

The Gospel of John (114): The King in His Death (2)

Introduction:

We have given our attention to the account of the death and burial of our Lord Jesus as recorded in John's Gospel. Let us begin today by reading this passage once again. Here is **John 19:28-42**:

²⁸After this, Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, that the Scripture might be fulfilled, said, "I thirst!" ²⁹Now a vessel full of sour wine was sitting there; and they filled a sponge with sour wine, put it on hyssop, and put it to His mouth. ³⁰So when Jesus had received the sour wine, He said, "It is finished!" And bowing His head, He gave up His spirit.

³¹Therefore, because it was the Preparation Day, that the bodies should not remain on the cross on the Sabbath (for that Sabbath was a high day), the Jews asked Pilate that their legs might be broken, and that they might be taken away. ³²Then the soldiers came and broke the legs of the first and of the other who was crucified with Him. ³³But when they came to Jesus and saw that He was already dead, they did not break His legs. ³⁴But one of the soldiers pierced His side with a spear, and immediately blood and water came out. ³⁵And he who has seen has testified, and his testimony is true; and he knows that he is telling the truth, so that you may believe. ³⁶For these things were done that the Scripture should be fulfilled, "Not one of His bones shall be broken." ³⁷And again another Scripture says, "They shall look on Him whom they pierced."

³⁸After this, Joseph of Arimathea, being a disciple of Jesus, but secretly, for fear of the Jews, asked Pilate that he might take away the body of Jesus; and Pilate gave him permission. So he came and took the body of Jesus. ³⁹And Nicodemus, who at first came to Jesus by night, also came, bringing a mixture of myrrh and aloes, about a hundred pounds. ⁴⁰Then they took the body of Jesus, and bound it in strips of linen with the spices, as the custom of the Jews is to bury. ⁴¹Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid. ⁴²So there they laid Jesus, because of the Jews' Preparation Day, for the tomb was nearby.

When we begin to read the next recorded event, which is in John 20:1ff, the narrative advances to the morning of the resurrection, early on "the first day of the week." Although it is certain that the body of the Lord Jesus lied in His tomb from His death on His cross until His bodily resurrection from the dead, John records nothing for us, nor do the other three Gospel writers, of the state or of the place of the soul of Jesus during the time of His death from His crucifixion until His resurrection. We might ask ourselves, "What was transpiring with the reasonable soul of Jesus as His body lay in the grave?" But we might ask further, "What is the state of all souls who have died through history and whose bodies became lifeless upon the separation and departure of their souls from their bodies?" The state of the dead is not an easy subject to understand, yet alone address, but I thought that it would be suitable and helpful if we did so today.

We will address our subject under the following headings:

1. The human body and soul
2. The person of Jesus Christ in His incarnation
3. Various views of the state of the soul upon death
4. The biblical teaching regarding the state of the soul upon death
5. What Jesus Christ had wrought while His body was in His grave

I. The human body and soul

Most Christians believe that the Bible teaches that a human being is a trinity in his essence, that is, a man or woman is comprised of a soul, a spirit, and a body. These together constitute a single living individual. But most Protestants did not hold this view, but rather they viewed the Bible to teach that man is a duality. Man is a body and soul, and frequently the Scriptures identify the soul to be the spirit—they are one and the same. This better reflects the teaching of the Holy Scriptures. The physical body is the means through which the soul experiences life and interacts with the world through the five physical senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell. The soul, or spirit, is what animates the body—makes it alive. The soul is the true self, which functions in the realm of mind (thought), emotions (feelings), and will.

Many Christians fail in that they distinguish the human soul and the human spirit as two separate entities. It is commonly asserted that the individual as born in sin is spiritually dead, but what they mean by that is that the spirit is not present, but had been extinguished by sin. They claim that when one is born again by the Holy Spirit then God imparts a spirit to a person, resulting in becoming a complete, whole persons, comprised of body, soul, and spirit. The problem with this teaching of the distinction between soul and spirit as two separate parts of a person is that it is not biblical. For the Bible does not teach that a person is a trinity of body, soul, and spirit—a trichotomous view, but rather, the Bible teaches that God has made us a living soul that animates a physical body—the dichotomous view. The Scriptures teach that if a person is void of his spirit, he is dead, not just spiritually dead, but physically dead. James 2:26 reads, “For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.”

