

DO THE DEAD DIE? Part 1.

PARTS ONE AND TWO

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In part 1 of our study, "DO THE DEAD DIE?" we are going to be addressing the following questions: What happens when a man dies? Does he go straight to heaven upon death? Is the soul immortal? What is the spirit? and other questions about the state of the dead. In part 2, we will answer questions like: What and where is hell? What happens to the lost upon death? Is the story of the rich man and Lazarus a real event? etc.....

With the earliest history of man, Satan began his efforts to deceive our race. He who had incited rebellion in heaven desired to bring the inhabitants of the Earth to unite with him in his warfare against the government of God. Adam and Eve had been perfectly happy in obedience to the Law of God, and this fact was a constant testimony against the claim which Satan had urged in heaven, that God's Law was oppressive and opposed to the good of His creatures. And furthermore, Satan's envy was excited as he looked upon the beautiful home prepared for the sinless pair. He determined to cause their fall, that, having separated them from God and brought them under his own power, he might gain possession of the Earth and here establish his kingdom in opposition to the Most High.

Had Satan revealed himself in his real character, he would have been repulsed at once, for Adam and Eve had been warned against this dangerous foe; but he worked in the dark, concealing his purpose, that he might more effectually accomplish his object. Employing as his medium the serpent, then, a creature of fascinating appearance, he addressed himself to Eve: "Yea, Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" Genesis 3:1. Had Eve refrained from entering into argument with the tempter, she would have been safe; but she ventured to parley with him and fell a victim to his wiles. It is thus that many are still overcome. They doubt and argue concerning the requirements of God; and instead of obeying the divine commands, they accept human theories, which but disguise the devices of Satan. The woman said unto the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: but of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die." And the serpent said unto the woman, "Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:2-5. Here, Satan declared that they would become like God, possessing greater wisdom than before and being capable of a higher state of existence. Eve yielded to temptation; and through her influence, Adam was led to sin. They accepted the words of the serpent, that God did not mean what He said; they distrusted their Creator and imagined that He was restricting their liberty and that they might obtain great wisdom and exultation by transgressing His Law.

But what did Adam, after his sin, find to be the meaning of the words, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die!" Did he find them to mean, as Satan had led him to believe, that he ushered into a more exalted state of existence? Then indeed there was great good to be gained by transgression, and Satan was proved to be a benefactor of the race. But Adam did not find this to be the meaning of the divine sentence. God declared that as a penalty for his sin, man should return to the ground from whence he was taken: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:19. The words of Satan, "Your eyes shall be opened," proved to be true in this sense only: After Adam and Eve had disobeyed God, their eyes were opened to discern their folly; they did know evil, and they tasted the bitter fruit of transgression.

In the midst of Eden grew the tree of life, whose fruit had the power of perpetuating life. Had Adam remained obedient to God, he would have continued to enjoy free access to this tree and would have lived forever. But when he sinned he was cut off from partaking of the tree of life, and he became subject to death. The divine sentence, "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return," points to the utter extinction of life.

Immortality, promised to man on condition of obedience, had been forfeited by transgression. Adam could not transmit to his posterity that which he did not possess; and there could have been no hope for the fallen race had not God, by the sacrifice of His Son, brought immortality within their reach. While "death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned," Romans 5:12; Christ "hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel." 2 Timothy 1:10. And only through Christ can immortality be obtained. Said Jesus: "He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life: He that believeth not on the Son shall not see life." John 3:36. Every man may come into possession of this priceless blessing if he will comply with the conditions. All "who by patient continuance in well-doing seek for glory and honour and immortality," will receive "immortal life" Romans 2:7.

The only one who promised life in disobedience was the great deceiver. And the declaration of the serpent to Eve in Eden — "Ye shall not surely die" — was the first sermon ever preached on the immortality of the soul. Yet this declaration, resting solely upon the authority of Satan, is echoed from the pulpits of Christendom and is received by the majority of mankind as readily as it was received by our first parents. The divine sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die" Ezekiel 18:20, is made to mean: The soul that sinneth, it shall not die, but live forever in eternal torment in hell. We cannot but wonder at the strange infatuation which renders men and women so credulous concerning the words of Satan and so unbelieving in regard to the words of God. Had man after his fall been allowed free access to the tree of life, he would have lived forever, and thus sin would have been immortalized. But cherubim and a flaming sword kept "the way of the tree of life" Genesis 3:24, and not one of the human family of Adam has been permitted to pass that barrier and partake of the life-giving fruit. Therefore there is not an immortal sinner.

There have long been two schools of thought on this question however. Some have maintained that man was created mortal, so far as his body was concerned, but that he possesses an immortal entity called either a "soul" or a "spirit." Others have felt equally certain that man was not in any sense created immortal. [The basis for such a conclusion is the statement of God to man in Eden: "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." Genesis 2:17. The fact that man was created with the possibility of dying should he sin, evidences the fact that he was not immortal.] They have been convinced that man was not in possession of an ethereal soul, or spirit, which survived death as a conscious entity, apart from the body.

But before we talk about immortality, either innate or conditional, it would be best if we first define our terms; so let us examine the Bible and the original languages to find out their meanings and usages.

In the Old Testament the word "soul" is translated from the Hebrew word 'NEPHESH,' a word that occurs 755 times in the Old Testament. It is most frequently translated "soul," but it is also translated in many other ways.

'NEPHESH' comes from the root word 'NAPHASH,' a verb occurring only 3 times in the Old Testament. (Exodus 23:12; 31:17; 2 Samuel 16:14), each time meaning "to revive oneself" or "to refresh oneself." The verb seems to go back to the basic meaning of breathing. A definition for 'NEPHESH' may be derived from the Bible account of the creation of man. Genesis 2:7. The record states that when God gave life to the body He had formed, the man literally "became a soul of life." The "soul" had not previously existed, but came into existence at the creation of Adam. A new soul comes into existence every time a child is born. Each birth represents a new unit of life uniquely different and separate from similar units. The new unit can never merge into another unit. It will always be itself. There will be countless individuals like it, but none that are exactly that unit. This uniqueness of individuality seems to be the idea emphasised in the Hebrew term 'NEPHESH.'

'NEPHESH' is applied not only to man but also to animals. The clause "let the waters bring forth abundantly the moving creature that hath life" Genesis 1:20, is literally, "let the waters swarm swarms of souls of life [individuals of life]." Hence animals as well as human beings are "souls."

And as many of today's translations of the Bible correctly translate 'NEPHESH' to be "and man became a living being," so too, all of us are "beings," "souls" whom Christ died to save. As God said in Ezekiel 18:20, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," if a sinning soul cannot die, what did Jesus die to save??? Now, which do I believe?? That, according to Ezekiel 18:20, that I am a soul who can die, or, according to the idea of others, my "soul" goes straight to heaven or hell, (upon death) which, by the way, isn't death at all, just a transporting from one place to another! Strange thing too, while I am sitting here typing this, the radio station has just announced that the president of the radio station

has just died, and quoting: "Brother _____ was called away to the LORD at ten past four this morning. Our sympathy goes to his wife and children... Sympathy? But according to the announcer, he has just been called to heaven! If this is true, they should be rejoicing!

[However, we will be looking more closely at this later on...]

The basic idea of "soul" being the individual rather than a constituent part of the individual, seems to underlie the various occurrences of 'NEPHESH.' It is therefore more accurate to say that a certain person IS a soul, than to say he HAS a soul. This fact is clearly expressed in Genesis 2:7, "Man became a living soul."

