

Transcript- 87

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We're going to continue our series of going through the top 20 most popular questions of all time. Today we're going to do is what happens after death. I say it's a complicated question. There's a lot of things that ends and outs of the question. Different ways of asking the question, and even different ways of answering the question depending on precisely what the person is asking, but we're going to try to cover this, give you the basics of what the Bible says, and then obviously on each of these topics we probably do a whole entire episode, so we'd encourage you to come back to GotQuestions.org and read some of the articles because they go into this a lot more in depth on each of the side issues that we're going to be able to cover today.

Shea Houdmann

But in brief, most people just think well. OK believers, go to heaven to spend eternity with God and unbelievers go to hell to spend eternity separated from God. And while yes, that is the answer, it's not quite as simple as that, so that's some of the details we're going to cover today. But Jeff is actually going to start us off this morning with it's a little bit about is there life after death. So Jeff, what is the Lord giving you to share this morning.

Jeff Laird

Well, you would think that for a ministry like ours, to even ask that question or bring up the question, is there life after death? Would seem a little strange, but it's a legitimate question that not only people have, but even when you're reading scripture, there's reasons why people want to ask exactly what the perspectives are. When you look at the Old Testament for example, there's not nearly as much detail about exactly what happens after a person dies. There is no real deeply developed theology around the afterlife in the Old Testament. Now, that doesn't mean that there aren't references to things about the afterlife. 2 examples that are handy in this case. Job makes a comment in one of his discussions where he talks about something happening after he dies. David has a remark that he makes about seeing his deceased infant son again. So there's there's concepts in there, but these ideas of sheol and the grave are not nearly as well developed in the Old Testament.

Jeff Laird

Now, obviously that's not necessarily a sign that there is no afterlife because God shows us all the time in Scripture that he tends to just tell us what we need to know in the moment and in the moment of the Old Testament, his focus is on the world, the nation of Israel, and those things that they're doing right then and there. When you move into the New Testament, then your concept of the afterlife becomes very explicit. There's a crystal clear directly stated, life after death when your physical body passes away, there is a spiritual existence that continues on and that continues on in a permanent sense.

Jeff Laird

Where the debate is in the New Testament is really about what happens in the immediate moments afterwards, and that's what you were alluding to, Shea is that there's some confusion because of pop

culture because of misunderstanding about precisely what's going on when we take that last breath. And then what happens in those few moments after that?

Jeff Laird

So from a biblical standpoint, there absolutely is life after death, and that echoes what most spiritual and religious beliefs around the world have always taken that there's some continuation of our existence when our physical life goes away. Where there's more confusion and debate really is in the details for what the Bible says about exactly the things that are going on immediately after a person passes away. From a scriptural standpoint we can find a lot of those things and those things are basically New Testament based, but there is information there for us to see.

Shea Houdmann

Just looking at the Old Testament like you said Jeff and then like the Sadducees in the New Testament, it's always said of them that they did not believe in the resurrection. So did Sadducees literally did not believe in the afterlife. So here are some people who were very very familiar with the Old Testament taught and came to the conclusion that there is no afterlife, there is no resurrection that we die it's over. So clearly as you said, the Old Testament is not as explicit as the new, but again, the Old Testament does teach that there's an afterlife. It just doesn't teach it as clearly as the New Testament, so that transitions maybe to just dive into the what happens after death discussion, so Kevin, why don't you tell us a little bit about what you've been studying this week?

