

DEATH AND AFTER

Old Testament People and Death (Two-Compartment Theory)

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. There has been much confusion, especially in the 19th and 20th centuries about the condition and the location of one's soul after death. The whole subject stresses the importance of the intermediate state. By the intermediate state is meant "that realm or condition in which souls exist between death and the resurrection" (L. Beottner, Immortality).
- B. The Bible itself has very little to say about the intermediate state because the Bible stresses not the intermediate state but the ultimate state; that is, the return of Christ in His second advent and the new era that shall then begin. However, there are passages that do say something about the intermediate state for both the saved and the unsaved. The teaching on the intermediate state is clearer in the New Testament than in the Old Testament and a rule of Biblical interpretation is that the New Testament is the final criterion for interpretation of the Old Testament. The New Testament teaches that the intermediate state is a state of conscious existence for both the righteous and the wicked – for the righteous a state of joy; for the wicked a state of suffering (II Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:23; II Cor. 12:2-4; Luke 23:43; Rev. 14:13; Luke 16:19-31).
- C. Probably the best definition of the intermediate state is found in the Westminster Confession of Faith which says,

"The souls of the righteous, being then made perfect in holiness, are received into the highest heavens, where they behold the face of God in light and glory, waiting for the full redemption of their bodies; and the souls of the wicked are cast into hell, where they remain in torments and utter darkness, reserved to the judgment of the great day. Besides these two places for souls departed from their bodies, the Scripture acknowledgeth none."

- D. The Westminster Divines set forth a general teaching on the intermediate state and no one can argue with this general statement. However, the Bible may leave room for the Two-Compartment theory which deals with the state of souls before and after the death of Christ. NOTE: Dogmatism on the Two-Compartment theory would be wrong but it is set forth as a possible explanation of departed souls before and after the Cross.

II. THE TWO-COMPARTMENT THEORY

- A. Introduction: There has been much controversy over the Two-Compartment theory, but it has been held by good Bible scholars. There is much Biblical support for it but not enough to be dogmatic on the subject.
- B. Definition: The Two-Compartment theory states that the Old Testament saints' and unbelievers' souls after death went to a temporary abode called Sheol-Hades. Sheol-Hades was divided into two compartments – Paradise and Tartarus. Paradise

was the abode of the righteous, a place of joy and bliss, and Tartarus was the abode of the unrighteous dead, a place of punishment. At Christ's death on the Cross, He descended into Sheol-Hades and declared His victorious death on the Cross to the unbelievers in Tartarus and took the Old Testament believers of Paradise with Him to heaven. Paradise was moved to heaven and Tartarus of Sheol-Hades remained the temporary abode of all unbelievers whether of the Old Testament or New Testament ages. Someday in the future Sheol-Hades will be thrown into the Lake of Fire forever. NOTE: This view has much scriptural support and also has the support of Roman Catholic theologians who teach the doctrine of Limbus Patrum,

Roman Catholic theology holds that Old Testament believers at their death were gathered into a region called the limbus patrum, where they remained without the beatific vision of God, and yet without suffering, until Christ had accomplished His work of redemption. The word limbus is from the Latin, meaning fringe or outskirts, and the limbus patrum was one of the several compartments into which first Jewish theology and then later Medieval theology divided the unseen world. After His death on the Cross, and while His body remained in the grave, Christ is supposed to have descended to this region, delivered the souls held captive there, and led them in triumph to heaven (Beottner, Immortality).

C. Support

1. Sheol and Hades: The word "sheol" probably means "to be hollow" and the NAS Bible called it the "nether world." In the Old Testament the Hebrew word to designate the place of the souls of the dead is Sheol. Sheol is the abode of righteous men (Psa. 89:48; 88:3; Hosea 13:14) and of the wicked (Num. 16:33; Psa. 49:14; Job 21:13; Psa. 9:17; Proverbs 7:27; Deut. 32:33). God is sovereign over it (Deut. 32:22; Job 26:6). Men are conscious in Sheol for conversation takes place there (Ezk. 32:31; Isa. 14:9, 10). The Psalmist thought he would be kept out of the "lowest Sheol" (Psa. 86:13), indicating there might be a higher part of Sheol. Those who are truly saved are not to stay in Sheol (Psa. 49:15). NOTE: The key verses are Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27-31. Psalm 16:10 says Christ's soul would not be left in Sheol and the New Testament quoting this verse in Acts 2:27-31 says Christ's soul shall not be left in Hades; thus Sheol and Hades are one and the same place. The parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus tells us that they were conscious in Hades and a great gulf separated the two but they could communicate (Lk. 16:19-31). POINT: Sheol and Hades were the same place and both the wicked and the righteous were there. OBJECTIONS: (1) Sheol in the Old Testament may mean the grave (Gen. 42:38; 44:29-31) and is just a figurative way of speaking of death for both the righteous and unrighteous; (2) Sheol must refer to the state of death in the grave because it says man's earthly goods are in Sheol (Num. 16:29-33); this is figurative language for the grave and death; (3) In Psalm 16:10 and Acts 2:27-31 the words azab (loosen, relinquish, permit) and egkatalaipo (desert, forsake) are used and it does not seem to teach our Lord's soul was to go into Sheol-Hades but that God would not "permit" or "desert" Christ's soul into Hades, indicating He never went to Hades. NOTE: For those who reject the Two-Compartment theory, they feel that Sheol means primarily the grave and/or

punishment. Beottner says, “Briefly, we may say that the Old Testament Sheol usually means the grave, but sometimes the place of punishment, while in the New Testament, Hades and Hell usually mean the place of punishment but sometimes the grave.”