And so, in the Bible the *soul* of a person is sometimes referred to as his *spirit*. This is commonly found in the Scriptures. Why does God use two different terms? He does so to better describe what a human being is like. When God uses the term “*soul*” to describe a person, He is showing the distinctiveness of that man or woman as an individual person with an individual self-identity. When God uses the word “*spirit*” to refer to a person, He is emphasizing the fact that each of us owe our life to God, who gave us life, that each of us are dependent upon Him in this life, and that our true self is distinct from the body. This is what a theological note in The Reformation Study Bible says:

Each human being in this world consists of a material body animated by an immaterial personal self. Scripture calls this self a “soul” or “spirit.” “Soul” emphasizes the distinctness of a person’s conscious self-hood; “spirit” carries the nuances of the soul’s derivation from God, dependence on Him, and distinctness from the body as such.¹

Now, what of...

II. Jesus Christ in His incarnation

Of course the person of the Lord Jesus Christ is unique. He is truly God and truly man.

A. Jesus Christ is eternal God.

The Bible in numerous ways in numerous places sets forth Jesus Christ to be God incarnate. Jesus Christ is the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, the eternal Son of God. As such His essence is spirit. God has no physical body and is, therefore, not limited to space. God as spirit exists everywhere, and does so in His fullness. There is no place where God is not present and there is no place where God is not present in His fullness. The **Westminster Shorter Catechism** of 1647 states the matter well: “God is a spirit,² infinite, eternal, and unchangeable, in his being,³ wisdom,⁴ power,⁵ holiness,⁶ justice,⁷ goodness,⁸ and truth.⁹”

¹ Sproul, R. C., gen. ed., **The Reformation Study Bible** (Reformation Trust, 2015), p. 10.

² **John 4:24**. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth.

³ **Psalms 90:2**. From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.

Malachi 3:6. For I am the Lord, I change not; therefore are ye sons of Jacob not consumed.

What is suggested by the truth that God is spirit? It suggests to us that God is personal; He is a living, conscious, thinking, acting Being. That God is spirit also declares that God is not physical in His being. Here are the words of **Robert Reymond** (1932-2013):

The second thing God's *spiritual* nature means is that He is noncorporeal. This may be demonstrated from Luke 24:36-43, where, in response to the disciples' assessment that He is "a spirit," Jesus said: "Look at My hands and My feet. It is I Myself! Touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have" (v. 39). But what does it mean for God to be noncorporeal? It means that no property of matter may be ascribed to Him. He has no extension in space, no weight, no mass, no bulk, no parts, no form, no taste, no smell. He is invisible (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:16) and being one in essence and without parts, is indivisible (this last term denotes what some theologians refer to as His "simplicity").

B. Jesus Christ is truly Man.

But Jesus Christ is also, of course, truly human. He was born to the Virgin Mary, deriving His human nature from her. He was as every other human person in history, that is, once the Holy Spirit had miraculously enabled Mary to become an expectant mother though she had known no man. Jesus derived from His mother His human nature, which consists of His physical body and His human soul, which again, is comprised of His mind (intellect), His emotions (affections, or emotions) and His will. Jesus Christ is therefore a divine person who joined to Himself His human nature, who remained God but who also became truly man.

C. Jesus Christ, one Person with two natures

James 1:17. The Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

1 Kings 8:27. But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded?

Jeremiah 23:24. Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? Saith the Lord. Do not I fill heaven and earth? Saith the Lord.

Isaiah 40:22. It is he that sitteth upon the circle of the earth, and the inhabitants thereof are as grasshoppers; that stretcheth out the heavens as a curtain, and spreadeth them out as a tent to dwell in.

⁴ **Psalms 147:5.** Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite.

Romans 16:27. To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

⁵ **Genesis 17:1.** And when Abram was ninety years old and nine, the Lord appeared to Abram, and said unto him, I am the Almighty God; walk before me, and be thou perfect.

Revelation 19:6. "And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth."

⁶ **Isaiah 57:15.** "For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones."

John 17:11. "And now I am no more in the world, but these are in the world, and I come to Thee. Holy Father, keep through Thine own name those whom Thou hast given me, that they may be one, as We are."

Revelation 4:8. "And the four beasts had each of them six wings about Him; and they were full of eyes within: and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come."

⁷ **Deuteronomy 32:4.** "He is the Rock, His work is perfect: for all His ways are judgment: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He."