Kevin Stone

Sure, and you mentioned the Sadducees and their belief that there was no resurrection. I just think that is such a such a hopeless viewpoint and Jesus corrects them in the Gospels and says you don't know the power of God or the scriptures that do teach resurrection. He goes on to explain why that was so, but I think one of the clearest places in the New Testament that shows life after death is in Luke Chapter 16, and Jesus tells a story here and some people call this a parable. Some people say that this was an actual, you know, a true story. Either way Jesus is clearly teaching life after death in this portion of Scripture, and it concerns a rich man that is unnamed and then a man named Lazarus who was a poor man by contrast, and both of these men died. And then this beggar named Lazarus Jesus says he was carried by the Angels to a place that Jesus calls Abraham's bosom, so a place of comfort, place of rest where Abraham is pictured as embracing Lazarus. Lazarus is in his bosom. He's being embraced and this is a wonderful picture of the rest and the peace and the blessing that Lazarus experiences. Then Jesus says that the rich man dies and was buried and then the very next thing that we read is that he lifted up his eyes in Hades or Sheol to use an Old Testament term and was in torment and so some very important things here that are happening in in Luke 16 in Jesus Story. We see life after death that both Lazarus and the rich man continued their existence after they died physically in this world, and we see the immediacy of their condition. We see the permanence of their condition, and we also see the consciousness of their condition. I've already kind of spoken to the immediacy of it, Jesus says Lazarus died and very next words out of Jesus mouth, were that he was carried by the Angels to this place of Bliss, and so it happens right away.

Kevin Stone

Same thing with the rich man. Rich man dies very next thing Jesus says is he was in Hades and he lifted up his eyes and torment. Looked around him. He saw he saw some things and he started as they started having some interaction with Abraham and that was within viewing distance, but separated.

Kevin Stone

So this place of the dead, the Old Testament would call it sheol. In the New Testament, Hades, this place of the dead. This this grave, this this area, where the souls of people go after they die physically is split into two regions. It looks like. There's a region of blessing and a region of torment and Lazarus and the rich man go to. Each one goes to one of these two places, and it happens immediately. There's no intermediate state. There's no place where they both had to go and kind of, you know, work off their sins. There's no purgatory. It's never taught in scripture. They immediately go to either a place of blessing or a place of torment.

Kevin Stone

We also see the consciousness of their condition because the rich man is feeling things he says he's in pain, he's in torment. He speaks. He and Abraham have a conversation back and forth between these two realms that, these two regions of Hades, and he has desires. He wants some things. First, he wants Lazarus to come over and bring him some water because he's tormented in this flame, he says, and then he has a desire that his brothers back still living in this world wants his brothers to hear, he says till Abraham send Lazarus back so that he can go warn my brothers about this place. Right now they're having this big funeral. They're singing my praises and they're planning a big funeral dinner and somebody needs to go back and, and say timeout, you need a sermon on how to avoid this place.

Kevin Stone

Abraham denies that request, but the point I'm making is that the rich man had desires. He was conscious of things and he wanted some things. His desires were not fulfilled, neither thing that he asks for was given to him. And I think that shows the reality of Hades condition as well, or I guess we're speaking of Hades. This a place of the dead, but the desires are unfulfilled. Whatever desires you have in the place of torment, they will be unfulfilled.

Kevin Stone

Also, we see the permanency of their condition, because when the rich man asks that Lazarus come over and bring him some water. Abraham says no, can't be done. There is a great gulf fixed between these two places. Lazarus is where he is, and he's going to stay. You are where you are and you will stay there. Great Gulf fixed between these two regions. Nobody can cross from one to the other and you can't go back to Earth either. Lazarus was not sent back and the rich man didn't even ask to be sent back. It's as if he knew that wasn't going to happen, but you know, if we go to a hotel or something here and we are not happy with our accommodations, we'll just call the front desk and ask for another room. And we'll pack our bags and we'll move to that other room. Air conditioners broken or whatever we want someplace new. Or we'll just pack our bags and go to a different hotel, but. There's none of that happening in Hades. If you are in that place of torment, you can't just pack your bags and move over to the good side. That will never happen. There's a great gulf fixed. The condition is permanent and this remember is prior to the resurrection. So immediately after death the spirits of these men go to these

places. This is place of bliss, place of torment, and it looks like they are there permanently awaiting the resurrection. Awaiting the judgment.

