

The Truth About Death

Excerpts from “Thou Shalt Surely Die”

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DEATH: FRIEND? OR FOE?

Is death an enemy of man? Or is death a great friend, especially to ailing or aged persons? What is death? Is it the absence of life? Or is it a continuance of life on a different plane or in a different location? It is common to say of loved ones who have died: “They have gone to be with the Lord.” At funeral services ministers tell the people: “Our beloved brother is not here; he is in heaven. These bodily remains are but the tenement of clay in which he lived while on earth. Though we will greatly miss him, he is now in that fair land where all tears are wiped away and no sorrows ever come. Some glad day we will be reunited with him.”

What he has said is that the man himself did not really die, but that he merely passed to another state of existence, leaving his dead body for the living to bury. In that view, death can be defined simply as a different kind of life, and we need not fear death, because in reality there is no death of ourselves, only the death of our body.

Strangely enough, upon being badly injured or taken seriously ill, most who profess to believe this will do everything in their power to keep from dying! They will employ expensive medical assistance, perhaps even going into debt to pay for it; they will pray and solicit the prayers of others that they might be healed and so continue to live. Many travel hundreds or thousands of miles, often with great difficulty and expense, to request prayer from some “healing” evangelist.

Although they may not realize it, by these actions they are demonstrating a lack of faith in what they profess to believe about dying. According to their own stated belief in what will happen to them if their body dies, they will enter into “heaven” to be in the very presence of Jesus Christ. What experience in a continued life on earth could compare with their life after death? Why would any who believe this want to postpone such a blessing? Why should friends or relatives pray that God would keep the injured or ill one from his most glorious reward by maintaining him in life upon the earth?

Quite obviously there is an inconsistency between what they claim to believe and what they really seem to believe as testified by their actions.

The inconsistency in part is that, although they may claim to believe that death is a friend, when death actually approaches, they cannot help but treat death as an enemy.

Is this because they know, deep down in their innermost being, that God is right when he says death is not a friend to man, but an enemy?

The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. (1 Cor. 15:26)

We should not feel we are different if we treat death as an enemy. Hezekiah, in the Old Scriptures, knew that death was not his friend. When Isaiah prophesied that Hezekiah was soon going to die, “*Hezekiah wept sore.*” (Is. 38:3) He then prayed, and God added fifteen years to his life. Why was Hezekiah unhappy with the thought he would soon die? Did he not believe he would be with God when he died? Hezekiah himself gives us the answer:

For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee, as I do this day. (Is. 38:18, 19)

Hezekiah understood death to be an enemy. He believed that when he died, he would go down into “the grave,” where he would not be able to praise God or hope for His truth.

The fact that death is an enemy also is taught in the New Scriptures.

Epaphroditus, one of Paul's disciples. *was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. (Phil. 2:27)* Both Hezekiah and Epaphroditus would have been deprived of many years of life, had not God in mercy intervened. Their lives were spared, and they rejoiced that God had added more years to their lives. Another example showing death to be an enemy is found in Jeremiah 31:15, 16:

Thus saith the Lord; A voice was heard in Ramah, lamentation, and bitter weeping; Rahel weeping for her children refused to be comforted for her children, because they were not. Thus saith the Lord; Refrain thy voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears: for thy work shall be rewarded, saith the Lord; and they shall come again from the land of the enemy.

Matthew tells us that this prophecy was fulfilled when King Herod killed all the children under two years of age in Bethlehem in his attempt to kill Jesus shortly after His birth. These children “were not,” that is, they were killed. “The land of the enemy” is not heaven, but death, the state described by the words, “they were not.” The “not” in the Greek here is *ouk*, which always expresses full and direct negation (independently and absolutely). The weaker and conditional negative *me* was not used. The stronger negative was also used in Jeremiah 31:15.

The Bible says that Rahel (or, Rachel) shall see them when they “come again” (are resurrected) from this land. But meanwhile, “they are [were] not,” for they died and ceased to exist consciously. Therefore we see that some very godly people considered death to be an enemy and hated and feared it. Let us now begin a deep search of the Holy Bible to see why they felt as they did about death.

IS THERE DEATH AFTER LIFE?

