Messiah."

## Attaining to the Resurrection Out From Among Dead Ones

Paul's deep desire to attain the resurrection is amplified in chapter 3 of Philippians where he reveals his longing to

**know Messiah and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead (3:10,11).**

The apostle's eagerness is not for death as an end in itself, but for death as a means of attaining to the resurrection. Resurrection, not death, was Paul's goal. If at his death, Paul expected his soul to rise to be with Messiah, then death would have been his desire. But clearly, resurrection is the finish line for him, not death.

Erickson notes that

Philippians 3:11 speaks of *eksanastasin teen ek nekron*, literally the "out-resurrection out from among dead ones," a meaning that is generally lost in English translations, which say something like; "a resurrection from (or of) the dead." Paul seems in this text to have been aspiring to a resurrection that will, in effect, result in a separation from dead persons. (Erickson, p.100)

The fact that Paul describes his resurrection as resulting in a separation from dead persons naturally implies that he expected at his death to be in company with dead persons until the resurrection when he would part company with the dead. The apostle obviously assumes by this that all dead persons are in the same state of existence (like we saw in Psalm 49 above); namely, unconsciousness, and that at the resurrection, he would come out from among those who are dead.

Many in the "Bible-believing" world are unwilling to accept this truth, because the false teaching of your dead ones being in the presence of Jesus is much easier to feed on and it tickles the ears. But there is ample evidence in the Scriptures that the dead are simply dead - they are gone and only the rotting flesh remains. The Old Testament abounds in references to the unconsciousness of man in death. And the New Testament builds on this foundational truth, amplifying on it primarily with regard to the believers hope of having victory over death at the coming of Messiah.

Satan wants the Christian church to go on believing that lie which says that when a man dies he does not really die. And the Christian Church has been quick to swallow that lie and circulate it, because Satan has cleverly wrapped a few Scriptures around it. But this lie must be rejected en masse by the true followers of Yahusha. The biblical references to the state of the dead are clear and straightforward, and the New Testament writers - when correctly interpreted - are found to be in agreement with the Old Testament writers that the believer will be clothed with immortality, not at death, but at the resurrection of saints when Messiah returns.



## Will God Send Unbelievers to an Everlasting Burning, Torturous Hell?

We have discussed how the Christian community at large has been duped into believing that when they die, the



souls of all who belong to Messiah will go to heaven to be with "Jesus" and enjoy bliss while waiting for the resurrection when their souls will be reunited with their bodies. We have presented Scripture which clearly refutes this popular notion. We have noted that the Bible presents information which indicates that, at death, the believer enters a state of "sleep" and will be awakened in the resurrection event at Messiah's coming, at which time, we will be "**with him forever**" (see 1 Thessalonians 4:17).

A parallel false notion of many Christian denominations is the teaching that the wicked dead (those not belonging to Elohim's family through the redemption purchased by Messiah) will not ultimately die, but will spend all of eternity burning and screaming in tortured agony in a never-ending blazing fiery hell. According to this teaching, this is God's punishment on all people who do not accept Jesus as their personal Savior. That doctrine, amazingly, is believed and taught by millions of sincere Christians around the globe. Evangelicals use this doctrine to frighten their targeted converts into making a profession of faith so that they might avoid this horrifying fate.

The Christian doctrine of a never ending conscious existence in a torturing fiery hell is the most insidious and despicable teaching about the Creator of heaven and earth ever hatched in the human mind. Christians are actually teaching that the loving and compassionate God of heaven is also the cruelest, harshest, dispassionate and mean-spirited being in all the universe. If God really did send anyone to a never-ending conscious state of enduring horrific burning torture, then he would be incalculably more cruel and hostile than any human being that ever lived.

Even in human terms, the most wicked judge on earth would never even think about sending anyone to a place where they would be in constant torture and pain, with no possibility of end. In the real world, many believe the death penalty itself is cruel and inhumane. Any type of torture is thought to be unnecessary and could result in felony charges against the torturer. Serial killers who extend their torture over their innocent victims over a matter of hours or days are recognized as the worst of all human beings on earth. Yet Christians actually think that their God is a billion times crueler than the worst, cruelest murderer on earth.