From the basic idea of a 'NEPHESH' being an individual, or a person, springs the idiomatic use of 'NEPHESH' for the personal pronoun. Expressions such as "my soul" are idiomatic for "I", "me," "thy soul" for "you," "Their soul" for "they" or "them."

Since each new 'NEPHESH' represents a new unit of life, 'NEPHESH' is often used synonymously with "life." In 119 instances the K. J. V. translates 'NEPHESH' by "life", and there are other instances where "life," and there are other instances where "life" would have been a more accurate translation.

The majority of the occurrences of 'NEPHESH' may be appropriately translated by "person," "individual," "life," or by the appropriate personal pronoun.

"The souls that they had gotten at Haran" Genesis 12:5, is simply "The persons that they had gotten in Haran." "That soul shall be cut off." Leviticus 19:8, is simply "he shall be cut off."

When we turn to the New Testament, we find that the word "soul" is translated from the Greek word 'Psuche,' with the meanings "life," "breath" or "soul." 'Psuche' is translated 40 times in the New Testament as "life" or "lives," clearly with the meaning commonly attributed to the word "life," (Matthew 2:20; 6:25; 16:25). It is rendered 58 times as "soul" or "souls," (Matthew 10:28; 11:29; 12:18). In some of these instances it means simply "people," (Acts 7:14; 27:37; 1 Peter 3:20). In other instances it is translated as, or equivalent to, some personal pronoun, (Matthew 12:18; 2 Corinthians 12:15). At times it refers to the emotions, (Mark 14:34; Luke 2:35), to the natural appetites (Revelation 18:14), to the mind, (Acts 14:2; Philippians 1:27), or to the heart, (Ephesians 6:6). There is nothing in the word 'Psuche' itself that even remotely implies a conscious entity that is able to survive the death of the body. And there is nothing in the Bible use of the word indicating that the Bible writers held any such belief.

Some Bible students, recognising that the word "soul" as used in the Old Testament hardly supports the idea that man possesses a separate, component part that can survive the death of the body, have turned to Ecclesiastes 12:7 to support the doctrine that man has an immortal something that can exist apart from the body. The text reads:-

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."

The word "spirit" in this text is translated from the Hebrew word 'RUACH,' which has the various meanings of "wind" or "breath," as in Job 27:3, "All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils." In the Old Testament 'RUACH' is translated "breath" 33 times, as in Job 27:3, or Ezekiel 37:5. "Wind" 117 times, as in Genesis 8:1, "spirit" 76 times in the sense of vitality, as in Judges 15:9, "courage" in Joshua 2:11, "temper" or "anger" in Judges 8:3, and in reference to the disposition, as in Isaiah 54:6. 'RUACH' is also used to describe the living principle in men and animals 25 times, as in Psalms 146:4, the seat of the emotions 3 times, as in Samuel 1:15, the "mind" 9 times, as in Ezekiel 11:5, and of the Spirit of God 94 times, as in Isaiah 63:10.

In not one of the 379 instances of its use in the Old Testament does 'RUACH' denote that in man there is a separate entity capable of conscious existence apart from the physical body. Therefore, I believe that the "spirit" that returns to God upon death, as recorded in Ecclesiastes 12:7 is nothing more than the "breath" we have, the life principle imparted to man by God.

When we turn to the New Testament, we find that the word "spirit" is translated 2 times from the Greek word 'PHANTASMA,' and 288 times from 'Pneuma.' The Greek word 'Pneuma' is translated from the K.J.V. 288 times as "spirit," 93 times as "ghost," (modern revisions have entirely abandoned the use of the word "ghost" in favour of "spirit," where the word 'pneuma' is being translated), 1 time as "life," 1 time as "wind" and 1 time as "spiritual." 'Pneuma' is used (1) of air in motion, such as "wind" in John 3:8, and "breath" in Rev. 11:11.

(2) of the principle of life, as in Luke 8:55. (3) of the frame of mind, disposition, influence, or attitudes that govern man, the basis of his character, as in 1 Cor. 4:21; 2 Cor. 12:18. (4) of incorporeal beings, such as angels Hebrews 1:14, demons, or evil spirits, Matthew 8:16. (5) of the Holy Spirit, as in Matthew 1:18, etc.... There are also other shades of meaning related to the applications cited here.

There is nothing inherent in the word 'pneuma' by which it may be taken to mean some supposed conscious entity of man capable of existing apart from the body, nor does the usage of the word with respect to man in the New Testament in any way imply such a concept. As far as the Bible is concerned, the word "immortal" is applied only to God:-

"Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be glory and honour for ever and ever." 1 Timothy 1:17.

This is the only occurrence of the word "immortal" in the Scriptures. Innate immortality is ascribed solely to DEITY:-

"I give thee charge in the sight of God... who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; who only hath immortality." 1 Timothy 6:13-16.

The gift of immortality is promised to man, and he is urged to seek for it, **Romans 2:7**. In fact it is promised to the faithful at the second coming of Christ:-

"We shall not all sleep (die), but we shall be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:16 Paul makes it very clear that the "last trump" and the raising of the dead are at the second coming of Christ. Now, if man is urged to seek for immortality, it is only too clear that he does not now possess it. At the creation of man in the beginning, death was set before him as the sure result of disobedience: "In the day that thou eatest thereof, thou shalt surely die." Genesis 2:17. It is obvious that man was not created incapable of dying. It is equally clear from the account of the fall that man could have lived forever, if he had continued to partake of the fruit from the tree of life. But God made sure that sinful man could not partake of the life giving fruit, and set an angel barring the way, "Lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and live forever." Genesis 3:22. It is simple to deduce from this fact that man was created capable of eternal life only on the condition of obedience, or that of being separated from the tree of life and dying because of disobedience.

So then, what happens when a man dies?? Well, we will answer that by first looking at how man was created to start with:-

"And the Lord God formed of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." Genesis 2:7.

Here is a very simple mathematical statement:

DUST + BREATH = LIVING SOUL.

Death is no more than a reversal of the above:

LIVING SOUL — BREATH = DUST.

It's that simple!!!

As God made the solemn announcement to Adam about the result of sin, Adam saw how terrible death really is:-

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it thou wast taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return." Genesis 3:19.

Now, consider the following questions, how much did Adam know about life or anything before he was created? Nothing of course! Now, how much can you remember before you were born?? Just the same, NOTHING! We have no memory of the past because we were not alive. Now, what about when you are dead? God told Adam that he was taken from the ground, and that he would return there. How much would Adam know after death? Nothing. He didn't know anything before life. What about us? How much do we know after death? Nothing:-

"The dead know not anything neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them (their memory) is forgotten. (they no longer have a memory) Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they anymore a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." Eccl. 9:5, 6.

Isn't that clear enough? The Above texts describe wonderfully how we were before we were born. We didn't know anything. We had no memory. No emotions. Nor did we participate in anything done under the sun. Only the living can do such things.

"The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living.... shall praise thee." Isaiah 38:18, 19.

How much praise and glory did you give to God before you were born? None. You didn't make one sound. And you won't when you're dead either. Only the living can do such things:-

"The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence." Psalms 115:17.

"What profit is there... when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? Shall it declare thy truth?" Psalms 30:9.

"In death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?" Psalms 6:5.

"Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise thee?" Psalms 88:10.

If death is nothing more than a transition from Earth to Heaven, why is it an enemy?
"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." 1 Corinthians 15:26.