In Romans 5:12 we read:

Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world, and through sin death, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all sinned. — (C.V. - Concordant Version)

In other words, as a consequence of Adam's sin, death has “passed through into all mankind,” and it is on account of death operating in mankind that all men sin. For light on the meaning of the term “death,” let us turn to the historical record of the event mentioned above in Romans 5:12.

After God formed man from the dust of the ground, He placed him in the garden of Eden. He then imposed upon him this well-known restriction:

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. (Gen. 2:16, 17)

The marginal rendering of the last phrase is significant: “Dying, thou shalt die.” In other words, the dying process (i.e., “mortality”) was to begin to operate in Adam the very day he ate of the forbidden tree, and this was to ultimately result in his actual death.

In Genesis 3:19 the “death” which Adam ultimately was to die is graphically described:

In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it was thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

It appears that none of the living creatures of Gen. 1 had any existence prior to their creation, and Adam had no prior existence before God formed him from the ground and made him “a living soul” (Gen. 2:7). Thus God must have meant by that last verse that when Adam died and returned unto the ground, he would return to his previous state of non-existence. According to the early chapters of Genesis then, death can simply be defined as the opposite of life.

If this is true, then there should be other Bible passages which treat life and death as opposites. Consider the following:

(1) *Now when Jacob saw that there was corn in Egypt, Jacob said unto his sons, Why do ye look one upon another? And he said, Behold, I have heard that there is corn in Egypt: get you down thither, and buy for us from thence; that we may live, and not die. (Gen. 42:1, 2)*

(2) *And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die. . . (Gen. 43:8)*

(3) *Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? Buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give us seed, that we may live, and not die. (Gen. 47:19)*

(4) *Cut ye not off the tribe of the families of the Kohathites from among the Levites: But thus do unto them, that they may live, and not die. . . But they shall not go in to see when the holy things are covered, lest they die.* (Num. 4:18-20)

(5) *Let Reuben live, and not die.* (Deut. 33:6)

(6) *Until I come and take you away to a land like your own land. . . that ye may live, and not die.* (2 Kings 18:32)

(7) *In those days was Hezekiah sick unto death. And Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz came to him, and said unto him, Thus saith the Lord, Set thine house in order: for thou shalt die, and not live.* (2 Kings 20: 1 and Is. 38:1)

(8) *I shall not die, but live, and declare the works of the Lord.* (Ps. 118:17)

(9) *But if the wicked will turn from all his sins. . . he shall surely live, he shall not die.* (Ez. 18:21)

(10) *Because he considereth, and turneth away from all his transgressions that he hath committed, he shall surely live, he shall not die.* (Ez. 18:28)

(11) *For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.* (Rom. 6:23)

The Scriptures teach that Adam's sin brought death to us, and Christ's death and resurrection brought life to us. Therefore, we can conclude that death is not another form of life; death is the opposite of life, and in fact, death is the absence of life.

The Bible has much more to say on this subject. Let us go on.

DEATH IS LIKENED UNTO SLEEP

God inspired Moses, Job, David, Solomon, Isaiah, Daniel, Luke, Paul, and Peter to refer to the dead as being asleep. We read in Deut. 31:16 . . .

And the Lord God said unto Moses, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers.

This same expression, "sleep with thy fathers," also occurs 36 times in the books of the Kings and Chronicles alone. Thus it would seem that God desires that His people should become familiar with this inspired phrase. However, this terminology did not long survive apostolic times. It was seldom used during the middle ages, during which time Catholicism held sway. It was revived briefly during the Protestant Reformation, but it has died out once again. Today we usually only hear it when the Scriptures are read. So it should be interesting and perhaps informative to read some of those Scriptures and see what the inspired Bible writers said concerning the connection between sleep and death:

(1) *So man lieth down, and riseth not; till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.* (Job 14:12)

(2) *Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death.* (Ps. 13:3)

(3) *As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness: I shall be satisfied when [and not before] I awake, [at the resurrection] with thy likeness.* (Ps. 17:15)

(4) *And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake. . .* (Dan. 12:2)

(5) *But go thou thy way till the end be; for thou shalt rest [“sleep”] and stand in thy lot at the end of the days.* (Dan. 12:13)

(6) . . . *for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.* (Job 7:21)

We find this same concept used throughout the New Scriptures as well:

(1) *Weep not; for she is not dead, but sleepeth, and they laughed him to scorn, knowing that she was dead.* (Luke 8:52, 53)

(2) *Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awaken him out of sleep. . . Howbeit Jesus spake of his death. . .* (John 11:11, 13)

(3) *For if the dead rise not, then is Christ not raised . . . then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.* (1 Cor. 15:16-18)

(4) *But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them which slept.* (1 Cor. 15:20)

(5) *For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him.* [or, “will God, through Jesus, lead forth together with Him” — C.V., 1 Thess. 4:14]

(6) . . . *we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [“precede”] them which are asleep.* (1 Thess. 4:15)

Thus we see that in both the Old and the New Scriptures death finds an exact parallel in the condition of sleep. Both in sleep and in death men are unconscious of time and events that occur around them.

Martin Luther, the prince of the Reformers, wrote concerning the unconscious sleep of the dead:

We should learn to view our death in the right light, so that we need not become alarmed on account of it, as unbelief does; because in Christ it is indeed not death, but a

fine, sweet and brief sleep, which brings us release from this vale of tears, from sin and from the fear and extremity of real death, and from all the misfortunes of this life, and we shall be secure and without care, rest sweetly and gently for a brief moment, as on a sofa, until the time when he shall call and awaken us together with all his dear children to his eternal glory and joy. For since we call it a sleep, we know that we shall not remain in it, but be again 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. . . Scripture everywhere affords such consolation, which speaks of the death of the saints, as if they fell asleep and were gathered to their fathers, that is, had overcome death through this faith and comfort in Christ, and awaited the resurrection, together with the saints who preceded them in death. (from "A Compend of Luther's Theology," ed. by Hugh Thomson, p. 242).

— There are 125 references to "soul sleep" in Luther's writings. Although he appears to have wavered in his views, Luther died believing in "soul sleep." (See T.N. Ketola, "A Study of M.L. Teaching Concerning the State of the Dead"). —

Those who believe that man himself retains consciousness after death teach that consciousness is independent of the body. Thus, when the body dies, the consciousness remains unaffected. But this notion is proven daily to be false. No man remains conscious while his body sleeps, for sleep itself is an unconscious state of being.

Some may insist dreaming while the body is asleep proves that the mind operates independently of the body. However, researchers have found that dreams occur as the physical body is disturbed. As an example, if the person is cold, he may dream of snow. If he is hungry, he may dream of food. If he has had a deep, emotional experience that day, or seen an exciting movie, these will bring on dreams.

Comas are unnatural sleep brought on by injury, drugs, or illness. The body is alive, but decreased activity of some part of the body has made the mind unconscious. No doctor who has had medical experience would dare insist that mind consciousness increases as body life and brain function decreases.

Natural sleep, comas or other types of unconsciousness seem to verify that consciousness of the mind exists only in a living body.

Paul admonished Timothy to "hold fast the form ("pattern" - C.V.) of sound words" (2 Tim. 1:13). It is important that we use the inspired words of God when we speak of death, lest we should be led astray in our understanding of it.

UNCONSCIOUSNESS IN SHEOL-HADES

Under a column headed "With the Lord," a weekly church paper recently noted the deaths of two ministers of their particular denomination. Are these two ministers really in the presence of God

in a conscious state? If so, they most certainly must be joyfully praising the Lord with all those who preceded them. But what does the Bible say of the believers who have died? King David wrote:

The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence. (Ps. 115:17)

David tells us that they do not praise the Lord, because they go down to a place of silence. The Septuagint rendering of verses 17 and 18 is very significant:

The dead shall not praise thee, O Lord, nor any that go down to hades. But we, the living, will bless the Lord, from henceforth and to the age.

In the original Hebrew of the Old Scriptures the dead were said to go to sheol. The comparable Greek word in the New Scriptures is hades. When the Judean translators of the Septuagint Bible (280 B.C.) came to the word sheol, they always rendered it with the Greek hades. When the writers of the New Scriptures quoted a passage from the Hebrew, they rendered sheol as hades. An example:

For thou wilt not leave my soul in sheol. (Ps. 16:10) Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hades. (Acts 2:27)

The Hebrew word “sheol” occurs 65 times in the original texts. The translators of the King James Version rendered it “hell” 31 times, “grave” 31 times, and “pit” 3 times (see Strong's or Young's Concordances for verification). However, none of these 65 occurrences of “sheol” depict a place where the dead suffer conscious torment.