This wicked doctrine came from the worst period in Catholic Church history. It is a teaching concocted by the severely corrupted Roman Church in order to scare the populace into conformity and obedience to the Papal authority. Martin Luther even stated that he could not support the doctrine of the immortality of the soul, which he called one of the "endless monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals" (*The Kingdom of the Cults* [Bethany: Minneapolis, 1985], p.447). The teaching became so widespread, that many of the reformers and protestant denominations adopted this as one of their own interpretations.

How could a kind, merciful, loving and compassionate God also be the cruelest being in all the universe? The answer is obvious. He could not be so cruel. Yahuwah, the Creator of the universe, is indeed an Elohim who shows his loving-kindness to a thousand generations of those who love him. And he also is a "**jealous Elohim, punishing the children for the sin of the fathers to the third and fourth generation of those who hate me**" (Exodus 20:5). But he is never cruel and his judgment is never unfair or excessive.

As we have noted in the study above, those who die, whether believers in Messiah or not, all fall into a state of unconsciousness, called "sleep" by the writers of Scripture. Messiah's followers do not go to heaven, and unbelievers do not go straight to a fiery hell, at death. All fall asleep and will be awakened in the judgment.

At the judgment, all will be paid back "according to their works."

**He will punish those who do not know Elohim and do not obey the gospel of our Master Yahusha. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of Yahuwah and from the majesty of his power (2 Thessalonians 2:8-9).**

The "everlasting destruction" is exactly what it sounds like: everlasting destruction - that means that these people will

exist no more. The judgment against them is for God to snuff out their existence. They will be no more. This death - the final end of life - is the compassionate thing to do. God does not keep them around to torture them. He ends their existence.

The "second death" written about in the book of Revelation is the final destruction and end of existence of those who have rejected the righteous ways of Yahuwah. Evil and all who embrace it are finally eradicated from the universe, never to rear their ugly heads again.

## **"Hell Fire" and the Place "Where Their Worm Does Not Die"**

The modern belief that the unrighteous will go to a blazing inferno when they die is due primarily to the misunderstanding and misinterpretation of several Scriptures which describe the fate of the wicked. Those unfortunate misinterpretations were exacerbated under the influence of a 14th century fictional piece written by Dante Alighieri. His epic poem, *the Divine Comedy*, consisted of three parts; *Inferno*, *Purgatorio* and *Paradiso*. These three sections correspond to the three places commonly believed to be the eternal destiny of all people.

The *Inferno* was depicted as the place of torment inside the earth where all sinners go for their eternal punishment and torture. Dante described 9 levels of *Inferno* ("hell"), each one successively worse than the last, and corresponding to the severity of the sin those persons in each of the levels committed. *Purgatorio* was portrayed as the place where people who did neither evil nor good in their lifetime would spend eternity. There, they were mildly tortured because they did not listen to their conscience during their lifetime. And *Paradiso* was the place where the good would go to experience bliss for all eternity.

It is amazing how much of the modern concept of hell as taught in many Christian churches is based on Dante's fictional story. Many Christians use the threat of being tortured in an eternal hell fire to scare people into making a confession of faith. They base their view of the eternal hell fire on a few statements of Scripture. Primary are those statements made by the Master that have been grossly taken out of context. He described the judgment at the end of the age as follows:

**This is how it will be at the end of the age. The angels will come and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Matthew 13:49-50)**

Messiah also talked about the "fire of hell":

**If your hand or your foot causes you to sin cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life maimed or crippled than to have two hands or two feet and be thrown into eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into the fire of hell. (Matthew 18:8-9)**

And,

**If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. It is better for you**

**to enter the kingdom of Elohim with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where 'their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched.' (Mark 9:43-48)**

What most people don't understand about Messiah's references to the fiery hell is the context in which they were made. Everyone who heard Yahusha's words were familiar with Jerusalem and its topography. Surrounding the city of Jerusalem were two valleys, one of which was called the Valley of Hinnom. It was in that valley, historically, that many Israelites sacrificed their children to Molech by burning them in the fire.

