

The Discerner

the voice of... **Religion Analysis Service**

A QUARTERLY EXPOSING
UNBIBLICAL TEACHING & MOVEMENTS

Volume 33, Number 3

July • August • September 2013

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Hare Krishna

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*"Hereby know we the spirit of truth
and the spirit of error" 1 John 4:6*

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Religion Analysis Service

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RAS TEAM NOTES

We congratulate our President, Steve Lagoon, has just finished his M-Div. at Northwestern College in Roseville, Minnesota. God willing, Steve hopes to embark soon on a ThM degree in Theology at Luther Seminary in St. Paul.

Steve's educational program has been interrupted several times in the past due to family and economic needs. He has also accepted a new pastoral position in Randolph, MN.

Larry and Shirley Sutherland are celebrating their 60th year of marriage this year. They are parents of five, grandparents of nine, and great-grandparents of five.

Our new RAS brochure is enclosed. Please refer to it for addresses and research items. Please remember RAS in prayer as we consider a significant outreach program among colleges and churches. Extra copies of our brochure for individual use can be secured upon request. "Thank you" for your letters, notes, calls, and gifts!

DEAR READER

So many current events have sobered serious Christians lately. For instance, there is ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the tension among world leaders is palpable. At home, nature's forces have been unleashed in Colorado with huge floods of "biblical proportions"- this after damaging forest fires (conflagrations) in California and Colorado, and a giant boardwalk fire (arson?) in New Jersey. Economic woes threaten whole blocks of nations and here in the USA health care issues and heightened unemployment figures portend discouraging times ahead. And we recall with smoldering shock how many states have subverted biblical and traditional marriage for unnatural, abominable sexual perversions. No wonder that America's "exceptionalism" is being questioned on every hand.

All of the above affects us all. 2. Thessalonians describes the "latter days" as abounding in lawlessness (anomia), and Luke's Gospel says that they will be times of perplexity/distress (aporia). In view of this, the Word of God must again assume its central position on our coffee tables and bedside stands, car amatures, and vest pockets. Above all, we must treasure the Word of God in our hearts and minds (1. Peter 3:15) and be ready always to witness for Jesus Christ by life and word. If we do, the devil with all his wiles and machinations will not be able to thwart God's purposes in us. In view of all God's promises for now and the future, may our prayer be: "Lord, cleanse me from every defilement of the flesh and the spirit...help me to perfect holiness in the fear of God!" (Paraphrase of 2. Corinthians 7:1).

Wishing you God's blessings these days,

Laurence J. Sutherland

WITH THIS ISSUE

We should never tire in the careful exposition and examination of the great themes of God's Word. As we do so, we are quick to discover any subtractions or additions to them. This is well demonstrated and delineated in Rev. Lagoon's article on the Jehovah's Witnesses as they deviate strongly from evangelical belief about the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the grave. This intriguing analysis serves as a strong message against JW error.

Our second article concerns itself with Joel Osteen, pastor of Houston's Lakewood Church, who is absolutely opposed to certain basic tenets of traditional biblical and evangelical doctrines. Gary Gilley, patiently and analytically charts and refutes Osteen's popular but unbiblical "health and wealth" preaching. We at RAS would like to hear your reaction to this presentation.

Our final contribution is a clear presentation of the so-called "Intermediate State". This is a relatively dark area in our theological thinking, and the biblical references are relatively few. Frank Norris, the former pastor of the giant First Baptist Church in Dallas, Texas, gives us a clear exposition of the various dimensions of this topic such as Sheol/Hades/Abraham's Bosom and Gehenna from both Testaments. This study should help us in any rebuttal to those who advance Annihilation or Universalism.

The quiz centers on the Ancient World. Score yourself and let us know if you achieved 70% or better.

Laurence J. Sutherland

THE JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES' DENIAL OF CHRIST'S RESURRECTION

by Steve Lagoon

The resurrection of Jesus Christ stands at the heart of the Christian faith. It is central to the Christian gospel (1 Corinthians 15:1-4). Essential to the doctrine of the resurrection of Jesus Christ is that He (in fact) rose bodily out of the grave. Indeed, in what sense could it be considered a resurrection if Christ's body remained dead in the ground?

That is why the bodily resurrection of Christ has been the target of so many false teachers and critics of Christianity who twist and distort this most important doctrine. In this article, we will specifically focus on the false teachings of the Jehovah's Witnesses (or Watchtower) concerning the resurrection.

The basic thesis of the Jehovah's Witnesses is that Jesus did not rise bodily from the grave, but rather, He rose only spiritually. For instance, rather than affirming Christ's bodily Resurrection, the Watchtower states: "Disposing of Jesus' physical body at the time of the resurrection presented no problems for God."¹

In another place, the Watchtower says: "It follows that Christ could not take his body back again in the resurrection, thereby taking back the sacrifice offered to God for mankind."²

Since Jehovah's Witnesses deny the physical or bodily resurrection of Christ, they essentially have no resurrection since the only sense in which they affirm Christ was raised was as a spirit or life-force.

For example, the Watchtower says:

"As a spirit Son of God, Jesus Christ was able to ascend back to heaven."³

The problem for Jehovah's Witnesses is that they have defined the spirit or life-force that was within Jesus during His earthly existence as merely impersonal:

"Thus, after a person dies, his spirit does not exist as an immaterial being that can think and carry out plans apart from the body."⁴
Likewise, they teach that, "When that Ru'ach, or active life-force,

1 Reasoning from the Scriptures, New York, and (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, INC., 1985, 1989) 217.

2 (Aid to Bible Understanding, New York, Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, Brooklyn New York, 1971) 1396.

3 God's Eternal Purpose Now Triumphant for Man's Good, New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society, 1974) 155.

4 Reasoning from the Scriptures, New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1985, 1989) 385.

leaves the body, the person's thoughts perish; they do not continue in another realm."⁵

The reality is, then, that Jehovah's Witnesses, despite their claims to the contrary, do not really believe in Christ's resurrection.

1 Corinthians 15:50

Jehovah's Witnesses deny the physical nature of Christ's resurrection by distorting certain passages of Scripture. For instance, they appeal to 1 Corinthians 15:50: "I declare to you brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

They suppose that this proves that Jesus' resurrection cannot be physical and therefore must be spiritual. However, the phrase "flesh and blood" is an idiom that stands for natural unregenerate man in contrast to the supernatural working of God.

In other words, Paul was arguing that outside of the supernatural power of God, unregenerate natural (flesh and blood) man cannot inherit the kingdom of God. In order to inherit the kingdom, then, natural man must be changed by the supernatural power of God. "The perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality" (1 Corinthians 15:53).

Indeed, if we follow Paul's argument in the same passage, he states: "The body that is sown is perishable, it is raised imperishable; it is sown in dishonor, it is raised in glory; it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power; it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42b-44).

