

Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Teach?

Dudley Fifiield

The Soul.....	2
The Death State	3
"Dust to dust"	4
Heaven – God's Dwelling Place	5
"Our father which art in heaven".....	5
The Earth is Man's Inheritance	6
Hell is the Grave	6
"Hell Fire"	7
Tartarus.....	8
The Destiny of the Wicked.....	8
The Reward of the Righteous.....	8
Resurrection.....	9
Judgement.....	10
Some Objections Considered.....	10
<i>"The Kingdom of Heaven"</i>	10
<i>The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16)</i>	11
<i>The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:39-43)</i>	11
Conclusion.....	12

The Bible is a reasonable book. There is nothing contradictory about it: everything fits together in a manner that makes its message both dynamic and easy to understand. Its teachings make sense and it is this simple logic that presents such a challenge that no-one of good will can deny its impact.

This booklet has been written to show that – in contrast to the plain and reasonable teaching of Scripture – popular ideas about heaven and hell are unreasonable. What are these ideas? For centuries it has been commonly believed by most professing Christians that heaven is the abode of the righteous dead where they experience everlasting joy and happiness, and that hell is the eternal abiding place of the wicked who are subject to never-ending torment in its unquenchable fires.

In more recent times many have abandoned the idea of hell – and with it any real desire to investigate whether this is, in fact, a true reflection of what the Bible teaches. This abhorrence of eternal suffering (surely a right instinct) has caused men to cherish instead a vague hope of universal salvation – that all will enjoy eternal happiness irrespective of the works done during their mortal life. Yet that has now left people with a sense of unease, because they sense an injustice in assuming that there can be a reward for both good and bad alike.

Christadelphians do not share either the modern idea of 'heaven for everyone', or the more traditional ideas of 'blessings in heaven' and 'punishment in hell'. They have read the Bible themselves (as we hope the readers of this booklet will do) and concluded that, although 'heaven' and 'hell' are mentioned many times, they are *not* the eternal abiding places where people hope (or fear) to go to at death.

A grievous error has been made in interpreting the Bible. But the error is not first of all concerned with heaven or hell; the error really grew out of another theory, that all men are born with what is called an 'immortal soul'. This is variously described as a 'never dying entity', a 'divine spark'; and to it are attributed all the characteristics of what is termed 'the real man' – personality, conscience, reason and understanding, emotions and all the moral qualities of which man is capable. The *body* is said to be mortal and corruptible, turning to dust and ashes after death, whereas the *soul* is immortal and incorruptible and lives on in endless bliss or misery.

And, of course, once one has accepted such a view of human nature, then a belief in some other place or places as the abiding and continuing home(s) of the soul after death becomes a logical necessity. But, if this view of human nature is incorrect, then the popular conceptions of heaven and hell may also be quite false.

We propose therefore briefly to examine the Bible teaching concerning the soul and human nature and then, on this foundation, to establish the reasonable and logical teaching of the Bible concerning the ultimate destiny of the righteous and the wicked.

The Soul

It should be stated at the outset that the phrase 'immortal soul' or 'never dying soul' or indeed any similar expressions are not to be found in the pages of the Bible. Of God alone it is written, "*Who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto*"

(1 Timothy 6:16). Man has no inherent immortality and although the word 'soul' occurs frequently in its pages, the Bible does not teach the idea of something independent of the body that lives on after death. The Bible account of the creation of man defines the 'soul' quite clearly:

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and man became a living soul" (Genesis 2:7).

It is the man himself, the body formed from the dust, energised by the breath of life, which is described as "a living soul". The original Hebrew word *nephesh* means simply 'a breathing creature' and it is used not only of man but also of animals. For example:

- "moving creatures" (margin 'souls') (Genesis 1:20);
- "living creatures" ('souls') (Genesis 2:19);
- "every living thing" ('soul') (Genesis 1:28).

It is true that *nephesh* is adopted for a variety of purposes in later Scriptures. In the Authorised Version the original word has been translated "soul" 530 times, "life" or "living" 190 times, "persons" 34 times, "beasts", etc. 28 times. Among its other renderings are "self", "heart", "mind", "appetite", "body" etc. But always its use is associated with the activity of a living, breathing creature and never does it imply anything about the duration of life. Indeed, far from ascribing immortality to the soul the Bible emphatically declares that it is both capable of dying and by its very nature liable to die:

- *"He spareth not their soul from death"* (Psalm 78:50);
- *"What man... shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave?"* (Psalm 89:48);
- *"The soul that sinneth, it shall die"* (Ezekiel 18:4).

