

IMPLICATIONS OF UNCONSCIOUSNESS

MY GRANDFATHER, JOSEPH CRANDALL, was in the ministry for over 60 years before he passed away in 2008; and one of his many thrilling experiences he loved to tell was about a woman known as Sister Ricker. Back in the late 1940's, Grandpa pastored a church in Littleton, Maine. The Spirit of God was moving and people were getting saved, healed, and filled with the Holy Ghost. The way Grandpa told the story, he had been having special meetings in his church, and one Sunday night he was in the pulpit preaching away. In the back sat Sister Ricker, a middle-aged woman who had been having severe heart

troubles, and at one point during the preaching she put up her hands and let out a loud, Pentecostal, “Hallelujah!” Nothing usual for a Holy Ghost meeting, so Grandpa kept right on going. A few moments later, however, someone from the back stood up and said, “Brother Crandall! Sister Ricker just died!”

Grandpa went to the back and there was Sister Ricker slumped over in the pew. The people around her checked for a pulse but could find none. Apparently there was no plumbing in the building at the time because a couple of sisters had to run across the street to get cold water in hopes of reviving the lifeless woman, but all their attempts to shock her only confirmed that she was, in fact, gone.

I can still hear my Grandfather telling it, “God had done so much in those meetings. I didn’t want them to end on this kind of note.” So what did he do? He got the whole church to pray, and pray they did! As Grandpa had his hands on Sister Ricker’s cold forehead, they lifted up their voices. “You’ve never heard a church pray like they did,” he would recount.

All of a sudden, Grandpa saw Sister Ricker’s eyes begin to flutter. Brother, did that get the people shouting! In a few moments, the church member who had been dead for over 30 minutes was breathing again and sitting up normally.

Grandpa closed out that Sunday night service in victory and Sister Ricker went back home, raised her young daughter, and lived a long, long time afterward.

There is one more surprising part of this story: *Sister Ricker was very upset with Grandpa.* “Brother Crandall,” she complained, “I was in Heaven with Jesus. Why did you call me back? It was so glorious, but the Lord told me I had to come back because you were praying.”

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In modern times alone, hundreds of people have testimonies of going to Heaven or to Hell, many medically verified as having died. I have personally met two people who came back from the dead, and one of them was a woman in Kenya who, like Sister Richer, was so upset with her pastor for praying for her resurrection she did not come back to church for a year! She, too, adamantly claimed of being in Heaven and in the presence of the Lord, and she had not wanted to return to earthly life.

As someone who believes that the Bible is the inspired Word of God, I would like to put all of these accounts aside for a moment and ask a question: do claims of people experiencing life after death match up

to biblical revelation? There are some who say that while the Bible promises post-resurrection immortality to believers, there is otherwise no scriptural proof that a person goes to Heaven after they die. Many of these same people also claim the Bible does not teach people will suffer in a temporary Hell or an eternal Lake of Fire. So, should you and I accept these after-death testimonies as being legitimate or should we view them as coming from some ungodly source?

Changes

If accounts such as Sister Ricker's are true, it is apparent the Lord is confirming the long held belief of Heaven and Hell consciousness. That being the case, the Western Church in particular needs to step things up in declaring such truth. In the last 30 years or so, many preachers have preferred talking about material gain than heavenly rewards, and even more preachers have completely avoided the subject of punishment in the hereafter.

If, however, the things people are describing as post-mortem encounters are untrue and illusory, then the Church is *not* neglecting its duty but is becoming more faithful to Christian doctrine. For that matter, if, after death, saints *do not* go into the presence of the Lord or sinners *do not* open their eyes to suffering,

then much of what we culturally practice and presume must be dramatically corrected.

Above all, Christian funerals would have to be altered: no more talking about the deceased enjoying peaceful scenes or being welcomed by other saints to glory; no more looking forward to being with either the departed or Jesus at the moment we breathe our last; and no more talk about the Great Shepherd being with us as we walk through “the valley of the shadow of death.” Instead, we would have to preach that once in the grave we are going to be separated from Christ, His presence, and everyone else until the Last Day. Aloneness would be the new grave-side reality.