David recognized that he would go to sheol, but he had faith that God would not leave him there forever. Job, too, knew that he would have to wait in sheol until the resurrection:

If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come. (Job 14:14)

The Septuagint rendering of this same passage is very enlightening:

For if a man should die, shall he live again? Having accomplished the days of his life? I will wait till I exist again.

Thus, according to the Septuagint translation, Job said that he would have to wait in the grave until he existed again at the resurrection. Meanwhile. . .

If I wait, the grave [sheol] is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. (Job 17:13)

Notice that Job did not say that his body would go to a place of darkness, but “I have made my bed in the darkness.” Sheol is not only a place of silence and darkness, but it is also a place where all mental activity ceases:

For in death there is no remembrance of thee; [God] in the grave [sheol] who shall give thee thanks? (Ps. 6:5)

While I live will I praise the Lord: I will sing praises unto my God while I have any being. [Sept., “as long as I exist” — Ps. 146:2]

If while I live equals as long as I exist, then conversely, when David ceased to live, he also ceased to exist. David recognized that he had to do all of his praising God before he died, because there was no praise or remembrance of God in sheol. David also said of death:

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. (Ps. 146:4)

Please note that “perish” is from the Hebrew word “abad,” which signifies “to be lost.” At death, man loses consciousness.

The Bible tells us that Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, and he too confirms what his father David said:

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything. (Eccl. 9:5)

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 [sheol] whither thou goest. (Eccl. 9:10)

There are some who tell us that we cannot take these quotations in Ecclesiastes at face value, since Solomon was discoursing on “things “under the sun.” Others claim these statements are invalid, because Solomon was “backslidden” when he penned them. But what saith the Scriptures?

And God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding exceeding much, and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is on the seashore. And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men. . . (1 Kings 4:29-31)

And God said unto him. . . I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. (1 Kings 3:11,12)

And further, because the Preacher [Solomon] was wise, he still taught the people knowledge, yea, he set in order many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find out acceptable words, and that which was written uprightly, even words of truth. (Eccl. 12:9, 10)

Those who disparage Solomon's writings on death overlook the fact that Solomon's statements on the condition of the dead are in total agreement with David's and Job's. Are we to believe that

they too were backslidden and their writings untrustworthy? God forbid! King Hezekiah also said:

For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee as I do this day. (Is. 38:18, 19)

Hezekiah was not saying there was no hope of resurrection for the dead. He said that the dead cannot hope because they have no consciousness. Only the living can praise God or can hope.

Some who deny Solomon's statements above, will quote certain phrases of Solomon's which they think prove the dead are alive. We will examine them in detail a little further on.

The above-quoted Scriptures are not isolated passages. There are many other Scriptures which coincide perfectly with them. The preponderance of God's Word teaches that the dead are actually dead in their graves, unconscious (asleep), and are awaiting their respective resurrections. The prophets all were agreed upon this issue in contrast to all of the other false religions of the nations surrounding Israel. Jesus placed His stamp of approval upon their doctrines by telling two of his disciples:

O fools, and slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken. (Luke 24:25)

There is only one man who ever walked this earth who is immortal, and He is the resurrected Christ. *the King of kings, and Lord of lords, who only hath immortality. (1 Tim. 6:15, 16)*

Christ is immortal and is seated at the right hand of the Father (Eph. 1:20). He conquered death in His resurrection, and thus we can be assured that we too shall conquer death and mortality at

his coming. Is the artist's conception the Scriptural view of "sheolhades"? Or is it merely a figment of man's darkened imagination?



God says of "sheol-hades": "*There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the weary be at rest. There the prisoners rest together; they hear not the voice of the oppressor.*" (Job. 3:17- 18)

DEATH IS A RETURN

There is a significant point many in Christendom seem to have overlooked. God does not say that He formed man's body of the dust of the ground. No, God says He formed man of the dust. Only theologians say it was the body.

