

What is the State of the Dead?

Alive in heaven and hell or asleep in the grave. Both sides examined.

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Introduction

Death is an unpleasant subject, many of us would like to avoid. Yet, the bible declares “It is appointed unto man once to die”. Even so, many including scientists and doctors throughout the ages have sort to lengthen man’s life in a quest for immortality and yet God’s limit of 120 years (Gen 6:3) for man’s life remains in place. So unless God intervenes, we must all face the reality of death. But what is death and what is the state of the dead?

There are many beliefs concerning death and the state of dead. However, the central theme and teaching of most, whether Christian or non-Christian is the idea that while we must all die physically, death is not really death, but a mere gateway for our souls to depart and enjoy either eternal bliss or continuous punishment. Let’s call this the doctrine of the 'immortal soul'. However, for the Christian, if this teaching is true, then there are some logical questions for the intelligent mind. What reason or purpose would there be for the resurrection of the dead in Christ if we are already alive with Him in heaven? If the purpose of the resurrection of the dead is only to bring our old mortal bodies back to life to join our soul or spirits this too would seem strange since we are to receive new bodies at His Second Coming? And how did Christianity come to share this same doctrine with nearly all false pagan religions, including Egyptian, Babylonian, Greek, Hindu and Islamic? Is it possible that from the time Satan spoke the words “you will not surely die”...but will “become like God”, mankind has continued to fall for this same deception? Both Christian and non-Christian alike.

For us the only way we can know the truth and answer the many questions, is through studying the bible as our only authority. Just as many men of God, prophets, reformers and Christ Himself have called all true Christians to do. Only then can we know whether this doctrine of the ‘immortal soul’ is really found in God’s Word? Or if not, then the truth. To do this, we must set aside our existing beliefs and simply read with an open mind and believe what the bible says, regardless of the difficulties it may bring. Always taking a literal interpretation, unless it’s clearly a figurative passage. In which case, we must find the other parts of the bible which deal with the same topic and allow the bible to interpret itself. However, many will point to the doctrines and traditions of the church or point to what the masses believe as their authority. We must resist this pressure and follow the example of the brave reformers who declared at the Diet of Spires in 1529:

“We protest by these present, before God...who will one day be our judge,...neither consent nor adhere in any manner whatever to the proposed decree in anything that is contrary to God, to His Word”...“There is no true doctrine but that which conforms to the Word of God. The Lord forbids the teaching of any other faith. The Holy Scriptures with one text explained by other and plainer texts, are, in all things necessary for the Christian, easy to be understood, and adapted to enlighten. We are therefore resolved by divine grace to maintain the pure preaching of God’s only Word, as it is contained in the scriptures of the old and new testaments, without added thereto. The word is the only truth. It is the sure rule of all doctrine and life, and can never fail or deceive us.”

Therefore, the aim of this study is not to communicate anything new, but simply to bring to light the truth which has always existed within the scriptures themselves and is presented in three parts. Firstly, a review of the history and development of the doctrine of the ‘immortal soul’ in contrast to what the early church fathers and reformers believed. Secondly, a review of the scriptures which teach the mortality of man and the certainty of death where he will sleep in grave until either Christ comes or judgement day. Thirdly, a review of the scriptures which appear to teach man continues to live after death in either eternal bliss or hell. In this way we can reconcile these seemingly different beliefs with God’s Word so we can finally understand the truth.

Let’s now look at the beginnings of the doctrine of the ‘immortal soul’ and how it came to develop into the dominate belief today.

Where did the Doctrine of the Immortal Soul Originate?

There is much evidence that the concept of an immortal soul which continues to live conscientiously after death originated from Egyptian, Babylonian and Greek thought and religion and later crept into Christian teaching. A study of the early religions and philosophies (some of which are listed below) shows this belief in the 'immortal soul' was held by the ancient pagan religions well before Christianity and goes back to early periods in man's history. In fact, the ancient Greek historian Herodotus (5th century B.C.) tells us in his 'History' that the ancient Egyptians were the first to teach that the soul of man is separable from the body, and immortal:

"The Egyptians were 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" (from Euterpe, the second book of Herodotus' History).

"The concept of immortality is a product of Greek thinking, whereas the hope of a resurrection belongs to Jewish thought... Following Alexander's conquests Judaism gradually absorbed Greek concepts." - Dictionnaire Encyclopédique de la Bible (Valence, France; 1935), edited by Alexandre Westphal, Vol. 2, p. 557.

"Immortality of the soul is a Greek notion formed in ancient mystery cults and elaborated by the philosopher Plato." - Presbyterian Life, May 1, 1970, p. 35.

"Do we believe that there is such a thing as death? ... Is it not the separation of soul and body? And to be dead is the completion of this; when the soul exists in herself, and is released from the body and the body is released from the soul, what is this but death? ... And does the soul admit of death? No. Then the soul is immortal? Yes." - Plato's "Phaedo," Secs. 64, 105, as published in Great Books of the Western World (1952), edited by R. M. Hutchins, Vol. 7, pp. 223, 245, 246.

"The problem of immortality, we have seen, engaged the serious attention of the Babylonian theologians.... Neither the people nor the leaders of religious thought ever faced the possibility of the total annihilation of what once was called into existence. Death was a passage to another kind of life." - The Religion of Babylonia and Assyria (Boston, 1898), M. Jastrow, Jr., p. 556.

"The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is...nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture...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" (The Jewish Encyclopedia, article, "Immortality of the Soul").

Further proof that the doctrine of the 'immortal soul' crept into Christian teaching through Greek thought, rather than the bible itself:

"The Christian concept of a spiritual soul created by God and infused into the body at conception to make man a living whole is the fruit of a long development in Christian philosophy. Only with Origen [died c. 254 C.E.] in the East and St. Augustine (died 430 AD) in the West was the soul established as a spiritual substance and a philosophical concept formed of its nature... His [Augustine's] doctrine... owed much (including some shortcomings) to Neoplatonism." - New Catholic Encyclopaedia (1967), Vol. XIII, pp. 452, 454.

"He (St. Augustine) fused the religion of the New Testament with the Platonic tradition of Greek philosophy." - The Encyclopaedia Britannica

Tertullian (A.D. 155-220), wrote: "For some things are known even by nature: the immortality of the soul, the instance, is held by many ... I may use, therefore, the opinion of Plato, when he declares: 'Every soul is immortal'" (The Ante-Nicene Fathers, vol. III). Notice, it is the opinion of Plato that is cited!

Why should these early professing Christian scholars have resorted to the opinions of a pagan Greek philosopher? Could it be that the 'immortal soul' doctrine is not clearly supported in scripture?

What Did the Early Church Fathers Believe?

Having reviewed many of the writings of the early church fathers, including Clement of Rome (30-97 AD) and Polycarp of Smyrna (69-155 AD) it would appear that many, if not most of the Church Fathers who wrote before 200 AD did not believe in the 'immortal soul', but rather taught that man was mortal and must die, where he would sleep in grave until Christ came. At which time only those who believed in Him would awaken and be granted eternal life (immortality). However, from 200 AD onwards the doctrine of the 'immortal soul' appears to have sprang up and began to gain a foot hold until it eventually became the dominate teaching.

Examples of the early church fathers writings on this subject are:

Clement of Rome (AD 30-97)

Clement I was born in approximately 30 AD. Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD) says he was the Clement mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Philippians 4:3. He was ordained to the ministry by the Apostle Peter. According to Eusebius of Caesarea (263-339 AD), who is known as "the Father of Church History", he served as the fourth Bishop of Rome from 88-97 AD.1 Clement's Epistle to the Corinthians, commonly known as 1 Clement, is the oldest specimen of post-Apostolic literature we now possess.

"For what can a **mortal man** do, or what strength is there in one made out of the dust?" (1 Clement 39:2)

"Do we then deem it any great and wonderful thing for the Maker of all things to **raise up again** those that have piously served Him in the assurance of a good faith...?" (1 Clement 26:1)

"he that is born of woman...**lives but a short time**"..."man lieth down, **and riseth not**: till the heavens be no more, **they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep**"..."**If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come**"... "the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. The waters wear the stones: thou wastest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man." (1 Clement 30:7)

Referring to the apostles as having appointed ministers and having given "instructions, **that when these should fall asleep**, other approved men should succeed them in their ministry." (1 Clement 44:2)

"**Enter into thy secret chambers for a little time**, until my wrath and fury pass away; and I will remember a propitious day, and **will raise you up out of your graves.**" (1 Clement 50:4)

Ignatius of Antioch

Ignatius Theophorus was born in approx 35 AD, probably in Syria. He was a pupil of the Apostle John, and served as the third Bishop of Antioch at the end of the first century and beginning of the second. He was martyred at the Colosseum in Rome in 107 AD.

"Let no man deceive himself. Unless he believes that Christ Jesus has lived in the flesh, and shall confess His cross and passion, and the blood which He shed for the salvation of the world, **he shall not obtain eternal life**, whether he be a king, or a priest, or a ruler, or a private person, a master or a servant, a man or a woman." (Ig. Smyrnaeans 6:1-2)

Note that he writes "eternal life" must be "obtained", rather than it being something all are born with.

"Be sober as God's athlete. **The prize is immortality and eternal life**, of which you have been persuaded." (Ig. Polycarp 2:8)

If "immortality and eternal life" are the "prize", then it is again not something we all naturally possess already.

Justin of Samaria

Flavius Justinus of Samaria, popularly known as Justin Martyr wrote:

"Jesus Christ, being crucified and dead, rose again, and having ascended to heaven, reigned; and by those things which were published in His name among all nations by the apostles, **there is joy afforded to those who expect the immortality promised by Him.**" (First Apology 42:5)

Here we are told immortality is to be expected in the future.

“The soul partakes of life, since God wills it to live. Thus, then, it will not even partake [of life] when God does not will it to live.... Whenever the soul must cease to exist, the spirit of life is removed from it, and there is no more soul.” (Dialogue With Trypho 6:7-8)

“we [Christians]...rejoice in death, believing that **God will raise us up by His Christ, and will make us...immortal...**” (Dialogue With Trypho 46:15)

“if anyone be...an observer of the doctrines delivered by [Jesus], **He shall raise him up at His second advent** perfectly sound, **after He has made him immortal...**” (Dialogue With Trypho 69:18)

It would not be necessary for Jesus to “make” an immortal soul “immortal”?

“If you have fallen in with some who are called Christians, but who do not admit this [truth], and venture to blaspheme the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob; who say there is no resurrection of the dead, and that their souls, when they die, are taken to heaven; do not imagine that they are Christians” (Dialogue With Trypho 80:9)

It would seem that the ‘doctrine of the immortal soul’ was long ago rejected by our early church fathers.

Theophilus of Antioch

“When you shall have **put off the mortal**, and **put on incorruption**, then shall you see God worthily. For **God will raise your flesh immortal with your soul; and then, having become immortal, you shall see the Immortal**, if now you believe on Him.” (1 Autolyucus 7:12-13)

What the Reformers Believed

Martin Luther and many other early protestant leaders, such as John Wycliffe, William Tyndale, John Milton, and John Darby preached what some call ‘conditional immortality’. Martin Luther, the great reformer, hotly opposed the Roman church’s doctrine of the ‘immortal soul’, saying in defence (Prop. 27, published in 1520 AD): “I permit the Pope to make articles of faith for himself and his faithful-such as...that the soul is immortal, with all those other monstrous opinions to be found in the Roman dunghill of decretals”..."Salomon judgeth that the dead are a sleepe, and feele nothing at all. For the dead lye there accompting neyther dayes nor yeares, but when they are awoken, they shall seeme to have slept scarce one minute." — Martin Luther, An Exposition of Salomon’s Booke, called Ecclesiastes or the Preacher (translation 1573). It was Luther who also wrote:

“My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness:
I dare not trust the serpent’s lie
Regarding immortality.
On Christ, the solid rock, I stand:
All other ground is sinking sand.”

