

An Alternate View of the Afterlife

What happens after we die?

As we approach old age or the inevitable end of an incurable disease, most of us think of what's next. Is there really anything after I die?

1. Is there really a heaven and hell? If so, which one is where I will be? And more importantly what will I be doing.
2. Is that the end? Nothing extends beyond death.
3. Or does God have a perfect plan for us continuing our existence? Everlasting life.

There are hundreds of ideas about the afterlife. Some espoused by philosophers, some by theologians, some by self-proclaimed prophets, some by your "friend next-door".

For millennia the idea of heaven and hell have been espoused to control the behavior of people. The fear of hell, if you don't toe the line as the church says, is hanging over your head every minute of your life.

Did I just commit a mortal sin? Have I just blasphemed God and now He hates me?

These and hundreds of other questions haunt us to the point that many people just give up and say the "hell with it", I'll do what I want – live it up and not worry about the consequences.

The previous paper showed that the idea we have been fed about hell is totally non-Biblical. I think it is not only non-Biblical it is demonic. Designed to keep us so involved with minutia that we can't even consider the real purpose that God created us for in the first place.

Unfortunately the Bible gives us very few clues and even then many are cloaked and shrouded in figurative language. So we are left to surmise for ourselves what will happen upon our death.

Or are we?

As your "friend next door" I would like to go out on a limb and explain how I currently see this subject. I will try to support my assumptions with what I believe the Bible indicates. Then I will go further out on a twig and tell you what I think may be beyond that.

First things first

First I think we need to know how we are created. Namely we are created with a body, a soul and a spirit. Nothing new here – right? But have we studied this completely to find what each of these is.

The body is the frame - the meat, skin and bones, etc. It is composed of physical elements as Genesis calls dust or *adamah* {literally red dirt}. It has no life in and of it's self. We know this without knowing it. What do we say when a person dies? We say; "Let's bury the body". We know the person is dead, yet there is a body left, until it decays. In Hebrew the word is *nevelah* – body, corpse, carcass, dead body. Humans and animals have a body.

The soul is the life. In Hebrew it is *nefesh* – soul, life, appetite, desire. This is what makes the *nevelah* alive. This soul is the life-giving part of the person, which incidentally is also the life-giving part of the animals. This life giving substance is given to the bodies by God. Without the *nefesh* nothing lives. That goes for the smallest microbe to the largest dinosaur. Without God there is no life. Up to this point we are no different than the animals.

Genesis 2:7 [Orthodox Jewish Bible]
*And Hashem Elohim {God} formed the adam {person} of the apha min ha-adamah {dust of the ground}, and breathed into his nostrils the nishmat chayyim {breath of life}; and the adam {person} became a **nefesh** chayyah {living being}.*

Genesis 2:19 [Orthodox Jewish Bible]
*And out of the adamah {dust of the ground} Hashem Elohim {God} formed every beast of the sadeh {area, country, field}, and every oph HaShomayim {birds of the air}; and brought them unto the adam {person} to see what he would name them; and whatsoever the adam {person} named kol {voice} **nefesh** chayyah {living being}, that was shmo {his name}.*

When Rachel was giving birth to Benjamin she died in the process as we see in Genesis 35:18 New American Standard Bible (NASB) *It came about as her soul (nefesh) was departing (for she died), that she named him Ben-oni; but his father called him Benjamin.*

The spirit is unique to human beings. It contains the wisdom, understanding, heart, conscience, mind, emotions and knowledge of a person. God gives the basic information for the spirit to each individual. As the person grows and learns and experiences more and more, that information is added to his spirit. So at the end of physical life everything that that person has done is recorded in this spirit.

The word is a bit confusing as in Hebrew the word is *ruach* meaning breath or wind. By extension one can understand this word as something that is not physical and cannot be seen. We cannot see the wind or a breath but we know it is there because of its effect on the physical. Consequently, we cannot

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see or measure the spirit but we can see the effect it has on a person.

In Exodus 31:2-3 (NIV) we find a definition of God's Spirit. "See, I have chosen Bezalel son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah, and I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills...."

