



February 3, 2023

Do We go to Heaven when We Die?

Warm hellos friends, brethren, co-workers, spiritual family, and scattered children of God from here on the Gulf Coast. My wife and I pray and hope this finds you doing well, and that again your week has been blessed.

Most of us have at one time in our lives attended funerals conducted by a minister who preached the dead person into heaven. I remember comments often made such as "he or she is in a better place now" or "he or she is looking down on us and enjoying the celebration of his or her life."

Even as a young boy, I would reflect and ask myself, "why is it a better place, if they are enjoying the celebration of their physical life that is now gone?" It simply didn't add up to me.

Why do people believe that the dead go to heaven when they die? Do you?

This question often came up from some in the churches I pastored in Colombia, and I thought I would share a few comments in this regard that will be helpful. Might I suggest you study and discuss these scriptures with one another?

One of the primary reasons people believe the dead go to heaven is that they believe in the *immortality of the soul*. They are convinced that humans have a soul or entity that continues on after death, and is the conscious part of the human that is separate from the body. But then many believe that souls have bodies and they can be seen and also see others in the heavenly realm. They go there to be with and be welcomed by grandpa and grandma who have died previously. People cling to the idea that their loved ones are not really dead, but still alive in heaven. It is a means for most of being comforted, and in effect denying that the person has really died.

If we take scripture for what it says, you and I believe and understand the truth

about human life and what happens at death.

You'll not find the phrase "immortal soul" in God's Word, nor does it appear in the Scriptures. Okay, so then where did the idea come from?

Belief in a separate soul and body was popular in ancient Greek society and was taught by one of their most famous philosophers. The immortality of the soul was a principal doctrine of the Greek philosopher, Plato. In Plato's thinking, the soul was self-moving and indivisible, and that it existed before the body which it inhabited, and in which it would survive. The first century church did not accept this belief, but it crept into *a greatly changed church* that emerged later on.

The Hebrew Scriptures identify man as a soul, and at death he ceases to have life or any consciousness. "*And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.*" (Genesis 2:7 KJV) The Hebrew word here translated soul is *nephesh* and is found throughout the Scriptures. We are told that "*The soul who sins shall die. . .*" (Ezekiel 18:20) Friends, Scripture tells us that souls are not immortal. They die. The dead are unconscious and lie lifeless in the grave. "*For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten.*" (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

So, are there Scriptures that some turn to in order to explain their assertion that souls are immortal and go to heaven or hell? Let's go ahead and look at several.

"*And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. . .*" (Matthew 10:28) The word translated body is the Greek word *soma*, and the Greek word translated soul here is the Greek word *psuche*. It is equivalent to the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Jesus is speaking here, and some believe that Jesus is claiming that the soul is immortal and cannot be killed. But, we need to read the last half of the verse. "*But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.*" (Matthew 10:28)

Jesus said that the soul can be destroyed. What is the "hell" spoken of in this

verse? The Greek word used here is *gehenna*, which comes from the combination of two Hebrew words, *ge* and *hinnom*, meaning "valley of Hinnom."

The term originally referred to a valley on the south side of Jerusalem in which pagan deities were worshiped. My wife and I had the privilege decades ago to see this location with our own eyes while visiting Jordan and Israel. Because of its reputation as an abominable place, it later became a garbage dump where refuse was burned. *Gehenna* became synonymous with "a place of burning" and a site used to dispose of useless things.

Christ was showing that when one man kills another the resulting death is only temporary. God can raise anyone to life again either in this life (see Matthew 9:23-25; 27:52; John 11:43-44; Acts 9:40-41) or the life to come. We must revere God, who alone can obliterate all possibility of any later resurrection to life. When God destroys one in "hell," that person's destruction is permanent. It is called "*the second death*" (Revelation 20:14-15)

Let's examine another Bible passage that is often misused. "*When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then a white robe was given to each of them; and it was said to them that they should rest a little while longer, until both the number of their fellow servants and their brethren, who would be killed as they were, was completed.*" (Revelation 6:9-11)

First, might we notice that these "souls" were slain. And other servants would be "killed" as they were. They are located "under the altar" and they have shed their blood. The bronze altar at the tabernacle was where sacrifices were killed and offered. The fifth seal is *figurative* of the great tribulation. In this vision John sees under the altar the martyred believers who sacrificed their lives for their faith in God. These souls symbolically cry out, "*Avenge our blood!*" This can be compared to Abel's blood symbolically "*crying out*" to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Of course neither souls nor blood can literally speak. But, some would argue that

yes they can!

Let's look at a couple more Scriptures that state that the dead have *not* gone to heaven. David, the king of Israel and author of many of the Psalms, whom God called "*a man after My own heart*" (Acts 13:22), did *not* go to heaven at his death.

The apostle Peter, speaking under God's inspiration, stated: "*Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day*" (Acts 2:29). He then added that "*David did not ascend into the heavens*" (verse 34). If anyone deserved to go to heaven after he died, one would think David would.

Notice John 3:13: "*No one has ascended to heaven but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man [Jesus Christ] who is in heaven.*"

This scripture makes two points significant to our discussion here. First, these are Jesus' own words. If anyone had gone to heaven, Jesus would know about it.

Second, John recorded these words many years *after* Jesus died and ascended to heaven, still affirming that no one other than Jesus had gone to heaven. John added the words, "*that is, the Son of Man [Jesus Christ] who is in heaven*" when he wrote the Gospel long after Jesus had ascended to heaven.

Hopefully this will challenge you to study more on this topic. I'm not going through this to agitate or cause anyone to lose hope in God. I simply desire that we would look into God's Word, and believe and then do what our God speaks. You and I are to grow in grace and knowledge, drinking in of the very Word of God daily through study of His Bible and prayer with Him. So, some thoughts to consider as we near the end of another week, and look forward to God's Sabbath.

Arms up friends! Our sincere prayers and thoughts are with you daily. Thanks in advance for your heartfelt prayers for us.



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