In 1522, he wrote:

"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 at night and their uprising in the morning?"

William Tyndale, the bible translator said: “In putting departed souls in heaven, hell, and purgatory you destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul throve to prove the resurrection... And again, if the souls

be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good a case as the angels be? And then what cause is there of the resurrection?...The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that souls did live for ever. And the Pope joineth the spiritual doctrine of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together-things so contrary that they cannot agree.” — William Tyndale, An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue (1530 AD).

John Darby in the early editions of his book 'The Hopes of the Church of God' made the following interesting statement:

“We would express our conviction, that **the idea of the immortality of the soul has no source in the gospel**; that it comes, on the contrary, from the Platonists, and that **it was just when the coming of Christ was denied in the church, or at least began to be lost sight of, that the doctrine of the immortality of the soul came in to replace that of the resurrection.** This was about the time of Origen.”

Of course, if it hadn't been for John Calvin, who reintroduced the doctrine of the 'immortal soul', then 'conditional immortality' (immortality to be obtained only by Christians at Christ's second coming) may have reasserted itself as the dominate belief and remain so today. However, it was John Calvin who fiercely attacked 'conditional immortality' and preached immortality for all.

What the Majority of Modern Churches Teach Today

The position of most churches today is well stated by the popular evangelist, Dr. Billy Graham, in his book, Peace With God, chapter 6, paragraph 25, where he says, “The Bible teaches that you are an immortal soul. Your soul is eternal and will live forever. In other words, the real you - the part of you that thinks, feels, dreams, aspires; the ego, the personality - will never die. The Bible teaches that your soul will live forever in one of two places - heaven or hell.”

In the same chapter, in paragraph 28, he adds, “The Bible teaches that whether we are saved or lost, there is conscious and everlasting existence of the soul and personality.”

What does the Bible teach?

Of course, even if the doctrine of the immortal soul originated from other religions and may not have been taught by the early church fathers or many of the great reformers it doesn't mean it can't also be taught in scripture. However, having studied the most of the scriptures on this topic, the vast majority appear to teach the mortality of man. That all men must die, where he will sleep in grave until either Christ comes, at which time only those who have believed in Him will be awoken and be granted eternal life (immortality). For all others they must await judgement day.

However, there are a relatively small number of other scriptures which appear to contradict the vast number of scriptures which teach the above opening the door for much endless debate in the church over the state of the dead. However, when did God allow us to pick and choose which scriptures we accepted and which we would not? And when have the scriptures ever really been in conflict with one another? No, God never gave us the freedom to pick and choose what we would believe and what we would disregard. The whole of the scriptures was given to us for our study and understanding (not just a superficial read) and we will only gain the truth once we look at all the scriptures with an open mind and reconcile them all together.

So let's start at the beginning.

What is Man and what is the Soul?

“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.” (Gen 2:7)

Firstly, we are told that man is made up of the physical elements of the earth (a fact now confirmed by modern scientists) and after receiving the breath of life from God, became a living soul. Notice it does not

say that man was given a soul (or a spirit) but simply received the 'breath of life' after which he became a soul, a living person. This same idea is repeated in the New Testament:

"It is even so written: 'The first man Adam became a living soul.' The last Adam became a life-giving spirit." (1 Cor. 15:45)

"In Noah's days...a few people, that is, eight souls, were carried safely through the water." (1 Pet. 3:20)

In the Bible, "soul" is translated from the Hebrew word *nephesh* and the Greek word *psuchē* and simply means "a breathing creature" or "breath" of a creature. Bible usage shows that this word is used whether it is a person, animal or the life that a person or animal enjoys.

To many people, however, 'soul' means the immaterial or spirit part of a human being that survives the death of the physical body. Others understand it to be the principle of life. However, these latter views are not supported by scripture. We become living souls when God breathes life into us and only live as long as God wills it. After His "breath" is withdrawn, we (soul) die.

Animals also said to be Living Souls

Notice that the same Hebrew word '*nephesh*' and Greek word '*psuchē*' translated as soul is applied to both mankind and animals:

"God went on to say: 'Let the waters swarm forth a swarm of living souls...And God proceeded to create the great sea monsters and every living soul that moves about, which the waters swarmed forth according to their kinds, and every winged flying creature according to its kind. . . . And God went on to say: 'Let the earth put forth living souls according to their kinds...And God proceeded to make the wild beast of the earth according to its kind and the domestic animal according to its kind and every moving animal of the ground according to its kind.'" (Gen. 1:20, 21, 24, 25)

"In case a man strikes any soul of mankind fatally, he should be put to death without fail. And the fatal striker of the soul of a domestic animal should make compensation for it, soul for soul." (Lev. 24:17, 18)

"It became blood as of a dead man, and every living soul died, yes, the things in the sea." (Rev. 16:3)

Man and Animals said to be Destined for the Same Fate

"I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." (Ecc 3:18-20)

Both mankind and beasts are said to both be living souls and have the same '*ru'ach*' (Hebrew for spirit), or breath and both be destined to the same fate.

What Other Scholars State About the Biblical Understanding of the Soul?

"There is no dichotomy [division] of body and soul in the Old Testament. The Israelite saw things concretely, in their totality, and thus he considered men as persons and not as composites. The term *nepeš* [*ne'phesh*], though translated by our word soul, never means soul as distinct from the body or the individual person. . . . The term [*psy·khe*] is the New Testament word corresponding with *nepeš*. It can mean the principle of life, life itself, or the living being." - New Catholic Encyclopaedia (1967), Vol. XIII, pp. 449, 450.

"The Hebrew term for 'soul' (*nefesh*, that which breathes) was used by Moses..., signifying an 'animated being' and applicable equally to nonhuman beings. ... New Testament usage of *psychē* ('soul') was comparable to *nefesh*." - The New Encyclopaedia Britannica (1976), Macropaedia, Vol. 15, p. 152.

“The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith, and is accordingly nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture.” - The Jewish Encyclopedia (1910), Vol. VI, p. 564.

In summary of the above and other writings not directly quoted, the belief that the soul continues its existence after the death of the body is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith, and is accordingly nowhere taught in Holy Scripture. As long as the soul was conceived to be merely a breathing creature ("nephesh") or its breath, and inseparably connected, if not identified with the life-blood (Gen 9:4; Lev. 17:11), no real substance could be ascribed to it. As soon as the spirit or breath of God ("rûach"), which was believed to keep the soul (breathing creature) alive, including both man and beast (Gen 2:7, 6:17 and 7:22; Job 27:3), was taken away (Ps. 146:4) or returned to God (Eccl 12:7; Job 34:14), the dead soul went down to Sheol or Hades (grave), there to lead a shadowy existence without life and consciousness (Job 14:21; and Ps. 6:6 115:17; Isa. 37:18; Eccl. 9:5, 10).

What does God say about the Fate of Man

“And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: **for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.**” (Gen 2:15-17)

“And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life; Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field; In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, **till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.**” (Gen 3:17-19)

"Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: **thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust**" (Ps. 104:29)

"**All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again**" (Eccl. 3:20)

"**Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.**" (Eccl. 12:7) Note that the Hebrew word for spirit is ru'ach and could also just as correctly be translated 'life-force' or breath of life'.

The text does not teach or indicate in any way that at death the spirit travels all the way to the personal presence of God, but rather, any prospect for the person to live again rests with God.

God plainly stated that if Adam and Eve ate of the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil, then they would surely die and return to the dust from which they came. No ifs or buts or exceptions and this same fate still awaits us all. In other words, according to the above scriptures the process of creation is reversed in death (Ps. 104:29). With the breath or life returning to the God who breathed it, our bodies return to the dust from which they were made and we are therefore no longer living souls. Our only hope at that time, as it is now is in Jesus Christ and His Second Coming when He will raise the dead back to life.

What did Satan say About Death?

“Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden? And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden: But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die. And the serpent said unto the woman, **Ye shall not surely die:** For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” (Gen 3:1-5)

Satan states Adam and Eve would not die, but become like God. Of course he is the father of all lies and should not be trusted. And yet most if not all religions, including mainstream Christianity teach that man never dies but continues living after death contrary to what God plainly spoke.

Can the Soul of Man Die?

“Look! All the souls—to me they belong. As the soul of the father so likewise the soul of the son—to me they belong. The soul that is sinning - it itself will die.” (Ezek. 18:4)

“And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (Matt. 10:28)

“Indeed, any soul that does not listen to that Prophet will be completely destroyed from among the people.” (Acts 3:23)

The bible would appear to clearly teach that just like the body, the soul not only dies, but will also be destroyed. Obviously, if the soul was immortal it could not die, let alone be destroyed.

“But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.” (Ps 49:15)

The grave also is said to have power over the soul and will need to be redeemed by God at Christ's second coming. Of course, let's not forget according to the biblical meaning the body, soul or person are not separate, but one and the same.

Does Conscious Life Continue for a Person After the Spirit Leaves the Body?

“**There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest.** There the prisoners rest together; **they hear not the voice of the oppressor.** The small and great are there; and the servant is free from his master. Wherefore is light given to him that is in misery, and life unto the bitter in soul; Which long for death, but it cometh not; and dig for it more than for hid treasures; Which rejoice exceedingly, and are glad, when they can find the grave?” (Job 3:17-22)

This is not the picture of the wicked going straight to 'hell' to begin their eternal torment, since they are said to be at rest where they no longer hear the voice of the oppressor and can cease from troubling. They are even said to be glad to find the grave! It would appear they are at rest or asleep in the grave until judgement day just as taught throughout the bible.

“So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, **they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.** O that thou wouldest **hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.** Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire to the work of thine hands. For now thou numberest my steps: dost thou not watch over my sin? My transgression is sealed up in a bag, and thou sewest up mine iniquity. And surely the mountain falling cometh to nought, and the rock is removed out of his place. The waters wear the stones: thou washest away the things which grow out of the dust of the earth; and thou destroyest the hope of man. Thou prevailest for ever against him, and he passeth: thou changest his countenance, and sendest him away. His sons come to honour, and **he knoweth it not;** and they are brought low, but **he perceiveth it not of them.** But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn.” (Job 14:13-22)

Here Job a righteous man, himself expects to sleep in the grave until God's wrath be past and the appointed day in the future should come in which he will be changed. During this time he states he will not know that his sons come to honour him for he will be asleep.

“**For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?**” (Ps 6:5)

“**What profit is there in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise thee? shall it declare thy truth?**” (Ps 30:9)

“For he seeth that wise men die, likewise the fool and the brutish person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue for ever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man being in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts that perish.”...“But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah.” (Ps 49:10-12,15)

"Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? **shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah. Shall thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? or thy faithfulness in destruction? Shall thy wonders be known in the dark? and thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?**" (Ps 88:10-12)

"The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence." (Ps 115:17)

"His spirit goes out, he goes back to his ground; in that day his thoughts do perish." (Ps 146:4) Here 'ru'ach' is translated "spirit", while other translations say "breath." (Also Psalm 104:29)

"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psa 146:4)

"For the living know that they shall die: **but the dead know not anything**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also **their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished**; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun."..."Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for **there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest**" (Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10)

"For **the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.** The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth" (Is. 38:18, 19)

To summarise, we are taught that both the righteous and wicked have the same immediate destiny. We will all die and be buried in the grave while we await either the first or second resurrection of the dead. Those in Christ are said to be hidden in the grave and kept secret until God's wrath be past, when He will remember us at the appointed and set time when our change shall come and we will arise at His second coming. During this time of waiting, even the wicked are to cease from troubling, being at rest and hearing not the voice of the oppressor. These scriptures paint a very different picture to the wicked being in hell immediately after death.

