

Worshiping God in

# Spirit AND Truth

A MAGAZINE FOR UNDERSTANDING God's TRUTH

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## TO HEAVEN ... AND BACK

ONE IN FIVE OF THOSE WHO HAVE HAD  
NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES CLAIM THEY HAVE HAD  
OUT-OF-BODY JOURNEYS TO HEAVEN AND BACK.

WHAT HAPPENED TO THE OTHER 80% OF THE NDEs?  
IS SUCH A THING EVEN POSSIBLE ... ACCORDING TO YOUR BIBLE?  
WHAT IN SCRIPTURE WOULD ARGUE AGAINST IT?  
HOW DOES SCRIPTURE DEFINE DEATH?

# In this Issue

**What the Hell?:** This is a frank discussion about the entire concept of hell as a place designated by God for eternally punishing the wicked. It delineates between what religious traditions have taught and what Scripture actually reveals. It is an eye-opening discussion with which you should be familiar. Page 2

**To Heaven ... and Back:** If you really believe that the Bible is God's revelation of His truth, then you will want to know what the biblical facts are about this subject. We can be sure of what scriptural truth is if we know what it teaches about what man is and what death is. We'll learn about all of that to draw our conclusion about the claims that some among us have gone to heaven ... and back. Page 8

**The Doctrine of the Immortal Soul:** Many in mainstream Christianity believe the immortal soul is the real person and cannot die! If that is what the Bible teaches, why, in an effort to "save" you in Christ, do the majority of "Christian" churches teach that you will die for your sins if you do not repent? What, according to them, is "death" for the immortal soul? When you "die," they say, your immortal soul, goes immediately either to heaven or hell. Resurrection from the dead is, therefore, an afterthought. What does God's word reveal about this doctrine? Is this doctrine God's truth? Page 13

**Where are Enoch and Elijah?:** It is commonly taught that Enoch and Elijah were taken to heaven. How true could that conclusion be ... based on what we learn in all of the articles in this issue? Some say that Enoch and Elijah did not die because God changed them ... as if that would negate Jesus' statement in John 3:13. The objective of this study, therefore, is to demonstrate that these two famous men in Scripture, who were supposedly taken up to heaven by God, were not ... could not have been ... changed or taken to heaven as many believe they were. Page 18

**The Problem with "Eyes" and "Ears":** In Isaiah 5, the prophet sings of all the things that the Lord God did to benefit Israel and to cause her to have great honor and respect among the nations ... but the song quickly devolves into a kind of dirge about a complete disaster that was to come over the Jewish remnant of the nation of Israel that was left after the Assyrians had carried off the House of Israel (Israel, the nation, was divided between the House of Israel and the House of Judah – read 2 Kings 16-18). Why? It was a problem with their "eyes" and "ears." Page 23



## From the Desk of ... the Pastor

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In this issue, we are going to explore several topics that should be of great interest to those who sincerely seek to worship God in spirit and in truth (John 4:23, 24). There are many theological ideas that go counter to what God has revealed to His people in Scripture. Many “Christians” have not accepted the challenge to ferret out, with thoughtful and deliberate intention, the difference between what is commonly taught among 32,000+ “Christian” denominations and what the Bible actually says (see Matt. 24:4, 5).

Two of our articles will be especially insightful in that regard: “To Heaven ... and Back” and “The Problem with ‘Eyes’ and ‘Ears.’” The lessons derived from these two studies are interconnected. They demonstrate why there are many reasons that we should quit swallowing the “bait” in the ideas and theories of the confusing array of theologies offered by the world’s “Babel” of religious confusion.

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### “Hell” and High Water

When I was a child in elementary school, during my six years there I had a few occasions to run afoul of the “Law.” Mostly, I had to learn and recite scriptures as punishment. When I was in the sixth grade, the approach changed.

The Principal was a woman that I describe as being “Puritanical” because she was excessively strict regarding discipline ... a hard and zealous woman of the “Word.” “Hell” was her weapon of choice when it came to disciplining me (others got the “devil” beat out of them – so I was told). This was a public school.

On one inglorious occasion, she told me that wicked little boys like myself were destined to burn in the whitest, hottest place in Hell forever ... with the Devil and his demons poking me with pitchforks all over my miserable little body.

She towered over me and glared at me through her eye-glasses as she shook her right forefinger in my face. My only choice to escape such an eternity of punishment, she said, was to fall on my knees, repent, and beg God’s forgiveness for spitting water all over “little Hanson” and messing up

the hall floor outside her office. I also had to beg “little Hanson’s” forgiveness.

I broke down into a quivering pile of tears and snot as I did as I was told ... and then begged “little Hanson” to forgive me of such an egregious trespass of God’s holiness. Then, without missing a beat, she jumped on “little Hanson” about spitting water all over “little Ford.” It was a “come to Jesus moment” that this woman constructed in order to get the two of us straight.

I suppose that I became a theological scholar before I entered the seventh grade because of the memorized scriptures and the threats of “hellfire.” That notwithstanding, let’s see what I have learned since.

### What Does “Hell” Mean?

Do you know that the old English word hell in the King James Version is translated from three different words that have different meanings? And, do you know that the Old English word hell of King James’ day (as it has been commonly used since his time) originally had nothing to do with fire? How useful can such information be to you?

You will be shown how you can prove the truth of God's word in a thoughtful and deliberate manner ... if you really want to know and understand His truth (see John 8:31, 32). God will find out how serious you are about His truth. Then, you will not be taken advantage of by the "Puritans"!

Understood correctly, it is proper to say that all of the dead are presently in "hell." And when you die, you will join them in "hell." Unless you know God's revealed truth, you will probably get very upset with me for making such statements. I figure Miz Davis would have.

## The Pagan Influence

Perhaps when you learn the truth about "hell" and from where all of your present ideas about it came, you will sigh with great relief and be grateful to God that His truth is supreme and reflective of a great love for mankind. You should know and understand, however, that God will severely punish the incorrigibly wicked with fire for their sins. God's great love does not excuse a lack of remorse about and repentance of one's sins.

The common idea about "hell" in most religions known to man is that it is the abode of evil spirits, created by their deity of choice, where lost and condemned souls of mankind go for eternal punishing. It is the place of severe, intense, and cruel punishment that is to be suffered throughout all of eternity by the souls of those who have angered that deity by their sins and unbelief.

How did we come to have such a religious belief in mainstream "Christianity"? Most reliable encyclopedias will tell you that the concepts of "hell" in Hindu, Persian, Egyptian, Grecian, and Christian theologies are essentially the same.

The source from which the Western religions adopted the concept was pagan philosophers and religions. Some of the so-called great "Christian" leaders of the Middle Ages borrowed liberally from those pagan sources and included them in their writings so much that they eventually came to be generally accepted as true "Christian" doctrine.

Two of the most influential writers were Augustine (AD 345-430) and Dante Alighieri (AD 1265-1321). Both men were influenced heavily by Virgil (a highly respected Roman poet who lived ca. BC 70-19 and belonged to the Greek-influenced Roman national school of pagan thought) and Plato (a highly respected Greek philosopher, born in Athens ca. BC 427, who was a student of Socrates).

In other articles, I have cited Plato's famous play, *Phaedrus*, as the source of Plato's discussion

about the immortality of the soul ... a concept borrowed from Plato by both Augustine and Dante to buttress their concepts of "hell."

As a matter of fact, Augustine is reputed to have declared that Plato and Socrates were actually "Christians," which automatically put a "stamp of 'Christian' approval" on their pagan theologies and philosophies.

Let me demonstrate my point here:

Augustine said that Socrates, antedating Christianity by five hundred years and feeding his mind on the contemplation of the ... mean [that is, low in quality or value] attributes, the poor and empty moral spiritual natures, of pagan gods, was as grand a Christian as any Churchly saint or martyr. And he said that the pagan brand of Christianity was as lofty and pure a type as the kind he knew (Alvin Boyd Kuhn, 1944; *Who Is This King of Glory?*; Elizabeth, NJ: Academy Press; p. 282.)

Kuhn himself was a "Christian" pagan, of sorts.

What have we learned here? First, we have learned that the concepts of a "fiery hell" came from paganism, not from God's word. Second, we have learned that the concept of the immortality of the soul came from the same pagan source.

Kuhn adds:

Augustine ... received the Christian doctrine of the Trinity from Plotinus, who had fed his mind on the attributes of the pagan divinities and was steeped in Hellenistic rational religion and esotericism (*Ibid.*).

Some might wonder what is so wrong with borrowing concepts from pagan religions and philosophies. After all, didn't Jesus Himself speak of "hell fire" (Mark 9:43-50)? Let's apply a measure of logic here. If Jesus Christ was the Lord God of the Old Testament, then He was the one who told Moses to write down Deuteronomy 12:29-32. His command was that His people should not resort to pagan religion and philosophy in order to learn how they had worshiped their gods. Why? He did not want them to adopt pagan rituals and beliefs into their worship of Him. Would it make sense for Him to change His mind about His people adding to or diminishing from His word? No (see Deut. 4 and Jer. 10:1-16).

Yet, for 12 centuries various schools of Chris-

tian theologians used two pagan thinkers, Plato and Aristotle, to discover the principles upon which to base a systematic method for establishing truth and reason for Christian theology (Ibid; p. 283)! As Kuhn remarks: "The mind that was in Jesus Christ was apparently not substantial enough ..." for such a task (Ibid.).

### What Did Jesus Teach about "Hell"?

In Mark 9:43-48, Jesus Christ's words are translated by the King James Version to read "hell" and "hell fire." Here is where we begin to learn a few things about what Jesus actually said as opposed to what you might have been led to believe that He said. This is one of the places where people think they have "proof" that the bible teaches the common concept of "hell."

From Deuteronomy 32:22 to Revelation 20:14, the Strong's Exhaustive Concordance lists 53 references to "hell" in KJV. About 31 of them are in the OT, and 22 are in the NT. The Hebrew word used in the OT is Sheol, but the NT uses three different words: gehenna, hades, and tartaroo (pronounced tar-ta-ruh-oh). In the Greek translation of the OT, hades is used instead of Sheol. The OT does not use gehenna or tartaroo. What difference does this knowledge make relative to the truth of God's word?

Let's take a look at the Hastings Dictionary of the Bible to see what difference it makes:

In our Authorized Version [KJV] the word "hell" is unfortunately used as the rendering of three distinct words, with different ideas [that is, their meanings are different]. It represents 1. the "sheol" of the Hebrew Old Testament, and the "hades" in the New Testament ... It is now an entirely misleading rendering, especially in the New Testament passages. The English revisers, therefore, have substituted "hades" for "hell" in the New Testament ... In the American revision the word "hell" is entirely discarded in this connection. [The American Standard Version gives a footnote in Mark 9:43-48 to show that "hell" should read "Gehenna"; Moffatt translates it "Gehenna."]