Even after the practice of child sacrifice in the Valley of Hinnom ended, this same valley became the place where the dead bodies of criminals and animals were thrown. It was the garbage dump for the city. It was always on fire and was infested with the maggots which eat away at dead and rotting flesh, or any garbage.

In referencing Gehenna as the place the dead end up, Messiah is saying that when the wicked are slaughtered, they will be thrown into a virtual garbage pile where the fire burns and the maggots eat. Some will be thrown alive into this fiery pit, where they will be weeping and grinding their teeth in pain as they burn to their death. He is not saying that people will be burning in a conscious state for all of eternity in a horrendous painful condition from which there is no relief. That kind of destiny in torment would not accurately represent Elohim's justice or his mercy. It in fact isn't true. Messiah is saying that the wicked will be destroyed forever.

As for Yahusha's description of the grave as the place "**where their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched,**" he was citing the prophet Yeshayahu, who was referring to this same valley of Hinnom as the place where the dead bodies are thrown and burned. In the Messianic Age (here called "the new heavens and the new earth"), those who go to Jerusalem to worship the king will also be able to see this valley of Hinnom outside the city walls where the dead have been piled up and burned:

**As the new heavens and the new earth that I make will endure before me," declares Yahuwah, "so will your name and descendants endure. From one New Moon to another and from one Sabbath to another, all mankind will come and bow down before me," says Yahuwah. "And they will go out and look upon the dead bodies of those who rebelled against me; their worm will not die, nor will their fire be quenched, and they will be loathsome to all mankind." (Isaiah 66:22-24)**

When the worshippers "go out" from the presence of Yahuwah in the Holy Place, they will exit the temple site and through the city gates and see this loathsome end of the rebellious down in the valley. Even after the wicked are dead, the fire will continue to burn in the garbage dump and the maggots will continue to feed off the carcasses. It will be a constant reminder of the fate of unbelievers.

Yet another reference to this Gehenna, the place of the burning rubbish pile, Yahusha alludes to the death of the *body and soul*:

**Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can *destroy both soul and body in hell* (Greek *gehenna*). (Matthew 10:28)**

Again, when the body dies, the soul sleeps in death. Elohim is able to awaken the sleeping soul of those who belong to him. Thus, men can kill the body but they cannot prevent Elohim from renewing the life of the faithful one. Elohim has the power over the eternal destiny of a man. So, the wicked are "destroyed" in the fiery pit of Gehenna, which means their body and their soul are destroyed permanently.

## Doesn't "The Rich Man and Lazarus" Teach About the Blazing Eternal Hell?

It has long been held in conservative Christian circles that the story Messiah told about the rich man and Lazarus, as recorded in Luke 16, gives us great insight into what happens after we die. The rich man would, in their view, represent the wicked people, while Lazarus represents the righteous ones. The story tells of their passing away and finds Lazarus living in a fine place and the rich man in torment. Thus they conclude a heaven and a hell as the places where people go after death.

However, to interpret this story Messiah told the way they do is to be completely ignorant of the context of the story and the culture it was told in. And, even more importantly, Christians get lost in the imagery portrayed and so completely misunderstand the lesson that Messiah was teaching.

First, we must understand the context in which this story is told. The Pharisees were sneering at Yahusha when he rebuked them in their duplicity:

**"And if you have not been trustworthy with someone else's property, who will give you property of your own? No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both Elohim and Money." The Pharisees, who loved money, heard all this and were sneering at Yahusha. He said to them, "You are the ones who justify yourselves in the eyes of men, but Elohim knows your hearts. What is highly valued among men is detestable in Elohim's sight. The Law and the Prophets were proclaimed until Yochanan. Since that time, the good news of the kingdom of Elohim is being preached, and everyone is forcing his way into it. It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law. Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery, and the man who marries a divorced woman commits adultery." (Luke 16:12-18)**

The reason the Pharisees were sneering at Yahusha is because they loved money. Remember Yahusha had said that you cannot love Elohim and money. The Pharisees pretended to love Elohim but really loved money.

Because of their love for money, the Pharisees made up their own laws which conflicted with Elohim's laws. One example of this is that they told people to give to the temple treasury money that they should have honored their father and money with. Thus, the Pharisees were led to teach others to break the commandments of Yahuwah on account of their own traditions which were motivated by their love of money. The Pharisees justified their behavior by insisting that the money given was for Elohim's purposes, but they freely spend that money on their own pleasures.

