

Luke 11:24 When the unclean spirit is gone out of a man, he walketh through dry places, seeking rest; and finding none, he saith, I will return unto my house whence I came out. 25 And when he cometh, he findeth it swept and garnished. 26 Then goeth he, and taketh to him seven other spirits more wicked than himself; and they enter (1525) in, and dwell (2730) there: and the last state of that man is worse than the first.

First, notice that these remarks from Jesus not only involve possession by multiple evil spirits, just as we saw in Matthew 8 and Luke 8, but these remarks from Jesus regarding possession come after the accounts recorded in Matthew 8 and Luke 8. Consequently, Jesus' teaching here cannot be disconnected from the experiences of demonic possession described in the earlier chapters.

Second and more importantly, notice that in both Matthew 12 and Luke 11 Jesus metaphorically describes the human body as a "house" in which the evil spirits dwell. This is directly parallel to Job's depiction of the body as a vessel for the human spirit.

Third, it is equally important to note that in both passages Jesus describes these spirits as able to "go out" from the "house" of the body at which point they continue to consciously exist even though they are disembodied.

Of course, Jesus comments here are focused on evil spirits, commonly known as demons. Jesus is not talking about the human spirit, the spirit of each man. As such, Jesus' remarks do not directly testify that human spirits continue to exist even when disembodied through death. Nonetheless, Jesus' does depict the human body that is possessed as a "house" in which these evil spirits dwell, go out, and can even return all the while continuing to exist. The only question is whether this model applies also to human spirits. We have already seen some indications regarding this question. Earlier in our study we discussed 1 Kings 17:17-24, which records the account of the soul of a dead child coming back into his body after Elijah prayed for him. To examine further evidence regarding this question, we turn back to Paul's comments in 2 Corinthians 5.

2 Corinthians 5:1 For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. 2 For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven: 3 If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked. 4 For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life. 5 Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit. 6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home (1736) in the body, we are absent (1553) from the Lord. 7 (For we walk by faith, not by sight:) 8 We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent (1553) from the body, and to be present (1736) with the Lord. 9 Wherefore we labour, that, whether present (1736) or absent (1553), we may be accepted of him.

First, we recall from our earlier examination of 2 Corinthians 5 that the terms “tabernacle” and “earthly house” in verse 5 refers to the mortal bodies of men. These mortal bodies can “dissolve” or be destroyed as Paul also notes in verse 5. Likewise, the imagery of being “clothed” or “found naked” follows immediately in verse 2 as an elaboration of the concepts found in verse 1. The dissolving of the body in verse 1 is unavoidably parallel to the notion of being naked and in need of clothing in verses 2-4. In other words, being clothed refers to the state of being in the body. And being naked refers to the state of being without a body.

Consequently, here in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul is affirming the idea that the human body is a vessel, a house, and clothing for the human spirit. In fact, Paul makes similar comments just one chapter earlier in 2 Corinthians 4:7-14. In this chapter, Paul describes the difficulties that he and other Christians had been subjected to in their mortal bodies. One similarity can be found in verse 14, in which Paul states that our mortal bodies would eventually be raised up by Jesus Christ. This is similar to chapter 5 in which Paul describes how our mortal bodies will eventually be “swallowed up” and “clothed” with life.

But more importantly, in verse 7 of chapter 4 Paul refers to our mortal bodies as “earthen vessels.” Consequently, from these two chapters in 2 Corinthians we can see that Paul is identifying the body as a house or vessel for the human spirit just as Jesus does in Matthew 12 and Luke 11.

Second, because Jesus himself already described the human body as a “house,” we must regard Paul’s use of that same exact language as a deliberate continuation of Jesus’ teaching. However, unlike Jesus, Paul specifically applies this concept of the human body as a “house” to the human spirit itself, not merely to evil spirits.

Third, we turn our attention to Paul’s comments in verses 6-8, which are extremely critical to this entire study. Just as Jesus stated plainly that evil spirits continue to consciously exist even after they leave the “house” of the human body that they possess, here Paul similarly states that when Christians die and are thereby no longer “at home in the body,” they do not cease to consciously exist but to the contrary they exist in the presence of the Lord.

The only way to avoid this conclusion is to suggest that the phrase “present with the Lord” does not literally identify a location, but merely denotes metaphorically that God remembers us and will remember to restore us to existence later on. But such a theory is proven wrong for several reasons.

Number one, the suggestion that the phrase “present with the Lord” does not refer to the real location of dead saints contradicts Paul’s use of the phrases “naked” and “unclothed.” If the dead cease to exist, then they are neither “naked” nor “unclothed.” They simply do not exist.

Number two, in Philippians 1:20-25, Paul explains that he is “in a strait betwixt two” options and he did not know which he would prefer, “life” or “death.”

Philippians 1:20 According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, **whether it be by life, or by death.** 21 For to me **to live is Christ, and to die is gain.** 22 But **if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour: yet what I shall choose I wot not.** 23 **For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better:** 24 **Nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.** 25 And having this confidence, I know that **I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith.**

In Paul's words, the two options were his "desire to depart, and to be with Christ" and his desire to "abide in the flesh" which is "more needful" and helpful to the faith of the Christian flock he oversaw. In verse 23, Paul expresses that it is "far better" for him to "depart" and "be with Christ," which the passage denotes would occur upon Paul's death. But clearly, Paul was not experiencing an eager desire to cease to consciously exist and abide only in God's memory. Paul wanted to "be with the Lord." The word "be" in the phrase "be with Christ" is the Greek word "einai" (Strong's Number 1511), which means, "to be, to exist, to be present." And moreover, this phrase "be with" with regard to Christ in verse 23 is parallel to Paul's assurance to his audience in verse 25 that he would "abide and continue with you." Paul would just as much exist in the presence of the Lord as he existed among his fellow Christians on earth prior to death. This comparison to Philippians demands that we understand being "present with the Lord" in 2 Corinthians in reference to a continuation of conscious existence in a location near to the Lord.

Number three, the Greek word here for "absent" is "ekdemeo" (Strong's Number 1553), which means "to go abroad, depart." The very notion of "absence" is itself a statement about location. It describes a state when a person or thing is in one place instead of another. Likewise, the word "present" is "endemeo" (Strong's Number 1736), which means, "to be among one's own people." So, the vocabulary clearly refers to a change in location, not a cessation of existence and not simply existing in someone's memory, etc.

Number four, Paul applies the terms "absent" and "present" reciprocally to both the state before death and the state after death and this reciprocal application demands that human beings continue to consciously even after the death of the body. This is worth taking a few minutes to emphasize so the impact won't be missed. When describing our state before death in verse 6, Paul says that, "whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord." As mentioned a moment ago, the Greek word for "absent" here is "ekdemeo." But Paul uses this very same Greek word to describe our state after death in verse 8 when he writes, that when we are "absent from the body" we are "present with the Lord." The same is true for the Greek word translated as "present." The English wording of verse 6 obscures this fact a little because it uses the phrase "at home in" rather than the phrase "present with." However, both phrases are a translation of the same Greek word, "endemeo," which we also mentioned a moment ago. And because Paul is using the exact same two Greek terms to describe both our state

before death and our state after death, it is impossible for being “present with the Lord” after death to refer to anything other than a conscious, ongoing existence.

For instance, no one would argue that we don’t consciously exist while we are “present” in the body. When we are alive in the body, the word “present” obviously refers to where we are located as a conscious, existing being that is capable of interacting with other conscious beings. Therefore, when the same Greek word is applied to our state after death, it must refer to the same thing, our location as a conscious, existing being. Conversely, when Paul says that before death we are “absent from the Lord,” he means that the Lord is in heaven and we are down here on earth. We are in different locations. Therefore, because “absence” refers literally to different locations in verse 6, it must also be used to literally refer to different locations in verse 8. When we are “absent from the body” and “present with the Lord,” our bodies are decomposing on earth, but we exist in a different location than our bodies because at that point we exist in heaven with Jesus. But in either case, we exist just as much when away from the body as we do when we are present in the body. If we did not exist after death, then we would not be present anywhere at least not in the way that Paul is using the term “present” in these verses.

Consequently, the reflexive nature of verses 6 and 8 demands that our “presence” with the Lord after death is just as much of a reference to our location as a consciously being as our “presence” in the body prior to death also refers to our location as a conscious being away from the Lord. Ultimately, regardless of whether or not the evil spirits in Matthew and Luke are disembodied spirits of dead Nephilim, Paul’s continuation of Jesus’ language describing the body as a “house” for the spirit demonstrates a common understanding held by both Jesus and Paul that the spirit does continue to exist even when it exits the location of the body as it does when the body dies. Moreover, this clear evidence from the New Testament corroborates the Old Testament passages that we’ve already examined, which depict human beings continuing to consciously exist after the death of the body and prior to resurrection.

But as clear and incontrovertible as this evidence is, in the sections ahead we will continue to see additional, clear evidence that human beings continue to consciously exist after death.

Evidence #8 – Luke 16, Luke 20, Abraham, and John 5

In Luke’s Gospel, Jesus tells a parable in which a rich man and a beggar named Lazarus both die. We have already examined this passage in an earlier section. At that time, we were interested in the passage’s depiction of the spirits of the dead retaining recognizable bodily form. In this segment, we will return to the text with particular focus on its proof that human beings continue to consciously exist even after the death of the body and prior to resurrection.

Luke 16:19 There was a certain rich man, which was clothed in purple and fine linen, and fared sumptuously every day: 20 And there was a certain beggar

named Lazarus, which was laid at his gate, full of sores, 21 And desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table: moreover the dogs came and licked his sores. 22 **And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried;** 23 **And in Hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.** 24 **And he cried and said, Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus, that he may dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.** 25 **But Abraham said, Son, remember that thou in thy lifetime receivedst thy good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things: but now he is comforted, and thou art tormented.** 26 **And beside all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed: so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot; neither can they pass to us, that *would come* from thence.** 27 **Then he said, I pray thee therefore, father, that thou wouldest send him to my father's house:** 28 **For I have five brethren; that he may testify unto them, lest they also come into this place of torment.** 29 Abraham saith unto him, They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. 30 And he said, Nay, father Abraham: but **if one went unto them from the dead**, they will repent. 31 And he said unto him, If they hear not Moses and the prophets, **neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.**

With regard to the question of human existence after death, there are several relevant pieces of evidence in this chapter of Luke. As we examine these points, we should note that although the English text uses the word "Hell" in verse 23, the presence of righteous men like Abraham in an adjacent location demands that we understand the setting in terms of the Jewish concept of Sheol, which had separate areas for the wicked and the righteous. (Incidentally, in this passage the word "Hell" is translated from the Greek word "Hades," Strong's Number 86, which corresponds to the Hebrew "Sheol" as a place within the earth where the dead resided.)