Just as before we were born we had no memory, neither will we in death:-

"His breath goeth forth, he returned to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Psalms 146:4.

While Jesus was on Earth, He used the death of His friend Lazarus to teach the disciples about death. He likened death to sleep:-

"These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth, but I go, that I may wake him out of sleep. Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death; but they thought that He had spoken of taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead." John 11:11-14.

Have you ever gone to bed, and as soon as your head hits the pillow, your alarm clock wakes you up in the morning? You had no dreams. No thoughts. You have no memory of the last 8 hours

at all. You were asleep. Death is just like that, according to Jesus. A deep, dreamless sleep. However, just in case we have missed Christ's point, He says it again:-

"A all wept, and bewailed her: but He [Jesus] said, Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth." Luke 8:52. (This is repeated in **Matthew 9:24 & Mark 5:39**).

Now why do you suppose that Jesus likened death to sleep? The answer is because if someone is asleep, they can be awakened. And Jesus called Himself the Resurrection and the Life. While he was around, no one could stay dead if He chose to wake them up. Praise the LORD! In fact, Christ's own resurrection is the groundwork of the gospel message, for:-

"If Christ be not raised, your faith is in vain... Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." 1 Corinthians 15:17, 18.

Did you notice the phrase "fallen asleep?" Because there is hope of a resurrection, death is likened to sleep, for they who are asleep in Christ can be awakened, to live forever. But what of those who die lost? We will look at that in part two of this study.

The resurrection is called the hope of the Christian. (Notice **John 6:39, 40; Luke 20:37**; compare with **Matthew 11:5; Luke 7:22**). Job said:-

"I know that my redeemer liveth, and that He shall stand at the latter day upon the Earth: and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold, and not another; though my reins be consumed within me." Job 19:25-27.

The Psalmist David, expressing his hope for the future, declared:- **"I shall be satisfied, when I awake, with thy likeness." Psalm 17:15.**

Even in the days of Jesus, when the Pharisees were questioning Him about matters pertaining to the future, they did not discuss the question of death, but rather the resurrection. (**Matthew 22:28-30**).

Paul's hope was definitely fixed on this climactic event. Writing to the Philippian church, he expressed the longing of his soul when he exclaimed:-

"If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." Philippians 3:11. See also (**1 Corinthians 15:18, 22, 23; 1 Thessalonians 4:14, 17**).

In the New Testament, the resurrection of the Christian is referred to as "the resurrection of life." **John 5:29**, and "the resurrection of Jesus Christ." **1 Peter 3:21**. The rewards are given to the saints, not at death but at the second coming of Christ:-

"Behold I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:12.

Another important factor is that, at death, the saints go into the grave. They will live again, but they come to life and live with Jesus after they are raised from the dead. And this takes place at the second coming of Christ. (See **Matthew 16:27; Isaiah 40:10; 1 Thessalonians 4:16-18; 2 Timothy 4:8**).

But while asleep in the tomb, the child of God knows nothing. Time matters not to him. If he should be there 1000 years, the time would be but a moment. Have you ever been to hospital for an operation? You remember, they wheeled you on a bed into the surgery and gave you an anaesthetic, soon, you feel asleep. Deeply asleep. Next thing you know is you're waking up back in the recovery room.... then suddenly you're waking up in your own room. You haven't a clue as to how much time has passed. In fact, you don't even remember falling asleep! You had no dreams, nothing even passed through your head. Sounds a lot like **Psalm 146:4**, your thoughts perished. **Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6**, no memory, no emotions, no love, nothing. You felt absolutely nothing while you were in that

deep sleep. It is no wonder that Jesus likened death to sleep! So then, when one who serves God closes his eyes in death, and whether one day or 2000 years elapse, the next instance of his consciousness will be when he opens his eyes and beholds his blessed LORD coming in the clouds. To him it is death --- then suddenly glory. In what way then, is death an enemy? It is no respecter of persons, rank, sex, age, ability, plans, goals, aims, nothing. It will take anyone, anywhere, anytime. It cuts down Kings, rulers, anyone. It does not consider any plans you may have, and once you're dead, you cannot continue with anything you wanted to do:-

"Whatever thy hand findeth to do, do it with all thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, wither thou goest." Ecclesiastes 9:10.

The second death, [of which we will deal more with in the next study] is the real enemy, for from this "sleep" there will be NO resurrection. Ever. Eternal death is a terrible fate for the wicked.

In talking with some Christians on the state of the dead, I have heard them say, "Oh, please don't tell me that my Mother isn't in heaven now, I just couldn't bear to think otherwise."

All right, what of the thought that death is simply a transition from this life to the next, while we go on living down here on Earth. If it is that, at death, a conscious "soul" or "spirit" immediately leaves the body and wings its way to heaven..... or if you haven't been so good, the other place below, then what about those who have died and were raised back to life in the Bible?? Did they have anything to tell us???

There are at least 7 instances recorded of those who were raised from the dead:

- 1} The widows son. **1 Kings 17:20-24.**
- 2} The Shunammite's son. **2 Kings 4:20, 34, 35.**
- 3} The widows son of Nain. **Luke 7:11-15.**
- 4} The daughter of Jairus. **Luke 8:41, 42, 49-56.**
- 5} Tabitha. **Acts 9:36-41.**
- 6} Eutychus. **Acts 20:9-12** and
- 7} Lazarus. **John 11:1-44; 12:1, 9.**

Doubtless some of these were dead for but a short time, for according to Jewish custom, burial took place on the same day as the death. Lazarus had been dead longer, however, "four days" according to Martha.

The question that naturally arises is this: Did the souls of these individuals go immediately at death to either heaven or hell?? If so, it would surely be too bad to bring one back from heaven, where, having once arrived, he would naturally expect to remain forever. To bring one back from the realms of bliss to this vale of tears would be to run the risk of him sinning again, and so of losing eternal reward. On the other hand, if one were brought back from hell, as popularly conceived, he would doubtless be very glad to be released from punishment and would have another opportunity of accepting the gospel.

If the soul goes to either heaven or hell at death, surely those who have been resurrected would talk of the glories of the heavenly land, or they would warn sinners in no uncertain tones of the torments of the damned. Yet there is no record of their having said a single word. How strange, if the soul or spirit survives death as a conscious entity, that we have no record at all from any of the above individuals concerning what happened during the period they were dead!

Mention might well be made of one of the saints of ancient days. He died, in the regular course of events, and was buried as were his fathers before him. The divine record says:- "David.... is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day." Acts 2:29.

To say that it was David's body that was buried, and that his soul went on to the realms of bliss, would certainly not be in accordance with the teaching of the Word of God. This might accord with popular theology, but the divine record definitely declares that:-

"David never went up to heaven." Verse 34 (Knox translation).

"For David is not ascended. Better, ascended not. He went down into the grave, and "slept with his fathers." The Cambridge Bible.

In fact, David is one of the many saints listed in Hebrews 11, having died, waiting for that "better resurrection."

In talking with others on this topic, I have asked them, 'If it is true that your soul or spirit goes to heaven upon death, what does **1 Thessalonians 4:16** mean when it says that when the Lord comes back to Earth, that He will raise those who are "dead in Christ?"

'Oh,' they explain, 'that's only their bodies. You see, Jesus is going to give souls their bodies back again.'

I ask, 'When Enoch and Elijah were taken to heaven, did their bodies stay here? "No... No, but they changed on the way up...'

