

Is there life after death? (D. Mar)

I have received many questions like this. While there are many approaches to this question, this response to the seeker is an example.

1. Because the only objective data we can refer to is from the Bible, the seeker must establish whether the Bible is completely true or not. Look into how God's word was passed down to us in its origin and transmission, and understand why there are different Bible translations based on their source material and translation approach. Consider as well, how biblical archaeology confirms people, places, events, and cultural practices of the Bible. If the seeker is not convinced that God's word is not all true, then we have no basis for discussion.

2. The seeker should determine how objective his reading skill is. A good objective method of reading is: the more you observe, the less you need to interpret. Read by asking, "what do I see?" before asking, "what does it mean?" If the seeker is unaware of hermeneutics, the science of reading, encourage him to take the time to explore biblical hermeneutics. And this skill transfers very well across all aspects of one's literary life.

3. When you study John 12:49-50, Jesus speaks of eternal life. Whatever Jesus reveals comes explicitly from His Father; thus, whatever concepts we derive from the New Testament must find its basis in the Old. If an interpretation is solely derived from the New Testament, without any basis in the Old Testament, then it is incorrect.

For I did not speak from Myself, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." (John 12:49-50)

4. When you study Genesis 17:7-8, God makes a covenant with Abraham informing what He will be and who He chooses: 1) He will be God, and 2) He chooses to be God to Abraham and to His descendants. Abraham's descendants in the Old Testament were those who obeyed the Mosaic Covenant (the Law), and in the New Testament, those who had faith in Jesus Christ (Rom 4:16-25), which the apostle Paul defines in explaining the transition from the Old to the New Covenant. Note carefully that in this unilateral and unconditional covenant between God and Abraham, God chooses one after he comes to faith (like Abraham). Nowhere in the Old Testament, does God chooses to be God to a non-Believer (Eph 2:11-12).

And I will establish My covenant between Me and you and your seed after you throughout their generations for an everlasting covenant, to be God to you and to your seed after you. And I will give to you and to your seed after you, the land of your sojournings, all the land of Canaan, for an everlasting possession; and I will be their God." (Gen 17:7-8)

5. When you study the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 15:17-18), God defines the scope of the Promised Land in the first book of the Bible. In the last book of the Bible, Revelation, the earth that we know of goes away, and on the New Earth, God defines the dimensions of New Jerusalem where Believers will reside (Rev 21:10-17). Because the dimensions of the Promised Land match that of New Jerusalem, we see that God's Promised Land is the future New Jerusalem that comes well after the end of human history.

Now it happened that the sun had set, and it was very dark, and behold, there appeared a smoking oven and a flaming torch which passed between these pieces. On that day Yahweh cut a covenant with Abram, saying,

"To your seed I have given this land,
From the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates: (Gen 15:17-18)

And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city,... (continues)

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Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like precious stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper. It had a great and high wall. It had twelve gates and at those gates, twelve angels; and names have been written on those gates, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the sons of Israel. There were three gates on the east and three gates on the north and three gates on the south and three gates on the west. And the wall of the city had twelve foundation stones, and on them were the twelve names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. And the one who spoke with me had a gold measuring rod to measure the city and its gates and its wall. And the city is laid out as a square, and its length is as great as the width; and he measured the city with the rod, 12,000 stadia; its length and width and height are equal. And he measured its wall, 144 cubits, according to human measurements, which are also angelic measurements. (Rev 21:10-17)

6. God works within a judicial framework that is established by His divine covenants for the expressed purpose of establishing His kingdom, which requires people and land. The Mosaic Covenant has two purposes: 1) teach one how to be holy (what sin is and how to atone for it), and 2) determines who enters the Promised Land. Just before stipulating the Law, God defines what faith is with a conditional statement; faith is not something God bestows or gifts.

a) Believe that the invisible God is historically real and alive.

You yourselves have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I lifted you up on eagles' wings and brought you to Myself. (Ex 19:4)

While the Old Testament uses the Exodus as the supernatural demonstration that the invisible God of the Bible is historically real, the New Testament uses Jesus Christ in the same fashion.

For the Law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has seen God at any time; the only begotten God who is in the bosom of the Father, He has explained Him. (John 1:18-19)

Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me. If you have come to know Me, you will know My Father also; from now on you know Him, and have seen Him." Philip said to Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it is enough for us." Jesus said to him, "Have I been with you all so long and have you not come to know Me, Philip? He who has seen Me has seen the Father; how can you say, 'Show us the Father'?" (John 14:5-9)

b) A trust in that belief that engenders obedience to His word.

So now then, if you will indeed listen to My voice and keep My covenant, then you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.' These are the words that you shall speak to the sons of Israel." (Ex 19:5-6)

While faith in the Old Testament is conditioned on obedience to the Mosaic Law, faith in the New Testament is conditioned on obedience to Jesus Christ who died and paid the price for our sins.

Do not think that I came to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I did not come to abolish but to fulfill. For truly I say to you, until heaven and earth pass away, not the smallest letter or stroke shall pass from the Law until all is accomplished. (Matt 5:17-18)

He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus... (continues)

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answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our dwelling with him. (John 14:21-23)

c) We know that Exodus 19:4-6 is God's definition of faith, because of its outcome: "then you shall be My treasured possession among all the peoples, for all the earth is Mine; and you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation." In the New Testament, Peter refers to both Genesis 17:7-8 and Exodus 19:4-6, faith in Jesus Christ results in the same outcome:

But you are a chosen family, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession, so that you may proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; for you once were not a people, but now you are the people of God; you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy. (1 Pet 2:9-10)

7. In preparation for life after death, Jesus Christ prepares a place for those who have faith in Him.

Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father's house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that where I am, there you may be also. And you know the way where I am going." Thomas said to Him, "Lord, we do not know where You are going. How do we know the way?" Jesus said to him, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me. (John 14:1-6)

8. Some time after the end of human history, under God's judicial framework, there is a determination of who are qualified as "people for God's own possession."

And Jesus cried out and said, "He who believes in Me, does not believe in Me but in Him who sent Me. And he who sees Me sees the One who sent Me. I have come as Light into the world, so that everyone who believes in Me will not remain in darkness. And if anyone hears My words and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world, but to save the world. He who rejects Me and does not receive My words, has one who judges him; the word I spoke is what will judge him on the last day. For I did not speak from Myself, but the Father Himself who sent Me has given Me a commandment—what to say and what to speak. And I know that His commandment is eternal life; therefore the things I speak, I speak just as the Father has told Me." (John 12: 44-50)

For it is written, "As I live, says the Lord, to Me every knee shall bow, And every tongue shall confess to God." So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. (Rom 14:11-12)

Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sits upon it, from whose presence earth and heaven fled away, and no place was found for them. Then I saw the dead, the great and the small, standing before the throne, and books were opened; and another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged from the things which were written in the books, according to their deeds. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it, and death and Hades gave up the dead which were in them, and they were judged, every one of them according to their deeds. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone's name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire. (Rev 20:11-15; Dan 12:1-3)

9. Life after death, exemplified by Jesus Christ's resurrection, is determined by one's faith.

Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die—ever. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26)