We could have no more emphatic testimony that the soul is capable of death.

The Death State

The question remains, however: What does death involve? In the early chapters of Genesis, we read not only of the creation of man but also of his 'fall' – of the entrance of sin and death into the world. The Lord God commanded the man:

"Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die" (Genesis 2:16,17).

Disobedience to God's commandment would bring death. What death involved is made clear when God judged Adam for his sin:

"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).

There was, in effect, to be a reversal of the process of creation. Then God formed man from the dust and breathed into his lifeless body the breath of life, so that he became a living, breathing creature. So, in death, God withdraws that life-giving energy of which He alone is the source (see Job 34:14,15; Psalm 36:9); and the body corrupts and disperses into dust (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

"Dust to dust"

It may seem self-evident to say it, but before he was brought into being by the creative power of God, Adam did not exist. If death is the reversal of the creative process then the result must be a cessation of being and the disintegration of the living, breathing creature, whether he be man or animal, for so far as their natural constitution is concerned there is no difference between them: *"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence over a beast... All go to one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again"* (Ecclesiastes 3:19,20).

The Psalmist writes:

"Lord, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best is altogether vanity O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more" (Psalm 39:4,5,13).

So there is no conscious existence in death: no part of man lives on, either in heaven or hell. There is no extension of being-not even for the righteous. King Hezekiah, a faithful servant of God, wrote:

"For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee... the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day" (Isaiah 38:18,19).

And the wise man summarises the position:

"For the living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything... Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished... Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest" (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10).

In the face of such clear teaching about death, so easy to understand, what need is there for further explanation? There can be no continuing existence after death either in heaven or hell. The Bible speaks to us simply and logically and leads us inevitably to this conclusion.

This does not mean of course that there is no reward for the righteous or indeed no punishment reserved for the wicked. But whatever these might be, because of the harmony that exists throughout the Bible, such reward or punishment must be consistent with the facts that we have already established. A consideration of what the Scriptures say concerning heaven leads us smoothly onwards in our developing understanding of what the Bible teaches about these vital questions of life and death.

Heaven – God's Dwelling Place

Heaven is God's abiding place. Of course, in making such a statement we must not limit the power and transcendence of God, whom Scripture teaches to be everywhere present by his spirit. The Psalmist, meditating upon this omnipresence of God, wrote:

"Whither shall I go from thy spirit? or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there: if I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost parts of the sea; even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, Surely the darkness shall cover me; even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee; but the night shineth as the day" (Psalm 139:7-12).

When Solomon built his temple – a house for God to dwell in – he too recognised this truth:

"Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded" (1 Kings 8:27).

But though God's spirit fills all space, this truth is compatible with the fact that the Scriptures speak of a "dwelling place". On that same occasion, Solomon besought God for Israel:

"When they shall pray towards this place... then hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest forgive" (1 Kings 8:30,39,43).

"Our father which art in heaven"

The wise man wrote:

"God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few" (Ecclesiastes 5:2);

and Jesus taught his disciples to pray:

"Our father which art in heaven" (Matthew 6:9).

This concept of God's heavenly habitation is summed up in the following passages:

"...who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; whom no man hath seen, nor can see" (1 Timothy 6:16);

"The heaven, even the heavens, are the Lord's: but the earth hath he given to the children of men" (Psalm 115:16).

Man has no access into God's presence in heaven; but the Lord Jesus, God's only begotten Son, after his resurrection *"was received up into heaven and sat on the right hand of God"* (Mark 16:19).

This again is the logical conclusion to which the Scriptures have led us:

"No man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man" (John 3:13).

The Earth is Man's Inheritance

Heaven is not for man: his habitation both now and any future existence is the earth:

"The meek shall inherit the earth and shall delight themselves in the abundance of peace... For such as be blessed of him shall inherit the earth... The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell therein for ever" (Psalm 37:11,22,29).

The Lord Jesus was referring to this Psalm when he said, *"Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth" (Matthew 5:5)*. He taught his disciples to pray, *"Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven" (6:10)* And John had a vision of the redeemed (those delivered from sin and death), who sing:

"Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by thy blood... and hast made us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:9,10).

The earth, then, is man's habitation and also his promised eternal abiding place. We shall leave for a moment the question of how this inheritance on earth is granted, because first of all we must clear up some common misunderstandings about "hell".

