

IS THERE  
DEATH  
AFTER  
LIFE?

MARK H. GRAESER • JOHN A. LYNN • JOHN W. SCHOENHEIT



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NOTE:

All Scripture quoted in this book is from the King James Version unless otherwise noted. Words in all capital letters indicate our added emphasis.

(NIV) = New International Version

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## *Preface*

**I**t was once said with tongue in cheek that “religion” introduces a person to the subject of death and then keeps reminding him about it until he experiences it firsthand. Actually, every person, religious or not, is from the early years of his life well aware of the inescapable reality of his death. British poet Thomas Chatterton once remarked, “I have been at war with the grave for some time, and I find it not so easy to vanquish it as I imagined. We can find asylum to hide from every creditor but that.”

God never intended for there to be a dead end on the road of life. Through Jesus Christ, He has made available the antidote to death, which is life—*eternal* life. Rather than simply believe what God’s Word says about death and its aftermath, many people have concocted their own doctrines regarding this horrible, inescapable tragedy.

Such doctrines fall into the category of “religion,” which is man’s own ideas and traditions about God and the deep issues of life. Unfortunately, the religious traditions of men have for many people long superseded the words of God. Jesus confronted the religious leaders of his day, saying, “Ye do err, not knowing the scriptures, nor the power of God” (Matthew 22:29); “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition” (Matthew 15:3); and “...ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition” (Matthew 15:6).

So it is with the many traditions and beliefs regarding the subject of life after death that are in vogue today. Man-made, they do not provide a true answer to the question in each person’s heart: “What happens to me when I die?” It is truth, not tradition, that sets one free, as Jesus stated (John 8:32). Conversely, error regarding important spiritual matters enslaves people. Apart from the truth, we are besieged with many confusing and often frightening theories.

The Word of God states that many “through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage” (Hebrews 2:15). This bondage is often due to one’s fear of the unknown. In His wisdom and mercy, our benevolent Creator knew that we would experience such emotion. In

keeping with His desire to provide man with “all things that pertain to life and godliness” (II Peter 1:3), He has provided answers to the many unsettling questions regarding the topic of death. He has stated in His Word that He does not want us “ignorant concerning those that are asleep [dead]” (I Thessalonians 4:13).

Speaking about the written Word of God, Jesus Christ said, “Thy Word is truth” (John 17:17). When it comes to spiritual things beyond the realm of man’s five senses, such as life after death, the Word of God is the *only* credible witness. In stark contrast to the vague, groundless theories and speculations originating in the minds of men, God, the author of life, presents clear, straightforward answers to the most profound questions of the human heart. Thus we must look into God’s Word, the literature of eternity, and let Him speak for Himself about the deep issues of life and death.

The Bible is the standard of all literature, and God the Author of all authors. As literature, it contains a rich variety of linguistic thoughts, expressions and usages. Like any author, God has the right to use language as He deems appropriate to His purposes. E.W. Bullinger, an eminent British Bible scholar (1837-1913), identified the use of more than 200 figures of speech in the Bible. These figures greatly enrich its literary value and at the same time entrust its readers with great responsibility.

Those who endeavor to study, understand and interpret the Bible must become very sensitive to the literary devices it employs, because its study is not merely for cultural amusement. Our very lives, both temporal and eternal, depend on an accurate understanding of God’s words, which are the very “words of life.”

When God makes statements of fact, or uses language in the way it is normally used, we should surely take note. When He departs from customary usage of words, syntax, grammar and statements true to fact, we must take double note, for such departures serve to better communicate truth than can literal statements of fact.

As the only credible witness of eternal and spiritual verities, the Bible gives testimony in a variety of ways—some literal, some figurative. Misconstruing the use of its language is one of the principle errors of the orthodox Christian Church, particularly, as we shall see, regarding the state of the dead. This has resulted in the Word of God being twisted, distorted and misrepresented.

The real source of all that is contrary to God's Word is His archenemy, the Devil. He was the first to minimize the grim reality of death, and his original lie, "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4), is still being propounded. Millions have been duped into believing that eternal life is not conditional upon obedience to the Word of God, but is inherent within all men no matter what they believe.

Although most ancient pagan religions, such as those of the Babylonians and Egyptians, believed in some form of immediate life after death, the ancient Greeks were the first to philosophize that each man has an "immortal soul." The refrain caught on, and by the third century it had been harmonized into a watered-down Christianity, despite its complete antithesis to Scripture. Over the centuries, corollary falsehoods have been attached to this grievous error. The most harmful are (1) that God is responsible for death and (2) that all unbelievers will be eternally tormented.

Tragically, the vast majority of so-called "orthodox," "fundamental," "Bible-believing," "mainline," "evangelical" Christian churches has embraced and traditionalized these false doctrines. While Christians should have been proclaiming the biblical truths that death is an enemy, that the Devil is its author and that eternal life is conditional upon a believer being raised from the dead by Jesus Christ at His appearing, most have not.

Instead, they have joined the ranks of the "spiritists," "spiritualists" and nearly all non-Christian religions in teaching that those who have died are not really dead. Sadly typical is the incredible statement made recently by a radio preacher that "When a Christian dies, he has just begun to live." How ironic it is that this error has also greatly helped the cause of millions of proponents of "New Age" doctrine, which fundamental Christianity so vehemently denounces.

Both Christians and non-Christians are teaching that death is merely a transition or "graduation" into a higher realm of consciousness. Thus it is little wonder that the world is absolutely inundated with movies, music, literature and countless quotes by politicians, movie stars, sports heroes and other public figures promulgating this false doctrine. Calling death a "graduation" or the beginning of real life almost makes it alluring and thus opens up sincere people's minds and lives to the forces of evil and their destructive influences. It also makes the Word of God "of none effect."

## *Is There Death After Life?*

We are not the first, nor are we the only ones at present, to go against the grain of so-called “orthodoxy” and herald the truth of God’s Word regarding this vital subject. Our work contains many references to other men’s works, both pro and con, that go into more detail on certain issues. We encourage you to study in greater depth those things that interest you.

Our goal in producing this work is not to offend other Christians, but to glorify the One True God and His Son Jesus Christ and to help God’s precious people, many of whom have “a zeal for God, but not according to knowledge” (Romans 10:2). To do so, we are bound to speak the truth in love. May our sincere effort be found acceptable in the sight of God and serve to make known the truth of His Word.

It is our prayer that this book helps satisfy your hunger and thirst for the truth. We know it is not perfect, but we trust it will enlighten you in regard to that which *is* perfect, the Word of God. We pray also that it will inspire you to both search the Scriptures and share with others the truth you find there. We love you dearly and welcome any further insight you may have on this subject.

II Peter 1:2

Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord.

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# *Introduction*

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**T**he subject of the state of the dead affects the deepest issues of the hearts of Christian believers, such as our conception of God and His love, our understanding of our salvation and eternal destiny, our life-style, our evangelistic efforts and our will to live. Also at stake in this study is the most fundamental of Christian values—our faith in the integrity and credibility of the Bible.

Certain basic questions are usually raised by the mystery of death. Among them are:

- (1) What is the “soul”?
- (2) What is death?
- (3) Where are the dead?
- (4) In what state of being are they?
- (5) When will this state end?

Traditionally, the orthodox Church has taught that the human “soul” is immortal. Thus it survives death, which affects only the physical body. The soul goes consciously either to heaven, to be in the presence of God, or to hell, a place where the soul is aware of separation from God and is tormented for eternity. However, upon careful study, it is clear that Scripture says differently. In fact, there is not one verse in the Bible that speaks of anyone who has died being alive in heaven with Jesus Christ.

The accurate biblical answer to the above questions can be expressed in this statement:

*The dead are truly dead in “gravedom” and are “sleeping” until the coming of Christ, when He will awaken them.*

Before we present biblical and historical evidence we believe leads to this conclusion, we will first consider some of the consequences of believing Satan’s original lie and then set forth the truth of God’s Word as it answers the above questions. There *is* death after life, but because God so loved mankind that He gave His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ, and raised Him from the dead, there is also life after death for those who believe on Him.

We realize the doctrine that the dead are conscious in eternity is usually taught sincerely by well-meaning Christians, often in an attempt to comfort the bereaved upon the loss of loved ones. Nevertheless, we encourage those who hold this traditional position to reconsider it in the light of Scriptural truth, which in the end will prove vastly more comforting, satisfying and uplifting than “the doctrines and commandments of men.”

## *Consequences of Believing Satan's Lie*

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### *The Father of Lies*

**A**mong other things, Jesus Christ came to expose Satan's methods. Chief among these is the Devil's consistent contradiction of God's Word.

John 8:44

Ye are of *your* father the devil, and the lusts of your father ye will do, he was a murderer from the beginning, and abode not in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he speaketh a lie, he speaketh of his own: for he is a liar, and the father of it.

In John 10:10a, Jesus clearly revealed Satan's intentions: "The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill and to destroy." Satan's ultimate goal is to promote death and destruction, as the Bible makes clear.

Hebrews 2:14

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil. (NIV)

The Devil holds the power of death, and one of his most effective aids in exercising this power is the lie that death is in reality the gateway to eternal life and ultimate wisdom. He first told this lie early in Genesis.

Perhaps you recall that Satan's first recorded utterance in Scripture was a challenge to the veracity of God's Word. Satan said, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden?'" (Genesis 3:1, NIV). This deceptive misquote of God's revealed Word led to his second utterance, "Ye shall not surely die" (Genesis 3:4), which was just the opposite of what God had said to Adam.

Genesis 2:16,17

And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat:

But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.

God said, "Thou shalt surely die." Satan said, "Ye shall not surely die." Scripture makes clear who was telling the truth.

Romans 5:12

Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned.

Death, both spiritual and physical, was the result of man's believing Satan's lie. The idea that there is really no such thing as death is still being promoted today, even within the Christian Church. Satan's

purpose has remained the same: to promote the idea that humans do not actually die, but go on living after their death whether they believe God's Word or not. In this way, he obscures the light of the good news of Christ and His resurrection, one's only hope of deliverance from death unto eternal life.

## *False Hope*

The false doctrine that the dead are alive and already in heaven or hell is so well entrenched in the average Christian's mind that he has probably never considered its harmful ramifications. Understanding that Satan is the "father" of this lie explains why the consequences of believing it are so serious. The first, and perhaps most serious, consequence of believing this doctrine is that it changes the Christian's focus from the appearing of the Prince of Life, Jesus Christ, to the coming of one's own death.

In 1829, the Scottish Bible scholar Edward Irving, in a lecture entitled "The Second Advent of Our Lord," stated that:

... instead of looking to that glorious event [the Lord's appearing], and to all the circumstances connected therewith, the church has nearly forgotten it, and instead of it, to take up with miserable substitutes, such as that every man should think but of the day of his death; from which consideration there comes not joy nor strength, but weakness and oppression.... <sup>1</sup>

In contrast, the late Dr. Walter Martin, a noted Christian apologist, in his epochal work *The Kingdom of the Cults*, which well represents the position of orthodox Christianity on this subject, wrote:

The great hope of the believer, then, is the joy of personal union with the Lord, and this union, the Apostle Paul tells us, takes place at the death of the body. <sup>2</sup>

How sad it is to teach God's people that the hope of a Christian is his own death, and how opposed to God's perspective that death is an "enemy," as I Corinthians 15:26 clearly states: "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." Biblically, death is a thief, not a benefactor. Death *takes away* life; it does not *give* a greater life.

In attempting to preserve the traditions of historic, orthodox Christianity, such teaching that the "dead" are "alive" blatantly contradicts God's Word and further entrenches the Christian church in this error. Those who have mistakenly propounded this doctrine have apparently overlooked the many verses plainly stating that the focal point of a Christian's hope is not his own death, but the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ from heaven. For example:

John 14:2,3

In my Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I WILL COME AGAIN, and receive you unto myself; that where *I am*, *there ye* may be also.

I Thessalonians 2:19

For what *is* our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? *Are not* even *ye* in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ AT HIS COMING?

I Thessalonians 4:16,17

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:

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.