Notice the repeated emphasis on the continuity between the body that had perished with the resurrection body by the repetition of "it." In other words, the resurrection body is the same body that was laid in the grave. This then is a strong affirmation of the physicality of Christ's resurrection body, in accordance with the whole purpose of Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.

1 Peter 3:18

The Jehovah's Witnesses also point to 1 Peter 3:18 where Peter says: "For Christ also died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but made alive in the spirit" (RSV).

They point to the phrase "in the spirit" and claim this as proof that Jesus died physically, but was raised only as a spirit. The confusion is

5 Reasoning from the Scriptures, New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, 1985, 1989) 383.

easily cleared up by the New International Version's rendering: "He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit" or the King James Version's "but quickened by the Spirit."

Peter's point is not to deny the physical nature of Christ's resurrection body, but rather to show the agent of the resurrection, namely the Holy Spirit. The context supports this understanding. Peter points out in the next verse (1 Peter 3:19) that it was by the power of the same Holy Spirit that Christ "preached to the spirits in prison."

How Did Christ Apparently Move Through Walls?

But how do Jehovah's Witnesses interpret those New Testament passages that speak of Christ's appearance in bodily form. They argue that Jesus simply materialized bodies temporarily to create the illusion of resurrection:

"Jesus evidently materialized bodies on these occasions, as angels had done in the past when appearing to humans."⁶ Otherwise, they ask, how was Jesus able to apparently able to move through walls (John 20:19-20), or through His grave clothes (John 20:6-7)? Therefore, they conclude, His resurrected body must have been spiritual and not physical (except for brief periods of materialization).

However, the text never says that Jesus walked through solid walls or doors, nor does it say He passed through His grave clothes. We can only speculate as to how Jesus was able to enter the locked room or leave His grave clothes. To be sure, these events were miraculous, but no more miraculous than when Jesus walked on water (Matthew 14:25). The fact that Jesus walked on water does not imply that His body was not real or physical, and neither does the miracle of leaving His grave clothes or emerging in a closed room imply that He was anything less than physical.

Another example is found in Acts 8:39-40: "When they came up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord suddenly took Philip away, and the eunuch did not see him again, but went on his way rejoicing. Philip, however, appeared as Azotus and traveled about." Would anyone argue that Philip was not truly physical, merely because he was moved in a supernatural way from one location to another? Would anyone argue that the bread Jesus multiplied was only illusory or immaterial, because of the miraculous way Jesus multiplied it (John 6:1-14)?

It may be that rather than moving through walls, Jesus was actually moving through "dimensions." We should not let our limited understanding about the nature of reality force us into unwarranted and unbiblical conclusions about the nature of Christ's resurrected body.

6 Reasoning from the Scriptures, New York, and (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, INC., 1985, 1989) 217.

Mark's Report of Jesus in Another Form?

False teachers often point to Mark's statement that Jesus appeared in a different form after the resurrection (Mark 16:12). It is important to keep in mind that this passage is in the much disputed ending of Mark's gospel as the note in the New International Version indicates "The earliest manuscripts and some other ancient witnesses do not have Mark 16:9-20." Therefore, we should exercise caution when appealing to this passage for support of a doctrine. Nonetheless, we do know that Jesus appeared in a different form in the sense that His resurrected body was a glorified body, albeit still a physical one as Jesus Himself made clear:

"Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:38-39). Just to drive home the point, He had a little dinner with the disciples in His resurrection body (Luke 24:40-43).

Was Christ Recognized After the Resurrection?

Not to give up easy, the Jehovah's Witnesses state:

"While Jesus appeared to Thomas in a body similar to the one in which He was put to death, He also took on different bodies when appearing to His followers. Thus Mary Magdalene at first thought that Jesus was a gardener. At other times His disciples did not at first recognize Him."⁷

Further, they point to the fact that two of Jesus' disciples didn't even recognize Him after the resurrection as He walked with them on the road to Emmaus (Luke 24:13-32). Jehovah's Witnesses suggest that the disciples on the road to Emmaus did not recognize Jesus because when He materialized temporary bodies, they did not look like Jesus had looked before the cross.

But the text itself tells the real reason why His disciples did not recognize Him. It wasn't because Jesus resurrected body had a different appearance than it had previously, but rather, Luke tells us that the disciples "were kept from recognizing him" (Luke 24:16), and later "their eyes were opened and they recognized him" (Luke 24:31). In other words, even after the resurrection, Jesus looked like Jesus! *So much so, that His disciples had to be kept from recognizing Him.*

Mary Magdalene in the Garden

Again, the Jehovah's Witnesses point to John's account of Jesus' appearance to Mary Magdalene (John 20:10-18). They point out

7 You Can Live Forever In Paradise On Earth, New York (Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, INC., 1982) 145.

that Jesus' resurrection appearances must have been in bodies that Jesus temporarily materialized for the occasion, because instead of recognizing Jesus, Mary thought He looked like a gardener (John 20:15). In response, one merely has to point out the reasons for Mary's mistake.

To begin with, she thought with good reason that Jesus was dead, and naturally didn't expect to see Him. Also, it is early in the morning, not the full light of day. Further, Mary has been crying (John 20:10). Most importantly, the text specifically says that Mary "turned toward Him" (John 20:16) when He said her name, indicating that she had not looked closely at Him till then.

Also, it is sometimes noted that Jesus told Mary Magdalene, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father" (John 20:17). It is then supposed that Jesus didn't want Mary to touch Him, because His body was not real, but only spiritual.

The obvious problem with this view is that on the very same day (and a week later), Jesus was touched by other disciples (Matthew 28:9 and John 20:27). The context in John makes it clear that Jesus' point to Mary Magdalene was not to prohibit her from touching Him (as though He had no real physical body), but rather because she would have to let Jesus go. Rather than to stay and cling to Jesus, she would have to "Go instead to my brothers, and tell them" about the resurrection.

That is to say that Mary (and all the disciples) needed to let Jesus go in preparation for the time when He would leave for good and in His place send the indwelling Holy Spirit.

What About the Nail Prints?

In addition to the above, to deny that Jesus actually rose bodily from the grave is to make Jesus a liar. It would mean that the nail prints in His hands weren't really made at Calvary, but were whipped up to fool people into thinking that the resurrected body was the same one that hung on the cross, when in fact it wasn't.

In his gospel, the apostle John made Jesus' bodily resurrection clear: "Jesus answered them, 'Destroy this temple, and I will raise it again in three days.' . . . *But the temple he had spoken of was his body*" (John 2:19, 21).

Occasionally, skeptics of the bodily resurrection will argue that the idea of a general resurrection of all believers' bodies is non-sense because of the fact that at death our bodies are broken down and scattered; the elements of which are evermore present in the circle of life.