Even for those Christians (the righteous) dead in the grave, there is to be no knowledge or memory of God. No one to give thanks, praise or declare the truth. No celebration. Rather a place of forgetfulness and darkness where all thoughts (including love, hatred and envy) have perished so that the dead know nothing. During this time, there is to be no reward, no work, no knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave. This is certainly not a description of the Christian immediately going to heaven to be with Christ at the moment of death.

Death Described as Sleep

It is interesting death is referred to as 'sleep' approximately 63 times throughout the bible, including both the old and new testaments. This includes sleeping at death and arising out of our sleep when Christ returns. Clearly, God chose this description to best convey what the state of the dead would be in, in a way we would understand. If the dead immediately either went to heaven or hell, then this would not be a good description. Here are some examples:

"And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, **thou shalt sleep** with thy fathers" (Deut. 31:16).

"So **David slept** with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David" (1 Kings 2:10).

"And **Solomon slept** with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead" (1 Kings 11:43).

"Why did the knees prevent me? or why the breasts that I should suck? For now should I have **lain still and been quiet**, I should **have slept**: then had I been **at rest...**" (Job 3:12-13).

"For now shall I **sleep in the dust**; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I **shall not be**" (Job 7:21).

"So man **lieth down**, and **riseth not**: till the heavens be no more, they **shall not awake**, nor be raised out of their **sleep**" (Job 14:12).

"Consider and hear me, O LORD my God: lighten mine eyes, lest I **sleep the sleep of death**" (Ps. 13:3).

"In their heat I will make their feasts, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and **sleep a perpetual sleep**, and **not wake**, saith the LORD." (Jer. 51:39).

"And many of them that **sleep in the dust** of the earth **shall awake**, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."..."But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou **shalt rest**, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days" (Dan. 12:2, 13).

"And all wept, and bewailed her: but he said, Weep not; she **is not dead, but sleepeth**" (Luke 8:52).

"These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, Our friend **Lazarus sleepeth**; but I go, that I may **awake him out of sleep**. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of **his death**: but they thought that he had spoken of **taking of rest in sleep**. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is **dead**" (John 11:11-14).

"And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he **fell asleep**" (Acts 7:60).

"For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, **fell on sleep**, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption" (Acts 13:36).

"For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many **sleep**" (1 Cor. 11:30).

"After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are **fallen asleep**."..."Then they also which are **fallen asleep** in Christ are perished."..."But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that **slept**."..."Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all **sleep**, but we shall all be changed" (1 Cor. 15:6, 18, 20, 51)

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are **asleep**, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which **sleep** in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are **asleep**" (1 Thess. 4:13-15).

"And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may **rest** from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13)

Returning to Dust at Death

"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, **till thou return unto the ground**; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, **and unto dust shalt thou return**." (Gen. 3:19)

"Remember, I beseech thee, that thou hast made me as the clay; and **wilt thou bring me into dust again**" (Job 10:9)

"All flesh shall perish together, and **man shall turn again unto dust**" (Job 34:15)

"My strength is dried up like a potsherd; and my tongue cleaveth to my jaws; and **thou hast brought me into the dust of death**." "All they that be fat upon earth shall eat and worship: **all they that go down to the dust shall bow before him: and none can keep alive his own soul**" (Ps. 22:15, 29)

Notice that no one shall keep alive his soul.

"Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: **thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust**" (Ps. 104:29)

"**All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again**" (Eccl. 3:20)

"**Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it**" (Eccl. 12:7)

"Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. **Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust:** for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, **and the earth shall cast out the dead**" (Is. 26:19)

How can we be said to "dwell in the dust" if we are alive and living (dwelling) somewhere else?

"And **many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake**, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Dan 12:2)

How can those who are asleep in the dust awake if they have been alive somewhere else all along!

Man is mortal

"Shall **mortal man** be more just than God? shall a man be more pure than his maker?" (Job 4:17)

"Let not sin therefore reign in your **mortal body**, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof." (Rom 6:12)

"But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your **mortal bodies** by his Spirit that dwelleth in you." (Rom 8:11)

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, **and this mortal must put on immortality.** So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, **and this mortal shall have put on immortality**, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Co 15:51-54)

Notice, we are not only taught we are mortal, but are also clearly told that we will not be raised up and made 'immortal' until Christ comes. This is completely different to the doctrine of the 'immortal soul' which teaches we are immortal and are raised up when we die.

"For we which live are always delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our **mortal flesh.**" (2 Co 4:11)

Again, the scriptures teach that man is mortal and only those who put their trust in Christ will be made immortal when He returns.

Immortality is Only Something that will Occur in the Future

"But is now made manifest **by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel**" (2 Tim. 1:10)

"But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God; Who will render to every man according to his deeds: **To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life:** But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath" (Rom 2:5-8)

We could not "seek for...immortality, eternal life", nor could Jesus bring them to light if we already had immortality and eternal life. Rather God will render these according to man's deeds at a future time.

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, **at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, **and this mortal must put on immortality.** So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, **and this mortal shall have put on immortality**, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Cor 15:51-54)

The above scripture describes the first resurrection when the dead in Christ will be raised at His second coming. It's only at this future time, that us mortals will put on immortality and this could not be done if we were already possessed immortality.

If Already Immortal, why was God Determined that we Should not Become Immortal?

“And the LORD God said, Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live for ever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. **So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.**” (Gen 3:22-24)

The scripture states God further banished Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden so they could not “take also of the tree of life” and live forever. If they were already immortal, then there would have been no reason for God to be concerned that this might happen.

Only Christ Immortal

“**Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God**, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.” (1Tim 1:17)

“I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession; That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ: Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords; **Who only hath immortality**, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see: to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.” (1 Tim 6:13-16)

The scriptures declare that only Christ is immortal. Therefore when studied along with the other scriptures above which state that man is mortal and can only hope to become immortal at the Second Coming of Christ, then there is no room for misunderstanding. Man is mortal! Of course, there are some who teach that while our bodies are mortal, our souls are immortal and much of God’s plan of redemption was only concerned with saving the body from the grave since we are to be with him in heaven. However we have already reviewed many scriptures which plainly state that man is a living soul (not has one) and when he dies (this includes the soul) goes down into the grave where we are to sleep until we are resurrected at which time we are to receive new bodies. It would seem foolish to believe God was only concerned with saving the body from the grave when He is giving us new bodies.

David did not Ascend to Heaven, but is Asleep and Buried Today

“the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.” (Acts 2:29),

“**For David is not ascended into the heavens**: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand” (Act 2:34)

“For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, **fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption**.” (Act 13:36)

David is described by God, as having a heart after God. Surely, if anyone was to be admitted to heaven at death, it would be David and yet he is said to still be dead and buried and not ascended to heaven.

No one has Ascended to Heaven

We know that not only has David not yet ascended to heaven, but in fact no one has at this time. We know this because Jesus Himself said:

“And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13).

A Common Destiny for All

“For all this I considered in my heart even to declare all this, that the righteous, and the wise, and their works, are in the hand of God: no man knoweth either love or hatred by all that is before them. All things

come alike to all: **there is one event to the righteous, and to the wicked; to the good and to the clean, and to the unclean; to him that sacrificeth, and to him that sacrificeth not: as is the good, so is the sinner; and he that sweareth, as he that feareth an oath.** This is an evil among all things that are done under the sun, **that there is one event unto all: yea, also the heart of the sons of men is full of evil, and madness is in their heart while they live, and after that they go to the dead.**" (Ecc 9:1-3)

Whether righteous, clean, wise, wicked or a sinner all are go to the same place at death.

Same Destiny as Animals

"I said in mine heart concerning the estate of the sons of men, that God might manifest them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts. **For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast:** for all is vanity. All **go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again.** Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" (Ecc 3:18-21)

Whether a man or an animal, we are all to die the same death and go to the same place.

The Body Goes to Sheol and Hades Which Both Refer to the Grave

In both Greek and Hebrew, the same word translated as 'grave' is also used and sometimes translated as 'hell'. In other words, the Hebrew word 'sheol' and the Greek word 'Hades' both refer to 'grave' and 'hell'.

"O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, **until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!** If a man die, shall he live again? **all the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come...**But his flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul within him shall mourn" (Job 14:13, 14 & 22).

If this text says that there is consciousness after death, as some claim, then the fleshly body must be conscious as well since it is feeling pain. If the "flesh" that is in "pain" is in sheol ("the grave," vs. 13) then the "soul" that is mourning, must be there as well.

"For I know that thou wilt bring me to death, and to **the house** appointed for all living" (Job 30:23).

"If I wait, **the grave [sheol] is mine house:** I have made my bed in the darkness" (Job 17:13).

"Drought and heat **consume** the snow waters: so doth the **grave [sheol]** those which have sinned. The womb shall forget him; **the worm shall feed** sweetly on him" (Job 24:19, 20).

Since it is the body that decays, it must be the body that is in the grave (*sheol*) here.

"Like sheep they are laid in the **grave [sheol];** death shall **feed on them;** and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and **their beauty shall consume in the grave [sheol]** from their dwelling" (Ps. 49:14).

"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the **grave [sheol],** whither thou goest" (Eccl. 9:10).

The spirit and or soul could not be conscious after death, since there is no knowledge or wisdom in the grave where we go (sheol/hades).

"And they shall not lie with the mighty that are fallen of the uncircumcised, which are gone down **to hell [sheol] with their weapons of war:** and they have laid **their swords under their heads,** but their iniquities shall be upon their bones, though they were the terror of the mighty in the land of the living" (Ezek. 32:27).

Is it reasonable to imagine people's spirits or souls taking their "weapons of war" to hell with them? This must be a picture of people being buried in the grave with their armour.

"And in **hell [hades]** he lift up **his eyes**, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in **his bosom**. And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of **his finger** in water, and cool **my tongue**; for I am tormented in this flame" (Luke 16:23).

If spirits or souls have tongues, eyes, bosoms, and fingers, why would they need bodies too? If spirits or souls don't have such parts, then could this parable picture their bodies in the grave? (sheol/hades.)

Eternal Life Only Comes Through Jesus Christ

"Jesus saith unto him, I am the way, the truth, and the life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by me." (John 14:6)

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." (Rom 6:23)

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." (Joh 3:16)

According to these scriptures, only those who put their faith in Jesus will receive eternal life. There is no other way of receiving it since those who do not believe in Him are to perish. Therefore, the doctrine of the 'immortal soul' must be rejected since it teaches all men are already immortal and as a result will receive eternal life regardless of one's faith. All roads do not lead to "everlasting life". This is only obtained through a faith in Jesus Christ.

To be Found in the Grave at Christ's Return

"And at that time shall Michael stand up, the great prince which standeth for the children of thy people: and there shall be a time of trouble, such as never was since there was a nation even to that same time: and at that time thy people shall be delivered, every one that shall be found written in the book. **And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.** And they that be wise shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they that turn many to righteousness as the stars for ever and ever." (Dan 12:1-3)

"But go thou thy way till the end be: for thou shalt rest, and stand in thy lot at the end of the days." (Dan 12:13)

"I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes." (Hos 13:14)

"But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave: for he shall receive me. Selah." (Psa 49:15)

"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.**" (Joh 5:28-29)

"Martha saith unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (Joh 11:24)

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, **concerning them which are asleep**, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, **even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.** For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. **For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air:** and so shall we ever be with the Lord. Wherefore comfort one another with these words." (1Th 4:13-18)

"For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. **But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.**" (1Co 15:21-23)

“And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. **Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.** If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.” (1Co 15:17-19)

There is nothing in these scriptures which support the idea that man is immediately resurrected at death to either heaven or hell to continue his or her life, but rather they all teach the one and same truth. That when man dies he goes down into the grave where he must await either the Second Coming of Christ or Judgement Day.