Titus 2:13

Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious APPEARING of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ;

It is the occasion of Christ's appearing from heaven that Christians should anticipate as the way of deliverance from the bondage and corruption of death. Jesus Christ is the only gateway to eternal life and the only means by which believers will have access to God's presence in heaven. When Jesus Christ comes again, He will fashion new, glorious bodies for us (Philippians 3:21). Apart from having these new bodies, there is no hope of entrance into the presence of God. Near the end of his life, the Apostle Paul wrote the following about this occasion:

II Timothy 4:8

Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me AT THAT DAY: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Shifting the event that triggers our entrance into the presence of God from Christ's appearing to our own death is nothing short of satanic subterfuge. In the minds of many, Satan has subtly changed the gateway to eternal life from Jesus Christ to death itself. Considering the past actions of God's archenemy, this clever trick is totally consistent with his methods. The Christian's hope is not death, but the appearing of Jesus Christ.

## *Who Needs Resurrection?*

A second consequence of believing the doctrine that the dead are alive is one that has drastic implications for biblical integrity and harmony. Believing that all the dead are conscious in heaven or hell reduces the great truth of resurrection to virtual insignificance. Death

must be *true* death if resurrection is to be meaningful. If death involves only the body, with the soul and/or consciousness living on, then resurrection has lost *at least* half its significance.

If all believers have gone into the presence of God at their deaths, the monumental importance of Jesus Christ's resurrection is negated. If Abraham, David, Job and others were already in heaven as disembodied souls or spirits, enjoying the presence of God in "eternity," then our enemy, death, had already been vanquished before Christ's resurrection, and eternal life was available without Christ. In fact, if it were true, as many teach, that Enoch, Elijah and Moses went to heaven bodily, then Jesus is not even the only human in heaven with a body. Such teaching contradicts the Word of God, confuses sincere Christians and dilutes their joy of hope.

It also leads to a question posed by Wycliffe, Tyndale, Luther and others during the course of Christian history. If disembodied souls are able to live and enjoy the presence of God in heaven for eternity, then what is the need for a resurrection?

William Tyndale (1492-1536), the heroic Reformation figure chiefly responsible for translating the Bible into English, wrote the following to combat the teaching of the Roman Church:

And when he [Sir Thomas More] proveth that the saints be in heaven in glory with Christ already, saying 'If God be their god, they be in heaven for he is not the God of the dead ...' therewith he stealeth away Christ's argument wherewith he proveth the resurrection, that Abraham and all the saints shall rise again, and not that their souls were in heaven, which doctrine was not yet in the world, and with this doctrine he [More] taketh away the resurrection quite, and maketh Christ's argument of none effect.

And in like manner Paul's argument to the Corinthians is worth naught. For when he sayeth, 'If there be no resurrection we be of all wretches the most miserable ...' I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine if he had [known] of it that the souls of their dead had been in joy, as he did with the resurrection that their souls should rise again. If the souls be in heaven in as great glory as the angels after your doctrine, show me what cause should be of resurrection.<sup>3</sup>

Tyndale went on:

And you in putting them [the souls of the dead] in heaven, hell and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection ... the true faith putteth the resurrection which we are warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers, denying that, did put that the souls did ever live. And the Pope joineth this spiritual doctrine of the philosophers together, things so contrary that they cannot agree <sup>4</sup>

If a body is not required for life in the “hereafter,” then God is going to a lot of trouble for no apparent reason by “reuniting” everyone with his body. And the physical death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, serving only to allow the disembodied soul or spirit to be united with a body that it obviously can do without, seems to be of little significance.

The teaching that the soul lives on after death destroys the uniqueness of Christian doctrine, that is, that Jesus Christ’s bodily resurrection is prerequisite to anyone being given eternal life. With so much biblical emphasis on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, any doctrine undermining it is highly suspect.

### *That Sounds “Familiar”*

A third consequence of believing the doctrine that souls live on after the body dies is that it plays into the hands of those who promote the practice of communicating with the dead. Today many people, both Christian and non-Christian, attempt to communicate with the spirits of the dead, often in seances or via “channeling.” Such practices are similar to ancestor worship, historically a practice of most non-Christian religions. Pagans believe that the spirits of departed ancestors intervene in their lives, both for good and evil. Thus, as godlike beings, they must be worshiped and entreated. Superstition and fear of the unknown are always hallmarks of such false doctrine.

If there really are “departed souls” or “spirits” that are conscious and have knowledge of eternity or other matters of interest to those of us still earthbound, why not communicate with them? Because they are not there to answer. What *will* answer are evil spirits (fallen angels currently under Satan’s dominion) impersonating the dead. In the Old Testament, however, God expressly forbade communication with such “familiar spirits.” For example:

Leviticus 19:31

Regard not them that have familiar spirits, neither seek after wizards, to be defiled by them: *I am* the Lord your God.

Leviticus 20:6

And the soul that turneth after such as have familiar spirits, and after wizards, to go a whoring after them, I will even set my face against that soul, and will cut him off from among his people.

Deuteronomy 18: 10,11

There shall not be found among you *any one* that maketh his son or his daughter to pass through the fire, *or* that useth divination, *or* an observer of times, or an enchanter, or a witch.

Or a charmer, or a consulter with familiar spirits, or a wizard, or a necromancer.

II Kings 23:24

Moreover the *workers with* familiar spirits, and the wizards, and the images, and the idols, and all the abominations that were spied in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem, did Josiah put away, that he might perform the words of the law which were written in the book that Hilkiah the priest found in the house of the Lord.

They are called “familiar spirits” because these evil spirits are familiar with people who have died and can even reproduce their likenesses and personalities as if they were still alive in the realm of the “hereafter.”<sup>5</sup> The judgment of God against Saul, Israel’s first king, that led to his death was in part caused by his attempt to divine the Lord’s will through a familiar spirit impersonating Samuel (I Samuel 28:7-9; I Chronicles 10:13,14). It is appalling that the orthodox Christian position cites this record as evidence that the dead can appear and communicate to the living.<sup>6</sup> (For further explanation of this record, see Chapter Seven.)

There is nothing in the New Testament that changes God’s Old Testament prohibition against attempting to communicate with the dead. The reason for this is simple: The dead are unconscious in “gravedom” and cannot communicate with the living. If anything is communicated, it will be from evil spirits attempting to deceive people into accepting that the dead have not “surely died.”

Before her death in 1970, Eileen Garrett was for more than thirty years one of America’s greatest mediums. What did those spirits that spoke through her want to communicate? “Their primary mission seemed to be to prove the survival of human consciousness beyond death.”<sup>7</sup> Acceptance of the doctrine that the dead are alive and can be communicated with may very well be the first step toward allowing such spirits into one’s life, making possible all manner of destructive results.

In their book, *America, The Sorcerer’s New Apprentice*, Dave Hunt and T.A. McMahon rightly observe that “one of mankind’s most compelling fascinations in every culture throughout history has been to communicate with the dead. Mediumship is one of the world’s oldest professions and has always been an integral part of nature religion in its many forms.”<sup>8</sup>

The authors also quote from an article by Andrew Greeley in the January/February 1987 issue of *American Health Magazine*, entitled “Mysticism Goes Mainstream”: “Nearly one-half of American adults (42 percent) now believe they have been in contact with someone who has died.”<sup>9</sup> Hunt and McMahon comment that the figure of 42 percent represented nearly a 60 percent increase from a previous poll eleven years earlier and stated: “Any disease showing statistics like that would be recognized as epidemic.”<sup>10</sup>

## *Death: Friend or Foe*

A fourth consequence of believing the doctrine of immediate entrance into heaven at death, and the corollary teaching that death is God's will, is that it may subtly undermine a Christian's will to live by causing him to accept death as a "friend." But God's Word is clear:

I Corinthians 15:26

The last ENEMY *that* shall be destroyed *is* death.

If a person is persuaded that death is a "friend" that will introduce him to the glories of eternity, he may adopt a cavalier attitude toward his own death. Satan can then wield the power of death more easily, manipulating the untimely death of his victims by fatal disease, murder, suicide or accident.

Why should a Christian aggressively cling to life on earth and endeavor to live it to the fullest when a much brighter and higher existence awaits him with God "on the other side"? Does this teaching motivate a Christian to behave in a manner that will cause him to prolong, preserve and enjoy his earthly existence and service to God? To the contrary, one's belief in an immediate afterlife might even cause him to hasten his own death.

One effect of this false doctrine may possibly be seen in the context of a serious illness. It is generally understood that an individual with a strong will to live is more likely to survive a life-threatening illness. How ironic that Christian believers who have access to God's miraculous, supernatural power for deliverance often negate it by a truncated will to live, based on their misunderstanding of the true nature of death. Unbelievers who think that this life is all there is can too often muster more of the innate and God-given instinct for survival than does a child of God. Does it glorify God that His people should have less desire than unbelievers to live as long as they can on earth? Does this help win the lost and persuade them of the benefits of following the way of Jesus Christ?

In the same vein, many Christians are very fatalistic about the moment of their deaths. Perhaps to deal with the fear of death, they assume the Lord already has the day picked. When their "number is up,"

they will die, regardless of their behavior, thoughts or even prayers. They think that God alone determines the day of their death when *He* is ready.

There is, however, no biblical justification for the idea that the day of one's death is "set in stone." Rather, the Bible is replete with examples of men and women shortening or prolonging their lives by the way they lived—for example, Saul (I Chronicles 10:13) and Hezekiah (II Kings 20:1-5).

Although believing that God determines the day of one's death may seem comforting to a misguided believer in, say, an airplane bouncing through turbulence, it actually may work against him. In a critical situation, intense prayer and supplication would be much more beneficial than passively waiting to see what God's will is. It is obvious that our own choices go a long way toward determining what kind of life we live and for how long. Thinking fatalistically, one is probably less likely to do those things that make for a long and healthy life.

If it were true that it is God who determines one's appointed time to die, then death would be a friend, and God would be its cause. Neither is true. God's will for man is a long, healthy and prosperous life as a testimony to His love and goodness (e.g., Proverbs 4:10; 9:11; Ephesians 6:3). Jesus said that He always did the Father's will (John 4:34; 5:30; 6:38; 17:4), and He healed all who came to Him in faith (Matthew 4:23; 8:16; 9:35; Luke 9:11). (For an explanation of why the Bible says in the Old Testament that God at times killed His own people, see Appendix: The Idiom of Permission.)

Of course, most Christians who teach that God kills His people seldom say it that way. They usually say, of a Christian who has died, that God "called him home." What an incredible euphemism! Think about it. "Home." What visions the word carries with it: a hot meal, a warm bed, a loving family. But what are people *really* saying about a saint who has died, when they sweetly say that God "called him home"? They're saying that God, Who is love, light and goodness, ran him down with a bus, ate out his insides with cancer or had him beaten to death in an alley. Repulsive? Yes, death is just that.

Although Jack Sharkey, former world heavyweight boxing champion, was hardly known as a spokesman for fundamental Christian orthodoxy, his statement in 1978 upon hearing of the death of his friend,

boxer Gene Tunney, is representative of its confusion. Sharkey said that Tunney's death "makes me think it's too bad. We all get along and the good Lord takes us."<sup>11</sup> How can the *good* Lord do *bad* things?

The Word of God clearly states that God is "good" (Mark 10:18) and that death is an "enemy" to His people (I Corinthians 15:26). God tells us also that it is the Devil who holds the power of death (Hebrews 2:14) and that the Devil was a "murderer from the beginning" (John 8:44).

It should be noted here that although death is of the Devil, this does not mean that a Christian who dies is "bad" or "out of fellowship" or "possessed." Because of the fall of Adam, physical death is the inevitable end of life for each person, unless he is still alive when Christ again appears.

If the Church fails to change its wholly untenable biblical position that the "dead" are actually "alive," it will unwittingly continue to play into the hands of spiritualists, adherents of Eastern mysticism and the proponents of the rapidly growing New Age movement, who deny both the significance of Christ's resurrection and the unique opportunity for eternal life through faith in His name. It will also continue to offer people a weak and false hope based on paganism, rather than the comforting and satisfying truth of God's Word.