Hell is the Grave

There are three main words in the Authorised Version which have been rendered "hell". In the Old Testament it is the Hebrew word *sheol*; in the Greek of the New Testament there are two words, *hades* and *gehenna*. The word *sheol* was commonly used to indicate the abode of the dead below the earth. It is better rendered by "the grave" or "the pit". In the Authorised Version *sheol* has been translated "grave" and "hell" on 31 occasions each, and "pit" on three occasions. *Sheol* is therefore the grave, the common place of the dead where men's bodies are subject to decay. The grave is the place where the dead *"know not anything... their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished... there is no knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave"* (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10).

"Like sheep they are laid in the grave [sheol]; death shall feed on them. and their beauty shall consume in the grave [sheol]" (Psalm 49:14).

There are no exceptions: death and the grave give to men an equality they can never find in life, for:

"There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master" (Job 3:17-19).

In the New Testament the word *hades* is the equivalent of the Hebrew *sheol*. In the Septuagint – a translation of the Old Testament into Greek, compiled approximately two hundred and fifty years before the birth of Jesus – this word is used almost without exception to represent *sheol*. In Peter's speech on the Day of Pentecost he quotes from Psalm 16 to prove the resurrection of Jesus and the Greek text of Acts uses the word *hades*:

"Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither suffer thine Holy One to see corruption" (Acts 2:27).

"Hell Fire"

The third word translated "hell" is *gehenna*, a term always associated with fire and with one exception only found in the Gospels. The relevant passages in Matthew's record of the Gospel are as follows: 5:22,29,30; 10:28; 18:9; 23:15,33. It is worth observing that there are thus only about half a dozen different references to "hell fire" in the Bible. Of course, even if there were only one, it would still need to be given careful consideration to determine its meaning.

For the purpose of our enquiry we shall take just one passage: the explanation given in this instance applies equally to all the others. We have selected the words from Mark 9 (parallel to Matthew 18:8,9) because this is undoubtedly the most explicit and comprehensive example of the Lord's teaching about Gehenna:

"And if thy hand offend thee, cut it off: it is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands to go into hell, into the fire that never shall be quenched: where their worm dieth not, and the fire is not quenched" (verses 43,44, see also 45-49).

From a superficial reading one might feel a certain repugnance about eternal fires and never-dying worms. Happily neither of these ideas is involved in a true understanding of the passage.

The word Gehenna comes from the Hebrew *Ge-Hinnom*, which was in fact a geographical location. It means the Valley of Hinnom, sometimes referred to as Tophet. It was a valley on the edge of the (then) city of Jerusalem and from the earliest times it was a place of ill repute – associated with idolatrous worship and abhorred by the Jews because of horrific practices associated with false worship: see, for example, Jeremiah 7:31-33. In the days of Josiah the valley was cleansed and its evil practices forbidden (2 Kings 23:10). Its infamy, however, lived on and it became a place for Jews to burn the refuse of the city; later they used it to dispose of the carcasses of animals and unburied criminals after execution. For this purpose and to avoid the stench of putrefaction, fires were kept burning there continually and it became synonymous with death and condemnation.

The reference to fires that are never quenched now begins to be seen more clearly: they are used to express the nature of divine judgement. The judgements of God are certain and inexorable. This indeed is what is suggested by, "Their worm dieth not" – nothing can prevent or interfere with the declared judgement of God upon those who turn their backs on Him.

Tartarus

Before leaving the subject of "hell", a brief word is appropriate about one instance of the word *tartarus* in the New Testament:

"God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell [tartarus]" (2 Peter 2:4).

In Greek mythology the word referred to a subterranean cavern, a nether-world into which the wicked were cast.

The use of this word can in no way confuse the clear teaching of Scripture as already stated. Its use arises out of the peculiar circumstances connected with the event to which Peter refers. There is some uncertainty as to the precise reference to "the angels that sinned": some have seen in these words a references to Korah, Dathan and Abiram, who, when they spoke against Moses and rebelled against God, suffered a unique punishment when *"the ground clave asunder... the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up... They went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished"* (Numbers 16:31-33),

This event would certainly provide an adequate explanation for the use of the word *tartarus* by Peter on this one occasion.

The Destiny of the Wicked

So far as the wicked are concerned, we have already established that they cannot possibly exist after death, suffering eternal torment and misery. The following passages are a selection from many:

"The wicked shall perish... they shall consume away" (Psalm 37:20).