Also in Galatians 5:22-23 (NIV) we read; **But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.**

This same *ruach* can be detected when there is lack of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge as when one has the spirit of delusion or error, or an unclean spirit, or even a broken spirit. All of these are pretty much only related to the human existence, as they are not physical but mental actions.

You may have noticed that sometimes the word is written as Spirit and other times spirit. The spirit is the spirit given to mankind and the Spirit is God's Spirit or Holy Spirit. Since God gives the spirit, I contend that the spirit in man is inexorably connected to the Holy Spirit. And further that the spirit in man returns to God at death.

We can conclude this from the poetry in Ecclesiastes 12:6-7 (NIV)

*Remember him—before the silver cord is severed,
and the golden bowl is broken;
before the pitcher is shattered at the spring,
and the wheel broken at the well,
and the dust returns to the ground it came from,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

An individual may or may not realize that his spirit is connected to the Holy Spirit, but since it does belong to God there must still be a connection – realized or not.

The words soul and spirit are often used interchangeably, but to do so clouds the meaning of each of the words. Even translators do this so it is often good to look for the original word when possible.

Mankind is different from the rest of Creation

According to the Bible, mankind is distinct from all the rest of creation, including the animals, in that he is made in the image of God. As God is triune -- Father, Son and Holy Spirit -- so man is designed with three parts -- body, soul and spirit. Not that we are exactly like God is but in this way at least, we are in an image of His being.

Except for the body we are also made up of immaterial aspects, which are intangible. That includes the soul (*nefesh*), spirit (*ruach*). These characteristics exist beyond the physical lifespan of the human body, because they belong to Him.

God gave the soul (*nefesh*) and that returns to Him at our death. (The soul or life of an animal also returns to God because in Him is life.) God gave the spirit (*ruach*) and that returns to Him at our death. These immaterial aspects make up part of a whole person.

The Scriptures make it clear that the soul and spirit are the primary immaterial aspects of humanity, while the body is the physical container that holds them on this earth.

Does that mean we are inherently eternal? I don't believe that that is necessarily correct. We can be, but that is at the will of God. So if our *nefesh* and *ruach* return to God, then are these two parts of a human eternal?

I might be persuaded that they are but not as a complete being as one might think.

I would like to use an analogy here, but remember if we take any analogy too far it becomes gibberish.

Let's think of a laptop computer. It is made up of a lot of hardware – keyboard, CPU, hard drive, display screen, etc. All of these are physical items. We can touch them, use them, and fix them. Let's think of this as the body.

Inside there is a place where we supply a battery that supplies energy to the unit. We could think of this as the soul because it makes the laptop come alive.

Inside and on the hard drive there is information – programs, notes, documents, pictures; all the stuff we have for the laptop to use. We can think of this is the wisdom and understanding of the unit – the spirit.

I know I am stretching this a bit, but stay with me.

Now our laptop gets old, the screen is cracked; the keys stick on the keyboard and the battery is weak and won't take a full charge. But we don't want to lose all of that precious information that is on the hard drive, so we pull out all of the information on the hard drive and store it in a safe place. We recycle the old unit and wait until we can afford a new laptop.

When we get the new improved laptop we transfer the information we stored from the old hard drive into the new computer and continue on as if nothing happened.

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I believe that in a small way this explains how God retains the essence of our being in order to resurrect us from the dead.

He can easily recreate our body, and He is able to give that body life. He did it once; He can do it again.

But how would He instill in the new body all of the experiences and knowledge we gained in the first body, unless He has it stored somewhere?

Where He stores it – I don't have a clue. I submit though that is why our spirit returns to Him.

A Resurrection of the Dead

In 1 Corinthians 15:20-23 (NIV) we are told that **all** will be resurrected. *But Christ has indeed been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep.* ²¹ *For since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man.* ²² *For as in Adam **all die**, so in Christ **all will be made alive.*** ²³ *But each in turn: Christ, the firstfruits; then, when he comes, those who belong to him.* (emphasis mine)

By the words “*those who belong to him*” I think it could mean everyone, because He owns everything which He created and that includes everyone. I realize that we often interpret it as the saints but I think it could also be interpreted this way. It might be that it should be interpreted both ways but at different times in history.