I note the opinion of the great early church theologian Saint Augustine:

“At the resurrection the substance of our bodies, however disintegrated, will be reunited. We maintain no fear that the omnipotence of God cannot recall all the particles that have been consumed by fire or by beasts, or dissolved into dust and ashes, or decomposed into water, or evaporated into air.”⁸

Indeed, if God was able to create Adam from the dust of the earth in the first place (Genesis 2:7), we have no problem believing He can do it again. Further, the Scriptures make it clear that our resurrection bodies will be like Christ’s (1 Corinthians 15:20, 49; 1 John 3:2). Therefore, if, as we have seen, Christ’s resurrection was physical, Christians should expect the same.

Yet many scoff at the idea of the resurrection. I love the response of the French philosopher Blaise Pascal: “What reason have atheists for saying that we cannot rise again? Which is the more difficult, to be born, or to rise again? That what has never been, should be, or that what has been, should be again? Is it more difficult to come into being than to return to it?”⁹

Let us as Christians, stand up for the essential Christian doctrine of the bodily resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ and stand against those who would deny this important truth.

8 Saint Augustine, *The City of God*, 22:2, as quoted in *The Great Quotations*, Edited by George Seldes, New Jersey (Castle Books, 1966) 70.

9 Blaise Pascal, *Pensees*, 24, as quoted in *The encyclopedia of Religious Quotations*, Frank S. Mead, Ed. (Fleming H. Revell Company, 1965) 380.

Rev. Steve Lagoon is president of Religion Analysis Service, writes often for *The Discerner*, and has a sharp eye for distortions of the witness to the authority of the Scriptures.

Joel Osteen and The Prosperity Gospel

by Gary Gilley

The New Age book and video by Rhonda Byrne, *The Secret*, which gained popularity recently due to Oprah Winfrey's strong promotion, teaches that we can "create [our] own happiness through the law of attraction." Whether it is cash, health, prosperity or happiness, all can be ours if we will just learn to use "the secret." Byrne tells us, "Disease cannot live in a body that is in a healthy emotional state." But be warned: "If you have a disease and you are focusing on it and talking to people about it, you are going to create more disease cells."¹

Such rhetoric should sound familiar to anyone even faintly aware of the Word of Faith Movement, often termed "the prosperity gospel." This group has been infiltrating evangelicalism for decades and is now the fastest growing segment of Christianity in the world. Some have estimated that up to 90 percent of those claiming to be Christians in Africa are of the prosperity gospel variety.

Well-known personalities within the movement include Kenneth Hagin (deceased), Kenneth Copeland, Robert Tilton, Paul Yonggi Cho, Benny Hinn, Marilyn Hickey, Frederick Price, John Avanzini, Charles Capps, Jerry Savelle, Morris Cerullo, Joyce Meyer and Paul and Jan Crouch.

As implied by the title "Word of Faith," the supporters of this movement believe that faith works like a mighty power or force. Through faith we can obtain anything we want — health, wealth, success, or whatever we please. However, this force is released only through the **spoken word**. As we speak words of faith, power is discharged to accomplish our desires.

In *Christianity in Crisis*, Hank Hanegraaff summarizes the theology of Kenneth Hagin (considered by many to be the father of this movement) as found in his booklet *How to Write Your Own Ticket with God*:

In the opening chapter, titled "Jesus Appears to Me," Hagin claims that while he was "in the Spirit," Jesus told him to get a pencil and a piece of paper. He then instructed him to "write down: 1, 2, 3, 4."

¹ Taken from The Secret DVD

Jesus then allegedly told Hagin that “if anybody, anywhere, will take these four steps or put these four principles into operation, he will always receive whatever he wants from Me or from God the Father.” That includes whatever you want financially. The formula is simply: “Say it, Do it, Receive it, and Tell it.”

1) Step number one is “Say it.” “Positive or negative, it is up to the individual. According to what the individual says, that shall he receive.”

2) Step number two is “Do it.” “Your action defeats you or puts you over. According to your action, you receive or you are kept from receiving.”

3) Step number three is “Receive it.” We are to plug into the “powerhouse of heaven.” “Faith is the plug, praise God! Just plug in.”

4) Step number four is, “Tell it so others may believe.” This final step might be considered the Faith movement’s outreach program.²

Kenneth Copeland states the faith formula this way: “All it takes is 1) seeing or visualizing whatever you need, whether physical or financial; 2) staking your claim on Scripture; and 3) speaking it into existence.”³

Paul Yonggi Cho, pastor of the world’s largest church in South Korea, borrowing from the occult, has developed what he calls the “Law of Incubation.” Here is how it works: “First make a clear-cut goal, then draw a mental picture, vivid and graphic, to visualize success. Then incubate it into reality, and finally speak it into existence through the creative power of the spoken word.”⁴

If a positive confession of faith releases good things, a negative confession can actually backfire. Capps says the tongue “can kill you, or it can release the life of God within you.” This is so because, “Faith is a seed . . . you plant it by speaking it.” There is power in “the evil fourth dimension” says Cho.

Hagin informs us that if you confess sickness you get sickness, if you confess health you get health; whatever you say you get. The spoken word releases power — power for good or power for evil is the commonly held view of the movement. It is easy to see why the title “positive confession” is often applied to this group.

2 Hank Hanegraaff, *Christianity in Crisis* (Eugene, Oregon: Harvest House Publishers, 1993), p. 74, 75.

3 *Ibid.*, p. 80.

4 *Ibid.*, pp. 83, 84.

As you might guess, the teachings of the “Word of Faith” movement are very attractive to some. If we can produce whatever our hearts desire by simply demanding what we want by faith, if we can manipulate the universe and perhaps even God, then we have our own personal genie just waiting to fulfill our wishes. The similarities between Word of Faith teachings and *The Secret* are unmistakable.

The New Look: Joel Osteen

Many Christians can discern the obvious error of New Age teachings behind *The Secret* and similar books such as Eckhart Tolle’s *The New Earth* (another Oprah favorite), as well as the over-the-top proclamations of many within the prosperity gospel movement. However when similar teachings are repackaged, reworded and presented in a winsome fashion, a larger number will fall prey. Enter Joel Osteen and his brand of the prosperity gospel-lite. As we will see, Osteen teaches essentially the same theology as his Word of Faith mentors, but he gives it an updated twist.

Joel Osteen has become a household name due to his incredible success. He “pastors” the largest church in America, Lakewood Church in Houston, Texas, which in 2008 boasted average weekend attendance of 43,500, almost double that of its nearest competitor.⁵ Osteen took the helm of Lakewood Church in 1999 upon the death of his father, John. John Osteen was openly a prosperity gospel preacher who founded Lakewood in 1959 and had built it into a 6000 member church before his son replaced him. Joel, who until that point had given leadership to the television ministry of Lakewood and had preached only once before, was thrust into the pulpit and immediately the church began to explode. Today Lakewood services are broadcast in over 100 countries, Joel has written two multi-million seller books, and he, along with his wife, mother, and numerous musicians from Lakewood, travel throughout the world offering an event they call “A Night of Hope.” While most churches struggle to find and keep members, people are willing to purchase \$15 tickets to attend “A Night of Hope” and the auditoriums are usually packed.