First, in verses 22-24 the rich man has died and is in Hell, yet Jesus' describes the rich man in Hell as still being able to see, able to recognize Abraham and Lazarus, able to communicate to Abraham, and consciously aware of his own discomfort in Hell. Moreover, Jesus also clearly depicts Abraham and Lazarus the beggar as continuing to exist. Abraham formulates arguments and communicates responses to the rich man's requests. Abraham is even depicted by Jesus as being aware of the physical environment in which they were residing at that point after death, as we can see in verse 26.

Second, in verse 27 the rich man petitions Abraham to send Lazarus to warn the rich man's brothers so that they would not end up in the same place of torment. Here Jesus' comments not only conform to but confirm our assertion from Old Testament passages like Genesis 37, Genesis 25, and 2 Samuel 12 which depicted Sheol as a place where the dead are reunited with deceased family members.

Third, in verse 31 both the rich man and Abraham make it clear that the figures in this narrative have not yet risen from the dead within the context of the story. The

rich man asserts to Abraham that his brothers would believe Lazarus “went unto them from the dead.” And while the rich man does not specify that he has resurrection in mind, Abraham clearly does specify when he responds, “neither will they be persuaded, though one rose from the dead.” In addition, there is little doubt that Jesus is here making a point that those who have disregarded the prior testimony of God’s prophets will also not be persuaded by his own forthcoming resurrection from the dead. Consequently, in this passage from Luke we have Jesus not only employing the general premise of the Jewish belief in Sheol but also Jesus explicitly depicting that human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of their bodies.

In fact, Jesus is so explicit that the dead continue to consciously exist that the only way to avoid such a conclusion is to limit the scope of Jesus’ motivations when he provided this narrative in Luke 16. In other words, if Jesus’ point is strictly to warn people about the dangers of bodily indulgence, neglect of our fellow man, and disregard for God’s Word, then perhaps the particular details of the narrative can be categorized as more or less irrelevant and extraneous instead of as doctrinally significant. To put it even more casually, maybe this is just a parable and Jesus’ did not intend the details as an actual or accurate description of the state of man after death.

However, such dismissive characterizations based on restricting Jesus’ intentions are problematic for the following reasons.

First, it is not possible to simultaneously conclude that Christ’s parable in Luke 16 is merely intended to convey a warning about the dire consequences of certain bad behaviors while at the same time concluding that the dire consequences depicted in the parable were not intended to reflect reality. Consider how utterly ineffective it would be to warn someone against committing a crime on the grounds that doing so will result in their incarceration in prison if both the speaker and the audience understand that criminals don’t go to prison because there really is no such place. Such a warning would utterly lack the power to persuade anyone to avoid unlawful behavior. On the contrary, a warning of this kind is only effective if both the speaker and the audience know and accept the reality of the stated consequences. If hell isn’t a real place where dead humans reside and consciously experience suffering or comfort, then Jesus’ parable in Luke 16 is utterly pointless, misleading, and impotent. In other words, removing the reality of conscious existence in Sheol after death from Luke 16 unavoidably and completely undermines any point Jesus hoped to communicate to his audience. Jesus’ purpose in telling this parable is inextricably linked to the reality of existence in Hell in such a way that you cannot unravel one without unraveling the other also.

Second, we must address the extent of both fictional and real elements within parables. It would be a mistake to think that simply because something is a parable, we can regard all of its elements as mere fiction rather than accurate depictions of basic reality. There is little doubt that those who heard Jesus’ parables immediately understood that the narratives were fictional in nature with

regard to particular individuals and events. For example, no one who heard Jesus' parable about the sower and the seed in Matthew 13:3-8 would think that Jesus was talking about a real man who actually sowed seed on exactly four different types of ground. Likewise, no one who heard Jesus' parable about the merchant who finds a pearl of great value in Matthew 13:44 would think Jesus was talking about a real merchant who actually found a particularly valuable pearl and all he had to buy it. And no one who heard Jesus' parable about the good Samaritan in Luke 10:30-37 would think Jesus was talking about a specific man who was beaten by criminals on the road to Jericho, ignored by a priest and a Levite, and then helped by a Samaritan who placed him in and paid the innkeeper exactly for exactly two days of service.

Yet despite the fact that the particular individuals would have been immediately understood as fictional by the audience, the basic realism of the settings was equally apparent to the audience as well. Farmers, seed, soil, weeds, birds, rocks, merchants, pearls, Jerusalem, Jericho, criminals, priests, Levites, Samaritans, and inns were all real and part of common experience. Moreover, the effectiveness of the parables depends on using real and common phenomenon that the audience would be familiar with. If parables employed fictitious and unprecedented imagery for their setting, the audience would quickly fixate on the strange or controversial nature of the setting and miss the basic point. Consequently, while we may regard the basic character arcs in Luke 16 as fictional, it would be contrary to the basic nature of parables to regard the setting and phenomenon in the parable as fictitious and not reflective of basic reality, common experience, or widely accepted beliefs.

Third, it would be highly irresponsible for Jesus to incorporate details into the narrative that he knew were not reflective of reality, especially given the fact that some portion of his Jewish audience already believed these details to be real aspects of what happens to men after death. At the very least, Jesus would unintentionally be affirming an existing and incorrect false doctrine that human beings continue to consciously exist after death. Who could blame anyone who heard Jesus' say these things (or read Luke's account) and concluded that Jesus himself really believed the ancient Jewish concept that humans continue to consciously exist in Sheol after death? In order to avoid basing our conclusions on an interpretation which depicts both Jesus and Luke as irresponsibly misleading with regard to subjects as important as the consequences for sin, rewards for right living, and whether men continue to exist after death, we should accept Jesus' depictions of Sheol as intentional and responsible affirmations of a belief that was already present among the Jewish people. Furthermore, this conclusion is required by the fact that Old Testament texts such as Isaiah 14:4-11 and Ezekiel 32:17-32 also depict the wicked dead as conscious in Sheol. Moreover, Isaiah and Ezekiel describe that those who are already dead verbally express their anticipation of new arrivals to join them in Sheol. This is also consistent with the rich man in Luke 16:28, who anticipates that his wicked brothers would one day arrive in the same place of torment where he was. The presence of such concepts in Old Testament texts affirms that the conscious existence of the dead (including the

wicked dead) was part of Jewish beliefs and that Jesus' himself was confirming those beliefs.

Fourth, this last point becomes all the more pressing when you consider that the only counterargument is essentially an assertion that is nowhere disclosed or supported by the text. After all, the assertion that Jesus' did not intend the details of the parable as a basically realistic depiction of postmortem experience is not something found anywhere in the text of Luke 16. For contrast, consider John 21:23 in which the author takes a moment to redress an inaccurate notion that John would never die, which some had mistakenly derived from Jesus' comments. But here in Luke, with a subject like the immortality of the human soul on line, there's no wink, no aside to the audience to let them know that Jesus' depictions of continued existence in Sheol is not intended as a description of reality. Neither Jesus nor Luke who authored this account provide even the slightest hint of a warning to avert his immediate audience or later readers from taking Jesus' description of the postmortem state as accurate.

Fifth and most importantly, it is not possible to dismiss Jesus' depiction that Abraham continued to exist consciously in Sheol simply on the grounds that Luke 16 is a parable due to the fact that Jesus elsewhere makes the same statement outside the context of a parable. In fact, Luke 20 records Jesus' famous exchange with the Jewish religious sect known as the Sadducees, which also mentions Abraham in the context of a general discussion about life after death. This same discourse can also be found in Matthew 22:23-33 and Mark 12:18-27, but since Luke's account occurs only four chapters after the parable of Abraham, Lazarus, and the rich man in Sheol, we'll focus on Luke's account.

Luke 20:27 Then came to him certain of the Sadducees, which deny that there is any resurrection; and they asked him, 28 Saying, Master, Moses wrote unto us, If any man's brother die, having a wife, and he die without children, that his brother should take his wife, and raise up seed unto his brother. 29 There were therefore seven brethren: and the first took a wife, and died without children. 30 And the second took her to wife, and he died childless. 31 And the third took her; and in like manner the seven also: and they left no children, and died. 32 Last of all the woman died also. 33 Therefore in the resurrection whose wife of them is she? for seven had her to wife. 34 And Jesus answering said unto them, The children of this world marry, and are given in marriage: 35 But they which shall be accounted worthy to obtain that world, and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage: 36 Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection. 37 Now that the dead are raised, even Moses shewed at the bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38 For he is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him. 39 Then certain of the scribes answering said, Master, thou hast well said. 40 And after that they durst not ask him any question at all.

We have already discussed the Sadducees earlier and established that they rejected belief in the immortality of the soul and bodily resurrection. But here we will focus specifically on Jesus' comments regarding Abraham in verses 37-38.

First, we must focus on Jesus' all-important declaration that God "is not a God of the dead, but of the living: for all live unto him." Now, perhaps it could be argued that Jesus only means that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are "alive unto" God in some sense that God is timeless and the future resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is already a present reality to God. However, the particulars of his passage prevent us from reaching such a conclusion.

Number one, the notion that God is timeless in this specific sort of way is itself far from clear in scripture, so it would be unwise to hang the interpretation of Jesus' statement on such a concept. Moreover, while the advent of modern scientific language and studies has invited many philosophers and theologians to contemplate God in terms of abstract concepts like time, it is unlikely that either the Sadducees, the crowd who overheard this exchange, or even Jesus' own disciples would have been familiar with conceptualizing God in terms of time, timelessness, and the way God experiences or perceives things like past, present, and future. Yet verses 39-40 make it clear that Jesus' answer was something that those standing by were immediately able to comprehend and perceive the definitive nature of his proof. Verse 40 infers that the veracity of Jesus' answer was so compelling that even the Sadducees dared not ask him anymore questions on the topic. Consequently, given the historical setting it is difficult to accept that Jesus' is attempting to prove resurrection with an abstract assertion regarding how God perceives time. The nature of Jesus' rebuttal must have been something far more apparent and tangible to his immediate audience.

