

THE TRUTH ABOUT SOUL SLEEP

Soul sleep is the belief that when a person dies their soul is in an unconscious state, often called sleep, until a final judgment.

The Bible does liken the death of a believer to sleep. Jesus said Lazarus was asleep (Jn. 11:11). Stephen fell asleep (Acts 7:60). Paul talked about deceased believers sleeping (1 Cor. 11:30; 15:51; 1 Th. 4:14, 5:10).

As we will see, when the Bible speaks of sleeping after death, it is referring to the body of the person and not the soul or spirit. The soul and spirit is the real person. The soul and spirit are the part of the person that gives them life, intellect, conscience, emotion, and will. God breathed into Adam and he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7).

The body is just the house the soul and spirit indwelt while living in this world. When a person dies, their spirit and soul departs and their body is left behind. Solomon wrote, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Ec 12:7).

WHAT THE OLD TESTAMENT TEACHES US ABOUT DEATH

Death and Old Testament believers

The Bible teaches that the Old Testament believers were very much alive and aware of their surroundings after their death. They went directly to a place of peace and comfort when they died.

The Bible calls this place of peace and comfort "Abraham's bosom" (Lk. 16:22). The fact that it is called "Abraham's bosom" implies Abraham was there at that time.

David had this place of comfort in mind when he said, "I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever" (Ps 23:6).

David said he would go to be with his deceased son. He said, "I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me" (2 Sa 12:23). Going to his son implies him being aware of his surroundings and having communication with his son. It certainly does not suggest being asleep.

The Bible tells us Rachel's soul departed from her body when she died (Gen. 35:18). The real Rachel, her spirit, departed her body, and her dead body was left behind.

Moses and Elijah appeared at the transfiguration (Mt. 17:3). The fact that they talked with Jesus proves they were not in a state of sleep.

Paul said David "fell on sleep" (Acts 13:36). However, he goes on to say, he "was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption". Clearly, this refers to David's body sleeping for it says it "saw corruption". The spirit of a believer never sees corruption.

Lazarus is written about in the New Testament but he died before Jesus' death and resurrection. He is, therefore, included with the Old Testament saints. He, also, went straight to Abraham's bosom when he died. Jesus said, "And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom" (Lk 16:22). The real Lazarus was "carried" by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

In this place Lazarus was "comforted" (Lk. 16:25). Being "comforted" disputes any idea of being asleep.

The rich man asked that Lazarus be sent to his brothers (Lk. 16:24). Certainly, a sleeping man could not do such a thing.

Death and Old Testament unbelievers

The Bible teaches that the Old Testament unbelievers were very much alive and aware of their surroundings after their death. They went directly to a place of pain and agony when they died.

WHAT THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHES US ABOUT DEATH

If the Old Testament believers went to a place where they were alive and aware, certainly, the same is true of the New Testament believers.

- Jesus refuted soul sleep

Jesus told His disciples He was going to His Father's house to prepare a place for them. He said He would return to "receive" them unto Himself. He continued by saying, "that where I am, there ye may be also" (Jn. 14:1-3). All this speaks of being alive and alert, not of sleeping in a grave.

Jesus certainly was not talking about sleeping when He said "where I am, that shall also my servant be" (Jn. 12:26). He was instead, talking about believers having wonderful fellowship with Him.

Jesus spoke to the thief on the cross and said, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Lk 23:43). He would be "with" Jesus. Jesus was not sleeping in the ground. The word "with" also makes it obvious Jesus was referring to the thief being alert and aware of His presence.

Jesus called heaven a place of "rest", not a place of sleep (Rev. 14:13). The word "rest" means "repose or refresh". It speaks of resting from labor and being refreshed, not unconscious.

Jesus refuted soul sleep when He died. To begin with, after His death, His body stayed on the cross until Joseph took it down and placed it in the tomb (Mt. 27:57-60). While His body was in the tomb for three days and nights the real Jesus was very much alive and active. The Bible says He gave up his spirit while on the cross (Lk. 23:46; Jn. 19:30). His spirit departed His body.,

- Stephen refuted soul sleep

As Stephen was being stoned, he said "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit" (Acts 7:59). The implication is, that Jesus accepted Stephen's spirit the instant he died. It was his body that fell asleep, not his spirit.

- Paul refuted soul sleep

Paul made it clear that all believers go straight to be with the Lord when they die. There is no suggestion about their soul sleeping.

Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Php 1:21). Death being "gain" does not sound like something a person would say if they were just going into an unconscious state.

Paul continued by saying, "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Php 1:23). He says first, he will be "with Christ". Then, he says death "is far better" than living. Once again, this is not something he would say if death meant he would go to sleep in a grave.

Paul was referring to the Rapture when he said Jesus is coming to raise those who "sleep in Christ" (1 Th. 4:14-18). The purpose of the Rapture is to raise the bodies, not the spirits, of the believers who have already gone to heaven.

Perhaps the verses that are most clear in refuting soul sleep are where Paul is writing to the Corinthians. He wrote, "Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord" (2 Co 5:6). Paul is saying that while we are alive (at home) in our earthly body, we are "absent" from the Lord.

He reverses the thought in verse 8 where he wrote, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" (2 Co 5:8). The word "absent" means "to vacate" and the word "present" means "to be at home". He said clearly, when we are "absent" from our body, we are "present with the Lord". In other words, the believer moves out of their physical body when they die and moves in with the Lord in heaven.

- Peter refutes soul sleep

When writing about the death of Jesus, Peter said, "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit" (1 Pe 3:18). He said Jesus' was dead in the flesh (body) but alive in the Spirit.

John tells us the day will come when our bodies will be changed into the likeness of Jesus' body (1 Jn. 3:2).

CONCLUSION

The fact is, nowhere in the Bible is it suggested anyone, believer or unbeliever, went into a state of sleep after they died.

One of the good things about heaven is the fact that those who go there will be forever conscious. One of the bad things about hell is the fact that those who go there will be forever conscious (Lk. 16:22).

Unbelievers go immediately to hell where they are very much aware of their environment.

The rich man was feeling, thinking, listening, and talking in hell (Lk. 16:24). There was no soul sleep, nor purgatory for the rich man or Lazarus.