

What Happens To Us After We Die?

1 Thess. 4:13-18

Introduction:

1. People have always been fascinated about what happens after death.
 - a. So-called after death experiences are popular topics for magazine articles and T.V. documentaries. Some describe blissful scenes of bright light and inviting figures, others, scenes of demons and hostile images.
 - b. Some say that there is no after life that after death there is no more consciousness.
 - c. Others offer ideas of reincarnation.
2. I believe the Bible's information to be accurate. I am personally skeptical, uncertain and doubtful of the personal experiences of individuals who have supposedly died and come back. I cannot explain their experiences and will just leave them in the area of the "unknown."
3. But the Bible does have some things to say and interestingly people have interpreted the biblical evidence in different ways. Maybe this is because what is said does not fully answer all of our questions.
4. What does the Bible say? What passages are relevant? What does happen to us after death? It would be comforting to know. Do I go to a place of waiting or do I go directly to heaven into the presence of God?

Discussion:

- I. One view is that after death the faithful do not go to heaven immediately, but to a place called Paradise (aka Abraham's bosom) there to await the day of judgment and after the judgment they go to heaven.
 - A. This view is based on Lk. 16:19-31 but it has some weaknesses.
 - B. Reading and analysis of Lk. 16:19-31.
 1. The account is set in a context of a series of parables (14:7, 16; 15:3, 11; 16:1).
 2. The account of the rich man and Lazarus bears the marks of a parable.
 - a. The immediate context.
 - 1) Pharisees, lovers of money (Lk. 16:14). What they esteemed highly was detestable to God.
 - 2) Jesus had already used one parable on this topic (Lk. 16:1ff).
 - b. Introduction—"Now there was a certain . . ." (cf. 16:1; 15:1, 11; 14:16).
 - c. One of the rules of interpreting parables is that often they have only one point to make (e.g. 14:11; 15:7, 10). We must avoid over-interpretation, i.e. assigning special meaning to each detail of the parable.
 - d. It may be over-interpretation when we take a parable like this and interpret into it specific details regarding the after life when this is not the topic of the passage.

The focus is on the contrast between men highly esteeming wealth when God does not.

C. Further description of this view.

1. This view holds that Hades-Sheol is composed of two compartments.
 - a. Paradise or Abraham's bosom where the righteous dead are prior to judgment.
 - b. Torment or tartarus where the unrighteous dead are prior to judgment.
2. Afterwards the righteous are raised, judged and enter heaven; the unrighteous are raised judged and enter Gehenna, final punishment, or the second death.
3. Three terms are used in the Greek language which the KJV translates "Hell."
 - a. Hades—equivalent to the O.T. "sheol" referring simply to the realm of the dead. It may be referring to a condition rather than a place.
 - b. Tartarus—a place where angels are reserved until judgment (2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6).
 - c. Gehenna—refers to the valley of Hinnom SW of Jerusalem; the location of the sacrificial offering by fire of children to the god Molech by Judah's kings Ahaz and Manasseh. Jeremiah called it the Valley of Slaughter. It came to denote the place of the punishment of the ungodly.

D. This view suggests that tartarus and Gehenna are two separate places.

1. Some scholars see them as two separate places: Chaffin, Pulpit Commentary; Vincent, Word Studies; Vine, New Testament Words. These reason on the basis that the evil angels are reserved for judgment and conclude that there must be another place that they go after judgment.
2. Other scholars (Barnes, Notes On N.T.; Robinson, Word Pictures; Thayer, Greek Lexicon) point out that tartarus was used by the Greeks as the abode of the wicked dead, a place of punishment, answering to the Gehenna of the Jews.
3. If tartarus is the same as Gehenna then perhaps paradise is the same as heaven. If this is the case the position of an intermediate state is eliminated and when people die they either go to be with the Lord or they do not.
4. A rigid distinction between paradise and heaven is not strongly supported in Scripture. See Hughes, New International Commentary on New Testament, 2 Corinthians, pp. 432, 436.
 - a. The third heaven seems to be the same as Paradise in 2 Cor. 12:2, 4.
 - 1) Heaven where birds fly.
 - 2) Heaven where moon, stars, planets are.
 - 3) Heaven where God is.
 - b. Rev. 2:7 places the tree of life in the Paradise of God. Rev. 22:1-5 places the tree of life at the throne of God.
 - c. It is possible that Abraham's bosom (Lk. 16:22) is heaven.
 - d. Jesus and the thief were in Paradise immediately after death (Lk. 23:43). It may mean that they were in heaven.

II. An alternative view is thus that Abraham's bosom (Lk. 16:22) is heaven and tartarus and Gehenna are the same and that when the faithful die they go to be at home with the Lord.

A. Two passages that are critical to this view are Phil. 1:23 and 2 Cor. 5:1-8.

B. An evaluation of Phil. 1:23 and 2 Cor. 5:1-8.

1. Both are addressing as the primary subject of death and what happens after death.

a. In Phil. 1:23 Paul regards the period after death as "gain" because it means to be with Christ.

b. In 2 Cor. 5:1-8 Paul is finding encouragement not to lose heart in life, because of what he is expecting afterward. He prefers to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord (v. 8). The Lord is at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens (Heb. 8:8ff).

2. Mention of an intermediate place or state where one waits to be with the Lord until after the judgment is noticeably absent.

3. That there is consciousness after death is necessarily implied in these texts.

C. This view is more convincing to me than the other.

1. I think it "fits" what is said in Lk. 16:19-21.

2. I think it "fits" Phil. 1:23 and 2 Cor. 5:1-8.

3. "But what about the judgment?" Our tendency is to think concretely, literally and chronologically. If we go from one place to another in this life we expect the same or similar in the next. We even tend to define heaven in terms of geographical place rather than relationship. We have trouble comprehending what our spiritual bodies will be like (cf. 1 Cor. 15:35-49). Is it any wonder we have trouble comprehending "place" in this relation? We see events on this earth transpiring in a linear time sequence. But then we sing songs about "when time shall be no more." We tend to see judgment as "a day in court." We have a court date. We may even have images of God sitting behind a bench, with gavel in hand, dressed in long robe, but such images may not be appropriate. We may think of being in jail, taken to the court house, standing before the bench, being judged, sentenced and then that sentence carried out. Maybe! But maybe not! Maybe we need to be more careful with our imaginations. Maybe God is making His decision of judgment now and then executing it after our death.

III. The preparations we need to make to be with the Lord.

A. 1 Thess. 4:13-18 speaks about what will happen when the Lord returns.

1. Those who have died in the Lord will come with Him when He returns. I might ask, "Where have they been, but with the Lord?"

2. Those who are alive will be caught up together with them to meet the Lord in the air.

3. Thus we shall always be with the Lord.

B. Make it your ambition to be pleasing to Him (2 Cor. 5:8).

Conclusion:

1. There is great comfort in the anticipation of being with the Lord.
2. To die is gain. Prefer to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.
3. Don't lose heart no matter what difficulty comes your way. Keep right on entrusting yourself to Him who judges righteously. Set your mind on heavenly things.
4. "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ; who will transform the body of our humble state into conformity with the body of His glory, by the exertion of the power that He has even to subject all things to Himself" (Phil. 3:20-21).