Other things would need to be tweaked as well. We Christians would have to put away all those endearing songs about streets of gold and meeting at the Eastern Gate; and we certainly would have to consider accounts such as the one of Sister Ricker as coming from a lying spirit to trick believers into false hope and sinners into false fear. More significant, a good part of what we preach about Jesus Himself would have to be modified. We would no longer be able to credit Him with the power we thought He had.

Let’s push the envelope a bit—there is a reason I’m doing this, by the way—and suppose that in regards to unbelievers, they will have no consciousness

of temporal or eternal punishment, that Hell and the Lake of Fire are only resting places for oblivious beings.

This adjustment would prohibit the familiar evangelism appeal of warning sinners that they will burn in eternity. Instead, the godless would have to be informed that though repentance and faith in Christ brings everlasting reward, sin does not have consequences of the same time frame. Both evangelists and evangelism would be reduced to telling the wayward that before they opted out of following Jesus and clean living, they should consider the alternative: going extinct.

Anchored in the Word

You might be asking, “Brother Holcomb, why are you supposing all this? Every Christian believes that you go to Heaven or Hell after you die. Only cults believe otherwise.” You would be surprised at the number of people that profess the Bible is their sole source of doctrine and yet who are ever so quietly spreading an “unconscious” teaching, which has long been refuted by conservative saints all over the world.

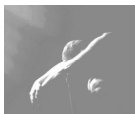
This is an age when every norm is being deliberately attacked and people are trying to fit society with an artificial reality. In the Church, corruption and dilution are grotesquely common; and if you are simply

coasting along with what family, friends, and your church believe, you are in a dangerous position. You are highly susceptible to false doctrine and heresy. Not only could you become inadvertently polluted, but by harmonizing with lies you could be spreading spiritual infection to others! This is why it is imperative you know the Word of God for yourself—even if it is something as basic as a person going to Heaven or Hell after they die.

Yes, there is another side to reality, one more powerful, more significant, and more conscious than what flesh and blood can know; and I believe God has always allowed people like Sister Ricker to come back from the dead and reassure us that what we think is the end is not the end. Yet more important than all the experiences and stories put together, life after death is a biblical assertion; and thus it is essential to the overall truth of Jesus' power, promises, and the significance of His death on the cross.

What follows in this book is the evidence you need to immunize yourself and others against the aforementioned fallacies and to stimulate your faith in what is authentic Christian doctrine (some of which may be surprisingly unknown even to seasoned believers); and it all starts with understanding the way in which God has designed you.

CHAPTER



REVIEW

1. Some people claim the Bible teaches that after physical death, no one is conscious in either Heaven or Hell. Many of these same people also claim sinners will not be alive in the Lake of Fire.
 2. There are radical implications to adopting these view points, one of which is a modification to the way in which we preach Jesus.
 3. There is experiential evidence of Heaven and Hell, but more importantly we must be know the scriptural evidence for ourselves.
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WHAT HAPPENS AT DEATH

IT MAY SURPRISE YOU but a look at death yields evidence for life thereafter. God, who is true and knows all things, describes death for us in His Word, in the very beginning. Adam and Eve had sinned and so God was passing judgment on their disobedience, decreeing laws that, to this day, apply to every one of us. God said to Adam,

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou *art*, and unto dust shalt thou return.

—*Genesis 3:19*

This is death, plain and simple: the physical body looses its breath, becomes limp, and that which was taken from the ground returns to the ground. This is biblical revelation as well as common knowledge but vital to point out for the following reason.

As covered in the last chapter, the Lord breathed into man “the breath of life,” but notice: He did so *only after* man’s body had been formed. In other words, *man’s spirit did not come from the dust*. This is why, in the pages of God’s Word, it is man’s flesh, *and only his flesh*, that is ever described as succumbing to decay or returning to the dust. At death, something else takes place to man’s spirit, and there is ample evidence as to what it is that happens.

Ancient beliefs

In his 2007 essay *Funerary Practices and Afterlife Expectations in Ancient Israel*,¹ Stephen Cook of Virginia Theological Seminary noted that archaeologists have uncovered ancient Hebrew graves where the dead were laid with lamps, food, and pots—all as store for the afterlife. Reuben Kashani, writing for the Jewish Virtual Library on the topic *Burial in the Bible*,² also acknowledged “the older practice of food offerings to the dead,³ of placing lamps in graves, and of burying the personal effects of princes and notables

with the corpse [as was done for Gamaliel I by Onkelos (Av. Zar. 11a)] ...”