Note carefully the wording of the Scriptures that we quote:

And 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. (Gen. 2:7)

That Adam was truly of the earth is made especially clear in the Concordant rendition of 1 Cor. 15:45:

The first man, Adam, "became a living soul" . . . the first man was out of the earth, soilish . . . (1 Cor. 15:45, 47, C.V.)

Adam was apparently complete, physically, but he was without "life." Upon receiving life, he then became "a living soul." The important point to remember is that, except for the breath of life itself, man was totally from "the dust of the ground."

That is why the Bible then states that when life leaves man, it is man himself that returns to the ground. Note God's explanation of this return, beginning with His direct statement to Adam:

In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken; for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Gen. 3:19) All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust. (Job 34:15)

Thou turnest man to destruction; and sayest, return, ye children of men. (Ps. 90:3)

Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust. (Ps. 104:29)

His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth, in that very day his thoughts perish. (Ps. 146:4)

All go unto one place, all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. (Eccl. 3:20)

Note the personal pronouns thy and thou in all of the above passages. If our theologians and Bible teachers would but read them, they would see that it is man himself who returns to dust—not just his body with man himself then going somewhere else.

SPIRIT, SOUL, BODY

In any discussion of death as a return, we must consider the relationship between spirit, soul, and body, since Solomon did write:

Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it. (Eccl. 12:7)

The Hebrew word for spirit is ruach, and its Greek equivalent is pneuma. Both words literally mean "breath" (air in motion). When God breathed into man the "breath of life" (Gen. 2:7), he came alive. Ruach is translated both breath and spirit in the King James Version, which will be discussed in more detail below. The spirit is not man. The soul, and NOT the spirit, constitutes

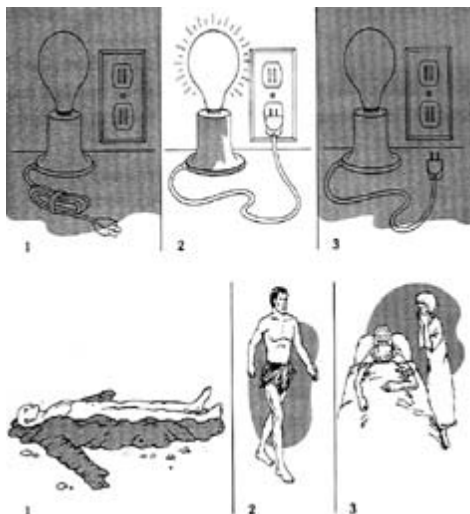
the individual, and is the seat of the conscious personality. In the Scriptures, the following identifying marks of a conscious personality are ascribed to the soul:

1. KNOWLEDGE (Joshua 23:14; Ps. 139:4; Prov. 2:10, 19:2).
2. THOUGHT (Esther 4:13; Prov. 23:7; Ps. 13:2).
3. MEMORY (Lam. 3:20; Deut. 4:9, 11:18).
4. LOVE, JOY, AND DELIGHT (Deut. 6:5; 13:3; Ps. 35:9, 86:4, 94:19; Matt. 22:37)
5. BITTERNESS, DISTRESS, IMPATIENCE (Gen.42:21; Num. 21:4; Judg. 10:16, 16:16; 1 Sam. 1:10, 22:2, 30:6; Ps. 143:11; Prov. 21:23).
6. MOURNING, SORROW, GRIEF (Job 14:22; Jer. 31:25; 1 Sam. 2:33; Ps. 42:5).
7. ABHORRENCE, HATE (Lev. 26:15; Ps. 11:5, 107:18; Isa. 1:14).

One doesn't need a college diploma to see that if the above are ascribed to the soul, and the soul "dies" (Ezek. 18:4), then the above marks of conscious personality cease, or "die" as well (1+1=2)! Genesis 2:7 makes it plain that when God breathed the "breath of life" into Adam, Adam was made "a living soul," not a spirit. We have already seen from 1 Cor. 15 that Adam's origin from the earth made him an "earthly" creature, whereas Christ was the spiritual being from heaven. Thus, when the spirit "returns to God," that life force leaves man, and he dies, returning to non-existence, i.e. to the dust of the ground.

For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. (Gen. 3:19)

Let us for a moment consider an electric light bulb and its operation. The bulb itself corresponds to body (physically complete, but without life). The electricity needed to light the bulb corresponds to spirit (or, the breath of life from God which energizes the body). The union of the bulb with electricity produces light, corresponding to soul (awareness and sensation).