The word "hell" is [also] used 2. As equivalent to [the Greek word] "tartaros" (II Peter 2:4), [a place of restraint for the fallen angels ... this word is used only once in Scripture] ... and 3. More prop-

erly as the equivalent of "gehenna."

Thus, we can understand that three different words with three different meanings are translated to read "hell." Mark 9:43-48 uses the term "gehenna" and 2 Peter 2:4 uses the term "tartaros." We can find "hades" used in Luke 16:23 and Revelation 20:14 (for examples). You can use an exhaustive concordance to look up the other references (in the NT: 11x to "gehenna"; 10x to "hades"; 1x to "tartaros"). What we should be able to see is that the meaning of "hell" has been greatly confused because translators have attempted to make one English word ("hell") cover all three meanings! What does this mean?

If we go to Luke 16:23 and find the Rich Man in "hell" ... and know that the Greek term is hades ... then we should understand that Jesus does not mean the same definition for "hell" there that He does in Mark 9:43-48. If we understand the meaning of "hades" in Luke 16:23, then we also can have a better understanding of the parable Jesus is telling and what drives its correct interpretation. It is not correctly understood in its most prevalent interpretation in mainstream Christianity because too much of that interpretation changes God's truth into a lie (Rom. 1:25).

So, the long and the short of Jesus' teaching about "hell" is that He uses two different words to explain what He means by the term translated into English as "hell."

Now let's see how that should change the wrong interpretation to the correct interpretation. We do not need to explain 2 Peter 2:4 any further since it is used only once as a reference to the impending punishment of rebellious angels: They are presently restrained in a dark abyss waiting for God's judgment. If there is a difference between hades and gehenna, then that difference can demonstrate what is wrong with the traditional concept of "hell."

### The Difference between Gehenna and Hades

When you are using theological dictionaries and lexicons, you have to remember that the authors and editors will, many times, use extra-biblical sources to derive definitions. They will also allow the generally accepted "Christian" definitions to influence how they define a term. Some of that is the result of comparing a given term to what other religious groups outside of apostolic Christianity meant by the term.

Consider the Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich Lexicon's subtitle: "... and other Early Christian Literature." This will include the literature of heretical "Christian" groups like some of the Gnostics. While certain definitions would apply to their religious paradigm, it would not apply to the apostolic paradigm. Therefore, we have to be careful to take the definitions from the context of apostolic Christianity.

The simplest definition of "sheol" and "hades" is "the grave." There is a difference between the term "grave" in Genesis 35:20 and "hell" in Deuteronomy 32:22. It is a small difference: "grave" is the site of Rachel's burial, while "hell" ("Sheol") is the general term for the "grave" itself. In other words, "hades" and "Sheol" are representative of a hole in the ground and someone's "grave" represents the place where a hole in the ground was made for their burial.

If you consult an exhaustive dictionary for the most archaic usage of the term "hell," you will find two things most prominent. First, Old English and Middle English used the term to mean to conceal. This would square with Job's request of the Lord God in Job 14:13: "O that you would hide me in the grave, that you would keep me secret, until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a time, and remember me." Why? Job seeks a time to be called forth from the grave and returned to life by a resurrection from the dead (vv. 14, 15; see also John 5:21-29, 1 Cor. 15:50-58, and 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Second, in one other archaic usage, "hell" represented a box into which a tailor threw his scraps of cloth and a printer threw his scraps of paper and damaged materials. It was called a "hellbox." During King James's time (1500s through 1600s), "hell" was also a place where people stored their potatoes for the winter. It represented a dark place – maybe even a secret place – where the potatoes would not quickly rot.

Most of the other definitions represent pagan (heathen) definitions applicable to their peculiar beliefs about life after death. In order to represent God's truth about the matter, we must ignore the pagan (heathen) definitions because they have nothing to do with God's definition and revelation about life after death. As a matter of fact, most pagan (heathen) concepts about life after death do not admit that the person has really died! How?

The immortal soul that supposedly inhabits the physical body and is the real person simply leaves the body upon the body's death. The body rots, and the soul inhabits other bodies as it continues the 12 stages of achieving its ultimate goal of re-

turning to the heavenly heights (from which it has fallen) to "salvation" through its numerous reincarnations. Plato claimed that it takes about 10,000 years to complete this "journey."

Essentially, then, "hell" in its most archaic usage represents a place where something is hidden. A hole in the ground would be a "grave" in which a dead body is hidden and kept secret from public view. That would essentially explain the term hades. What, then, is gehenna?

In Luke 12:5, Jesus warns the people listening to His teachings to be wary of the one who can throw them into gehenna fire (Mark 9:43-48). He is not warning them about hades here ... and the words are not interchangeable. Gehenna is specifically a place of punishment. Hades is the hole in the ground into which you are put when you die – in other words, it is your grave ... the place where you are "hidden" and "kept secret" after death. The grave, in and of itself, is not a place of punishment beyond the circumstances of your death.

So, we see that there are two distinctly different meanings applied to two different words that are translated merely as "hell" in many biblical translations. We also can understand here that unrepentant sinners will suffer a fiery punishment in gehenna ... not hades.

That fiery place does not presently exist on or below the surface of the earth. It is not presently needed because the dead are buried and/or returned to their dust. Read this in Genesis 3:19 and Ecclesiastes 3:18-20; 12:7. The word "spirit" is from the Hebrew word ruach and has to do with the breath of life that the Lord God breathed into Adam when he was created (Gen 2:7; Ps. 103:14; 104:29). When someone dies, that breath leaves the body. You will never see a dead person breathing.

Smith's Bible Dictionary says that gehenna is the Greek name for Hinnom. It defines Hinnom as follows:

HINNOM, THE VALLEY OF (Josh. xviii. 16). On the S. and W. of Mt. Zion. The origin of the name is unknown (Jer. vii. 31). An idol of bronze of great size was set up in the valley, facing Olivet, where children were sacrificed in the fire, which seems to have been kindled inside the idol. Josiah abolished the worship, and strewed human bones all over the place, making it unclean, and thus prevented the renewal of worship there (2 K. xxxiii. 10). These inhuman practices gave the place a horrible character, and caused its name to be

detested and used as a figure for a place of torment (Philadelphia: A. J. Holman Company; no date; pp. 113, 130; emphases added).

Smith follows suit with mainstream Christianity when they aver that gehenna was a figure of a place of torment. Another context that is well-known is that Hinnom became the trash dump for Jerusalem and its surrounding territory. All manner of trash and dead bodies were thrown into this valley and set on fire. It is called an unquenchable fire (Mark 9:45) because no one could put it out. It burned day and night as long as it had fuel to prolong it. It could hardly torment the dead bodies – any live bodies that might have been thrown into it would have suffered great anguish until they died. Gehenna has not burned for centuries.

Jesus used this valley as a figure of a future place where unrepentant sinners will be thrown so that they will be consumed in a fire that will reduce them to ashes (see Mal. 4:1-3). They will suffer temporary mental anguish prior to and during being thrown into the fire. Their punishment will be eternal only in the sense that they will never again exist in any form (Isa. 65:17; Eze. 28:18; Mal. 4:1) – their ashes will eventually return to the dust from which man was created (Gen. 3:19).

Mark 9:44, 46, and 48 and Isaiah 66:24 are not claims that there is such a thing as an immortal worm ... even though some lexicons might very well call them immortal worms. A reasonable explanation is this: Any fleshly bodies not consumed by the gehenna fire became the birthplace of maggots. The maggots fed on the rotting flesh until they pupated into flies. The worm, therefore, did not die; it pupated from the larval form to the adult form. The worm in Exodus 16:24 and the worm in the above references are two different types of maggots. Jesus never intended for us to understand that there are some maggots that will exist in an eternal larval state (even if some lexicons perpetuate such myths).

The George M. Lamsa translation of an Aramaic (the language which Jesus spoke) Bible translates that verse to read: "... where the embers do not die, and the fire does not go out." Even there, Lamsa is perpetuating the idea that the fire is still burning at Gehenna. It is not. The expression "not quenched" explains the situation more clearly.

## The Rich Man and Lazarus

If you understand that the doctrine of the im-

mortal soul is not a biblical doctrine and that death is a state in which you have no conscious awareness of anything (Ecc. 3:10; Ps. 30:9), then you are ready to understand the parable about the Rich Man and Lazarus. First, read Revelation 20:4-6 and understand that the righteous firstfruits are raised from the dead at the return of Jesus Christ. The incorrigibly wicked are not raised until 1,000 years later ... when they will be sentenced to death and thrown into the Lake of Fire for destruction (see v. 15). This information is also important for understanding the parable.

Luke 16:22 says that the Rich Man died and was buried – that is, he was put into a hole in the ground that we call a "grave." It says that Lazarus was "carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" – that is, he was placed into a very special relationship of honor with Abraham. Both of these descriptions have something to do with life after death (see 1 Cor. 15:23 re: the order of resurrections) – but it is vastly different from what is commonly taught.

In Genesis 13:15, the Lord God gave Abraham and his "seed" the Land of Promise forever. He sealed that promise with His oath in Genesis 15:8-18 (read also Heb. 6:13-20). Galatians 3:7-9 shows that all people of true faith are the "seed" of Abraham. In Galatians 3:26-29, Paul shows that those who are true Christians are Abraham's seed and heirs according to the promise that the Lord God made to him.

Romans 8:14-17 shows that true Christians will be joint-heirs with Jesus Christ. Galatians 3:13-16 shows that Jesus Christ was to be the inheriting "seed" regarding the promises to Abraham. This is the means by which you are to understand what being "carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom" really means. You can see that action in Matthew 24:29-31 and Revelation 14:14-16, as well as 1 Corinthians 15:50-58 and 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.

What does this mean? For the purposes of the parable, it means that Abraham and Lazarus were resurrected from the dead 1,000 years before the Rich Man was resurrected. Abraham and Lazarus already had been changed from flesh to spirit 1,000 years before the Rich Man was resurrected. But most translations say that the Rich man woke up in hell (that is, hades – in his grave). If you ignore what I have written thus far, then you are subject to being deceived by the fables and myths about an ever-burning hellfire that were borrowed from paganism. You will participate in changing God's truth into a lie (Rom. 1:25)!

We know that the incorrigibly wicked are not changed from flesh to spirit when they are resur-

rected. They will be called out of their graves in their flesh-and-blood bodies – that is, out of hades (see John 5:25, 28). Once they have received their death sentences, then they will be thrown into “gehenna” fire (that is, the Lake of Fire).