## *What Is the “Soul”?*

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### *This Is Your Life*

**T**o understand the entire subject of “life after death,” it is important to consider the word “soul.” Unfortunately, the traditions, doctrines and commandments of men have distorted its biblical definition. Though it does have a considerable range of biblical meaning, “soul” cannot be stretched to mean what the Greeks said it meant: “consciousness” or “personality” able to exist apart from the body.

Early in the Bible, God describes man:

Genesis 2:7

The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.

In his commentary on the Bible, Dr. Basil F.C. Atkinson states regarding this verse:

It is a mistake to see in this statement the idea that a spiritual nature, akin to the Divine and not shared by the lower creation, was imparted to man.<sup>12</sup>

The Hebrew word translated “soul” in Genesis 2:7 is *nephesh* and is used elsewhere in the Bible for animals as well as man.

Genesis 1:21

And God created great whales, and every living creature [*nephesh*] that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it *was* good.

Leviticus 11:46

This *is* the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature [*nephesh*] that moveth in the waters, and of every creature [*nephesh*] that creepeth upon the earth:

Biblically, insects, birds, fish, animals and man have a common life force that animates them. When this is gone, they are dead.

Ecclesiastes 3:19

For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath [*ruach*]; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast.

To say that man is animated by the same life force as all members of the animal kingdom is not to imply that man is merely an animal. God made man in His image and that makes man a unique creation. Only man has the capacity to use language, to reason, to morally discern between right and wrong and so forth. God’s purpose in giving man these special attributes was so that man could understand His Word, know Him and love Him.

Several English words in the Bible refer to this life force: “breath,” “life,” “soul” and “spirit.” Precise definitions of and distinctions between the Hebrew words *nephesh* (soul) and *ruach* (spirit) and their New Testament Greek equivalents, *psuche* and *pneuma*, are very dif-

difficult to arrive at. They deal with intangible realities, and their biblical usages overlap. Robert L. Whitelaw offers a pertinent analogy:

Life is *never* spoken of as a substance, least of all a self-conscious entity, added to or removed from the body. Its closest analogy today is in an electric lamp; electricity (still a mystery) converts a mere lamp-structure into a light-giver, yet nothing is added to the lamp when it is turned on, nor removed when it is cut off. So Jesus at death is spoken of in Isaiah 53:8 as “cut off out of the land of the living.” Life, like electricity, will forever remain a mystery to science in this world.<sup>13</sup>

The soul is the impersonal, temporal, natural life force present in man and is sometimes called “the spirit of man.” For example:

James 2:26

For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

There is nothing in the Hebrew text to connote that “soul” is, by definition, something that can live apart from a body and thus be immortal. Neither is the word “soul” ever used as the “spirit” of the dead.<sup>14</sup> It is most significant that *in the entire Old Testament there is absolutely no mention of a soul going to heaven at death.*

The biblical usage of the Hebrew word *nephesh* (soul) conveys the conception of “the whole person,” including his thoughts, feelings, desires and abilities. Via the figure of speech synecdoche, a part put for the whole, the “soul” figuratively represents the whole person, even though literally it is only the life force that animates him. Thus in Scripture, “My soul”= I and “His soul” = He.

There are other figurative usages of *nephesh* that refer to “dead souls,” meaning “dead persons” (Leviticus 19:28; Numbers 6:6; Haggai 2:13). Since at death the soul ceases to exist, *nephesh* is figuratively spoken of as going to the grave when it dies.

Psalm 16:10

For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*sheol*= gravedom];  
Neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Psalm 49:15

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave  
[*sheol*= gravedom]: For He shall receive me. Selah.

Dr. Atkinson again writes that, for many, the meaning of “soul” is:

... derived from the Greeks, chiefly from the great fourth-century [427-347 B.C.] thinker and teacher, Plato, who regarded the soul as a distinct immaterial and immortal entity imprisoned in the body and released from it at death, and carrying the actual human personality. It was in this sense that Plato and the Greeks used the word *psuche*. In the New Testament, however, as in the Septuagint version of the Old Testament, the Greek word [*psuche*], like other prominent terms, is used as is the equivalent word which it translates. The words may be Greek, but the conception is Hebrew. The Old Testament knows nothing of a soul in the Platonic sense. The word *nephesh* means a living animal entity. It may be applied to a human being, in which case it means “person,” a sense in which it may still sometimes be used in English. It may be applied to animals in which case it means “creature.”<sup>15</sup>

It is clear that “the ‘soul’... does not stand in dualistic contrast to the body, but signifies man himself whom God seeks and saves for life eternal.”<sup>16</sup> (For more information on the word “soul,” see Appendix 13 in *The Companion Bible*, edited by E.W. Bullinger.)

### *It's Greek To Me*

The idea of the immortality, or the “eternality,” of the soul definitely has its roots in Greek paganism. The Greeks considered the

body to be a lower thing than the mind.<sup>17</sup> Once a soul was free from the shackles of the body, it could wing its way into the higher realms of consciousness. The Greeks therefore rejected the notion of a bodily resurrection as needless (see Acts 17:32) and taught that the soul lived on, crossed the river Styx and lived in the land of shades.<sup>18</sup>

One can hardly overemphasize the harmful influence of Greek philosophy upon Christian thought. Consider the following statements from various writers regarding this:

The strongest force working in favor of a general acceptance of the belief in natural immortality has been the dominant influence of Platonism in the earlier stages of the development of Christian doctrine.<sup>19</sup>

The notion about the separate state of the soul was an importation into Christianity of the old Greek philosophy. The departed *souls* of the early Christianity were the *shades* of Homer and the Greeks.<sup>20</sup>

But early, a majority of the Christians were Greeks or people more or less Hellenized in thought, so that Greek ideas were bound to assert themselves, especially the Platonic concept of the soul as an indestructible entity.<sup>21</sup>

Many Christian writers of the second and third centuries wanted to show their pagan neighbors the reasonableness of the biblical faith. They wrapped their understanding of Scripture in the robes of philosophy, choosing from the vocabulary of worldly wisdom the words which sparkled and adorned it best.<sup>22</sup>

Church fathers of the first five centuries faced Platonic and neo-Platonic adversaries who denied the Christian resurrection but affirmed the inalienable immortality of the soul. The philosophers themselves disagreed on some of the fine points. In this setting the apologists reasoned for the bodily resurrection of all men, both good and evil. The common doctrine of the soul’s immortality was a convenient tool in handy reach.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of the innate immortality of the soul as a Christian doctrine makes a distinct appearance in patristic literature (that written by those who have come to be known as “the Church Fathers”) late in the second century A.D. in the writings of Athenagoras of Alexandria

(c. A.D. 127-190). This Greek philosopher converted to Christianity and retained his neoplatonic concept of the nature of man. In defense of Christianity, he endeavored to show that Platonism and the religion of Christ are in fundamental accord.<sup>24</sup> Tertullian of Carthage (c. A.D. 160-240) was another who strongly advocated the immortality of the soul.<sup>25</sup>

The renowned Augustine (A.D. 354-430) expanded upon Tertullianism. Significantly, he had written a book giving sixteen reasons for the immortality of the soul *before* he became a Christian.<sup>26</sup> Augustine offered proofs of immortality that showed his indebtedness to Platonic thought.<sup>27</sup> His Platonic assumption of the inherent immortality of the soul greatly hindered a clear biblical exegesis and consequently set a similar standard for most of Christendom.

Regarding Augustine, one writer has commented:

The evidence in the early Christian writers is clear that much confusion of thought prevailed until Augustine by his genius clarified Christian doctrine through the modified form of Neoplatonism. His system in no slight degree determined the course of thinking within the church on the question of immortality down to the latter part of the 19th century.<sup>28</sup>

The middle ages also was characterized by Platonic emphasis at the expense of the need for resurrection. Foremost in influence among those of that time was Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), one of the most prominent Roman Catholic theologians of all time. While establishing Aristotelianism as the foundation of "Christian philosophy," Thomas also championed the soul's survival after death and its immediate individual judgment, so that any later judgment was to him but a reaffirmation.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast to the doctrine of the innate immortality of the soul was the doctrine today referred to in theological circles as "conditional immortality," that is, that no one will live forever unless Jesus Christ one day gives him eternal life. This doctrine, which we believe was dominant in the early days of the church because it represents the position of Scripture, virtually disappeared between the fourth and sixteenth centuries. As far as we know now, Lactantius of Nicomedia in Asia Minor (c. 250-330) was the last prominent Christian theologian to hold forth this truth, which was from then on submerged in religious error.<sup>30</sup>

## *The Reformation: A Near Miss*

The doctrine of conditional immortality did not re-surface until the time of the “Reformation,” when Martin Luther briefly fished it out. He stated:

I permit the pope to make articles of faith for himself and his faithful such as ... the soul is immortal, with all those monstrous opinions to be found in the Roman dunghill of decretals.<sup>31</sup>

In France, during the upheaval of the Reformation, some of those known as “Anabaptists” rejected John Calvin’s teaching on the immortality of the soul and joined Luther, Tyndale and others in declaring that the dead will stay dead until they are resurrected by Christ. According to Calvin himself, “The Anabaptists in general say that souls, being departed from the body, cease to live until the day of resurrection.”<sup>32</sup>

The Anabaptists were willing to question from Scripture any established church tradition and on other issues differed sharply from both Lutherans and Calvinists. As a result, they were hated by both groups. History shows that Calvin and his followers succeeded in linking Luther’s view of “Christian mortalism” with that of the despised Anabaptists, and popular opinion rejected it.<sup>33</sup>

Thus while rejecting the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory, Protestantism generally failed to reject its belief that at death souls passed at once to heaven or hell. The resurrection remained an afterthought. Though Calvin rested his ultimate hope of eternal life upon Christ, it was he who put the Protestant stamp of approval on the traditional understanding of souls and their immediate reward or punishment. His influence may still be seen today.

In Calvin’s monumental *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, there is a lengthy discussion of the immortality of the soul, and he commends Plato as “not only enjoyable, but also profitable” as a teacher in this area of learning.<sup>34</sup> One would think the following was written by an ancient Greek, but it leaked from Calvin’s Platonic pen:

The body, which decays, weighs down the soul, and confining it within an earthly habitation, greatly limits its perceptions. If the body is the prison of the soul, if the earthly habitation is a kind of fetters, what is the state of the soul when set free from this prison, when loosed from these fetters? Is it not restored to itself, and as it were made complete, so that we may truly say, that all which it gains is so much lost to the body? ... For then the soul, having shaken off all kinds of pollution, is truly spiritual, so that it consents to the will of God, and is no longer subjected to the tyranny of the flesh; thus dwelling in tranquillity, with all its thoughts fixed on God.<sup>35</sup>

To put it mildly, one would be hard pressed to document the above statements from the pages of Scripture. To take Calvin's "logic" a step further is to conclude that the resurrection is, for the soul, a return to prison. Of greater concern is Calvin's contention that, contrary to Isaiah's prophecy, Christ did not "pour out his soul unto death." He wrote:

Now, O dreamy sleepers, commune with your own hearts, and consider how Christ died. Did He sleep when He was working for your salvation? Not thus does he say of himself, "As the Father hath life in himself, so hath he given to the Son to have life in himself." (John 5:26) How could he who has life in himself lose it?<sup>36</sup>

Apparently Calvin did not believe that Jesus actually died. To say that Christ did not truly die means that He was not truly resurrected and thus could not be the Savior of man.

I Corinthians 15:3,4

For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures,

And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

Christ was not “working for our salvation” after He died, but while He was *alive* and “obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). The implications of Calvin’s enormous error are vast. It was his Augustinian theology that drowned out Luther, Tyndale and others and guided the doctrinal outcome of the Reformation.

In the Spring 1990 issue of *Resurrection Magazine*, Norman Raxworthy wrote:

Why has this glorious (and practical) truth of the resurrection become so diffused and neglected in the Church today? The reasons for this situation go back into history. In the third century, Christian apologists sought to defend Christianity within the framework of Greek philosophy. Origen (d. 254), for example, freely adopted Platonic thought as a means of explaining Christian doctrine. To the Jews it was argued that Christ was the fulfillment of prophecy, and a Christian understanding of the Hebrew Scriptures was developed. To the Greeks, however, the argument was that Christianity was not only consonant with Greek philosophy, but was perhaps the very culmination of it. Thus the Hellenists were able to accept a Christianity that taught soul-survival as the hope of the believer, rather than resurrection (an idea repugnant to much of Greek thought). So Paul was reconciled to Plato. As a modern scholar comments: “Not surprisingly the Greek view of the soul had infected the early church, whose catch-phrase was ‘*soma-sema*’ (‘the body a tomb’). To their minds the soul was released from its prison at death.”

