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Life After Death Series: Part 5 – Difficult Verses (CONTINUED)

119 Ministries would like to thank all those who directly and indirectly provided research, content, and feedback leading to the creation of this teaching series.

We are now deep into the Life After Death Series. We have spent a great deal of time detailing the nature of death. We have highlighted the importance of the resurrection as the only thing that saves us from death. And we have covered a lot of the difficult verses, such as Luke 23 and the thief on the cross and the parable of Lazarus and the Rich man in Luke 16. We still have a few difficult verses we need to cover before we move on to what eventually happens to believers and unbelievers in the end.

Three Scriptures from Paul are likewise often cited as "proof" that souls live on after the body dies. First, let's look at a passage from Paul's second letter to the Corinthians:

2 Corinthians 5:1-9

For we know that if the tent that is our earthly home is destroyed, we have a **building from God**, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this tent we groan, longing to put on our heavenly dwelling, if indeed by putting it on we may not be found naked. **For while we are still in this tent, we groan, being burdened—not that we would be unclothed, but that we would be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.** He who has prepared us for this very thing is God, who has given us the Spirit as a guarantee.

So we are always of good courage. **We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord**, for we walk by faith, not by sight. **Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.** So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please him.

If we simply go back to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, we find that "our earthly home" (verse 1), our physical body, will be "swallowed up by life" (verse 4) at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50-54). This is the context in which Paul writes here. When Paul says that "**while we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord,**" he is simply saying that we can't be with the Lord until we receive our immortal bodies at the resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:50).

The KJV says it in almost the same way and is likely more familiar to most people.

We would rather be “[absent from the body and to be present with the Lord](#)”

When understood correctly, Paul confirms that it's only at the resurrection that we will be alive with Yeshua. When Paul speaks of being "[absent from the body to be present with the Lord](#)," he is speaking of the resurrection of the dead, when the mortal body will be replaced by the "[building from God](#)" (verse 1). It is when Yeshua arrives that we are resurrected, and then, we are with him. The first portion of these verses are describing the resurrection...our new bodies are our new tent or dwelling, our new clothing.

Paul is saying that while we live in this earthly body, in this tent or dwelling that will eventually be destroyed, that we are not yet with Yeshua. Then he went on to say we would rather be away from the body and at home with Yeshua. This is just a simple statement of fact that we wish we were already resurrected. He is saying something to the effect of “while we are in our physical earthly bodies, we have not been resurrected into our new bodies, and thus not with Yeshua.

Biblical scholars have attempted many explanations for Paul's apparently contradictory teaching about the intermediate state of the believer between death and the resurrection. They have proposed that Paul came to grasp more about the state of the dead as his eschatological understanding increased. This supposedly explains the difference in views between his earlier writings (1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15) and those later on (Philippians 1, 2 Corinthians 5). However, some scholars conclude that any perceived deviations are simply due to differences in emphasis caused by the different circumstances under which each letter was written.

In DPHL (Dictionary of Paul and His Letters), we find this insightful comment regarding Paul's apparent change in position from 1 Corinthians to 2 Corinthians:

...Both letters assert a transformation of the believer in Christ; but what of the timing of that transformation? F.F. Bruce remarks wisely on this matter: "The tension created by the postulated interval between death and resurrection might be relieved today if it were suggested that in the consciousness of the departed believer there is no interval between dissolution and investiture, however long an interval might be measured by the calendar of earthbound human history." (p. 440)

In other words, a believer whose consciousness ended at death would not be aware of the passage of time on earth upon awakening in the resurrection. This would allow Paul to say that he would rather be absent from his mortal body and present with the Lord and still not invalidate those things he had earlier written about the dead being in a state of sleep.

Now let's examine a passage from his epistle to the church at Philippi:

Philippians 1:21-24

[For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.](#)

Based on Paul's understanding as presented earlier in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, why

would he say that it would be gain for him to die? How would departing allow him to be with Messiah?

Based on Paul's view of the state and resurrection of the dead as outlined in the passages we've already covered, it would be gain for him to die because he would be asleep and would no longer be suffering in the flesh. In the sleep of death, there is no comprehension of the passage of time. The next moment of consciousness for Paul after his death would be at his resurrection, when Yeshua returns for the faithful. In view of these considerations, it's easy to see what Paul meant here.

