

"BEYOND THE GRAVE"

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TWO MAIN VIEWS ABOUT THE INTERMEDIATE STATE OF THE SOUL

I. SOUL SLEEP - The dead person has no conscious existence until the resurrection of the body.

1. Death is called "sleep."

1 Thes. 4:13 *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope.* (NASB)

Acts 7:60 *Then falling on his knees, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them!" Having said this, he fell asleep.* (NASB)

Objections:

a. "Sleep" refers to the state of the body, not the soul.

Acts 7:59 *As they stoned him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."* (NLT)

Matt. 27:52 *The tombs also were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.* (NRSV)

b. "Sleep" is a metaphorical expression of physical death as a temporary state for believers.

John 11:11-13 *This He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I go, so that I may awaken him out of sleep." The disciples then said to Him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that He was speaking of literal sleep.* (NASB)

2. The dead has no thought or activity.

Eccl. 9:10 *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.* (NKJV)

Psalms 146:4 *His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; In that very day his thoughts perish.* (NASB)

Psalms 6:5 *For in death there is no remembrance of You; In the grave who will give You thanks?* (NKJV)

Objections:

a. Physical death ends the earthly existence of man (unified body and soul), not the soul.

Psalms 115:15-16 *Dead people do not praise the LORD; those in the grave are silent. But we will praise the LORD now and forever. Praise the LORD!* (NCV)

b. The souls of believers go into God's presence immediately after physical

death.

2 Cor. 5:6-9 *So we are always confident, even though we know that as long as we live in these bodies we are not at home with the Lord. For we live by believing and not by seeing. Yes, we are fully confident, and we would rather be away from these earthly bodies, for then we will be at home with the Lord. So whether we are here in this body or away from this body, our goal is to please him.* (NLT)

II. CONSCIOUS EXISTENCE OF THE SOUL

1. At physical death, the spirit or soul separates from the body and goes to "sheoul." or "hades."

Eccl. 12:7 *You will turn back into the dust of the earth again, but your spirit will return to God who gave it.* (NCV)

Psalms 89:48 *What man can live and not see death? Can he deliver his soul from the power of Sheol?* (NASB)

Sheol (Heb., Gr. *Hades*) - The abode of the dead in Hebrew thought.

Hades (Gr., Heb. *sheoul*) - used in NT

Gehenna - "a place of burning."

Isaiah 14:9 *"Sheol from beneath is excited over you to meet you when you come; It arouses for you the spirits of the dead, all the leaders of the earth; It raises all the kings of the nations from their thrones."* (NASB)

2. There are separate regions for the souls of believers and the unbelievers.

Luke 16:19-23 *"The poor man died and was carried away by the angels to be with Abraham. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was being tormented, he looked up and saw Abraham far away with Lazarus by his side."* (NRSV)

a. The souls of believers go immediately to join God in paradise.

Luke 23:42-43 *Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."* (NKJV)

Phil. 1:22-23 *But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.* (NASB)

b. The souls of unbelievers go immediately to eternal punishment.

Matt. 25:46 *"And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life."* (NLT)

Heb. 9:27 *And just as each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.* (NLT)

Luke 16:24-31 *"And he said, 'Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house - for I have five brothers - in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'" (NASB)*

SPECIAL ISSUES

1. Should we communicate with the spirits of the dead?

Deut. 18:10-12 *Never sacrifice your son or daughter as a burnt offering. And do not let your people practice fortune-telling, or use sorcery, or interpret omens, or engage in witchcraft, or cast spells, or function as mediums or psychics, or call forth the spirits of the dead. Anyone who does these things is detestable to the LORD.* (NLT)

Isa. 8:19-20 *And when they say to you, "Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter," should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.* (NKJV)

2 Cor. 11:14-15 *Even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. So it is no wonder that his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness.* (NLT)

Answer: God prohibited His people from communicating with the dead and using mediums so they will not be deceived by evil spirits who masquerade as dead loved ones (*"familiar spirits"*).

Read about Saul and the Witch of Endor (1 Sam. 28)

2. Could we affect the destiny of the dead?

Luke 16:24-26 *"And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. 'And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us.'"* (NASB)

Answer: Those who died in unbelief immediately go into eternal punishment and their destiny is irrevocably fixed.

What about Purgatory? The doctrine of purgatory teaches that the souls of those who died with *mortal sins* (sins that are "unto death") went straight to hell, while the souls with *venial sins* (which are not "unto death") are purified from these sins by punishment in this intermediate place. This doctrine is not found in the Bible and was not taught by the Apostolic Church and early Christians. It was developed in the medieval times when the church misunderstood the gospel of grace. The church taught that people are saved through their good works, a merit system that require perfection for salvation. Because of this teaching, they believed that nobody was righteous enough to enter heaven, which is right. But instead of teaching salvation by grace, i.e. we enter heaven through the perfect righteousness of Christ, they invented a place for imperfect people to be purged of all evil if they did not die with mortal sins. In addition, the church also taught that by compiling *impetratory merit* (good works that can be credited for others) and *indulgences* they can help the souls to get out of purgatory quicker. The Protestant Reformation biblical teaching of salvation by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone made purgatory unnecessary.

What about Jesus' spirit preaching to the spirits in prison after His death?

1 Peter 3:18-20 *Christ suffered for our sins once for all time. He never sinned, but he died for sinners to bring you safely home to God. He suffered physical death, but he was raised to life in the Spirit. So he went and preached to the spirits in prison – those who disobeyed God long ago when God waited patiently while Noah was building his boat. Only eight people were saved from drowning in that terrible flood.* (NLT)

Comment: Peter talked about Jesus preaching to the spirits of those who did not believe during Noah's preaching before the Flood. While the term "preach" is used, this does not necessarily mean that Jesus preached for salvation. Some translations (NRSV, NASB) used "made a proclamation" instead of "preached," to clarify that Jesus' activity in Hades was not salvific but, rather, declarative. He pointed out to the unsaved souls that what they refused to believe when they had a chance during Noah's time, had now been accomplished. There is no indication that these souls believed and were saved.

3. Do the souls of dead believers in heaven pray for the living?

Rev. 6:9-11 *When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of all who had been martyred for the word of God and for being faithful in their testimony. They shouted to the Lord and said, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you judge the people who belong to this world and avenge our blood for what they have done to us?" Then a white robe was given to each of them. And they were told to rest a little longer until the full number of their brothers and sisters – their fellow servants of Jesus who were to be martyred – had joined them.* (NLT)

Rev. 5:8 *When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.* (NRSV)

Luke 15:10 *"In the same way, I tell you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."* (NASB)

Answer: The souls of dead saints are aware of what's happening on earth, they pray for the people on earth, and they rejoice when people get saved. If the living saints are taught to offer prayers of intercession for others (as an extension of the intercession of Christ), then the saints in heaven are also involved in the same intercession ministry. Why? They are just as eager as the living saints (or more) to receive their resurrected bodies. But while the saints may be praying for the living, the Bible never teaches that we are to pray to the saints.

3. Do the souls in the intermediate state have a body?

Answer: The story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16) and the description of the martyred souls (Rev. 6:9-11) both indicate bodily functions (speaking, seeing, hearing, feeling pain, wearing a robe, etc.) that allow them to continue acting in their original personalities (recognizing each other, singing praises and worshiping). However, the Bible's emphasis on the believers' hope in the final resurrection implies that the souls of the saints in heaven are incomplete and their visible form, whatever it is, is merely in an intermediate and unnatural state.