

# What is the State of the Dead?

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All scriptures are quoted from the English Standard Version unless otherwise stated.

## There Is No Consciousness in Death

As shown in the previous study the Bible does not teach that humans have an immortal, immaterial, conscious 'soul' which lives on after death. This is why other Scriptures show that there is no mental activity from a person once they are brain-dead. The Hebrew Scripture writers asked and stated the following:

- ❖ “Why did I not *die* at birth...for then I would have lain down and **been quiet**; I would have slept; then I would have been **at rest**...” (*Job 3:11-13*).
- ❖ “For *in death* there is **no remembrance** of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?” (*Ps. 6:5*).
- ❖ “His spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his **thoughts perish**” (*Ps. 146:4 NASB*).
- ❖ “For Sheol does not thank you; **death does not praise you**; those who go down to the pit do not hope for your faithfulness” (*Isa. 38:18*).
- ❖ “For the living know that they will die, but *the dead know nothing*, ... Their love and their hate and envy have already perished, ... for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in sheol, to which you are going” (*Eccl. 9:5, 6, 10*).
- ❖ “*The dead do not praise* the Lord” (*Ps. 115:17*).

So because a person has no parts that literally separate from the body at death these texts show that there is no consciousness then – all “*thoughts perish*” so that they “*know nothing*.” Please note that Job states that if he had died at birth he “*would have slept*.”

## Death is likened to Sleep

Throughout the entire Bible ‘lying down and being asleep’ is a common euphemism for death and so indicates the lack of consciousness at that time. This term is used by God, Samuel, Job, David, Jeremiah, Gabriel to Daniel, Luke, Paul, Peter, and Jesus:

- ❖ *God says that to Moses*: “...you are about to **lie down with** your fathers” (*Deut. 31:16*).
- ❖ “Then David **slept** with his fathers and was buried...” (*1 Kings 2:10*).
- ❖ “...so a man **lies down** and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his **sleep**. Oh that you would hide me in Sheol...” (*Job 14:12, 13*).
- ❖ “...lest I sleep **the sleep of death**” (*Ps. 13:3*).
- ❖ “And many of those who **sleep in the dust** of the earth shall awake” (*Dan. 12:2*).
- ❖ “And when he [*Stephen*] had said this, he **fell asleep**” (*Acts 7:60*).
- ❖ “For David... **fell asleep** and was laid with his fathers and saw corruption...” (*Acts 13:36*).
- ❖ “For ever since the fathers **fell asleep**, all things are continuing...” (*2 Pet. 3:4*).
- ❖ “Our friend Lazarus has **fallen asleep**, but I go to awaken him...Now Jesus had spoken of **his death**, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep” (*John 11:11, 13*).
- ❖ “For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number **sleep**”  
(*1 Cor. 11:30 NASB* or “...*some have died*” *ESV*).
- ❖ “Then He appeared to more than 500 brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have **fallen asleep**” (*1 Cor. 15:6*).
- ❖ “Then those also who have **fallen asleep** in Christ have perished...But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those that have **fallen asleep**” (*1 Cor. 15:18, 20*).
- ❖ “I tell you a mystery. We shall not all **sleep**, but we shall be changed” (*1 Cor. 15:51*).
- ❖ “...whether we are awake or **asleep** we might live with him” (*1 Thess. 5:10*).

- ❖ “We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are **asleep**, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope...God will bring with him those who **have fallen asleep**...we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have **fallen asleep**” (1 Thess. 4:13-15).

These two phrases of “lying down” and “having fallen asleep” imply a waking up at a future time and so hint at the resurrection. All of the above speak of the whole person; so it is the whole person who goes into the grave.

### Sheol (*Hebrew*) Occurs 65 times = the Grave

It is acknowledged by all scholars that, in the Scriptures, the Hebrew word *sheol* and the Greek word *hades* mean the same thing i.e. the grave—gravedom, although it is not a reference to individual graves. An example is of Jacob’s distress when he says:

- ❖ “...‘in mourning will **I** go down to **the grave** [*sheol*] to my son” (Gen. 37:5 NIV) and:
- ❖ “If harm comes to him [*Benjamin*] on the journey you are taking, you will bring my grey head down to **the grave** [*sheol*] in sorrow” (Gen. 42:38 NIV).
- ❖ “And of”those who trust in themselves ... Like sheep **they** are destined for **the grave** [*sheol*], and death will feed on them” (Ps. 49:13, 14 NIV).