⁸ **Psalms 100:5.** "For the Lord is good; His mercy is everlasting; and His truth endureth to all generations."

Romans 2:4. "Or despisest thou the riches of His goodness and forbearance and longsuffering; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance?"

⁹ **Exodus 34:6.** "And the Lord passed by before him, and proclaimed, The Lord, The Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth."

Psalms 117:2. "For His merciful kindness is great toward us: and the truth of the Lord endureth for ever. Praise ye the Lord."

Jesus Christ is one Person, the eternal Second Person of the Holy Trinity, but upon His incarnation He has had two natures—divine and human. This means that He has two separate but conjoined capacities of thought, emotions and will. One is eternal—His divine nature, the other is temporal—His human nature, in that it had a beginning but has no end.

In the first few centuries various notable persons stood forth and made errant assertions regarding the identity and nature of Jesus Christ as God and man. The result was much confusion and error. But in time God brought together sound churches and their leaders to work through these matters. With the Holy Scriptures as their only guide they refuted and corrected error and crystalized true, biblical statements of the person of Jesus Christ. Here is the commonly acknowledged definition and description of person of Jesus Christ set forth by the **Council of Chalcedon** in A.D. 451:

In agreement, then, with the holy [Nicene] Fathers, we all unanimously teach [Christians] to confess one and the same Son, our Lord Jesus Christ: the same perfect in deity and the same perfect in manness, truly God and truly man, the same of a rational soul and body, consubstantial with the Father according to the deity and the same consubstantial with us according to the manness, like us according to all things except sin; begotten of the Father before the ages according to the deity and in the last days the same, for us and for our salvation, [born] of Mary the Virgin, the God-bearer, according to the manness, one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, Only-begotten, being made known in *two natures* without confusion, without change, without division, without separation, the distinction of the natures being by no means removed because of the union but rather the property of each nature being preserved and concerning *in one person* and one subsistence, not parted or divided into two persons but one and the same Son and Only-begotten, God, Word, the Lord Jesus Christ. As the prophets of old [declared] concerning Him, and the Lord Jesus Christ Himself has taught us, and the [Nicene] Creed of our Father has handed down.¹⁰

This declaration of the biblical person of Jesus Christ helps us to better interpret and understand the Holy Scriptures. For example, when we declare the truth of Colossians 1:19, “For it pleased the Father that in Him all the fullness should dwell”, we should understand what we are saying and what we are not saying. We are declaring, “Yes, joined with the divine nature of the Second Person of the Holy Trinity was the human nature of Jesus Christ—Jesus Christ is fully God.”

But let us understand that we are not saying that the divine nature of Christ was limited or restricted only to the body of Jesus Christ. The divine nature is in fullness in Jesus Christ, just as His divine nature is in fullness everywhere, for His divine nature is Spirit. Even when the fullness of God was in the body of Jesus as the man Jesus lived and died on earth, the fullness of His deity as the Second Person of the Holy Trinity continued to exist everywhere in His fullness. Just as we had declared earlier of God, so we say of the divine nature of the Son of God: “God as spirit exists everywhere, and does so in His fullness. There is no place where God is not present and there is no place where God is not present in His fullness.” Even when our Savior walked about on this earth, His divine nature existed in fullness in all of creation, even the entire cosmos. Our Lord Himself revealed this in His words in John 3:13, “No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man *who is in heaven*.” Here Jesus is talking, but He declared that His divine nature was even then in heaven, that is, with His Father, even as His divine nature was also in fullness in His human body, as Colossians 1:19 declared.

But now let us consider...

III. Jesus Christ in His death

When Jesus declared, “It is finished”, as recorded in John 19:30, He then bowed His head and “He gave up His spirit.” His body died even as His spirit, which we should understand as His divine and human

¹⁰ Reymond, p. 608.

natures, separated from His body. He did not cease to be a man upon His death. With His incarnation, He had become the God-Man forever. But His conscious self--His soul--separated and departed from His body.

We should understand that this time of His death was a manifestation of His humility as our Savior. Our Lord lived out His life and ended His life in a state of humility. He was always meek and modest, never desiring or seeking recognition or notoriety. He came to be a servant and He lived as a servant to God His Father and also to all that He ever encountered. And He died in a state of humility. But our Lord's humility did not end on His cross. His body going into His tomb was further manifestation of His humility. Earlier we referenced the **Westminster Shorter Catechism**, which states the matter this way in question #27:

Question: Wherein did Christ's humiliation consist?