Examination of Scriptures Appearing to Teach we go to Heaven when we Die?

After studying the large number of scriptures which teach all men will die and sleep in the grave until the Second Coming of Christ or the Great Day of Judgement, we are told by a few in some Christian quarters that these are just old testament ideas and are therefore no longer relevant (if that was possible) even though many of these scriptures are actually found in the New Testament. Otherwise, we are told they have been ‘superseded’ by the few scriptures which appear to teach the doctrine of the ‘immortal soul’. As mentioned before, it’s impossible for the Word of God to contradict itself and it will be found that all scripture teaches the same thing and contains no error. Now let’s look at the few scriptures which are said to teach that all men die and go straight to either heaven or hell to see if this theory is true or not.

Thief on the Cross - Luke 23:43

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Firstly, since this is an answer to a question raised in the previous verse, how can we hope to understand its meaning if we don’t first read the actual question? Reading the question reveals the thief never asked Jesus to remember him in heaven, but rather asked Jesus to remember him when he came into his kingdom. This is very important.

“And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom” (v.42).

As Jesus hang on the cross, we know Jesus was not about to come into His kingdom, for God’s plan of salvation was still to be worked through and is continuing today. We also know, Jesus has still not come as the triumphant conqueror to set up his kingdom and reign on this earth with his chosen (Rev 5:10) since Israel is yet to repent. He won’t come to claim His kingdom until His second coming. Accordingly, the thief must have been thinking of a future time when Christ would return in glory to establish His kingdom on the earth. Thus when the thief asked to remember him in the kingdom, Jesus assured him that he would be with him in paradise.

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.”

Is it possible, Jesus just side stepped the thief’s question regarding the Kingdom and mentioned paradise instead? Or is it possible that He understood the kingdom and paradise to be identical? Isaiah 51:3 reads:

“For the LORD shall comfort Zion: he will comfort all her waste places; and he will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the LORD; joy and gladness shall be found therein, thanksgiving, and the voice of melody.”

The Septuagint renders it this way:

“And I will be comforting you, O Zion, and I comfort all her deserts, and I will place her deserts as paradise and her wilderness as the LORD’S paradise. They shall find gladness and exultation in her, confession and the voice of praise.”

The Septuagint version (used in Jesus’ day) is very interesting, because it shows how the Judeans used the word ‘paradise’ in translating the Old Testament two centuries before Christ. We see from the above that they used the word paradise in place of Eden and the garden of the Lord. Therefore, it appears the word

paradise was a reference to the Garden of Eden, not heaven! This is further substantiated by its meaning in Hebrew “a park, that is, (specifically) an Eden (place of future happiness)”. It both describes the original condition of the earth before sin entered and in Rev 2:7 also is used to describe the future, perfected Kingdom of God, when the earth would again become a “Paradise.” We know this because we are told in Rev 2:7 that the Tree of Life is to be in the Paradise of God and in Rev 22:2 we are told the Tree of Life is to be in the centre of the Kingdom of God, showing us again the Kingdom of God and “paradise” are one and the same.

But how can we reconcile this with Jesus seeming to say that they both would be in paradise on the day of their crucifixion? Luke 23:43 as written in most modern versions appears to teach just that:

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise”

Of course, forgetting what the words have been shown to mean, for many the interpretation rests solely on punctuation and the placement of the comma. However, this view rests solely on human authority since in the original Hebrew and Greek text of the Bible there was no punctuation between words like we have today in our English translations. These were added much later in the fifteen century by a printer in Venice and then first divided into verses in 1560 AD in the Geneva Bible.

The translators, supposing that men go either to heaven or to torment immediately after death, inserted a comma before the word “today,” to make Jesus say it that way. However, the comma could just as easily also been put after the word “today” and meant that Jesus was simply telling the thief that day, what would happen in the future.

The phrase “I say unto thee today” may sound strange to our ears today. However, there were many scriptures when “today” or “this day” were used to emphasize a noteworthy day. In fact, in the Septuagint Greek bible there are 221 similar phrases in its different forms with the same meaning. 51 cases rendered “To-day I say” and in 170 cases rendered “I say to-day”

The Companion Bible agrees in its notation on Luke 23:43 - Today. Connect with this “I say,” to emphasize the solemnity of the occasion; not “shalt thou be.”

In addition to this, when a verb is to be linked to a particular day, the Greek word “hoti” follows the verb. For example when the verb “I say” is followed by the Greek word “hoti” (‘that’ in English) then the verb is to occur that day i.e. Mark 14:30 “Verily I say unto thee, that (hoti) ‘this day...thou shalt deny me thrice”.

However, when ‘hoti’ does not follow the verb, like in Luke 23:43 the verb “I say” need not necessarily be linked to “to-day”. Whether the verb is to occur that day or a future day must be determined by the context. It would be reasonable looking at the context as discussed here that it should be applied to a future day, which would also fit with the common Hebrew idiom, “I say unto thee this day” which is used constantly through the bible to simply denote a solemn day. If Jesus really meant for us to understand it was to happen ‘that’ day then “hoti” would have followed.

Finally, for those still doubting, it can also be shown that Jesus could never have meant that He would be with the thief in paradise that day, since He did not ascend to Heaven (again ignoring the true meaning of ‘paradise’ as shown previously) that day, but “died” and was “buried” and “descended first into the lower parts of the earth” (Eph 4:9) where He remained like Jonah for “three days and three nights” (Matt 12:40 and Mark 9:31). After this He “rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Cor 15:4) and “shewed himself alive after his passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:” (Acts 1:3) before finally ascending to heaven. To leave no doubt, we know He did not secretly ascend to heaven any time between dying on the cross and visibly ascending to heaven, since “Jesus said, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father:” (John 20:17) to Mary Magdalene after resurrection. Therefore, this passage cannot be used to prove that the thief was alive that same day in paradise in Heaven with Jesus since Jesus was not there that day or any other until He ascended there approximately 43 days later.

Maybe Jesus lied to the thief on the cross saying “To day shalt thou be with me in paradise”? Maybe the Bible contradicts itself? No! As noted above, He promised him a place in His future kingdom. Thus we

conclude that Luke 23:43 teaches that the repentant thief on the cross shall receive a place in the Kingdom of God at the resurrection when Jesus returns.

The Transfiguration on the Mount - Matthew 17:1-9

“And after six days Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart, And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light. And, behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him. Then answered Peter, and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. While he yet spake, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them: and behold a voice out of the cloud, which said, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him. And when the disciples heard it, they fell on their face, and were sore afraid. And Jesus came and touched them, and said, Arise, and be not afraid. And when they had lifted up their eyes, they saw no man, save Jesus only. And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, Tell the vision to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.” (Matt 17:1-9)

As is so often the case, we can't hope to understand this difficult text unless we first put it into its correct context. Accordingly, the above text must be read in conjunction with the final verses of Matt 16 where Jesus promised His disciples that some would see Him glorified coming in His kingdom before they died:

“Verily I say unto you, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of man coming in his kingdom. (Matthew 16:27-28).

Now we know, Jesus has not yet come in glory in His Kingdom (His second coming) and we also know all the disciples (those standing there) have long since died, so either Jesus was mistaken or there is another explanation. However, understanding that some of the disciples who were standing there did see a vision of the future coming of Jesus in His kingdom, therefore fulfilling Jesus' promise and making perfect sense of the above scripture.

Of course, there will be a few who may still want to believe that Moses and Elijah did appear with Jesus in person (physically). As result of this belief they may draw the conclusion that since Moses and Elijah are 'still living', we too will also continue living after we die and immediately join them in heaven. However, Jesus Himself states very clearly what the disciples saw:

“And as they came down from the mountain, Jesus charged them, saying, **tell the vision** to no man, until the Son of man be risen again from the dead.”

As the verse above states, the disciples saw a VISION of the future kingdom and glorification of Jesus Christ in the Kingdom. Moses and Elijah appeared not in person with Christ, but in a vision of Christ's post resurrected state. Showing that Jesus fulfilled both the Law (Moses) and the prophets (Elijah). He is to be exalted and glorified, but this is still to happen at His second coming since Jesus said:

“For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works.

As further evidence of the true meaning of the word “vision” in this passage, it is the same Greek word as used 11 times during the book of Acts. Including Paul's vision of the large sheet being let down to earth containing “all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air” and his vision of the “a man of Macedonia” standing and begging him. In these cases no one tries to show these actually physically happen, but rather shows them to mean a vivid dream, just as the above passage should also be understood.

Lazarus and the Rich Man - Luke 16:19-31

The parable of Lazarus and the rich man has been the foundation for many beliefs within traditional Christianity about the afterlife and how we go to either heaven or hell as soon as we die. Some have viewed it not as a parable, but as actual events which took place which Christ retold to teach us about the punishment of sinners in hell. Yet a thorough, unbiased examination of this story will show that the generally accepted interpretations of this passage are incorrect and misleading. To understand whether this was a true

literal story or a parable we need to go back several verses to understand the context and audience, before examining the many symbols used:

“And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him. And he said unto them, Ye are they which justify yourselves before men; but God knoweth your hearts: for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God. The law and the prophets were until John: since that time the kingdom of God is preached, and every man presseth into it. And it is easier for heaven and earth to pass, than one tittle of the law to fail. Whosoever putteth away his wife, and marrieth another, committeth adultery: and whosoever marrieth her that is put away from her husband committeth adultery.” (Luke 16:14-18)

Jesus was speaking to the Pharisees whom we are told were “covetous”. They were very proud and judgemental of others, however Jesus condemns them essentially saying that although they may feel justified and rich before other men, before God they were an abomination, naked and poor. It’s along these lines which Jesus continues to speak to them and now turns to the story of Lazarus and the Rich Man.

Now if this was a literal story in which Jesus was sharing to teach about the afterlife and where we go immediately at death, then it wouldn’t fit with the preceding conversation as above. There would also be a major contradiction in the Bible since here, Lazarus is shown to have immediately received the promise of eternal life. Yet Jesus Himself had already stated earlier that “no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven”. And the author of Hebrews clearly writes that Abraham, as well as all the other Old Testament saints have not yet received the promises given to them by God:

“These all died in faith” (Abraham, Enoch, Moses etc), **“not having received the promises**, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth”...”**But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly:** wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city”...”**And what shall I more say?** for the time would fail me to tell of Gideon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets: Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens. Women received their dead raised to life again: and others were tortured, not accepting deliverance; that they might obtain a better resurrection”...”**And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise:** God having provided some better thing for us, **that they without us should not be made perfect.**” (Heb 11:13-40)

The bible states the great men and women of faith listed in Hebrews 11 have not yet been made perfect, nor received eternal life. They, along with all the saints of God from every age, are currently sleeping in their graves (Job 3:11-19; Psa. 6:5; 115:17; Ecc. 9:5, 10; I Cor. 15:20; Isa. 57:1-2; Dan. 12:2; Acts 2:29, 34; 13:36) awaiting the first resurrection, which will take place when Christ returns (Matt. 24:30-31; I Cor. 15:51-52; I Thess. 4:16; Rev. 11:15-18).

Further, if it was a literal story, then there would be many more contradictions, problems and absurdities as follows:

- If it was teaching about the dead in Christ going to heaven at death, then why is there no mention of either heaven or souls? Since it only mentions hell, was Abraham and Lazarus also in hell?
- If man was dead in his sins and separated from God with the sacrifice of Jesus his only hope in being reconciled with God, how then was it possible for Abraham and Lazarus to be in ‘heaven’ before Jesus had died and risen again?
- If Jesus Himself had said earlier that “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven”, how could Lazarus possibly be in heaven?
- How could Lazarus go literally to Abraham's bosom? Abraham (as now) was unquestionably dead and without his reward as discussed above (Heb. 11:8, 13, 39, 40).
- Where did those men, women and children who lived and died prior to Abraham go when they died since Abraham's Bosom could not have existed prior to Abraham's death?!
- Jesus never accuses the rich man of any sin. He is simply portrayed as a wealthy man who lived the good life. Nor is Lazarus ever proclaimed to be a righteous man. He is just one who had the misfortune

to be poor and unable to care for himself. If this story is literal, then the logical implication is that all the rich are destined to burn in hell (remember Job, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and David were all extremely wealthy), while all the homeless and destitute will be saved. Does anyone believe this to be the case?