These customs Cook and Kashani have written about are proof of what people in Bible times believed, and incredibly they are directly referred to in the following two biblical passages and vaguely in others,

I have not eaten thereof in my mourning, neither have I taken away *ought* thereof for *any* unclean use, nor given *ought* thereof for the dead.

—*Deuteronomy 26:14a*

They joined themselves also unto Baalpeor, and ate the sacrifices of the dead.

—*Psalms 106:28*

Have you ever wondered why the Lord forbade Israel from shaving certain parts of their head or from tattooing? These things were rituals belonging to cults of the dead,⁴ and the Hebrews coming out of Egypt were wrongfully participating in prayer and worship to their deceased ancestors,

Ye shall not make any cuttings in your flesh for the dead, nor print any marks upon you: I *am* the LORD.

—*Leviticus 19:28*

Ye *are* the children of the LORD your God: ye shall not cut yourselves, nor make any baldness between your eyes for the dead.

—*Deuteronomy 14:1*

Lewis Bayles Paton, a scholar of the last century, wrote that “among the Semites belief in the continued existence of the disembodied *nephesh* or *ruwach* existed from the earliest times.”⁵ He explained,

“The early Hebrews, like all the other Semites, regarded man as composed of two elements, *basar*, or ‘flesh,’ and *nefesh*, or ‘breath.’ The *nefesh* was ... identical with the life. It was the seat of knowledge, appetite, emotion, and activity.⁶ In composition with the pronominal suffixes *nefesh* had the meaning of ‘self,’ e.g. *nafshi*, ‘my breath,’ equals ‘myself.’ It resided in the blood, hence the commandment, ‘Be sure that thou eat not the blood: for the blood *is* the *nefesh*; and thou mayest not eat the *nefesh* with the flesh ... thou shalt pour it upon the earth as water.’⁷

“The Hebrews believed that the dead retained a large measure of their former intellectual and emotional faculties ... ‘Rachel mourns over the captivity of her children’⁸ ... ‘The blood of murdered Abel cries to Yahweh from the earth,’⁹ that is, the soul that resides in the blood is

conscious of the wrong done to it and demands vengeance.” – *Spiritism and the Cult of the Dead in Antiquity*, The MacMillan Company (1921), Chapter VIII, pages 232-234

Express doctrine

Here’s something I found very interesting: the Hebrew word *abad*¹⁰ is translated 98 times as “perish” but its precise meaning is “to wander away.” This piece of scholarly trivia matches perfectly with what the Bible already expressly teaches.

Apostle James defines death as “the body without the spirit” or more accurately the body being “at a space from” the spirit,¹¹ while the psalmist tells us that the human spirit “goes forth,”¹² which literally means it exits¹³ (hence the familiar biblical term “to give up the ghost”). Apostle Peter endorsed the belief that the body and spirit separate at death when he talked about putting off his own “tabernacle” and exiting.¹⁴

Let’s take another look at the word *abad* and “wandering away.” Job 20:7-8 (verses about the wicked) not only includes *abad* but it actually emphasizes its meaning in context,

Yet he shall perish [wander away] for ever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say,

Where *is* he? He shall fly away as a dream, and shall not be found: yea, he shall be chased away as a vision of the night.

Keep in mind that when Jesus appeared to the disciples for the first time and they thought He was a ghost, Jesus did not rebuke His disciples and say, “Don’t you know it’s impossible for a spirit to appear without its body;” rather, He endorsed the opposite,

Behold my hands and my feet, that it is I myself: handle me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see me have.

—*Luke 24:39*

God gathers

OK. We have evidence that ancient Hebrews recognized life after death; and we have clear, biblical statements that upon dying, a person’s spirit exits or wanders away. Still, this is not all that happens. The Word also reveals that God takes or, as Job describes, “gathers unto Himself” the spirit and breath of man.¹⁵

All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward ... ?

—*Ecclesiastes 3:20-21*

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was:
and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.