Number two, once again we must keep in mind that although the Sadducees rejected belief in the immortality of the soul, many Jewish people at that time believed in Sheol as the place where both the wicked and righteous dead went to reside after death. Those who were standing nearby and heard Jesus' cite Exodus 3:6 to refute the Sadducees would have naturally connected his assertions that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were "alive" at the time of Moses to their own belief that Abraham and the saints of the Old Testament period resided in Sheol. If Jesus did not intend to affirm their belief regarding Sheol, then his comments were arguably irresponsible given the cultural context and lack of clarifying qualifications offered by Jesus at the time of his remarks.

Moreover, unlike abstract concepts regarding God and time, historical considerations require us to interpret Jesus in light of the concepts available in the culture he was speaking to. Since Sheol was an ancient belief held among the Jewish people, if Jesus' comments are compatible with that belief, then we are obligated by principle to interpret Jesus in light of that cultural context before we consider or accept any interpretation that would have been foreign or unfamiliar to his audience, (such as an interpretation that Jesus is talking about God's perception of time). In short, Jesus' assertion that Abraham was alive at the time of Moses must be understood in terms of the Jewish cultural perception regarding

Sheol as a place where the dead continued to exist. And as such, we must understand Jesus' rebuttal of the Sadducees as a proof for the existing concept of Sheol.

Number three, we must consider the preceding statement in verse 37. Jesus is citing an Old Testament account involving Moses at the burning bush. This account is recorded for us in Exodus 3:1-6, which concludes with God telling Moses "I am the God of thy father, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." The important thing here is that this statement was made to Moses hundreds of years after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In other words, Moses and the Exodus provide the temporal setting, not some abstract assertion about how God perceives the future resurrection as a present reality. And to be even more specific, Jesus is pointing to the grammar and the historical setting of this statement made by God to Moses. Hundreds of years after the death of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, God did not say, "I WAS the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Instead, he used the present tense and said, "I am the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Unlike abstract conceptualizations about how God perceives time, an appeal to historical context and grammar is something that would have been familiar and comprehensible to the scribes in verse 39, who affirmed that Jesus had responded well to the Sadducees challenge.

Number four, there is another major problem with interpreting verses 37-38 along the lines that the future resurrection of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are "present" in God's perception of time. Specifically, such an interpretation would utterly fail to prove the resurrection, which is the very point Jesus is debating with the Sadducees. Under this interpretative scenario, Jesus would be telling the Sadducees that in God's perception the future resurrection is just as much a present reality as Jesus' conversation with the Sadducees as well as God's encounter with Moses at the burning bush. In other words, earlier events in history would be just as much a present reality in God's perspective as future events. But if that concept is what Jesus had in mind, then God would not need to resurrect Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in order for them to be presently alive to God because their lives in the past prior to their deaths would already be just as much present reality to God. Simply put, they would be alive to God simply by means of having ever lived at all. Consequently, if Jesus intended to refute the Sadducees' by appealing to some notion of God as timeless or beyond time, then he would have failed to prove resurrection and his citation of Exodus 3:6 would be useless rather than brilliant.

Ultimately, as a matter of best practice it is better to conclude that Jesus offered his proof based on the types of grammatical and exegetical considerations that they were accustomed to and historical and cultural concepts that were available to them at the time. Alternately, any interpretation that involves Jesus offering proofs based on abstract concepts regarding God's perception of time must be discarded on the grounds that they are not only less in tune with the types of concepts that would have been most familiar to Jesus' first-century audience but also useless for proving the resurrection based on Exodus 3:6.

Third, by pointing to the fact that Exodus 3:6 is a present-tense description of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Jesus is pointing out that these men continued to exist even hundreds of years after the death of their bodies. Of course, in saying this Jesus is actually proving the immortality of the soul rather than directly proving bodily resurrection. But that isn't really a problem for three reasons.

Number one, the way verse 37 begins it is clear that Jesus intends to move past the superficial aspect of the Sadducees question concerning marriage in the resurrected state and instead focus on the root of their error regarding resurrection as a whole.

Number two, earlier we established that the Sadducees denied both the immortality of the soul and bodily resurrection. It's not difficult to see how someone might perceive a logical connection between these two concepts. After all, no one believes that God is resurrecting soulless bodies. So, in order for there to be bodily resurrection, the soul will have to exist at some point after the death of the body. And the Sadducees clearly didn't believe that God would recreate souls who had previously ceased to exist anymore than they believed God would reconstitute bodies that had decomposed back into soil. So, for a religious group like the Sadducees who rejected any existence of the soul after the death of the body, the rejection of bodily resurrection was no doubt a foregone conclusion. If the soul permanently ceased to exist at death, then there could be no resurrection of the body. Conversely, in order for there to be a resurrection of the body, Jesus would have to first prove to the Sadducees that the soul did not cease to exist when the body died. Demonstrating that human souls continue to consciously exist after the death of their bodies would, in turn, lead to the necessity of bodily resurrection, at least so that righteous souls such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would not remain bodiless.

Consequently, it would make sense for Jesus to unravel the Sadducees' rejection of resurrection by taking aim at their denial of the immortality of the soul. This wholesale undermining of their approach is reflected in Matthew 22:29 and Mark 12:24, in which Jesus tells the Sadducees, "Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God." By proving that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continued to exist hundreds of years after the deaths of their bodies, Jesus is showing the Sadducees' rejection of resurrection as baseless and presumptuous. He is destroying an even more basic part of their theology and unraveling their rejection of resurrection as part of the domino effect. The sweeping nature of this rebuttal is no doubt why opposing parties ceased to question Jesus after the way he handled the Sadducees. And ultimately, it makes perfect sense for Jesus' to prove the resurrection of the dead by addressing the issues of the immortality of the soul.

Fourth and most importantly, we must consider the combined implication of Jesus' statements in both Luke 16 and Luke 20. In Luke 16, Jesus tells an instructive narrative in which he depicts Abraham as still existing (and consciously aware) in Sheol after his death. While that statement does occur within the context of what can be regarded as a parable, Luke 20 is not a parable at all but instead a direct refutation of a religious group that denied the

resurrection of the dead and the immortality of the soul. And in Luke 20, Jesus again depicts Abraham as still existing long after his death at the time of Moses hundreds of years later. We simply cannot view these comments from Jesus in isolation from each other. They occur four chapters apart in the same book! There is a clear continuity to Jesus' public statements about Abraham, both inside and outside of parables. Abraham still existed even after the death of his body. And since that aspect of Luke 16 is shown to be an accurate reflection of Jesus' depiction of postmortem existence, we must also regard Luke 16's depiction that other people continue to exist after death (such as the illustrative Lazarus and the rich man) as equally accurate.

And finally, we should consider both Luke 16 and 20 alongside Jesus' statement in John 5:28-29.

John 5:28 Marvel not at this: for **the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.**

We will examine these verses in John 5 again later on. But for now, there are two things worth noting from Jesus' comments. Number one, notice that as Jesus discusses the resurrection in this passage, he includes not only the righteous, but "all" the dead as seen in the phrase "all that are in the graves." In verse 29, he even specifies "they that have done evil" will be resurrected. Number two, notice the order of these events as Jesus depicts them. The wicked, including the wicked dead, are "in the graves" when they hear his voice but before they come forth to resurrection. This indicates that "all" the wicked dead will continue to consciously exist the entire duration of time between the deaths of their bodies until the resurrection of their bodies. In fact, Jesus depicts the wicked as just as much consciously existing prior to resurrection as the righteous are. When we combine this statement in John with Luke 16 and 20, we see not only that the parable in Luke 16 is an accurate attestation that the wicked and righteous continue to exist consciously after death, but also that the wicked dead do not get annihilated by the fires of Sheol but instead remain conscious in that fiery location for the entire duration leading up to their resurrection.

Evidence #9 – Moses and the Transfiguration

In our last segment, we saw Jesus assert that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continued to exist after the death of their bodies, not just in a parable, but in a public discussion proving that life does not end at death as the Sadducees taught. As it turns out, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are not the only historic figures that the New Testament depicts as still existing after their deaths in a context that is not a parable.

Matthew, Mark, and Luke all record an event known commonly as "the Transfiguration" in which Jesus takes Peter, James, and John up on a high

mountain. While there, Jesus' face "shines as the sun" and his clothing becomes "glistening" and "exceedingly white as snow."

Matthew 17:1 And after six days **Jesus taketh Peter, James, and John his brother, and bringeth them up into an high mountain apart,** **2 And was transfigured before them: and his face did shine as the sun, and his raiment was white as the light.** **3** And, behold, **there appeared unto them Moses and Elias talking with him.** **4 Then answered Peter,** and said unto Jesus, Lord, it is good for us to be here: if thou wilt, **let us make here three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.**

Mark 9:1 And he said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power. **2** And after six days **Jesus taketh with him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and he was transfigured before them.** **3** **And his raiment became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them.** **4** **And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses:** and they were talking with Jesus. **5** **And Peter answered** and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and **let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias.**

Luke 9:28 And it came to pass about an eight days after these sayings, **he took Peter and John and James, and went up into a mountain to pray.** **29** And as he prayed, **the fashion of his countenance was altered, and his raiment was white and glistening.** **30** And, behold, **there talked with him two men, which were Moses and Elias:** **31** **Who appeared in glory, and spake of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.** **32** But Peter and they that were with him were heavy with sleep: and **when they were awake, they saw his glory, and the two men that stood with him.** **33** And it came to pass, as they departed from him, **Peter said** unto Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and **let us make three tabernacles; one for thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias:** not knowing what he said.

There are several items worth noting here.

First, when it comes to the question of whether or not human beings continue to exist after the death of the body, the most relevant detail in these three accounts is that when Jesus is transformed, Moses appears with Jesus.

Second, Elijah appears here as well. However, 2 Kings 2:1-11 describe that Elijah did not die, but instead left the earth when he was taken alive up to heaven in a fiery chariot. His experience is not entirely unlike Enoch, who Genesis 5:21-24 and Hebrews 11:5 describe as being taken to be with God without dying but while he was still alive. Consequently, Elijah does not constitute an example of someone who continues to exist after the death of the body.