Osteen has no theological training and it is obvious from his books, sermons and interviews on television that he has little knowledge of the Scripture. Nevertheless, he has caught an unprecedented wave of popularity and could clearly claim the title as the most admired pastor in America. This popularity of course is due largely to his message. Eschewing anything controversial or negative

⁵ <http://churchrelevance.com/top-100-largest-churches-in-america-of-2008/>. It is worthy of note that according to this source, attendance has dropped by 3,500 people from the previous year; a virtual megachurch in its own right.

(such as hell or judgment or even sin), Osteen proclaims a message of pure positivism. The title of his first book, *Your Best Life Now*, summarizes what Osteen has to offer his many audiences. If we will follow certain principles or steps (seven to be exact), so the storyline goes, our existence will be happy, healthy, and blessed with everything that would make this life wonderful. This is a message that appeals to the flesh of unbelievers and worldly-minded Christians and would account for the superstar status that Osteen now has. Of course this is a harsh accusation. I am charging Joel Osteen with being a false teacher: a man who has twisted the gospel to entice the fallen nature of people, who has turned God into a genie, and who has distorted Scripture to present a warm and fuzzy yet warped form of Christianity. In order to see if I am correct or just being mean-spirited, we need to turn to Osteen's actual words as found in *Your Best Life Now*.

What the reader will find in this best selling book is a mixture of common sense, helpful practical advice, and a multitude of success stories interlaced with a heavy dose of deceitful teaching. Let's begin with the gospel. It is not so much that Osteen presents a false gospel (which he seems to do in *Your Best Life Now*) but rather, no gospel at all. In a 300 page book which will be read by millions of unbelievers, the closest Osteen ever comes to the gospel is, "Work out your own salvation. Salvation is more than a onetime prayer. It is constantly working with God, dealing with the issues He brings up and keeping a good attitude, fighting through until you win the victory."⁶ What Osteen believes concerning the gospel is uncertain, but what is undeniable is that the emphasis of his ministry is maintaining a positive outlook on life rather than a right relationship with God. Except for this one sentence, the entirety of the book is taken up with "seven steps to living at your full potential" as stated in the subtitle. This theme resonates with the thinking of those whose lives and minds are in conformity with this world system rather than being "transformed by the renewing of our minds" (Rom 12:2).

It really should not surprise us that men like Osteen have caught the public's eye since they are merely telling it what it wants to hear (2 Tim 4:3) which is: we need to make the best of this life, enjoy every minute we can, because this is the best it is ever going to be. This philosophy is the world's, not God's who consistently calls us to live for higher values than this world and self (1 John 2:15-17). As Paul wrote to the church at Colossae, "Set your mind on things above, not on the things that are on the earth" (Col 3:2). Paul did not mean by this, as conservative Christians are often accused, that we are

6 Joel Osteen, *Your Best Life Now* (New York: Faith Word, 2004), p. 212.

to ignore life on this planet and go hide somewhere until the Lord returns. It means that we live for a higher purpose than personal pleasure and success “for you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God” (Col 3:3). Osteen makes no attempt to draw his readers to this higher purpose, to a life lived for God. Instead God is to be manipulated for our own pleasure. I think Osteen would appreciate Eliphaz’s advice to Job (later condemned by God), “Yield now and be at peace with Him; thereby good will come to you” (Job 22:21).

Let’s take some looks at specifics:

The Offer

Osteen’s attraction is found in what he is offering which is nothing less than a life of good health, abundance, wealth, prosperity and success, “If you develop an image of victory, success, health, abundance, joy, peace, and happiness, nothing on earth will be able to hold those things from you” (p. 5).⁷ Since these are the things most people treasure and, since Jesus informed us that “where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matt 6:21), it is predictable that the seductive promise of a map leading to these treasures would find many adherents. And it certainly does. But what specifically is being offered?

Health

If we follow the teachings of Osteen we can expect good health. His mother for example was diagnosed with terminal cancer twenty years ago, but because she confessed good health she is cancer free today (pp. 126-127). As a matter of fact, one of the highlights of the “A Night of Hope” events is the testimony by Osteen’s mother concerning her physical healing – implying of course, that those in the audience can also be healed if they will but do what Joel suggests.

Abundance

Osteen, without qualification, declares that all of us are destined for greatness of every kind: “You were born to win; you were born for greatness, you were created to be a champion in life” (p. 35), and abundance, “He wants you to live in abundance. He wants to give you the desires of your heart...God is turning things around in your favor” (p. 78). As a matter of fact, apparently irrespective of our relationship with God, “Before we were ever formed, He programmed us to live abundant lives, to be happy, healthy, and whole. But when

⁷ Quotes and page numbers throughout the rest of this book are taken from Osteen, *Your Best Life Now*.

our thinking becomes contaminated it is no longer in line with God's Word" (p. 114).

Two things should be noted at this juncture. First, the Scriptures teach no such thing. While eternal life with the Lord is the ultimate destiny of the redeemed, judgment and then the lake of fire is the ultimate destiny of the lost (2 Thess 1:9; Rev 20:14-15). In the meanwhile, in this life the rain falls on the just and the unjust, and Christians may suffer as many trials as unbelievers, perhaps more (Rom 5:3-5; James 1:2-4; 2 Cor 4:8-12, 11:23-29; Heb 11:35-40). It is true that Psalm 37:4 promises, "Delight yourself in the Lord; and He will give you the desires of your heart," but upon a little reflection it will be seen that one who delights himself in the Lord desires God, not mere material blessings, good parking spots, success in business and a nice wardrobe. Osteen's program trivializes the abundant life Jesus came to give His followers (John 10:10).

Secondly, when the prosperity teachers use the phrase "God's Word," the reader must carefully discern what is meant. Often, as in this case, "God's Word" is not a reference to the Bible but to words spoken, supposedly by God, extrabiblically through the Word of Faith adherents. Osteen then is not accusing people of being out of step with the Scriptures, but being out of step with the teachings of men such as himself. This is nothing less than a claim that God has revealed His Word apart from Scripture and through prosperity leaders.

Wealth

"God wants to increase you financially, by giving you promotions, fresh ideas and creativity" (p. 5), or so Osteen promises. How does he know this since in biblical times promotions were not common practice, fresh ideas and creativity did not carry the value they do today and wealth was not necessarily seen as a sign of God's pleasure? Someone might counter that David and Solomon were wealthy, but this was not the case for Jeremiah and Habakkuk, both godly men who lost everything. Job flourished for a time, lost it all, and then gained it back. Did one of Job's "comforters" clue him in on prosperity philosophy? Was that the turning point? Hardly. It was when Job repented of his arrogance that God restored his former affluence, and God was under no obligation to do that. The scriptural principle is that the Lord is sovereignly at work in our lives. He can choose to bless us with riches, or He can choose to bless us by taking our riches away.