Before he had even exited his grave, the Rich Man was aware that he was flesh-and-blood and headed for the Lake of Fire. Abraham and Lazarus were not in close proximity to him and the Lake of Fire (Luke 16:23). The Rich Man was, indeed, in a place of torment because he was already feeling the heat of the Lake of Fire (v. 24). He was trying to plead his way out of the situation in which he found himself. Once Abraham refused his requests, the Rich Man attempted to get Abraham to warn his brothers. Essentially, Abraham told him that they would suffer a similar fate unless they had listened to “Moses and the prophets” (vv. 29-31; see also Matt. 5:17-19).

Revelation 20:14 reveals that both death and hades will ultimately be thrown into the “gehenna” fire of the Lake of Fire. When all of the fuel that is thrown into that Lake is consumed, there will be nothing left but ashes (Mal. 4:1-3). The

Lake of Fire will thereafter cease to exist.

Expressions like “tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Rev. 20:10) are expressions that refer to the finality and completeness of the punishment. Ever is translated from the Greek term aión, which lexicons define as being “a period of time.” When the New Heaven and New Earth come into existence (Rev. 21), there will be no further need for the Lake of Fire because death (therefore, sin – see Eze. 18:4, 20, 1 Cor. 15:24-28, and Rom. 6:23) and the grave will be destroyed (see 1 Cor. 15:55). The punishment will be complete, final, and eternal, but the punishing will last only as long as it takes the fire to burn the bodies to ashes.

Therefore, Revelation 20:10 should not be construed to be an affirmation of an eternally burning, non-consuming, tormenting fire especially designed by God for punishing incorrigible immortal souls in a place supervised and maintained by Satan and a contingent of demons. Such a doctrine is the product of pagan/heathen religions and not at all what the witness of God’s word reveals to us.

Now you know God’s truth. What will you do with it? Use this knowledge wisely.

## Bible References to the Meaning of Death

1. Genesis 3:19: “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, because you were taken out of the ground: you are dust, and you shall return to your dust.” Even though Adam was the only human who was actually created out of dirt clods (Gen. 2:7), his subsequent offspring have been counted by God as being earthy (1 Cor. 15:47-49). In Adam, we are dust.
2. Genesis 3:22-24: The Lord God prevented Adam and Eve from partaking of the Tree of Life (the source of immortality – freedom from death). This left them with no access to any means by which their lives could be perpetuated beyond the shut-down of all of their body functions ... unless God chooses to intervene.
3. Job 14:1-15: Man has a limited number of days to live. Regardless of how long that turns out to be, he will still experience an eventual shut-down of all of his body functions, die, and eventually return to his dust (vv. 1-12). At his appointed time, God will call him out of his grave to face his judgment: eternal life or eternal damnation (see Dan. 12:1, 2; John 5:21-29; Heb. 9:27).
4. Psalms 6:5: If there is no remembrance of God in the grave (that is, in death) – and no way to give Him thanks or praise, then it impossible for man to die, go to heaven to worship and speak to Him, and then return to human life. If you are truly dead or merely an NDE, such an experience is impossible (see also Ps. 30:9; 88:5, 10; and Is. 38:18).
5. Ecclesiastes 3:18-20; 9:4-10: Man and animal are alike in their deaths: They breathe out their last breath and begin disintegrating into their dust. Man has no advantage over the animal ... which means that he is “... like ol’ Rover: when he’s dead, he’s dead all over.” In death, there is no hope, memory, work, intelligence, knowledge, or wisdom.
6. 1 Corinthians 15:3, 4, 12-54: Even Jesus Christ died the death of the human (vv. 3, 4). If He did not do so, then there was no sacrifice for our sins, God has lied to us, and we have falsely testified that God raised Him from the dead (vv. 12-18). The physical body came first; the spiritual body will come later at Jesus Christ’s return (vv. 46-51). If we were already immortal in any way, there would be no need for us to put on immortality or incorruption (vv. 52-54).

Biblical death, then, is the absence of life in any form.

# To Heaven . . . and Back

(John 3:13)

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The statement by Jesus Christ in John 3:13 poses an interesting puzzle for those who claim to believe the Bible. How is it possible for Jesus to say such a thing when, supposedly, Enoch and Elijah both were taken to heaven by God? If He was the God of the Old Testament before He came in the flesh as Jesus Christ, shouldn't He know better? Did He misspeak . . . or did He subsequently change His mind?

In this study, we are going to take a look at the claims of people that: they died, went to heaven, and returned to live out their lives for some holy purpose. Could such a thing be possible – according to the Bible – in the face of Jesus' assertion in John 3:13? If you really believe that the Bible is God's revelation of His truth, then you will want to know what the biblical facts are about this subject. We can be sure of what scriptural truth is if we know what it teaches about what man is and what death is. We'll learn about all of that to draw our conclusion about the claims that some among us have gone to heaven . . . and back.

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## Samples of Stories about Going to Heaven and Back

I recently “surfed” the Internet to find stories about people who have had what they call “near death experiences” so that I could understand what their claims are. I want to share a few of them with you and then explain – according to Scripture – why I have a problem with their claims of having gone to heaven and back. While the stories are riveting accounts of some kind of extraordinary experiences, it is very dangerous to accept them as truth if they do not square with God's revelation in the Bible.

The first one was about a woman who had been an abused child, had an abortion, and suffered strong guilt feelings. In her “near death experience,” she felt her soul leave her body, and she knew instantly that she was in heaven. She met God the Father and fell down in worship toward Him. He gave her a choice of staying in heaven or going back to her four children. She chose to stay, but God sent her back anyway because He had a special task for her to complete.

The second one was taken to heaven during a sexual molestation when she was five years old. There were many children gathered around Jesus who, Jesus said, had suffered similar experiences. He put her on His lap, and she listened to His heartbeat. She did this four times during her life: #2 being when she was having difficulties during the pregnancy with her first son (the doctors accidentally overdosed her); #3 being when she was pregnant with her daughter (she had a risk of toxemia, so she had to rush back to her body); and the

last one was when Jesus took her up to give her a revelation about His plan for her singing voice. She was also taken on one occasion to visit hell and learn more about it.

The third one was in an awful wreck and suffered a brain stem injury. While she was in a coma, her soul was separated from her body and taken to heaven. While there, she was told that God had a special mission for her to complete and sent her back to her body.

The fourth person drowned 1/14/99 and had an out-of-body experience. God told her that she was not ready to be there because she still had a special job to finish. At the same time, He told her that her son had already accomplished what he was meant to accomplish; so, she knew that he was going to die – which he did 10 years later on June 21, 2009.

The last one was bullied as a child. In 2002, he learned that he had terminal cancer. During the time he was trying to overcome that, he had an out-of-body experience and was taken to heaven. He, too, had to return because God was not ready for him yet.

All of that having been said, look at John 11:1-46. After Lazarus had been in the grave for four days – rotting and stinking – Jesus raised him from the dead. Examine this account very carefully. There is no discussion or concern about what happened to Lazarus' immortal soul during that time.

Par Lagerkvist wrote the book *Barabbas* about the criminal who was acquitted in Jesus' place (see Matt. 27:15-26). After Jesus was crucified, Barabbas went about his life trying to figure out why such a righteous man was crucified instead of him. One day he visited with Lazarus, who was in a

kind of foggy stupor, and asked him what he had experienced during the time he was dead. Where did he go and what did he do? What is death like? Lazarus stared blankly at him and said: "It was nothing. I went nowhere. I did nothing."

That one vignette took me aback when I read it as a young Christian minister in a college "Values for Modern Man" philosophy class in the late 1960s. My immediate question was about why God would snatch a dead person out of heaven and make his or her soul re-enter a vacated body. I would later be shown God's truth about life after death. Lagerkvist won the Nobel Peace Prize in Literature in 1951.

### What Medical Scientists Have to Say

I also studied through an Internet article at <http://jonbarron.org/article/brain-functions-even-after-death#> (5/28/2009; Baseline of Health Foundation) about how the human brain functions even after death. I will paraphrase the content of this article. My reason for studying this was to satisfy my curiosity about any possible explanations for the experiences some people have had during what is called "near death experiences" (NDEs).

The author's first step is to legally define what death means to the American Medical Association and the American Bar Association: "the irreversible cessation of all functions of the entire brain, including the brain stem." I understand this to mean that there is no thought, memory, knowledge, or understanding that is possible because the brain is totally unable and incapable of functioning on any level. Based on that definition of legal death, they laid out a few noteworthy questions related to near death experiences. I admit a measure of caution here because they speak first of what is total death relative to the brain functions ... which, obviously, affects the total body; yet, they attempt to explain themselves by discussing near death experiences (NDEs).

Here are their questions:

1. How do we explain that up to 20% of those who die [according to their definition] and are brought back to life report that they retained consciousness even during the near death experience?
2. How do we explain the common phenomenon of seeing the light at the end of a black tunnel and the encounters with dead relatives – many of whom they did not previously know?

3. Is consciousness a part of the function of the seemingly inert brain, or is it a function of "mind" outside of the brain?

Some have sought the answer through the physiology (the science dealing with the functions and vital processes of living organisms) of NDEs. Some attribute the phenomenon to overactive imaginations and others to mystical origins. The majority believe that it is caused by the physiological changes that occur in the brain as it shuts down during the death process ... and reverses itself before the actual death is completed (thus, I posit, the term NDE as opposed to actual death experience: ADE).

A 2006 study was published in the journal *Neurology* that the NDE is most likely something similar to the REM (rapid eye movement) experienced between the sleeping and waking states. This is the stage during which dreaming occurs. It is not uncommon to experience very vivid dreams during this time. A common explanation of this dream state is that the brain is repairing itself.

Barron cites a few more "theories" that attempt to explain the NDEs, but he sums up all of the speculations thus:

All of these theories presuppose that though the brain is shutting down – although it's undergoing physiological changes – it still has some viability, that it still functions at some level. But new research flushes this idea down the toilet, because at least one subject retained total recall of what happened to her on the operating table when she had absolutely zero measurable brain activity (emphases added).

In this case, surgeons performed some "outrageously risky surgery" on a woman (who died from a brain aneurism) by chilling her body and draining all of the blood from her brain. She was described as being "as deeply comatose as you can be and still be alive" (emphases added). It is important to me that this is counted as an NDE, not an ADE. Her ears and eyes were covered with impenetrable barriers during this surgery; yet, she was able to describe how she floated to the ceiling and watched the entire proceeding; the number of people present, accurate details of the surgical instruments used, and comments made by the medical team. She also saw the light at the end of a dark tunnel and met with long-dead relatives.