Please note that it was the whole of Jacob that would go into the grave because he said “I.” If there was a separate part—a separate soul—he would only have said that his body would go to the grave but “I” will go to God. No one in the Scriptures ever says such a thing. Also it is the whole of each person in Psalm 49 that is destined for an early grave.

### Hades (*Greek*) Occurs 11 times = Sheol and therefore = the Grave

By comparing quotations from the Hebrew Scriptures by the Christian Scripture writers in the New Testament, one can see that Sheol is the same as Hades:

- ❖ “...you will not abandon my soul to **Sheol**, or let your Holy one see corruption” (Ps. 16:10).
- ❖ “..you will not abandon my soul to **Hades**, or let your Holy one see corruption” (Acts 2:27).
- ❖ “...a pale horse. And its rider's name was *Death* and **Hades** followed him” (Rev. 6:8).

#### THE DEFEAT OF DEATH AND HADES BY MEANS OF THE RESURRECTION

- ❖ “...[*Jesus*] was not abandoned to **Hades**, nor did his flesh see corruption” (Acts 2:31).
- ❖ “I will build my church; and the gates of **Hades** will not overpower it” (Matt. 16:18 NASB).
- ❖ “I died, and behold I am alive for evermore, and I have the keys of Death and **Hades**” (Rev. 1:18).
- ❖ “...the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and **Hades** gave up the dead who were in them...Then Death and **Hades** were *thrown into the lake of fire*...” (Rev. 20:13, 14).

NOTE: The term ‘*hades*’ is also used as a metaphor for abasement: “You, Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to **Hades**” (Matt. 11:23, Luke 10:15).

### The Dead Remain in the Grave until the Resurrection

As we have seen it is the whole person as a dead soul who remains in the grave until the time of resurrection. The idea that ‘the spirit of a person’ has been resurrected is contrary to the biblical description of all occurrences of resurrections. Furthermore, the first resurrection is yet future. This is clearly the case for King David of whom Peter said:

- ❖ “David... both died and was buried and his tomb is with us to this day ... For David did **not ascend into the heavens**...” (Acts 2:29, 34).
- ❖ *Similarly for the faithful ones of the past:* “These all died in faith, **not having received** the things promised” (Heb. 11:13).
- ❖ *The future* “...hour is coming, in which **all** who are in the tombs will hear his voice, and will come forth; those who did **good deeds** to a resurrection *of life*, those who committed the **evil deeds** to a resurrection *of judgment*” (John 5:28, 29).

So David and all the heroes of faith are still in their tomb having not yet received their rewards because, although Jesus does now have “the keys of Death and Hades” (Rev. 1:18), he has not yet returned so that he may use them (1 Cor. 15:22, 23).

## Misunderstood Passages

### *THE PARABLE OF THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS*

The context of this account in **LUKE 16:19-31** shows that it is one of a series of parables and begins in the same style as certain others of Jesus’ parables with: “*There was a rich man...*” It may be that Jesus adapted one of the seven or more popular Jewish stories of the time. However, this is not a teaching about the so-called intermediate state because neither are heaven, soul, or spirit mentioned in the parable. The mistaken literal interpretation that is used in an attempt to prove disembodied life after death would mean that:

1. Disembodied spirits have *eyes, tongues, fingers* and can *speak* or that people in their bodies go to heaven.
2. Heaven and Hades are within speaking and seeing distance of each other.
3. Abraham is in heaven in contradiction of Hebrews 11:13: “*These all died in faith, not having received the things promised.*” (Also see Acts 2:29).
4. People are rewarded or punished immediately after death instead of at the resurrection day.

However, Jesus aimed this parable at the Pharisees because of their selfish neglect of the lowly. Also these “*who were lovers of money heard all these things and ridiculed him [Jesus]*” (vs 14). And he told them “*You...justify yourselves before men*” (vs 15). So the singular moral lesson of the parable is that a time would come when there will be a reversal of the situation for the Pharisees as represented by the rich man and his five brothers, because they did not acknowledge Jesus as having come from God. These Pharisees would be debased, as it were, to Hades in a way similar to that which is described by Jesus when he said: “*Capernaum, will you be exalted to heaven? You will be brought down to Hades*” (Matt. 11:23). There would be a reversal also of the situation for honest hearted ones as represented by Lazarus. These would be exalted to a situation of honour. As with others of Jesus’ parables the punch line comes at the end with **verse 31** and shows that the Pharisees were wasting every opportunity to hear and obey God:

- ❖ “He [*Abraham*] said, ‘If they do not hear Moses and the Prophets, neither will they be convinced if someone should rise from the dead.’”