Yahusha was aware of their unfaithfulness and was scolding them for it. He reminded them that Yochanan had brought the message of Good News but that the Pharisees had rejected that, too. And he alluded to their mishandling of the Torah by reminding them that the Torah does not allow adding to or taking away from Elohim's Law ("**It is easier for heaven and earth to disappear than for the least stroke of a pen to drop out of the Law**"). But they had been ignoring Elohim's Word and making up laws of their own. And finally, he cites another example of how the Pharisees transgress the Torah by their own tradition in reciting yet another commandment that they continued to promote transgression of for their own purposes: that of the law of adultery.

With this conflict between Yahusha and the Pharisees as a backdrop and context, Yahusha tells the story of the rich man and Lazarus.

**There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named El'azar, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Avraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In hell, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Avraham far away, with El'azar by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Avraham, have pity on me and send El'azar to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue, because I am in agony in this fire.' But Avraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while El'azar received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been fixed, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' (Luke 16:19-26)**

This story is pure fiction. If one were to carefully consider in the narrative the circumstances and the logistics of the story, it would be obvious that it does not depict a realistic scenario. This story was merely to illustrate a more important lesson that Yahusha was teaching about the Pharisees (more about that lesson coming up).

The details of the story make it obvious that it is made-up. First, when the beggar died, the "**angels carried him to Avraham's side.**" Does the Bible anywhere speak of angels carrying the dead ones away? This is the stuff of Jewish myths and folklore, but has no basis in biblical revelation. And where in the Scriptures do we learn that Abraham is the one who welcomes the spirits of the dead believers at death? Being in Abraham's bosom was another popular Jewish legend (myth) about the destiny of the righteous after death.

The truth of the matter is that Abraham is dead and waiting for the resurrection to receive the inheritance that Yahuwah promised to give to him. He has not yet entered into that inheritance:

**All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised. (Hebrews 11:13)**

**These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised. Elohim had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect. (Hebrews 11:39-40)**

None of those who were commended for their faith have yet received the promises. They are all still dead. It is at the coming of Messiah and the resurrection of the dead that Abraham and all those of faith will rise at the same time and together receive their allotted inheritance and have their promises fulfilled in the Messianic Age. Therefore, it is impossible that Abraham's side could be the place where good people go when they die!

Moreover, the Messiah himself said that no one has ever ascended into heaven, except himself:

**No one has ever gone into heaven except the one who came from heaven-- the Son of Man. (4th Gospel [John] 3:13)**

If it's true that no one has ascended into heaven, then Abraham is not in heaven welcoming the saints who die! Abraham is NOT in heaven. The same is said of David, about whom the Scripture says,

**For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, "Yahuwah said to my Master: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet." (Acts 2:34-35)**

Nobody - neither Abraham nor David nor anyone else - has ascended into heaven prior to Messiah's ascension. Therefore, it is safe and reliable to say that Abraham is not welcoming the righteous ones to paradise when they die. The story Messiah was telling was pure fiction, and everyone knew it!

Furthermore, consider the statement that the rich man called to Avraham, begging for a little water. Again, the logistics of these two places separated "by a great chasm" suggest that nobody can talk to someone else on the other side in this imaginary place. That would be absurd. A real conversation could not have taken place because of the vast distance between them. Clearly, Yahusha was utilizing the literary device of hyperbole (exaggeration, overstatement) to bring home his rich rebuke of the Pharisees.

This invented exchange between two dead men comes to a climax when the rich man realizes that his fate is fixed:

**He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send El'azar to my father's house, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.' Avraham replied, 'They have Mosheh and the Prophets; let them listen to them.' 'No, father Avraham,' he said, 'but if someone from the dead goes to them, they will repent.' He said to him, 'If they do not listen to Mosheh and the Prophets, they will not be convinced even if someone rises from the dead.' (Luke 16:27-31)**

Since there is no real communication or transportation across the "chasm" of death, the only hope is that someone will warn his five brothers before they all die. And here is where we come to the focal point of this fictional story and the lesson Messiah was bringing home.