There are Christians today who still see resurrection in this kind of way, and think that “rising from the dead” means that at death their soul ascends to heaven. But this idea is not taught in the Scriptures. Indeed, the very reason why the Greeks of Paul’s day could not accept the resurrection was that they believed in the immortality of the soul. The idea of resurrection is at odds with the doctrine of the immortality of the soul.<sup>37</sup>

## *You Shall Be As Gods*

In contrast to Plato, who believed that a man's soul is *eternal* and thus existed before the body it inhabited, orthodox Christian writers through the years have generally qualified their teaching that man has an immortal soul. Most have said that each man's immortality had its beginning as a gift from God.

W.G.T. Shedd is representative of the traditional understanding of man's innate immortality.

But irrepressible and universal as it is, the doctrine of man's immortality is an astonishing one, and difficult to entertain. For it means that every frail finite man is to be as long-enduring as the infinite and eternal God; that there will no more be an end to the existence of the man who died today than there will be for the Deity who made him. God is denominated 'The Ancient of Days.' But every immortal spirit that ever dwelt in a human body will also be an 'ancient of days.' ...Yes, man must exist. He has no option. Necessity is laid upon him. He cannot extinguish himself. He cannot cease to be.<sup>38</sup>

Such doctrine is in effect little different than Satan's original hand-in-hand lies: "Ye shall be as gods" and "Ye shall not surely die." Thus the original lie of the soul's immortality is still being advanced today, with multiple and horrendous ramifications. It strikes at the heart of Christian doctrine regarding the nature of man and the impossibility of his redemption apart from God's grace. Edward John Carnell eloquently helps us separate truth from error in this regard:

Instead of teaching that man is of such infinitely incontestable value, that God, to be worthy of His name, must preserve him immortally, the Christian follows Paul's judgment that there is none righteous, no not one (Romans 3:10). Man, then, deserves *death*, not life. The Christian cannot appeal to the rationality of the universe, for all rationality is from God. He cannot claim an independent rule of goodness and justice to assure him of life, for all goodness and justice flow from God.

In short, the Christian knows that man, a vile, wretched, filthy sinner, will receive immortal life solely and only by God’s grace; man neither deserves immortality nor is worthy of it. Unless He that made man sovereignly elects to give him salvation and life, by grace and not by works, man is absolutely without hope.<sup>39</sup>

The Christian’s hope is a bodily resurrection, not an immortal soul.



## *What Is Death?*

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### *Dead or Not Dead?*

**S**ince one's body and soul are inseparable in life, it would follow that the same holds true in death. In any language, "death" is the absence of life that once was. In the biblical languages and in English usage, death has both a literal and a figurative meaning. Let us look first at the literal meaning. Quite rightly, English dictionaries define "death" and "dead" in terms of "life" and "living": "having ceased to live" (*Funk and Wagnall*) or "deprived of life" (*Webster*). The mutually exclusive nature of these two terms is biblically apparent also.

Deuteronomy 30:19

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that* I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

Luke 24:5

And as they were afraid, and bowed down *their* faces to the earth, they said unto them, Why seek ye the living among the dead?

I John 5:12

He that hath the Son hath life; *and* he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

On the literal level of meaning, both in biblical languages and in English, a living being is either still “living” or it is “dead” (not living). “Death” is the ending of “life.” When something has ceased to “live,” it is “dead.” If it is “dead,” then it is not “living.” It cannot be “dead” and “not dead” at the same time and in the same literal sense. This is elementary logic, upon which depends the value of language as a tool for communication of truth.

A brief look at how the New Testament juxtaposes the two Greek words *zoe* (life) and *thanatos* (death) makes clear their antithesis. The following verse is a good example:

Romans 6:23

For the wages of sin *is* death [*thanatos*]; but the gift of God *is* eternal life [*zoe*] through Jesus Christ our Lord.

If we cannot depend on the language of the Bible, we cannot be sure that God’s Word reveals truth about the state of the dead or any other subject. To remain logical and consistent with the entire thrust of Scripture, we must conclude that biblically, one who is “dead” is *truly* dead and not “alive” in any sense of the term.

As stated, the Hebraic understanding of the human being was that his body and soul were totally integrated and neither could exist without the other. Considering an apple seed may help us understand this inseparable union. So integrated is its life with its body that, if one could isolate the life that it contains, the seed and the life in it would be destroyed.

Only when language is used figuratively is it possible for a living thing to be dead physically, but alive in some other manner. This is true both in the biblical languages and in English. Such figurative usages of “dead” are found in Romans 6:2 and Ephesians 2:1, where Christians are said to be “dead” to sin, that is, they are alive in Christ, via the holy spirit

He has given each one. It should be noted, however, that even in figurative usage, the mutually exclusive definitions of “dead” and “alive” are maintained.

Prior to their salvation, the Ephesian believers had been physically alive, but spiritually “dead” in sin. This usage of “dead” pertains to the spiritual death that was the penalty for Adam’s sin.

Romans 5:12

Wherefore, as by one man [Adam] sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

“Soul,” or physical life, pertains to literal, physical death, and “holy spirit,” or eternal life, pertains to the figurative usage of death. In the absence of soul, the body is truly and literally dead (Genesis 2:7). In the absence of holy spirit, the person is figuratively, or spiritually, dead (I John 5:12; Ephesians 2:1,5).

Incidentally, some have argued that the Greek language forces the conclusion that a Christian is presently in possession of “eternal life.”<sup>40</sup> They somewhat disparagingly refer to the idea that a Christian’s future bodily death necessitates his future bodily resurrection as “conditional immortality.” If one had to take the Greek only in the literal, nonfigurative sense, this would be a good point. In a figurative manner, however, God throughout His Word refers to things He will do at a future time as though they were present realities. Often He “calleth those things which be not, as though they were” (Romans 4:17). For example, Abraham was called “the father of many nations” years before he ever had a son (Genesis 15:18), and Israel was in possession of the Promised Land before they ever set foot in it (Joshua 1:11).

As Christians, we have the “earnest,” or downpayment, on eternal life, which is holy spirit. We will receive the whole purchased possession at Christ’s coming (II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:10-14). Making the downpayment into a literally present possession in full to substantiate the continuity of consciousness of the dead damages biblical integrity and indicates an ignorance of biblical figures of speech.

Either we have eternal life now in a figurative manner, and still must contend with the literal reality of death, or we now have eternal life literally, in which case death becomes figurative. The orthodox position makes death figurative except for the literal death of the body, which is relatively insignificant since the essential person lives on.

### *What Does The Old Testament Say?*

Most orthodox writers contend that the Old Testament has little to say about what happens after death, but this is hardly the case, as we shall see. In answering the question “What is death?” we must consider foundational verses in the Old Testament that establish the idea that the dead are truly dead and not conscious or alive in any sense of the word. In doing so, we must remember a simple principle regarding biblical study: Unless there is some clear shift between the Old and the New Testaments that would lead us to a new awareness of truth in regard to a particular subject, we ought to preserve the traditions of the Old Testament revelation as being also “the Word of God.”

The Old Testament is “the New Testament concealed,” and we need the New Testament revelation to guide us in interpreting it on many points. However, Romans 15:4 says that the Old Testament is “for our learning,” and we ought not to assume that every doctrine it declares will be overturned in the New Testament. Our continual quest in biblical study is to propound truth consistent with the Bible as a whole. We must not select texts that develop a micro-position inconsistent with the macro-position of the entire Bible.

Such is certainly the case with the subject of the state of the dead. Squeezing a theological position out of a few particular verses while overlooking larger scriptural themes and clear verses on the subject is at best poor scholarship and at worst dishonest. Furthermore, we ought to be sensitive to the original Hebraic stamp on the entire Bible and realize how much the later extraneous influence of Greek philosophy and language contributed to historic “Christian” theology.

The Psalms are a particularly fruitful place to begin our study of the Old Testament. What they say regarding the state of the dead ought to be regarded as authoritative.

Psalm 49:12,14

Nevertheless man *being* in honour abideth not: he is like the beasts *that* perish...

Like sheep they are laid in the grave; death shall feed on them; and the upright shall have dominion over them in the morning; and their beauty shall consume in the grave from their dwelling.

Psalm 89:48

What man *is he that* liveth, and shall not see death? Shall he deliver his soul from the hand of the grave? Selah.

In these verses, we see that death is universal and overpowering. No man can deliver his own soul from the grave, which is its (the soul's) destination. "The hand of the grave" refers to the power of the grave.<sup>41</sup> Only God's power is greater than the grave's.

From the Old Testament, we learn also that there is no consciousness in the grave:

Psalm 6:5

For in death *there is* no remembrance of Thee: In the grave who shall give Thee thanks?

Psalm 30:9

What profit *is there* in my blood, when I go down to the pit? Shall the dust praise Thee? shall it declare Thy truth?

Psalm 88:11 and 12

Shall Thy lovingkindness be declared in the grave? *Or* Thy faithfulness in destruction?

Shall Thy wonders be known in the dark? And Thy righteousness in the land of forgetfulness?

Psalm 115:17

The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence.

Psalm 146:4

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Isaiah 38:18

For the grave cannot praise Thee, death can *not* celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth.

So in death there is only silence, with no remembrance, no thoughts, no praise, no hope, no celebration. No thanks! In a very significant Old and New Testament metaphor, which we will later analyze in depth, this condition of unconsciousness is called “sleep.”

Job 14:12

So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens *be* no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.

A consistent biblical theme is the parallel comparison of death to sleep. Some argue that the sleep metaphor is used primarily in the New Testament and refers to only the body sleeping and never to the soul or the whole person.<sup>42</sup> This is patently false. The Hebraic conception of death is that of “sleep,” from which God delivers and redeems people through the vehicle of resurrection.

In the Bible, *the body is requisite to life* and therefore must be restored in order for the soul, the whole person, to be revived. There is no biblical indication that a disembodied “soul” or “spirit” lives on after a person is dead.

Job 7:21

And why dost thou [God] not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I *shall not be*.

If Job believed that his soul would go to heaven when he died, he would not have said, “You [God] will search for me, but I will be no more.” Job would be “no more” because he would be dead and awaiting the resurrection necessary for him to be alive again.

Consider the following verses in regard to both the concepts of sleep and a future resurrection:

Daniel 12:2

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.

Psalms 49:15

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave; for He shall receive me. Selah.

Notice that his “soul,” not just his body, is *in the grave*. Biblically, the “soul,” as previously noted, refers to his whole being, which is in the grave. But God will redeem his whole being from the grave. Other references to the grave and resurrection, such as the following, occur in Job.

Job 14:13,14

O that Thou wouldst hide me in the grave, that Thou wouldst keep me secret, until Thy wrath be past, that Thou wouldst appoint me a set time, and remember me!

If a man die, shall he live *again*? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come.

Because of the tragedy that befell him, Job was despondent—so despondent that he wished to die. Yet he realized that death would only keep him from his present pain, not bring him into a state of eternal bliss. That, he knew, was dependent upon God “remembering” him and one day raising him from the dead with a new body. Job knew the change would come in God’s appointed time and that, until then, he would remain in the darkness of the grave. This is clear in the following verses:

Job 10:20-22

*Are* not my days few: cease *then*, and let me alone, that I may take comfort a little,

Before I go *whence* I shall not return, *even* to the land of darkness and the shadow of death;

A land of darkness, as darkness *itself*; and of the shadow of death, without any order, and *where* the light *is* as darkness.

If he had been expecting to go to heaven, Job would hardly have described it as “a land of darkness.” Finally, consider both the doctrinal and practical clarity of these verses:

Ecclesiastes 9:4-6, 10

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion.