'They did? But you give me no bible texts. Anyway, if that were so, what happened to their bodies?? And surely id their souls go to heaven upon death anyway, why didn't God just let them die?? But He didn't. He saved them physically. He took them with their bodies.'

Let's suppose, however, that it's correct that you go straight to heaven upon death. In your non-bodied state you wing your way to the realms of bliss. (And your name by the way is Abel. The very first being ever to die in the universe). You begin to enjoy the fact that now you are forever free from that inhibiting "home" called the human body. Did I say "forever?" I'm sorry.

That's quite wrong. For our friends tells us that at the second coming of Christ you are going to be re-united with your body. Oh, yes, it will be a perfect body, incorruptible, immortal, for it is made that way at the last trump, but this time you will be living in it for eternity. Is this really the way it is?? What does the Bible mean when it says:-

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." **Ezekiel 18:4.**

That your body goes into the ground but your soul goes and lives in heaven until the second coming? No. God has said,

"Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." **Genesis 3:19.**

And no one can read that statement any other way. We go back to where we came from. And only God has the power to call us from our dusty beds at the second coming. Therefore, there are no immortal sinners.

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## **DO THE DEAD DIE? PART 2.**

There have long been two schools of thought on the topic of the destiny of the wicked. Many are taught and believe that there is a place called "hell" where the wicked ( the lost) are to forever to burn for their sins. This idea is supported by some Scripture that, if read by itself without the rest of the Bible seems to support the idea of an "eternally burning hell." Many others though, who just cannot reconcile the idea that a loving God is going to punish for eternity those who refuse His love, believe that God is going to destroy the wicked once and for all. It will be an eternal punishment, not eternal punishment.

When Satan first said to Eve in Eden, "Ye shall not surely die," Genesis 3:4, it was the first sermon ever preached on the immortality of the soul. God had told Adam and Eve that if they were disobedient they would die. The only one who promised them life after disobedience was Satan. The divine sentence, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die," Ezekiel 18:4, is made to mean: the soul that sinneth shall not surely die, but live forever in eternal torment and everlasting punishment. But God has said "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." Genesis 3:19. Has God created a creature that even He Himself cannot destroy?? If so, what did Christ mean when He said, "...fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell?" Matthew 10:28. Notice Jesus said destroy not punish.

Satan, having made many accept the idea of natural immortality, led them on to conclude that the sinner would live on in eternal misery. Now the prince of darkness, working through his agents, represents God as a revengeful tyrant, declaring that He plunges into hell all those who do not please Him, and causes them ever to feel his wrath; and while they suffer unutterable anguish and writhe in the eternal flames, their 'loving' Creator looks down upon them with satisfaction.

Thus the archfiend clothes with his own attributes the Creator and benefactor of mankind. Cruelty is satanic. God is love; and all that He created was pure, holy, and lovely, until sin was brought in by the first great rebel. Satan and his workers represent God as even worse than themselves, in order to justify their own malignity and rebellion. Satan endeavours to shift his own cruelty of Character upon our heavenly Father, that he may cause himself to appear as the one greatly wronged by his expulsion from heaven because he would not submit to so unjust a governor. He presents before the world the liberty which they may enjoy under his mild sway, in contrast with the bondage imposed by the stern decrees of Jehovah. Thus he succeeds in luring souls away from their allegiance to God.

How repugnant to every emotion of love and mercy, and even to our sense of justice, is the doctrine that the wicked dead are tormented with fire and brimstone in and eternally burning hell; that for the sins of a brief earthly life they are going to suffer torture as long as God shall live. Yet this doctrine has been widely taught and is still believed by many of the creeds of Christendom today.

That there is punishment for the wicked, the Bible is only too clear on. Yet it is not a punishment that is received as soon as one dies. Neither evil angels nor wicked men are now receiving final punishment for their transgressions. Such punishments are still future. In the days when Jesus was on Earth, the devils asked Him, "Art thou come hither to torment us before the time?" Matthew 8:39. Evil angels are "reserved unto judgment." 2 Peter 2:4, or, "unto the judgment of the great day." Jude 6. Concerning the wicked we read that God reserves "the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished." 2 Peter 2:9.

What then constitutes the punishment of the wicked? The only safe and reliable source of information on this question is, of course, the Word of God. Unless our ideas are based upon the authoritative Word of God, they should carry no weight with anyone. We shall therefore note some of the expressions used by the LORD in this connection. We read that as the final penalty for their transgressions and their rejection of the Son of God that:-

1. THE WICKED WILL DIE — On more than one occasion we are told that "the soul that sinneth, it shall die." Ezekiel 18:4. But some may say, "that is the Old Testament." True, but "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God and is profitable for doctrine...." 2 Timothy 3:16. And the fact is, the same truth is also taught in the New Testament, for we read, "the wages of sin is death." Romans 6:23. And in this verse a unique contrast is drawn, life is promised to the righteous; death to the unrighteous.

Over and over again death is emphasised as the punishment of the wicked. Sinners are declared "worthy of death" Romans 1:32; the end of sin is death, Romans 6:21; and "sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death." James 1:15. In ancient days God in His love and mercy pleaded with Israel through His servants the prophets, time after time His appeal was "Why will ye die, O house of Israel?... I have no pleasure in the death of him that dieth." Ezekiel 18:31, 32. Now if you go to be with God when you die, why doesn't God find any pleasure in death?? I thought He loved us? Doesn't He want us in heaven with Him? Obviously, death is not a transfer from earth to heaven, otherwise God would be happy about it.

2. THE WICKED WILL BE "CUT OFF" — This thought is emphasised repeatedly, especially in the Old Testament. The Psalmist, looking forward to the time when sin would be abolished declares, "evildoers shall be cut off." Psalms 37:9. And again, "the wicked are cut off." verse 34. The words "cut off" are, in the main, rendered from the Hebrew word 'KARATH.' This is a strong word, and is several times translated "destroy" as in Ezekiel 28:16.

3. THE WICKED WILL PERISH — This expression is repeatedly used in relation to the destruction of the wicked hosts. the word "perish" is translated from the Hebrew word 'ABAD,' and means, "to be cut off" or "to be cut down." It will be observed in the following texts: "the wicked shall perish." Psalms 37:20; "the wicked perish at the presence of God." Psalms 68:2. Another significant

expression occurs in Psalms 37:10, "the wicked shall not be." This is paralleled in the New Testament by our LORD's statement that "Whosoever believeth in Him should not perish." John 3:16.

4. THE WICKED WILL BE BURNED UP — This is also a strong expression, and is used on many occasions. In Malachi 4:1 it speaks of the day when the wicked shall be burned up. Matthew writes of their being bound "in bundles to burn them." Matthew 13:30, and also mentions that "the tares are gathered and burned." verse 40. Peter declares that "the earth also and the works therein shall be burned up." 2 Peter 3:10. We read of the final destruction of the unrighteous as being in "the lake of fire." Revelation 21:8, and this John calls "the second death." Same verse. While the expression "the first death" does not appear in Scripture, the term "second death" does. [Revelation 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8], but, to have a "second death," a "first death" is necessary. This second death is associated with the final punishment of the wicked, and in reality indicates a death from which there is no resurrection. The first death is obviously the death resulting from Adam's sin, and from this first death, or sleep, there is to be a resurrection for all mankind. This applies to all, for Acts 24:15 tells us there will be a "resurrection of the dead both of the just and the unjust."