Let's examine another passage from Paul's first epistle to the Thessalonians:

1 Thessalonians 5:9-10

For God has not destined us for wrath, but to obtain salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ (Messiah Yeshua), who died for us so **that whether we are awake or asleep we might live with him.**

The only way to use this text to support the conscious spirit theory is to ignore its context. Remember, only a few short verses earlier, Paul is speaking about the awakening of the dead from sleep at the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17). In this verse, Paul is merely saying that whether a believer is awake (alive in the flesh) or asleep (dead in the grave), eventually we will live with Yeshua the Messiah after the resurrection.

Conscious spirit advocates prominently use these three passages by Paul to try and substantiate their claim that the righteous dead are alive in Heaven with Yeshua. In doing so, they have to discard or explain away many clear Scriptures, from Paul and others, which refute this position. One such obvious Scripture is found in Paul's second letter to Timothy, written just before his death:

2 Timothy 4:6-8

For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the **time of my departure has come.** I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Henceforth there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, **will award to me on that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved his appearing.**

Here Paul plainly tells Timothy that he is about to die, and his reward will not be received from the Lord until the day of his appearing - the day Yeshua returns from heaven to resurrect the saints. That is about as direct a statement as you will get from the Apostle Paul on any topic, and it absolutely refutes the belief that believers are rewarded at death by being consciously present with our Messiah in Heaven.

Now let's examine the account of the transfiguration, which is commonly held up as proof that souls remain conscious after death:

Matthew 16:28-17:9

Truly, I say to you, there are some standing here who will not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom.”

And after six days Jesus took with him Peter and James, and John his brother, and led them up a high mountain by themselves. And he was transfigured before them, and his face shone like the sun, and his clothes became white as light. And behold, there appeared to them **Moses and Elijah, talking with him.** And Peter said to Jesus (Yeshua), “Lord, it is good that we are here. If you wish, I will make three tents here, one for you and one for Moses and one for Elijah.” He

was still speaking when, behold, a bright cloud overshadowed them, and a voice from the cloud said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him." When the disciples heard this, they fell on their faces and were terrified. But Jesus (Yeshua) came and touched them, saying, "Rise, and have no fear." And when they lifted up their eyes, they saw no one but Jesus (Yeshua) only.

And as they were coming down the mountain, Jesus (Yeshua) commanded them, "Tell no one the **vision**, until the Son of Man is raised from the dead."

Conscious spirit advocates reasonably claim that the only way Moses and Elijah could have appeared on the mountain with Yeshua is if they were alive in heaven and came down from there. On the surface, that conclusion is understandable.

Unfortunately, that claim is not substantiated by Scripture. In fact, the Greek text of verse 9 literally invalidates that belief.

First, we must understand that this event took place to fulfill Yeshua's promise that some of the apostles would "**not taste death until they see the Son of Man coming in his kingdom**" (Mark 9:1; Matthew 16:28). It has been nearly 2,000 years since Yeshua walked the earth as a man, and the Kingdom of God still has not come in power. It will not come in power until Messiah returns from heaven to rule the nations with a rod of iron. So how could any of the twelve apostles see that event before they died?

The key to properly understanding this passage is to realize that what Peter, James, and John saw was a supernatural vision of the future, not a present reality. The word translated as "vision" in Matthew 17:9 is the Greek noun *horama*. Regarding the meaning of this word, Friberg's Analytical Lexicon of the Greek New Testament says: "*in the NT, [horama is] a supernatural vision, given as a means of divine communication . . .*"

In fact, this same word (*horama*) is used to describe Peter's vision of the great sheet filled with all kinds of four-footed animals of the earth, wild beasts, creeping things, and birds of the air (Acts 10:9-17) and Paul's vision of the Macedonian man pleading for the gospel to be preached to them (Acts 16:9-10). These things literally did not happen. No one believes they literally happened. They were all visions.

Additionally, in the ancient Septuagint Greek translation of the Old Testament, *horama* is used to describe the supernatural visions of the future given to Daniel (Daniel 7:1; 8:13; 10:1), as well as others.