So where does Osteen come up with the idea that “God wants to increase us financially?” His basis is in his very limited and selective experience. He tells us, for example, that when his father was “willing to go beyond the barriers of the past [by applying the principles found in this book], he broke that curse of poverty in our family. Now, my siblings and I, and our children, grandchildren, even great-grandchildren, are all going to experience more of the goodness of God because of what one man did” (p. 25). Of course, millions of examples throughout the world and throughout history could be given of godly people living in poverty, and the children of the wealthy wasting their inheritance and privileges, but Osteen seems to conveniently ignore such examples. Instead he is convinced “God wants to give you your own house” (p. 35). The U.S. government and the banking system seemed to agree with Osteen until the recent economic crash. Now they’re taking away many of those houses. But this does not deter Osteen; he is persuaded that we will prosper.

Prosperity

Prosperity is more than health and wealth; it includes all the good things life can give. Apparently God is working extra hard to make life easy for us. Osteen promises, “It’s going to happen... Suddenly, your situation will change for the better... He will bring your dreams to pass” (pp. 196-198). Such statements leave no room for the cancer patient who does not get better, the factory worker who is laid off and never again finds a comparable job, the athlete who has a career-ending injury, or all those losers at the “American Idol” auditions (we can be thankful for this one at least). Such people would have reason to question Osteen’s pronouncement that, “God didn’t make you to be average. God created you to excel” (p. 82). Just two minutes of reflection would unveil the fallacy of this statement. By definition everyone cannot be above average – somebody has to be in the middle of the pack, and someone has to bring up the rear. This kind of idea sounds like the familiar grade inflation going on in many of our schools and universities today. If ninety percent of students all make an “A” average (which is not uncommon anymore) that does not mean that they are smarter than past students, it just means that the evaluation system has been changed so that more students (and potential employers) think they are successful. In addition, did not Paul tell us that of the ones God calls there are “not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise...” (1 Cor 1:27)? Our Lord seems to have standards and values that are out of alignment with Osteen’s.

Still Osteen insists, “You will often receive preferential treatment simply because your Father is the King of kings, and His glory

and honor spill over onto you” (p. 40). Osteen prays, “Father, I thank you that I have Your favor” (p. 41). By God’s favor Osteen has in mind such earth shaking issues as finding the perfect parking spot in a crowded lot (pp. 41-42). Why a perfectly healthy middle-aged man would pray for the premier parking spot, knowing of course that someone with greater physical needs will be denied such a spot, is never explained. Osteen admits God sometimes refuses to answer his parking prayer, but this “doesn’t mean that I am going to quit believing in the favor of God” (p. 43). Osteen can’t lose. If he finds the best spot in the lot he has God’s favor; if he circles for 15 minutes and fails in this all-important task, it is not going to derail his theology.

Success

“God wants you to go further than your parents” (p. 8). This statement is made without a speck of biblical evidence. On the contrary it was a rarity in Scripture to find a child who exceeded a godly or successful parent. Further, the same is often true in our own experience – some children go further than their parents, others do not. Osteen is making an unsupportable statement.

But not to be deterred we are told, “God wants you to live an overcoming life of victory. He doesn’t want you to barely get by. He’s called *El Shaddai*, ‘the God of more than enough’” (p. 33, emphasis his). On the contrary: *El Shaddai* is a title used for our Lord in the Old Testament which is often translated “God Almighty.” It speaks of the all sufficiency of God, and is a special title of reverence. Osteen has invented his own meaning and in the process turned God into our personal sugar daddy, ready to hand out the goodies to any who think they have discovered the secret to His heart.

Good self-image

“God wants us to have healthy, positive self-images, to see ourselves as priceless treasures. He wants us to feel good about ourselves... God sees you as a champion... He regards you as a strong, courageous, successful, overcoming person” (p. 57-58). Really? From what source does Osteen draw his view of self-image? Certainly not Scripture which never mentions such a thing. Rather than chase after good self-images Paul warns us “not to think more highly of ourselves than we ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment” (Rom 12:3). But instead of taking seriously the instruction of Scripture, Osteen is happy to chase after the fads found in pop-psychology. He goes on, “When you are tempted to get discouraged,

remind yourself that according to God's Word, your future is getting brighter; you are on your way to a new level of glory" (p. 67).

Eternally this is a true statement for the child of God, but to promise such will be the case in this life is pure deception. And since Osteen makes no distinction between the redeemed and the unregenerate in his book, he is offering a false and damning hope to most of his audience, those who do not know Christ as their Savior.

The Belief System

Upon what does Osteen base his belief system? It is certainly not Scripture for the Bible never teaches anything remotely similar to this prosperity brand of Christianity. That is not to say that *Your Best Life Now* is totally devoid of biblical references, but the few that are attempted are almost all hopelessly out of context or twisted beyond recognition (see pp. 10,14,18, 30-31, 33, 61, 76, 79-83, 87-89, 104, 115, 129-130, 134,164). Osteen gives notice early and often that his views are not drawn fundamentally from Scripture but from his experiences and those of others. Still, in the introduction Osteen writes, "Within these pages, you will find seven simple, yet profound, steps to improve your life, regardless of your current level of success or lack of it. I know these steps work, because they have worked in the lives of my family members, friends, and associates, as well as in my own life" (p. viii).

Osteen supports his thesis through the use of numerous success stories of one type or another. Some of his stories are impossible and/or at best incapable of being documented and therefore raise a red flag concerning his integrity (pp. 12, 23, 73, 122, 161, 167, 201-202, 229, 280-281, 292). Others are highly selective examples of happy endings (see pp. 4, 7-8, 27, 111-112, 125, 127, 199-200, 246). As a result of such stories Osteen can promise that, if his theories are embraced, "suddenly, things will change, suddenly, that business will take off. Suddenly, your husband will desire a relationship with God. Suddenly, that wayward child will come home. Suddenly, God will bring your hopes and dreams to pass" (p. 199). Or maybe not! Inexplicably (given his belief system and insistence that God will bring prosperity to our lives if we follow the formula) Osteen must admit that all things do not end in success. Both his sister and father experienced the failure of divorce (pp. 151, 176), some people are not healed (pp. 181-182), things don't always work out the way we desire (pp. 207-209), his father suffered kidney failure and was on dialysis for years (p. 247) and died of a heart attack (p. 248). While Osteen declares "God does not send problems" he admits that "sometimes He allows us to go through them" (p. 205). But the fact is that even

in Osteen's story-theology world the people of God suffer the same ups and downs, successes and failures, health and sickness and so forth as the unbeliever. One has only to glance through the Psalms to realize that this is not our "best life now." We live in a corrupt world and until the Lord returns our sin-tainted universe will often disappoint and grieve us. Stories of success (and failure) can be lined up from here to eternity, but such stories are not the basis of truth, or of life; the Word of God is.