Answer: Christ's humiliation consisted in his being born, and that in a low condition, made under the law, undergoing the miseries of this life, the wrath of God, and the cursed death of the cross; ***in being buried, and continuing under the power of death for a time.***

In asserting this statement the Westminster divines referenced 1 Corinthians 15:3-4, which reads, "For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, ***how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; and that He was buried,*** and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."

We are familiar with the Scriptural metaphor of the human body to be as a tent. But the Scriptures also set forth the physical body as the ***clothing*** for one's soul. This is what Paul declared regarding his longing to be clothed in His resurrection body in 2 Corinthians 5:1-5:

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. ²For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be ***clothed upon*** with our house which is from heaven: ³If so be that ***being clothed we shall not be found naked.*** ⁴For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: ***not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon,*** that mortality might be swallowed up of life. ⁵Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

Paul used two metaphors in these verses for the human body. The physical body is like a ***house*** in which our soul dwells, but it is also like ***clothing*** which our soul wears. Being without clothing would be a cause of shame or humiliation (or at least it should be so in our culture). Paul did not want to be a soul apart from a body, to be unclothed. The state of death prior to the resurrection of the dead when we are clothed with our glorified bodies, is a state of humiliation. Christ was humble in the manner that He died on the cross and in the time that His body lie in the grave and His soul was apart from His body. But He was then glorified in His resurrection when His soul had reentered His body so that it lived again.

But we may ask, "Where did His soul go during the time of His death?" Luke recorded for us clearly the destination to which the soul of Jesus Christ departed. When Jesus was hanging upon His cross, the dying thief next to him came to faith and repentance. He had requested of Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom" (Luke 23:42). Then Jesus promised him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise" (Luke 23:43). When Jesus died on the cross, His body was prepared and placed in a tomb. But His soul went to "paradise", where the thief who had been saved through faith alone joined Him.

And so, where is, and what is, "paradise?" Our Lord was speaking of a restoration of His people to Paradise, which mankind had lost in the beginning with the first entrance of sin. Paradise is a reference to a beautiful and expansive garden, a restored "Garden of Eden", greatly enhanced and expanded, I would think, which is filled with everything pleasant and beautiful. Our Lord Jesus in another place declared to a local church,

"He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the Paradise of God" (Rev. 2:7).

The last two chapters of the Bible speak of paradise as a beautiful new world with a new Jerusalem. There is a river of life that flows from the throne of God that gives life to trees on either side. It is the depiction of a beautiful well-cultivated garden (which may be an orchard) filled with fruit-bearing trees that seem to bring spiritual benefit as well as culinary pleasure. Paradise is set forth as an amazing, wondrous place, filled with beauty that will astonish the eye and delight the soul. It is a land of beauty and wonder. It is in its fullness a land of blessed Sabbath rest.

But upon the third day, the conscious soul of our Lord re-entered His physical body even as it was transformed into a glorious body. He lived again in the sense that His divine person with His divine and human soul reanimated His physical body, and He came forth from the grave. His body had entered the tomb a temporal, physical body, but His body came forth from the grave transformed, having become a glorified body. He was no longer subject to death. He was no longer in a state of humiliation, for He was now in a glorified body that was suited to exist for eternity. Jesus Christ ascended into heaven and was coronated as King of kings and in His human, glorified, resurrected body was seated on His throne from which He rules over all mankind through history, bringing this world to its appointed end to the glory of His Father.

We might take a few moments to identify a few...

III. Various views of the state of the soul upon death

An understanding of our Lord Jesus in His death and upon His resurrection will enable us to identify the errors of those religions and philosophies that teach about death in other ways. Of course many *secularists* deny the existence of the soul. Consciousness is nothing more than the state of a physical body while it is living. When death occurs, all existence ceases. There is no life after death.

But there are others, like the Hindus, who believe in *reincarnation*. They teach that the soul, or the that the non-physical essence of a living being will begin a new life in a different physical form after death. Perhaps this will be a higher life form or lower, depending on how well you lived according to their religious principles in this life. This is also the teaching of Buddhism, who taught that “karma” influences rebirth, and that the cycles of repeated births and deaths are endless. Of course we repudiate this as nonsense. Christ’s life, death, and resurrection make no allowance for a doctrine of reincarnation.