Third, in contrast to Elijah, the death and burial of Moses is directly affirmed in scripture. In Deuteronomy 31:14 and Deuteronomy 32:48-50, God tells Moses that the day is approaching when Moses would die. And Deuteronomy 34:1-5 records that Moses “went up from the plains of Moab unto the mountain of Nebo” just as the Lord commanded and “Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab.” Verse 6 of Deuteronomy 34 actually tells us that Moses was “buried in a valley in the land of Moab.” Joshua 1:1 begins with the phrase, “Now after the death of Moses.” Therefore, since Moses did indeed die over a thousand years before the incarnation of Christ and the transfiguration of Christ, Matthew 17, Mark 9, and Luke 9 provide direct evidence that Moses continued to exist even after the death of his body. From our analysis of Jesus’ statements in Luke 16 and 20, we might well conclude that Moses resided in Sheol just as Abraham did.

There are only three options to avoid the conclusion that Moses’ appearance proves that human beings continue to exist after the death of the body. Moses was resurrected at some prior point in history before the transfiguration, or Moses was resurrected at around the time of the transfiguration, or Peter, James, and John are seeing a vision of the future general resurrection of mankind in which Moses is a participant.

However, none of these three options holds up to scrutiny.

First, although Peter, James, and John may have seen a preview or foretaste of Christ’s glorious coming during the transfiguration, they were not seeing a future period of time. We know this because Luke 9:31 states that Moses and Elijah conversed with Jesus and “spoke of his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem.” The Greek word for “should” here is “mello” (Strong’s Number 3195), which means “to be about” in the sense of “be on the point of doing” or “to intend” or “have in mind.” In other words, Moses and Elijah are discussing Jesus’ death as an event that has not happened yet at the time of their discourse with Jesus during his transfiguration on the mount. And if Jesus’ death was still in the future from Moses and Elijah’s perspective, then Peter, James, and John could not be seeing a vision of the future resurrection at which point Jesus’ death and resurrection would be an event of the past.

Second, we have already established that Elijah did not die but was taken alive to be with God. So, Elijah is in no need of resurrection in order to appear with Jesus on the mountaintop during the transfiguration. This would mean that Moses and Moses alone would have to have been uniquely resurrected either specifically at this time or at some prior point in history. But there is simply no basis in scripture for speculating about the resurrection of Moses or other saints prior to Jesus’ incarnation, death, and resurrection, which we have already established earlier in our study. Moreover, earlier we cited the findings of apologist Dr. William Lane Craig who notes that “Jewish beliefs about the afterlife precluded anyone’s rising from the dead before the general resurrection at the end of the world” and that “Jewish hope in the resurrection of the dead was invariably a corporate and eschatological hope. The resurrection of all the righteous dead would take place

after God had brought the word as we know it to an end.” (See the book “Jesus’ Resurrection: Fact or Fiction,” pages 182-184.) Therefore, to suggest a singular resurrection of Moses prior to or at the time of the transfiguration is not only utterly without scriptural support but it was prohibited by Jewish beliefs at the time of Jesus.

Third, as we have seen there were rare occurrences of people being restored to mortal life in the Old Testament and New Testament prior to the resurrection of Jesus. However, as we also demonstrated, mortal resurrections always occurred within a matter of days of the individual’s death and the individual always returned to their normal life typically to resume daily activities with their bereaved family. Consequently, since Moses’ appearance at the transfiguration is over a thousand years since his death and any such resurrection would not serve to restore Moses’ to the normal activities of his daily life or to his bereaved family, a resurrection of Moses at the time of transfiguration is not compatible with the established scriptural model for mortal resurrections.

Consequently, Moses’ appearance at the transfiguration cannot be explained as the result of a resurrection. And since we know that Moses had died over a thousand years prior to the transfiguration, the only conclusion is that Moses’ presence during the transfiguration proves that Moses continued to consciously exist even after his death. And because we’ve already established from the New Testament that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob also continued to exist after their deaths, the unavoidable conclusion is that these are not isolated exceptions but the general trend as believed by Israelites during the biblical period and preserved as the correct understanding in the bible itself.

Evidence #10 – Luke 23 and the Thief on the Cross

The circumstances of Jesus’ death on the cross provide another New Testament proof that human beings continue to consciously exist even after the death of their bodies. This particular proof stems from Jesus’ comments to one of the two criminals who were crucified next to him.

Luke 23:32 And there were also two other, malefactors, led with him to be put to death...39 And one of the malefactors which were hanged railed on him, saying, If thou be Christ, save thyself and us. 40 But the other answering rebuked him, saying, Dost not thou fear God, seeing thou art in the same condemnation? 41 And we indeed justly; for we receive the due reward of our deeds: but this man hath done nothing amiss. 42 And he said unto Jesus, Lord, remember me when thou comest into thy kingdom. 43 And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise.

First, verses 39-40 tells us that while one of the criminals “railed” at Jesus, the other criminal confessed his crime, acknowledged that Jesus was sinless, addressed Jesus as “Lord,” and petitioned Jesus’ to “remember” him when Jesus’ came in his kingdom.

Second, it is also important to note the timing of the death of Jesus and these two criminals. John 19:31-32 are clear that the Jewish authorities asked Pilate to break the legs of Jesus and the two criminals in order to ensure that they died and could be taken down from the crosses before sunset when in Jewish reckoning the Sabbath day began. Of course, John 19:33 explains that Jesus' legs were not broken because he was already dead. And the implication is that the thieves also died before sunset.

Third, as all the Gospels record Jesus was not resurrected until the third day after his death. In Luke 23:46, in anticipation of his death Jesus expressed his trust in God the Father with the phrase "into your hands I commit my spirit." Nevertheless, in John 20:17 Jesus appears to Mary Magdalene on the day of his resurrection and tells her, "I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." This statement in John 20 indicates that, although Jesus trusted God the Father with regard to what would happen when he died, Jesus did not spend the intervening days between his death and his resurrection in the presence of God the Father in heaven.

Fourth, with these facts in mind we arrive at the critical proof. In Luke 23:43, Jesus' replies to the second thief's profession and request by promising him, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise." The question necessarily arises as to where exactly Jesus and this thief would be together that same day, especially given the fact that they both died that same day and Jesus apparently had not ascended to the Father until at least the third day after his death.

Fifth, Jesus' promise in verse 43 cannot be a promise to resurrect the criminal. Matthew 27:50-54 does record that after Jesus died, "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection." But the text specifically states that these saints did not rise from their graves until "after his resurrection." So, Jesus cannot be promising the thief that he would be resurrected the same day that he was crucified and died.

Sixth, the existing Jewish concept of Sheol as a place for the dead is both a natural and sufficient solution to this quandary. Since the Jewish people believed that upon the death of the body the dead went to reside in Sheol within the earth, Sheol would provide a place for both Jesus and the thief to go together on the very day that they died.

Seventh, the Greek word for "paradise" in Luke 23:43 confirms that Jesus has Sheol in mind. The particular Greek word is "paradeisos" (Strong's Number 3857). The Online Bible Greek Lexicon defines "paradeisos" saying, "the part of Hades which was thought by the later Jews to be the abode of the souls of pious until the resurrection." This definition is identical with the description of Sheol that Jesus' himself employed in Luke 16 when he described Abraham and the deceased beggar Lazarus in a place of comfort separated by a deep gulf from the wicked dead who were in fiery torment.

Eight, the definition for “paradeisos” can also mean “a heavenly paradise” or “heaven.” Paul uses “paradeisos” to refer to heaven in 2 Corinthians 12:1-4 where he describes a man who was “caught up to the third heaven” and who was “caught up into paradise.” However, since John 20:17 indicates that Jesus had not yet ascended to the Father prior to the third day after his death, it is unlikely that Jesus is promising the thief that together they would ascend into heaven on the day of their deaths.

Consequently, the only meaning that is available to Jesus in his cultural context and fits with the details of Jesus’ comments is the place of comfort for the righteous within Sheol. However, whether Jesus intends to refer to heaven or a place of comfort within Sheol, Jesus’ promise to the thief in Luke 23:43 demands that the thief would continue to exist after the death of his body.

Evidence #11 – 1 Peter 3-4, Jesus Preaching to the Dead

Another passage which demonstrates that human beings continue to consciously exist after death is 1 Peter 3.

1 Peter 3:18 For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit: 19 By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison; 20 Which sometime were disobedient, when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

The relevant portion of the chapter starts in verse 18, which recounts Jesus “being put to death in the flesh.” But verse 19 continues stating that after his death Jesus “went and preached unto the spirits in prison.” The critical questions here are who were these imprisoned spirits and how and when did Jesus preach to them?

First, we notice that those who Jesus preached to in this verse are identified as “spirits.” The Greek word here is “pneuma” (Strong’s Number 4151), which we have examined earlier. The intriguing point here is why Peter chose to use this term instead of just using the term “men.”

Second, verse 20 actually tells us something else about those Jesus goes to preach to in these verses.

Number one, and perhaps even more interesting, verse 20 specifies that these individuals lived “when once the longsuffering of God waited in the days of Noah.” This is important because now we know the full picture. This passage is saying that sometime after his death, Jesus went and preached to individuals from Noah’s day. In short, these are not people alive during the time of Jesus’ first advent in the first century but people who lived thousands of years earlier. Consequently, Peter must be talking about individuals who are deceased.

Number two, the fact that Peter is talking about individuals who lived in Noah's day also explains why he refers to them using the more specific term "spirits" instead of a more general and typical term like "men." In short, they were disembodied spirits and they were kept in prison for their former sins.

In light of these facts, it is clear that here we have Peter affirming the Jewish belief in Sheol where the dead were kept within the earth after the bodies died.

Number three, since we are establishing the idea that Jesus preached to the dead who were kept in Sheol, it is important to determine exactly who Jesus is preaching to. Is he giving a second chance to all men, including those who died stubbornly in sin and unbelief? Here we must take note of the word "sometime," which is a translation of the Greek word "pote" (Strong's Number 4218). "Pote" means "once, formerly, aforesaid." It is used in John 9:13, Romans 7:9, and Galatians 1:13 and 23 to refer to things that previously occurred but then ceased. And in Romans 11:30, Ephesians 2:2-3, 11, 13, 5:8, Colossians 1:21, Colossians 3:6-7, Titus 3:3, and 1 Peter 2:10 "pote" is used specifically to refer to Christians being previously sinful but then having stopped when they repented and came to Christ. It is also noteworthy that this same idea is also expressed in 1 Peter 4:1-4 using different Greek terms. Here we must also keep in mind that chapter 2:5 of Peter's second epistle describes Noah as "a preacher of righteousness." Consequently, it is consistent with New Testament language to interpret verse 20 as saying "who were formerly disobedient," conveying the sense that they had repented and turned from sin due to the preaching of Noah. And in that case, Peter would not be stating that Jesus went and preached to all the dead, even the most stubbornly wicked, but only to those who had repented at the teaching of one of God's messengers. (For more information on 1 Peter 3 and the evidence that people repented in Noah's day, see our online article, entitled, "The Days of Noah.")

