

Life after death NT concepts #2

Intro: As our study of the OT and NT terms for life after death continues, I hope that we are able to develop a composite picture of what God affirms about life after death. In our earlier study of NT terms we considered the terms “abyss” and “Hades” both of which are used generally in the NT in harmony with their OT usage. However, we did see a clearer distinction in the condition of the state of the righteous and the wicked in the NT. This distinction is further brought out by the other terms used in description of the afterlife.

Tartarus

Tartarus, thought of by the Greeks as a subterranean place lower than Hades where divine punishment was meted out, was so regarded in Jewish apocalyptic as well. (Moulton and Milligan)

Peter uses a verb form of the Greek place of punishment in the underworld called “Tartarus”.

For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to pits of darkness, reserved for judgment; (2 Peter 2:4) And angels who did not keep their own domain, but abandoned their proper abode, He has kept in eternal bonds under darkness for the judgment of the great day. (Jude 6)

Also note that Peter uses a verb derived from the Greek concept of Tartarus and does not thereby implicitly support the Greek cultural concepts.

We should remember that it is angels who are kept there.

However there is another text that uses a similar picture of imprisonment.

For Christ also died for sins once for all, the just for the unjust, in order that He might bring us to God, having been put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit; in which also He went and made proclamation to the spirits now in prison, (1 Peter 3:18-19)

then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from temptation, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment for the day of judgment, (2 Peter 2:9)

What these verses contribute to our understanding is that both wicked men and angels are held under punishment for the day of judgment and eternal sentence.

Paradise

*Paradise is a loan-word from ancient Iranian and means a garden with a wall. The Gk. word *paradeisos* is used for the first time by Xenophon for the gardens of the Persian kings. The LXX translates “garden of Eden” of Gn. 2:8 by *paradeisos*.*

In the Old Testament

This Persian word occurs in the OT but is usually translated “forest”, “park” or “orchard”. The word is thus

nowhere used in the OT in an eschatological sense, which meaning developed in the later Jewish world. The following trends can be discerned. The word paradise was used to give expression to the meaning of primeval times and then expanded to include fantastic speculations on the glory and bliss of those times. This was connected with the expectations of a wonderful Messianic time in the future. This coming age of glory would be identical with the garden of Eden of ancient times. The Jews believed also that paradise was present in their own time, but concealed. This concealed paradise was the place to which the souls of the patriarchs, the chosen and the righteous people, were taken. The ancient, future and present paradise were regarded as being identical. To sit in Abraham's bosom, in Talmudic language, was to enter Paradise (*cf.* 4 Macc. 13:17).

In the New Testament

And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise." (Luke 23:43)

Thus, Jesus appropriates the concept of this word to describe the blessed state of the thief with him.

was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak. (2 Corinthians 12:4)

Paul spoke of an experience in which he was caught up into Paradise. However, in further describing it he locates it in the "third heaven" (v. 2). In Jewish thought this was considered the abode of God. Thus, Paradise seems to be the abode of God.

'He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.' (Revelation 2:7)

Clearly in this text the Paradise of God is God's dwelling place.

It is possible that the word Paradise is appropriated for both the intermediate state as well as the final destiny of the righteous without necessarily implying that they are identical. However, it is more likely that those who enter Paradise are in some way in the presence of Christ. And that leads to the final expression:

With the Lord

Paul's statements concerning the prospects of death

But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; (Philippians 1:23)

we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord. (2 Corinthians 5:8)

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep in Jesus. (1 Thessalonians 4:14)

Portrayals of the departed in the book of Revelation

And I said to him, "My lord, you know." And he said to me, "These are the ones who come out of the great tribulation, and they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. "For this reason, they are before the throne of God; and they serve Him day and night in His temple; and He who sits on the throne shall spread His tabernacle over them. (Revelation 7:14-15)

The picture may be of final glory or it could be a picture of the state of those who have died in tribulation while the plan of God continues on earth. The context may favor this in view of the scheme of the book.

Summary and Implications of the terms

It appears from our study that the dead are conscious after death. They are aware of their condition and can communicate with those about them. There is a separation of the righteous from the wicked and this separation can not be altered after death. The intermediate state is not purgatorial. The wicked are already experiencing punishment in view of their past ungodly life. The judgment may reveal the reasons for their punishment but clearly their condition anticipates their final punishment in hell after the judgment. The righteous are also already experiencing a foretaste of their heavenly reward based on their godly life. They have not yet experienced the full glorification the gospel promises, such as receiving a glorified body after the resurrection, but clearly they are in comfort and joy in the presence of Christ.

Conclusion: The Biblical teaching on life after death serves as both a warning and a comfort. From the moment we leave this life we will be experiencing a foretaste of our eternal condition. What comfort we have to know that those who have served the Lord faithfully as well as ourselves at our death will be ushered into the blessedness of Paradise awaiting our final glorification at the resurrection.