But there are some who claim to be Christian who deny a conscious existence upon death. The doctrine of *soul-sleep* is held and promoted by the Seventh Day Adventists. Sometimes this teaching is known as the doctrine of “conditional immortality. Seventh Day Adventists teach that when a person dies, his soul goes to sleep but will be awakened on the day of the resurrection when the body comes forth from the grave. Jehovah Witnesses also teach a doctrine of soul-sleep. Actually, their teaching is more like soul annihilation that takes place at death, but the faithful Jehovah Witness will be somewhat recreated at a future end time event.

Mormons have a very bizarre belief in the afterlife. Those who are saved through being baptized in the Mormon Church will live forever in their families, continuing to have children through eternity, even as they become gods and goddesses just as Jesus Christ had become in the past. It is a terrible, blasphemous, and grossly corrupt teaching that cannot be found in the Bible.

IV. The biblical teaching regarding the state of the soul upon death

When we come to the Bible to understand the state of existence after death, it is important that we do not build a full understanding based upon the Old Testament. Of course the Old Testament speaks of death frequently, and it describes souls in the state of death, but God’s full revelation to His people regarding the afterlife was not revealed until His Son, Jesus Christ, came and He revealed what had not been formerly known. The Scriptures speak to this. Paul wrote of his Gospel ministry to Timothy:

Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God, ⁹who has saved us and called us with a holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace which was given to us in Christ Jesus before time began, ¹⁰but has now been revealed by the appearing of *our Savior Jesus Christ, who has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through the gospel*, ¹¹to which I was appointed a preacher, an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles. (2 Tim. 1:8-11)

The gospel of Jesus Christ brought “to light”, that is, revealed spiritual truth to His people regarding life, death, and immortality. The New Testament has the full revelation regarding these matters, although the Old Testament Scriptures address the state of the dead in some ways.

A. The state of the dead in the Old Testament

The Old Testament word that is used frequently with respect to the state of the dead is *Sheol*. It is found in 18 verses in the New King James Version of the Old Testament. Sheol is a rather broad term that carries different meanings in different contexts. Sometimes it is word used for the physical grave in which the bodies of those who died are placed. In other contexts it describes the abiding place of conscious souls whose physical bodies have died.

Sheol was regarded as a rather shadowy existence, in which souls were conscious, but they were not technically “living.” This is because the Hebrews understood that true life could only be experienced through the five physical senses of the body. If the body was dead in the grave, then “life” could not be truly experienced. True life would be enjoyed upon the future resurrection of the dead. Daniel 12:1-3 read,

And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. ²*And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.* ³And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever.

Notice that all shall “awake”, which speaks of their bodies, not their souls, but all humanity are included here in this general resurrection at the end of history. It is important to understand that in the Old Testament the souls of all people who died, whether saved or lost, went to *Sheol*. King David declared respecting his own soul in his prayer to God, “You will not leave my soul in *Sheol*, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption” (Psa. 16:10). This verse was quoted by Peter in his sermon on the Day of Pentecost, applying it to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Peter declared,

For David says concerning Him:

‘I foresaw the LORD always before my face,

For He is at my right hand, that I may not be shaken.

²⁶Therefore my heart rejoiced, and my tongue was glad;

Moreover my flesh also will rest in hope.

²⁷For You will not leave my soul in *Hades*,

Nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption.

²⁸You have made known to me the ways of life;

You will make me full of joy in Your presence.’ (Acts 2:25-28)

Here the NKJV translated the Hebrew word, *Sheol*, using the Greek word, *Hades*. Sheol in the Old Testament is Hades in the New Testament. It was the abode of all souls who died.

Now one of the problems with the early English translations of the Bible, including the King James Version, is that it translated the Hebrew word, *Sheol* (OT Hebrew) and *Hades* (NT Greek) with the English word, “hell.” This is how the King James Version translates the passage of Acts 2:25-28:

²⁵For David speaketh concerning Him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for He is on my right hand, that I should not be moved: ²⁶“Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope: ²⁷Because ***Thou wilt not leave My soul in hell***, neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption. ²⁸Thou hast made known to Me the ways of life; Thou shalt make Me full of joy with Thy countenance.”