The Methods

Drawing, however, from many selective stories, and ignoring what God has to say, Osteen presents a methodology that he promises will produce a life of abundance, success, health and affluence. This system is not unique to Osteen, having come almost verbatim from the prosperity teachers mentioned above, but he has taken this false teaching to a new audience. Let's examine how the program works.

There are three basic steps to "your best life now."

Visualization

The initial step in Osteen's program is visualization: "The first step to living at your full potential is to enlarge your vision. To live your best life now, you must start looking at life through eyes of faith, seeing yourself rising to new levels. See your business taking off. See your marriage restored. See your family prospering. See your dreams coming to pass. You must conceive it and believe it is possible if you ever hope to experience it" (p. 4, emphasis his).

The reason why visualization is necessary is because it has the power to bring about what you envision. "You will produce what you're continually seeing in your mind... If you develop an image of victory, success, health, abundance, joy, peace, and happiness, nothing on earth will be able to hold those things from you... Start anticipating promotions and supernatural increase. You must conceive it in your heart and mind before you can receive it... You must make room for increase in your own thinking, and then God will bring those things to pass" (pp. 5-6).

Apparently even God is at the mercy of that which we visualize; after all, "Thoughts [not God] determine destiny" (p. 101). "If you don't think your body can be healed, it never will be... When you think positive, excellent thoughts, you will be propelled toward greatness, inevitably bound for increase, promotion, and God's supernatural blessings" (p. 104).

Faith

It is not enough to think about and visualize what we want, we must also express faith. “God works by faith. You must believe first, and then you’ll receive” (p. 33). “We receive what we believe. Unfortunately, this principle works as strongly in the negative as it does in the positive” (p. 72). “Understand this: God will help you, but you cast the deciding vote... [we must] get into agreement with God” (p. 74). “It’s our faith that activates the power of God” (p. 306).

It is vital that we visualize what we want and to expect (“express faith”) because our faith attracts what we visualize. While Osteen never calls this the “law of attraction” notice its similarity to the same concept as taught by New Age teachers such as Eckhart Tolle, Rhonda Byrne and others. “Your life will follow your expectations. What you expect is what you will get” (p. 13). “Our thoughts contain tremendous power. Remember, we draw into our lives that which we constantly think about. If we’re always dwelling on the negative, we will attract negative people, experiences, and attitudes. If we’re always dwelling on our fears, we will draw in more fear. You are setting the direction of your life with your thoughts” (p. 109).

Words

Still, it is not enough to think good thoughts and express faith in them; it is necessary to speak your desires out loud. This is why the prosperity gospel is often called the “Word of Faith” movement – for power lies in the spoken word. Follow Osteen’s thinking. “Our words have tremendous power, and whether we want to or not, we will give life to what we’re saying, either good or bad... Words are similar to seeds, by speaking them aloud, they are planted in our subconscious minds, and they take on a life of their own” (p. 122). Osteen suggests, “Get up each morning and look in the mirror and say, ‘I am valuable. I am loved. God has a great plan for my life. I have favor wherever I go. God’s blessings are chasing me down and overtaking me. Everything I touch prospers and succeeds. I’m excited about my future!’ Start speaking those kinds of words, and before long, you will rise to a new level of well-being, success, and victory. There truly is power in your words” (p. 123).

But there is more. We must also speak to our problems, “Whatever your mountain is, you must do more than think about it, more than pray about it; you must speak to that obstacle... Start calling yourself healed, happy, whole, blessed, and prosperous. Stop talking to God about how big your mountains are, and start talking to your mountains about how big your God is” (p. 124). Osteen can

confidently promise us, “Friend, there is a miracle in your mouth” (p. 125). How so? “The moment you speak something out, you give birth to it. This is a spiritual principle, and it works whether what you are saying is good or bad, positive or negative” (p. 129). Therefore, “You must start boldly confessing God’s Word, using your words to move forward in life, to bring to life the great things God has in store for you” (p. 130).

And it is totally up to us to pull this kind of life off. “God has already done everything He’s going to do. The ball is now in your court. If you want success, if you want wisdom, if you want to be prosperous and healthy, you’re going to have to do more than meditate and believe; you must boldly declare words of faith and victory over yourself and your family” (p. 132). Osteen is presenting a pure self-help program and baptizing it in the name of God. Those who fail to reach these promised benefits have only themselves to blame, since they apparently did not follow Osteen’s formula.

Conclusion

Whenever the supposed things of God and people of God become popular with the inhabitants of this fallen world we would be wise to walk softly and be extra discerning. The Jews persecuted and/or killed almost every one of their prophets (Acts 7:52); the apostles were despised by the world and Jesus was murdered by those He came to save. Jesus pronounced a blessing on those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness (Matt 5:11) and warned, “If they persecuted Me, they will also persecute you” (John 15:20). Why? Because the message of the Cross is foolishness to those who are perishing (1 Cor 1:18). Therefore when we find a Christian message or ministry or man or woman being praised by unbelievers we can be assured that either unregenerate humanity has not yet caught on to what is being said, or that what they are saying is in line with what the unbeliever already believes. As we have demonstrated Osteen’s message is exactly what unbelievers and undiscerning Christians want to believe and they are thrilled to have someone who claims to be a reliable spokesperson for God agree with them. This would account for Osteen’s incredible success, but it does not account for, or excuse, the inconceivable gullibility and immaturity of professing Christians.

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THE ABODES OF THE DEPARTED SPIRITS

Dr. J. Frank Norris (1877-1952)

We have previously shown, according to the testimony of the Holy Scriptures, the following two facts: first, that man has a soul (spiritual nature) and, second, that at death the spiritual nature separates or departs from the body.

Inasmuch as we have learned that death is but the separation or departure of the spirit or spiritual nature from the body, the next logical question to be asked by every thinking person would be, "WHAT BECOMES OF THE DEPARTED SPIRITS? Are they roaming about in space or do they depart to some definite place? If so, what place?"

First, it can be clearly and emphatically stated that the spirits of the departed DO NOT roam about in space. The Bible makes it clear that there is a definite abode for them.

In order to get a correct understanding of the subject, it will be necessary to consider and distinguish between the PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE ABODES OF THE DEAD. We must also get a proper knowledge of the words as they are used in the ORIGINAL HEBREW AND GREEK TEXTS, and not as the translators have rendered them in the King James Version. It would be impossible to arrive at an accurate understanding of Death, Heaven, and Hell, from the English Translation, without first going direct to the original Hebrew and Greek.

WHY? The following Scriptures as rendered in the King James Version, will illustrate the predicament.

Christ said in Luke 16:22, 23, "the rich man also died, and was buried; and in HELL (*Hades*) ..." The original word (*Hades*) is here translated Hell.

In Matthew 23:33 Christ said, "Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of Hell? (*Gehenna*)."

The original word (*Gehenna*) is also translated Hell.

In II Peter 2:4, "For if God spared not the angels that sinned but cast them down to HELL (*Tartarus*) ..."

Here the original word (*Tartarus*) is also rendered Hell.