Clearly the transfiguration on the mountain was a vision of the future Kingdom, given to Peter, James and John to fulfill Yeshua's pledge of some seeing the Kingdom prior to seeing death. They were granted a glimpse of the Messiah in his glory, with two of the saints who will literally be there with him in the Kingdom (Moses and Elijah), and the two metaphorically symbolize that the Kingdom will be founded on Spirit and Truth (John 4:24). Scripturally, it's very difficult to make a convincing case that Moses and Elijah had to be alive at that very time in order to be seen in a vision of the future.

Next, let's examine Yeshua's claim that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is not the God of the dead but of the living. Some proponents of the conscious spirit theory claim that this statement is proof that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive at the time Yeshua said this. We have covered this some already, but we will briefly cover it again as a review.

First, we need to realize that the premise for Yeshua's statement was to disprove the Sadducees

contention that there is no resurrection. With the understanding of why Yeshua said this, let's look at what the Scriptures really say:

Matthew 22:31-32

And as for the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was said to you by God: 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living."

Mark 12:26-27

And as for the dead being raised, have you not read in the book of Moses, in the passage about the bush, how God spoke to him, saying, 'I am the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not God of the dead, but of the living. You are quite wrong."

Luke 20:37-38

But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob. Now he is not God of the dead, but of the living, for all live to him."

Clearly, Yeshua was pointing out to the disbelieving Sadducees the reality of the resurrection in these parallel passages. The context is about Yeshua proving the resurrection.

Even though Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were dead at the time Yeshua made this statement, God had promised to resurrect them. That is Yeshua's point. God gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did (Romans 4:17). Therefore, Yeshua could confidently state that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were alive, because he knew that God would keep His promise to resurrect them.

Just in case that is confusing, the book of Hebrews twice clearly tells us that these three (as well as all the other key Old Testament figures) are dead, awaiting their perfection and reward at the resurrection of the righteous:

Hebrews 11:13

These all (including Abraham-v. 8, Isaac-v. 9, and Jacob-v. 9) died in faith, not having received the things promised, but having seen them and greeted them from afar, and having acknowledged that they were strangers and exiles on the earth.

Hebrews 11:39-40

And all these (including Abraham-v. 8, Isaac-v. 9, Jacob-v. 9), though commended through their faith, did not receive what was promised, since God had provided something better for us, that apart from us they should not be made perfect.

Yeshua and the author of Hebrews are not in conflict. Yeshua was simply speaking in context of the promised resurrection. Those who are promised the resurrection are considered "alive."

Similarly, those who are unbelievers, even though they are literally alive, are called dead, because unbelievers are promised the second death.

Some also try to use the words of "souls under the altar" in Revelation 6 to support their belief in conscious spirits in heaven:

Revelation 6:9-11

When he opened the **fifth seal**, I saw under the altar the **souls** of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the witness they had borne. They cried out with a loud voice, "O Sovereign Lord, holy and true, how long before you will judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" Then they were each given a white robe and told to rest a little longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brothers should be complete, who were to be killed as they themselves had been.

First and foremost, we have to realize that the book of Revelation was written in symbolic language. No scholar that we know of expects four horsemen to literally ride throughout the world at the time of the end, wreaking havoc when the first four seals are opened (Revelation 6:1-8). These horsemen and their mounts are understood to be allegorical representations of events that will take place. So why would we interpret the fifth seal in a strictly literal sense when the first four are clearly symbolic? Might we suggest being consistent?

The altar is the place where the sacrifices are presented. Remember, they are symbolically "[under the altar](#)."

Its appearance here is representative of those martyrs who sacrificed their lives in the service of God.

The question asked by these "souls" is used to symbolically introduce the final great martyrdom of believers at the end of this age.

Even this illustrative metaphorical event shows the true status of the dead. These slain saints are told to REST a while longer, until the last massive slaughter of believers is finished. They are to return to resting in the sleep of death until the resurrection of all believers occurs at the seventh trumpet (Revelation 11:15-18). Then, and only after then, will YHWH unleash His wrath.

Lastly, let's examine the account of Saul conjuring up the spirit of Samuel. Saul was facing the Philistine army, and because of his disobedience, God had forsaken him. Since he was afraid of the Philistine army and God would not answer his inquiries about the coming battle, Saul resorted to the use of a medium to contact the dead prophet Samuel. The account is found in 1 Samuel 28:

1 Samuel 28:11-19

Then the woman said, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" He said, "Bring up Samuel for me." When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out with a loud voice. And the woman said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul." The king said to her, "Do not be afraid. What do you see?" And the woman said to Saul, "**I see a god coming up out of the earth.**" He said to her, "What is his appearance?" And she said, "An old man is coming up, and he is wrapped in a robe." And Saul knew that it was Samuel, and he bowed with his face to the ground and paid homage.