For the living know that they shall die: BUT THE DEAD KNOW NOT ANY THING, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; NEITHER HAVE THEY ANY MORE A PORTION FOR EVER IN ANY *THING* THAT IS DONE UNDER THE SUN.

Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do *it* with thy might; for *THERE IS NO WORK, NOR DEVICE, NOR KNOWLEDGE, NOR WISDOM, IN THE GRAVE*, whither thou goest.

What happens to the body at death? There can be no argument here. Genesis 3:19 says “for dust thou art, and unto dust thou shalt return.” In the Old Testament culture, a dead body was buried in the ground, and this burial spot was a *qeber*, or “grave.” But whether the body is buried in the ground, dumped in the ocean or cremated, it eventually is recycled by nature to the point that it no longer exists except in the memory of God. As Job hoped, God will remember and bring to life all those who have believed His Word.



## *Where Are the Dead?*

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### *A Grave Question*

**O**rthodox Christian teaching is that at death the soul departs to one of two literal places, heaven or hell. But this doctrine does not account for those believers who died prior to the resurrection of Jesus Christ. We believe Charles F. Baker's work entitled *Dispensational Theology* is representative of its confusion. In a chapter entitled "The Intermediate State: The Place of the Dead," in the section "*Sheol-Hades*," Baker writes:

It would APPEAR that as far as the unsaved are concerned there has been no change in their state since the death of the first one. There SEEMS to have been a change brought about by the resurrection of Christ which affects the state of the saved dead, but whether this is a change of actual location or a matter of more complete revelation is NOT CLEAR. Of one thing we may be sure: the saved dead are now with the Lord awaiting resurrection. <sup>43</sup> (Emphasis ours).

Can we really be “sure” when things are “not clear”? Such confusion is due to men making *literal* that which is *figurative* in the Bible.

What happens to the “soul” at the death of the body? In Scripture, the soul figuratively “departs.” Genesis 35:18a shows this figurative usage. “And it came to pass, as her soul [*nephesh*=life] was departing, (for she died)...” To where does the soul “depart”? It “departs” to *sheol*, which is often translated “hell,” but which biblically means the grave, or “gravedom.” [For a thorough examination of the meaning of the Old Testament Hebrew word *sheol* and the corresponding New Testament Greek word *hades*, the reader is referred to the word “hell” in E.W. Bullinger’s *A Critical Lexicon and Concordance to the English and Greek New Testament* (Zondervan Publishing Co., Grand Rapids, Michigan).]

The following verses show that at death the soul departs to *sheol*.

Psalm 16:10

For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*sheol*—gravedom];  
Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption

Psalm 49:15

But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave  
[*sheol*—gravedom]: for He shall receive me. Selah.

It is significant that in Psalm 49:15 the Hebrew word for “receive” is *laqach*, which means “to take away.” God, through Christ, will “take away” the dead from the grave.

In Greek mythology, Hades was the god of the underworld, and his name came to represent this fictitious place. The Septuagint was a second-century B.C. Greek translation of the Old Testament, and in it the word *hades* was chosen as the counterpart to the Hebrew *sheol*. As they do with *sheol*, many English versions of the Bible erroneously translate the Greek word *hades* as “hell” rather than “grave.”

In his lexicon, Dr. E.W. Bullinger makes a thorough case for the translation of both *sheol* and *hades* as “gravedom,” a word he apparently coined to describe “the state of being of the dead” in the most biblically

accurate manner. This state—the grave—is different than *qeber*—a grave, because *sheol* exists only as a concept, not an actual place. Bodies buried in a *qeber*, a literal grave, will eventually disappear. *Sheol* is the figurative state, or “dwelling place,” of the dead.

Though some who champion the traditional doctrine of immediate life after death have argued that *sheol* was a literal place of eternal torment, Scripture plainly says otherwise. Edward Fudge quotes *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*: “Nowhere in the Old Testament is the abode of the dead regarded as a place of punishment or torment,” and *Bakers Dictionary of Theology*: “*Sheol* is uniformly depicted in the Old Testament as the eternal amoral abode of both righteous and unrighteous alike.”<sup>44</sup>

A figure of speech is a legitimate grammatical construction designed to emphasize a particular point. A figure of speech arrests our attention by its departure from literal fact or normal grammatical usage. Thus to recognize a figure of speech, we must first identify the literal truth regarding the subject.

Because *sheol* means “gravedom”, where there is no consciousness, Scripture references referring to those in *sheol* walking, talking, etc., must be figurative. For example:

Isaiah 14:8-10

Yea, the fir trees rejoice at thee, *and* the cedars of Lebanon, *saying*, Since thou art laid down, no feller [woodcutter] is come up against us.

Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet *thee* at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, *even* all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations.

All they shall speak and say unto thee, Art thou also become weak as we? art thou become like unto us?

The context of these verses is the fall of the king of Babylon (verse 4). His fall would have made the fir trees and cedars in Lebanon “rejoice,” because they were prized for lumber and often carried off to Babylon (verse 8). Via the figure of speech personification, the trees are

vividly portrayed as rejoicing because no one has come to cut them down. Verse nine continues this figurative language, as the dead welcome their new companion.

When the Bible says that Jesus descended into “the lower parts of the earth” (Ephesians 4:9), it means that He died and was buried in *hades*, or “gravedom.” In Hebrews 2:9, God’s Word says about Jesus “that He by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” For three days and three nights, Jesus was as dead as anyone else who ever tasted death. As Isaiah plainly stated regarding the death of the Messiah: “He was cut off from the land of the living” (53:8); “He made his grave with the wicked and with the rich in his death” (53:9).

It is too bad that *sheol* and *hades* have been translated into the English word “hell,” which has today taken on the mythological Greek meanings associated with the pagan idea of an “underworld” where the dead continue to live on in torment. E.W. Bullinger’s comments on the word *hades* in Appendix 131 of *The Companion Bible* are extremely enlightening:

The meaning which the Greeks put upon it does not concern us; nor have we anything to do with the imaginations of the heathen, or the traditions of Jews or Romanists, or the teachings of demons or evil spirits, or of any who still cling to them.

The Holy Spirit has used it as one of the “words pertaining to the earth,” and in so doing has “purified” it, “as silver tried in a furnace” (Psalm 12:6). From this we learn that His own words “are pure” but words belonging to this earth have to be “purified.”

The Old Testament is the fountain-head of the Hebrew language. It has no literature behind it. But the case is entirely different with the Greek language. The Hebrew *Sheol* is a word Divine in its origin and usage. The Greek *Hades* is human in its origin and comes down to us laden with centuries of development, in which it has acquired new senses, meanings, and usages.

Seeing that the Holy Spirit has used it in Acts 2:27, 31 as His own equivalent of *Sheol* in Psalm 16:10, He has settled, once for all, the sense in which we are to understand it. The meaning He has given to *Sheol* in Psalm 16:10 is the one meaning we are to give it wherever it occurs in the New Testament, whether we

transliterate it or translate it. We have no liberty to do otherwise, and must discard everything outside the Word of God.

## *A Matter of Life or Death*

Another corollary doctrine of pagan origin is promulgated along with the idea that the “dead” are “alive.” If man is “deathless,” there must be an eternal dwelling place for the evil as well as the good. Thus arose the concept of “hell” as a place of eternal torture for all sinners, who supposedly go there immediately upon death.

As we have seen, however, *hades* is clearly a figurative “place” where the dead exist only in the mind of God, who remembers every person who has died. He will send His Son, “the firstborn from the dead” (Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5), to raise the rest of the dead from this “place” (John 5:28,29).

There is a place of “everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord” (II Thessalonians 1:9) mentioned in the Bible. This is *gehenna*, which refers to the fire of judgment in which the wicked will one day be consumed.

*Gehenna* is the Greek word for the Hebrew “valley of Hinnom,” which was the city dump outside of Jerusalem. It was common knowledge to the people Christ was addressing that garbage was thrown into “gehenna” to be burned up. No one listening to Christ teach believed that the garbage continued to exist in the fire without being consumed. The point of Jesus using the word “gehenna” was to clearly show that those who were not saved were like the garbage, to be burned up and destroyed.

*Gehenna* is also called “the lake of fire” in the Book of Revelation. It is the place where fire will bring to pass the ultimate annihilation of the Devil and his hosts. Ezekiel 28:18 foretold this destruction by fire that would bring Satan “to ashes.” Apparently, this will take quite a while. According to Revelation 20:10, “forever and ever” is better translated “unto the ages of the ages.”<sup>45</sup>

All people who have “done evil” will also one day be destroyed in this lake of fire. Why? Because the wages of sin is *death*—not eternal torment. Thus Jesus Christ died in place of sinners to pay the legal penalty for the sin of all men. In *The Fire That Consumes*, Edward Fudge quotes James D.G. Dunn in his essay, “Paul’s Understanding of the Death of Jesus:”

Had there been a way for fallen man to overcome his fallenness ... Christ would not have died ... But Christ, Man, died because there is no other way for man—any man. His death is an acknowledgement that there is no way out for fallen men except through death—no answer to sinful flesh except its destruction in death. <sup>46</sup>

In the same context, Fudge quotes Oscar Cullmann’s *Immortality of the Soul or Resurrection of the Dead? The Witness of the New Testament*, that Jesus:

... can conquer death only by actually dying, by betaking Himself to the sphere of death, the destroyer of life, to the sphere of ‘nothingness,’ of abandonment by God ... Whoever wants to conquer death must die; he must really cease to live—not simply live on as an immortal soul, but die in body and soul, lose life itself, the most precious good which God has given us ... Furthermore, if life is to issue out of so genuine a death as this, a new divine act of creation is necessary. And this act of creation calls back to life not just a part of the man, but the whole man—all that God had created and death had annihilated. <sup>47</sup>

For those who believe in Jesus Christ, He has paid the price for their sin and given them the gift of eternal life. Those who do not believe in Him will pay the penalty for sin *themselves*. How? By dying twice, once in this life and once and for all in the lake of fire, which is referred to as the “second death” (Revelation 20:6,14). Everlasting life is just that—life without end—and everlasting death is destruction without hope of recall—permanent extermination. This is God’s perfect justice,

and it is definitely “a matter of life or death.”

John 5:28,29

Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice,

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 [judgment].

Revelation 20:15

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Scripture gives no hint that, when the unjust are raised from the dead for final judgment, they will be raised with new, immortal bodies as will the just. When human bodies are put into a crematorium, which is usually about 1700 degrees, they burn up. It is only a guess, but it seems likely that the “lake of fire” will be somewhat hotter than any man-made fire. Considering that one day “... the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up” (II Peter 3:10), it seems logical that human bodies will follow suit.

In the Bible, the purpose of fire is to purge the bad from the good by burning it up.

Matthew 3:12

Whose fan *is* in His hand, and He will throughly purge His floor, and gather His wheat into the garner; but He will BURN UP [*katakaio*—to consume] the chaff with unquenchable fire.

This word *katakaio* is used in Hebrews 13:11 regarding the sacrificial beasts that were burned outside the camp. Neither chaff nor beasts burn forever. They burn up and are gone. *Nowhere* does the Word

of God say that He will torment forever those who have refused to believe in Him. Among other things, this would be irreconcilable with Revelation 21:4, which states that from then on throughout eternity there will be no more sorrow, crying or pain.

Sidney Hatch well expresses how farfetched is the idea of a just God forever tormenting by fire those who refused to believe in Him.

A civilized society looks with horror upon the abuse and torture of children or adults. Even where capital punishment is practiced, the aim is to implement it as mercifully as possible. Are we to believe then that a holy God—our heavenly Father—is less just than the courts of men? Of course not.<sup>48</sup>

Another word, *tartaros*, is used once and translated “hell” in II Peter 2:4. It refers to the place of imprisoned evil spirits, rather than a place of torment for sinners.

