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Issue 8

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

Ian McPherson

Many believe that man, like a beast, is fully mortal, and therefore simply returns to the dust. This false view is not only shared by Atheists, but also by materialistic religions such as Jehovah's Witnesses and Christadelphians. It was also the view of Sadducees in Jesus' day (Acts 23:8)

Man is unique: *"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). Unlike the animals who were simply created as "living creatures" (Genesis 1:21). Man was made in two phases, His body was formed from the earth, but the life in his body was breathed directly into Him by the Almighty. The result was a unique creature called man whose inner being was made in the image of God. (Genesis 2:7).

Man's soul is eternal: *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."* (Ecclesiastes 12:7). Man's spirit does not return to the dust with his body. When Rachel died her soul departed (Genesis 35:18) and when a widow's son was miraculously raised from the dead by Elijah, *"the soul of the child came into him again"* (1 Kings 17:22). The spirit therefore continues to exist after death. Jesus said *"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul"* (Matthew 10:28). Man's soul therefore cannot be killed, it is eternal (See also 2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1)

Man's soul awaits judgement in "hades": Modern versions of the Bible rightly distinguish between the Greek words "Gehenna" and "Hades". They translate "Gehenna" (The final place of eternal punishment) as "hell" and simply transliterate the Greek word "hades" which is the temporary realm of the dead

where souls wait for the final judgement. The KJV has translated both "Hades" and "Gehenna" as "hell" which is confusing to some.

Man does not go to heaven or hell till Jesus returns: *"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation."* (John 5:28-29). At His second coming the dead will be raised and given new incorruptible bodies (1 Corinthians 15:42-55). In these new bodies we face the judgement and spend eternity in either heaven or hell (Matthew 10:28, 25:46). No one except Jesus has died and ascended back into heaven. (John 3:14)

Jesus was in the realm of the dead for three days: But unlike the rest of the dead, *"His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption"* (Acts 2:31). In rising from the dead He *"Loosed the pains of death"* (Acts 2:24) and is now *"alive for ever more"* and holds *"the key to hades and death"* (Revelation 1:18). In Luke 16:19-31 Jesus gave a vivid description of the realm of the dead. He spoke of a poor beggar named Lazarus, and a rich man who both died and were in hades. Lazarus however was **being comforted** in "Abraham's bosom" while the rich man was **in torment** (V25). In hades both were conscious, and able to remember their life on earth, and could communicate.

The rich man is in the deep region of hades known as "Tartarus": (Translated 'hell' in 2 Peter 2:4). This is described as "chains of darkness" where the angels that sinned and the all the unjust are *"reserved unto the day of judgement"* (2 Peter 2: 4-9). Satan's kingdom is the "world" (1 John 5:19). The final phase will be "Gehenna" (Hell), the place, into which the lost will be cast body and soul, and spend eternity in torment (Matthew 10: 28; Revelation 20:15).

Lazarus was in a place called "Paradise": (Acts 2:47). When he died he was taken by the angels into the comfort of "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). This place of comfort in hades is called "paradise". We know this because Jesus said to the penitent thief of the cross, *"Today thou shalt be with me in paradise"* (Luke 23:43). Paradise therefore is not heaven, but the place of bliss in God's kingdom, where saints await their final reward in heaven. The kingdom of God consists of all God's people, whether alive or

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Devonport, TAS 7310

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dead (Hebrews 12:22-24). The earthly phase is the church, which is enrolled in heaven. Paradise is the second phase which contains "the spirits of just men made perfect" (Hebrews 12:24). Heaven is the final phase where all the faithful will spend eternity after Christ comes again at the judgement. (Matthew 25:34)

In conclusion, when we die, we will go to either paradise (a place of bliss), or to Tartarus (a place of suffering). In hades our fate is sealed. There is gulf between the lost and saved that cannot be crossed. While on earth however there is hope, the Lord does not want any to perish but all to be saved (1 Timothy 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9-10; Ezekiel 18:32).

THE SECOND COMING OF CHRIST

Brett Rutherford

Ever since Jesus promised His disciples that He would return to take them to a prepared place, men have been speculating on when His return would occur (John 14:1-3). Some have even suggested that Christ has already returned. Of course, we are not interested in the opinions of men regarding this subject. We want to know what the Bible has to say about the time and manner of Christ's return.

The first thing we need to consider regarding the second coming of Christ is the time of His return. Countless books, papers, tracts have even been written predicting the exact day of Jesus' return. Tragically, many have chosen to consult these documents instead of considering what Christ had to say on this subject.

One thing we can be clear about the time of Jesus' return is that as soon as someone predicts the time of His return, that prediction is wrong. Jesus made it clear that only God the Father knows when Christ's return will be. The Lord told His disciples, ***"But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."*** ***"Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect"*** (Matthew 24:36, 44). One needs to be wary of any religious organization that claims they know when Christ will return. They are making a claim to know something that even Jesus did not know during His ministry.

One must also be warned that there are some who teach that Christ has already come. From what the Scriptures teach about what will happen when Jesus returns it is obvious that He has not yet returned. For example, the Bible teaches that the second coming of

Christ will be associated with the Lord's final judgment on the world (Matthew 25:31-46; II Thessalonians 1:5-10). Obviously, Christ has not yet sat in final judgment upon all men. Therefore, He has not yet come.

Secondly, it is clear that Jesus has not yet returned because His coming will be associated with great fanfare that will be witnessed by all men (I Thessalonians 1:7,8; Revelation 1:5-7). Clearly, Christ has not returned for no man has heard the great trumpet sound, or witnessed the angels descending with the Lord in fiery vengeance upon the disobedient. There is certainly nothing in Scripture to suggest that the Lord will return in secret.

In the third place, the second coming of the Lord will be associated with the resurrection of all the dead (the righteous and unrighteous) (I Thessalonians 4:13-18; Acts 17:31). It goes beyond the ridiculous to believe that the resurrection of the dead is a past event.

In the fourth place, when the Lord returns the earth will be destroyed (II Peter 3:7-10, 12). I think that I can confidently assert that the universe has not yet disintegrated. With an equal level of confidence I can safely assert that the Lord has not yet come again.

In the fifth place, when Christ returns our bodies will be transformed from a physical body into an incorruptible spirit (I Corinthians 15:24-57). Because there are still men whose spirits are still confined to a mortal, corruptible body we can safely assume that the Lord has not come.

Finally, it is clear that the Lord has not yet returned because when He does so He will take the righteous to Heaven, and will condemn the unrighteous to an eternity in Hell (Matthew 25:31-46; II Thessalonians 1:5-10). Keep in mind that the unrighteous will spend just as much time in Hell as the righteous will spend in Heaven (Matthew 25:46). There is nothing in Scripture that suggest that the unrighteous will simply cease to exist (Revelation 21:8). "Death" is not defined as the end to one's existence. It is defined as "separation." At Christ's second coming the unrighteous will be eternally separated from God (II Thessalonians 1:9).

The Scriptures teach that Jesus will return suddenly, and unexpectedly to judge mankind, therefore we should heed Christ's warning to "keep watch" (Matthew 24:27; 42). Christ's warning "to watch" is used in the sense of being prepared, vigilant. One certainly does not want to be caught unprepared when the Lord returns (Matthew 25:1-13; II Corinthians 5:10-11; Hebrews 10:23-25).