—Ecclesiastes 12:7

Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest
away their breath [*ruwach*, spirit], they die, and
return to their dust.

—*Psalms 104:29*

“Where does God take a person’s spirit?” you will naturally ask. Be patient. I get to that in the next two chapters. First of all, it is important to perceive and settle in your heart that you are not an animal which, in the end, simply drops over and becomes compost; but neither do you merely become unconscious at death. You have a spirit that belongs to God and that returns to Him.

Forbidden practice

So far in this chapter, we have found evidence for after-death consciousness by taking a head-on approach, now let’s use the biblical back door.

More evidence for post-mortem existence comes *via* a practice explicitly condemned by God in the Book of Deuteronomy: that of being a medium or “necromancer.”¹⁶ *Holman Bible Dictionary* defines

“Necromancy” as “conjuring the spirits of the dead to predict or influence future events,” and it lists a “Medium” as being “one possessed by or consulting a ghost or spirit of the dead ... ”

In 1 Samuel 28:7-25, we find the story of King Saul going to the witch or medium of Endor so that she could contact for him the deceased prophet, Samuel. Saul needed direction and Samuel was the only one he had ever trusted for it. One very important detail stands out in this account: the Bible says that during the séance, “the woman saw Samuel.” Nothing in this passage even remotely suggests that she saw a spirit *like* Samuel; it unmistakably identifies the “old man ... covered with a mantle” as the prophet himself.

It should be noted that God never said it was *impossible* to contact those who have died. To the contrary, the fact that He prohibited human beings from the act shows it can be done.

Legitimate contact

Now, God can do anything He wants; and in an event that can only be credited to a display of divine sovereignty, there is another scriptural account of someone communicating with the dead. In the first three gospels,¹⁷ Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a mountain and there becomes transfigured in front

of them. Suddenly, “there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with [Jesus].”¹⁸ Some ignorantly say that this was just a vision, yet not only did Jesus and the three disciples see the prophets (a vision involves one person), but the context assures us that the Lord was communicating with the real and conscious Moses and the real and conscious Elijah. Unlike Saul, however, Jesus was not breaking one of Moses’ commandments. Though He dialoged with the deceased prophets, He had not conjured them up; they spontaneously appeared to Him, and they appeared by the will of God.

Christ’s encounter with Moses and Elijah ratified many things, but the one of immediate interest is that the dead are indeed conscious.

How death is like sleep

Sometimes in Scripture, dying is equated with sleeping; however, the Bible does not teach (as some claim) that death *is* sleep. Sleep is only used as a figure of speech, and no one clarified this better than Jesus. Speaking to His disciples, He said to them,

Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus

spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

—*John 11:11-14*

In direct language as well as indirect reference to returning to dust, the Bible specifies that it is our bodies, *not our spirits*, which experience deathly sleep.

Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.

—*Isaiah 26:19*

Now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.

—*Job 7:21b*

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

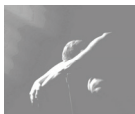
—*Daniel 12:2*

Yet even besides this clarification, the biblical use of sleep as death *by itself* indicates sustained consciousness, that there is something about dying that

happens above and beyond the failure and decomposition of the body.

What takes place every night when you go to sleep? Your body lies down and becomes motionless, inactive, and to a degree unresponsive; however, your spirit still functions: you dream, and when you dream you are often aware of people and places that are nowhere near close proximity to your physical body. In a dream, you can be engaged in activity, recognize sights and sounds, experience emotions, hold conversations, and you may even think about what you would like to do when you awake. Sleep is the perfect picture of death. One part of you has failed (so to speak) while another part continues and is conscious—but where do you continue? Where does God take your spirit?

CHAPTER



REVIEW

1. Unlike his body, man's spirit was not formed from the "dust of the ground." In the Bible it is man's flesh, and only his flesh, that is ever described as decaying and returning to dust.
 2. There is historical and scriptural evidence that the ancient Hebrews recognized life after death.
 3. The Bible teaches that at death our spirit separates from our body.
 4. God takes or, as Job described, "gathers" our spirit.
 5. The scriptures use sleep as a figure of speech for one who is dead. Sleep is a perfect picture of death: one part of you has failed (so to speak) while another part continues and is conscious.
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