For a superb biblical exposition of the subject of eternal death versus eternal torment, the reader is referred to *The Fire That Consumes*, by Edward Fudge (Providential Press, 1982, Box 21806, Houston, Texas 77218). Writing in the Fall 1990 issue of *Resurrection Magazine*, Fudge summarized some of the main points of his book as follows:

1. The Old Testament utilizes some 50 Hebrew verbs and 75 figures of speech to describe the ultimate end of the wicked—and every one sounds exactly like total extinction.
2. The notion of unending conscious torment arose for the first time in anything resembling biblical literature in the noncanonical book of Judith—in a clear “twisting” of words taken straight from Isaiah.
3. By Jesus’ day, there were at least three “Jewish” ideas about the end of the wicked: (a) annihilation at the grave; (b) resurrection for everlasting torture; and (c) resurrection for judgment followed by total and irreversible extinction in hell.
4. When our Lord taught on this subject, he generally used Old Testament language which most naturally describes complete disintegration of the entire person in the fire of the Age to Come.

5. New Testament writers choose the word “hell” (*gehenna*) to describe the fate of the lost *only* in the Gospels, *only* speaking to Jews, and *only* when addressing people familiar with the geography of Jerusalem.
6. Most often, New Testament authors use the words *die*, *death*, *destroy*, *destruction*, *perish* and *corruption* to describe the end of the wicked—in contexts which suggest the normal, straightforward meaning of these ordinary terms.
7. All New Testament expressions thought to teach eternal torment come from earlier biblical literature—where they regularly describe destruction that is irresistible, total, and which cannot be reversed.
8. No passage of Scripture teaches the inherent or natural immortality of the “soul” or of any other aspect of the human creature.
9. Although Scripture clearly affirms a resurrection of both just and unjust, the Bible nowhere says the *lost* will be raised *immortal*, as the saved will be.
10. The notion of everlasting torment appears explicitly in Christian literature for the first time in the writings of the Apologists, who expressly base it on the Platonic assumption that the soul is “immortal” and *cannot* be destroyed.<sup>49</sup>

In Robert H. Mounce’s work, “The Book of Revelation,” *In The New International Commentary on the New Testament*, his quote of Alford’s statement about “the second death” is appropriate to close this chapter.

Alford writes, “As there is a second and higher life, so there is also a second and deeper death. And as after that life there is no more death (Revelation 21:4), so after that death there is no more life.”<sup>50</sup>



## *In What State of Being Are the Dead?*

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### *The “Sleep” Metaphor*

I 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.

**A**s we have seen, the dead are truly dead and in “gravedom.” When their bodies have rotted, they have ceased to exist. But because they “exist” in the memory of God, He remembers them and intends via Jesus Christ to raise them to life. Thus He figuratively refers to their state of being as “sleep.” This clearly implies a future awakening. Because both their body and soul are dead, the term “sleep” has to be a metaphor.

The purpose of biblical figures of speech is to communicate truth more effectively or forcefully than would simple statements of fact. A metaphor or analogy is useful to augment our understanding if we carefully analyze the points of similarity between the compared terms. In this case, death and sleep have at least five points of similarity that give us much insight into the state of the dead, consistent with what we have already seen from the Old Testament.

The first similarity between death and sleep is that both are overpowering forces. A human being needs to rest. If deprived of sleep long enough, a person will literally fall asleep in the midst of any task, no matter how demanding. The human will is no match for the power of sleep. Consider Jesus' disciples. Close to the time when He would be arrested, Jesus and His disciples were on the mount of Olives. There was probably no more critical time for Peter and the disciples to stay awake and pray.

Mark 14:35-38

And he went forward a little, and fell on the ground, and prayed that, if it were possible, the hour might pass from him.

And He said, Abba, Father, all things are possible unto Thee; take away this cup from me: nevertheless not what I will, but what Thou wilt.

And He cometh, and findeth them sleeping, and saith unto Peter, Simon, sleepest thou? couldest not thou watch one hour?

Watch ye and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. The spirit truly is ready, but the flesh is weak.

Like sleep, death is an inexorable force for all men (unless they are still living when Christ appears). No amount of self-discipline can cheat "The Grim Reaper." The most we can ask is "to be old and full of days," as God's Word describes many Old Testament saints upon whom He had conferred His blessing. Our days on earth may be healthy and full of joy, but they are nevertheless numbered. Only when the day arrives that we receive a body fashioned like Jesus Christ's glorious body will we become immortal beings who cannot die.

A second point of similarity between sleep and death is that in either state there is no consciousness of time or space. Remember that Ecclesiastes told us that the dead "know not anything." This is also true of those who sleep, and that is why people are very vulnerable to danger while they sleep. Because we are somewhat helpless in this state, God has provided us with encouragement and a promise of protection.

Psalms 121: 2-4

My help *cometh* from the Lord, which made heaven and earth.

He will not suffer thy foot to be moved. He that keepeth thee will not slumber,

Behold, He That keepeth Israel shall neither slumber or sleep.

Psalms 3:5

I laid me down and slept; I awakened; for the Lord sustained me.

The lack of consciousness in sleep is also illustrated in Elijah's mocking of the 450 prophets of Baal. After they had tried many times to evoke his power, saying, "O Baal, hear us," the Scriptures teach that there was "no voice, nor any that answered."

I Kings 18:27

And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry aloud: for he is a god; either he is talking, or he is pursuing [out for a walk], or he is in a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth, and must be awaked.

The analogy of waking the dead from sleep makes no sense if the dead are already conscious in a higher sphere of existence, and the argument that only the body "sleeps" in death, while the soul continues to function, holds no water. On the contrary, the sleep metaphor emphasizes the absence of consciousness.

During physical sleep, bodily functions continue uninterrupted. It is the mind that sleep reduces to un-consciousness. The following biblical usages of physical "sleep" show the mental emphasis of this concept.

I Thessalonians 5:6,7

Therefore let us not sleep, as do others; but let us watch and be sober.

For they that sleep sleep in the night; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

The sleep metaphor thus must refer to the absence of mental awareness or consciousness, which is the major qualitative difference between the sleep state and the waking state. The sleeper is not aware of elapsed time, nor of the reality of space and time in the conditions that surround him. When he awakens, his mind becomes alert and aware once more. Likewise for one who has died, when he is raised from the dead.

A third point of similarity is that both in death and in sleep no productive work can be done. Perhaps that is why God contrasts sleep and productivity.

Proverbs 6:6-11

Go to the ant, thou sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise:

Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler,

Provideth her meat in the summer, *And* gathereth her food in the harvest.

How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? When wilt thou arise out of thy sleep?

*Yet* a little sleep, a little slumber, A little folding of the hands to sleep:

So shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth, And thy want as an armed man.

The time to work for God is while one is alive (Ecclesiastes 9:4-6, 10). That is why God's Word states:

Psalm 116:15

Precious in the sight of the Lord *is* the death of His saints.

A saint who has died cannot work for God. Some misconstrue this verse to say that God considers the deaths of His people “valuable” to Him, because He needs them “home” with Him in heaven for some higher task. However, the word “precious,” *yakar*, is better translated “costly.” *Yakar* also occurs elsewhere in the context of the death of God’s people, and its meaning is clearly defined.

Psalm 72:13,14

And he shall spare the poor and needy, And shall save the souls of the needy.

He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence: And precious [*yakar*] shall their blood be in His sight.

Clearly God is not saying that the death of the poor and needy is something valuable, but rather *yakar* refers to the high value to God of those who love Him. For them to die would be costly to Him. So it is with “His saints” in Psalm 116:15. Their death is “precious” in the same sense that *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines “precious”: “costly; implies especially high quality or rarity of an object; implies uniqueness and irreplaceability.” The death of His saints is “precious” because those whom God has sanctified for His purposes are (1) rare, (2) unique, (3) of high quality and (4) irreplaceable. Therefore, their deaths are costly. The dead cannot work for God, so it costs Him a lot to lose one of His faithful.

Understanding this point offsets the following argument: If death is like sleep and in the *consciousness* of a Christian the moment of his death is, in effect, the moment he meets the Lord, that is no different than his going to heaven the moment he dies, and thus it provides him no more incentive to live.

On the contrary, the believer who knows that death renders him unable to enjoy fellowship with the Lord or to do anything for Him realizes not only that there is no benefit to death, but also that it causes irreparable loss to himself, his family and friends and to God.

The dead are “asleep” and thus unproductive. They no longer exist and therefore are not to be prayed for or prayed to. They are not “up there” smiling down on us, watching over us or directing us in life, in spite of what one may read, hear about or experience.

Nor are they intervening on our behalf. In a recent championship basketball game, a player, whose father had died only hours earlier, made a spectacular shot. Later in an interview, another player remarked about the shot and said that his teammate’s father “put that one in.” The man’s father, we are to understand, was apparently hovering over the basket and helping his son sink difficult shots. An obvious question arises: Did not the other team have any deceased relatives who could have blocked the shot?

In an article in *USA Today*, a woman who won two \$250,000 keno jackpots said it was her dead father who inspired her to play at a specific club. She said that her father stood at the foot of her bed one night, comforting her about her money problems. “Baby,” she recalls him telling her, “stop worrying. Everything’s going to be okay.”<sup>51</sup>

God’s Word makes it plain that her “help” did not come from either her human father or from her heavenly Father, but rather from the “father of lies.” There *is* an abundance of heavenly help available, however, from God the Father, His Son Jesus Christ and millions of angels. We are much better off relying on all this divine power than looking to dear Aunt Ethel, who, as “dust,” is currently helpless.

A fourth point of similarity is that sleep takes place in a limited time period, sandwiched between one’s falling asleep and waking up.

Mark 4:27

And [the sower] should sleep, and rise night and day, and the seed should spring and grow up, he knoweth not how.

The phrase “sleep and rise night and day” illustrates a continuance of rising and sleeping for a period of days. Thus we can see that each

state of sleep has a beginning and an end. Similarly, death is not final. It is an interim state that ends in an awakening.

A fifth similarity between death and sleep is that there is a continuity of being of the person when he awakens from sleep. The same person falls asleep and awakens again. Peter was still Peter after he awoke in the garden. Jesus was still Jesus when He awoke in the tomb.

If at death one's physical body eventually goes back to dust and thus his soul no longer exists, what then is the "continuity" factor? According to Job 14:13, a dead believer exists only in the memory of God, but certainly God, through Christ, is able to make a new body for him. After all, God started "from scratch" once before, didn't He?

## *How Did Jesus Christ Describe the State of the Dead?*

To consider what Jesus said about death, we now investigate the Gospels. There is nothing in Jesus' teachings that would lend credence to the Greek concept of the immortality of the soul or the soul's survival after the death of the body. (Matthew 10:28; 22:23-32; Luke 16:19-31; 23:42, 43; John 11:20-27; 14:2,3 are discussed later in this book in the chapter entitled "Difficult Scriptures Explained").

In Matthew 9:24, Mark 5:39 and Luke 8:54, Jesus also refers to the dead as "sleeping," just as did the Old Testament. The same holds true for the following verses from the record of Jesus raising his friend Lazarus from the dead. They speak for themselves regarding the sleep metaphor.

John 11:11-14

These things said He: and after that He saith unto them, Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.

Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well.

(Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but *they* thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep.)

Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.

We know that Jesus Himself expected to die and be buried in the grave for three days and three nights.

Matthew 12:40

For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth.

If the dead go to heaven to be in God's presence when they die, why wouldn't Jesus? If anyone should have been given that privilege by God, it was Jesus. He made no such claim, however, for Himself or for others.

Jesus did, however, often make mention of the resurrection of the dead, consistent with Hebrew understanding. For example:

Luke 14:14

And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed **AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST** [not "when you die"].

Speaking of her brother Lazarus who had died four days earlier, Martha spoke to Jesus.

John 11:24-26

Martha saith unto Him [Jesus], I know that he [Lazarus] shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.

Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live:

And whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.

Note that neither Jesus nor Martha spoke of Lazarus as if he were alive in heaven. Lazarus, raised by Jesus after being dead for four days, was not yanked out of heaven. Rather, he was restored to life.

Where had Jesus learned about resurrection, specifically His own? From the Scriptures. Jesus had studied the Old Testament and knew therefore that He was to be raised from the dead. The record of Isaac's figurative resurrection (compare Genesis 22:1-18 to Hebrews 11:17-19) was a type of his own literal resurrection, and scriptures such as these bolstered Jesus' faith in God's promise. Perhaps the two most notable Old Testament verses regarding the Messiah's resurrection are Psalms 2:7 and 16:10. These also were etched upon Jesus' heart.

