

*General Questions to Ponder*

As a child, what did you think happens after death? Why did you think so?

What did your parents and grandparents think about afterlife? How do you know? Why, do you suppose, they thought so?

As a child or adolescent, on what occasions did you hear about afterlife? Who assumed it or described it? What kinds of details did you hear?

How much of Christian faith depends on afterlife? How much of Methodist faith? Explain.

According to your experience, is belief in afterlife based mainly on fear? Mainly on a desire for justice? Mainly on a moral code?

Early on, Ehrman says that neither the Old Testament nor Jesus offers any evidence for belief in the sort of afterlife perpetuated among contemporary Christians, perhaps particularly amidst atonement theology. How do you receive such a pronouncement from Ehrman?

How comforting, how compelling, is belief in heaven and hell for most of us?

Why do we seek to do good works if not for the promise of heaven? Why do we seek to avoid sin if not for the threat of hell?

*Questions from Ehrman*

Why is death fearsome? Why is the process of dying fearsome? How might belief in afterlife alleviate fears?

What do Enkidu and Gilgamesh fear about death? What does Gilgamesh do to avoid dying? Who is Ut-napishtim, and what secrets about afterlife does he offer Gilgamesh? How precisely and why does Gilgamesh fail to achieve an afterlife? What does Siduri (the alewife) tell him he should value instead?

According to the ancients, what is the worst thing about dying and death?

Through Socrates, Plato offers two possibilities for death—what are they? How does the latter introduce and underscore the dualism of body and soul?

Nowadays, do we separate body and soul? What about mind and heart—where do they fit in? Can we define *body*, *soul*, *mind*, *heart* and distinguish amongst them?

An important American surgeon and writer Richard Selzer (1928-2016) wrote a famous essay titled “The Exact Location of the Soul.” Where is the soul, and how might we (or a surgeon) find and identify it?

Does the soul live after the body dies? How do we know? Evidence? Why does it matter?

What or where is the source of our being?

Why do most Christians reject the notion of death as “deep and lasting sleep with no pains, worries, concerns”? Why do most Christians reject the notion of death as nothingness?

*The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* present differing views of afterlife—how do they differ? How does this afterlife differ from that in the Hebrews’ Sheol? From either notion proposed in Plato? What exactly happens in Tartarus? In Elysium?

Do flesh and bones continue after death? Is that true when Odysseus meets Anticlea, when Aeneas meets Achilles and then Anchises? If there is no flesh and bone, then what suffers in Tartarus? What is rewarded in Elysium?

Why is proper burial important to the ancients? Think of Elpenor and Palinurus. Think of Antigone’s dying in order to bury Polyneikes in Sophocles’s play. Why does “proper burial” matter—and what, then, is “proper burial”?

What is the significance of the River Styx and the River Lethe for the dead? How do both Odysseus and Aeneas manage to visit the underworld (afterlife) and still return to the land of the living? (Also true of Herakles, Orpheus, and others.). Is such a journey desirable?

Why don’t we long for reincarnation as described in Plato and Vergil? For a cleansing for the current soul and its assignment to another body for another cycle of life?