The Pharisees did not believe Mosheh and the Prophets. They transgressed the Law at every turn and followed their own man-made traditions instead. As a result of their unbelief, they didn't receive Yochanan as a true prophet and they didn't believe that Yahusha was the Messiah sent from the Father.

So, Yahusha declared that if people will not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they won't be convinced if someone were to rise from the dead. Yahusha's own resurrection from the dead would not convince these hard-hearted, unbelieving, stiff-necked Pharisees of Yahusha's claims to be the Messiah.

So the fictional story of the rich man and Lazarus was graphically told to make the point that the Pharisees would not believe in spite of the overwhelming evidence and testimony that Yahusha is the Sent One from Elohim. The details of the story were merely colorful fluff derived from the prevailing Jewish mythology of death to highlight the reality that those who are Messiah's faithful ones are those who receive and believe and obey the Torah and the Prophets. At the end of the day, the faithful will be rewarded and the wicked will be snuffed out.

## Funerals

In light of the truth of the Scriptures that the dead really are dead and gone, it saddens me deeply when I see Christian funerals treated like a welcome home party. They like to call them "home going" celebrations, or some other like expression, because they believe that their dead loved one has gone home to be with Jesus. The preacher waxes eloquent on what he imagines it is like for that soul as he or she has finally met Jesus face to face and is rejoicing and celebrating this blissful outcome.

So they put the body down into the ground - but no worry! "He's in a better place." And, "That dead corpse is not

Fred anyway. Fred is in heaven right now, looking down on us and wishing we were there with him!" So the friends and relatives try to maintain a light hearted attitude as they say "goodbye for now" to Fred. And nobody is supposed to be too downhearted because "now he's with Jesus!" What could be better?

I only hope that people will one day realize that death is not a reason to celebrate. And a funeral is not a happy occasion. Death is ugly. People that die are really altogether dead, and they aren't coming back. And they aren't in a better place - unless you think returning to dust as a better place than living. Funerals are a proper place of weeping and mourning because somebody has really died and is gone. He's not in heaven. He's not in that fiery hell. He is altogether gone and is no more. He won't be rejoining us for the rest of anybody's life.

When unbelievers die, it is truly tragic that they are gone and we will never have time with them again. But when the faithful ones of Elohim die, we must still mourn and grieve, because death means that the person is dead - body and soul. But we don't grieve as unbelievers do. The unbelievers have no expectation of seeing their dead one again. But the faithful of Messiah do have such a hope.

As Paul puts it, "**we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope**" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). Why don't we grieve over those who have fallen asleep? Paul says nothing of them "being with Jesus in heaven." Paul does not offer us comfort in knowing that our dead brother or sister is now with Jesus looking down on us. But what he does offer as hope for us is the resurrection from the dead.

**For the Master himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of Elohim, and the dead in Messiah will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Master in the air. And so we will be with Yahuwah forever. Therefore encourage each other with these words. (1 Thessalonians 4:16-18)**

This is what our message should be at funerals. Paul says to encourage one another with "**these words.**" The resurrection is our hope. It is then that we shall see our dead loved one and be with our sleeping loved one again, and forever. But until then, he is gone. Surely we must grieve and mourn because of death at funerals.

## Conclusion

The popular mythologies about what happens at death nearly all depict life in some altered state in heaven or in hell. Nearly everyone believes that this life on earth is not "all there is." Thus, people have always put their hope in what they imagine to be rather than in what the Bible teaches actually is. God said that sin will cause us to "surely die." So, death is the very real end of life.

The Scriptures clearly declare the fate for human beings. Those who sin and rebel against their Creator and have no inclination to repent and live life the way the Creator intended will die and be no more. But those who have placed their loyalty and trust in Elohim and in his Messiah will be rewarded with a resurrected life to be lived during the Messianic Age.

No one goes to heaven or to hell when they die. At death, everyone dies and their bodies return to the dust from which they were made. There is no mind, no consciousness, nor awareness in death. But at the resurrection, those faithful ones will be given life as a reward for their allegiance and loyalty to the one who made them in his image.