- Those who believe this to be a literal story, teach that the body dies and goes down to the grave while the soul goes to heaven or hell, and yet this passage describes bodies rather than souls being in 'heaven/hell' e.g. eyes, bosom, tip of finger and tongue etc.
- Surely, if the rich man was agonising in hell, he would have asked for more than just a drip of water to quench his agony? Would not a jug or bottle, or even a handful of water be more logical? Would the rich man be so stupid as to expect righteous Lazarus to leave the comfort of "Abraham's bosom" and spend time visiting the rich man in the flames of fire?
- Can there exist a "great chasm" that is so great that no one can pass across it, and yet the inhabitants on both sides are able to carry on a conversation with each other without difficulty? Is the great gulf to be taken literally, with heaven and hell being side by side?
- Is heaven literally a place where conversations can be carried on between those enjoying bliss and those agonizing in hell? In the book of numbers we are told that it is detestable to God for anyone to try and communicate with the dead!
- Do those who believe in Abraham's bosom really believe that this is a place where the righteous deserve to be? Remember that both Abraham and Lazarus could see and hear the sorrowful pleadings of the rich man from across the "great chasm". Was the 'reward' for the righteous to have them confined to a place where for centuries they would have to see the agony, smell the smoke, and listen to the shrieks of the damned as they are screaming for relief while being tortured on the other side of the "great chasm"? For the righteous, the very act of having to watch these unfortunate wretches writhe and moan in the fire would itself be a punishment.

Clearly, there is no way to reconcile the numerous contradictions and problems listed above with a literal understanding of the story of Lazarus and the rich man. What, then, does the death of these two men represent? Only, when we accept this as a parable (proved by the large number of symbols used) can we answer this question. Only then can the true meaning of this story be understood and it be seen that Jesus was comparing the proud rich Jews (House of Judah) with the poor, outcast and lost Gentile nations (House of Israel). Here, their demise depicts an elemental change in the status and position the two groups were about take.

We begin by studying the description Jesus gives us of the rich man. Firstly, he tells us that this man was clothed in purple and fine linen. This type of clothing would not have been out of the ordinary for one of considerable wealth during this time period. According to The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible "purple raiment was costly, and consequently its use was the privilege of the rich exclusively...and especially by kings". However, the colour purple also had symbolic meaning. The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible continues and states: "It was a sign of royalty" (Judges 8:26; Esther 8:15; Prov 31:22; Macc 8:14; Mark 15:17; John 19:2 & 5). In regard to the fine linen, The New Westminster Dictionary of the Bible states: "Of this material also were made curtains, veil, and the door hangings of the tabernacle (Ex 26:1, 31 & 36)...and describes the material of the priestly garments". (Ex 28:6,15: 40-42; 39:27-29; Lev 16:4)

So we see that the garments worn by this rich man were symbolic of royalty and the priesthood. Accordingly, the clothing of the rich man identifies him symbolically as the House of Judah or 'Jews', since the colour "purple" represented the Royal House of David, while the "fine linen" represented the priestly Tribe of Levi, both whom were part of the House of Judah. Rev 2:9 also confirms the fact that the 'Jews' were rich. They "fared sumptuously every day" since they had the scriptures, the synagogue worship and the Temple sacrifices. Just as the rich man is described as having "five brethren", it will be remembered that Judah also had five brothers (Gen 35:23).

Abraham is said to have replied to the rich man's request that he send Lazarus to his brothers saying, "They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them". It was the Jews who had Moses (the Law) and the prophets at that time and nobody else and the rich man's reply that they would not listen to them was also true of the Jews throughout their history. They had often ignored the prophets and on many occasions even stoned the prophets. Lastly, the rich man replies, "but if one went unto them from the dead, they will repent." Abraham then states that if "they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead" and we all know how exact this statement turned out to be, since the Jews never repented even after seeing firsthand the death and resurrection of Christ Jesus.

On the other side, Lazarus was "laid at his gate, full of sores, And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores". This is a perfect description of

the House of Israel at that time, for they had been reduced to beggary and had nothing since they had been rejected and cast out by God when He deposed them and sent them into captivity. "Then said God, Call his name Loammi: for ye are not my people, and I will not be your God" (Hos 1:9). The House of Israel was in a sorry state just at the border of the Holy Land. Mostly in Asia Minor (2 Esdras 13:40-45 and Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 11, Chap 5, v2;) and therefore at the rich man's gate with his only companions "the dogs" or heathen who aggravated his miserable condition as they "came and licked his sores". Israel was covered by 'sores', marred by idolatry and heathen practices and longing for help and comfort from the land of their fathers. In other words they desired "to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table", but instead only the dogs administered to them with their heathen and wicked doctrines.

Lastly, the name Lazarus was a common name for Israelites and it's interesting that both the Hebrew names "Lazarus" and "Israel" relate back to the same Hebrew root word according to the Strong's Concordance. Also the name "Lazarus" in its Greek form of the Hebrew word "Eleazer", literally means "he whom God helps" and this certainly could arguably only be applied to Israel since God is said to be Israel's helper:

"Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord? He is your shield and helper" (Deut 33:29)

"O Israel, trust thou in the LORD: he is their help and their shield." (Psa 115:9)

"O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in me is thine help." (Hos 13:9)

Now we have identified the characters in the parable, let's review the background and history of both Israel and the 'Jews' (Judah), including what these two terms actually mean. This will enable us to understand the many reasons why so many make the mistake of viewing the Israelite (Israel) and 'Jew' (Judah) as the same people even though this understanding isn't supported by either scripture or history. The 'Jews' themselves understand the difference and state that "Strictly speaking it is incorrect to call an Ancient Israelite a 'Jew' or to call a contemporary Jew an Israelite or a Hebrew" (1980 Jewish Almanac, article entitled "A brief History of the Terms for Jew" pg.3).

Firstly, the nation of Israel split into two separate nations (Israel and Judah) after King Solomon's death (1 Kings 12). The House of Israel (10 Tribes in Northern Palestine) after being taken captive by the Assyrians around 721 BC is said to have never returned to Palestine, but migrated north west to the land they would be replanted. God is said to have removed all Israel from His presence (i.e. removed them from Palestine) and the bible doesn't mention anyone returning except one priest (2 Kings 17:23-28). This is further confirmed in 2 Esdras 13:40-45 stating when the House of Israel was captive in Assyria, they took "counsel among themselves, that they would leave the multitudes of the heathen, and go forth into a further country, where never mankind dwelt". Josephus the renowned ancient Jewish historian, wrote in his Antiquities of the Jews, Book 2, Chapter 5, v2 that out of all the "entire body of Israel" (12 tribes), only 2 tribes remained in Asia and Europe subject to the Romans since the "ten tribes were beyond Euphrates till now" and were an "immense multitude, and could not be estimated by numbers". This migration has also been confirmed by many leading historians, archaeological findings and historical records which is all in fulfillment of the prophecies and promises concerning Israel. As for the House of Judah (3 Tribes in Southern Palestine) only a small remnant of descendants are said to have returned after their captivity by the Babylonians (Ezra 2:1, 64).

In other words, from the time of their separation in King Rehoboam's day, both nations and peoples were completely separate and were treated as such in the bible. This included the promises and prophecies made after this event. Accordingly, when the Prophets directed their prophecies to Israel, it is to the House of Israel they must be applied and vice versa. It is a common mistake to apply the promises made to Israel to Judah. However, the House of Israel and the House of Judah are prophesied to join together and return from the northern land to Palestine after Christ returns and establishes His rule from Jerusalem (Jer 3:14-18).

Secondly, the promises were made to the racial descendants of Jacob (Israel), not the 'Jews' only for they represent but a very small portion of Israel (being only 1 of 13 tribes). In fact the Jewish people make up an even smaller portion of Israelites since the term 'Jew' is only applied in the bible to the very small remnant of 42,360 of the Tribe of Judah who returned to the land of Israel about 538BC after their captivity in Babylon when they become known as the Nation of the Jews (Ezra 2:1, 64). This is confirmed by the Jewish historian Josephus who wrote "Jew is the name they are called by from the day that they came up from Babylon." (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 2, Chapter 5). Many of the Southern Kingdom of Judah either choose not to return to Jerusalem (Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews, Book 11, Chap 1, v3) or had been

taken captive earlier by the Assyrians around 721BC along with the Northern Kingdom of Israel as confirmed by the bible (2 Kings 18:13-17) and ancient Assyrian Cylinder records. This is a fact even the Learned Jewish Rabbis state themselves since they have always looked forward to the day they would be united with the "lost ten tribes of Israel". Dr Hertz, former Chief Rabbi of London said, "The people known at present as Jews are descendents of Judah and Benjamin, with a certain number of the descendents of the tribe of Levi. As far as is known there is no further admixture of other tribes. We look forward to the gathering of all the tribes at some future date."

Thirdly, the number of true 'Jews' was reduced further as they inter-married with other races in disobedience to God's commands soon after they returned from captivity, while many other races of people converted to the Jewish faith and also became known as 'Jews'. In Esther 8:17 we are told "many people of other nationalities became Jews because the fear of the Jews had seized them". Many Edomites adopted the Jewish religion around 125 BC when their kingdom was destroyed by the 'Nation of the Jews' and the whole nation of the Khazars converted to Judaism around the 8th century AD. They later spread out to become the 'Jewish' populations of Eastern Europe. As a result of this change, we must be careful not to assume that all those who call themselves 'Jews', are in fact the actual racial descendants of the Tribe of Judah. Just as Christ was careful not to when talking to those who called themselves 'Jews' in His day. Is it not possible that Christ in John 8, was acknowledging that although they might be able to claim Abraham as their father, they were at best descended through the line of Esau who was rejected by God, rather than through the line of Jacob? They stated themselves that their forefathers had never been slaves of anyone, which would prove the point since if they were Israelites their forefathers would certainly have to have been slaves in Egypt.

As a result of this inter-marrying and other races converting to Judaism and calling themselves 'Jews' also, it has become increasingly difficult to understand the difference between Israel and the 'Jews' (Judah). This is because the word 'Jew' now means something completely different to the Hebrew and Greek words it was originally translated from. While the term 'Jew', was once a racial label referring to a "descendant of Judah" (Strong's Concordance) and "One belonging to the tribe or to the Kingdom of Judah" (Westminster Dictionary of the Bible), it has since changed into a mere religious one. Enabling many different nationalities who were never descendants of Abraham through the line of Isaac and Jacob (Israel) to claim themselves to be 'Jews' who are not. This problem is referred to by both Jesus in John 8 and in Revelation where we are told there would be those who would call themselves 'Jews', but who were not:

"I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan." (Rev 2:9)

"Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee." (Rev 3:9).

Maybe the best definition of the term 'Jew' is best summed up by the modern Israeli State government itself who state "The term Israelite is purely biblical. An Israeli is a citizen of Israel, regardless of religion. A Jew is a person anywhere in the world born to a Jewish mother, or converted to Judaism, who is thus identified as a member of the Jewish people or religion." (Information Division, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Jerusalem, February 1998). Accordingly, the word "Jew" refers to a person's religion, not their race or ethnic background.

