

CAN THE DEAD RECEIVE THE GOSPEL?

The Bible consistently presents acceptance of the gospel (the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus Christ for our sins as stated in 1 Corinthians 15:1-4) as an urgent matter to be settled before death. To die without the gospel is the ultimate calamity.

". . .Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2).

". . .To-day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts. . ." (Hebrews 2:7,8).

". . .As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked; but that the wicked turn from his way and live: turn ye, turn ye from your evil ways; for why will ye die. . .?" (Ezekiel 33:11).

". . .It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27).

Identical words are used in the original language of the Bible to describe the everlasting duration of life experienced either in God's presence or in fiery punishment (Matthew 25:46). Which it will be is determined by one's spiritual condition at the time of death, as graphically portrayed in the New Testament account of the rich man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19-31). If one is a believer like Abraham (Luke 16:22; Romans 4:3-5) he will be saved from eternal punishment. However, Luke 16:26 specifically rules out any possibility of a post-death bridging of the gap between hell and heaven. In other words, those who die and go to the place of separation from God can never be rescued.

Two excerpts from 1 Peter 1 (3:18-20 and 4:6) are sometimes thought to teach that the gospel is indeed preached to the dead and accepted in the spirit world. However, on the basis of the previously demonstrated Bible doctrine, remembering that God cannot contradict Himself (2 Timothy 2:13), no other scripture could possibly teach reception of the gospel after death. Upon careful examination it will be discovered that the objects of the preaching in 1 Peter were actually alive at the time they heard the gospel, but at the time of Peter's writing they were dead.

Some have tragically misunderstood the Savior's words in John 11:25, ". . .He that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." It is mistakenly interpreted to mean that unbelieving dead people may come to saving faith. However, a clearer translation reads, ". . .He who believes in me shall live even if he dies." And the very next verse conclusively declares one must be physically alive at the time he believes (accepts) the gospel and is thereby made forever spiritually alive, prepared to live in God's presence throughout eternity. ". . .Whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?" (John 11:26).