So you see, *HADES*, *GEHENNA*, *TARTARUS*, are three different words, and are the names of three different places, and are all translated in the King James Version by the one word, Hell.

Now then, when reading the English word Hell in the New Testament, how can we possibly know to which of the three places the writer was referring? One can readily see why it is necessary to go directly to the original text to arrive at a correct understanding of the subject.

Now let us turn our attention to a similar situation in the Old Testament.

You remember Jacob thought his son Joseph was devoured by a “wild beast” and said, in Genesis 37:35, “I will go down into the GRAVE (*SHEOL*) unto my son mourning.”

Here the original word is *SHEOL* and is rendered GRAVE by the translators.

Psalms 16:10: “Thou wilt not leave my soul in HELL (*SHEOL*).” Here again is the same original word *SHEOL*, but this time it is not translated grave as in Genesis 37:35, but it is rendered HELL.

In Numbers 16:30, concerning the wicked that die, it says, “They go down quick into the PIT (*SHEOL*).” Here again, in the original, is the same word *SHEOL* but this time it is translated neither GRAVE nor HELL, but PIT.

Thus it is easily comprehended why it is absolutely necessary to use for our foundation, words from the original Hebrew and Greek texts.

Where Are the Departed Dead?

Continuing with the thought, TO WHAT PLACE DO THE SPIRITS OF THE DEPARTED DEAD GO? The Bible makes it clear that the place of the spirits of the departed dead is called *SHEOL* in the Old Testament Hebrew, and *HADES* in the New Testament Greek.

The Hebrew word *SHEOL* means PLACE OF THE DEPARTED DEAD. The word is found 65 times in the Old Testament. Thirty-one times it is translated “HELL”, thirty-one times, “GRAVE”, and three times it is translated “THE PIT.”

The Hebrew Old Testament word for the place of the departed dead is *SHEOL*, and the Greek New Testament word for the same place is

HADES, the abode of the dead – the unseen state.

Perhaps some sincere seeker for the truth is saying “How do you know that the word *SHEOL* in the Old Testament Hebrew means the same as *Hades* in the New Testament Greek?”

The following reference will prove the point.

It was prophesied of Jesus the His soul should not remain in *SHEOL* and His body should not see corruption. Psalm 16:10: “For thou wilt not leave my soul in hell (*SHEOL*), NEITHER WILT THOU SUFFER THY Holy One to see corruption.”

The Hebrew word that appears here is “*SHEOL*.” THIS SAME VERSE IS QUOTED IN THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK. Acts 2:27: “Because thou will not leave my soul in hell (*HADES*) neither will thou suffer thy Holy One to see corruption.

This is positive proof that the Hebrew word *SHEOL* has identically the same meaning as the Greek word *Hades*, because this very same verse of Scripture is written both in the Hebrew and Greek, and the word rendered for *SHEOL* is *Hades*.

As additional proof on this point, it is well to note that the “Septuagint” version of the Old Testament, translated from Hebrew to Greek by seventy scholars in the year 275 B.C., invariably renders *SHEOL* by *Hades*.

Then *SHEOL* in the Hebrew, or *HADES* in the Greek, is the same place, and means THE ABODE OF THE SPIRITS OF THE DEPARTED DEAD.

Now then, Judge Rutherford, and all those who adhere (The Jehovah’s Witnesses) to his theory, in attempting to establish the fact that there is no abode for departed spirits, would like to have us believe that *Sheol* or *Hades* IS NOT the place of departed spirits, but that it means the GRAVE where the bodies are laid. He tells us that *SHEOL* means the grave – the condition of death, not the abode of spirits.

BUT AGAIN WE FIND THAT THIS IS NOT SO. *SHEOL* IS ONE PLACE, AND THE GRAVE IS ANOTHER. They are not the same. The following considerations furnish definite proof of the distinction between *SHEOL*, the abode of the departed spirits, and the grave, the resting place of the body.

The Grave for the Body Is Clearly Distinguished from the Abode for the Spirits

FIRST: the words for grave in both the Hebrew and Greek languages, are altogether different than the words *Sheol* or *Hades*. The Hebrew word for “grave,” into which only the “bodies” of the dead go, is *qeburah*, and the Greek *mnémeion*. These are used many times in the Scriptures. Jacob could not join his son in the grave, but he could join him in the “place” for departed spirits.

This is definite proof that *SHEOL* does not mean “grave,” as the grave for the body, but is the abode of the departed spirits.

SECOND: the word *SHEOL* is NEVER USED IN THE PLURAL, for it is ONE PLACE (abode of spirits) but the word for “grave” is used many times in the plural, proving that there can be many “graves” but only one *SHEOL*.

THIRD: we never read of a person having a *SHEOL*, but we often read of a person having a “grave.” This proves that *SHEOL* is the abode of spirits and not the grave for the body, inasmuch as a person cannot have a *SHEOL* but he can have a “grave.”

FOURTH: the body is never said to be in *SHEOL* and the “spirit” is never said to be in the “grave,” which again proves that *SHEOL* is not the grave.

FIFTH: no *SHEOL* was ever dug by man or was ever located on the earth, but this CAN be said of graves. Therefore we know that *SHEOL* is the abode of the departed spirits and not the grave – the place of bodies.

Other Scriptures clearly distinguish between the abode of the spirits and the resting place for the body which further proves that *SHEOL* or *Hades* is not the grave, as Rutherford claims it is.

SIXTH: in the final judgment, both the GRAVE and *HADES* will deliver up the dead. Revelation 20:13, “Death (the grave, the abode of the body) and hell (*Hades*, the abode of the spirit) delivered up the dead which were in them.” This distinguishes between the two, and shows that *Hades* is not the grave.

SEVENTH: Christ has the keys of both. Revelation 1:18: “Behold I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (*Hades*, the abode of the spirits) and of death (grave, the abode of bodies.)” This again shows that *Hades* is not the grave.

EIGHTH: Christ's soul was not left in *Hades* neither was His body left in the TOMB (Acts 2:27). Here again the grave is clearly distinguished from *Hades* the abode of departed spirits, which shows that *Hades* is not the grave.

NINTH: when Jacob's twelve sons sold Joseph into Egyptian slavery, they deceived their father Jacob by bringing to him Joseph's blood-stained coat, making him think that a "wild beast" had devoured Joseph (Genesis 37:35). Jacob's sons and daughters tried to comfort him but he would not be comforted, and said, "I will go down into the 'GRAVE' unto my son mourning."

The original word in the Hebrew where this word is rendered "grave" is *SHEOL*.

Judge Rutherford, in trying to show that *SHEOL* is the grave or the place where bodies are laid, says, "It is easy to be seen that Jacob expected to go to the TOMB." But we shall prove that this word *SHEOL* does not mean grave – the place of bodies, but that it means the place of departed spirits.