Shea Houdmann

So one of the questions we get really often is due to several times in the Bible describes the state of the dead as being sleep. So there's a doctrine commonly called soul sleep, which says that when you die, you are basically asleep until the final resurrection, which is then you are then sent to your final eternal destination, and I think Kevin's point is excellent according to Luke chapter 16 that no, the moment you die, you are in a place of either bliss or torment. Now at the beginning of this episode I talk about how complicated this can be. Well, what gets complicated is they when exactly is everyone resurrected? 'cause there's the believers in the Old Testament. There's believers in the current age. There's depending on your view of the end times, there's believers during the tribulation. There's believers during the millennial Kingdom, all of whom have died and the Bible possibly describes different people being resurrected at different times, so whatever the case, the main point is that when we pass out of this life, our soul spirit goes to a place of either bliss or torment depending on whether we had trusted in Christ as Savior, trusted God's plan of salvation, and then at some point there is a resurrection where we are then judged, I invite you to read Revelation Chapter 20:11-15, the Great White Throne judgment where everyone is resurrected, debatable whether believers are at that judgment or whether believers are judged separately at the judgment seat of Christ.

Shea Houdmann

But then after that judgment, everyone is sent to their final destination. Either the new heavens and the new Earth for believers, or the Lake of fire for unbelievers. So yes, the answer is what happens after death. You either sent to essentially heaven or hell, depending on whether you had received God's gift of salvation through Christ. But how exactly? The whole process, whether there's some sort of place we are temporarily until the final resurrection, that's where it gets complicated, and that's what results in the multitude of different questions we get about this issue.

Jeff Laird

I think when we talk about things like soul sleep and issues like that, it's good to look back at what we were talking about with people like the Sadducees. My understanding of the Sadducees in Jesus era, they did not believe in a resurrection, but they also didn't accept, if I understand correctly, they didn't understand they didn't accept any scriptures other than the first five books of the Old Testament. They didn't accept the extended scripture, they didn't accept, and they certainly didn't accept any of the oral traditions that were around that and there is more to God's word than just particular statements in books. So yes, when we see things like sleep associated with death, yes, those comments are in there and they mean something. But there's additional context behind those that we need to use. One of the things we see is that sleep is always used just in the context of making a contrast between people who are currently physically alive as opposed to those who have passed away, it's not used in a context to talk about people afterwards. You mentioned revelation. There's parts of revelation where before these universal resurrections are happening, people are communicating with God. That doesn't seem to resonate well with the idea of people being insensible or asleep.

Jeff Laird

When Paul says things like it's better to be absent from the body and present with the Lord. There again He didn't say something like it would be better to be asleep. I would rather just be unconscious until the resurrection, so I think from a contextual standpoint there's no good reason to think that we're just zonked out until the resurrection. Like you said though, a lot of these things do get complicated because there are other contexts and there are other things to look at.

Jeff Laird

I think one of the important things for us to focus on is the idea that God tells us what we really, really need to know and what we really need to understand. When we were having a discussion previously about some end times issues, I was bringing up the idea that there's priorities that we need to have using reference to the Titanic and life jackets and things at some point in time we need to recognize that we have things that we need to know right now and things we need to do right now. All those other things are going to take care of themselves afterwards.

Jeff Laird

There isn't a good reason for God to give us an explicit play by play, moment by moment idea of what's going to happen after death. Because we can't do anything about that other than the things he wants us to do right now. So some of these things are legitimately open questions. So even though we can be clear on them, we can also recognize that some of these things aren't tremendously important.

Kevin Stone

One of the things that we need to do right now is believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our eternal destiny depends upon it and John chapter 3, verses 17 and 18 could not be more clear. God did not send his son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because they have not believed in the name of God's one and only son, whoever believes in the son has eternal life. But whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. That's the difference between that place of bliss and the place of torment.