What puzzles me is that she was considered to be "brain dead" while involved in an NDE. They

concluded that this amounted to “death” because her brain waves could not be measured. This suggests to me that there could have been brain activity going on ... they simply could not measure it – perhaps because of the chilling and blood drainage that put her into that deep comatose state.

This has led some to speculate that the “mind” exists outside of the brain and, therefore, has the ability to remain aware beyond the “death” of the brain. Job 32:8 says that there is a “spirit” in man. Many conclude that Job is speaking of the immortal soul. The Hebrew term from which spirit is translated is ruach, which is descriptive of the “breath of life” that the Lord God breathed into the first man (Gen. 2:7). That breath of life is what gave Adam life and self-awareness – mind power. I will show later why this is not an immortal soul.

What is special about this spirit is that it gives the nephesh (“living, breathing creature”) the “jump start” it needs to come alive and stay alive. It “fires” the “engine” of the brain – which con-

brain is still functioning ... even if its waves cannot be detected. Many people talk to the comatose because it is widely believed that the comatose still hear them even if they cannot respond.

There are four brain wave states: alpha, beta, gamma, and delta. The following definition from [www.toolsforwellness.com/brainstates.html](http://www.toolsforwellness.com/brainstates.html) explains the “delta state”:

Long, slow, undulating. Delta is the slowest of all four brain wave frequencies. Most commonly associated with deep sleep, certain frequencies in the Delta range also trigger the release of Human Growth Hormone so beneficial for healing and regeneration. This is why sleep – deep restorative sleep – the kind that Delta frequencies help induce is so essential to the healing process.

Delta is the brain wave signal of the sub-

“Sleep” is a scriptural euphemism for death. Being “awakened” from that “sleep” is being resurrected – that is, brought back to life. (See Daniel 12: 2 and John 11: 11-14.)

trols all of the functions of the body and the mind. This ruach (spirit) from God, therefore, includes man’s natural mind-power.

According to Exodus 31:1-6, God has the ability to enable the brain to develop wisdom, understanding, and knowledge that man might not otherwise naturally possess. In 1 Corinthians 2:6-16, we are shown that God has the power, through holy spirit, to add spiritual knowledge which man is not naturally equipped to have. It enhances the brain’s ability to learn and understand things on a spiritual level above the mere human ability. Nevertheless, Ecclesiastes 9:10; 12:7; Job 14:1-15, and Psalm 6:5 say that all of the brain’s functions, including the mind-power and spirit-power, not only do not exist, but cannot exist, after actual death.

One researcher contends that:

...The NDE changes brain waves permanently, conferring the individual with an ability to move into a delta state similar to that experienced by monks, yogis, and long-term meditators.

What is significant about that? Think about this: a coma is not a death state. It is defined as a state of deep sleep. Even at its deepest level, the

conscious, the seat from which intuition arises. That means Delta-based programs are not only an ideal choice for their sleep and deep regeneration potential, but also when you want to access your unconscious activity and help that well-spring of information flow to your conscious mind for clearing and for empowerment.

At the end of it all, Barron admits: “We have no rational explanation at all for reports of consciousness after death.” That is a conclusion to a situation about which 80% of NDEs are not familiar because no such experience is had by them. As stated above, only 20% of NDEs have had such experiences. To me, that is significant. Why do two out of ten have it? What makes them so different from the other 80%? And ... why does speculation about one patient’s extraordinary experience drive a theory about the mind being separate from the brain?

I am now going to share with you what God reveals to us in the Bible about what He calls “death.” Generally speaking, this information is not even considered in the scientific community ... medical or otherwise.

## “You Shall Not Surely Die.”

(Genesis 3:4)

The first mention of death in Scripture is in Genesis 2:17. If we could know what the Lord God meant by that term, then we would be well on our way to understanding whether or not it is possible for a human to die, go to heaven, and return to his or her life in the flesh.

Knowing the Lord God’s definition of death would enable us to cut through all of the myths and fables and human traditions about what happens to you when you die. We could celebrate what Jesus told us in John 8:31, 32: Knowing and living by His revelation in Scripture will enable us to know the truth and be set free from spiritual ignorance and human traditions and speculations (see also John 4:23, 24).

The English term die appears more than 315 times in the OT. There are four Hebrew words that are translated into English as die. The Hebrew term t<sup>e</sup>muwtha appears once. The term maveth appears six times. Next, gava appears 8 times. Finally, the term muwth appears over 300 times. Genesis 2:17 is translated from muwth, which means (in that context) “to die of natural or other causes.” The “other causes” part is rather open-ended.

However, we have not gotten a very definitive idea about what constitutes death. Let me stress that muwth is the word that is used far more than any other word cited above in the OT for die, died, and death. If we understand what muwth means, then we will be a step closer to understanding what happens when you die. Also, understand that the other words have quite a bit in common with muwth. Finally, we must remember that Genesis 2:17 is a pronouncement by the Lord God; so, muwth can very easily mean that it is a penalty imposed by God ... not just ordinary, natural death.

The most common dictionary definition of die is “to stop living.” Such a definition presupposes that human “life” means “to have a life force that perpetuates one’s existence.” Such a definition also presupposes that the living being will have an awareness, on some level, of his or her existence – even if it consists of some kind of “out-of-body” experience. The expression used in Genesis 2:7 is that man became a living being (Hebrew = nephesh – a living, breathing being). What does this mean?

The Lord God revealed to Moses in Leviticus 17:11 that “the life of the flesh is in the blood” (emphases added). Stop the flow of blood by whatever means, and the human life ceases to function. In addition to that, stop the breath of the human,

and the human life ceases to function. Ultimately, all functions of the body shut down completely and the life force is arrested to the point that the human body cannot function in any way whatsoever. It will “stop living.”

When that happens, according to Ecclesiastes 9:10: “There is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol [Hades = “the grave”], to which you are going” (RSV; emphases added). Your body functions cease without remedy, and your brain is incapacitated (that is; unable and unfit for functions) so that no thought whatsoever can be summoned forth for any reason at all.

The closest thing to which I can compare it is what happens when you are anesthetized for surgery. You are totally unaware of the passage of time and what is taking place. When you are awakened, you have no memory whatsoever of the procedure ... sometimes even of things that happen until you are completely recovered from the anesthesia. Been there ... done that.

In both Testaments, the term sleep is sometimes used as a euphemism for death. In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term suited for this comparison is shakab, which means “to lie down for any purpose” – including death. If you compare Deuteronomy 31:16 to Exodus 22:27, you can see by the contexts that Deuteronomy 31:16 is about death and Exodus 22:27 is about sleep (compare also Job 7:21 to Prov. 6:9). Shakab is used in all four Scriptures.

This euphemism is not used to make more palatable the idea of death. It is used to express the expectation that whoever lies down to “sleep” will also be “awakened” out of that “sleep.” To understand the difference between the two, compare Daniel 12:2 to Joel 1:5. Both are based on the Hebrew term for awake (quwts), which has to do with “abruptness in starting up from sleep.” Which of the two is death and which is sleep? What do you make of Christ’s statement in John 5:21-29? Can you compare it to Daniel 12:2? Does a resurrection back to life suggest an abrupt awakening?

If you look up the term awake (Greek = exupnizo and exupnos) in the New Testament, you can see the same kind of comparison being made. Look at Acts 16:27. Now look at John 11:11. Which has to do with awakening from sleep and which to awakening from death?

Now ... read David’s comment in Psalm 6:5. Does David’s description of death suggest that there is any brain function in death – even relative to God Himself? Do the Old and New Testaments agree about what death is? What does this have to do with Genesis 3:4?

The serpent’s deceptive lie suggested that Eve

would not die if she violated the Lord God's command about eating the fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Read that with the meaning above attached. The serpent was suggesting that she would not go into a state in which her brain and body functions would cease and she would begin a process of disintegration back into the dust out of which mankind was created. The serpent tacitly suggested that she would still have access to the Tree of Life and that her life would be perpetuated by that fruit.

He also suggested that the Lord God's prohibition was self-serving and that He would not be able to ultimately prevent her from living and pursuing whatever path of life she wanted to pursue. Genesis 3:19, 22 gives us understanding that the Lord God was in control of the situation: (a) He could enforce their disintegration back to dust and (b) He could block their access to immortality and eternal life.

Therefore, any subsequent claims and beliefs by humans that they are really immortal souls (or any other such like concepts) housed in a body of flesh are bogus and the continuation of the deceiver's lie about what constitutes "life" and "death" among humans. Can you really go to heaven and back when God's word shows us so many reasons why that is not possible? Think this through very carefully! Will you, in faith, let God be true (Rom. 3:4)?

### Conclusion

The Bible does not support the idea that any human has been taken to heaven for any reason whatsoever ... no matter what kind of NDE they have had (remember: NDE does not equal ADE). Their experience might very well be inexplicable, but actually going to heaven is not a possible ex-

planation. God's truth is maintained from age to age. It does not change even for inexplicable experiences among human beings. You might consider the information contained in Matthew 24:24, Acts 8:9-11, 2 Thessalonians 2:11, and Revelation 13:13-15 as you think through the NDE anomaly.

You might well consider the actions of a powerful spirit enemy who can and does use deception and trickery to cause humans to see and hear and experience things that take their attention off of God's truth (see 1 Sam. 28:7-20; 2 Cor. 4:4 and Rev. 12:9). I have met people who told about their eyes melting out of their sockets and falling into intense fiery heat at their feet. Why? They were under the influence of adversarial spirits that plagued them day and night with very real noises and hallucinations and other horrible experiences. I have met others who were peaceful and "spiritual," yet adversarial (see Acts 16:16-19; 2 Cor. 11:13-15).

Satan is not always about the grotesque and horrible. He is the "prince of the power of the air" and "a liar and the father of it" (John 8:44). He is the one who has led astray the entire world through his lies and deception – the one who comes in the guise of an angel of light and righteousness ... more than he does as the lord of darkness (2 Cor. 11:13-15; Rev. 12:9).

If you can be deceived into believing extraordinary stories about 20% of NDEs having been taken to heaven and sent back to life to perpetuate such stories (80% of whom had no such experience), then you can fall victim to the lying spirit that tells you that such stories are proof that going to heaven is your eternal reward. When you do that, then you agree with Satan that God is a liar. You need to ask God for the "eyes" and "ears" that you need for true spiritual understanding.

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"God is not a man  
that He should lie"  
Num. 23:19).

