



Conducted by
Alf Marsden

“Would you please explain what is meant by “the heresy of Soul-sleeping,” and would you please do this in the context of Luke 16: 19-31.”

I think that we should try to answer this question by just giving information relative to the specific question, and not by stating opinions which may or may not be true. The reader can then either accept or reject the evidence, or possibly make the question a subject for private study. Therefore, I shall attempt to define the “Soul-sleeping” heresy, the arguments used to support it, and the arguments used by those who oppose this heresy. Let me say at the outset that this so-called “Soul-sleeping” heresy is not one that has been propounded much in the British Isles, but is one which has had much discussion in the U.S.A. Consequently, I should welcome any correction if I should err in any detail whatsoever.

Soul-sleeping

Those who adhere to the doctrine of Soul-sleeping teach that man is “wholly mortal.” He is made only of dust and will eventually return to the dust from whence he came. Man will die as a mouse or a rat might die; there will be no consciousness after death because there will be nothing left to be conscious. The wicked will be raised at the resurrection and will be totally destroyed (annihilated) after the resurrection. Soul-sleepers teach that there is no “inner man,” there is no hell, there is no punishment for the wicked. It follows, then, that we shall need to ascertain whether or not the Bible teaches this doctrine, and if it does not, what in fact it does teach.

Destruction

Soul-sleepers generally appeal to scriptures which speak about destruction, and they equate destruction with annihilation, i.e., “out of existence.” The word “destruction” occurs twelve times in the N.T. as follows: Matt. 7:3; Rom. 3:18; 9:22; 1 Cor. 4:5; 2 Cor. 10:8; 13:10; Phil. 3:19; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:9; 2 Pet. 2:1; 3:16. The noun “destruction” is represented by four Greek words in the N.T., and we would do well to examine these words in order to find their true meaning.

SUNTRIMMA occurs once in Rom. 3:16, “Destruction and misery are in their ways.” Many opponents of Soul-sleeping would argue that “misery” indicates prolonged, severe suffering, and that if “destruction” meant “out of existence” then the word misery would seem to be superfluous.

KATHAIRESIS occurs twice (2 Cor. 10:8; 2 Cor. 13:10). “For your edification

and not for your destruction." We would seem to be on the right path if we read "overthrow" for destruction.

OLETHROS is found four times (1 Cor. 5:5; 1 Thess. 5:3; 2 Thess. 1:9; 1 Tim. 6:9). The passage in 1 Cor. 5:5 speaks about the so-called incestuous brother at Corinth. It would seem that the literal destruction of the fleshly body is not meant here, but remedial punishment which would result in physical suffering as in the case of Job (Job 2:6) and for conquest of fleshly sins. The objective behind the discipline was restoration to the fellowship. You cannot restore someone who has been put out of existence, if destruction means annihilation.

APOLEIA is found five times (Matt. 7:13; Rom. 9:22; Phil. 3:19; 2 Pet. 2:1; 2 Pet. 3:16). This word as used in the N.T. indicates the loss of *well-being*, but not of *being*. It is rendered "perdition" in other scriptures where it is used, but the basic meaning is the same. The verb form of this noun is APOLLUMI and this word occurs ninety two times in the N.T. It is variously rendered by "perish"; by "lose, lost"; and by "destroy". The idea is not extinction but ruin, loss; the loss of well-being rather than being. The force of this verb is made evident in the parables of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son. In these instances the word would not possibly mean, so far as we can reason, that the sheep, the coin, and the son were "out of existence" because they were "lost" to the Shepherd, the woman and the father respectively.

The only thing that I can advise the questioner and the reader to do is to make a detailed study of these words in the contexts where they occur and then he may come to the conclusion that "destruction" and "to destroy" do not inevitably mean total extinction or annihilation of being, as many people seem to suppose.

Lazarus and the Rich Man

The teaching regarding these two men is to be found in Luke 16:19-31. There are those who say that this is a parable, but Jesus never designated it as such, nor has any other inspired writer, as far as I know, so for the purpose of this study we shall proceed as if it is not a parable until perhaps someone can prove that it is.

