

Where Did Old Testament Believers Go After They Died?

Luke 16:19-23 *Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom.*

Let's make some observations:

1. This is probably not a parable, since Abraham and Lazarus are named, and the characters in other parables do not have names. The names tie the story to reality. But even if this is a parable, the point is just the same.
2. No matter what else it dealt with (like money, greed, selfishness, or poverty), the whole emphasis, the majority of the description, is on what happens after death.
3. Both men died, that is, their bodies were dead and buried, yet the essential nature of both men, what we refer to as their soul, left their bodies and did not die or sleep.
4. Both men were immediately alive after death in a bodily form, and they were the same people they were on earth, including Abraham, who had died 2,000 years earlier.
5. Lazarus was in a place of comfort called *Abraham's bosom*.

Like all Old Testament people, Lazarus and the rich man were in a place, usually referred to as *Sheol*. The word *Sheol* can mean either trouble (Jonah 2:2), death (1 Kings 2:9), or the place of the dead. But frequently it refers to the place after death for both believers and unbelievers (Job 7:9; Psalm 16:10; 49:15; 139:8; Isaiah 14:9).

Old Testament saints, believers who have died (like Lazarus in Luke 16) were not yet qualified to be in the presence of God, until after Jesus paid for their sins on the cross (Hebrews 9:12). Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom, a paradise, the pleasant part of Sheol, seemingly the same as Rachel, Samuel, David, Moses, and the other Old Testament saints.

It seems that the Old Testament believers were led from Sheol to heaven, by Jesus after He died on the cross and paid for their sins (2 Corinthians 5:21; Acts 2:27; Ephesians 4:8-10). But what is abundantly clear is that, even though their fleshly bodies were dead and buried, both the rich man and Lazarus were alive and well in a bodily form, and the same people they were on earth, with their senses of sight, hearing, touch, movement, and a sense of morality. Their souls were certainly not dead, or asleep.

For more information see: "Christians Go to Heaven When They Die" under Study Papers; Long Papers on Relational Concepts web page: <https://relationalconcepts.org/>