"He shall go to the generation of his fathers; they shall never see light. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish" (Psalm 49:19,20).

"The wicked shall be cut off from the earth, and the transgressors shall be rooted out of it" (Proverbs 2:22).

"They are dead, they shall not live; they are deceased, they shall not rise: therefore hast thou visited and destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish" (Isaiah 26:14).

"They shall be punished with everlasting destruction" (2 Thessalonians 1:9).

The final punishment of the wicked is therefore annihilation, perpetual death, cut off from the land of the living for ever. This is fitting and appropriate in the light of our understanding of Bible teaching concerning life and death, "for the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23).

The Reward of the Righteous

But what of the reward of the righteous? We have seen that their eternal inheritance is the earth – an earth perfected and purged of all evil. We have, however, also learned that all men by nature are subject to death and that in death they have no conscious being. If Scriptural teaching is to be consistent, then there is only one possible way for the righteous to receive their reward: they must be made to live again by resurrection from the dead. The last Old Testament passage quoted in connection with the destiny of the wicked (Isaiah 26:1 4) spoke of their death as eternal: "*They shall not rise.*" In the same chapter, however, the prophet contrasts the fate of these with the reward of the righteous:

"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" (v. 19).

How is this to be achieved? The salvation that God offers necessitated Jesus' resurrection from the dead; and this has made it possible for all faithful men to be raised from the dead as he was. So Jesus could say, "*I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live*" (John 11:25); and on another occasion, "*For the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his [the Son of man's, i.e. Jesus'] voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation*" (John 5:28,29).

In his first Letter to the Corinthians, the apostle Paul deals at length with the resurrection of the dead, showing that it is at the very heart of the Christian hope. His challenge to some who doubted this doctrine was:

"Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead? But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain... Ye are yet in your sins... they also which are fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (15:12-18).

Resurrection

If there is no resurrection of the dead, there is no hope. But the triumphant conclusion of the apostle is:

"In fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have fallen asleep. For as by a man came death, by a man has come also the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive. But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, then at his coming those who belong to Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:20-23, RSV).

How could the apostle be more specific? Only through resurrection will life after death be achieved, and the Lord Jesus Christ is but the first of a great multitude, the first fruits of a great harvest of dead believers who will live again when Jesus returns to the earth.

There we have the key to the whole situation. While the world continues as it is now, dominated by evil men pursuing their ambition for power, it is difficult for us to envisage how the meek will ever inherit the earth, but central to the purpose of God is the second coming of Jesus to overthrow the kingdom of men; to destroy all that oppose Him and to

establish the kingdom of God, a divine society founded on principles of righteousness and equity over which he will reign for ever (see Matthew 6:10; Revelation 11:1-5; 2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Daniel 2:44; Micah 4:1-5).

Scripture teaching is not complicated and difficult to comprehend, but rational and logical.

Judgement

The Scriptures speak of two classes of people raised from the sleep of death at the last day: those who are given everlasting life, and others raised to shame and condemnation (Daniel 12:2). In fact mankind can be divided into three classes. First there are those who will not be raised from the dead, who have lived their lives in ignorance of God and His purpose and who consequently have no responsibility to Him: "*Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish*" (Psalm 49:20). Consistent with this, Daniel wrote that not all but "many of them that sleep shall awake".

For the second category – those who through their knowledge and understanding of God have become responsible to Him yet have not been faithful in their lives – there is an inevitable judgement at the great tribunal when God, through Jesus, shall judge "*every man according as his work shall be*" (Revelation 22:12). And then there is the third category: for the faithful it will be the fulfilment of all their hopes – a resurrection to eternal life, lived in a glorious incorruptible body, reigning as kings and priests upon the earth with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Some Objections Considered

It would be wrong not to acknowledge that there are some passages of Scripture which many people sincerely believe establish the orthodox teaching of the immortality of the soul and the popular conception of heaven as the abode of the righteous. Here are the chief examples of passages which might seem to teach a view contradicting what we have put forward so far:

"The Kingdom of Heaven"

This is a phrase used only in Matthew's record of the Gospel. It is assumed by some that because it refers to heaven, the actual location of the kingdom is *in* heaven. Thus, "*Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*" (Matthew 5:3) and, "*Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven*" (18:3) are taken to prove that the righteous enjoy their inheritance in heaven. If we are serious about Bible study, however, we should not jump to conclusions too easily and we should examine more carefully the phrase "kingdom of heaven" as used in Matthew and establish precisely what it means. We select just two passages which, we suggest, illustrate clearly that the kingdom of heaven is not actually located in heaven, but – in harmony with general Bible teaching – here on earth.