When the electricity is cut off, what happens to the light? Does it go somewhere? Does the light continue to exist in another place? No, when the electricity is cut off, light ceases to be (i.e. it dies). So it is with "spirit and soul and body" (1 Thess. 5:23). When the breath of life, or spirit, is cut off from the body, soul ceases to be (i.e. it dies). It does not continue to exist independently of body and spirit in another state, or location.

As we speak of an energized bulb as "a light," so also we speak of an energized or living body as "a soul."

Some confusion is engendered, of course, because the King James translators rendered the Hebrew word ruach both “breath” and “spirit.” An example is Psalm 104, where David used the Hebrew ruach when writing of both man and animals:

. . . Thou takest away their breath [ruach], they die, and return to the dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit [ruach], they are created. . . (vs. 29, 30)

David knew that the ruach (whether translated breath or spirit) was not the creature itself, but rather that life-force from God which gave the creature life (as electricity gives the bulb light). David's son Solomon knew this, for he wrote about both men and beasts:

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] . . . (Eccl. 3:19)

We previously quoted another passage where David combines the truth that it is ruach which gives man life, and when ruach is removed, man himself returns to the earth:

His breath [ruach] goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish. (Ps. 146:4)

Those who insist that man is a spiritual, immortal being who returns to God at death must also teach that man preexisted in heaven before the world was created. Man cannot return to God unless he was with God previously. Thus, the controversy can be reduced to a single question: Did man originate in heaven in an immortal state, or was man created from the dust of the ground?

Pre-existence is refuted by the Word of God just as certainly as is his continued existence after his body dies. In order to live again man must be resurrected!

RESURRECTION: IMPOSSIBLE IF THE DEAD ARE ALIVE!

Resurrection is a return from the dead. God says nothing in His Word about resurrecting men's spirits out of heaven. It is axiomatic that the living cannot be resurrected, for only the dead can be raised from the dead. The story of man's life, death, and resurrection is summarized in Psalm 104:29, 30:

Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled; thou takest away their breath, [spirit] they die, and return to their dust. Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created; and thou renewest the face of the earth.

In other words, when God removes his breath (spirit) from man, he dies and returns to dust. The resurrection is a recreation from the state of non-existence. In this way the earth and man will be renewed. Ezekiel says the same thing:

. . . *Breath came into them, and they lived. . . Behold, O my people, I will open your graves. . . and shall put my spirit in you, and ye shall live.* (Ez. 37:10-14)

Note three important things in this Scripture, all of which are generally overlooked:

1. Breath came into them and they lived. it does not say—nor is it true—that a “never-dying soul,” or a conscious entity returned to their bodies and caused them to live.
2. God says, I will . . . put my spirit [the breath of God] in you, and ye shall live. What caused them to live? The first part says it was “breath” and the last part says “my Spirit”; the breath of God breathed into their nostrils as with Adam in Genesis 2:7.

The most complete list of references to the word resurrection that we know is found in Young's Analytical Concordance. The concordance in the back of your Bible will have some of them, but not all. We will not quote the passages themselves, but we will give all of the references in the New Scriptures: Matthew 22:23, 28, 30, 31; Mark 12:18, 23; Luke 14:14, 20:27, 33, 35, 36; John 5:29, 11:24, 25; Acts 1:22, 2:31, 4:2, 33, 17:18, 32, 23:6, 8, 24:15, 21; Romans 1:4, 6:5; 1 Cor. 15:12, 13, 21, 42; Phil. 3:10, 11; 2 Tim. 2:18; Heb. 6:2, 11:35; 1 Peter 1:3, 3:21; Rev. 20:5, 6; and Matthew 27:53.

The above references speak of “the resurrection,” “the resurrection of Jesus Christ,” and most frequently, “the resurrection of [or from] the dead.” You may be surprised to hear that in no single instance do we read of “the resurrection of the body.” This is a phrase we hear everywhere in our day, but it absolutely cannot be found in God's Word. The phrase is very misleading and gives a false view of the resurrection, as well as a false view of both the nature and the abode of the dead: the grave.

