

## Can We See Beyond the Veil?

John 3.11-13; 14.1-3; Revelation 1.17-18

The great mystery of life is death – the unavoidable fate of every person who has ever lived: *It is appointed unto men once to die* (Hebrews 9.27). Science can show us distant galaxies and tiny atoms, but it cannot reach beyond the grave. Is there any *trustworthy* way to know?

- Blind leading the blind: Unreliable sources of knowledge
  - *Channeling and spirit mediums*
  - *Reincarnation and 'past lives'*
  - *Near-death experiences*
- Only God reveals: Reliable sources of knowledge
  - *The OT introduction to the afterlife: Sheol*
    - Confusing translations: Hell? The grave? The 'pit'?
    - Better: 'Place of the dead' – departed spirits
    - In OT times, both good and evil go there.
    - A conscious experience of joy or misery
  - *The NT development of the afterlife: Hades (Luke 16.19-31)*
    - It is the destiny for believers and unbelievers
    - It has two 'compartments' -- torment and blessing
    - 'Residents' are fully conscious of where they are
    - Their destiny is irreversible and just, and they know it

1. If there is one thing Satan wants to prevent people from thinking about, it is the finality of death, and the eternity which lies beyond. He is the great deceiver (Rev. 12.9) and the father of lies (Jn. 8.44). How does Satan get us to confuse, distort, or mock the idea that what we believe and how we live will affect our eternal future? How does Hollywood treat this issue?
2. It is self-evident that any reliable information about our experience beyond this life must come from someone who is from that sphere – who has been there, and can tell us about it. Since Satan is a liar, we can't trust what his agents – spirit mediums, eastern mysticism, or subjective near-death experiences – tell us. In John 3.11-13, Jesus speaks to Nicodemus about 'earthly' and 'heavenly' things. What unique perspective does Jesus, as the Son of God, bring to us?
3. While most Christians are not taken in by spirit mediums or eastern mysticism, near-death experiences have captivated many. Dozens of books have been written describing out-of-body experiences, seeing relatives who have died, or encountering a being of light. The visions of Stephen (Acts 7.56) and Paul (2 Cor. 12.1-4) are appealed to by some as evidence that these are real – but are they the same? Many near-death accounts describe 'Christ' in unbiblical ways, and Satan, we know, is a deceiver (see 2 Cor. 11.14)! While we can't judge all near-death experiences, one thing is for sure: We cannot accept them as authoritative revelations of what ultimately awaits us after death.
4. The Hebrew word *sheol* (used 65x in the OT) is often translated *hell*, but both righteous and unrighteous go there (contrast Gen. 37.35 and Num. 16.30). One thing is clear: There *is* conscious experience after death. The Greek word *hades* translates *sheol* in the New Testament. What can we learn about *hades* from Luke 16.19-31?