Then Samuel said to Saul, "**Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?**" Saul answered, "I am in great distress, for the Philistines are warring against me, and God has turned away from me and answers me no more, either by prophets or by dreams. Therefore I have summoned you to tell me what I shall do." And Samuel said, "Why then do you ask me, since the Lord [YHWH] has turned from you and become your enemy? The Lord [YHWH] has done to you as he spoke by me, for the Lord [YHWH] has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, David. Because you did not obey the voice of the Lord [YHWH] and did not

carry out his fierce wrath against Amalek, therefore the Lord has done this thing to you this day. Moreover, the Lord [YHWH] will give Israel also with you into the hand of the Philistines, **and tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me.** The Lord [YHWH] will give the army of Israel also into the hand of the Philistines."

Those who believe that souls continue to live after the body dies sometimes use this passage to try and prove their point. However, if they really considered what "Samuel" says here, they might choose to ignore it.

One school of thought holds that this appearance by "Samuel" was only a demon disguised as the dead prophet. However, since the text seems to treat the '*elohim*' which appeared as the actual Samuel, we will analyze the passage in that light first.

Notice the very first thing Samuel says to Saul through the medium: "**Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up**" (verse 15). It certainly sounds like the dead Samuel was asleep in death, and wasn't too happy about being bothered by Saul and his medium.

From the Scriptures, we know that Samuel was a righteous man, a servant of God who judged Israel all his life. We also know that Saul was originally selected by God to be the king of Israel, but was later rejected by Him because of rebellion and disobedience (1 Samuel 15:23).

Dualists believe the conscious spirits of saints go to heaven upon death, while the spirits of those who reject God go to hell. Since Samuel was clearly a man of God doesn't it seem strange that he would be rising up from the ground and saying he was being disturbed if he's supposed to be alive up in Heaven?"

Or some believe a literal version of parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man, in which there are two sides of Sheol, one being Abraham's bosom, and the other, the eternal torment of hell. Either way, a problem presents itself.

But let's look at what Samuel tells Saul about his fate: "**tomorrow you and your sons shall be with me**" (v. 19).

If we assume the entity conjured up was actually Samuel and not a deceptive demon, it's apparent that Samuel was called up by the medium from the sleep of death. He wasn't happy about having his rest disturbed. After Saul told Samuel what was going on, Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would be dead after the next day's battle with the Philistines, and then they too would be asleep in *sheol* ("the grave") with him.

Samuel had to be informed of current events, and at that moment Samuel uttered some prophecy regarding the next day's battle.

There is nothing in this encounter to suggest that we remain conscious after death.

In fact, the words of Samuel seem to clearly contradict that position. Samuel was in rest, in complete nothingness. Then his thoughts and emotions, as his unconscious spirit, was called forth in a medium. Remember, a body is needed for consciousness, otherwise there is no need for a medium.

The woman that Saul went to see is described as a medium. A medium acts as the communication vessel. Everything that was occurring was occurring inside the medium and spoken through the medium.

Even Saul could not see anything occurring and everything had to be described audibly to him.

The Hebrew word for medium comes from a wineskin (or water skin) and it is derived from that source because of the hollow sound that comes from inside the wineskin. The idea is sort of like a ventriloquist. In fact, interestingly enough, the ancient Greek version of the Old Testament, the Septuagint, translates the Hebrew word for necromancer into a Greek word (*έγγαστρίμυθος*) that means ventriloquist. It implies guttural sounds from the belly. Either way, it is denoting that the sound from a supposed dead person is coming from the medium, through whatever is going on inside the medium.

Strong's Hebrew Dictionary - זִנָּה 'owb, obe; from the same as 1 (apparently through the idea of prattling a father's name); properly, a mumble, i.e. a water skin (from its hollow sound); hence a necromancer (ventriloquist, as from a jar):—bottle, familiar spirit.