But of course in our English understanding, “hell” is the place where only the souls of the unsaved go upon death in order to suffer for their sins. Hell is a place of punishment. This faulty translation of the English word, “hell”, for the Hebrew word, “Sheol” or “Hades” has contributed to the confusion and errant teaching that after Jesus died upon His cross, He went for three days into the fires of hell in order to be punished for our sins. This is error. [I understand that Joyce Meyer teaches this error.] When Jesus cried out from His cross, “It is finished”, He did not mean, “It is almost finished, and will be finished after I go to hell for three days.” No, Jesus’ death on the cross brought an end to His suffering and secured a full payment for our sins. Salvation was accomplished on His cross; “It is finished!” The soul of Jesus went to “paradise”, not to hell. But His soul did go to Sheol, the abode of all the dead.

Those in Sheol are as *shades*, that is, they are without a lively personality and they are without strength. Sheol was understood to be a place of *darkness*. Job described his approaching death in this way:

Before I go to the place from which I shall not return,
To the land of darkness and the shadow of death,
A land as dark as darkness itself,
As the shadow of death, without any order,
Where even the light is like darkness. (Job 10:21f)

Sheol was a place of *stillness* or *silence*, again, life was not being fully experienced. We read in Psalm 94:17, “Unless the LORD had been my help, My soul would soon have settled in silence.” Sheol was understood to be far from God, distant from heaven, in a place below, but not beyond God’s control. Here is the pronouncement of God’s judgment by Amos in which God would search them out, whether they be in the lowest Sheol or in the highest heaven:

I saw the Lord standing beside the altar, and He said,

“Smite the capitals so that the thresholds will shake,
And break them on the heads of them all!
Then I will slay the rest of them with the sword;
They will not have a fugitive who will flee,
Or a refugee who will escape.
²***Though they dig into Sheol,***
From there shall My hand take them;
And though they ascend to heaven,
From there will I bring them down.
³And though they hide on the summit of Carmel,
I will search them out and take them from there;
And though they conceal themselves from My sight on the floor of the sea,
From there I will command the serpent and it will bite them. (Amos 9:1-3, NAS)

As biblical history unfolded, the idea of Sheol began to develop in other ways. After the Babylonian captivity (6th c. BC), it was common in Jewish writings to describe Sheol as the abiding place of departed

souls, both the righteous and the wicked, but that they were in different compartments, separated from one another. And this is reflected in our Lord's teachings as recorded in the Gospel of Luke.

B. The state of the dead according to Jesus

The clearest account of the souls of those who have died and their bodies are in the grave was taught by Jesus Christ Himself. Here is the account in Luke 16.

¹⁹“There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. ²⁰But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, ²¹desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. ²²So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. ²³And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴“Then he cried and said, ‘Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.’ ²⁵But Abraham said, ‘Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. ²⁶And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.’

²⁷“Then he said, ‘I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, ²⁸for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.’ ²⁹Abraham said to him, ‘They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.’ ³⁰And he said, ‘No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.’ ³¹But he said to him, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead.’” (Luke 16:19-31)

There are those that attempt to dismiss this account as a fanciful illustration by which Jesus was making a point, but that it is not true to fact. Sometimes they will call it a parable, in an effort not to interpret it literally. That will not work, however, for this cannot be regarded as a parable. In no other parable recorded of our Lord Jesus did He give a personal name to an individual within the account, as He did here--Lazarus. And besides, that argument fails to understand the true nature of a parable. A parable is never a fictional story that is invented to illustrate a teaching. Parables are always true to life events that are called upon to illustrate spiritual truth. “A farmer went out to sow seed in a field...” That is what farmers do. “A fisherman cast a net into the sea.” That is what fishermen do. And so, when they argue that this account of Luke 16 is not historical or true to fact, they are actually saying it is a fable, not a parable. But of course they would be wrong on that charge also. Jesus gave a true account of two men who had lived different kinds of lives, who both died and their bodies were buried, and the soul of the one went to a place of peace and rest, and the other went to a terrible place of pain and punishment. But it was in the same arena in which they could communicate with one another. Redeemed Abraham spoke with the condemned rich man.

But we see that although both the righteous and the damned were in the same place, they were separated from one another. Their fates were sealed. There was no bridge to cross from one side to the other. There is no allowance for purgatory, or a second chance after death. “Abraham's bosom” was a term used to describe the place of the departed souls of those redeemed from sin and who were then enjoying paradise. Here the rich man is said to be in Hades, or Sheol. In other words, in this context we see that Sheol (OT), or Hades (NT), is set forth as only the place of punishment.