There is, however, one passage which is often misunderstood to teach the resurrection of the body. Isaiah 26:19 says:

Thy dead men shall live, together with my [Isaiah's] dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust. . .

The first part of this verse speaks of “thy dead men”, not “the bodies of those who have died.” The last part of the same verse says, “Ye that dwell in the dust;” not “the bodies of them that dwell in dust.” These two parts of the same sentence do not mention “bodies” at all.

“Thy dead body” does not suggest that only Isaiah's “body” will be raised, while his soul or spirit will come down from heaven and re-enter his body. No, not at all. This passage simply illustrates that one cannot separate the body from the person.

To settle this matter further, let us consult two other translations of this passage, the Concordant Version and the Septuagint. The Concordant Version is a very literal translation, based upon the Hebrew texts, the Dead Sea Scrolls, and the Syriac. It reads:

Live shall your death-doomed! Their carcasses shall arise! Awake and jubilate, tabernaclers of the soil! For a night mist of lights is your night mist. And the land is causing the healers to fall.

The Septuagint translation is based upon a Hebrew text that is about 1,000 years older than any now in our possession. It reads in English:

The dead shall rise, and they that are in the tombs shall be raised, and they that are in the earth shall rejoice. . .

There is no mention of dead bodies being raised, it simply speaks of the resurrection of “the dead” and “they that are in the tombs.”

Pointing to the King James translation of Isaiah 26:19 to prove the resurrection of the body separate from the man himself not only goes against the rest of the King James, but the other translations show the argument is based upon an unclear translation of this verse in the King James.

All three translations speak of the after-death location of those who have died in terms which preclude “heaven”: King James: “*in the dust*” Concordant: (in) “*the soil*” Septuagint: “*in the tombs. . . in the earth.*”

The overwhelming evidence of Scripture proves that man himself surely dies and goes to the earth, and it is man himself who shall surely be resurrected from the dead.

The serpent's lie, (“thou shalt not surely die”), is the basis of all false religions. Thus, the doctrine of man's immortality is the common denominator of all false religions, and by this doctrine they automatically deny the resurrection of the dead...

The Liberals deny both the resurrection of the dead and the resurrection of the body. The Evangelicals, who say they believe the Bible to be God's inspired Word, do not openly deny the resurrection, but they change the doctrine to mean the resurrection of the body. They attempt to retain “the best of two worlds” by accepting both that men go to heaven when they die and that dead men shall be resurrected from the dust of the ground.

We have proven those doctrines to be mutually exclusive. We cannot be both dead and alive at the same time; we cannot be both mortal and immortal at the same time; we cannot be both in heaven and in the grave at the same time. Trying to believe two opposing doctrines results in doublemindedness and James says:

A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8)

God is warning us through James that a man who accepts opposing ideas on one subject is unstable in relation to all things. Accepting confusion in religious doctrines conditions one to accept error in other things as well.

The pulpit, radio, T.V., movies, newspapers, books, and magazines continually impose on us this “double mindedness” in relation to the dead. There is more of this propaganda than most people realize. All of our people, from infancy to old age, are deluged with this “life-after-death” propaganda. Perhaps trying to believe and teach two mutually exclusive doctrines is the reason we find so much instability in the professing Christian Church.



William Tyndale (1484-1536), the great English Reformer, recognized the inherent contradiction between these two doctrines. He wrote:

The true faith putteth the resurrection, which we be warned to look for every hour. The heathen philosophers did put that the souls did ever live. And the pope joineth the spiritual doctrines of Christ and the fleshly doctrine of philosophers together; things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshly minded pope consenteth unto heathen doctrine, therefore he corrupteth the Scripture to stablish it (“An Answer to Sir Thomas More's Dialogue”).

God's Word says that the resurrection will occur:

In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trump shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. . . so when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then [not before] shall be brought to

pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. (1 Cor. 15:52, 54)

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. Wherefore, comfort one another with these words (1 Thess. 4:16-18).

Commenting upon Sir Thomas More's false interpretation of these passages, Tyndale wrote with sarcasm:

Nay, Paul, thou are unlearned; go to Master More, and learn a new way. We be not most miserable, though we rise not again; for our souls go to heaven as soon as we be dead, and are there in as great joy as Christ that is risen again. And I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine, if he had wist it, that the souls of their dead had been in joy; as he did with the resurrection, that their dead should rise

again. If the souls be in heaven, in as great glory as the angels, after your doctrine, shew me what cause should be of the resurrection?