In light of these fact, it is clear that here we have Peter affirming the Jewish belief in Sheol where even the righteous dead were kept within the earth after the bodies died. Moreover, Peter is affirming that Jesus went and testified to spirits in Sheol after Jesus' death. This would also confirm the conclusion from Luke 23:43 that Jesus' promise to the repentant thief can only be explained in terms of Jesus and the thief going to the righteous area of Sheol after they died.

Third, if any doubt remains that Peter intends to state that Jesus' preached to the dead, the very next chapter of 1 Peter is explicitly clear on this point.

1 Peter 4:5 Who shall give account to **him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.** **6** **For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.**

As we can in verse 6, Peter plainly states that "the gospel was also preached to them that are dead." Here it might be tempting to suggest that the phrase "them that are dead" is merely a poetic reference to those who are condemned to die

because of sin but are not actually dead. But there are several details that disprove such a theory.

First, the close contextual proximity to Peter's statement just 10 verses earlier in chapter 3:19-20 demands that we interpret these phrases in light of each other. Consequently, the phrase "preached to them that are dead" must be understood in the preceding statement that after "being put to death" Jesus "went and preached unto the spirits in prison" from "the days of Noah." Therefore, we must take chapter 4:6 as direct confirmation that Peter is talking about preaching to the spirits of the dead from Noah's time. As such, Peter's testimony in this passage provides another piece of evidence that human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of the body.

Second, the immediately preceding statement in verse 5 also refers to the dead with its assertion that Jesus "is ready to judge the quick and the dead." Verse 5 is clearly meant to convey that Jesus will judge both those who are alive and those who have died. The word for "quick" is the Greek word "zao" (Strong's Number 2198). And the Greek word for "dead" is "nekros" (Strong's Number 3498) and it is the same word used in verse 6. Moreover, these are the exact same two Greek words used in Luke 24:5, when Jesus disciples see the empty tomb and the angels ask them, "Why do you seek the living among the dead?" The angels clearly referring to Jesus being bodily resurrected in contrast to those who are physically dead. Therefore, since the term "dead" in verse 5 of 1 Peter 4 refers to those who are literally, physically dead, we know that the use of the same word in verse 6 also refers to those who are literally, physically dead.

Third, 1 Peter 3:18 refers to Christ's death on the cross stating that he "suffered for our sins" that "he might bring us to God." The same verse continues by stating that Christ was "put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit." Undoubtedly, this verse is contrasting Jesus' death on the cross with his being physically resurrected by the Holy Spirit on the third day. This pattern of death and resurrection is repeated in 1 Peter 4:6, which states that Jesus preached to "them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit." The parallels between 1 Peter 3:18 and 4:6 are apparent. Both verses are describing people experiencing death and then resurrection. Most importantly, this parallel indicates Peter's reference to "them that are dead" in chapter 4:6 is describing people who have actually died just as Christ actually died on the cross.

Lastly, it should also be noted that chapter 4:6 also fits with Matthew 27:52-53 and Ephesians 4:8. In 1 Peter 4:6, Peter describes "them that are dead" saying that they "live according to God in the spirit." This phrase parallels 1 Peter 3:18, which describes Jesus' being "being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit," which is a clear reference to Jesus' resurrection. The application of such a similar phrase in chapter 4:6 to others who have died fits with Matthew 27:52-53 which states that when Jesus arose many saints also were resurrected from the dead. Similarly, Peter's assertion that these deceased persons were held captive in prison in 1 Peter 3:19 fits with Ephesians 4:8, which declares that when

he rose from the dead, Christ took with him those who were held captive. This leads us to our next point.

Evidence #12 – Matthew 16 and the Gates of Hades

In our two previous segments, we discussed Jesus' promise to the repentant thief on the cross and Peter's statement that after his death on the cross Jesus went and preached to the imprisoned spirits of the dead who had repented at the time of Noah. We have also previously examined Luke 16, which depicted Abraham and a beggar named Lazarus as residing after death in a place of comfort within the earth. These texts naturally raise the question of what happened to these saints who were kept in Sheol. For instance, are they still there? Fortunately, scripture contains the answers to these questions and in doing so scripture also provides us with additional evidence that the dead continue to consciously exist after the death of the body.

The evidence trail starts with Matthew 16 in which Jesus refers to the church and then declares "the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it."

Matthew 16:18 And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and **the gates of Hell shall not prevail against it.**

First, we should note that the term "Hell" is once again the Greek word "Hades" (Strong's Number 86). We discussed Hades briefly earlier when examining Jesus' use of the Greek word "paradeisos" in his promise to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43. At that time we noted that the Online Bible Greek Lexicon stated there was a "part of Hades which was thought be the later Jews to be the adobe of the souls of pious until the resurrection." We also noted that this definition was consistent with Jesus' depiction in Luke 16, which portrays Abraham in a place of comfort within the earth separated by a deep gulf from the wicked dead who were in fiery torment. As we can see from the excerpt below, Britannica Encyclopedia states that the Greek term "Hades" is used "in the Greek Old Testament" (commonly known as the Septuagint) as a "translation of the Hebrew Sheol, the dwelling place of the dead."

"Hades, Old Testament - Hades, in the Greek Old Testament, translation of the Hebrew Sheol, the dwelling place of the dead." – Britannica.com

We have also already established that in Jewish reckoning Sheol was divided into two parts, one of which was a place of comfort for the righteous dead. We have already seen this in Luke 16, but here again below is the excerpt from Britannica on that subject.

"Hell, Religion, Judaism – In the Hebrew Bible, Sheol (*She'ōl*) is a place of darkness, silence, and dust to which the spirit, or vital principle, descends at death... The unjust, the improperly buried, and the untimely dead endure the misery of Sheol, but, **for those who die in God's favour, the natural bitterness of death it mitigated by reunion with their ancestors." – Britannica.com**

At first glance, Jesus' statement in Matthew 16 may conjure up images of the church ransacking the gates of Hell in an attack posture or siege from the outside. However, given that Hades is the standard Biblical Greek equivalent for the Jewish concept of Sheol, where even the righteous dead reside, it is more appropriate to understand Matthew 16 as a declaration that the saints would no longer be kept within Sheol. In other words, Jesus isn't describing the church attacking Hell's gates. He's describing dead saints no longer being kept imprisoned within Hell's gates.

In fact, various passages in the New Testament confirm that Jesus' atoning death and resurrection resulted in the saints from ages past being released from Sheol and finally allowed to enter into heaven. This leads us to our next point for this segment.

Second, when describing Christ's redemptive work Hebrews 2:14 states that through his death Jesus destroyed "him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

Hebrews 2:14 Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, **he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;** 15 And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.

However, Revelation 1:18 records a declaration from Jesus in which Jesus describes himself saying, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hell and of death."

Revelation 1:18 I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of Hell (86) and of death.

When taken together, these statements in Hebrews and Revelation indicate that by means of his own sacrificial death and resurrection, Jesus brought an end to the devil's authority over the death of mortal man and that Jesus himself ultimately received the authority over death. But equally important, according to Revelation 1:18, through Jesus' sacrificial death he also received the authority over Hell. The Greek word for "Hell" here in Revelation 1:18 is "Hades" (Strong's Number 86). It is also interesting that both Hebrews and Revelation attached this transition of authority to the event of Jesus' death. Given these facts, what we see next in Matthew 27 is not really surprising.

Third, as we mentioned earlier Matthew 27 states that after Jesus' died and, in fact, "after his resurrection" the "graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves." This resurrection event overturned the death of the Old Testament saints and released them from Sheol, marking Jesus' triumph over the devil as well as Jesus' reception of authority over death and Hades.

Matthew 27:50 Jesus, when he had cried again with a loud voice, yielded up the ghost. 51 And, behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom; and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; 52 **And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose,** 53 **And came out of the graves after his resurrection,** and went into the holy city, **and appeared unto many.**

Fourth, Paul later reflects on this triumphant event in Colossians. In Colossians 2:14-15, Paul asserts that through his death on the cross Jesus “spoiled principalities and powers.”

Colossians 2:14 Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, **nauling it to his cross; 15 And having spoiled (554) principalities (746) and powers (1849), he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.**

Number one, the Greek word for “spoiled” here is “apekduomai” (Strong’s Number 554), which means “to strip off for one’s own advantage, to despoil, disarm.” This is an accurate term to use to describe Jesus’ stripping the devil of his authority over death and Hell.

Number two, the terms “principalities” and “powers” are also important. The Greek word for “principalities” is “arche” (Strong’s Number 746). And the Greek word for “powers” is “exousia” (Strong’s Number 1849). These terms denote ranks of authority. The same exact Greek terms are used elsewhere by Paul in Ephesians 6:12 where Paul explains that, “we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities (746), against powers (1849), against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.” In Ephesians 6, Paul not only couples these two Greek terms with the word “ruler” but he also identifies these rulers as “spiritual” beings in “high places.” Just one verse earlier in verse 11 of Ephesians 6, Paul encourages his audience to “stand against the wiles of the devil.” Consequently, verse 11 identifies that these principalities, powers, and rulers in high places are the devil and his angels. There is no doubt that Paul has the same intended meaning when he couples those same words in Colossians 2:15.

Number three, Paul also states that when Jesus stripped the devil of his authority, he did so publically. Paul states that Jesus “made a shew of them openly.” The Greek word for “openly” is “parrhesia” (Strong’s Number 3954). It is the same word used in John 7:4 when Jesus’ brothers’ respond to his miracles by telling Jesus to “shew” himself “to the world.” The word is used again in John 11:53-54, which states that Jesus “walked no more openly among the Jews” but instead went “to the wilderness” because the Jewish leadership “took counsel” to “put him to death.” Paul’s use of this word in Colossians informs us that he is referring to an event that was seen and known. This is perfectly in line with Matthew 27:53, which states that when the saints of the Old Testament rose bodily from their graves at the time of Jesus’ resurrection, they “appeared unto many.”

Fifth, Paul comments on this topic again in Ephesians 4:8 when he states that when Jesus “ascended up on high, he led captivity captive.”

Ephesians 4:8 Wherefore he saith, **When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive**, and gave gifts unto men.

This phrase is actually a quotation of Psalm 68:18.