One further question may be addressed.

V. What did Jesus Christ do while His body was in His grave?

He went to “paradise”, which we would say was what He described in Luke 16 as “Abraham’s bosom. Some would say that the soul of Jesus immediately went to heaven upon His death. But it is likely that until His death upon the cross in which He provided an atonement for sin, the abiding place of redeemed souls was in Sheol, and this is where the soul of Jesus went while His body was in the tomb. By the way of support we might consider what our Lord said to Mary Magdalene after He was raised from the dead. She thought that He was the gardener of the garden where His tomb lie. But when she learned it was her Savior she ran to Him and apparently grabbed His legs or feet. Here is the account in John 20, which we will be addressing in detail soon:

But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. ¹²And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. ¹³Then they said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping?”

She said to them, “Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.”

¹⁴Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. ¹⁵Jesus said to her, “Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?”

She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, “Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.”

¹⁶Jesus said to her, “Mary!”

She turned and said to Him, “Rabboni!” (which is to say, Teacher).

¹⁷Jesus said to her, “Do not cling to Me, *for I have not yet ascended to My Father*; but go to My brethren and say to them, ‘I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.’” (John 20:11-17)

This is the third day after Jesus had been crucified. He said that He had not yet ascended to His Father? But where has His soul been while His body was in the grave? He had been in paradise, that place He had described somewhat in Luke 16. But it was upon His resurrection and ascension into heaven that He emptied Sheol of the redeemed and brought them with Him when He came before His Father to be coronated as King of kings. He came to the Ancient of Days, that is, God the Father, even with the “clouds” of redeemed souls that He had won and reconciled to God through His death (Cf. Dan. 7:13f).

When Christ ascended He was not returning to heaven with empty hands. On the contrary, as a result of accomplished mediatorial work He returned in triumph to heaven, in the full possession of salvation for His people. These people were, so to speak, in His triumphant procession. They were captives in His train, chained, as it were, to His chariot. There was a vast host of captives.¹¹

It was a common event during the days of the Roman Empire that a conquering general would parade His captives through the city of Rome for all to see what he had accomplished. And so our Lord Jesus led “captivity captive”, bringing all the souls that He had redeemed into the very throneroom of heaven (Cf. Eph. 4:8).

But again, the question may be asked, “**What did Jesus Christ do while His body was in His grave, and His soul was in Paradise, the abiding lace of the redeemed?**” The answer may be found in **2 Peter 3:18-22**.

¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹*by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.* ²¹There is also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not the removal of the filth of

¹¹ William Hendriksen, **Ephesians**, New Testament Commentary (Baker Academic, 1953), p. 191.

the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God), through the resurrection of Jesus Christ, ²²who has gone into heaven and is at the right hand of God, angels and authorities and powers having been made subject to Him.

Admittedly this is a difficult passage and there are several quite varied interpretations. Here Peter was giving some closing admonitions to these Christians. In verses 17 through 22 He gave reasons that these admonitions should be obeyed. The first reason concerns the nature of suffering itself (3:17-18a). He declared that it is a good thing to suffer for doing right (3:17). But further, we are to see that this is what Jesus did upon our behalf (3:18). "For Christ also suffered once for sins the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God." And then in verses 18b through 20, Peter set forth the example and manner of Christ's sufferings (3:18b-20a). Jesus suffered and died once as a sacrifice for sinners (3:18a). Notice the sufficiency and finality of His sacrifice. Because of His perfect sinless life, his death as an atonement for our sin was fully met. He, the just One, died in the place of the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God. We, therefore, should be willing to suffer also in order to bring others to Him. He was then raised by the Holy Spirit (3:18b). But this is after He preached by the Holy Spirit to the imprisoned spirits of Noah's Time (3:19-20a).

Here is the difficult portion of our passage. What in the world does this mean? This is a highly debatable passage with respect to its meaning. Four possible interpretations seem to be offered most frequently:

- (1) This speaks of the pre-incarnate Christ who spoke through Noah when Noah preached before the flood.
- (2) This speaks of Christ proclaiming to fallen angels the certainty of their judgment, having done so between his death and resurrection.
- (3) This speaks of Christ proclaiming to angels after His resurrection the fact that they had been deposed.
- (4) This speaks of Christ descending into Sheol after He died on the cross, and during the three days before the resurrection He preached to the condemned spirits of those who had died in the flood. His preaching was a declaration of their certain and final judgment and perhaps declaring to His own people that He had secured their salvation.