5. THE WICKED SHALL BE DESTROYED — The thought occurs in a number of places. "All the wicked will be destroyed." Psalms 145:20. Evil angels once declared to Jesus, "Art thou come to destroy us?" Mark 1:24. Again, the wicked will be "Punished with everlasting destruction." 2 Thessalonians 1:9. And even the devil himself, the one who introduced iniquity into this fair world, will be destroyed. Hebrews 2:14. In fact, in very strong words God pronounces His sentence upon Satan, when in Ezekiel 28:18, 19, He declares: "... I will bring forth a fire from the midst of thee, it shall devour thee, and I will bring thee to ashes upon the earth..... and never shalt thou be anymore."

Some of the strongest words, it seems, have been used by the sacred writers to emphasise the fate of the wicked. They will not only "burn," Greek, 'kaio' { Revelation 19:20; 21:8}, but they will be "burned up," Greek, 'apollumi,' {Matthew 21:41; Mark 1:24}, but be "utterly destroyed," Greek, 'exolothreuo,' {Acts 3:23. [R.S.V.]}. They shall not only be "consumed," Hebrew, 'TAMAM,' {Psalms 104:35}, or "consume away," Hebrew, 'KALAH,' {Psalms 37:20}, but be "utterly consumed," Hebrew, 'APOLLUM' {Psalms 73:19}.

Not only in language plain and clear does the LORD reveal to man the fate of the ungodly, but He has sought to bring this truth home to us in familiar illustrations, figures of speech, and various similes, observe:-

1. THE WICKED ARE LIKENED TO COMBUSTIBLE MATERIALS — The Psalmist likens the wicked to something he saw repeatedly in the temple of ancient days: "The enemies of the LORD shall be as the fat of lambs." Psalms 37:20. Furthermore, the ungodly are likened to: "the chaff which the wind driveth away." Psalms 1:4. Isaiah says that "the whirlwind shall take them away as stubble." Isaiah 40:24. And Malachi also declared that in that day, "the wicked shall be stubble." Malachi 4:1.

2. OVERTHROW OF SODOM & GOMORRAH IS TYPE OF DESTRUCTION OF THE WICKED — The fate of Sodom and Gomorrah, in the days of old, is graphically described in the Bible. We read that they were overthrown, ( Deuteronomy 29:23, Isaiah 13:19), and that the cities were destroyed, (Genesis 19:29). The destruction was complete, for we read that the fire "destroyed them all." Luke 17:29. The punishment metered out to Sodom and Gomorrah was not of long duration, for we read that they were, "overthrown in a moment." Lamentations 4:6. Furthermore, another writer tells us how utterly they were overthrown:- they were turned "into ashes" 2 Peter 2:6. And Peter further declares that this experience was "an ensample unto those that after should live ungodly." Jude added a unique expression, which indicates that the destruction was not only complete, but that it was "the vengeance of eternal fire" Jude 7. This statement cannot mean a fire that is eternally burning, for today these two cities are no longer burning, but, rather, that this fire was eternal in its results. And this must be true of the wicked also, for Malachi tells us that on the same day that God destroys the wicked, that the righteous "shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the souls of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts." Malachi 4:3. Is this possible in an eternally burning hell?

## **EVERLASTING ETERNAL FOREVER AND EVER**

Well, then, what of the terms "everlasting" and "eternal?" These words are only found in the New Testament in connection with the fate of the wicked, in the following texts:-

- "Depart... ye cursed, into everlasting fire." Matthew 25:41.
- "And these shall go away into everlasting punishment." Matthew 25:46.
- "Punished with everlasting destruction." 2 Thessalonians 1:9.
- "In danger of eternal damnation." Mark 3:29.
- "Suffering the vengeance of eternal fire." Jude 7.

In each instance, whether translated "everlasting" or "eternal," the words are translated from the Greek word 'aionios.' For example, in Matthew 25:46, the "everlasting" {aionios} punishment is contrasted with "eternal" {aionios} life in the same verse.

In view of this fact, it might be observed that if the "eternal life," referred to is forever and forever, will not the "everlasting punishment" be for the same duration, insomuch as precisely same Greek word is used in both instances? Decidedly so!! The eternal life will continue throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity; and the punishment will also be eternal; not eternal duration of conscious suffering however, but punishment that is complete and final. The end of those who thus suffer is the second death. This death will be eternal, from which there will not, and cannot be any resurrection.

That this is so, can be seen in the use of the word "eternal" in other relationships. We read of "eternal redemption" Hebrews 9:12, and of "eternal judgment" Hebrews 6:2. Surely this does not mean redemption going on and on through all eternity, or an unending work of judgment. NO!! The work of redemption is complete and eternal in its results. The same will be true of the judgment. The same principle applies concerning "eternal damnation," "eternal fire," and "eternal punishment."

What then of the expressions "forever" and "forever and ever?" These expressions are found many times in Holy Scripture. In the Old Testament they are in the main from the Hebrew word 'OLAM,' which is translated quite often by the word "everlasting." It does have several other renderings however, such as "ancient time," "old time," "beginning of the world" et cetera,.....

Another expression in the Hebrew is 'NETSACH' { "Forever"}, and 'LENETSACH NETSACHIM,' { "forever and ever"}. 'NETSACH' is variously rendered as "always," "constantly," "ever," "evermore," and "perpetually."

In the New Testament the words "forever" et cetera, came from the Greek words 'cis tous aionas ton aionion,' which is literally, "to the ages of the ages," and is uniformly rendered "forever and ever."

It must be recognized that these words are used with limitations, and the only way to understand them is in the light of their context. If they are applied to God, as they are on so many occasions, the meaning is obvious, but if to man, then they can only apply as long as he lives. In other words, the term must be understood according to the object to which it is applied. These limitations can be seen in the following texts: The Passover was to be observed "forever" Exodus 12:17. The slave was to serve his master "forever" Exodus 21:6. the child Samuel is to abide in the tabernacle "forever" 1 Samuel 1:22. Jonah was in the belly of the great fish "forever." Jonah 2:6. And the leprosy was to cleave to Gehazi "forever." 2 Kings 5:27.

We find that the same limitations apply in the New Testament also, to the Greek words 'aion' and 'aionios' - Philemon was counselled to serve Onesimus "forever" Philemon 15. The book of Revelation declares, concerning Babylon, that, "her smoke rose up forever and ever." 19:3, that the wicked "shall be tormented day and night forever and ever." 20:10, and that, "the smoke of their torment ascended up forever and ever." 14:11. Now these are strong expressions, and can be rightly understood only in the light of Bible usage. A good illustration of this appears in Isaiah 34:8-10:-

"For it is the day of the LORD'S vengeance, and the year of recompences for the controversy of Zion. And the streams thereof shall be turned into pitch, and the dust thereof into brimstone, and the land thereof shall become burning pitch. It shall not be quenched night nor day; the smoke thereof

shall go up for ever: from generation to generation it shall lie waste; none shall pass through it for ever and ever."

This had a local application in days of long ago; and undoubtedly it will have a second application in the great conflagration in the last days. But think of its application in the days of Israel. What a picture of absolute destruction — brimstone and burning pitch, burning so fiercely it could not be quenched! The smoke ascended, and the record is that it ascended "forever." But note that this unquenchable fire ended in waste and desolation. Who would contend that fire is still burning today??? What we have here is a picture of absolute and complete destruction. So shall it be in the day of the executive judgment, when the wicked are destroyed. "They shall be destroyed forever' Psalms 92:7. The wicked host will not be "burning" forever, but shall be "burned up" forever:- "For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, shall be stubble: and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the LORD of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts." Malachi 4:1, 3.