We can only conclude that death is an enemy, an outrage, the most terrible of all tragedies. It is total, affecting the whole man.

Paul stresses the totality of death and the absolute need for the resurrection, when he states that if the dead rise not,

“let us eat and drink; for tomorrow we die.” (1 Cor. 15:32)

If there is to be no resurrection, even Christians are without hope, for Paul also says:

. . . they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. (1 Cor. 15:18)

The Bible truth, as we have seen, is that man does surely die. “Inherent immortality” is a chimera, a figment of man's darkened imagination. Our Lord Jesus Christ surely died for the sin of the world and overcame death by His resurrection. The death and resurrection of Christ has proven by example that His promise is true; we shall be raised immortal at His coming-at the last trump.

THE TWO TYPES OF DEATH

We have seen from Genesis 2:16, 17 that the penalty for Adam's transgression was mortality, that is, a dying process. We have also seen that according to Romans 5:12, this mortality was passed down to all men as a consequence of Adam's sin, rather than our own. In other words, God did not wait until we committed our first sin to make us mortal. Rather, we were all born mortal, not as a result of our own sin, but on account of Adam's sin.

Therefore, this type of death which we call mortality is experienced by all men and indeed by all of creation.

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; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast. . . All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. (Eccl. 3:19, 20)

However, there is another kind of death which only the wicked among men experience. It is called the second death.

But the fearful and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolators, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone; which is the second death. (Rev. 21:8)

The righteous ones who shall be resurrected to life, however, shall not experience this second death, for we read:

Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection; on such the second death hath no power. (Rev. 20:6)

We see, then, that there is a basic difference between the type of death caused by Adam's sin and the second death. The first type, which we shall call "the first death," befalls everyone without exception, whereas the second death befalls only the wicked. Also, we see that the first death began with Adam, while the second death is yet future.

And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell [hades] delivered up the dead which were in them; and they were judged every man according to their works. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. (Rev. 20:13, 14)

Thus, when all the dead who died the first death because of their mortality are raised from that death, the first death shall then be ended by being itself cast into the second death. So what is the purpose of the first death? We read in Job 21:28-30:

For ye say, Where is the house of the prince? And where are the dwelling places of the wicked? Have ye not asked them that go by the way? And do ye not know their tokens, that the wicked is reserved to the day of destruction? They shall be brought forth to the day of wrath.

The same statement is made in 2 Peter 2:9 . . .

The Lord knoweth how. . . to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished.

According to Young's Analytical Concordance, the words rendered reserved in both cases mean "held back," or to hold in abeyance. Job says that the wicked are held back "to the day of destruction," and "the day of wrath." Peter says that God holds back "the unjust unto the day of judgment."

In other words, the dead are not punished for their own sins before the judgment, for we read:

Doth our law judge any man, before it hear him, and know what he doeth? (John 7:51)

No, God does not pass sentence against any man for his sins until he has received a fair trial.

However, let one thing be clearly understood. Righteous Abel was the first man to die. Between his death and Christ's return and the judgment is a span of many thousands of years. But because there is no consciousness in the grave, there is also no consciousness of time. It shall be very much like when we fall into a deep sleep at night, and then morning seems to come almost the same instant that we fall asleep.

Sleep is thus the ideal condition in which to reserve the dead until they are resurrected, whether to immortality or to condemnation. It prevents men from being rewarded or punished before they are judged, while at the same time it eliminates all consciousness of time.

The purpose, then, of the first death is to reserve men in a state of timeless unconsciousness until the judgment, when they shall receive “*every man according to their works.*”

We now have given substantial proof from the Bible that man does surely die, and that there is no life after death until the resurrection. But we cannot stop here, for no matter how many Bible passages one uses to prove the dead really die, some minister will always say, “But what about . . . ?” and then quote (or misquote) some other passage of Scripture.

Since it is our desire that our readers will be able to answer every objection with Truth, we shall now go on and examine every Bible passage and argument used by those who attempt to deceive you into believing that man does not surely die.