



## Brown Community Group Discussion Guide

“Death, Glorification, Unification: What happens to our Body, Soul and Spirit?”

Lesson 6 – Did the OT Believers Enter Heaven Immediately and Praying for the Dead?

March 19, 2017

### I. Lesson Starters:

Did the Old Testament believers go straight to heaven as well to be in the presence of God even before Christ redemptive work? Did Christ’s resurrection make a difference or change anything at death for the believer with respect to entering heaven? Where did prayer for the dead originate? What are they praying for exactly if a person is dead?

### II. Old Testament Believers

Many have said that although the souls of believers since Christ’s resurrection go immediately to heaven to be with the Lord, the souls of believers who died before Christ’s resurrection did not enjoy the same blessings of heaven but went into a place of waiting for Christ’s redemptive work to be complete. This view can be seen in the Roman Catholic theology and some other denominations.

Not many scriptures give us direct references to the state of the Old Testament believers soul after they have died. We looked at several last week appearing to reference Sheol (1 Samuel 28:1-14; Psalm 6:1-7; Psalm 30:8-11; Psalm 88:1-12; Psalm 115:16-18). Those that do give us an indication of their state, point in the direction of immediate conscious enjoyment in the presence of God, not some type of waiting away from God’s presence.

#### Genesis 5:22-24

**22 After he became the father of Methuselah, Enoch walked faithfully with God 300 years and had other sons and daughters. <sup>23</sup> Altogether, Enoch lived a total of 365 years. <sup>24</sup> Enoch walked faithfully with God; then he was no more, because God took him away.**

#### 2 Kings 2:11-12

**11 As they were walking along and talking together, suddenly a chariot of fire and horses of fire appeared and separated the two of them, and Elijah went up to heaven in a whirlwind. <sup>12</sup> Elisha saw this and cried out, “My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!” And Elisha saw him no more. Then he took hold of his garment and tore it in two.**

#### Psalms 23:5-6

**5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. <sup>6</sup> Surely your goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever. Lord, you alone are my portion and my cup; you make my lot secure.**

#### Psalms 16:8-11

**8 I keep my eyes always on the Lord. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken. <sup>9</sup> Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will rest secure, <sup>10</sup> because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. <sup>11</sup> You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.**

#### Matthew 22:30-33

**30 At the resurrection people will neither marry nor be given in marriage; they will be like the angels in heaven. <sup>31</sup> But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, <sup>32</sup> ‘I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob’? He is not the God of the dead but of the living.”**

**<sup>33</sup> When the crowds heard this, they were astonished at his teaching.**

- Jesus answered the Sadducees implying that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob were living at that moment

- Also when you compare this to our scripture last week looking at Lazarus, Jesus says that “Now he is comforted” (Luke 16:25). Lazarus would have been in the same situation as the OT believers since Jesus’s resurrection obviously had not occurred yet

Therefore it seems likely that the Old Testament believers also entered immediately into heaven and enjoyed God’s fellowship at their death. It is fair to assume that additional blessings and rejoicing occurred when Christ returned to heaven after his resurrection, but we should not assume that the OT believers were transported to heaven for the first time after Jesus ascension.

### III. **Should We Pray for the Dead?**

Since the fact that the souls of believers go immediately to be in the presence of God, there is no purpose to pray for the dead. This idea is taught in 2 Maccabees 12:42-45(Apocrypha), but is not mentioned anywhere in our recognized Bible.

#### 2 Maccabees 12:38-45 - Atonement for the Dead

38 Judas rallied his army and went to the city of Adullam. As the seventh day was approaching, they purified themselves according to custom and kept the Sabbath there. 39 On the following day, since the task had now become urgent, Judas and his companions went to gather up the bodies of the fallen and bury them with their kindred in their ancestral tombs. 40 But under the tunic of each of the dead they found amulets sacred to the idols of Jamnia, which the law forbids the Jews to wear. So it was clear to all that this was why these men had fallen. 41 They all therefore praised the ways of the Lord, the just judge who brings to light the things that are hidden. 42 Turning to supplication, they prayed that the sinful deed might be fully blotted out. The noble Judas exhorted the people to keep themselves free from sin, for they had seen with their own eyes what had happened because of the sin of those who had fallen. 43 He then took up a collection among all his soldiers, amounting to two thousand silver drachmas, which he sent to Jerusalem to provide for an expiatory sacrifice. In doing this he acted in a very excellent and noble way, inasmuch as he had the resurrection in mind; 44 for if he were not expecting the fallen to rise again, it would have been superfluous and foolish to pray for the dead. 45 But if he did this with a view to the splendid reward that awaits those who had gone to rest in godliness, it was a holy and pious thought. 46 Thus he made atonement for the dead that they might be absolved from their sin.

Further there seems to be no strong indications that this was a common practice of Christians at the time of the New Testament. The concept of praying for the dead is integrally wound with Purgatory in some denominations, primarily Catholics.

- Once a believers has died and gone to be with the Lord, they are in a state of perfect happiness, thus requiring nothing that we could even pray for if we wanted.
- Heaven and Salvation are based on our deeds and decisions in this life (1 Cor. 3:12-15; 2 Cor. 5:10)
- Souls of the unbelievers go immediately to a place of punishment and eternal separation from God due to their sin;
- It does no good to pray for the unbelievers since their final destiny has been sealed at death
- Teaching or encouraging anyone to pray for the dead is not scriptural and could also result in a “false hope” for loved ones
- Further indication that praying for the dead is not correct can be taken from David’s example when his son died. David prayed intensely for his son prior to death, but after he died, David rose from prayer, washed, changed clothes and went to worship (2 Samuel 12:20).

### IV. **Group Questions:**

1. Do you think the souls of believers who died before Jesus resurrection are treated differently? Why or why not?
2. In the case of treating them differently, what other doctrines must accompany that belief to be true?
3. Discuss Maccabees 12:38-45 above from the Apocrypha, where does each verse stray or differ from what we doctrinal taught?
4. Have you ever been part of a prayer or been present when someone else prayed for the dead? How did you feel at that time? Did it create a sense of false hope or relief for the family or loved ones?