Matthew 13 contains a number of parables that Jesus used to illustrate his message. Most are prefaced with the words "*the kingdom of heaven is like unto*" yet some of the things that Jesus said are extremely difficult to reconcile with the thought of the soul transported to heaven at

death. For instance, in the parable of the tares, "*The field is the world... the harvest is the end of the world... As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend... Then shall the righteous shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father*" (verses 24-30,36-43). Can there really be "things that offend" in a kingdom in heaven?

After a meeting with a rich young man, who could not bring himself to sell his possessions and follow him, Jesus said, "*that a rich man can hardly [i.e. with difficulty] enter into the kingdom of heaven... It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God*" (Matthew 19:23-24). 'Kingdom of heaven' and 'kingdom of God' are parallel phrases.

Why then does Matthew employ the phrase 'kingdom of heaven'? Some verses from the Book of Daniel in the Old Testament illustrate its meaning: "*In the days of these kings shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed*" (2:44). In another chapter, Daniel writes: "*The heavens do rule*" (4:26). Even the great Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, was forced to acknowledge that "*God doeth according to his will in the army of heaven, and among the inhabitants of the earth*" and was led to "*praise and extol and honour the King of heaven*" (4:35-37). The kingdom of heaven is therefore descriptive of the rule of heaven and the phrase could reasonably be applied to any area where God's sovereignty is acknowledged. Thus Jesus taught us to pray, "*Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven*" (Matthew 6:10).

The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16)

We are now considering a *parable*. It is not fact, but Jesus is using a commonly believed fallacy – that the righteous were carried to 'Abraham's bosom' to be comforted, whereas the wicked suffer in hell. One of the points he is making is that God's standards are different from man's and may be the complete opposite of human assessments. Another is that the faith that pleases God is such that it will be prepared to believe what is written in the Scriptures. If God's Word cannot convince them, nothing can: "*If they hear not Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead*" (verse 31).

Notice how the detail of the parable is completely irreconcilable with commonly held views of immortal souls in heaven and hell. The rich man and Lazarus were able to observe one another and speak to one another from their respective abodes. They were not immaterial spirits, but they possessed bodies with fingers, tongues etc. (verse 24).

The parable was, then, a terrible warning to wealthy and powerful Jews, who believed that merely being born a Jew would guarantee them God's blessing.

The Thief on the Cross (Luke 23:39-43)

Here we have one of the most remarkable examples in the Bible of faith. This man, dying on a cross with the Lord Jesus Christ when all others had forsaken him, manifested a belief in the Gospel of the kingdom of God, accepting the resurrection of Jesus and anticipating his own resurrection in the day of Christ's coming in glory. The assurance that Jesus gave him was, "*Verily I say unto thee today thou shalt be with me in paradise*" (verse 43). Observe that we have not punctuated this promise. This is important, for in the original Greek text there

was no punctuation as we understand it. Commas etc. are inserted in the English translation according to the sense of the language, and the placing of the comma before the word "today" in the Authorised Version is debatable. It could with equal validity be placed *after* the word "today", thus changing the emphasis and sense of the words: "*Verily I say unto thee today, thou shalt be with me in paradise.*" In other words, "I am telling you now that your request will be granted".

In any case, to read the words as an assurance that they should both that very day be united in heaven is inconsistent with other Bible teaching. We have already referred to Psalm 16 (quoted in Acts 2), which tells us clearly that the soul of Jesus was not in heaven but in hell, from where he was raised on the third day: "*Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.*"

There are more Scriptures that we could examine in this way. The instances we have considered, however, should help us to appreciate that apparently contradictory passages have adequate explanations consistent with Bible teaching as a whole.

Conclusion

What then is our reaction to these Bible truths? They are not just intended as facts to be assimilated by the mind; they should affect our whole outlook on life. Appreciating the true nature of death, we should realise that life is our time of opportunity. As Hezekiah wrote,

"The grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day" (Isaiah 38:18-19).

The issue is one of life and death. Upon our decision depends our eternal future: the oblivion of perpetual death or the glorious awakening to life everlasting at the return of Jesus! How urgent it is therefore that we embrace the hope of the Gospel while time remains, lest we die "*having no hope, and without God in the world*" (Ephesians 2:12).

-- Dudley Fifield