Psalm 68:18 Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity (07628) captive (07617): thou hast received gifts for men.

The Hebrew word for “captivity” is the noun “shebiy” (Strong’s Number 07628), which means “captives.” And the Hebrew word for “captive” is the verb “shabah” (Strong’s Number 07617), which means “to take captive.” In other words, Ephesians 4 is describing that when Jesus’ ascended into heaven, he took with him those who were held captive. Those captives became his captives. He took them from those who previously had authority over them and now Jesus himself had authority over them. So, who were these captives that Jesus led into heaven? Matthew 16 and 27 answer plainly. Jesus led forth the saints who were previously kept within Sheol. This description of Sheol as a place where the dead are held captive is also perfectly consistent with the language we saw in 1 Peter 3, which described repentant persons of Noah’s day as kept in prison where Jesus went and preached to them after his death. Likewise, in Hosea 13:14, God promises his people that he will “ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death.” The Hebrew word for “grave” is “Sheol.” In its own context, Hosea could simply be a reference to delivering men from the grave in the sense of delivering them from death. But in light of Matthew 16, Matthew 27, and Ephesians 4, it seems likely that Hosea is actually referring to both the resurrection of saints from the Old Testament period and their deliverance from captivity in Sheol.

Sixth, this imagery of Jesus taking deceased saints with him when he exited Hell brings us back to another passage we examined earlier when demonstrating that corruption and resurrection are processes that operate on the body, not the spirit or soul. During that portion of our study, we took note of Acts 2:31, which says that Jesus’ “soul was not left in Hell.” Below is the text of Acts 2:31 again but this time we’ve included verses 32-33.

Acts 2:31 He seeing this before spake of **the resurrection (386) of Christ, that his soul (5590) was not left (2641) in Hell (86)**, neither his flesh (4561) did see corruption. **32 This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. 33 Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted**, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

Number one, notice specifically that verses 32-33 describe how after Jesus was “raised” from the dead (to which the apostles were “all witnesses”), he was then “exalted” to “the right hand of God.” This exaltation to the right hand of God in

heaven is also mentioned in passages like Hebrew 1:3, which says that when Jesus “had by himself purged our sins” he then “sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high.” Consequently, verses 32-32 of Acts 2 demonstrates that it is discussing the same events as Ephesians 4:8.

Number two, as noted previously, the Greek word for “Hell” in verse 31 is “Hades” (Strong’s Number 86). At this point we have now demonstrated that the Greek word “Hades” was a common Greek equivalent used as a translation of the Hebrew “Sheol” and that ancient Jews believed “Sheol” was a subterranean location below the surface of the earth where both the righteous and wicked dead resided after the deaths of their bodies.

Number three, when verse 31 states that Jesus’ “soul was not left in” Sheol, it once again demonstrates that Jesus was in Sheol for a short duration of time, just as indicated in 1 Peter 3 and 4. The assertion that he was not “left” in Sheol is a reference to his resurrection and ascension into heaven, just as indicated in Ephesians 4:8 and Hebrews 1:3. And although Jesus himself could theoretically be regarded as exceptional, the fact is that Matthew 16, Matthew 27, Colossians 2, and Ephesians 4 demonstrate that Jesus took deceased saints with him when he exited Sheol.

Consequently, Acts 2 provides further corroboration of the overall New Testament model on this topic in which Jesus’ soul continued to consciously exist after the death of his body at which point Jesus’ soul, like the souls of all men, descended into Sheol where he preached to some of those who died from the time of Noah and then took the deceased saints of the Old Testament period out with him when he was raised from the dead.

These passages provide an overall picture of what happened to deceased saints from the Old Testament period. When they died, their souls resided within the earth in the place of the righteous dead in Sheol. At the time of Christ, these deceased saints were resurrected with Christ, exited Hell, and went to reside in heaven where they remain in the Lord’s presence to this day. But, as we have seen the New Testament also gives us information about what happens to saints who die in the period after Christ’s resurrection and ascension. As we will see below, when saints from the New Testament period die, they no longer reside in Sheol within the earth. Instead, their souls go to heaven to be present with the Lord. However, unlike righteous men who died before the time of Christ and were resurrected with Christ, New Testament saints still await their future bodily resurrection, which the bible indicates will take place when Christ returns. These facts will be addressed in the points that follow.

Seventh, the fact that Jesus took the devil’s authority over deceased saints is also why numerous New Testament passages testify that from the time of Christ’s resurrection onward, those who die in the Lord no longer go to Sheol but now go into heaven to be with the Lord. In Philippians 1 and 2 Corinthians 5, Paul states plainly that when Christians die they go to be with the Lord.

Philippians 1:21 For to me **to live is Christ, and to die is gain...**²³ For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a **desire to depart, and to be with Christ;** which is far better.

2 Corinthians 5:6 Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, **whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord...**⁸ **We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.**

Additionally, Hebrews 12 describes the setting of the heavenly Jerusalem and states that there are members of the church there. (While this group of saints in heaven would certainly include resurrected saints from the Old Testament who are also part of God's church, for first-century Christians the use of the term "church" would also naturally evoke a reference to their fellow Christians who had died in the New Testament period as well. In a short while below we will discuss language from Jesus, which attests to the fact that dead saints from the Old Testament are indeed considered members of his church.)

Hebrews 12:22 But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels, ²³ **To the general assembly and church of the firstborn,** which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, **and to the spirits of just men made perfect.**

Likewise, Ephesians 1 and 3 describe how some of our brothers and sisters in Christ are already in heaven.

Ephesians 1:10 That in the dispensation of the fulness of times **he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth;** even in him:

Ephesians 3:14 For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, ¹⁵ Of whom **the whole family in heaven and earth** is named.

Revelation 6 depicts the souls of those who were killed for the word of God and states that they are "before the altar." Textual clues from this passage as well as connections to Revelation 20:4-6 indicate that these are saints from the New Testament period spanning from the first century when John received the Book of Revelation until the time period just prior to Christ's return. Incidentally, we know these saints are standing before the altar of the heavenly temple, not an earthly temple for two reasons. Number one, Revelation 14:17-18 describes the "temple in heaven" and states that there is an altar there. And number two, because the martyred saints in Revelation 6:10 contrast themselves with "them that dwell on the earth."

Revelation 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, **I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held:** ¹⁰ And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord,

holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on **them that dwell on the earth?**

Revelation 14:17 And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. **18** And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe.

Elsewhere, 1 Thessalonians 4 describes the Lord's return from heaven and notes when Jesus comes back he will bring the dead saints "with him." According to Paul's depiction here, Jesus will bring the disembodied dead saints with him from heaven. At this point, they will then return to their bodies which will be resurrected. And then the living will be "caught up together with them in the clouds."

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. **14** For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so **them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.** **15** For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. **16** For **the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout**, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: **and the dead in Christ shall rise first:** **17** **Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds**, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Eighth, we should also return to Matthew 16 and the term "church" itself. The Greek word for "church" is "ekklesia" (Strong's Number 1577). The Online Bible Greek Lexicon notes that "ekklesia" is a compound word formed two Greek words. The first word is the Greek preposition "ek" (Strong's Number 1537), which means, "out of, from." And the second word is the Greek verb "kaleo" (Strong's Number 2564), which means "to call." In other words, in Matthew 16 Jesus is referring to a group that he "calls out from" somewhere. And the context of Matthew 16 directly indicates that at least one sense in which Jesus calls the saints out is that he calls them out of Hades, or Sheol. This early usage of the term "ekklesia" in the New Testament demonstrates that the saints of the Old Testament period were considered members of Jesus' church. And the fact that the saints are called out of Sheol also demonstrates that the dead continue to consciously exist.

Ninth, this notion of Jesus calling the dead saints forth from Sheol is actually stated plainly by Jesus in John 5.

John 5:25 Verily, verily, I say unto you, **The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live.** **26** For as the Father hath life in himself; so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself; **27** And hath given him authority to execute judgment also, because he is

the Son of man. 28 Marvel not at this: for **the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, 29 And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.**

There are two things to note here in John 5.

Number one, verse 28 plainly tells us that ultimately “all that are in the graves shall hear his voice.” Revelation 20:4-13 informs us that even the future resurrection will happen in two stages separated by a thousand years. We also know that the mass resurrection in Matthew 27 isn’t either one of the two resurrections mentioned in Revelation 20:4-6 due to the fact that the earliest resurrection in Revelation 20 includes those who are killed in the persecution of the antichrist involving the mark of the beast system. Nevertheless, the use of the word “all” in John 5 informs us that Jesus is ultimately talking about “all” men in mass numbers, even if that resurrection is divided into distinct stages at different points in time.

Number two, just as Matthew 16 uses the term “ekklesia,” which means “called out,” in reference to those who will not be overcome by the gates of Hell, John 5 similarly states that those in the graves will “hear his voice.” In other words, Jesus will call them out of the graves. It would seem from Matthew 27, that one instance of this has already occurred historically with the Old Testament saints at the resurrection of Christ. But the very notion that the dead “hear” Jesus’ voice itself provides another piece of evidence that human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of the body. After all, if human beings ceased to exist when the body died and the impartation of spirit returned to God without any of its previous conscious individual identity, then there would be no one to “hear” anything. Truly, God could speak the non-existent back to existence with a word, but at the time when God speaks there would be no one there to hear it. Only after the word is spoken would they come to life and be able to hear him.

In conclusion, as we can see the New Testament description of what happens to the saints of the Old Testament is spelled out quite well in numerous passages. The New Testament authors obviously had a well-developed concept on this matter. Yet none of it works if we remove the Jewish concept that human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of the body. The biblical picture is that those who lived before Jesus’ death initially went into Sheol (until Christ’s death and resurrection) and those who die after Jesus’ resurrection now go to be with God in heaven to await the resurrection of their bodies. The detailed and consistent narrative regarding the release of deceased, Old Testament saints from captivity in Sheol to abide in heaven with God is another clear New Testament proof that human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of the body prior to the resurrection. Likewise, New Testament declarations that New Testament saints go to be in the presence of Christ in heaven to await resurrection also confirms that men consciously exist after the death of their bodies. But with these facts comes a critical question. Since we have established that Sheol is a prison for the righteous dead prior to Christ, shouldn’t we also expect that a

prison for disembodied human spirits is would necessarily also be a place of incarceration for the spirits of the wicked dead as well?