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# The Doctrine of the Immortal Soul

The temptation of Eve is generally misunderstood because of the pervasive belief that man is, or has, an immortal soul. It is rare among mainstream Christians and other religions to find those who do not believe this doctrine. Read the following quote for a reference point:

Man is twofold in nature. He is both spirit and body. Man is not a body and has a soul. He is a soul and has a body. The body is mortal [that is, it can die]; the soul is immortal [that is, it cannot die] ... [Man's] soul, the real person, is immortal. It will never cease to be... (The Baptist Faith and Message, Herschel H. Hobbs, Convention Press, 1971, p. 51; emphases added).

The upshot of this statement is that the real person cannot die! If that is what the Bible teaches, why, in an effort to “save” you in Christ, do the majority of “Christian” churches teach that you will die for your sins if you do not repent? Yet, they believe that Christ is saving your immortal soul – which, by their definition, cannot die. What, then, is “death” for the immortal soul? When you “die,” they say, your immortal soul goes immediately either to heaven or hell. Resurrection from the dead is, therefore, an afterthought. What does God's word reveal about this doctrine? Is it God's truth?

## What God Teaches About Death

What do you make of the serpent's statement to Eve in Genesis 3:4: “You shall not surely die”? The Lord God said they would die if they ate of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil. The serpent calls the Lord God a liar for saying that. Who is right: the Lord God or the serpent?

Is the serpent suggesting to Eve that she is an immortal soul ... or, perhaps, that the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil will confer upon her some kind of immortality? Is the Lord God suggesting that the human has no quality of life by which it can perpetuate itself if the body ceases to function? Consider thoughtfully your answers.

Now read Genesis 3:19-22. What will happen to the human after it dies (v. 19)? Does the Lord God suggest that the real person will not turn to dust? Does v. 22 suggest that Adam and Eve did not already possess immortality in any form? Did the Lord God block access to immortality? Would you consider that an enforcement of His judgment that they would die and return to the dust from which they were created? That they would, in fact, die and be without any kind of work or thought or knowledge or wisdom thereafter? Would you consider the serpent's claim to be a deceiver's lie?

## The Concept of Dualism

One of the amazing similarities of most, if not

all, pagan religions and philosophies is the belief that man is essentially a spiritual being. The most generally accepted idea is that man is an immortal soul housed in a body of flesh. Therefore, the body is not the real person; it is merely the temporary dwelling of the immortal soul as it makes its journey back to the heavens where God dwells, from where it has fallen. As a result of its “fall,” it is allowed to occupy the body of a beast or a human so it can recapture its vision of the dwelling place of God. How would a body without an indwelling “soul” operate?

You would do well to get this idea straight: their concept is that the real person is not the body, but an invisible, immaterial, immortal soul that thinks, hears, sees, plans, and lives on consciously forever, whether or not it occupies a body. Plato, in his play Phaedrus, creates a dialogue between Socrates and Phaedrus in which Socrates says that the soul was not created – that is, it is an infinite being existing alongside God; therefore, it is indestructible (Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg, The Rhetorical Tradition, Bedford Books of St. Martin's Press, Boston, 1990; p. 123b).

In a similar conversation with Gorgias, Socrates defines death like this: “Death, as it seems to me, is actually nothing but the disconnection of two things, the soul and the body, from each other” (Ibid; “Gorgias,” p. 110; emphases added). When that happens, the soul leaves the body and journeys to a heaven, a purgatory, or a hell for judgment and preparation for the next stage of its jour-

ney homeward. The host body is put into a grave to be destroyed and returned to the natural elements. Thus, the real person never dies; it is merely separated from the body. The body dies. Socrates tells Phaedrus that it normally takes about 10,000 years for it to return to the realm of God (that is, heaven) because of the things that could happen as it is reincarnated (put back into various fleshly bodies) during its journey home.

Compare the above information with the following quote:

[Because of sin] man's animal principle of life shall cease; his body shall return to the ground (Gen. 3:19). But his soul, the real person, is immortal. It will never cease to be (Hobbs; emphases added).

Find the similarities and write them down.

Presumably, the expression “animal principle of life” has to do with the life-force that animates the body. As far as this doctrine is concerned, this seems to cover the bases in Ecclesiastes 3:18-20 because the body will return to its dust. But ... this cannot be the same life-force that animates the immortal soul because, according to Plato, that life-force was not created and cannot cease to exist.

Here is how Socrates explained it to Phaedrus: (a) Each soul returns to the place from which it came in 10,000 years; (b) the only exception is the soul of an innocent philosopher or a lover of philosophy: if it can have three consecutive 1,000-year periods in such a state, it will receive its wings at the end of the 3,000th year [some believe that man becomes an angel after death – think of Jimmy Stewart in *It's a Wonderful Life*]; (c) all others will receive a 1,000-year judgment according to how they have lived their lives, after which time they can choose how they will live their second lives: as a beast or a human; (d) the soul that has never seen the truth cannot transmigrate into a human body; (e) the soul must use the various senses of the human being to collect perceptions of things that the soul once knew when it journeyed with God and use them to rise above the material world; and (f) only the mind of the philosopher has wings because only the philosopher is able to have communion with God, through memory, of those things that cause God to be divine; in this way, he is initiated into the perfect mysteries and becomes truly perfect – allowing him to return to the realm of God (Bizzell & Herzberg, p. 125).

It is in this concept of the immortal soul that all other concepts about it are rooted. You must understand that this concept is that of the pagan, not

what God has revealed through His word.

Hebrew and Greek thought involve two opposite concepts about what man is, as well as two different concepts about how creation operates. In later Greek thought – that is, as a result of the influence of men like Socrates and Plato – man is believed to be a duality of soul or spirit imprisoned in a body of material substance. This is in keeping with their concept that creation also represents a duality: the visible, temporary, material world and the invisible, eternal, spirit world. The temporary world is made up of matter, which is the realm of sin and darkness.

Therefore, as body, man is part of the sinful, changing, decaying realm. His true life is in the realm of the soul or spirit that is imprisoned inside the decaying body. His true destiny is to escape the material and to fly to the invisible world of eternal reality. Body life is an unreal, ultimately spurious existence. True life begins when the soul or spirit is delivered from its entanglement with the evil, material world. Neither the Old nor New Testament reflects such a dualistic concept of man or creation (paraphrased from George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1967, pp. 98, 99).

### How the Concept of the Immortal Soul Came Into Christianity

You can re-read Romans 8:18-25 to refresh your memory about the Hebrew concept: Man and creation both were subjected to decadence because of sin; therefore, both will be delivered from it at God's appointed time. In that claim, Paul is not saying that only the body of man is subject to decadence while the real person is not. The Bible does not teach an immortal soul doctrine or a concept of dualism.

How did this pagan belief in immortal souls get into traditional Christianity? The *Encyclopedia Judaica* says:

The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principle exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended.

This tells us that the concept is not intended in any of the teachings of the Old Testa-

**As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the great fish, so shall the Son of Man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40). **Jesus Christ died for our sins.****

ment – the Scriptures of the Jews, as some call it. Considering how all of Israel attached themselves to the gods of the pagans, it is no surprise that they adopted some of the religious concepts of the pagans. This is covered in part in Jeremiah 19:1-5 and 32:30-35. Traditional Christianity has been no different as it has syncretized religious concepts from pagan nations throughout its history.

Herodotus, the famous Greek historian who lived in the fifth century before Jesus, says in his work *Euterpe* (chapter 123):

The Egyptians were also the first that asserted that the soul of man is immortal. ... This opinion, some among the Greeks have at different periods of time adopted as their own.

In fact, Socrates learned this philosophy directly from the Egyptians and taught it to his most famous pupil, Plato. Neither of these pagan philosophers conceived of death as being without senses and perception; it was merely the separation of the soul from the body. As various aspects of Greek government, education, philosophy, and religion were spread by the Roman Empire, most European nations adopted them.

Tertullian of Phoenician North Africa, a Catholic “father,” wrote this:

For some things are known, even by nature: the immortality of the soul, for instance, is held by many. ... I may use, therefore, the opinion of Plato, when he declares: “Every soul is immortal” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. III, p. 547; emphases added).

What is Tertullian’s source of authority? How would such a position agree with Paul’s comments

in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 and the Lord God’s statement in Deuteronomy 12:28-32?

During the early 300s AD, Emperor Constantine forced the Catholic Church on the Roman Empire. About the same time, another Phoenician North African, Augustine of Hippo, (St. Augustine) “sanctified” the immortality of the soul in his massive work *The City of God*. He, too, was a neo-Platonist.

Arnobius, a Catholic writer and teacher at that time, wrote:

[The neo-Platonists] are carried away with an extravagant opinion of themselves that souls are immortal. ... Will you lay aside your habitual arrogance, O men, who claim God as your Father, and maintain that you are immortal just as He is?” (Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. LV, p. 440).

Does it appear that Arnobius agreed with the neo-Platonist movement? Is it clear, therefore, that the battle over the doctrine was still being waged during the 300s AD?

Notice how long the process of making the doctrine “stick” actually took. Thomas Aquinas, an Italian scholastic teacher and theologian who lived between AD 1225-1274, permanently established the doctrine of the immortality of the soul in the Catholic Church. About 50 years later, Durante Alighieri (Dante) wrote *The Divine Comedy*, which, even if he did it as a “spoof” (as some contend), influenced people’s belief in the pagan concepts of hell, purgatory, and paradise that he pictured in it.

In AD 1513 at the Lateran Council, the Catholic Church imposed the death penalty on all who refused to believe in the doctrine of the immortal soul! Here is the text of the edict:

Whereas some have dared to assert concerning the nature of the reasonable soul that it is mortal, we, with the approbation of the sacred council, do condemn and reprobate all those who assert that the intellectual soul is mortal, seeing, according to the canon of Pope Clement V, that the soul is ... immortal; ... and we decree that all who adhere to like erroneous assertions shall be shunned and punished as heretics” (emphases added).

In most cases, the punishment for heresy was death.

Notice this statement about the immortal soul in The Catholic Encyclopedia: “It enshrines the principles of ancient speculation” (article “Soul,” p. 157; emphases added). A “speculation” is a prediction that might or might not have sufficient evidence to actually confirm its “truth.” It is not necessarily wrong to speculate; it is wrong to consider your speculation as being absolute “truth.” It’s not. It is too “iffy” to be absolute “truth.”

This is a blatant admission that the belief that man is essentially a spiritual soul housed in a material body is actually a product of ancient pagan philosophical speculation! And, you have seen that the Bible condemns such philosophical speculations. This is called syncretism – the joining of contradictory concepts to make them “fit” a new concept.