From what Jacob thought and said we can see that he did not intend to go into the "grave" or tomb to meet his son Joseph, but into the abode of the departed spirits. As proof of this we know that Jacob did not believe that Joseph was in the grave, for he believed that a "wild beast" had devoured him (Verse 33). Therefore it would have been impossible for Jacob to go to the grave to meet Joseph if a wild beast had devoured him, but where he really intended to meet him was in the abode of the spirits of the departed dead.

This clearly shows the distinction between the grave and the abode of the departed spirits, and proves that *SHEOL* – *Hades* is not the grave for the bodies, as Rutherford says it is.

The following account of Jacob's death sets forth the same truth:

TENTH: Jacob is said to have been gathered unto his people at the moment of death (Genesis 49:33), though his body was not buried with the bodies of his ancestors till months afterward. "And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people."

Jacob died in Goshen in Egypt, but was buried in the land of Canaan. They were forty days embalming the body, and the mourning in Egypt continued thirty days longer. Joseph then obtained permission of Pharaoh to go and bury his father (Genesis 50:10), so that at least

eighty days elapsed between the gathering unto his people, and the burial of the body in the cave of Machpelah in Canaan.

Jacob was “gathered unto his people” at the time of his death, by the departure of his SOUL to the souls of Isaac, his father, and his grandfather Abraham. It is certain that his BODY was not then gathered to his people, at the time he expired, nor till seven weeks later, therefore his gathering to his people was not to their bodies in the graves, but to the place where they were in their disembodied state.

Consequently, the place of departed spirits, which is *Hades* in the Greek, *Sheol* in the Hebrew, is not the same as the grave for the body.

These ten considerations conclusively prove that Judge Rutherford and all those who believe in his theory are definitely wrong when they say that *Hades* means the grave, for *Hades*, the abode for the departed spirits has been clearly distinguished from the grave for the body.

HADES or SHEOL THEN, IS NOT THE GRAVE, the abode for the body, but the place of departed spirits.

In studying its location, we find that in 20 of the 65 Old Testament passages that refer to *SHEOL*, it is located downward. In Genesis 37:35 Jacob said, “I will go down to *SHEOL*.” In New Testament references to *Hades*, we also find that it is located downward. Matthew 11:23, “Thou shalt be brought down to *Hades*.” Luke 10:15, “Thou shalt be thrust down to *Hades*.” Never do we find the Scriptures locating *SHEOL-HADES* on the earth or above the earth, but always downward.

Thus far it has been established, from the Scriptures, that man does have a soul, and that at death the soul separates from the body, and that it departs to the place called *Sheol* or *Hades*, which is not the grave, but the abode of the departed spirits of the dead. We are now ready for the next logical question that follows.

What is Revealed About the Place Called *SHEOL*?

What kind of a place is it?

The reader will notice that thus far in the discourse on *SHEOL* nothing has been said relative to the righteous and the unrighteous. It has been merely stated that the spirits of all the dead, regardless of moral distinction, righteous or unrighteous, departed to *SHEOL*.

When we turn to our Bibles to learn what kind of a place it is, we find that the Old Testament sheds very little light on the subject. Nothing is said in regard to the spirits of the righteous and unrighteous. The Old Testament merely tells us that all the dead departed to *SHEOL*. It makes no distinction between abodes for the saved and he lost. Thus, it can be said that in the Old Testament, the light, as to the state of the departed dead, is in the twilight stage.

Perhaps this question comes to the mind of some sincere seeker for the truth. Why is it that the Old Testament is almost silent on the future state? Why does it leave us with so little information? The Bible clearly answers that question. The time for the revealing of the conditions beyond the grave had not yet come in the Old Testament days. It was reserved for Christ to “BRING LIFE AND IMMORTALITY TO LIGHT THROUGH THE GOSPEL.”

And that is just what Christ did. We know Christ came to save sinners, but II Timothy 1:10 also tells us that His coming “hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel.” The Old Testament teaching which is in the twilight stage on immortality and conditions in *Sheol*, is now made manifest, or revealed, by Christ through the Gospel.

Notice the Scripture verse does not say that when Christ came He brought life and immortality into EXISTENCE, but he brought it to light – He brought it into revelation – He revealed it. LIFE AND IMMORTALITY EXISTED IN OLD TESTAMENT DAYS, but now it is made manifest, or revealed, by Christ through the Gospel.

Now then, since Christ was the one who has brought immortality to light, we must accept His statements. We should learn what His teaching was regarding the conditions in the abode of the departed.

WHAT WAS CHRIST’S TEACHING REGARDING ALL THE DEAD, BOTH SAVED AND LOST, IN HADES?

His teaching is found in Luke 16:19-31, in the account of the rich man and Lazarus. This gives us a description of the abode of the departed dead as it was in the Old Testament days and in the days of Christ’s earthly ministry.

Used with permission of *The Biblical Evangelist*,
Dr. Robert Sumner, editor.

QUIZ:

MORE ABOUT THE ANCIENT WORLD

1. Jewish patriot who fought against the evil Syrian Antiochus Epiphanes?
 - a. Judas Maccabaeus
 - b. John the Baptist
 - c. Simon the Zealot
 - d. Josephus

2. The Tower of Babel symbolizes
 - a. strength
 - b. technology
 - c. confusion
 - d. wisdom

3. Scylla and Charybdis were
 - a. Points of danger in the Mediterranean
 - b. Training programs for young Grecians
 - c. Syrian tormentors of Jewish leaders
 - d. Egyptian builders of pyramids

4. Which was constructed first?
 - a. Zerrubabel's Temple
 - b. Herod's Temple
 - c. Parthenon in Athens
 - d. Solomon's Temple

5. To attack Carthage Roman soldiers had to cross
 - a. the Aegean Sea
 - b. the Mediterranean Sea
 - c. the Black Sea
 - d. the Caspian Sea

6. The Rosetta Stone found in Egypt was written in
 - a. cuneiform and ugaritic
 - b. teutonic and Latin
 - c. hieroglyphics and Greek
 - d. Sanskrit and mandarin

7. The worship center for the goddess Diana was
 ___ a. Corinth
 ___ b. Antioch, Syria
 ___ c. Alexandria
 ___ d. Ephesus
8. Which happened first in history?
 ___ a. Daniel is thrown into the Lion's Den
 ___ b. Cyrus the Great conquers Babyon
 ___ c. Nebuchadnezzar defeats Pharaoh-Necho at Carchemish
 ___ d. Jeremiah goes to Egypt
9. Which is "not" considered one of the Seven Wonders of the ancient World?
 ___ a. Hanging Gardens of Babylon
 ___ b. Roman Colosseum
 ___ c. Colossus of Rhodes
 ___ d. Great Pyramid of Giza
10. The stronghold for Jews seeking protection from Rome was called
 ___ a. Masada
 ___ b. Memphis
 ___ c. Caesarea
 ___ d. Petra

Answers:

1. (a); 2. (a); 3. (a); 4. (d); 5. (b); 6. (c); 7. (d); 8. (c); 9. (b); 10. (a)

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