Evidence #13 – Matthew 10 and Those that Kill the Body but not the Soul

In an earlier section of our study we turned our attention to Matthew 10:28. At that time, we examined how this verse demonstrates that life is an inherent property of spirit and that spirit does not yield to the destructive processes that can kill the body. However, as we will now explain, this passage also provides clear proof that the human soul continues to consciously exist after the death of the body.

Matthew 10:28 And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in Hell.

First, as we pointed out during our previous examination of this verse, here Jesus makes a simple and yet profound statement that the death of the body does not result in the death of the soul. Consider the fact that if the human soul ceased to exist when the body died, then anytime someone committed murder they would be killing the soul just as much as the body. In that case, Jesus statement would be false. Therefore, Jesus' statement here necessitates that the death of the body does not bring an end to the existence of the human soul. The soul continues to consciously exist even after the body dies.

Second, concerning the current topic of discussion, it is evident from Jesus' statement that he intends to convey a warning regarding a danger that exceeds the kind of harm that men can do to one another. In Jesus' words, men can kill the body only. But God can kill "both" the body and the soul. But the fact is, if the human soul ceases to consciously exist when the body dies, then God could not pose any greater threat to the soul than men do. Under such a scenario, from the perspective of the man being killed his existence ends when his body is killed. So, what more does he have to fear from God? Jesus' attempt to convey God as capable of imposing something worse than death would be next to meaningless to an audience that believed a man's conscious existence already ended at the death of the body.

Third, in order for Jesus' statement to be meaningful and for God to be able to pose a greater threat than men, the soul must continue to exist after the death of the body. Only in this scenario would the dying man have more to fear from God even after his body is destroyed by men. Therefore, Jesus' statement that men can kill the body but not the soul demands that the soul continues to consciously exist after death and, consequently, still has something to lose even as a disembodied conscious soul.

Of course, this raises a question regarding exactly what danger God poses to the soul. Does the text of Matthew dictate that God would bring the soul to an end? Or is there another possible meaning to the phrase "destroy the soul?" We will

have to return to these questions later on when examine the effect of Hell on human existence. For now, Matthew 10:28 simply provides one more clear New Testament proof that the soul does not cease to consciously exist when the body dies.

Evidence #14 – Revelation 6, 19-20, Saints Speak After Death Before Resurrection

In an earlier section titled, “Without the Body What Does a Spirit Look Like?” we briefly examined details from Revelation 6 and 20. As we noted at that time, Revelation 6 describes saints who have been “slain,” who are waiting before God in the heavenly temple, and who are told to wait for other saints to be killed before God will execute his judgment and wrath upon their enemies. Revelation 19-20 picks up on this promise from God when Jesus returns to carry out God’s vengeance on his enemies and to resurrect the saints so they can reign with Christ in his kingdom. Most importantly, Revelation 20:4-5 asserts that the resurrection of the dead saints does not occur until the point in time when Jesus’ returns to overthrow his enemies and establish his reign on the earth with the saints. This means that the saints in Revelation 6, who were still waiting for God to judge his enemies and execute his wrath could not have been resurrected yet. However, the fact that they are aware of the passage of time and petition God between their death and their resurrection entails another biblical passage asserting that humans continue to consciously exist between the death of the body and the resurrection.

For reference, we have placed the relevant portions of Revelation 6 and 19-20. (Notice that the dead saints in Revelation 6:9 wear the same clothing as the armies that follow Jesus when he returns in Revelation 19:14, which indicates that this is the same group, although now its ranks are complete.)

Revelation 6:9 And when he had opened the fifth seal, **I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God**, and for the testimony which they held: **10 And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?** **11 And white robes were given unto every one of them; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.**

Revelation 19:11 And I saw **heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.** **12** His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself. **13 And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God.** **14 And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.** **15 And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the**

fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. 16 And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, **KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS...20:2** And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3 And cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season. 4 And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: **and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God,** and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; **and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years.** 5 But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. **This is the first resurrection.**

Evidence #15 – 1 Thess. 4, The Dead Return with Christ Before Resurrection

In 1 Thessalonians 4, Paul gives instruction concerning what will happen when Jesus returns. His particular focus is explaining what happens with regard to Christians who have died in the years before Jesus' return.

1 Thessalonians 4:13 But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning **them which are asleep**, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. 14 For **if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring (71) with him.** 15 For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that **we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent (5348) them which are asleep.** 16 For **the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:** 17 **Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air:** and so shall we **ever be with the Lord.** 18 Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

For our current study, the critical statement comes in verse 14 in which Paul explains, "them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him."

First, we know that the phrase "bring with him" refers to Jesus' return because the very next verse refers to "the coming of the Lord" and verse 16 likewise describes that, "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven."

Second, there is something else that is interesting about this phrase "bring with." Who is it that God will "bring with" Jesus when Jesus returns from heaven? Verses 13 and 14 have already identified who this is. Verse 13 uses the phrase "them which are asleep" and "them also which sleep in Jesus." Verse 16 further identifies "them which sleep in Jesus" with "the dead in Christ." In other words, "those who sleep" is a poetic reference to those who have died. In a later section of this study, we will directly answer the question, "does the analogy of sleep

prove that dead humans are not conscious?" But for now it is only important to note that "sleep" is a New Testament reference to being dead.

Third, another important factor can be found in verse 16, which states that when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven" and there is the sounding of the trumpet, it is at that point when "the dead in Christ shall rise." This means that the dead do not rise until Christ descends from heaven, returning to the earth. At this point, the question emerges, when are the dead saints brought with Christ, before their resurrection or after? The arrangement of verses 14 and 16 indicates that the saints are brought with Christ in verse 14 before they are resurrected in verse 16.

Fourth, we should consider whether or not this phrase "bring with" requires the dead saints to be with Christ in heaven and to travel with him from heaven. Could it instead indicate that the dead saints simply meet up with or rendezvous with Christ when he returns to the earth? There are two points worth noting here.

Number one, the Greek word for "bring" is "ago" (Strong's Number 71), which means, "to lead, take with one." This is clearly not a reference to Christ rendezvousing with the dead saints on the earth. It clearly requires Christ taking the dead saints with him when he descends from heaven to the earth. Notice that this is consistent with the imagery of Revelation 6 and 19-20, which also depicts deceased saints as with God in heaven prior to their resurrection.

Number two, we might also consider whether or not the phrase "bring with" refers to the dead saints being caught up in the clouds to be with Christ or perhaps descending from the sky to the earth with Christ, instead of traveling with him all the way from God's throne in heaven. But here we must consider Paul's contrast to those saints who remain alive on earth until the return of Jesus. In verse 15, Paul explains that, "we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep." The Greek word for "prevent" is "phthano" (Strong's Number 5348), which means, "to come before, precede, anticipate." In other words, verse 15 is saying that the saints who have not died will not go before those who have died. But most important is the contrast between the living and the dead. Paul is very clear that the living saints "remain" here on the earth.

This is relevant for three reasons.

One, it is another indication that the dead saints are in a different location or, more specifically, that they are arriving at the start of Christ's earthly reign from a different location than the living. The living have remained here on earth. The dead have gone somewhere else, which is why the dead need to be brought here with Christ when he returns. The living do not need to be brought here, which leads us to our next point.

Two, it would not make any sense to describe living Christians who are already on the earth being "brought" to the earth with Christ for his return. The living are

already here. They do not need to be “brought” here. Only those who are not here on earth need to be brought to earth, which leads to our third and final point.

Three, this passage has not left vague what it means when it refers to those who need to be “brought” to the earth. Verse 14 has already stated that Christ is among those who God will bring to the earth. In fact, the phrase “them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him” clearly identifies “him” as “Jesus,” which means Jesus is among those who are brought back to the earth by God. Here we find incontrovertible evidence of what Paul means by “bring.” The dead are “brought” in the same sense that God brings Jesus. Jesus has not been on earth. He has been in heaven. And verse 16 states that he will “descend from heaven.” Consequently, in the context of this passage anyone who is “brought with him” must be “brought” from heaven where Jesus himself resided with God prior to returning to the earth. The inclusion of the dead saints with Jesus requires that they exist in heaven prior to Jesus’ return and prior to their resurrection, which verse 16 clearly states does not occur until Jesus’ returns.

In conclusion, 1 Thessalonians 14 is another passage, which teaches that the dead continue to exist between the death of their bodies and their resurrection, just as Paul plainly declares in 2 Corinthians 5:8, “We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.” Clearly, Paul understood that when Christians died, they did not cease to exist but merely relocated away from their decomposing bodies to be near Jesus Christ in heaven and there to await returning to the earth alongside Christ at which point they would be bodily resurrected.

Summary of Evidence

In summary, we have seen multiple, biblical proofs that human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of the body but prior to resurrection. Those proofs can be itemized as follows.

Genesis 37

- 1) Jacob is told that his son Joseph was dead and Jacob concludes that Joseph was torn apart by wild animals. Jacob expresses his expectation that when he died he would be reunited with his son Joseph who Jacob perceived was already dead, which cannot be a reference to burial placement since Joseph’s body was not available to bury.

Genesis 25

- 2) Scripture states that when Abraham died, he was “gathered to his people,” which cannot refer to his burial due to the fact that Abraham’s sons were still alive and his ancestors were buried in an entirely different location.

The Death of Moses and Aaron

- 3) Scripture states that when Aaron and Moses died they were “gathered to their people,” even though they both died on different mountains from one another in the wilderness between Egypt and the Promised Land where none of their ancestors or people were buried.

2 Samuel 12

- 4) When David's first child with Bathsheba dies, David refers to some aspect of his child that cannot be brought to him. Since the body was available, David must have meant the soul or spirit. David goes on to express his expectation that he would at some point go to be with the child, which contextually means that he would one day go where the spirit of the child resided after death.

1 Samuel 28

- 5) Scripture records that King Saul used a witch to bring the Prophet Samuel up from the place of the dead, at which point Samuel relays information that the witch did not have, including a very specific and accurate prophecy about the circumstances of Saul's death.

Unclean Spirits

- 6) As established in our studies on "Spiritual Warfare" and "Giant Lineages," ancient Jews and Christians believed that some wicked angels had offspring with human women and that when these offspring died, their spirits wandered the earth and sometimes possessed the living.

Matthew 12, Luke 11, 2 Corinthians 5, and Philippians 1

- 7) When describing possession by an evil spirit, Jesus refers to the body as a "house" that the spirit can exit and then later return to. In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul continues Jesus' analogy of the body as a house and describes how the human spirit itself depart from the body and go to exist in another location, specifically the presence of the Lord in heaven. In Philippians 1, Paul confirms this expectation that when the body dies, Christians continue to exist in a different location, specifically the presence of the Lord.

