

April 24, 1998

Hi, Linda!

Here is a response to the paper you e-mailed me regarding life after death. The paper is a mixture of truth and error. I'll comment on the most significant errors.

1. The author states that death is a state of nonexistence, an absence of life. This is not true.

Here are a number of Scriptures which indicate that death involves continued spiritual existence:

**Luke 16:19ff.** This is Jesus' account of the Rich Man and Lazarus. In it he describes two men after death; one righteous and enjoying conscious bliss, the other unrighteous and suffering conscious torment in hell. Some seek to dismiss the teaching of this story as a fictional parable, but please note:

- 1) The text does not identify this as a parable. If it is a parable, it is the only parable Jesus ever told which actually named an individual by name. I think Jesus was here telling a true story.
- 2) If it is a parable, I cannot imagine that Jesus would have foisted false theology on us via a parable. If the characters are fictional, which I do not believe they are, at least Jesus would have depicted the underlying realities with accuracy.

Following are texts in which Jesus describes the afterlife of the wicked, not as non-existence or unconsciousness, but as a place of conscious suffering:

**(Mat 8:12 NIV)** But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

**(Mat 13:42 NIV)** They will throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**(Mat 13:50 NIV)** and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**(Mat 22:13 NIV)** "Then the king told the attendants, 'Tie him hand and foot, and throw him outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

**(Mat 24:51 NIV)** He will cut him to pieces and assign him a place with the hypocrites, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

**(Mat 25:30 NIV)** And throw that worthless servant outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.'

**(Luke 13:28 NIV)** "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out.

The Apostle Paul taught that physical death for the believer is a matter of going to heaven, with a physical resurrection to follow at the Return of Christ for His Church:

**Philippians 1:23ff,** I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; 24 but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. 25 Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of you for your progress and joy in the faith...

**II Corinthians 5:6ff,** 6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

**I Thessalonians 4:13** Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope.

14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. 15 According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep.

16 For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. 17 After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.

**NOTE:** The use of the word “sleep” to describe the state of the believing dead is not a reference to unconsciousness, but rather is the language of appearance in reference to the physical body. The body at death is virtually “asleep,” to be “awakened” at the resurrection. Cf. I Corinthians 15

**Revelation 20:10** describes the doom of the Devil and the “beast” and the “false prophet” (both evil human beings) in the Lake of burning sulfur” where “[t]hey will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.” There is no hint here that death is a state of non-existence of unconsciousness. Exactly the opposite is stated. Note also that a few verses later this “lake of fire” is the destiny of all the wicked dead following the “great white throne” judgment. (Revelation 20:11-15)

Note that the Bible talks about a “second death.” If the first death (physical death) is a state of non-existence, then how can there be a second death?

**(Rev 2:11 NIV)** He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by **the second death**.

**(Rev 20:6 NIV)** Blessed and holy are those who have part in the first resurrection. **The second death** has no power over them, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years.

**(Rev 20:14 NIV)** Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is **the second death**.

**(Rev 21:8 NIV)** But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars--their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is **the second death**."

**NOTE:** It is clear from these passages that the first death is physical death, while the second death is assignment to eternal torment forever alienated from God. The New Testament conception of “death” has the idea of “separation.” In physical death, the physical part of man is separated from the spiritual part of man. In the “second death” man is forever separated from God.

2. The author quotes **Ecclesiastes 9:5**, “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten.” This is a favorite text used by the “annihilation” and “soul sleep” advocates (Seventh Day Adventists, for example). However, Ecclesiastes is a terrible place to find theology. Certainly this is God’s Word, but this book of the Bible was given of God as an accurate portrayal of the foolish thinking and the emptiness of a life lived without God. Just as the Bible accurately quotes the words of the Devil (cf. **Genesis 3:4**) so the words of the foolish philosopher are recorded here in Ecclesiastes. Note that if we are to take our theology from Ecclesiastes, we must also affirm that “All share a common destiny--the righteous and the wicked...” (**9:2**) and that all of life is evil (**9:3**) and meaningless (**9:9**). You don’t get Ecclesiastes’ God-blessed moral until the last two verses, “Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.” (**12:13-14**)

Linda, there's more I could say about this, but maybe this is enough. Let me know if you have more questions. Thanks for asking and God bless you!

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