LEH Septuagint- ἔγγαστρίμυθος, Lv 19:31; 20:6-27; Dt 18:11; 1 Sm 28:3 ventriloquizing 1 Sm 28:7; ὁ ἔγγαστριμυθος ventriloquist Lv 19:31; familiar spirit (of a ventriloquist) 1 Sm 28:8 Cf. HARLÉ 1988, 172

So, while Samuel was brought up through a medium which enabled him to communicate with Saul, he was able to reveal prophecy about future events, just as many other prophets connected to YHWH have done.

Some may find all of this quite disturbing, and perhaps a good example of why God condemns mediums (Leviticus 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:11) and outlaws attempting to consult the dead through them (Isaiah 8:19).

Now, it may be even possible that Samuel was not actually conjured up, as it presents a disturbing idea.

If the witch of Endor conjured Samuel from the dead, does that mean the wicked have power over God's faithful in the afterlife?

Think about that for a moment...maybe that is possible, but the idea that we, as believers, can be summoned after death at the command of a witch practicing divination does not appear to be too accurate.

Think about this as well. How likely should we consider it possible that after we die, that YHWH would allow us to participate in a sin of someone else that is worthy of capital punishment in the Torah?

Because we have two choices in that situation. Either an evil person can summon us after death beyond our will, or we have the choice in partaking of the sin of mediating the dead. Saul even admits that YHWH stopped talking to him. Are we to believe that YHWH used Samuel in a highly forbidden practice to then talk to Saul, when YHWH refused to answer Saul through proper channels?

What do we mean by that?

We are told in Samuel 28:6 that YHWH had stopped answering Saul, even through the prophets. So why would God break his silence through an act of necromancy which is expressly forbidden in the Torah?

We pray to YHWH that He does not allow us, after death, to be commanded by wicked mediums into their bodies.

Would it not be more likely that this appearance of Samuel was really a lying spirit relaying information that was already known?

In this light, it appears possible that Samuel was not called forth at all. Perhaps it was a demon or a trick of the mediator. It is interesting, as soon as the mediator saw Samuel, or whatever it was, she was apparently immediately surprised, as indicated by her crying out with a loud voice. It is as though, as a mediator, this type of experience had never occurred before. Because of that, she knew the person she was speaking with was very important, and she realized it was Saul.

It would seem more likely that the appearance of Samuel was a spirit, such as demon masquerading as a dead person. It seems like Samuel because it is telling the story from the subject's perspective. Just like how many places in the bible tell the story from the perspective of the witness. On the flip side, the story does present the event as it literally being Samuel. Samuel even appealed to the value of obeying YHWH and revealed some prophecy. So, it is challenging text to properly understand.

In the end, the story of Saul and the medium at Endor is a morality play of sorts, an object lesson to teach how dangerous it is to forsake God and to turn to the counsels of demons through sorcery and divination. It is a path of fear, despair, lies, curses, and death. It records the sad and tragic end of a man who had shown such great potential but who had allowed jealousy and pride to bring him and his house to ruin.

Regardless if one takes the position that Samuel was actually summoned or not, the event itself does not support the idea that we are conscious after death prior to the resurrection, and for the purposes of this teaching series, that is all that really matters. Because quite honestly, we are not exactly certain of which position we would take on properly interpreting this event with Saul, and neither are most serious scholars. In either case, neither position supports any conscious "life after death" prior to the resurrection.

Satan's first lie to Eve is still alive and well here on planet Earth. However, a review of all pertinent Scriptures clearly shows that the dead are unconscious and "asleep" until they are resurrected. Their spirits are not conscious in heaven or hell. All passages touted by dualists as showing otherwise can be reconciled to this understanding so that the Scriptures are in harmony.

Death is the end of life. If it were not for the promise of a resurrection, we would have no hope for life. But our heavenly Father has promised to raise us from the dead and give us eternal life in His son, Yeshua the Messiah.

So, this leads us to the resurrections to come. What happens when those in the faith are resurrected? When does this occur? What can we expect? Do we go to Heaven? What happens when those not in the faith are resurrected? When does this occur and what can they expect? Do they go to Hell for eternal torture as punishment? The remaining parts of the Life After Death series will focus on everything that follows the resurrections, for both the just, and also for the unjust.

We pray you have been blessed by this teaching.

Remember, continue to test everything.

Shalom!

For more on this and other teachings, please visit us at www.testeverthing.net

Shalom, and may Yahweh bless you in walking in the whole Word of God.

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