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"The Churches of God Outreach Ministries provides leadership, information, and biblical teaching in spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Matthew 28:19-20"

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THE LONG SLEEP

It's 'the cure for all diseases'.

So why fear it?

by James McBride

"It's not that I'm afraid to die. It's just that I don't want to be there when it happens". So said Woody Allen. And probably most of us would echo that thought! But apart from that act of dying, what most people fear is what happens after death. Each of the main religions has its own take on it. For Christians there's heaven, hell, purgatory, limbo. In Islam there's hell - and paradise, often attained by embracing suicidal martyrdom. For atheists and agnostics there's emptiness, nothing. Most, however, can't believe that there's nothingness beyond the ups and downs of life.

It's the uncertainty that bothers us. Ideally we would settle for 'heaven'. We would have made it into an eternity of peace and tranquillity. Life, however, doesn't come with a guarantee that we will end up there. There is always the unsavory alternative. In fact, the whole concept of death, dying and the after-life is for the most part grossly in error.

Nearly Dead?

Widely publicized of late has been the notion of a 'near-death experience' - an idea sold as evidence for an after-life. During surgery the patient 'dies'. There's a journey down a long tunnel towards a bright white light, often with a welcoming figure at the end. Specialist Dr. Sam Parnia has researched this for some seven years. He suggests three main explanations: the chemical changes in the brain during surgery, a projection of pleasant and comforting feelings of someone who thinks they are about to die - and "...a separation of human mind and consciousness at the point of death. In other words, a soul that lives on after death". He claims that around five percent of the population have had such an experience - presumably those who have lived through it!

Those who died in surgery cannot of course recount such an experience. The vast majority of those who have died under the knife and been resuscitated, however, do not recall such an event. For those who have encountered it,

all find it comforting. None have seen flames at the end of the tunnel! Yet there have been atheists and agnostics. There have been those who by no stretch of the imagination would merit 'heaven'.

Blueprint

The human brain is the most complex of organs. We are born with an estimated hundred billion brain cells which during life make billions of interconnections - making each of us what we are. It's a 'mystery' that has not yet been fully unraveled. Indeed the brain's capabilities may never be fully understood. But we do have an authentic blue-print detailing what happens when we die - the Christian Bible.

The Bible includes writings penned over six thousand years. And it is totally consistent in its understanding of the after-life - from Genesis to Revelation. Whatever you think of it as divine revelation such a body of belief cannot be discounted. In a nutshell, the message is: when we die we are just that - dead. Dead as a lifeless tree. There is no conscious existence. It's summed up by King Solomon: *"For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing. They have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love and their hatred and their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 9: 5-6). (Though that's not the end of the story.)

The notion of an 'immortal soul' permeates human thought, and has given rise to the uncertainty about death and beyond. In Christianity it generates the horrific notion that a loving God will consign His creation to an eternity of torment in the flames of 'Hell'. But different faiths have different versions of Hell - though most subscribe to the notion of 'the great barbecue below'. Who merits Heaven, the alternative? That's tricky. You have to 'be good' in this life - a concept variously interpreted, and usually at odds with the teaching of the Christian Bible. Confusion reigns,

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in other words.

Origins

When, then, did this notion of an 'immortal soul' begin? Early. At a time pre-dating the beginnings of religion, and influencing all of them. [Request the article *Babylon - Fountain of Error* for some insights.] It certainly wasn't God's idea. His view was: "...out of [the ground] you were taken. For dust you are, and to dust you will return" (Genesis 3:19). It's the view consistently held by all the Bible writers. Every atom of our bodies comes from the earthly elements. The 'soul' has proven to be elusive, despite intensive neurological probing.

When you die you are dead - just like any other creature. 'Soul' -Heb *nephesh* - is the term used in the Hebrew Scriptures for every breathing being, including animals.

And it is possible for the soul to die: "*The soul who sins shall die*" (Ezekiel 18:4, 20). Jesus said the same: "*God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life*" (John 3:16). Notice: "...*should not perish...*". Jesus contrast the two states - death *and* eternal life.

So where did the false notion of an 'immortal soul' come from? Again, the Scriptures tell us where to pin the blame: "*You will not surely die*" (Genesis 3:4). Not God's words - but Satan's! It's the *big lie* that undergirds every major religion - including Christianity, and that spawned a web of destructive teachings - including that of 'hell fire'. We should not be surprised at the source, for Jesus called him '*...the father of lies*' (John 8:44).

Awake from Sleep

If you have had an anaesthetic you will know what death is like! You lie on the trolley chatting, perhaps. Then next you know, it may be the next day. No memory of rather traumatic events. You may even have died a couple of times as did an acquaintance of mine. (Incidentally, he never entered a tunnel nor was he bathed in white light.) It will be like that for you, just as it will be so for someone who died six thousand years ago. It is so for every member of the human race who has ever lived.

But that's not the end. For every one of us will be brought back to life: "...*it is appointed unto men [mankind] to die once, but after this the judgment*" (Hebrews 9:27). It's called resurrection. Job - one of the earliest writers in the Bible - understood the concept of resurrection: "*All the days of my hard service will I wait till my change comes. You will call and I will answer you. You shall desire the work of your hands*" (ch 14: 14-15).

Writing to Christians, the apostle Paul says: "*We shall not all sleep [ie die] but we shall all be changed - in a moment in the twinkling of an eye.... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal shall put on immortality...*" (I Corinthians 15:50-54). This happens when Jesus Christ returns to reign on earth for a thousand years - the 'millennium'. The apostle John calls it '*the first resurrection*' (Revelation 20:5).

The apostle then addresses all those not in that resurrection: "*The rest of the dead lived not until the thousand years were finished*" (v.5a). Every human being that has drawn breath since man was created - and who is not in that first resurrection - will be restored to *physical* life. They will then be given opportunity - not previously available to them - to become a part of the spiritual Kingdom of God through Jesus Christ.

The divine plan holds no fear for anyone - unlike the twisted concepts purveyed by the all-encompassing false religions which reject the inspired writings of the Christian Bible.

[Request the article: *After the Resurrection*]

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