Therefore, I reject the doctrine of an eternally burning hell for the following reasons:-

1. Because everlasting life is a gift from God {Romans 6:23}. The wicked will not possess this — they "shall not see life" John 3:36; "no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him" 1 John 3:15. They would still be living, even if in eternal torment.
2. Because the thought of eternal torment would perpetrate and immortalize sin, suffering, and woe, and therefore contradict, I believe, divine revelation, which tells us that one day these things shall be no more: {Hebrews 9:28; Revelation 21:4}.
3. Because such a teaching would detract from the attribute of love as seen in the character of God, and shows our heavenly Father with an attitude of wrath which is never appeased. "God is love." \*
4. Because it seems to me to provide a plague spot in the universe of God throughout eternity, and would seem to indicate that it is impossible for even God Himself to ever abolish it, (sin, suffering, torment, hell). And even if God could, He's not going to.
5. Because it is a contradiction to the justice of God. Cain killed one person, his brother, and yet (supposedly) has been in hell suffering for thousands of years. Hitler, on the other hand has had millions put to death, yet (supposedly) has only been in hell for the last 40 years. And this is justice??
6. Because it has a reversal of roles — it shows Satan using fire to punish for eternity lost sinners when in reality God is going to use fire to destroy Satan for eternity. Ezekiel 28:18, 19.
7. Because the Scriptures teach that the atoning work of Christ is to "put away sin" Hebrews 9:26. — first from the individual, and then ultimately from the universe. The full fruition of Christ's sacrificial, atoning work will be seen not only in redeemed people but in a restored heaven and earth. {Ephesians 1:14}.

\* An important note on number three. A large class to whom the doctrine of eternal torment is revolting, are driven to an opposite error. They see that the Bible teaches of God as a being full of love and compassion, and they cannot believe that He will consign His creatures to the fires of an eternally burning hell. But holding that the soul is naturally immortal, they see no alternative but to conclude that all will finally be saved. Many regard the threatenings of the Bible as designed merely to frighten men into obedience, and not to be literally fulfilled. Thus the sinner can live in selfish pleasure, disregarding the requirements of God, and yet expect to be finally received into His favour. Such a doctrine, presuming upon God's mercy, but ignoring His justice, pleases the carnal heart and encourages the wicked in their iniquity.

If it were true that the souls of all men passed directly to heaven at the hour of death, then we might covet death rather than life. Many have been led by this belief to put an end to their existence. When overwhelmed with trouble, perplexity, and disappointment, it seems as easy thing to break the brittle thread of life and soar away into the bliss of the eternal world.

God has given in His Word decisive evidence that He will punish the transgressors of His law. Those who flatter themselves that "God is love, He is too merciful to execute justice upon the sinner," have only to look to the cross of Calvary. The death of the spotless Son of God testifies that "the wages of sin is death" Romans 6:23. and that every violation of God's law must receive its just retribution, for, "sin is the transgression of the law" 1 John 3:4. Christ the sinless became sin for man, { 2 Corinthians 5:21}. He bore the guilt of transgression, and His Father's face being hidden, until His heart was broken, and His life crushed out. All this sacrifice was made that sinners might be redeemed. In no other way could man be freed from the penalty of sin. And every soul that refuses to become a partaker of the atonement provided at such a cost must bear in his own person the guilt and punishment for his transgression.

### **WHAT OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS? (IT WOULD DO WELL TO READ LUKE 16:19-31).**

To take this story at its face value, without the rest of Scripture to test it by, one could possibly conclude that this story is 100% true in every detail, and that the wicked do, in fact, go to an "eternal hell fire," and that the saints go straight to "Abraham's bosom" upon death. But the Bible says concerning the study of it that:-

"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:" Isaiah 28:10.

And we surely cannot ignore the plainest language in Scripture concerning the state of the dead, and say that Jesus Himself taught something totally opposite. For example, in the story, the rich man knows that he has died, and shows concern for his brothers who are still living, but how does this stand in the light of Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6: "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything... also their love, and their hatred, their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in anything that is done under the sun?" Another, the story shows each dead person talking to each other, yet Psalms 115:17 says, "the dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence." We must remember, when studying the Bible, that Scripture backs up Scripture, not our own ideas or the opinions of others. So then, let us take a look at this story in the light of all of Scripture, and see if it can stand the test...

The scene of the parable is laid in 'hades,' the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew 'SHEOL,' in the story both the rich man and Lazarus had died with the rich man being buried on earth with the appropriate ceremonies. Although nothing is said about an intangible, immortal soul leaving the body at death, these two characters are often regarded as disembodied spirits — two ghosts, feeling their respective ghostly misery and joy, with words issuing from their lips.

The rich man, (from now on called "Dives," from the Latin adjective for "rich"), in torment, is depicted in the story as seeing Lazarus afar off in "Abraham's bosom" — a common concept — and beseeching Abraham to send Lazarus to relieve his torment with a drop of water to cool his tongue. But instead, he is reminded of the impassable gulf fixed between them.

That's the picture — the gulf between heaven and hell realistically too wide for "spirits" on opposite sides to cross over, but narrow enough for them to talk to each other!!! Now if this portrayal is real, then the abodes of the saved and the damned are forever within sight and sound of each other, yet the space between them is unbridgeable. It's a strange contention that the sights and sounds of the agonies of the damned are to enhance the bliss of the redeemed. (?). It must not be overlooked that Lazarus was carried off to "Abraham's bosom," not heaven. Nor to the presence of God. Abraham is the chief personage — and each of the characters is portrayed as without a prior resurrection. But this concept results in a maze of absurdities and contradictions. Abraham is shown to be talking, that he is actually there. Are we to understand from this that all the saved will dwell in "Abraham's bosom"??? And what of Abraham himself, having died and his sons burying him? Genesis 25:8, 9. Yet the Bible

gives no record of his resurrection. In fact, Abraham is listed with the other patriarchs in Hebrews 11 as one waiting for that "better" resurrection at the second coming of Christ.

The parable was a common method used by Christ in teaching truth. And the laws, or principles, of parables, familiar in Christ's day were a sufficient safeguard against misunderstanding. This particular parable, unique in the New Testament, has its nearest parallel in the Old Testament, in the parabolic imagery of Isaiah 14:9-11, which represents dead Kings, though actually in their graves, rising up and sitting on thrones in sheol, conversing and rejoicing over the mighty Babylonian conqueror who had put them to death, and who himself was now conquered by death and is coming to take his throne in the nether regions.

Jotham's parabolic story of the trees, the vine, and the bramble engaging in a political discussion is another parallel in the Old Testament. The episode never took place in reality, but that no way detracts from the truth emphasised in parabolic form. This parable pictures inanimate objects personified, and even given life and speech. In Judges 9:8-15 we read, "the trees went forth on a time to anoint a King over them; and they said... "anyone will recognise this clearly as figurative language.