Jesus was proved right because the Pharisees in general were not persuaded that he was the Messiah who had taught God’s truth even after he had been raised from the dead.

### *KING SAUL AND THE SPIRIT MEDIUM AT ENDOR*

In going against the Mosaic Law King Saul asks the woman spirit medium at Endor to:

- ❖ “Bring up Samuel for me” (1 Sam. 28:11). Then we read that:
- ❖ “When **the woman saw** Samuel” she says “**I see** a god coming up out of the earth” and she also sees “an old man... wrapped in a robe” (1 Sam. 28:12-14).

So Saul sees nothing, but is led by the woman’s description to believe that it is actually Samuel. This is evidently an impersonation of Samuel by a demon because there is no reason to believe that God would speak to Saul through a supposed spirit of Samuel after he had earlier refused any further communication with him (verse 6). Furthermore, Saul was completely out of favour with God:

- ❖ “So Saul **died for his breach of faith**...he did not keep the command of the LORD, **and he consulted a medium** seeking guidance” (1 Chron. 10:13). Very evidently this passage is no proof that Samuel was still alive as a spirit after his death.

### *THE SHADES IN ISAIAH*

- ❖ “Sheol beneath is stirred up to meet you when you come; it rouses **the shades** to greet you, all who were leaders of the earth; it raises from their thrones all who were kings of the nations. All of them will answer and say to you: ‘You too have become as weak as we! You have become like us!’” (Isaiah 14:9-10).

This passage is poetical, and in particular allegorical as noted from the dumb trees rejoicing over the downfall of the king of Babylon in verse 8. Similarly, the dumb shades (the dead kings) also register surprise at his fall.

*THE SPIRIT RETURNS TO GOD*

❖ "...the dust returns to the earth as it was, and **the spirit returns to God** who gave it." (*Eccl. 12:7*).

*The spirit had no conscious personality in the creation of Adam when God gave it and has none when it returns to God.* "The return of the spirit to God refers to death" as stated in *The New American Commentary* Vol.14 Ecclesiastes p.343.

*THE THIEF TO BE IN PARADISE*

❖ "“Jesus, please remember me when you come back to introduce your future Kingdom.” Jesus replied, “I promise you today, you will indeed be with me in that future paradise” (*Luke 23:43 Anthony Buzzard*).

The understanding of this text depends on how it is punctuated in English; yet the Greek text contained no punctuation marks. As it stands in most translations it would mean that the hanging criminal would be with Jesus before Jesus himself was resurrected ‘on the third day’ from *hades* (Acts 2:31) which is not ‘paradise.’ It is pure conjecture to say that ‘paradise’ is the upper compartment of ‘hades.’ There is no such teaching in the Scriptures and *hades* is simply gravedom, whereas paradise will be on the earth of the future (Rev. 2:7). Furthermore, the first resurrection was not to begin until the time of Jesus’ return—his *parousia* and so making it impossible for the thief to be resurrected on the same day that he died. However, if the punctuation is presented as: ‘I assure you **today**, you will be with me in Paradise.’” With this rendering the meaning fits with biblical teaching and logic. There are numerous examples of similar grammatical structure e.g. Paul’s words of: “Therefore, I testify to you **this day**...” (Acts 20:26). So Rotherham presents the text as: “I say unto thee this day: With me shalt thou be in Paradise.”

## Conclusion

With this biblical understanding of what happens to a person when he dies one does not need to be anxious that some loved one is suffering hell-fire torture and that this would be for eternity (Please see STUDY 7 dealing with texts which appear to teach hell-fire torture) or to be anxious over one’s own uncertain destiny. Nevertheless, the biblical truth that ‘when a person is dead they are really dead’ clearly means that no one goes to heaven at death. However, from a biblical point of view, we need to answer the question concerning whether or not some will go to heaven at some point in time. After all it is a biblical fact that Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives to heaven and is now seated at God’s right hand in heaven. So we will attempt to answer this question and deal with related issues in the next several studies.

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