Revelation 20:4-5 *I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony about Jesus and because of the word of God.... They came to life and reigned with Christ a thousand years. (The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.*

{For ease of speaking, let's call those who have been “given authority”, saints; and the “rest of the dead”, people}

I believe that this reference in Revelation indicates that there will be first a resurrection of the saints, and at a later time the resurrection of the rest of humanity.

If all of humanity is resurrected then they are not in an ever-burning hell being tortured beyond endurance.

They are resurrected for a purpose and I believe that purpose is two fold. The saints are resurrected to support the rest in learning to love and follow Jesus.

The rest of humanity, the ones that couldn't or wouldn't follow Jesus in their lifetime will be given the opportunity to understand and accept Him in a world that is not a fallen world as it is today.

They will still have free will, but during their lifetime their free will was stunted by pride, lack of understanding, or negative events in their lives.

When these things are corrected I believe that anyone in their right mind (which they will have at that time) will see that what Jesus stands for is the best existence possible. They will of their own free will choose His way of living.

Looking at events in the Bible, God almost always uses human beings to bring about His will. I see this event as much the same. True, the saints will be in their new improved bodies but they will still have the wisdom and understanding that they gained while being a human being during their lifetime (i.e. their spirit). Their experience and understanding will be a catalyst to helping others to see and understand Jesus way of life.

The people will be resurrected as they were in this lifetime and given a life to live in a world that is not broken and fallen as it has been since Adam. They will be able to learn and practice a way of life that they have never known due to circumstances in their previous life. It is not as some suggest – a second chance. It is their first chance to follow God. Their first chance was stolen from them in their first life by the fallen and corrupted societies that they lived in.

Comment:

It is interesting to note that not only are people fallen since Adam & Eve sinned, the whole of the earth is fallen.

In Gen 3:17-19 (NIV) *To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’*

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life.

¹⁸ *It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field.*

¹⁹ *By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”*

The term “sweat of your brow” is particularly poignant. We usually take it as hard work, but

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in the original language it can also mean anxiety or fear. They would be constantly anxious about whether they would have enough food or shelter or safety from predators, etc.

The whole of creation was changed with the sin of Adam and Eve. The ground produced weeds with the food plants; some of the animals were going to prey on humans, everything was upset from the way it was when Eden was created. This is why in Revelation we find a new heaven and a new earth. The earth is renewed back to the way it was created in Eden.

Those resurrected, as saints will not be subjected to a second death. The people may be subject to the second death (although I doubt that any will be). I think God is smart enough to be able to show everyone that His way of life is eminently better than they could make on his or her own and still leave them with free will.

Luke 20:27-36 (NIV) *Some of the Sadducees, who say there is no resurrection, came to Jesus with a question. ²⁸ "Teacher," they said, "Moses wrote for us that if a man's brother dies and leaves a wife but no children, the man must marry the widow and raise up offspring for his brother. ²⁹ Now there were seven brothers. The first one married a woman and died childless. ³⁰ The second ³¹ and then the third married her, and in the same way the seven died, leaving no children. ³² Finally, the woman died too. ³³ Now then, at the resurrection whose wife will she be, since the seven were married to her?"*

³⁴ Jesus replied, "The people of this age marry and are given in marriage. ³⁵ But those who are considered worthy of taking part in the age to come and in the resurrection from the dead will neither marry nor be given in marriage, ³⁶ and they can no longer die; for they are like the angels. They are God's children, since they are children of the resurrection.

I think that the above scripture refers to the saints and not necessarily to the people.

My thinking is that marriage is a great teacher for learning to love and care for others. It begins in marriage and family and then extends to neighbors and beyond. I believe it to be one of many tools the saints will use to help the people to learn to love one another.

Let's Recap the Events

A person lives and dies.

His soul, the life giving part of his being leaves him and returns to God (the source of all energy and life).