If the term 'Jew' was not already hard enough to understand, matters are made worse when one learns that the term 'Jew' does not even exist in the original Hebrew or Greek scriptures. Nor the original 1611 version of the King James Bible. The term was only added to the King James Version in the late seventeenth century when it was revised. Benjamin H. Freedman, a Jewish man himself wrote "It is an incontestable fact that the word "Jew" did not come into existence until the year 1775. Prior to 1775 the word "Jew" did not exist in any language." (book entitled 'A Jewish man writes about the Jews' 1954).

The confusion surrounding the term 'Jews' and its misuse has unfortunately been made more difficult by many churches, governments and various 'Jewish' groups spreading the falsehood (many unintentionally) that the 'Jews' are exclusively 'God's people' and represent all Israel. For example, The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia defines "Jew" as meaning the same as defined in the Strong's Concordance stating "Jew denotes originally an inhabitant of Judah, but later the meaning was extended to embrace all descendants of Abraham." The question which faces us here is who had the authority and power to change the meaning of a word and extend its meaning and in doing so, transfer God's promises to a people who are not entitled to them?

It's sad that our politicians and church leaders haven't taken the time to learn the truth for themselves, but rather blindly believed the Zionist claims about themselves without ever asking for any evidence to prove their claims of descent. As a result true Israelites, which include descendants of the House of Israel (10 tribes), racial 'Jews' (descendants of Judah) and all who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Saviour (regardless of race), have had their rightful inheritance taken from them by a people whose ascendants never knew God nor lived in Palestine. Until this is rectified, the violence and bloodshed in the Middle East will continue. It is interesting that this all appears to have been prophesied in the bible stating that the Edomites (descendants of Esau) would claim Palestine for themselves Eze 33:24-29 and 36:1-8; Mal 1:1-5. Isn't it amazing that after thousands of years they are still trying to get the birthright and inheritance back which they had lost to Jacob and his descendants?

Now that we better understand the characters, let's continue with the passage. "And it came to pass that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom". In due course the House of Israel lost its identity and became gentilized among the nations of Europe. In passing the term 'gentile' is another misunderstood word, which does not mean 'non-Jew', but rather a "people of the same race or nationality who share a distinctive culture" (thefreedictionary.com) as translated from the Greek word "ethnos". Ezekiel in chapter 37 uses the same imagery in his vision of the dry bones when he sees them buried in their graves. As far as the world was concerned the beggar or Israel was dead. And then we have the significant statement with Lazarus or House of Israel being carried "into Abraham's bosom". Through the death of Christ, deposed and rejected, Israel would be able to be restored to the Abrahamic Covenant so that in the place they were called "not my people", they could be called "the sons of the living God." The reference Lazarus "was carried by the angels" talks of Israel's miraculous deliverance, protection and restoration to the covenant was a heavenly work.

"Yet the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered; and it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people, there it shall be said unto them, Ye are the sons of the living God" (Hos 1:10)

"Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel, and with the house of Judah: Not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt; which my covenant they brake, although I was an husband unto them, saith the LORD: But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the LORD, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people." (Jer 31:32-33)

"The rich man" (Judah) "also died, and was buried". After the destruction of Jerusalem, the Jewish nation was broken up, with those who escaped buried among the nations suffering persecution, murder and untold privations at the hands of many nations. They have certainly been through hell and have been tormented for two millennium since they cursed themselves at Christ's crucifixion. Thus the "good things" ended and they have since been "tormented". "Then answered all the people, and said, His blood be on us, and on our children." (Mat 27:25) Christ had also pronounced earlier to Judah "Therefore say I unto you, The kingdom of God shall be taken from you, and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof" (Mat 21:43). It must be pointed out that as the kingdom was taken from the Jews, the only "nation" it could be transferred to in line with God's plan and promises was Israel (House of Israel).

As the Jews (House of Judah) have continued to be persecuted and suffer throughout the centuries, they looked to the House of Israel for help, seeing the tables turned, with Israel reconciled and partaking in the blessings of God. However, they have not been able to be helped nor have their position improved since their remains a great gulf between Christianised Israel and the Jew since they totally rejected Jesus Christ and Christianity and this rejection and hatred continues today. This rejection includes the bible too, which few Christians appear to understand or realise that Judaism is not based on the Old Testament, nor even the Torah (books of Moses) but on the Jewish Talmud. A collection of books written in the centuries immediately before Christ and shortly after which contain the accumulated sayings of the learned Jewish sages and Rabbis, including the 'oral law' which they believe was handed down by Moses to the religious leaders, parallel, but different to the 'written law' as recorded in the first 5 books of the bible. The Jewish Talmud is a most violent and anti-Christian book and condones and encourages every possible crime and perversion provided it is against a 'non-Jew'. Non Jews being described as 'Goy' or 'Goyim', which translates as 'Cattle' in English. This is all confirmed by the 'Jewish' Rabbis themselves:

"This is not an uncommon impression and one finds it sometimes among Jews as well as Christians - that Judaism is the religion of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). It is, of course, a fallacious

impression...Judaism is not the religion of the Bible." (Rabbi Ben Zion Bokser, "Judaism and the Christian Predicament", page 59)

"The return from Babylon, and the adoption of the Babylonian Talmud, mark the end of Hebrewism (the religion of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob) and the beginning of Judaism." (Rabbi Stephen S. Wise, formerly Chief Rabbi of the United States)

"Judaism is, specifically, the religion of a Jewish community living among Gentile peoples and is to be distinguished from the religion of ancient Israel." (Funk & Wagnalls Standard Reference Encyclopedia, 1959, Volume 14)

The "rich man" Judah is told he must listen to the teaching and warnings of Moses and the Prophets and this gulf will continue until the House of Judah repents and accepts the Word of God and Christ Himself.

Unfortunately, some overlooking the problems which arise when trying to take this story literally, while ignoring the large number of symbols used throughout will assert that this passage can't be a parable (a simple fictional story using symbolism to convey deeper hidden truths) on the grounds Jesus did not call it a parable. However, this objection is not valid since only 11 of the 26 parables recorded in Luke's gospel are actually named parables. Stress is often placed upon words "there was a certain rich man" to emphasize the historical character of the language used. But in Luke 16:1 the parable of the unjust steward commences with the same language. Must this parable be read literally too? (Similar language is used in other parables - see Luke 12:16) Others will argue that parables are not fictional, but all simple true stories used to make the meanings clearer for the uneducated people He was teaching and should therefore be read literally. Therefore Lazarus and the rich man must be historical figures and the narrative must have occurred as written. Yet Christ said His purpose for speaking to the people in parables was exactly the opposite to this understanding cited above:

"The same day went Jesus out of the house, and sat by the sea side. And great multitudes were gathered together unto him, so that he went into a ship, and sat; and the whole multitude stood on the shore. And he spake many things unto them in parables...And the disciples came, and said unto him, Why speakest thou unto them in parables? He answered and said unto them, Because it is given unto you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Esaias, which saith, By hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive: For this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them." (Matt 13:1-15)

"...Unto you it is given to know the mystery of the kingdom of God; but unto them that are without, all these things are done in parables: That seeing they may see, and not perceive; and hearing they may hear, and not understand..." (Mark 4:11,12).

"But without a parable spake he not unto them: and when they were alone, he expounded all things to his disciples." (Mark 4:34).

As these passages clearly state, Jesus spoke to the people in parables to hide the spiritual meaning of what he was saying. He only intended for his disciples to understand what the parables truly meant. It is no wonder, then, that so many have misunderstood what Christ was teaching with the parable of Lazarus and the rich man.

[Not the God of the Dead - Matthew 22:23-32](#)

"The same day came to him the Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection, and asked him, Saying, Master, Moses said, If a man die, having no children, his brother shall marry his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. Now there were with us seven brethren: and the first, when he had married a wife, deceased, and, having no issue, left his wife unto his brother: Likewise the second also, and the third, unto the seventh.

And last of all the woman died also. **Therefore in the resurrection** whose wife shall she be of the seven? for they all had her. Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. **For in the resurrection** they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. **But as touching the resurrection of the dead**, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” (Matt 22:23-32)

The inference drawn here is if “God is not the God of the dead but of the living”, then the dead are really still alive in heaven or hell. Like other arguments where only part of a passage is used, we must read the whole passage from verse 23 to get the full context. Especially what Jesus spoke from verse 29 to understand what He really meant. Verse 23 tells us Jesus was speaking to the "Sadducees, which say that there is no resurrection.” Lets now read the whole of Jesus' response:

“Jesus answered and said unto them, Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God. For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. **But as touching the resurrection of the dead**, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob? God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.” (Matt 22:29-32).

It must be understood the Sadducees did not believe there would be any resurrection and were only asking a question as to what would happen "at the resurrection" to try and trick Jesus and disprove His teaching. Since Jesus twice in His short discourse responded to the Sadducees by talking of the resurrection of the dead to refute the Sadducees doctrine that there is no resurrection of the dead nor a future life, we can understand He was not attempting to prove that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were alive right now, but since there WILL BE a resurrection from the dead, they like all believers will be raised back to life. This is why Jesus, states “as touching the resurrection of the dead”....”God is not the God of the dead, but of the living”. Could He be any clearer?

As a side, the Companion Bible concurs with this interpretation in its comment on this passage: “The only conclusion being that they must rise and live again in the resurrection in order that he may be their God.”

Paul's Dilemma - Philippians 1:22-23

Many people who believe in the ‘immortality of the soul’ say that this is one of the strongest:

“For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:”

People's failure to recognize what Paul was saying is due to the belief that they have had all their lives regarding the doctrine of the ‘immortality of the soul’. They try and read that belief into the text itself. However, Paul's statement here “My desire to depart and be with Christ” is a “relational and not a anthropological statement...it is a statement of the relation that exists and continues between the believer and Christ through death, not a statement of the ‘state’ of the body and soul between death and the resurrection” (Biacchicchi, p.178).

Also, if the reader would read verses 12-21 it will be clear what Paul is saying, that his death would be gain for Christ. Gain for the spreading of the Gospel, “to die is gain” (v.21).

Gain for Paul or Christ? Let see!

Paul had been cast into prison, but instead of the other Christians hiding themselves, they were “confident by my bonds” and openly preaching the Gospel. Thus Paul says: “But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the Gospel” (v.12).

After spending much time rejoicing over “the furtherance of the Gospel,” Paul finally begins to discuss the possibility of being executed for his faith:

“...So now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life or by death

“For [because] to me to live is Christ, and die is gain” (vv.20-21)

We see that Paul is telling us that the Gospel of Christ would be spread further either by his death or by his life, and Christ would be magnified either way. As Tertullian testified in the second century A.D., “The blood of Christians is seed...” So was Paul to gain?

NO! Christ was to gain by the furtherance of the gospel by either Paul’s martyrdom, or Paul life’s mission of preaching the Gospel to the world.

Through verse 23 we can now understand what Paul was speaking of. “I am in a strait betwixt two,” or “I am being pressed out of the two.”

Here was Paul’s dilemma which was for Christ’s gain not his. If he was to be executed, Christ would be magnified, or if he was to be acquitted, Christ would be magnified as well. Paul could not decide which was best for Christ, so he decided not to state any preference to the Philippians: “...yet what I shall choose I wot not [literally “I am not making known”] (v.22). Paul could not choose either of them, so Paul introduces a third choice which was his real desire: “having a desire to depart and to be with Christ; which is far better” (v.23). His third choice was far better. But does this verse indicate heaven? No it does not. The Greek verb “To depart” in this verse is “analuō”. This word is found only one other time in the scriptures, where it is rendered “return.”

“And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their lord, when he will return [analuō] from the wedding; that when he cometh and knocketh, they may open unto him immediately “ (Luke 12:36).

This same Greek verb ‘analuō’ also occurs many times in the Apocrypha and is also translated with the meaning “to return”. It would therefore make sense, to translate this Greek verb in Philippians the same as in Luke and elsewhere.