2. Sheol-Hades Has Two Compartments: Christ lived and died in the Old Testament dispensation and would naturally accept Old Testament theology that was correct. Christ taught that the Rich Man and Lazarus were both in Hades but one was in bliss and the other in misery (Lk. 16:19-31). Lazarus is said to have been in “Paradise,” a place of bliss for Old Testament saints (Lk. 16:25). Just before Christ died, He told the thief who believed, “Today, you shall be with me in Paradise” (Lk. 23:43). That very day the thief would be with Christ but Christ did not go to heaven until 40 days after His resurrection. The bottom half of Sheol-Hades is thought to be Tartarus, which was originally made to house wicked angels (II Pet. 2:4), but men who do not have Christ as Lord and Saviour cast their lot with the devil and his angels and thus experience God’s eternal judgment (Matt. 25:41). OBJECTIONS: (1) The Bible seems to teach that Paradise is equivalent to heaven (II Cor. 14:4; Rev. 2:7); (2) it seems as though the Old Testament saints were looking for heaven and not for some intermediate state of bliss called Paradise (Psa. 73:24; 17:15); (3) all Old Testament saints did not go to Sheol-Hades, for Enoch (Gen. 5:4) and Elijah (II Kings 2:11) were raptured.
3. Christ Descended Into Sheol-Hades: At the time of His death (perhaps during the whole three days His body was in the tomb) Christ descended into Sheol-Hades. Because of His death, Christ went into “prison” (Tartarus) to proclaim to the Old Testament people (at least the pre-flood people), who rejected Him, His victorious death (I Pet. 3:18-20). We must assume that these Old Testament unbelievers were in Sheol-Hades, namely Tartarus. Another assumption is that Christ not only proclaimed His death to pre-flood rejecters but to all Old Testament saints. This proclamation was not to give rejecters a second chance but to proclaim that He was and is victor over sin, death, judgment, Satan and hell, making their misery more miserable. It is also stated that Christ descended “into the lower parts of the earth” before he ascended into heaven (Eph. 4:6-10). At the time He descended, He “led captive a host of captives” which could refer to the Old Testament saints who were in the Paradise section of Sheol-Hades. When He ascended, He took the Old Testament saints and the Paradise section of Sheol-Hades with Him and relocated it in heaven. Now Paradise is in heaven and that is why Paul could say that he was caught up into Paradise (II Cor. 12:4). This may be the time that Old Testament saints were made part of the Church, being then united to Christ. The Two-Compartment theory is consistent with the Apostle’s Creed which says, “descended into hell.” NOTE: The Two-Compartment theory may give some explanation to the resurrection that occurred at the time of Christ’s death (Matt. 27:51-53), although we cannot be dogmatic on this point. OBJECTIONS: (1) I Pet. 3:18-20 is open to another interpretation: Christ was made alive in the spirit and preached to spirits in prison; this happened before the flood, indicating that it was the same Spirit of Christ who spoke through Noah to the people of his day; (2) Eph. 4:6-10 and Matt. 27:51-53 are not clear passages and too many assumptions must be made.

4. Christ Left Hades in Place: Sheol-Hades remained after Paradise was removed to heaven. In the New Testament, Hades almost always has reference to the place of the wicked dead who die. Tartarus, which is in Sheol-Hades, is the place where unbelievers go after this life because in unbelief they have cast their lots with the devil and his angels. Sheol-Hades (Tartarus) remains as a place of separation from God and punishment.
5. Hades to Yet Be Cast Into the Lake of Fire: All men, whether saved or unsaved, will be bodily resurrected. The saved will be resurrected to life and the unsaved to death (John 5: 28, 29). At the Great White Throne judgment unbelievers' resurrected bodies will be united with their souls which have been in Hades, and at that time Hades and all unbelievers will be cast into the Lake of Fire forever (Rev. 20:14, 15).

III. DANGERS OF THE TWO-COMPARTMENT THEORY

- A. Could Lead to a Form of Soul Sleep: One must be careful to maintain that Sheol-Hades is a place where men are conscious. Jews and Roman Catholics who held to a type of Two-Compartment theory held that believers after death were in a dreamy, semi-conscious state, neither happy nor miserable, awaiting the resurrection of the body.
- B. Could Lead to a Temporary Judgment of Old Testament Unbelievers: Some who have held this view have said that when Christ went into Hades and proclaimed His victorious death, He set free all in Sheol-Hades, even the unsaved, and took them to heaven.
- C. Could Lead to a Place of No Judgment: Liberal theology teaches that Sheol of the Old Testament is a place without moral distinction, and therefore without blessedness on the one hand or pain on the other. It was according to this view a dreamy sort of underworld of comparative inaction, darkness and silence. This lends support to a universalistic salvation.

IV. OPTION TO THE TWO-COMPARTMENT THEORY

- A. Among Bible scholars, the most prominent view is to reject the Two-Compartment theory and see all the words for heaven and hell to be figurative, represent – the bliss of the saved and the punishment of the wicked.
- B. Sheol, Hades, Gehenna, Tartarus, Lake of Fire, Abyss under this view all refers to Hell. Sheol in the Old Testament refers to the state of death, the grave or hell. Paradise refers to heaven. NOTE: This is a far less complicated system but it does not seem to answer as many questions as does the Two-Compartment theory.