All admit that the story of Luke 16 must be either literal fact, and 100% true in every detail, or only a parable. It cannot be both. If it is correct and true in its doctrine, what then do we do with the rest of Scripture? But if only a parable, then only a moral thought can be conveyed. And this is so, for Christ is not here disclosing the particulars of life beyond the grave, rather, He was using a trenchant story of the times to admonish and rebuke those who refused His teachings on the right use of wealth. It was also believed by the Jews that they were saved, not because of the grace of God, but because of their race. And what's more, if one was a RICH Jew, then his chances of salvation were even better! Hence, Christ using an ancient story, but placing a rich Jew in hell, while a common beggar went to heaven, showed the bigoted Jew just where he was wrong. God doesn't save anyone because of their race, nor only if they are rich. He saves them because as the parable points out, they have heeded God's Word and lived in obedience to it.

Those who contend that this story is true, suppose that Dives and Lazarus are in a disembodied state, that is, destitute of bodies. "Spirits." And yet Dives is explicitly referred to as having "eyes" that see, and a "tongue" that speaks, as well as seeking cooling relief from the "finger" of Lazarus — real bodily parts. They are thus portrayed as going to their rewards bodily, despite the fact that Dive's body was duly buried and in the grave. Also, if this portrayal were real, who is there who would contend that a drop of water off the finger of Lazarus would be sufficient to help bring cooling relief for Dives?

To cite this allegory as a literal instead of a figurative account, would, as has been said, place heaven and hell geographically within speaking and seeing distance of each other, which is absurd. Saints and sinners eternally holding converse!! Will all who die in Christ see and talk across the diving gulf, through all eternity, with their own loved ones who have died out of Christ?? If this is true, that dead men actually hold converse with one another, then the parable contradicts the plainest declarations of Scripture — "His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Psalms 146:4. "The dead know not anything" Ecclesiastes 9:5. "The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence." Psalms 115:17.

If the narrative is literal, then the beggar received his reward, and Dives his punishment immediately after death and before the judgment day, Acts 24:15. To use this parable to prove that men receive their rewards at death is squarely to contradict Christ Himself, who states explicitly that both the righteous and the wicked receive their reward, "when the Son of Man shall come in His glory." (Matthew 25:31-41; Revelation 22:12). It is in direct conflict with Paul's declaration that God, "hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness." (Acts 17:31). This day will be when "the Son of man shall come in His glory... and before Him shall be gathered all nations: and He shall separate them one from the other." (Matthew 25:31, 32). A literal interpretation also conflicts with Christ's promise of reward in Luke 14:14, "Thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just." Compare also Paul's statement, "There is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the LORD... shall give me at that day." 2 Timothy 4:8 — the day of His appearing. This statement is in harmony with Malachi 4:1-4, which says that "the day cometh" — a future event — when the wicked are to suffer the torments of consuming fire.

Even King David, "a man after God's own heart" is still waiting in the grave for his reward, we are told in Acts 2:29, 34. It seems clear, that all the Bible, Moses and all the prophets, are united

and harmonious in testifying that the dead, both the righteous and wicked, lie silent and unconscious in death until the resurrection day. {See Job 14:12-15, 20, 21; 17:13; 19:25, 27; Psalms 115:17; John 11:11-14}.

Jesus frequently referred to the fate of the wicked. He mentioned "Hell" Matthew 10:28; He referred to "Hell fire" Matthew 5:22; He called attention to the resurrection of damnation" John 5:29; to the "damnation of hell" Matthew 23:33; and to "eternal damnation" Mark 3:29. We should also take special notice of Christ's words in Matthew 10:28, where Jesus says to "Fear him which is able to **DESTROY** ..." not 'able to inflict eternal torture,' no, destroy the "soul and body in hell."

In the parable, Dives lifts up his eyes "in torments," "in this flame." But according to Scripture this torment does not precede the second advent. { 2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8}. 'Gehenna' is the Greek word usually used when the fires of destruction are described. But in this story of Dives, the word "hell" is translated from 'Hades,' the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew word 'SHEOL,' which both mean, "the grave," and the grave contains no such fire. To the Jews, all the dead were in 'hades,' the 'grave' home of the dead.

This story in no way proves the consciousness of the dead, or the present and eternal torment of the wicked. Such a conclusion, I believe, is wholly without justification, and is contradictory to the clear, plain teaching of God's Word. Death is consistently set forth in Scripture as a condition of silence, darkness, a dreamless sleep, and unconsciousness. {See Psalms 6:5; 115:17; Isaiah 38:18}.

### **THE MEANING OF THE PARABLE**

We cannot stop here without giving you the reason behind such a parable. To do so would leave us with many unanswered questions!

The great gulf, ( Greek, 'chasma' "chasm" ) — narrow enough to allow conversation to take place across it, but deep enough to prevent passage — is incomprehensible on the hypothesis of immaterial "spirit" beings. Why is it impossible for them to pass between heaven and hell when they are "spirits??" Didn't the very same spirit just travel from earth to either place at the point of death? Why couldn't it travel a little further??

Rather, the gulf would indicate the irrevocable division that death fixes between the good and the bad at the close of their earthly probation. Each must remain in the class in which death finds him, until the great judgment day. Today, one may pass from the state of the condemned { John 3:18}, to that of the pardoned. But when death comes, it is forever too late — the gulf is fixed. The obvious purpose of this parable being spoken is for the influencing of the living, and is adapted to the time. But God's appointed time for the grace of man is before death and resurrection. Retribution comes after resurrection, Daniel 12:2. Life after death is always consequent upon the resurrection.

Moreover, when Dives pleaded with Abraham that Lazarus be sent back to warn his kinfolk against the terrors of hell, lest they come to the same place of torment, the answer was explicit: "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them" Luke 16:29. And if they will not heed them, then, Christ says plainly, they would not be persuaded, "though one rose from the dead." verse 31.

### **THEREFORE I BELIEVE.....**

(A) That the dialogue, with its parabolic personification, was wholly imaginary. And I believe not merely that it did not happen, but that it could never happen, between the saved and lost.

(B) That the time is likewise fictitious. Not only is the dialogue invented, but the time is antedated. (Men are not to be rewarded, or to receive retribution, until the resurrection) but here they are pictured allegorically as before the resurrection.

(C) This is the only place in Scripture where "hades" does not mean "the grave." But Christ, for the purpose of a parable, and utilizing current concepts, here antedates and portrays Dives and Lazarus and Abraham as alive in hades before the resurrection, just as Isaiah raises up his dead King in hades.

According to the teachings of Jesus in other parables, the recompense is at the resurrection of the just — the "time of the harvest" and the "end of the world," when God's people are gathered into His garner, and the wicked, as tares, are bundled for burning. {Matthew 13:30, 49; Luke 14:14}.

In this parable, Christ was meeting the people on their own ground. The doctrine of a conscious state of existence between death and the resurrection was held by many of those who were listening to Christ's words. The Saviour knew of their ideas, and He framed His parable so as to inculcate important truths through these preconceived opinions. He held up before His hearers a mirror wherein they might see themselves in their true relation to God. He used the prevailing opinion to convey the idea He wished to make prominent to all — that no man is valued for his possessions; for all he has belongs to him only as lent by the LORD. A misuse of these gifts will place him below the poorest and most afflicted man who loves God and trusts in Him.

It was brought to this group of critics, then, not to condone their errors but to illustrate from their own teachings, the unsoundness of their position. Our entrance into the kingdom of God is by grace, and grace alone; but once in the kingdom we are to live as citizens of the kingdom, according to the principles of that kingdom, as revealed in Scripture. If men turn from this clear revelation of God in His Word, they would not believe though one were to rise from the dead. A supernatural event, or even an accumulation of such events, will not suffice to convince those who reject the Word of God.

