



DIGGING DEEPER

WEEK 6

Afterlife

The prevalence of television shows and movies about zombies, the apocalypse, and those who have died and returned to earth reveal our culture's obsession with death. Whether we laugh at the crazy story lines or would rather not think of death at all, the certainty of the end of life gives us all pause from time to time. When loved ones die or cancer threatens, we are confronted with real questions about the afterlife.

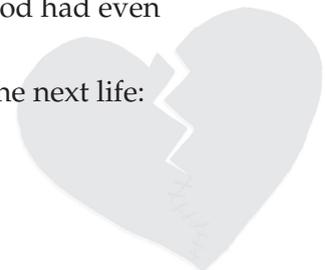
In a world that values tested theory over hypothesis, death still holds great mystery. No amount of research or personal testimonies of those who have had near-death experiences gives us concrete evidence of what really happens on the other side of the grave. We may not agree about what happens after we die, but we all can agree that we will in fact die. Most worldviews propose some ideas about what happens after death. The Greeks believed in the immortality of the soul after the body died. Others claim existence ceases upon death. As followers of Jesus, our hope for the next life is based on what we find in the Word of God.

We look to the whole of Scripture to inform our understanding of afterlife, acknowledging that some mystery still remains. The Bible gives us glimpses of another world but not a complete picture. For now, our view is partial and incomplete (1 Corinthians 13:12). If we think our understanding is puzzling, the Old Testament followers of God had even less revelation.

Here are just three verses in the Old Testament that reveal little hope for the next life:

For the dead do not remember you.

Who can praise you from the grave? (Psalm 6:5)



*What will you gain if I die,
if I sink into the grave?
Can my dust praise you?
Can it tell of your faithfulness? (Psalm 30:9)*

*For the dead cannot praise you;
they cannot raise their voices in praise.
Those who go down to the grave
can no longer hope in your faithfulness. (Isaiah 38:18)*

As in each of these verses, the word *grave* is used often in the Old Testament to refer to a “holding place” of the dead called *Hades* (Hebrew) or *Sheol* (Greek). While the place of the dead was not a fully developed concept, it does seem that within the dead there was mention of a good place (Abraham’s bosom, paradise) as well as a bad place of suffering (hell). Both were temporary places. Some believe that after Jesus’ death on the cross, he emptied paradise and brought the people there to heaven. Hell is also a temporary place that ultimately will be thrown into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:14).

Though Hades or Sheol was not a developed theological concept, we do find hope for life after death in the Old Testament. In addition to King David’s reference that he would see his dead child again (2 Samuel 12:23), there are other passages such as these:

*“But as for me, I know that my Redeemer lives,
and he will stand upon the earth at last.
And after my body has decayed,
yet in my body I will see God!
I will see him for myself.
Yes, I will see him with my own eyes.
I am overwhelmed at the thought!” (Job 19:25-27)*

*“But those who die in the LORD will live;
their bodies will rise again!
Those who sleep in the earth
will rise up and sing for joy!
For your life-giving light will fall like dew
on your people in the place of the dead! (Isaiah 26:19)*

“At that time Michael, the archangel who stands guard over your nation, will arise. Then there will be a time of anguish greater than any since nations first came into existence. But at that time every one of your people whose name is written in the book will be rescued. Many of those whose bodies lie dead and buried will rise up, some to everlasting life and some to shame and everlasting disgrace.” (Daniel 12:1-2)

We see that the Old Testament view of afterlife was limited but far from nonexistent. In fact, the above verses line up with New Testament teaching about bodily resurrection. Nowhere in Scripture do we find a more detailed account of a future resurrection than 1 Corinthians 15. Here we find this order:

- Jesus was raised from the dead as the first of a great harvest. (1 Corinthians 15:23)
- When He returns, all who belong to Him will be raised. (1 Corinthians 15:23)
- After that the end will come and the last enemy to be destroyed will be death. (1 Corinthians 15:26)

A few other New Testament passages lend more information about afterlife:

“And they will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous will go into eternal life.” (Matthew 25:46)

“But now, as to whether the dead will be raised—even Moses proved this when he wrote about the burning bush. Long after Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had died, he referred to the Lord as ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ So he is the God of the living, not the dead, for they are all alive to him.” (Luke 20:37-38)

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. (2 Corinthians 5:8)

While many disputable details exist about the next life, what we do know from Scripture is that Jesus made us righteous in the sight of God through His blood shed on the cross. We can rest in knowing that those who have called on the name of the Lord will enter the presence of the Lord and their bodies will be raised at His second coming.

Paul said in Philippians 1:21, “For to me, living means living for Christ, and dying is even better.” He said this confidently because he lived in light of eternity. His faith confidently rested on the hope that one day death will indeed be swallowed up in victory.

As we contemplate our own deaths and the deaths of people we love, we must seek to focus on what we know according to Scripture. Rather than join the world in conjecture and debate, we must rest our confident hope on God’s promises to raise us again to new life and to ultimately conquer death. We must accept the mystery of the afterlife not yet revealed to us and believe that what God has told us is enough for now.

Like Paul, we can choose to live for Christ in the time allotted for us on earth, and when the difficulty of this life overwhelms us, we can wait patiently and confidently knowing the next life will be better than what we experience now: “Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will reveal to us later” (Romans 8:18).

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