Kevin Stone

I just have to challenge our viewers, our listeners right now. Do you know Jesus? Are you trusting in him for your salvation? He's the only way of salvation. God's judgment remains on us unless we are in Christ. In Christ we are forgiven. In Christ we are blessed. In Christ we have eternal life, that place of bliss and the eternal life is more than just a place. It's a relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Kevin Stone

You know, Paul says it a couple different times in Second Corinthians chapter five, in Philippians chapter one. Both of those passages speaks of being present in this world versus being absent from the body and then being present with the Lord. And I love, I love that promise that to be absent from the body, for the believer, is to be present with the Lord. That is really the essence of heaven being present with the one who loves us and who made us and who redeemed us forever.

Shea Houdmann

Amen, well said Kevin, and that's kind of the direction I always wanted to go next and what happens after death is determined by your relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ and we've gone into some of the details of what the Bible says about the destinations. But ultimately you are the one who determines that. I mean, once I say that I know the Calvinists are going to go nuts, but ultimately the Bible says if you believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, then you will be saved.

Kevin Stone

That's right.

Shea Houdmann

That the wicked go away to eternal punishment. The righteous go away to eternal life. And in Matthew chapter 25, verse 46. So no matter which view you have of the sovereignty of God in Salvation we must believe in order to be saved and we receive Jesus Christ as our Savior. We will spend eternity in heaven, which more accurately described as the new heavens and the new Earth that you see in Revelation Chapters 21 to 22 if we do not receive Christ as Savior as John 3:36 says, as Kevin read that God's wrath remains on us. We will we decide do we want to be separated from God. Well God will grant that request and we'll be separated from God for eternity in what revelation Chapter 20 describes as the Lake of fire. So what happens after death is determined by our relationship with the Lord Jesus Christ so.

Shea Houdmann

Please if you have any questions about this, if there's anything that we could point you to in this episode, we want your eternal destiny to be secure in Christ. We want you to understand the gospel and understand receiving Christ results in the forgiveness of sins, results in an eternity in heaven. The most beautiful, amazing, wonderful place imaginable. Instead of the exact opposite. The most horrible place you could imagine and the entrance into heaven is simple. Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ and you'll be saved.

Shea Houdmann

So if we can conclude this episode with anything again, there's so many details we've discussed in brief. I'm just reminded that we did an episode entire episode on is there life after death with Lee Strobel several episodes ago. So I invite you to go back and read that and read this excellent book on that as well, but what happens after death? If anything, we want to point you to how you can know for sure that you would go to heaven when you die.

Kevin Stone

Strobel's book could be excellent. I also want to make another book recommendation here briefly, I've used this one at my church. It's by Erwin Lutzer. It's one minute after you die, and in it he discusses some of the other theories of what happens after you die. And then he takes a look at what Scripture says, and it's a very helpful book. I highly recommend it. One minute after you die by Lutzer.

Shea Houdmann

Again, very important issue, very complicated issue. We invite you to come back to GotQuestions.org and read some of the articles on this. We have ones on what happens after death. Is there life after death? On what is the intermediate state? What is soul sleep? What actually is heaven? What is heaven

like? What is hell like? So many articles. We have entire questions about heaven, hell, and eternity category where we try to dive into some of these issues a little more in depth, but ultimately we want to point you to faith in the Lord Jesus Christ is the most important answer to this question that determines what happens to you after death.

Shea Houdmann

So please come go to GotQuestions.org ask us any questions you have about this and seek the Lord with all your heart and He will be found. Receive the forgiveness of sins that He offers. You can be delivered from Hell and promising eternity in heaven. So again, what happens after death is sorry my Calvinist friends, but at least in part, it's up to you. So receive the Lord Jesus Christ. Believe in him and be saved. That's what we want to have happen to you. And everyone else from after death.

Shea Houdmann

This is the Got Questions podcast with Jeff, the managing editor of BibleRef.com and Kevin, the managing editor of Got Questions Ministries. Got questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.