

The Realm of Departed Spirits

There has been an on going controversy concerning the destiny of the human soul after death. Some hold the belief that our soul continues to live on, but in different forms until such time we are able to perfect ourselves in god likeness. Others believe the soul sleeps in an unconscious state until a future Judgment Day and then the soul of the sinner is eliminated, while the soul of righteous live on in a new earth. Still others hold that this life is all there is, that men have no soul whatsoever, and after we die that's it, the end of our existence.

Isn't it amazing at the number of doctrines found in the world that concerns the nature of man, his purpose in life and his existence or non-existence after death? Just as there are numerous views on the plan of salvation, worship and organization of the church and whether or not God authorizes only one church, there are as many views on the destiny of the soul as well. Most of the world holds the view that 'Hades' and 'hell' are one and the same place. Thinking that 'Hades' is just a nicer way of saying 'hell.' This is far from the truth of what the Scriptures teach us.

The Bible teaches that humanity was created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). Abraham recognized that there was something within him that would live on – his soul/spirit (Genesis 12:13). Solomon wrote that our bodies would turn to dust, but our souls/spirits would return to God and live on forever (Ecclesiastes 3:20; 12:7). It is our soul, which is commonly called the 'inner man' that God will redeem (Psalm 34:22). Our physical bodies are only a shell in which to house our true man – the soul/spirit. When our physical bodies die, our inward man – the soul/spirit – leaves and moves on to a temporary abode to await the final Day of Judgment. This temporary abode is what the Scriptures refer to in the New Testament as 'Hades,' (Luke 16:19-31; Acts 2:27, 31; Revelation 1:18, etc.), and the Old Testament as 'Sheol' (Numbers 16:30; Job 7:9; Psalm 86:13; etc.).

In Luke 16:19-31 we are given a clear glimpse into this temporary abode of the dead. Jesus telling of two individuals, each taken into Hades after their physical bodies had ceased to function. It is clear from this text that there exist two separate and distinct places in the Hadean realm. Each separated by a Great Gulf, which cannot be crossed. On one side is Torment where it appears that its inhabitants are already receiving punishment, and on the other side is Paradise, commonly called "Abraham's Bosom." No matter which side of the Great Gulf one will find him or herself, the dead will meet in Hades. The rich man found himself in torment, while the poor man was enjoying happiness. Notice also the reaction of the rich man and Lazarus. The rich man is said to be "in torments" (Luke 16:23) and looking across the Great Gulf saw Lazarus being comforted in paradise. The rich man desiring for someone to just dip the tip of their finger in water and touch his tongue so that he may be soothed (vs. 24).

Skeptics of hell find it hard to believe that the dead will be conscious of their sad state, but the Bible shows that everyone will know what is happening to them – whether it is torment or reward. The rich man was most definitely aware of his sad condition, as well as having the ability to remember the good life he had while living on earth. The same was true for the poor man, who now enjoyed the pleasures of paradise, thinking back to the suffering and poverty he faced during his earthly life.

Some ask why it would be the case that God would send souls to Hades instead of Heaven or Hell when the person would know his/her reward or punishment any way. So what is the purpose of Hades? Scripture tells us that our trial period is in the here and now (James 1:12; Psalm 66:10; Hebrews 11:17; Zechariah 13:9; Romans 5:3; et al). Like our penal system, a criminal may spend time in jail after his trial waiting for the final verdict and sentencing by the court. The same is true of the realm of Hades. Once we pass from this life into the next we have already gone through our trial, and once in Hades whether torment or paradise we are simply waiting for the final phase

when Christ the Judge will sum up our lives by the works we have done, or refused to do, whether good or bad and pronounce the final verdict (2 Corinthians 5:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14; 2 Timothy 4:1).

The destiny of our souls/spirits after the death of our physical bodies will be one that we will either rejoice or weep about. There are no second chances to get it right with God after we die; no Purgatory that will allow relatives to buy us out of punishment, nor is there reincarnation or soul sleeping that allows us not to have to face the punishment due us for unrighteous living. The rich man faced torment, as will every person who has not been added to the one church by God. Hades is where we all go when we die, waiting for Jesus to return and Judge the world of righteousness. Only after the Judgment Day will we spend eternity in heaven or hell – a destiny that depends totally upon the choices we make or refuse to make while living on earth.

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the Scriptures?
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The Destiny of The Soul



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