Luke 16, Luke 20, and Abraham (and John 5)

- 8) In Luke 16, Jesus tells an instructional narrative in which Abraham, a beggar, and a rich man continue to consciously exist after the death of the body. The rich man is in a place of fiery torment that is separated by a gulf from Abraham and the beggar who are in a place of comfort. Four chapters later in Luke 20, Jesus confirms that Abraham continues to exist after the death of his body when Jesus cites Exodus 3:6 to prove the resurrection on the grounds that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continued to exist at the time of Moses hundreds of years after their deaths. Moreover, Jesus' statement in John 5:28-29 demonstrate that just before being resurrected all the wicked dead are just as much conscious and able to hear the voice of Jesus' call them forth to resurrection as the righteous dead are. This straightforward teaching is confirms the indications of Jesus' parable in Luke 16 regarding the ongoing conscious existence after death of both Abraham and the wicked rich man.

Moses and the Transfiguration

- 9) In the transfiguration of Jesus, Moses and Elijah appear with Jesus and converse with him about his impending death. Although scripture records that Elijah never died but was taken up into heaven alive in a chariot of fire, scripture is repeatedly clear that Moses died and was buried. The specific textual details surrounding Moses' appearance at the transfiguration are not compatible with any type of resurrection. Therefore, Moses' presence at the transfiguration must be regarded as a

disembodied spirit, which proves he continued to exist after the death of his body.

Luke 23 and the Thief on the Cross

- 10) Jesus is crucified alongside two thieves and all three men die before sunset that same day. Jesus promises one of the thieves that he would be in paradise with Jesus that same day. This demonstrates that the thief continued to exist after the death of his body.

1 Peter 3-4, Jesus Preaching to the Dead

- 11) 1 Peter 3 and 4 state that after his death, Jesus went and preached to spirits of the dead who had been imprisoned from the time of Noah. This is consistent with the Jewish belief in Sheol and demonstrates that the dead continue to consciously exist even thousands of years after the death of the body.

Matthew 16 and the Gates of Hades (Matthew 27, Colossians 2, and Ephesians 4)

- 12) Jesus declares that the gates of Hell would not prevail against his church. In Jesus' declaration, the Greek term for "Hell" is "Hades," which was a common Greek equivalent used to refer to the Jewish concept of Sheol. Various passages of the New Testament describe that through his death, Jesus took the keys of death and Hell from the devil and when he rose again he made a public display of this triumph over the devil by leading forth dead captives and resurrecting them at the same time Jesus was resurrected. This is seen directly in Matthew 27:50-53, when saints from the Old Testament are resurrected bodily in conjunction with Jesus' resurrection. Colossians 2:15 and Ephesians 4:8 describe this resurrection of the Old Testament saints as a public parade of Jesus' liberation of these Old Testament saints from angelic authorities who kept them captive in death. (Hebrews 2:14, for example, explicitly identifies the devil as having the authority over death.) These events require that humans continue to consciously exist in Sheol after the death of the body.

Matthew 10 and Those that Kill the Body but not the Soul

- 13) In Matthew 10, Jesus admonishes his followers not to fear men who can only kill the body, but to fear God who can destroy both body and soul. This demonstrates that the soul does not die when the body dies. Only if the soul continues to consciously exist after the death of the body would a human being have any anything more to fear or more to lose after the body is killed.

Revelation 6, 19-20, Saints Speak After Death Before Resurrection

- 14) Revelation 6 describes saints who have asking God to avenge them but instead being given white linen clothing and told to wait for the rest of the martyrs to be killed before God would enact judgment and vengeance on his enemies. Revelation 19-20 describe the return of Jesus Christ as the point when God enacts judgment and vengeance. Chapter 20 identifies that the saints who were slain are resurrected when Christ returns in order to reign with him. This indicates that the dead saints in chapter 6 have not been resurrected yet, however, they clearly consciously exist as demonstrated by their awareness of the passage of time and their communication with God.

1 Thess. 4, The Dead Return with Christ Before Resurrection

15) Paul explains that when Christ Jesus returns to reign over the earth, there will be Christians who are alive and remain on earth, but that God will bring the dead Christians back from heaven to earth with Jesus when Jesus himself comes back from heaven to earth. This passage also demonstrates that the resurrection does not occur until after Jesus has descended to earth from heaven. This is similar to 2 Corinthians 5:8 in which Paul explains that “to be absent from the body” is “to be present with the Lord.” Consequently, dead Christians do not cease to exist when the body dies. Instead, they continue to exist but relocate away from their decomposing bodies to reside in heaven with Christ.

In conclusion, these 15 pieces of evidence and over 40 passages of scripture from the earliest portions of the Old Testament to the New Testament prove that human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of the body. However, now that we’ve concluded this specific portion of our investigation, there is one other related caveat worth addressing. As we have seen in the scripture, the dead do not simply exist “in God’s memory” or “in God’s mind.” To the contrary, the descriptions in scripture demand that the dead retain their individual self-awareness and identity. Consequently, it is simply not possible to reconcile scripture’s testimony with the theory that human beings cease to consciously exist at death, even by appealing to equivocating language such as “alive in God’s memory.”

Conclusion Regarding Ending Human Existence by Destroying or Removing the Human Spirit

Earlier in this study we established that in scripture the term “soul” refers to the individual being and commonly construes the more casual idea of a “person” or “individual.” We also established that according to scripture, each human being has a spirit as part of his or her being (just as we each have a body). In fact, God created human beings with two essential components, a body that was formed from the inanimate soil of the earth and a measure of spirit imparted from the Ever-Living God, which God originally breathed into the molded body that God made for Adam in Genesis 2.

So far in this study, one of the main questions we’ve been considering is whether or not human beings cease to exist as conscious individuals when the body dies. As we stated early in this study, it is not a question of whether God is capable of causing a human being to cease existing. We might well conclude that God has power to do many things that he has decided not to do and never will do. Therefore, ultimately these issues revolve around the question of how God chose to make human beings and what God has chosen to do with regard to human beings when their bodies die.

At this point, we have seen two categories of evidence in scripture revealing what God has established when it comes to human beings and the death of the body.

First, we have shown from scripture that life is an inherent property of spirit and that spirit is inherently unyielding to destruction. Second, we have also established from scripture that human beings do not cease to exist when their bodies die. Instead, when the body dies the human soul consists only of spirit and that spirit moves to reside in a different location separated from the decomposing body that it left behind.

Ultimately, these two categories of evidence eliminate options for bringing to an end the existence of any human being. Because God has made life an inherent property of spirit and made spirit inherently unyielding to destruction, the cessation of a human being cannot occur by means of causing the spirit within a man to cease to exist. But scripture does teach that when a man dies, the spirit within him departs. However, because scripture substantially testifies that individual human beings continue to consciously exist after the death of the body, we also know that the departure of spirit from the body does not bring about the cessation of individual, conscious human existence. Rather, human consciousness still remains an innate faculty of the human spirit and continues after the death of the body. Scripture simply records that upon departing from the body, the human soul and spirit are relocated to a different location either in Sheol or in heaven.

Here we might ask a pivotal question. Is it fair to call the spirits of men immortal, even if God can still later revoke their immortality? Yes. The inherent quality of a thing is defined by what it is like or what it does when left on its own. For example, our bodies will eventually die no matter what we do, no matter how much we exercise, or how healthy our diet is, or how much we avoid danger or disease. The reason for this is that the body is made from mortal soil from the earth. To return to dust is its natural progression (unless sufficient life-giving spirit is imbued to it to overcome that tendency of the mortal earthen material). On the other hand, as the passages in this section clearly demonstrate, if left on its own the spirit of man will live on even after the death of the body, even in the fires of Hell (as shown by Luke 16 and John 5). Consequently, the inherent trait of the spirit is to live on. And that's what it will do despite what happens to the body and no matter how harsh (or fiery) of an environment it experiences after death – at least unless God specifically intervenes. But once again, if God has to intervene to cause the spirit to cease to exist, then it is not inherently mortal because if it were inherently mortal, God would not have to intervene to cause it to cease to exist. It would do so on its own as a due product of its own natural course. Therefore, it is fair to describe the human spirit as immortal by nature even if considering the possibility that a special act of God (withdrawing his spirit or putting them in Hellfire) could revoke that immortality or end it through annihilation.

At this point, there is one last lingering question that needs to be addressed on this topic. What impact does Hell have on the existence of the human spirit? More precisely, does the information that scripture reveals about Hell depict Hell as a mechanism for ending the existence of the human spirit? However, since we have already seen that the spirits of men survive the death of the body and even endure in Hellfire until their resurrection centuries or millennia later, the only option left

for annihilation is if such immortality is something God will revoke. In other words, given the resilient and persistent existence of the spirit as depicted in scripture means we are not dealing with a scenario in which human spirits are inherently mortal and normally die but rather one in which they are inherently immortal and can only die if God undertakes special action to overcome or end their immortality.

However, in order to substantiate that God will undertake special, direct action to terminate the enduring existence of the human spirit after the death of the body, it is absolutely necessary to identify a biblical description of that mechanism and event. As we will see moving forward, there are essentially two possibilities for such a mechanism. First, it could be suggested that the fires of Hell are the mechanism of annihilation. However, it should be also noted that the possibility of Hellfire as the means of annihilation (particularly with regard to passages in Revelation regarding judgment day) has already been shown to be a problematic notion because of Luke 16 and John 5, which show that exposure to the fires of Hell does not annihilate spirits. Second, certain passages (such as can be found in Job, for example) could be cited to suggest that God might annihilate an individual human's existence by removing the spirit, reversing the process of creating Adam. However, because we have seen that the death of the body does not automatically entail the cessation of the individual human spirit, it would have to be conclusively demonstrated that such statements about God withdrawing spirit refer to the actual annihilation of the individual human spirit and consciousness not merely to the death of the body. As we will see later in this study, there is no reliable evidence in such texts to conclude that they refer to annihilation of the spirit and, in fact, they could easily refer only to the body dying if God were to separate a human spirit from the body. In that case, such passages would not provide any basis for asserting what happens to the human spirit after it is separated from the body or for insisting that the human spirit ceases exist as a conscious individual after it is called forth from the body.

In our next section we will turn our attention to the question of Hell as a mechanism for ending the existence of otherwise immortal spirits as well as the related alternatives to that notion.