Psalm 2:7

I will declare the decree: The Lord hath said unto me, Thou art my Son; This day have I begotten thee.

In hindsight, we recognize that this is a reference to His *resurrection*, not His birth, as we shall see shortly when we consider what Paul said in Acts 13.

In all the Old Testament, Psalm 16:10 is perhaps the most specific verse referring to the raising of the Messiah from "gravedom."

Psalm 16:10

For Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*sheol*=gravedom];  
Neither wilt Thou suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption.

After His resurrection, Jesus Christ taught His disciples these and other Old Testament verses that enabled them to understand the significance of His death and resurrection (Luke 24:27,45; Acts 1:3). Peter

in particular elevated the importance of Psalm 16:10 by quoting it twice in his discourse on the day of Pentecost.

### *What Did Peter Say?*

Not long after Jesus had taught His disciples Psalm 16:10, this signal verse became the main point of Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost:

Acts 2:22a, 24

Ye men of Israel, hear these words; Jesus of Nazareth...

Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death, because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Since the wages of sin is death and Jesus paid the price for all men's sin, He was temporarily gripped by the "pains of death." But once Jesus had died, the legally required penalty had been paid, and God could raise up His Son.

Acts 2:25-28

For David speaketh concerning him ... [Peter then quotes Psalm 16:8-11].

I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved:

Therefore did my heart rejoice, and my tongue was glad; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope:

Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell [*hades*=gravedom], neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Thou hast made known to me the ways of life; thou shalt make me full of joy with Thy countenance.

By revelation, David had plainly said that his soul would remain in the grave unless the Messiah retrieved it. Again, Acts 2:27 (referring to Psalm 16:10) reveals that God would allow the Messiah to go to the grave, but would not allow Him to remain there to see corruption.

Peter then goes on to make a statement that is perfectly consistent with what has already been shown to be the thrust of Scripture, that the dead are truly dead and sleeping in “gravedom.”

Acts 2:29

Men *and* brethren, let me freely speak [i.e., speak frankly] unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

No mention is made of David inhabiting the “great beyond” and looking down on the events of Pentecost with a smile. In fact, Peter is making a clear statement that, in contrast to Jesus Christ being raised from the dead, David is still dead. Unless the dead are really dead, the resurrection from the dead loses its great significance and the most important event in the history of mankind, namely Christ’s resurrection, is rendered virtually meaningless.

In Acts 2:31, Peter repeats Psalm 16:10, rewording it in terms of it having been accomplished: “He seeing this before, spake of the resurrection of Christ, that His soul was not left in hell, neither His flesh did see corruption.” By quoting it again, Peter identified it as the focal verse of the context. Verse 34 further establishes the contrast between David, who penned the words of Psalm 16:10, and Jesus Christ, who lived them.

Acts 2:34,35

For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit thou on My right hand,

Until I make thy foes thy footstool.

Could it be any plainer? David did not go to heaven when he died. And he is not in a holding pattern above Chicago. David understood that, when he died, he would stay dead until God exalted the Messiah to His right hand and then sent Him to raise David to eternal life. Peter also understood this truth.

## *What About Paul?*

Paul's great discourse in Acts 13:16-41 contains the same truths as Peter's preaching on Pentecost. The two most significant apostles of the first-century church agreed on the state of the dead and on the resurrection of the dead.

Acts 13:32,33

And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers,

God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee.

Paul's reference is to Psalm 2:7b, and he leaves no doubt that the resurrection of Jesus Christ fulfilled this promise.

Acts 13:34-37

And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, *now* no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

Wherefore he saith also in another *psalm*, Thou shalt not suffer Thine Holy One to see corruption:

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption.

But he, whom God raised again, saw not corruption.

As did Peter at Pentecost, Paul also quoted Psalm 16:10. His terminology is the same on every point. David died, saw corruption (returned to dust) in the grave and is now “asleep” and awaiting resurrection. The phrase “slept with his fathers” is a common Hebrew expression for death, often used in the Old Testament. Paul’s use of a similar expression in Acts 13:36 further supports the complete agreement of both Old and New Testaments regarding the state of the dead and supporting the idea of resurrection—a future awakening.

### *Rest In Peace*

In light of the sleep metaphor, it is clear that death is certainly not something to be desired or eagerly anticipated. It remains the mortal enemy of life and godliness, both of which can only be enjoyed by the living. It robs God of our love, worship and service. It robs us of our fellowship with God and the joy of living. Yet one who is born again need not fear what will happen to him while he is dead, for death is simply an interim state of “unconsciousness” to be ended by the coming of Jesus Christ. Christians asleep in death are unconscious of time, and hence their next waking moment is the coming of Christ. Christians who have died may, as the saying goes, “rest in peace.”

Before we end our discussion of the sleep metaphor, it will be interesting to allow Martin Luther to speak on the subject. Though his words are in no way equal to God’s Word, they are set forth here to remind the reader to the fact that this book’s authors are among many in history to have recognized this vital truth in God’s Word. It is too bad that Luther did not more vigorously include in his Reformation theology the truth that he obviously believed at one time.

The following quotes by Luther are taken from an article entitled “What Happens To People When They Die?” written by Blaine Newman in the Winter 1990 issue of *Resurrection Magazine*. (Sources are footnoted for the reader’s information.)

It would take a foolish soul to desire its body when it was already in heaven.<sup>52</sup>

For just as a man who falls asleep and sleeps soundly until morning does not know what has happened to him when he wakes up, so we shall suddenly rise on the last Day, and we shall know neither what death has been like or how we have come through it.<sup>53</sup>

Another proof that the dead are insensible. Solomon thinks, therefore, that the dead are altogether asleep, and think nothing. They lie, not reckoning days or years, but, when awakened, will seem to themselves to have slept scarcely a moment.<sup>54</sup>

We Christians, who have been redeemed from all this through the precious blood of God's Son, should train and accustom ourselves in faith to despise death, and regard it as a deep, strong, sweet sleep; to consider the coffin as nothing other than a soft couch of ease or rest. As verily, before God, it truly is just this; for he testifies, John 11:21: Lazarus, our friend sleeps; Matthew 9:24: The maiden is not dead, she sleeps.<sup>55</sup>

For since we call it a sleep, we know that we shall not remain in it, but be awakened and live, and that the time during which we sleep, shall seem no longer than if we had just fallen asleep. Hence, we shall censure ourselves that we were surprised or alarmed at such a sleep in the hour of death, and suddenly come alive out of the grave and from decomposition, and entirely well, fresh, with a pure, clear, glorified life, meet our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ in the clouds ...<sup>56</sup>

Just as soon as your eyes are closed you will be awakened. A thousand years will seem as though you have slept a half an hour. As we do not know how long we are sleeping if we do not hear the clock striking during the night, so in death a thousand years will pass away still more rapidly.<sup>57</sup>

We are to sleep until he comes and knocks on the grave and says, "Dr. Martin, get up." Then I will arise in a moment and will be eternally happy with him.<sup>58</sup>

## *Did You See Elvis?*

What about accounts of so-called “near-death” or “post-death” experiences, which have perhaps become more in vogue in recent years due to the improvement in medical technology? After being revived, some people have described either glorious or hideous visions and/or conversations with God, Jesus, the Devil, angels, dead relatives or friends. It is not surprising that among doctors, theologians, amateur philosophers and Hollywood producers there are many explanations for these stories.

First of all, no explanation that contradicts God’s Word can be valid. Obviously we cannot rule out God giving someone a vision even when he is near death, but if one were in fact clinically dead, it is clear from Scripture that no one could communicate with him.

At least some doctors agree. Dr. John Caronna, professor of clinical neurology at New York Hospital-Cornell Medical Center in New York City, referring to those who have “essentially died and been resuscitated,” said, “As a physician and a neurologist, I believe that this period is totally blank and that even if something happened during that period, it would not be remembered.”<sup>59</sup> Any “firsthand” reports to the contrary must be satanic counterfeits designed to promote his original lie, “You shall not surely die.”

Scripture records a number of instances when people were raised from the dead by Jesus and other men utilizing the power of God. Such miracles obviously blessed the families and friends of the ones who were raised to life. Were these living people selfishly desiring their dead loved ones to leave paradise and rejoin them in this cruel world? No. And it is *most* significant that not one of those raised from the dead professed any experiential knowledge of an afterlife.

In conclusion, the dead are in a state of “sleep.” The sleep metaphor simply and profoundly answers the question, “In what state of being are the dead?” In His wisdom, God has achieved an artful balance, preserving the idea of death as an enemy, but robbing death of its “sting,” so that we as Christians with the blessed hope of our Savior’s appearing and the guarantee of eternal life need not sorrow “even as others which have no hope” (I Thessalonians 4:13).



## *When Will the State of “Sleep” End?*

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### *What a Body!*

**T**hus far we have seen that the dead are truly dead and are “sleeping” in “gravedom.” It is interesting that the English word “cemetery” comes from the Greek word *koimeterion*, the verb root of which means “to put to sleep.” It is the word often used in the New Testament for the “sleep” of death.

In the case of a person who has been buried at sea, we say he has a “watery grave.” In a relatively short amount of time, his body occupies no “place” at all. This holds true for everyone who has died. The molecules of matter that made up his body are recycled into other organisms, plants or sediments. One’s life, however, is not recycled. Figuratively speaking, the person “sleeps” in “gravedom,” or “hell,” the state of the dead. In this state, he “exists” only in the mind of God, who remembers every person who has ever lived (Job 14:13). One’s body, soul and everything about him is recorded in God’s memory. Accordingly, God has given Jesus Christ the power to call all people back to life (John 5:25-30).

Remember that to the Greeks who believed in the dualism of one's physical body and his immortal soul, a resurrection of the body was superfluous. We can clearly see this by a comment made by those in Athens in response to Paul's preaching of Jesus Christ and resurrection.

Acts 17:18

Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

In contrast to that of the Greeks, the Hebrew conception of life after death necessitated one having a body. This is the proper scriptural perspective. To the Hebrews, the body and soul were inseparable realities, neither being able to exist without the other. If a person (a soul) was to be revived, he had to have a body, for no life can exist without a body. This is certainly the evidence of nature. Every living thing on earth has a body (I Corinthians 15:38-40). The life of every species of organism is perpetuated only by reproduction, with each generation being made in the genetic form of its predecessors. As Genesis expresses it, everything reproduces "after its kind."

The life of an individual organism dies when the organism dies. Its life is not recycled into another organism of its own or another species. This is important to understand because there is a move afoot in the New Age "scientific" community to change the biological life cycle. Instead of birth-reproduction-death, some now teach that the cycle is birth-death-rebirth. It is being claimed that not only matter, but also the life that animates it, is reborn into new organisms. This is reincarnation in a white lab coat.

The Old Testament teaching on resurrection was that a person would be resurrected with essentially the same body he had when he was previously alive.

Job 19:26,27

And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see

God;

I myself will see him with my own eyes—I, and not another.  
How my heart yearns within me! (NIV)

The New Testament expands upon this understanding and reveals that a Christian’s body will be changed into a glorious new body, made like Jesus Christ’s resurrected body.

I John 3:2

Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, WE SHALL BE LIKE HIM; for we shall see Him as He is.

There is no reason to suppose that this body will be much different in form than its original version. The differences will be in its quality of life, its scope of activity and its immortality. One would assume that the uniqueness of each individual’s appearance will be preserved, without the effects of disease, age or sin.

### *Incorruptible Seed*

Some may be concerned that, if in death their body and soul cease to exist, there is no “continuity factor” of their person. According to the traditional view, there is a continuity of consciousness via the “immortality of the soul”. The extinction of one’s being, even temporarily, is hard to accept. Beside the fact that God’s memory of dead believers is perfect and reliable, perhaps it will be comforting to know that there is another element of continuity for the Christian, which is the gift of holy spirit, as I Corinthians Chapter Fifteen explains.

In Corinth, there were “some” (I Corinthians 15:12) among the Greek Christians who held to the pagan doctrine of the immortality of the soul, saying that there is no resurrection of the body. The Word of God goes to considerable length to show that a bodily resurrection is necessary and, for Christians, guaranteed.