The situation as depicted is quite clear. The rich man dies and goes to hell; Lazarus dies and goes to Abraham's Bosom. Soul-sleepers say that in this state there would be no conscious existence; their opponents say that consciousness is indicated in the text. The word "hell" needs a little explanation. In his Expository Dictionary of N.T. Words, W. E. Vine says that "Hades" has been unhappily rendered "hell" in the A.V.; in the N.T. the revisers have always used the rendering "Hades." The word never denotes the grave, not does it indicate the *permanent* region of the lost; to the lost it is intermediate between decease and the doom of Gehenna. The condition, says W. E. Vine, is as indicated in Luke 16:23-31.

The condition, if Luke 16:23-31 is literal, is one of conscious torment for the rich man, and one of conscious bliss for Lazarus in Abraham's Bosom (a place of honour); this conclusion would seem to be fairly obvious according to the text. It is interesting to read what Josephus, the chronicler of the Jews, says regarding this intermediate region Hades, with respect to a description of Abraham's bosom. After indicating that Hades is allotted as a place for custody of souls, Josephus goes on, "For there is one descent in this region, at whose gate we believe there stands an arch-angel with a host; which gate when those pass through that are conducted down by the angels appointed over souls, they do not go the same way, but the just are

guided to the RIGHT HAND, and are led with hymns, sung by the angels appointed over that place, unto a region of light, in which the just have dwelt from the beginning of the world; not contrained by necessity, but ever enjoying the prospect of the good things they see . . . while they wait for the rest and eternal new life in heaven, which is to succeed this region. This place we call the "bosom of Abraham" (Josephus History, page 603). I am well aware that this is not inspired writing, and that Josephus was not even a Christian, but it does serve to illustrate the thinking of that time and gives us some insight of some section of Jewish thought.

What is Man?

In his second letter to Corinth, Paul teaches us that the christian man is dual, "For which cause we faint not; but though out outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). We reason from this statement that the christian man cannot be *all body*; there is an "inner man" also, and this inner man is sometimes referred to as the soul. At the beginning of Chapter 5, Paul teaches that, this "inner man" groans within this earthly tabernacle which is the body, and yearns to be "clothed upon" with our house which is from heaven. So the teaching seems to be that the earthly house (the body) will decay into the dust from whence it came; the "inner man" (the soul) will be "clothed upon" in a continued existence.

But what of the natural man who has not been born again? Is he just to disintegrate into dust. Is *he* all body? In Genesis we are taught that when God created man He breathed into his nostrils the breath of lives and man became a living soul. Jesus Himself said, "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 (APOLLUMI) both soul and body in hell" (Matt. 10:28). At the close of his first letter to Thessalonica Paul says, "May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly, and may your spirit, and soul, and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Thess. 5:23).

In the O.T. we read, "But this flesh upon him shall have pain, and his soul WITHIN him shall mourn" (Job 14:22). From this scripture it would seem that the inspired writer is saying that the soul is within the flesh.

Conclusion

Well, we have examined scriptures which at face value would seem to suggest that man will be utterly destroyed, and in that condition would not be capable of experiencing anything, conscious or otherwise. We have examined other scriptures which seem to indicate that man is made up of body, soul, and spirit, and in that condition the body would return to the dust but the soul would live on; if we say that the soul *lives* on then we would seem to be saying that such life would have conscious existence *apart from the body*. We have seen that the Revisers have used "Hades" instead of "Hell," and that Hades is designated as the place for departed souls, and is seemingly divided into a region called "Paradise" and "a place of torment" which is sometimes referred to as Tartarus; from Paradise and Tartarus, souls would eventually proceed to Heaven and Gehenna respectively.

As I see it, there are things that we shall not understand fully until we experience the reality of them, but while the scriptures are available to us we must seek to explain them as objectively as we can. I feel that I have only scratched the surface of what is obviously a very deep subject, and if anyone can lead us into a little more light than I would be eager to learn from them.

(All questions please to Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan, Lancs.).