The Companion Bible agrees with this conclusion, also stating that as this word is used both in Luke and the Apocrypha, where it was translated “return”, then “to depart” in Philippians should also be translated “for the return.”

So here we have Paul’s real desire “the return” of Jesus Christ and “to be” with him, “which is far better.” Paul third choice was to be in the resurrection and to be with Jesus, as he says in 1 Thessalonians 4:17: “so shall we ever be with the Lord.” And when you read verses 16-17 of that chapter Paul is speaking of the resurrection of the dead!

Lastly, notice Jesus uses this parable comparing it to HIS second coming. The “return” of their “Lord.”

Absent from the Body, and to be Present with the Lord - 2 Corinthians 5:1-8

“For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” (2 Cor 5:1-8)

Does this passage prove that Paul's desire was to leave behind his mortal body and depart in the soul or spirit to be with Christ in heaven? The inference drawn is that all the saved will go to be with their Lord in heaven immediately at death. Unfortunately, this passage is often mis-quoted to read "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord." The Apostle says he is "willing rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord." The former reading assumes an instantaneous transition from death to be with Christ, the latter allows for the interval of "sleep" in the grave, resurrection and judgment.

This passage is a good example of the few verses scattered among the letters which he addressed to the churches which seem to contradict what he wrote in other epistles. At least they have been interpreted as contradictions. For example, the following passages indicate the true teaching of the Apostle Paul:

The Sleep of death

“After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, **but some are fallen asleep.**” (1Co 15:6)

“Then they also which **are fallen asleep in Christ** are perished.” (1Co 15:18)

“But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become **the firstfruits of them that slept.**” (1Co 15:20)

“Behold, I shew you a mystery; **We shall not all sleep**, but we shall all be changed,” (1Co 15:51)

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, **concerning them which are asleep**, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, **even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.**” (1Th 4:13-14)

Resurrection to occur at Christ’s Coming

“**In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.** For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.” (1Co 15:52-54)

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. **For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.** Wherefore comfort one another with these words.” (1Th 4:13-18)

“I charge thee therefore before God, and the **Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;**” (2Ti 4:1)

“Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which **the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.**” (2Ti 4:8)

But did the great, spiritual, straight-thinking Paul write confusing things? Or is the contradiction only in the way readers have misunderstood his words? Let us examine the verses in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 and discover what Paul actually did teach on this crucial subject.

To summarise, Paul introduces to us, an earthly house and a heavenly house. He states that while in our earthly house we “groan” and are “burdened”, desiring to be clothed “with our house which is from heaven” so “we shall not be found naked.” Paul repeats these facts once again. He states that once we are clothed with our heavenly house which he so greatly desired, so our mortality might be “swallowed up”, which we can be assured of since we have the Spirit as a pledge. Paul states the grounds of his confidence, because although being at home in his earthly body and therefore absent from the Lord, he walks by faith confidently and desired for the day he will be absent from the body and be with the Lord.

With the subject fully before us, let us determine the meaning of the terms Paul uses in the text. What does he mean by the “earthly house” and the “heavenly house”? By being “clothed upon” and “unclothed”? By “mortality” being “swallowed up of life”? By being “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord”?

Paul answers all of these questions. In verse 6, he defines “our earthly house” as being “at home in the body.” The chief characteristic of this house is that it may be “dissolved.” In other words, it is mortal. This earthly house is, therefore, our mortal body or our present mortal condition. The house from heaven is “eternal” or immortal and represents the state of immortality that awaits the redeemed beyond the resurrection. Here is where the greatest misunderstanding enters the picture. Some have thought that the “house from heaven” is put on at the moment of death. But the apostle clearly spells out the TIME when he and we also will put on immortality.

The Time of the Change

Notice how he explains when “mortality is swallowed up of life,” in Romans 8:22, 23, “...ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.” This verse in Romans is a perfect, striking parallel to the verses in 2 Corinthians 5:1-8 and clarifies when we shall be clothed with that immortality. Notice the similarity of language and thought:

To the Corinthians Paul Wrote:

“We... in this tabernacle do groan.”

“Given to us the earnest of the Spirit.”

“Earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.”

To the Romans Paul Wrote:

“We groan within ourselves ...”

“Have the firstfruits of the Spirit.”

“Earnest expectation... waiting for the redemption of our body.”

These two scriptures are speaking of the same experience. The ultimate object in both cases is to change this mortal body into the immortal body and to change this “earthly house” into the “house eternal in the heavens.” Please notice that in one verse Paul was “earnestly desiring to be clothed” with his house from heaven, and in the other verse his “earnest expectation” was the “redemption of the body.” The comparison proves that this clothing from heaven takes place at the “redemption of the body.” Paul adds the final clarification in 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 when he again describes the time this change takes place: “...we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump... this mortal must put on immortality.” In other words, even though death should dissolve this mortal body, Paul makes it very clear that we do not put on the house from heaven (immortality) until the coming of Jesus and the redemption of the body. This is also established by the repeated references to the “naked” or “unclothed” state.

Unclothed in Death

What is meant by the term “unclothed”? Notice that Paul specifically declared that he did not desire to be naked or unclothed. We can be certain, then, that the unclothed state did not involve being with the Lord, since Paul did not desire it. In fact, the apostle made reference to being clothed with only two houses, the earthly and heavenly. In the unclothed state, he was neither in the earthly body nor clothed with the heavenly. That leaves only one possible explanation. To be “unclothed” or “naked” is the condition of death that is the interlude between the dissolving of the earthly house and putting on the heavenly.

Only Two Houses

Some have claimed that the house which we have “eternal in the heavens” is the immortal soul with which we immediately enter into heaven when the earthly house is dissolved. But this could not be. Notice the impossibility of such an arrangement. If the soul inhabited that heavenly “house” immediately at death, what happens when it must inhabit the immortalized body after the resurrection takes place? It is in the glorified resurrection bodies that the righteous dwell with God for eternity. This would involve those souls leaving the “house eternal in the heavens” which they inhabited at death, and going into the redeemed bodies at the resurrection. Then what happens to the house they vacated? Are the saints to have “houses to rent”? Moreover, this view introduces something that Paul never mentioned; three houses, whereas Paul’s language allows for only two. And one would have to be abandoned according to the popular view. Would it stand abandoned and fall into ruin? All this appears unscriptural and absurd.

The fact is, Paul is not talking here about the soul at all. He does not even once mention the soul in the passage or its context. He is simply contrasting the present life with the far more glorious life to come once Jesus comes again. He did not look forward to the sleep of death (being “unclothed”) when he would not be with the Lord, but he did long for the redemption of the body when he would be clothed with the “house eternal in the heavens.” While still in this life he would be clothed with a mortal body; and after mortality is “swallowed up of life,” he would have a heavenly, immortal body.

Earnest of the Spirit

Here is further positive proof that Paul was referring to the resurrection as the time to put on that eternal house. To both the Corinthians and the Romans, Paul emphasized that the Spirit was a pledge or “a deposit guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor 5:5 NIV). What did he mean? It couldn’t be a guarantee of what we already had (if we were already immortal) since it clearly states it was guaranteeing what was to come. The apostle makes it abundantly clear that the Spirit is a pledge of the redemption of our bodies at the resurrection. Again future. “...ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise, which is the earnest of our inheritance until the **redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.**” (Eph 1:13, 14)

Do not miss the point Paul makes that the “earnest of the Spirit” points to the time when our inheritance is received in full and the bodily redemption takes place. Paul used the same expression in 2 Corinthians 5:5 when talking about putting on the house from heaven, “has given us the spirit as a deposit guaranteeing what is to come” (2 Cor 5:5 NIV).” That Spirit is the pledge of the resurrection of the body. Another text removes all doubt: “But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you” (Rom 8:11). This verse provides undeniable proof that the indwelling Spirit is a guarantee that our mortal bodies will be quickened at the resurrection.

Swallowed Up When?

Now let us take note that Paul used an argument that forever precludes the soul going to heaven at death. In one simple statement, Paul shattered the popular argument for natural immortality. He said, “we...do groan that mortality might be swallowed up of life” (2 Cor 5:4). Obviously, mortality can only be swallowed up by immortality, or eternal life. Does this happen with the passing of the soul from the mortal body at the hour of death? Let us look at it. According to the common view, the body is mortal and the soul is immortal. Assuming for a moment that this is true, then what happens at death? At death the body, which is mortal, does not become immortal, but loses all its life and crumbles back to dust in the grave. Moreover, the soul, which we are told by some quarters is immortal already, is no more than immortal afterwards. Is there any “swallowing up of mortality by life” here? No, just the reverse and this common view which is in contradiction to what the Word of God actually says should be rejected.

Paul knew the Corinthians would not be confused by his language in 2 Corinthians 5 about mortality being swallowed up by immortality, because he had already written his first epistle to them explaining when that immortality would be put on. “...in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump...this mortal must put on immortality. Then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory” (1 Cor 15:52-54). When would death or mortality be “swallowed up?” “Then,” Paul said. When is Then? “In the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump.” How can we ever stumble over the plain language of these verses?

Paul was longing for that change from the earthly mortal body to the glorious immortal body. He stated that the change would take place on the resurrection-translation day. His chief hope seemed to centre on being translated without ever being “unclothed” in death. He yearned to “be clothed upon” by translation at the coming of Jesus, so that he would not be found “naked” (in the grave). Translation would mean that mortality would be “swallowed up of life.”

Nevertheless, he hastened to express confidence, as we have just pointed out, in the certainty of a resurrection when death would be swallowed up in victory (1 Cor 15:54). In either case, whether by translation or resurrection, he would be “clothed upon” with the immortal body. Either mortality would be “swallowed up” by being translated or death would be “swallowed up” by being resurrected.

Paul does not linger over the “unclothed” state, because his hopes rested in the new body to be received at Christ’s coming. He could not be “forever with the Lord” until that change took place “in the twinkling of an eye.” The interim sleep of death in the grave held no appeal for Paul, since it would seem but a fraction of a second and therefore utter oblivion to the one who died. Looking beyond the uninviting nakedness of death

to the land of life, Paul ruled out any possibility of a state between death and the resurrection when disembodied spirits could be present with the Lord.

Made for What?

The apostle makes one other point in 2 Corinthians 5 that destroys the idea of a disembodied soul. In verse 5, he affirms that God "has made us for this very purpose (NIV)." What thing? For what purpose had God made man? Paul answers that we might enjoy a state of being in which "mortality is swallowed up of life." (verse 4) Is that condition the separate existence of an immortal soul? Impossible! Because if man had not sinned, he would have reached that state without seeing death. God's purpose in making man would have been realised without death taking place, and the idea of an immortal soul would never have existed. Surely no one could believe that God "wrought us" for the "selfsame" purpose of sinning, dying and leaving the body in some invisible soul form.

Paul's Earnest Expectation

A related text that Paul wrote to the Philippians has also been twisted and misinterpreted much like 2 Corinthians 5. Here again Paul speaks of his "earnest expectation." Philippians 1:20-24:

"According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour; yet what I shall choose I wot not. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better: Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you."

First, let's clarify what Paul's "earnest expectation" really was in regard to being with Christ. Did he expect to be with Him at death? Not one text of the Bible teaches such a thing. Let the apostle answer for himself concerning his "earnest expectation." "For the **earnest expectation** of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God" (Rom 8:19). What was that manifestation when the sons of God would be revealed? Verse 23 answers, "...we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, **the redemption of our body.**" Paul's earnest expectation and hope was for the time when his body would be redeemed.

He did not say one word in Philippians 1:20-24 about the time he would be with the Lord. Some have attempted to interpret this text as though Paul said he wanted to depart and be with Christ immediately, but the word immediately is not in the scripture. In these verses, Paul does not specifically state when he will be with the Lord.