I Corinthians 15:17,18

And if Christ be not raised, your faith *is* vain; ye are yet in your sins.

Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ ARE PERISHED.

If Christ is not alive and able to raise the dead, then those who have died believing in Him are “perished.” Why? Because they are *not* alive in heaven in any form. They are dead in the grave, and only the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ can give them life. Thus, any teaching that Old Testament believers were alive in heaven prior to Christ’s resurrection is bogus.

Furthermore, if Jesus Christ has not been raised from the dead, then one who believes on Him as Lord is not even saved, because His resurrection is prerequisite to His Lordship. The formula for salvation is simple.

Romans 10:9,10

That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised Him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

The thrust of I Corinthians Chapter Fifteen is that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead, and therefore He will, in the future, raise all who believe on Him. Until that time, they are dead. As He was raised bodily, so will He raise others to eternal life by giving them immortal bodies. The point is that *human beings* need *bodies* to have *life*. As the present temporal animating life force of one’s physical body is his soul, so the future eternal animating life force of one’s spiritual body will be holy spirit.

I Corinthians 15:35

But some *man* will say, “How are the dead raised up? and with what body do they come?”

That is a very good question and one that deserves a godly answer.

I Corinthians 15:36-38

*Thou* fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die:

And that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other *grain*;

But God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him, and to every seed his [its] own body.

In mankind, physical birth is the result of a physical seed being “planted” by a man in a woman. (It is interesting that the Greek word for “seed” is *sperma*.) Spiritual birth also involves a seed.

I Peter 1:23

Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

This verse speaks of the new birth any person can receive by adhering to Romans 10:9. The word “seed” is figurative, because the holy spirit nature one acquires when he is “born again” is intangible. Why does God call this gift of life “seed”? Because it is what the Bible calls an “earnest” (II Corinthians 1:22; 5:5; Ephesians 1:14), that is, a token or down payment on what is to come. Therefore, if a Christian is “planted” in death, this incorruptible “seed” will one day blossom into an incorruptible “body” after its kind. God’s gift of holy spirit is the “continuity” factor.

#### I Corinthians 15:42-44

So also *is* the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption.

It is sown in dishonour; it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness; it is raised in power:

It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.

Customarily, if one wants apples, one plants an apple *seed*, not an apple itself. An apple seed, if planted, will one day have an apple “body.” It is worth noting that the apple “body” is much more attractive and useful than the apple seed that was planted. So it is with a human being. “Seed” implies *birth*. A corruptible, natural, human seed (sperm) results in one’s “natural” (physical) bodily birth. The incorruptible spiritual “seed” of holy spirit (I Peter 1:23; I John 3:9) that each Christian receives when he is born again will result in his new “spiritual body” when Jesus Christ appears.

In verses 51ff, I Corinthians 15 goes on to give more details about the destiny of those who during their lifetime receive the “seed” of holy spirit.

#### I Corinthians 15:51-54

Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed,

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we [living Christians] shall be changed.

For this corruptible [dead Christians] must put on incorruption, and this mortal [living Christians] *must* put on immortality.

So WHEN this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, THEN [and only then] shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Note that death is not swallowed up in victory until Christ comes. If Old Testament believers or Christians went immediately to heaven when they died, then death, not resurrection, would be the victory.

## *The Prince of Life*

Much has already been said about the significance of Jesus Christ’s resurrection, but we will review. If the dead are truly dead and “sleeping” in “gravedom,” and no one has ever gotten up from the dead except to live out his natural life on earth (e.g., Lazarus), then the stage is set for appreciating the uniqueness and importance of Jesus’ bodily resurrection. In this light, the entire New Testament clearly shows how much depends on the incredibly significant act of God raising His Son from the dead.

The first reference in the Bible to Jesus Christ is in Genesis 3:15, where He is figuratively called a “seed.” Why did God choose that term? Because after His suffering, death, resurrection, ascension and exaltation as Lord, Jesus Christ was to be given “life in Himself” (John 5:26). He is the “firstfruits” of those who have died (I Corinthians 15:20), and He will one day produce much more fruit by generating a new race of immortal men “after His kind.”

Jesus Christ is called the “Prince of life” (Acts 3:15). The word for “Prince” is the Greek word *archegos*, which means the first one in a column. Jesus Christ is the first man ever to conquer death. It is He Who

has blazed a trail to God's heart for all men who believe on Him to follow.

Jesus is also called "the captain [*archegos*] of salvation" (Hebrews 2:10). He is the "firstborn from the dead" (Colossians 1:18) and the "firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Having defeated the power of the grave, Jesus Christ will raise all the dead in the fullness of time (I Corinthians 15:22). It is He who will "bring many sons unto glory" (Hebrews 2:10). Were it not for God's magnificent power (Ephesians 1:20) that He gave to Christ to raise the dead, they would remain dead for eternity.

*When will the dead be made alive? Jesus Himself made this clear.*

John 14:2,3

In My Father's house are many mansions: if *it were* not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you.

And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto Myself; that where *I am*, *there ye* may be also.

No believer will literally be given eternal life until Jesus again appears and receives him unto Himself. The first time Jesus Christ will raise the dead is when He appears to gather together the Church, His body, in the air. As previously noted, I Corinthians 15:51-58 refers to this event. I Thessalonians 4:13-18 adds more details. The same basic truth is set forth, and we see that it is Jesus Christ Who will at His appearing awaken "sleeping" saints.

I 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.

When someone we love dies, God does not expect us not to sorrow. Grief is a godly process designed to enable a person to deal with such a tragedy. In this verse, we see that knowledge concerning those who

have died will help us not to sorrow as do those with no hope. The knowledge is in regard to our hope, and the next verse begins to elaborate upon it.

I Thessalonians 4:14

For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.

After the word “sleep,” the verse is better translated “God will by means of Jesus bring with Him.”<sup>60</sup> The context is regarding those who have died. As we have seen, they are in the dust of the earth, or “gravedom.” The verse cannot be saying that Jesus will bring them with Him *from* heaven because they are not *in* heaven. Rather, by way of Jesus coming for them, God will bring them with Jesus *from* the grave *to* heaven. How? Let’s keep reading.

I Thessalonians 4:15

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 [go before] them which are asleep.

Some Christians will live until the appearing of the Lord Jesus Christ.

I Thessalonians 4:16

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:

There sure is a lot of *noise* in that verse. Why, it’s enough to wake the dead. Yes, it is!!!

I Thessalonians 4:17,18

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.

Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Regarding I Thessalonians 4:13-18, Sir Anthony Buzzard shrewdly observes that in Thessalonica:

...the question had arisen in the minds of the believers as to what would be the state of those Christians who had died before the expected return of Jesus. Now Paul could have so easily removed all anxiety by pointing out that the dead in Christ were already with him, having at the moment of their death overcome the grave and passed to their reward in heaven. It is well known that he says nothing of the sort.

...he offers comfort to the believers in connection with those Christians who are said to be “sleeping”, an extraordinary term to use if He thought they were already fully conscious in bliss with the Lord...In a similar situation today, the church would be consoled with claims that the dead are already alive with God.<sup>61</sup>

What genuine comfort it is to know that when Jesus Christ appears to gather together all Christians, those who have died and those still alive, He will give each one a glorious new body just like his own.

Philippians 3:20,21

For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ:

Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Later, after Israel’s period of tribulation, Jesus Christ will come *to the earth* to save Israel at Armageddon. Unlike His first coming, when national Israel rejected Him, at His second coming, they will hail Him as Messiah and King. It is then that Jesus Christ will raise those people who believed God during Old Testament times as well as all people who believed the gospel of the kingdom during the time of tribulation. This resurrection is known both as the “resurrection of the just” (Luke 14:14; Acts 24:15) and the “resurrection of life” (John 5:29).

Finally, after the thousand years in which Christ reigns as King on earth, generally known as “the Millennium,” He will raise the remaining dead for the final “white throne judgment” (Revelation 20:11-15). This final resurrection is known both as the “resurrection of damnation [judgment]” (John 5:29) and the “resurrection of the unjust” (Acts 24:15; II Peter 2:9). At that time, those who believed on Him during the Millennium will be given eternal life. All unbelievers of all ages will also be resurrected at that time, and those whose names are not found written in the book of life will be cast into the lake of fire and destroyed forever.

## *Here Comes the Judge*

At this point, it should be noted that, according to God’s Word, there is no judgment issuing in either reward or punishment until Jesus Christ comes to do the judging. The traditional view of orthodoxy that judgment (and reward or punishment) takes place immediately after death is totally contrary to scriptural truth. Saint Peter is not presently taking tickets at the Pearly Gates. The Bible clearly refers to a specific “day of judgment” sometime in the future.

For Christians, “judgment” takes place at the gathering together of the Church, the Body of Christ. Since Jesus Christ by His death paid the penalty for sin, each Christian has been made righteous in Him. Therefore Christ’s “judgment” of each Christian at this time is not in regard to eternal life, which is a gift, but to reward him for the good works he has done.

Like hope, judgment is associated with the coming of Jesus Christ and not the moment of one's death. Christ is not forced to render specific judgments each time that someone dies, because this "judgment" is a future event at a specific time. Until this time of judgment, the dead remain in a "waiting" state. As we have already explained, this waiting state is called "sleep."

Consider these pertinent scriptures:

Luke 14:14

And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed **AT THE RESURRECTION OF THE JUST.**

John 12:48

He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall **JUDGE HIM IN THE LAST DAY.**

Acts 17:31

Because he hath appointed **A DAY**, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Romans 2:5

But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasurest up unto thyself wrath against **THE DAY OF WRATH AND REVELATION** of righteous judgment of God;

II Timothy 4:1

I charge *thee* therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick [living] and the dead **AT HIS APPEARING** and his kingdom:

Consider the following verses, which clearly state that all unbelievers, regardless of when they died, will be judged at the same time.

Revelation 20:12-15

And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is *the book of life*: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [*hades*= the grave] delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

And death and hell [*hades*= the grave] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.

And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

Verse fourteen is further proof that "hell" [*hades*] cannot be a literal place of *eternal* torment, because it, too, will be "destroyed." As we have seen, *sheol/hades* is only a figurative place, but since *death* will be no more, the "place" of the dead will also cease to exist. Jesus Christ will one day bring to pass "the death of death," the last enemy to be destroyed.

Revelation 21:4

And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away.

(For a more thorough discussion of when various groups of the dead will be made alive and a general chronological overview of eschatological ("end-times") events, the reader is referred to *Things To Come* by J. Dwight Pentecost (Zondervan Publishing Co.) and E.W. Bullinger's *Commentary On Revelation* (Kregel Publications).

Thus it is only Jesus Christ, the “last Adam,” who can and will, once and for all, solve the problem of sin and death brought on by the first Adam. Because He obeyed God all the way unto death, “even the death of the cross,” God has highly exalted Him (Philippians 2:8,9) and given Him all authority in heaven and on earth (Matthew 28:18). God has also given His Son eternal life in Himself (John 5:26). Jesus Christ will awaken from the sleep of death all who have believed in Him, and give them eternal life. Thus He will put back together and bring to pass God’s original plan of an eternal family living forever.

I Corinthians 15:54b-58

... then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

O death, where *is* thy sting? O grave, where *is* thy victory?

The sting of death *is* sin; and the strength of sin *is* the law.

But thanks *be* to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

This last verse is God’s exhortation to all Christians, based upon our hope of eternal life at the appearing of Jesus Christ. This hope is described in Hebrews 6:19 as an “anchor of the soul.” Thus we can stand, steadfast and unmoveable, “always abounding in the work of the Lord.” Our labor is not in vain.

*The dead are truly dead and sleeping in gravedom. Only at the coming of Jesus Christ will those who have believed in Him be made alive forever.*

In the face of Satan's original lie that now permeates nearly every segment of Christendom, let us who do understand and believe the magnificent truth of God's wonderful Word stand squarely, valiantly and boldly upon it. As those deceived by the Adversary are very vocal in their error, let us who love the truth herald it forth with great love for those who need to hear it. As Jesus said, only the truth will make one free. It is our hope that this book goes a long way toward that end.

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