

AFTERLIFE, questions & answers on the

This Thinksheet is not a catechetical Q&A but rather a discussion starter & guide. Proof-texters can find "biblical" support for whatever their afterlife-views, but canonical exegesis (i.e. seeing the Bible as a whole) requires that every text-supported view be treated with respect & mined for wisdom in "the living of these days." A side-benefit of the canonical perspective is that it requires persons in dialog on this & all other subjects to respect (1) one another's perspectives & (2) one another. In its recording of various points of view on this & many other subjects, the Bible itself is a model of what I like to call "staying at the table," humbly hoping for more access to truth while being courageous in proclaiming Truth as it has accessed us & such truths as we, within the limits of our finitude & sin, are convinced that we have accessed.

1 Do human beings survive death?

Answer #1 (probably the oldest): No, we should praise God now because we can't later (Ps.6.6: KJV, "no remembrance of thee" [God]; TANAKH, "there is no praise of You among the dead"). Gotta hurry up & praise God because when you're dead you're dead. An atheist Jew said to me that the only reason people are religious is to hedge their afterlife-bets--& was speechless when I indicated that his people's religion was well developed before they came to believe in a communicable afterlife (in advance of the "shades" of Sheol & Hades). Here is a permanent in biblical religion: God is so central that it is at least as if we, in doing our thing, are no more important/permanent than grass, in doing its thing (Is.40.8 TANAKH: "Grass withers,...-- But the word of our God is always fulfilled!").

Answer #2: Yes, at death the "soul" "shuffles off this mortal coil," i.e. the body. In Western civilization, this Hindic-Greek view for two millenia has been competitive with the Jewish-&-Christian doctrine of resurrection (which affirms soul/body/body/soul unity, with Jesus' resurrection as "first fruit" [1Cor.15.20,23]). Plato's PHAEDO, on the death of Socrates, has been the West's most influential pagan exposition of body/soul dualism as a picture of humanity's survival of death, i.e. immortality.

Answer #3: Some perhaps. (The hopeful answer.)

Answer #4: Who knows? (The agnostic answer.)

2 Does how we live here have any bearing on what becomes of us there?

Answer #1: No, the next life will be better for everybody.

Answer #2: Yes, life before & after death is a moral continuum.

Answer #3: No, nothing happens to us after death.

3 Does what we think about "there" have any bearing on life "here"?

Answer #1: No.

Answer #2: Yes. Monstrously, in the "9/11" & "suicide bombers" cases.

4 Since the afterlife is an impenetrable mystery, why even think about it?

Answer #1: Not doing so is really an option (in light of human history)?

Answer #2: Life here isn't a mystery? Do you personally think only about those aspects you consider not mysterious?

5 Who will be saved?

Answer #1: Nobody (see 1.1 [above]).

Answer #2: Everybody (compare 1.2 [above]). God "desires everyone to be saved" (1Tim.2.4; Jesus "gave himself [as] a ransom for all" [vv.5-6]), &--say the universalists--what God wants he'll ultimately get. "All will be made alive in Christ" (1Cor.15.22; the passage end at vs.28 with God "in all"). But even though the Bible has quite a few texts of this import, the idea is an affirmation of love & hope, not an article of faith (for as that it would trivialize human freedom & life's moral dimension).

Answer #3: Some, the others either ceasing to exist (Jn.3.16) or living an afterlife they'd rather not have (viz. hell: Mt.25.46).

6 Whom will the saved meet in the afterlife?

Centrally, the Savior: follow him here, meet him there.

7 What will the saved do in the afterlife?

Centrally, worship (Rev.22.3 NRSV: "his servants will worship him.").