He only states his "earnest expectation" to be there. We have found from other scriptures that his expectation centered on the resurrection or translation of the body. Other passages further clarify without any equivocation when the great apostle expected to be with Christ.

At the redemption of the body (Rom 8:23)
In the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor 5:5)
At the last trump (1 Cor 15:51-55)
When Christ our life shall appear (Col 3:4)
When the Lord descends with a shout (1 Thes 4:16)
At the coming of the Lord (2 Thes 2:1)
At "that day" (2 Tim 4:7, 8) (by which Paul means the second advent of Christ)

Paul had two conditions in view: to live or to die. Between these two, he was in a strait. The cause of God on earth drew him here, but he was weary from beatings, stonings, and bodily suffering. He almost felt that death would be desirable over the struggle of living. So evenly balanced were the influences drawing him in both directions that he hardly knew which course he preferred. Nevertheless, he said it was more needful for the church that he remain here to give them the benefit of his counsel and labour.

How to be with the Lord

Paul positively refuted the idea of an immortal spirit leaving the body at death when he pinpointed the only means of being with the Lord. In 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17 he said, "For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord."

Please note the significance of that word “so”. It means “in this way,” “in this manner,” “by this means.” “So”, in this manner, by this means, “shall we ever be with the Lord.” By describing, without any limitation, the way and means by which we go to be with the Lord, Paul precludes every other means. If there is any other way of getting to be with the Lord, then Paul’s language is a stupendous falsehood. If we go to be with the Lord by means of our immortal spirit when we die, then we do not go to be with Him by means of the visible coming of Jesus, the resurrection of the dead and the change of the living. Then Paul’s words would not be true. There is no possible way of avoiding this conclusion, except by claiming that the descent of the Lord from heaven, the mighty shout, the trumpet, the resurrection of the dead, and the change of the living, all take place when a person dies. A position too absurd to be considered.

Since Paul himself so carefully defines the manner of going to be with the Lord, why should man try to interpret Philippians 1:23 or 2 Cor 5:1-8 to mean something contrary to the writer’s own explanation? As we have just noted from 1 Thessalonians 4:16,17, Paul knew of only two ways to be with the Lord—by translation or resurrection.

To Live Or to Die?

He expressed the hope that “Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.” Paul tied life and death to a physical body, not some soul or spirit. The alternatives that drew him were either “to live” or “to die.” He was “in a strait” between these two. If he lived, Christ would be magnified, and if he died a martyr’s death, the cause of Christ would be magnified. It would be “gain” either way, both for him and for Christ.

But after considering the two alternatives, upon which he could not make up his mind (to live or to die), Paul is suddenly struck with a third choice, which he quickly declares to be “far better” than the other two. He described it as “willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” or “having a desire to depart and to be with the Lord, which is far better.” Better than what? Clearly, than either of the two he had just mentioned (living or dying). Again, we are reminded of Paul’s overwhelming desire to be translated without passing through the “unclothed” state of death. That was his deepest desire. Once more, we are constrained to ask: When did Paul expect this translation to take place? Moreover, when did he anticipate the change from mortality to immortality? He answers: “when Christ, who is our life, shall appear, THEN shall ye also appear with him in glory.” Colossians 3:4. When is THEN? At His second Coming. Have these appeared with Him in glory already? No. It will happen THEN, when He shall appear.

John agrees with Paul, “But we know that, WHEN HE SHALL APPEAR, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.” 1 John 3:2. Think for a moment about the implications of that statement.

John could not have believed that the righteous dead were already in the presence of the Lord. If so, they were able to see him “as he is” at that very moment, and they would already be changed into the “likeness” of Christ. However, he refutes the idea that any have seen him yet and declares unequivocally that it will all happen “when he shall appear.”

Translation or Resurrection?

Finally, let us take note that in case Paul was not permitted to depart this life by translation and had to depart by death, he did not expect to be with Christ until the resurrection. He clarifies this in 2 Timothy 4:6-8: “For I am now ready to be offered, and the time for my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: HENCEFORTH there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which **the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me AT THAT DAY**: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.”

In the clearest possible language, Paul not only explains but also emphasizes that his reward will be given at the coming of Christ. Even though his departure in death was “at hand,” he did not expect to be with Christ immediately. He expected it “henceforth.” The crown of immortality was “laid up for me,” he said. He would receive it “in that day” with others who would “love his appearing.” Surely, those of us living today should anticipate that same glorious appearing when we too shall receive, with Paul, the crown of righteousness, which fadeth not away.

In the Father's House there are Many Mansions - John 14:2

"In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also. (John 14:2-3)

Since Jesus ascended to heaven after His resurrection, and since God the Father dwells in heaven, we might safely assume that the "Father's house" of which Jesus spoke is in heaven. Moreover, since Jesus said, "I go to prepare a place for you," we might safely assume that the "place" He is preparing is in the Father's house in heaven. But notice that Jesus did not say that His followers would go to heaven and take up residence in the new mansions He had prepared for them. On the contrary, He said, "I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also." Jesus will receive His saints when He comes again and not before! He will establish His kingdom right here on this earth, and the saints will reign with Him (Revelation 2:26,27; 3:21; 5:10).

The term translated "mansions" is better rendered "rooms," "abodes," or "chambers." The Father's house, Jesus says, has many rooms, and He is now preparing a place for His disciples, but they will not take up residence in their new place until the Father's house and dwelling place comes to this earth.

Jesus promises, "He who overcomes, I will make him a pillar in the temple of My God, and he shall go out no more. I will write on him the name of My God and the name of the city of My God, the New Jerusalem, which comes down out of heaven from My God" (Revelation 3:12).

The apostle John saw the New Jerusalem in a vision. He wrote, "Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God'" (Revelation 21:2,3).

Notice that the dwelling place of God the "Father's house" will be located here on this earth.

Saul and Samuel - 1Sa 28:15-20

"And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and God is departed from me, and answereth me no more, neither by prophets, nor by dreams: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do. Then said Samuel, Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy? And the LORD hath done to him, as he spake by me: for the LORD hath rent the kingdom out of thine hand, and given it to thy neighbour, even to David: Because thou obeyedst not the voice of the LORD, nor executedst his fierce wrath upon Amalek, therefore hath the LORD done this thing unto thee this day. Moreover the LORD will also deliver Israel with thee into the hand of the Philistines: and to morrow shalt thou and thy sons be with me: the LORD also shall deliver the host of Israel into the hand of the Philistines. Then Saul fell straightway all along on the earth, and was sore afraid, because of the words of Samuel: and there was no strength in him; for he had eaten no bread all the day, nor all the night." (1Sa 28:15-20)

Some have tried to use this scripture to prove that if Samuel was alive in heaven after death then we will also. However, these scriptures upon closer reading seem to prove quite the opposite. Firstly, Samuel asks Saul why he has brought him "up" which one must understand to be out of the grave, since the only other alternative would be hell. If he was in heaven he surely would have asked why he has brought him down. Secondly, it would be strange if Saul and his son's punishment for their unrighteous and ungodliness was to join righteous Samuel in heaven. It would only make sense if Samuel meant they would also soon be dead and buried in the grave as he was just as many previous scriptures have taught. That the righteous and unrighteous all go to the same place (the grave) until either Christ's return or Judgement Day.

Summary

Most of us know the story in which God told Adam and Eve that if they ate from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil they would “surely die” and after eating and receiving the curse, they were banished from the Garden of Eden so they could not “reach out his hand and take also of the Tree of Life and eat, and live forever”. Our state is confirmed elsewhere since we are also told all men are mere mortals, while Christ “alone is immortal”. We are taught that “the soul who sins is the one who will die” and upon death we will sleep in the grave, returning to the dust we were created from. “All share a common destiny – the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad...and afterwards they join the dead”. We are further taught that “The dead know nothing”, for on the day we die our “thoughts do perish” and our “plans come to nothing” for where we are going “there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom”. God will not even hear the praise of those in the grave. Only those who have believed in Jesus, can look forward to immortality which is to only be gained by those who take part in the first resurrection which is to occur when Christ returns at His second coming in the last days. An event still to occur in the future.

Jesus also stated that He was going away to prepare a place for us, but would return again to receive us, so we might also be with Him. Thus clearly indicating there wouldn't be any believers with Him in heaven during the long interval of time between His ascension into heaven and His second coming. We also know that no one has yet ascended to heaven since Jesus Himself said “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven” (John 3:13). This reconciling with the words in the book of Acts concerning the state of David. “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption:”, “the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.” (Acts 2:29), “For David is not ascended into the heavens” (Acts 2:34). Surely, if anyone was going to ascend into heaven after his death David described as “a man after God's own heart” would certainly have and yet did not. When Jesus declared to Martha “Your brother will arise again”, Martha answered “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day” revealing the understanding of those who had spent much time with Jesus.

We also studied the few texts (including the story of the rich man and Lazarus; Jesus' conversation with the criminal on the cross and Paul's struggle with the desire to depart and to be present with Christ) which on initial reading seemed to contradict the above. However following a detailed study of these, we found each to also agree exactly with the above. That when a man dies, he sleeps in the grave until being resurrected back to life either at Christ's return or the great day of judgement. Neither of which have yet occurred.

But if the issue is really so clear-cut, why is it that so many Christians see death as an instant transformation into one of two forms of life, a life of eternal joy in heaven, or a life of eternal pain and suffering in hell? The answer is, the Christian Church borrowed many ideas from pagan philosophy and religions over the course of several centuries after the death of the apostles as the Roman Catholic Church grew in strength and finally dominated Christianity. These concepts gradually overshadowed Bible teaching and replaced the beliefs of the early Church. Even though many of the Reformers tried to get rid of these false teachings they were unable to do so and remain to this day.

Of course, the concept of the innate "immortality of the human soul" that eventually entered the Christian Church as above was the result of a long process which started much earlier in man's history. Pagan ideas, filtered through Greek poets and philosophers, found expression in the work of one of the most famous thinkers of the ancient world, the Greek philosopher Plato. Under Plato the concept of the "immortal soul" was fully developed. The world that Jesus entered was dominated by Greek culture. Rome ruled the world politically, but the fountain of knowledge was still Greece. Greek thought dominated the civilized world, and it was from this source that the Christian Church borrowed ideas about the "immortal soul."

Plato said that the human being is composed of two parts, an immortal soul housed inside a mortal body. Plato built his theory on an old Persian idea called "dualism." This idea claims that two forces, good and evil, have always existed and always will exist side by side in the universe. The visible world of matter is evil. The invisible world of "spirit" is good. From this, Plato came eventually to believe in a good immortal soul trapped inside an evil mortal body. Death became a sort of liberation. The immortal soul, freed from the degraded body, could soar to the heights of bliss. Death became a "friend" in contrast to the Bible description of death as mankind's last "enemy." From this background, the Christian Church eventually came to view death as the immediate release of the immortal soul (spirit) from the deceased body, on its way to eternal reward or

eternal damnation. Or, simply, when you die, your body returns to the earth and your soul goes immediately to heaven or to hell.

Fortunately, we need not put our faith in uncertain philosophy and religious tradition which change like fashion. Rather we are able to put our faith in Christ and His sure Word which never change, deceive nor ever lets us down. For this reason lets accept what the bible teaches on death and the resurrection. Being content that when He returns the dead in Christ will come back to life while those Christians still living will be changed in the "twinkling of an eye" so we call all meet Him together, at the same time.

Maybe this simple understanding would be easier if we just accepted that the "body", "soul" and so on, are not separable "parts", but merely different ways of describing the same individual person. The "body" is the person viewed from a physical standpoint; the "mind" is the person viewed from an intellectual standpoint; the "will" is the person viewed in his or her capacity to make moral choices; and so on.

It is my hope that the reader will continue to study this important topic with an open heart and mind and if the Word be true, be bold enough to accept the truth regardless of the cost.

God bless.