Read the following quote from Martin Luther, written around AD 1522:

It is probable, in my opinion, that, with very few exceptions, indeed, the dead sleep in utter insensibility till the day of judgment. ... On what authority can it be said that the souls of the dead may not sleep ... in the same way that the living pass in profound slumber the interval between their downlying [sic] at night and their uprising in the morning?” (Michelet’s Life of Luther, Bohn’s edition, p. 133; emphasis added).

What was the belief of this man who began the Protestant Reformation? Why? Martin Luther taught that it was the Pope, not the Bible, who taught that the soul is immortal (Defense, proposition #27). As a matter of historical fact, he was charged with heresy by Catholic Cardinal Du Perron for teaching “that the soul dies with the body, and that God would hereafter raise both the one and the other” (Historical View, p. 344). Even

Luther’s belief in the resurrection was flawed because of his dualistic concept about man.

William Tyndale, a Protestant reformer who printed the first English language New Testament, wrote:

In putting departed souls in heaven, hell, or purgatory you destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul proved resurrection. ... The true faith putteth the resurrection; the heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that souls ever live. And the Pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of the philosophers together [syncretism] – things so contrary that they cannot agree. ... And because the fleshly minded Pope consenteth to heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scripture to establish it. If the soul be in heaven, tell me what cause is there for the resurrection (emphases added)?

What is Tyndale’s position concerning the immortality of the soul? What argument does he use to refute it? Do you believe that his argument is scripturally valid? Why/why not?

“Christianity” today is little more than a quagmire of syncretized biblical concepts and pagan philosophies wrapped up in the name of Jesus Christ. It bears little resemblance to God’s inspired scriptural truth, even though it uses Scripture and the name of Jesus Christ to legitimize itself as being “Christian.” Olhausen, in his comment in Lange’s Commentary on 1 Corinthians 15:19, 20, says this: “The doctrine of the immortality of the soul, and the name [that is, immortal soul], are alike unknown in the entire Bible” (emphases added).

Norman H. Snaith, in discussing the fallacy of translating Hebrew thought with a Greek meaning, uses the Greek word psyche as an example of how meanings can be changed and distorted from the original intent. For example, the Greek translation of the Old Testament (the Septuagint) used the term psyche as the Greek translation of the Hebrew term nephesh (“a living, breathing being”; Gen. 2:7; KJV).

Snaith says that since the verb form, psychein, has to do with breathing (“that which is the clearest outward evidence of life”), the Greek meaning stands for a “breath-soul” and is used by the Greeks to describe that part of an individual that leaves the body upon death. So, psyche is used for “life.” This Greek concept also seems to suggest

that “mind” resides outside of “brain.”

However, as used by Homer and others, it speaks of that part of man that survives death – that is, the immortal soul. Snaith then warns the reader that using this meaning puts a meaning to nephesh that is totally foreign to the original, intended Hebrew meaning (“The Language of the Old Testament,” The Interpreter’s Bible, Abingdon Press, vol. 1, 1952, p. 230).

Snaith concludes his comments by saying:

Since the word “soul” in the English translation stands for the Hebrew nephesh, there is not one single instance in the Old Testament where the word ‘soul’ should be thought of as that which survives death. When the Bible writer says ... that God “breathed into [man’s] nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul,” ... he does not mean that God thereby gave to man an immortal soul. He means that God ... breathed into him his own life-giving breath, so that this shape of dust became alive. ... If, therefore, the belief in the immortality of the human soul is held to be a Christian doctrine, then it should be realized that it is not a biblical doctrine. The biblical doctrine is of a resurrection life [that is, of restoring life to the dead] for those who “have the spirit” and are “in Christ...” (Ibid.; emphases added).

In effect, Snaith admits that there are differences between what the Bible actually says and what some “Christians” teach. Remember that because it will come in handy as you begin to orientate yourself to learning more about worshipping God in spirit and in truth (see John 4:23, 24).

Finally, Snaith says that, in the New Testament, psyche (“soul”/mind) does not survive death. He says: “The New Testament follows the Septuagint and uses the word psyche as referring to something which is connected to this life only, and not with any life after death” (Ibid; emphases added).

John Short, in his commentary on 1 Corinthians 15: 51-58, wrote:

The Christian doctrine [of life-after-death] is not one of [innate, inherent] immortality but of resurrection. We shall do well to get this point clear. As expounded by the apostle Paul, man’s hope of sur-

vival [beyond death] depends not on the inherent immortality of his soul, but on the act of God. His immortality is involved in his resurrection, not his resurrection in his immortality. There is nothing in Paul’s writings nor in the N.T. to suggest that the soul is inherently immortal (“1 Corinthians Exposition,” The Interpreter’s Bible, Abingdon Press, vol. 10, 1952, p. 253; emphases added).

Inherent means that something belongs, by nature, as an indispensable part of one’s being; it is intrinsic – that is, it belongs to the essential nature of something from its inception. If the soul is not inherently immortal, then it is reasonable to assume that immortality would have to be given to it – which is exactly Paul’s point in these scriptures: man is not inherently immortal; therefore, he has to put on immortality. Those who are “in Christ” will do that only when He returns (1 Cor. 15:46-54).

This is where you understand Job’s comment in Job 14:1-15: Man, who has a limited number of days for “life,” eventually dies, wastes away, and lies in his grave until God calls him out of it by a resurrection from the dead. We know from 1 Corinthians 15:23 that everyone is not raised from the dead at the same time ... there is an order to the resurrections (see John 5:21-29d Heb. 11:17-19). True Christians will be raised first when Christ returns. The “rest of the dead” will be raised 1,000 years later (Rev. 20:4-6).

## Conclusion

Taking all of the above into consideration, no human has been changed from flesh to spirit by any means in all of human history ... except Jesus Christ (see Romans 1:1-4 and 1 Cor. 15:12-23). Because no human is or has an immortal soul, no one has been taken up to heaven except Jesus Christ.

The true Christian understands that the faithful dead are lying in their graves waiting for their time to be raised from the dead. They also know, according to 1 Corinthians 15:50-54, 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18, and Hebrews 11:39, 40, that the living faithful Christians will receive their eternal rewards together with the faithful dead when Jesus Christ returns. That knowledge makes a big difference in this matter! If you are truly dead according to the biblical definition of death, then there is no reason at all to believe that any human has visited heaven, God the Father and Jesus Christ, and dead, unknown relatives at any time during an NDE.

# Where Are Enoch and Elijah?

It is commonly taught that Enoch and Elijah were taken to heaven. How true could that conclusion be ... based on what we have seen thus far? We can add another Scripture to the ones already cited: Acts 26: 22, 23. Paul says that Christ was the first to be raised from the dead. Some might want to get petty and say that Enoch and Elijah did not die because God changed them ... as if that would negate Jesus' statement in John 3:13. That would make about as much sense as those who might say that no man has ascended to heaven because it is the soul, not the body, that goes to heaven when humans die.

The objective of this study, therefore, is to demonstrate that two famous men in Scripture, who were supposedly taken up to heaven by God, were not ... could not have been ... changed or taken to heaven as many believe they were. The biblical doctrine about life after death will be spelled out in a most sensible treatment of "precept upon precept ... line upon line ... here a little, there a little" (Isa. 28:9, 10).

## Figuring Out the Term Translate

We meet Enoch in Genesis 5:18-24. He lived a total of 365 years, a relatively short time compared to the others who preceded and followed him. In v. 22, it appears that he did not "walk with God" until the birth of his son Methuselah. That expression "walked with God" suggests that he had a fixed purpose and determination to be a righteous man according to God's standards (see Amos 3:3 and Eph. 1:4). You can find the same expression used of Noah (Gen. 6:9) and Abraham (Gen. 17:1).

Some suggest that his righteous life was an affront to those who were becoming increasingly wicked between Eden and the Flood (see Gen. 6:11, 12). The assumption is that his life was threatened and in danger; yet, he continued to be a "preacher of righteousness" despite the threats on his life. This would have been the reason that God "took him" (Gen. 5:24): He did not want him to be martyred. Some consider Enoch and Elijah to have been foreshadows of those who will still be in the flesh when Jesus Christ returns (1 Thes. 4:17).

What does it mean that Enoch "was not" and God "took him"? Paul clarifies this expression in Hebrews 11:5:

By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God (KJV; emphases added).

Three times the KJV uses the term translated and translation in Hebrews 11:5. What does it mean? Some render it "taken up" (MLB; RSV) and others "took him away to heaven without dy-

ing" (Living). Those translations seem to be "tainted" with the common assumption of being taken up to heaven for one's eternal reward. Why would I argue against that?

The past tense verb form translated comes from the Greek term metatithemi, which Bauer-Arndt-Gingrich defines thus: "lit. to convey to another place, put in another place, transfer." It gives an example from Acts 7:15, 16 where, in Stephen's trial for blasphemy, he states that Jacob was "carried over" (metatithemi) from Egypt to Sychem. But, they aver that Hebrews 11:5 means that Enoch was "taken up," as if he was taken up to heaven. That is defining from tradition, not truth.

With regard to the noun form metathesis, BAG defines it as: "removal" and "change, transformation" (for which they give no scriptural references ... even though they give references to other literature). For "removal," they cite Hebrews 12:27 where Paul speaks of the things that are shaken being "removed." They add that it means "taken up" when applied to Enoch. That is tradition-speak.

The most prevalent translation (note the use of the word translation: being changed from Hebrew to English) of Genesis 5:24 is that God took him. However, there is no sense of direction in that expression. There are no grounds that warrant the assumption that God "took him [up]." There are no grounds that warrant the assumption that God "changed" him from flesh to spirit (see John 3:3 and 1 Cor. 15:50). The evidence is strong that God removed him from where he was to another place.

He was conveyed or transferred or put in another place – not "taken up." It is not wise to play silly word games and say that Enoch did not ascend to heaven by his own power because, they claim, that God took him up to heaven. That's an

attempt to circumvent or pervert the meaning of Christ's statement in John 3:13.

Deuteronomy 34:6 might provide an example of this situation ... even if it does not say that God "took" Moses. That can be assumed by the statement that God buried Moses in the valley of Moab near Beth-peor where no one would ever find his grave (see also Jude 9). According to v. 7, Moses was in perfect health! How did Moses get to his grave site if he was not "carried over" or "transported" or "removed" or "conveyed" or "put in another place"?

### Did Enoch Die?

Notice in Genesis 5:23: "All the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty and five years." He did not live beyond that 365 years. Read the same expression in regard to the deaths of others in chapter 5. They end with "...and he died" (emphases added). Enoch's death was different because 5:24 says "... he was not ...."