The Lord Jesus came to save sinners. He died upon His cross and was buried, but then He was gloriously raised and exalted in heaven. And wherever He is, His people are with Him. He is on His throne in heaven ruling, and the souls of those He redeemed are there with Him.

“And the Spirit and the bride say, ‘Come!’
And let him who hears say, ‘Come!’ And let him who thirsts come.
Whoever desires, let him take the water of life freely. (Rev. 22:17)

Here are a few more words on the matter of baptism that is mentioned in this passage of 1 Peter 3:20ff.

The significance of Noah and the flood for the Christian (1 Peter 3:20b-21a)

¹⁸For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, ¹⁹by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, ²⁰who formerly were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water. ²¹There is also an antitype which now saves us, namely baptism...

1. Noah was saved through water, so Christians are saved through baptism (3:20b-21a).

First, take note of this: *the writer is expressing himself in the present tense*. “Baptism now saves us.” Some believe that when Peter wrote this epistle that he was writing primarily to new believers upon their soon submission to the rite of baptism. This verse is used to support this position. The Christians are being urged to stand for Christ and the gospel. They are being shown that alignment with Christ and His people will result in their salvation from the judgment that is upon the present evil world.

Now, baptism is likened to the salvation that Noah experienced through the flood of God’s judgment upon the world. Let us consider this man, Noah. One might think that the ark saved Noah. Some have suggested that as the ark bore Noah along, so the church, into which the Christian was placed through baptism, will bear the Christian safely through judgment. But the point here is being made that *Noah was saved through the flood. What was he saved from? Answer: the evil of the former world.* The floodwaters washed away the sin of the former world and Noah was saved from that evil world by the floodwaters.

Now those evil rulers that existed before the flood were a picture of the present evil rulers who would one day be removed from the world through a second and more thorough judgment when Christ returns a second time. But as Noah was saved through the waters, so the Christian will have been saved through the baptismal waters. But just as Christ preached (through Noah) to those condemned people, so the Christian is to proclaim the gospel to fallen and condemned humanity now, for the final judgment is most certainly coming.

Do not be surprised if they do not hear you, but you should be patient as God was patient with those condemned souls before the flood. God had waited patiently while the ark was being built. Only a few people then were saved, only eight, do not be surprised if relatively few escape this present day’s judgment.

But to prevent error or confusion, Peter explains that baptism is a figure of these things, not the actual instrument by which people may be cleansed of their sins. And so he says in **verse 21b**:

2. Baptism does not wash away sin, but is a pledge of one's faith (3:21b). Here is a good verse that may argue against anything but believer’s baptism. Baptism is to be performed upon persons who are able to consciously express and manifest faith in Christ. Baptism is a pledge of a commitment or as one translation puts it; it is an “answer of a clear conscience before God.”

3. Baptism saves the Christian through the resurrection of Jesus Christ (3:21a). Baptism was a picture of death. The Old Testament flood was a means of death of that former world. Baptism is a picture of death to our former world when we lived in our sins. That life is past and is gone. It was swept away and our sins were washed away in Christ. And as Noah came forth from the floodwaters into a new world and a new life with his family, so Christians through baptism do come forth to live a new manner of life in Christ among Christ’s people.

The resurrection of Jesus Christ brings about this new life. Baptism is the symbol. We were baptized into His death. We were raised with Christ in newness of life. The death and resurrection of Jesus Christ is the true instrument that effects our new life.

4. The triumph of Christ over all authority (3:21b-22). The last verse of our chapter describes the Lord Jesus' triumph over death and all forces that opposed Him and could possibly oppose you. He is at God's right hand, the position of power and authority, and all other powers have been subjected to Him. The point is this: *you need not fear any forces that seem to threaten you.* You may live consistently before them and even, if need be, speak out courageously in their presence, for the Lord Jesus is over them and will assure that they will do you no eternal harm.

In that exalted position the Lord Jesus can minister to you anything and all things that you are in need of in order to escape this present evil world. Do you need faith? He can bestow it. Do you need the gift of repentance whereby you will turn fully from sin to Him? He has that too in abundance. Do you need courage to face your trials? He can strengthen you. All things that you are in need of He has at His disposal and He freely bestows these things upon them who come to Him.