Therefore I cannot accept that this parable is an actual, literal, real event for the following reasons:-

1. The state of the dead, both the righteous and the wicked, as set forth in Scripture.
2. The final and total destruction of the wicked, as set forth in Scripture.
3. The non-immortality of the soul: "The soul that sinneth it shall die" Ezekiel 18:4.
4. The rewards of both the righteous and the wicked, given to all after the resurrection at the second coming of Christ, as set forth in Scripture. "Behold, I come quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be." Revelation 22:11.

Nowhere in the sacred Scriptures is found the statement that the righteous go to their reward or the wicked to their punishment at death. The patriarchs and the prophets have left no such assurance. Christ and His apostles have given no such hint of it. The Bible clearly teaches that the dead do not go immediately to heaven. If so, who is resurrected at the second coming ?? 1 Thessalonians 4:16. They are represented as sleeping until the resurrection. 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18; Job 14:10-12. In the very day when the silver cord is loosed and the golden bowl broken (Ecclesiastes 12:6), man's thoughts perish. They that go down to the grave are in silence, Psalms 115:17: they know no more any of that which is done under the sun, Ecclesiastes 9:6. Blessed rest for the weary righteous. Time, be it long or short, is but a moment to them. they sleep; but Jesus comes to wake them out of their sleep, with the trump of God to glorious immortality. "For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible... so when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." 1 Corinthians 15:52-54. If death were no more than a change from Earth to Heaven, why is it an enemy that needs to be destroyed, especially for the Christian?? We would go straight to heaven at point of death, so why fear it? No, as Jesus Himself has said, death is a sleep. And for those who fall asleep in Christ, it is a sleep that will not be eternal. As they will be called forth from their deep slumber, they will begin to think just where they ceased. The last sensation was the pang of death; the last thought, that they were falling beneath the power of the grave, will be their first thought when woken up by Christ. But, when they see that they are awakened from their sleep, their first glad thought will be echoed in the triumphal shout: "O DEATH, WHERE IS THY STING? o GRAVE WHERE IS THY VICTORY?!"

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**WHY IS IT SO IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND CORRECTLY?**

The doctrine of natural immortality, has supplanted the truth so plainly taught in Scripture, that "the dead know not anything."

The doctrine of man's consciousness in death, especially the belief that spirits of the dead return to minister to the living, has prepared the way for modern spiritualism. If the dead are admitted to the presence of God and the holy angels, and privileged with knowledge far exceeding what they before possessed, why should they not return to Earth to enlighten and instruct the living? Here is a channel regarded as sacred, through which Satan works for the accomplishment of his purposes. The fallen angels who do his bidding, appear as messengers from the spirit world. While professing to bring the living into communication with the dead, the prince of evil exercised his bewitching influence upon their minds.

He has the power to bring before men the appearance of their departed friends. The counterfeit is perfect; the familiar look, the words, the tone, are reproduced with marvellous distinctness. Many are comforted with the assurance that their loved ones are enjoying the bliss of heaven, and without suspicion of danger, they give an ear "to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils." 1 Timothy 4:1.

When they have been led to believe that the dead actually return to communicate with them, Satan causes those to appear who went down into the grave unprepared. They claim to be happy in heaven and even to occupy exalted positions there, and thus the error is widely taught that no difference is made between the righteous and the wicked. These pretended visitants from the world of spirits sometimes utter cautions and warnings which prove to be correct. Then, as confidence is gained, they present doctrines that directly undermine faith in the Scriptures. With an appearance of deep interest in the well-being of their friends on earth, they insinuate the most dangerous errors. The fact that they state some truths, and are able to foretell future events, gives to their statements the appearance of reliability; and their false teachings are accepted by the multitudes as readily, and believed as implicitly, as if they were the most sacred truths of the Bible. Thus under a new disguise the great rebel still carries on his warfare against God, begun in heaven and for nearly six thousand years continued upon earth.

Many will be ensnared through the belief that spiritualism is merely human trickery or cunning; but when brought face to face with manifestations which they cannot but regard as supernatural, they will be deceived, and will be led to accept them as the great power of God. These persons overlook the testimony of the Scriptures concerning the wonders wrought by Satan and his agents. Paul testifies that before the second coming of Christ there will be great manifestations of satanic power. The coming of the LORD is to be preceded by "the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness." 2 Thessalonians 2:9, 10. And the apostle John, describing the miracle working power that will be manifested in the last days, declares: "He doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven in the sight of men, and deceiveth them that dwell on the Earth, by the means of those miracles which he had the power to do." Revelation 13:13. No mere impostures are here foretold. Men are deceived by the miracles which Satan's agents have power to do, not which they pretend to do.

But none need be deceived by the lying claims of spiritualism. God has given the world sufficient light to enable them to discover the snare. As already shown, the theory which forms the very foundation of spiritualism is at war with the plainest statements of Scripture. The Bible declares that the dead know not anything, that their thoughts have perished, that they have no part in anything that is done under the sun; they know nothing of the joys or sorrows of those who were dearest to them on earth.

Furthermore, God has expressly forbidden all pretended communication with departed spirits. In the days of the Hebrews there was a class of people who claimed, as do the spiritualists of today, to hold communication with the dead. But the "familiar spirits," as these visitants from other worlds were called, are declared by the Bible to be "the spirits of devils." [Compare Numbers 25:1-3; Psalms 106:28; 1 Corinthians 10:20; Revelation 16:14]. The work of dealing with familiar spirits was pronounced an abomination to the LORD, and was solemnly forbidden under penalty of death. {Leviticus 19:31; 20:27}.

There are few who have any just conception of the deceptive power of spiritualism and the danger of coming under its influence. Many tamper with it merely to gratify their curiosity. They

have no real faith in it and would be filled with horror at the thought of yielding themselves to the spirits' control. But they venture upon the forbidden ground, and the mighty destroyer exercises his power upon them against their will. Let them once be induced to submit their minds to his direction, and he holds them captive. It is impossible, in their own strength, to break away from the bewitching, alluring spell. Nothing but the power of God, granted in answer to the earnest prayer of faith, can deliver these ensnared souls. Marvellous beyond expression is the blindness of the people of this generation. Thousands reject the Word of God as unworthy of belief and with eager confidence receive the deceptions of Satan. Nothing can arouse their fears. So fully have they yielded to the tempter, so closely are they united with him, and so thoroughly imbued with his spirit, that they have no power and no inclination to break away from his snare.

Satan has long been preparing for his final effort to deceive the world. The foundation of his work was laid by the assurance given to Eve in Eden: "Ye shall not surely die," "In the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil." Genesis 3:4, 5. Little by little he has prepared the way for his masterpiece of deception in the development of spiritualism. He has not yet reached the full accomplishment of his designs; but it will be reached in the last remnant of time. Says the prophet: "I saw three unclean spirits like frogs..... they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty." Revelation 16:13, 14. The people are fast being lulled into a fatal security, to be awakened only by the outpouring of the wrath of God. Then, it will be too late. Only those who have fortified their minds with the Word of God will then be able to stand. The rest of the world will be swept into the ranks of this horrible delusion. Is it important for us to understand the Bible truth on this topic then? Oh yes!

**What says the Bible, the blessed Bible?  
This my only question be.  
The ideas of men so often confuse us,  
What says the Bible to me?**

Yours in the Master's Service, *Peter Hitchens*

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Psalms 23. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures.

Peter Hitchens fell asleep on the 24th December 1997  
Waiting for the Master's call to eternal life.  
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