I remember in the movie "Day of the Dolphins," starring George C. Scott, that the "talking" dolphin Alpha told George (his trainer) that the talking dolphin Beta "is not." George understood that "B is not" meant that Beta was dead. Beta did not exist anymore (remember that "to be" is the infinitive for the state-of-being verbs). Whatever self-awareness Beta possessed had disappeared. "Beta" did not exist in any shape, form, or fashion – except as a dead pile of dolphin flesh. No breath. No pumping blood. No awareness of anything. No animating force. No brain waves.

If Enoch eventually died (and the correct evidence dictates that he did) and the real Enoch is not an immortal soul, then Enoch could not presently be in heaven. He lived for 365 years and died. We do not know how old he was when he was "taken."

It is not revealed whether he died on his own or God put him to "sleep." He was not taken up to heaven. If he was, then he preceded Jesus Christ, who was said to have been the first to have been raised from the dead and taken up to heaven to sit at the Father's right hand. Paul had it right when he said in Hebrews 11:5 that Enoch was taken to another place (that is, translated) and was not found. Does the fact that he was "not found" indicate that someone was searching for Him? Nobody ever found Moses or Elijah!

Let me demonstrate what "scholarship" has to offer on the subject. The Anchor Bible (v. 36, "To the Hebrews") makes this comment about Hebrews 11:5 re: "he was not, because God took him":

This is a rather unclear statement: it looks as if some verb has been omitted. The LXX [the Septuagint – the Greek translation of the Old Testament] has either preserved that verb from a text written before the verb was lost, or it has conjectured one to make sense: "... and he was not found, because God changed him" (LXX Gen. 5:24). Even with the LXX alterations, the question still arises: what happened to Enoch? It is uncertain. His case is like that of Melchizedek, leaving later believers to speculate (Double-day & Company, Inc., Garden City: New York; 1972; p. 185; emphases added).

This is about as good as it gets in the research I have done outside of the Bible to solve this problem: "unclear," "conjectured," "alterations," "uncertain," and "speculate." If they pursue the traditions of men for the answer, they will get something that does not follow the biblical revelation. If you follow Hebrews 11 to the 13<sup>th</sup> verse, for example, you will see a conclusion reached that is very definitive (and it includes Enoch): "These all died in faith, not having received the promises...." The word all includes Enoch.

In the main, commentaries often follow the conclusions of traditional "Christian" orthodoxy. We should beware of that in our research.

### The Christian Translation

All true Christians have undergone a "translation" of their own. Paul says in Colossians 1:13 that we have been "delivered [rescued] ... from the power of darkness, and ... translated [transferred] ... into the kingdom of his dear Son" (KJV; emphases added). Have we, therefore, been "taken up" to heaven? Have we been "changed" from flesh to spirit even before Jesus Christ has returned? No, on both counts.

There are two final thoughts about Enoch that I want to share with you. First, Paul says in Hebrews 11:5 that God did not want Enoch to "see death." Does that mean that Paul believed that Enoch did not die on the earth? No. If Enoch lived only 365 years, then, apparently, he died. Hebrews 9:27 speaks of a death that all humans will suffer, after which a judgment will take place. For what purpose would God have a judgment? Follow this closely.

Peter writes an interesting thought in 1 Peter 4:17:

For the time has come that judgment must begin at the house of God: and if it first begin with us, what shall be of them that obey not the gospel of God (emphases added)?

At which point does the true Christian die? I suggest a thoughtful reading of Romans 6, 7, and Hebrews 6:4-8. We die (figuratively speaking) to sin in baptism. We become “new” people in Christ at baptism. If we forsake God’s truth thereafter, then our final judgment is sealed: There is no more sacrifice for us (see Heb. 6:4-8; 10:26, 27). Because of this present, ongoing judgment of true Christians, we are able to be changed (Greek = allasso) from flesh to spirit only at the return of Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:46-58; 1 Thes. 4:13-18).

Paul makes it clear that the dead and the living true Christians will be “changed” together at the return of Jesus Christ, not before. As a matter of scriptural fact, Paul makes it clear in his summation of Hebrews 11 that all of the Old Testament faithful will receive the same reward together with the New Testament faithful (vv. 39, 40). Enoch is among those of whom Paul wrote (v. 5). Although Elijah and numerous other faithful are not mentioned by name, they, too, are among the faithful dead. Abel is the first faithful person he names (v. 4). Dying in the true faith does not give you an automatic, immediate ticket to heaven! Going to heaven is not even the reward of the faithful dead.

### Was Elijah Taken up to Heaven?

In 2 Corinthians 12:2, Paul mentions that he knew a man who was caught up to the third heaven. He says that he does not know if he was in his body or out of his body when it happened. Based on what we have covered thus far, it is doubtful that Paul was speaking of an immortal soul leaving this man’s body to make the trip to the third heaven. Based on the last part of v. 1, it is more likely that he is speaking of a vision or revelation that was given to him. It would have been little different from Matthew 4:8 and 17:1-9 (note v. 9: “Tell the vision to no man...”; emphases added).

From Paul’s story about this man, it has become the belief that God’s throne is in the third heaven. However, the non-canonical book “Secrets of Enoch” (to which I give no credence) shows Enoch ultimately being taken to the 10<sup>th</sup> heaven, where he came face-to-face with the Lord and was stripped of his earthly garments and given garments of the Lord’s glory (22:8). There is no claim that Enoch’s experience was merely a vision

or revelation. Enoch is also allowed to come back to earth for 65 days to deliver messages. Whom do we believe: Paul or “Secrets of Enoch”?

And if, as Jesus stated, no man (human), which includes Elijah, had ever ascended to the heaven from where He came, then the “heaven” into which Elijah was taken was a different “heaven”: The Bible reveals three different types of “heaven.” To which one was Enoch taken? Let’s see.

The third heaven is where Jesus is presently at the right hand of the Father. Because He is the High Priest of God, He is the only one (“man”) who has the right to be in that heaven with the Father. Why? In the earthly Tabernacle, the “holy of holies” was the place where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, the lid of which was the “Mercy Seat” where the Lord God sat when He came down to be present with Israel, (read Lev. 16, especially v. 15). The human high priest (who was a symbol of our heavenly high priest) was allowed to go into that area only once a year on the Day of Atonement. Hebrews 8:1-5 explains that the original earthly tabernacle under the Old Covenant, with its most holy place, or compartment, was the type of the throne of God in heaven.

The second heaven represents the space where we find the sun, moon, stars, comets and planets (Gen. 1:15-17). In Psalm 8:3, the Psalmist admired the “heavens, the work of thy fingers, the moon, and the stars, which thou hast ordained.” That “heaven” is outer space.

The atmosphere, the air that surrounds this planet, is also called heaven. In Genesis 1:20 we find that the “fowl [of the air] ... may fly above the earth in the open firmament of heaven.” In blessing Jacob, Isaac said, “God give thee of the dew of heaven,” and Moses praised God that the “heavens ... drop down dew” (see Gen. 27:28 and Deut. 33:28). This first heaven, from which dew comes and in which birds fly, is the atmosphere, where the clouds and the wind roam. Every living, breathing creature breathes the air of that “heaven.” Even then, they are limited to certain levels.

If you argue from religious tradition, then you will accept the idea from the lexicon definition that the Hebrew term shamayim (“heavens” – lofty or aloft) has a dual meaning “perhaps alluding to the visible arch in which the clouds move, as well as the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve” – including God’s abode. The reference in 2 Kings 2:1, 11 uses the term shamayim.

Since Elijah could not have gone to the heaven of God’s throne, then to which heaven did he go? The Scripture reads: “And Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven” (2 Kings 2:1, 11; empha-

ses added). The answer ought already to be quite obvious! Elijah did not go to the heaven of God's throne or into outer space, but into this earth's atmosphere, the first heaven. There could be no whirlwind in any other place but in the atmosphere surrounding this earth – in the first heaven in which the birds fly. You certainly have seen the great lifting power of a whirlwind, haven't you?

I know what you are thinking. You are thinking that I discount God's power to do such a thing. Not at all! I discount God's willingness to do such a thing that is contradictory to what His word teaches! It is not a matter of God not being able to do it; it is a matter of God not being willing to do it. There was no good reason for God to take Elijah to heaven where He is.

What was the reason for this unusual act of God? Why did He take Elijah up into the atmosphere? Was it to make him immortal? No! Scripture nowhere indicates that Elijah was made immortal or changed to spirit! The ancient prophets – including Elijah – did not receive any promise of immortality prior to or apart from us. Notice it in Hebrews 11:32 and 39: “These all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise”! And we shall not receive it until Christ returns (Heb. 11:40). So Elijah was not made immortal in any manner because that would have given him pre-eminence over Jesus Christ as the first human to have been changed from flesh to spirit. What does the Bible reveal that enables us to understand this mystery?

### 2 Kings 2:3, 5

The Smith and Goodspeed translation of 2 Kings 2:3, 5 says: “Do you know that today the Lord is about to take away your master from being your leader?” Elijah was the leader of a school of prophets in that day and was sent as God's prophet to wicked king Ahab and to his son Ahaziah of the House of Israel. God was now going to appoint Elisha to direct His work in that area because Ahaziah the king had died (2 Kings 1:17-18) and a new king was ruling.

God never takes an office from a man when that man has been faithfully performing his duty (see Rom. 11:29). Therefore, as a sign of this transfer of this area to Elisha, God removed Elijah from that area so that Elisha could deal with the new king. Elijah's office was not taken from him; he was transferred elsewhere.

When Elijah was taken up, his mantle dropped from him, and Elisha picked it up (2 Kings 2:12-15). Clarke's Commentary says that the mantle was

“worn by prophets and priests as the simple insignia of their office” (vol. 2, page 484).

Having crossed the Jordan River near Jericho, Elijah was taken up by a whirlwind (the Hebrew word can also mean “a tempest; for example, a hurricane or windstorm”) in what appeared to be a chariot and horses of fire. The violent motion of the wind pulled the mantle off the prophet as he was seen going up into the sky.

Elijah had promised that Elisha would have a double portion of the Spirit of God if he would be allowed by God to see Elijah taken up (2 Kings 2:9). This meant that Elisha would be the new leader of the sons of the prophets in that area.

Many are perplexed about where Elijah was taken. He did not ascend to the throne of God. He did not go into outer space. And ... he could not have remained in the atmosphere forever. God also did not say that Elijah was to die at that time. If he were to have died at that time, then Elisha could have assumed his new office without Elijah being moved elsewhere. We know that Elisha died in office after fulfilling his duty (2 Kings 13:14).