His body decays and is recycled back into the elements of the earth that he was made from.

His spirit returns to God for safekeeping and awaits the resurrection.

At the Resurrection.

At the resurrection, whether saint or sinner, he receives a new body. It probably has different capabilities for each group.

This new body is brought to life by the soul given by God.

The spirit, which has been with God, is placed back in this resurrected person.

This person now has a body that is not yet immortal, a life that is not yet eternal, but a spirit that has all of the experiences and understanding that it has gained throughout first life.

The saint now has a body that is immortal, a life that is eternal, and a spirit that has all of the experiences and understanding that it has gained throughout first life and beyond.

I believe that every person who God has created will eventually attain this later condition. Probably not all at the same time but all of God's children will reach this point eventually.

A Step into Eternity

OK, Here is where I step out off the limb and onto a twig or maybe even a little leaf.

The Bible talks about eternity and living forever, but it doesn't tell us what we will be doing – short of glorifying God. The following is my current idea based on some reasonable (I hope) suppositions. Be aware that I cannot support these ideas from the Bible.

For starters I see that God has created a universe that is so vast, so large, that no one can wrap his or her head around its size. The current size is estimated to be 8.8×10^{26} meters. That's 880000000000000000000000000000 meters or 288000000000000000000000000000 feet. The fact that it is expanding makes it even larger in the future.

Why is it so big?

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Besides the physical size, there is that vast amount of time. We are talking about at least 13.7 billion years to date and an estimated 4.5 billion years before it ends.

Why has it lasted so long?

Our little planet is such a small spec in this universe that it is almost infinitesimal compared to the size of the universe. (It is even less important if you subscribe to the theory of multiple universes.) It has existed only about 1/3 the time of the universe has. And the time we have inhabited it is much less than that.

My question is why is the universe so large and we are so small? Is it just to show how great He is? Or does it have a future purpose?

Maybe it does have a purpose. Could He be preparing His children here on earth to once again create worlds and populate them?

In John 1:1-4 (NIV) it tells us that Jesus created the earth and everything in it. *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. (we will be God's children – not God) ² He was with God in the beginning. ³ Through him all things were made; without him nothing was made that has been made. ⁴ In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind.*

Jesus (as a human being) is the firstborn child of God. We are children of God after Jesus – his brothers and sisters. Maybe, like many of the other firsts that Jesus taught us; maybe as He did here on earth, we will do likewise on other planets.

It's a wild idea, I agree, but like I always like to say God thinks big and usually comes from when and where we least expect. Could this be what we will be doing for a part of eternity?

This is only one idea of many options of what we might do as the resurrected children of God.

The point is I really don't want to be floating around on a cloud playing a harp and singing praise songs for all of eternity. I think I would like to be doing something constructive and following in my Father's footsteps of creating.

May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NIV)

Final Comments

My purpose in writing this is not to espouse a factual theory of what we will do in eternity but to get the reader to stop thinking and obsessing over the idea of heaven for a few and hell for the rest – always hoping for the former and scared to death of the latter.

I think the previous paper on Hell made an excellent argument that the current popular understanding of hell is hogwash. It was (and is) a scare tactic of churches and political entities that was taught to keep the masses in order. It was not biblical but gained a great number of followers and has continued up to this day.

It is wrong, and has caused immeasurable mental and physical damage to billions of people. This damage will need to be mended when the world is renewed from its current fallen state. The way this damage can be repaired is through the resurrection of the dead (both saints and sinners).

With the love and guidance from the saints of God in renewing the minds of those damaged by this misguided teaching, each individual child of God can and will be redeemed and given a place in the Kingdom of God.

I think it would be more productive of our lives, if we were to make sure we were preparing for our eternal future with God; and stop obsessing over this concept of hell that has been foisted upon us. We could better use this lifetime to learn and practice the things He has told us are important, starting with the fruits of HIS SPIRIT and progressing from there.

The Bottom Line

The bottom line comes down to what you believe is eternally important for you; having followed the guidance of your thinking by the **HOLY SPIRIT**.