Nevertheless, the sons of the prophets were fearful that the Spirit of God might allow Elijah to drop “upon some mountain, or into some valley” (2 Kings 2:16). Elisha knew that God would not allow Elijah to fall to the earth and die, but at their insistence he permitted men to go in search of him. They did not find him.

### More Scriptural Evidence

Immediately before Elijah disappeared into the distance, another son of Ahab, Jehoram (or Joram), had come to the throne in Israel (compare 2 Kings 1:17 with 3:1). The first and only year of Jehoram's reign, was about 849-848 BC. Six years prior to this, he had jointly reigned with his father Ahab and his brother Ahaziah after Ahab died. Elisha was the recognized prophet of God in that area during Jehoram's reign (2 Kings 3:11).

Meanwhile, in Judah, the son of Jehoshaphat began to reign as co-regent with his father (2 Kings 8:16). This king, also named Jehoram (or Joram), began to reign in the fifth year of the joint reign of Jehoram, king of Israel. This Jehoram was associated with his father Jehoshaphat on the throne in Judah for nearly six years. Jehoshaphat died in the year 845 BC. This was a full four years since Elijah had disappeared (remember, he had disappeared almost immediately after Jehoram of Israel began his sole reign in 849).

When Jehoshaphat was dead, his son Jehoram, now sole king of Judah, slew his brothers and

some of the princes to further secure the throne (2 Chron. 21:1-4). The year after Jehoshaphat's death, the Edomites revolted against Judah's king Jehoram (2 Kings 8:20-24 and 2 Chron. 21:8-10). After that brief war, Jehoram of Judah built high places and introduced pagan religious customs in Judah (2 Chron. 21:11). He followed the ways of the pagan nations about him and did evil in God's sight. His wife was the daughter of King Ahab of the House of Israel (2 Kings 8:18; 2 Chron. 21:6).

Because of the wickedness of this new Jewish king, God chose Elijah to write a letter to the Jewish king! The contents of the letter are found in 2 Chronicles 21:12-15. Part of it reads:

Because thou hast not walked in the ways of ... thy father ... but hast walked in the way of the kings of Israel ... and also hast slain thy brethren of thy father's house, which were better than thyself ... thou shalt have great sickness by disease.

From the wording of the letter, it is clear that Elijah wrote it after these events had occurred. You can see that he speaks of them as past events, and of the disease as a future event. Two years after the king became diseased, he died (843 BC) – having reigned only eight short years (2 Chron. 21:18-20).

The letter was written in the fifth year after Elijah had been taken to another location by the whirlwind. God used Elijah to convey the message because he was the prophet of God in the days of the present Jewish king's father, Jehoshaphat ... and the son was not going in the ways of his obedient father. It also proves that the letter Elijah had others to deliver was recognized as his and that he was known to be alive someplace. Just how much longer he lived, the Bible does not reveal.

If "it is appointed unto men once to die" (Heb. 9:27), then Elijah must have died sometime later. First Corinthians 15:22 says that all humans born of Adam (and that includes Elijah) must die: "In Adam all die." Elijah was "subject to like passions [like human nature and death] as we are" (James 5:17). Elijah the prophet, being mortal flesh as we are, died. He is certainly one of the "prophets" (Heb. 11:32) who died in faith not yet having received the promise (verses 13 and 39).

To suppose that God gave him the power of an endless life of nearly three thousand years since that time is to read into the Bible what is not there! He was mortal. He was subject to death. After being lifted into the habitable atmospheric heavens, he spent the remaining years of his life at some

unidentified location on the earth before he died of natural causes.

What about the appearance of Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration with Jesus? Does it prove that Elijah is still alive in heaven? Let's look at Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; and Luke 9:28-36 in order to understand what happened. After you have read the accounts, notice what Jesus told His disciples as they left the Mount: "Tell the vision to no man" (Matt. 17:9). A vision is not a material reality. It is a supernatural picture observed by the eyes.

Moses died, and was buried (Deut. 34:5-6). Both he and Elijah were still dead in their graves, but in vision both they and Jesus were seen in the glory of the resurrection – an event which Jesus, Moses, and Elijah had not yet experienced (Heb. 11:39). Jesus was the first to experience it (Acts 26:22, 23). The vision was granted the disciples after Jesus had spoken of the glory of immortality in the coming Kingdom.

### "I Will Send ... Elijah the Prophet"

The only remaining text that probably still puzzles people is Malachi 4:5-6:

Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord: and he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come and smite the earth with a curse.

This little-understood prophecy refers to the time immediately before God's ultimate intervention in human affairs, prophetically called "the Day of the Lord."

In Matthew 17:10-13, He showed that the work of John the Baptist was a preliminary fulfillment of Malachi's prophecy:

And his disciples asked him, saying, "Why then say the scribes that Elias [Elijah] must first come?" And Jesus answered and said unto them, "Elias truly shall first come, and restore all things. But I say unto you, that Elias is come already, and they knew him not, but have done unto him whatsoever they listed [whatever suited them]. Likewise shall also the Son of man suffer of them." Then the disciples understood that he spake unto them of John the Baptist.

Luke was also inspired to write about the work of John:

And he [John] shall go before him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; to make ready a people prepared for the Lord (Luke 1:17).

Luke said John was “in the spirit and power of Elijah,” not that he was literally Elijah. The actual Elijah had died centuries before. But John the Baptist was empowered by the same spirit which had guided the Elijah of old to point Israel’s eyes to the true God, and for much the same purpose.

Christ said that an Elijah is yet to come. You should know that John the Baptist was already dead at the time He said it. So just as John the Baptist was the forerunner of Jesus Christ at His first

coming, another “Elijah” is yet to come before the great and dreadful Day of the Lord, as a forerunner of Jesus Christ at His second coming. He, like John, will come in the spirit and power of Elijah to fulfill the commission of Malachi 4:5, 6 “lest I come,” says God, “and smite the earth with a curse.” As I said above, he is yet to come.

The world of Christ’s day did not recognize John as coming in the power and spirit of Elijah. And neither will the world today recognize the one whom God is yet to send in the spirit and power of Elijah shortly before the terrible Day of the Lord, when Jesus Christ will intervene in world affairs to set up the Kingdom of God on the earth. The Bible is very plain about God’s truth! Elijah is dead in the dust of the earth awaiting the resurrection of the just. Elijah, some years after being removed in the whirlwind to some other place on earth, went to the grave, but he will rise again at Christ’s return to live forevermore!

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## The Problem With “Eyes” and “Ears”

(Isaiah 6:9-13)

Isaiah 5 sets the stage for the Lord God’s pronouncement through Isaiah in Isaiah 6:9-13. It is called “A Song of the Lord’s Vineyard.” It was a song not familiar to those gathered at one of the Lord’s fall festivals (see Lev. 23:24-44). Quite frankly, it was a song that caught the pilgrims off guard because it moves from the favorable aspects of Israel’s relationship with the Lord God to the unfavorable. The prophet sings of all the things that the Lord God did to benefit Israel and to cause her to have great honor and respect among the nations ... but it devolves into a kind of dirge about complete disaster that was to come over the remnant of the nation of Israel that was left after the Assyrians had carried off the House of Israel (Israel, the nation, was divided between the House of Israel and the House of Judah – read 2 Kings 16-18). Why? It was a problem with their “eyes” and “ears.”

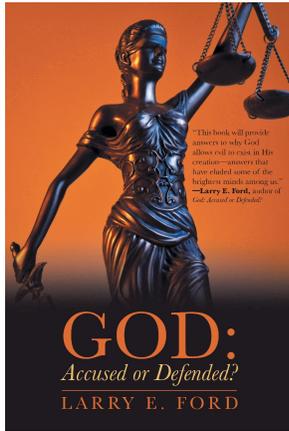
With all of the advantages offered by the Lord God, Israel not only failed to rise to be the best people imaginable, they perverted the goodness and character of God and rebelled against His great love. As the rich got richer and the poor got poorer, all sense of community was lost. Israel became a house so terribly divided that the less fortunate among them were exploited and oppressed, justice was thrown out the window, and the religion became centered around “the show” – pretentious, ostentatious, competitive, and more fit for the entertainment industry.

They favored the forms and ceremonies adopted from the Canaanites and abhorred those revealed to them by the Lord God. The rich gobbled up land with no regard for the needs of others. They were more excited about their parties and orgies and debaucheries than they were about basic morality ... much less holiness. They had gotten to the place that they did not know the difference between good and evil, darkness and light. As one commentator described it: “The sin against the Holy Ghost is not the blasphemy of the spoken word, but the state of soul so saturated with evil that for it there exists nothing else but evil. There is no longer a moral alternative...” (The Interpreter’s Bible, vol. 5, p. 202).

Into this horrid national situation was sent a prophet of God to pronounce judgment upon the House of Judah ... now the only remnant of the entire nation of Israel left to be called “God’s people.” They, like the House of Israel, had fallen prey to spiritual deprivation in which they were incapable of understanding God’s truth even when it was spoken to them very plainly. Now, the Lord God was about to deprive them of the spiritual “eyes” and “ears” it takes to be able to do so. Isaiah 6:9-13 reveals that it was going to be for

a very long time. In the meantime, they would be subject to death and destruction at the hands of others until only about one-tenth of them are left. While they might very well be a very religious people, they will be “dull of mind” (vv. 9, 10; see also Mat. 7:21-23; 13:9-17). They will be insensitive like cattle and incapable of knowing or performing God’s will. Read very carefully Matthew 24:4, 5 and Amos 8:11.

What does this have to do with you? It is a fair warning about the condition of your own spiritual “eyes” and “ears.” If you truly want to understand God’s truth, then you must do the things that heal them so that worshiping God in spirit and in truth is possible (John 4:23, 24). Only a few have that knowledge.



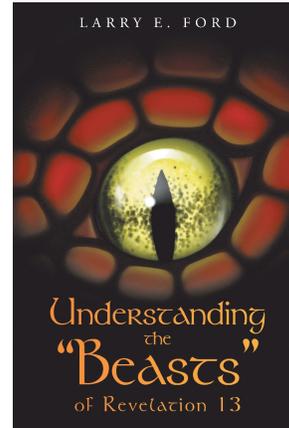
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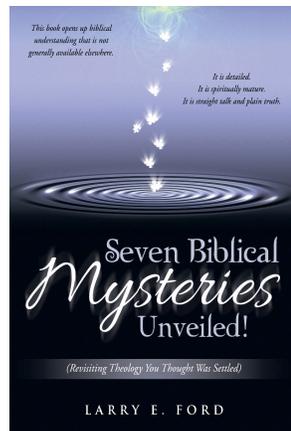
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