

Life After Death

“If a man die, shall he live again?”
—*Job 14:14*

No subject is of more compelling and universal interest than the possibility of life after death. This is because death itself is so universal and because all rationally minded humans want to live. No one, under normal circumstances, wants to die, yet all realize that so far as human foresight is concerned death awaits every member of the human race. So the question is in the hearts of all and upon the lips of many as to whether or not there is life after death.

Men and women throughout the ages, in their frustration over the death of their loved ones, and in the certainty of their own ultimate collapse before the “Grim Reaper,” have devised all sorts of philosophies in an effort to calm their fears and to deny the reality of what is so tragically real. They have attempted to believe that death is not what it seems to be; that it is not an enemy but a friend, a means by which humans enter into another and more sublime realm of life.

Over and over again the questions have been asked, both by the learned and the unlearned, Where are the dead? Just what does happen when a person dies? Are the dead more alive

than the living? Thousands of years ago the prophet Job asked, "If a man die, shall he live again?" (Job 14:14) Thus did God's prophet speak for countless millions who have mourned the loss of their loved ones, and who themselves, in common with all mankind, have dreaded the coming of certain death.

Job had a personal and vital interest in the answer to his question, "If a man die, shall he live again?" for he had just asked God to let him die. Job was not tired of living, but was worn out with suffering to the point where he wondered whether or not life under such conditions was worthwhile.

James wrote, "Ye have heard of the patience of Job." (James 5:11) Job needed patience, for God had allowed exceedingly severe calamities to come upon him. His flocks, his herds, and his family were all destroyed. He lost his health, and became afflicted with a loathsome skin disease which covered his entire body. Finally his wife turned against him, and said, "Curse God, and die."—Job 2:9

However, Job had no intention of cursing God. He trusted God even though he did not understand why he was allowed to suffer so severely. Understandably he sought release from suffering if it were God's will, so he prayed, "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time, and remember me!"—Job 14:13

Having thus asked God to let him die, Job pondered the question of what would be involved if God answered his prayer and permitted him to die. So he asked, "If a man die [if I die, as I have requested], shall he live again [shall I live again]?" Job spoke from the standpoint of his own experience and feelings, yet, as a prophet of God, his words are divinely inspired, so we know that he phrased the question concerning life after death in a manner which is in keeping with the truth of God's Word on the subject.

It is important to notice, therefore, that Job did not ask, "If a man die, is he more alive than ever?" Nor did he ask, "If a man die, does it mean that he has merely moved into another room, or has gone to heaven, or to a place of torment?" Job knew that when a man dies he is dead, so the question he asked was, "If a man die, shall he live again?"

Thus is brought to our attention the great fundamental truth of the Bible that life after death depends upon the reviving, the awakening, of the dead. There is hope of life after death, not because there is no death, but because God has promised to use his mighty power to restore the dead to life. Job knew that if he were allowed to die to escape further suffering, God would later restore him to life, for he further said, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait [in death], till my change [from death to life] come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee: thou wilt have a desire unto the work of thine hands."—Job 14:14,15

THE RESURRECTION HOPE

Job's affirmation that God, in his own due time, would call him forth from death is fully in keeping with the testimony of the entire Word of God on the matter of life after death. It is this hope of the resurrection that is set forth so clearly, and with such comforting assurance in the New Testament.

The Apostle Paul wrote, "Since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead." (I Cor. 15:21) The two "men" referred to in this text are Adam and Jesus. Adam transgressed the divine law, and brought upon himself and his progeny the penalty of death. Jesus took the sinner's place in death, and thus made possible the release of the Adamic race from death by means of a resurrection. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, "The wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."—Rom. 6:23

The resurrection of the dead is so vital to the assurance of life after death that the Apostle Paul, writing concerning Christians, emphasized that if there is no resurrection then "they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished." (I Cor. 15:18) This simply means that if there is no resurrection, even those who now believe in Christ, and follow in his steps, perish in death.

WHY THE CONFUSION?

Since the Bible so clearly teaches that the hope of life after death is based upon the promises of God to restore the dead to life in

the resurrection, the question naturally arises as to why so many of those who profess to believe the teachings of the Bible should be confused on the subject. The basis for this confusion originated in the Garden of Eden.

God said to Adam, "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. 2:17) Later Satan, speaking through the serpent, asked Eve about this, saying, "Hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?" (Gen. 3:1) Eve confirmed what God had said, including his statement that death would be the penalty for disobedience.—vss. 2,3

Then Satan, replying to Eve, said, "Ye shall not surely die." (Gen. 3:4) This was a denial of what the Creator had said. In effect, Satan charged God with lying when he said that death would be the penalty for disobedience. Possibly Satan believed that in some way he could thwart the divine purpose of inflicting the death penalty upon man. If so, he soon discovered that efforts to do so were futile, for the human race began to die.

However, Satan did not concede that he was wrong. Instead he began, through human agents, to circulate the propaganda that death is not what it seems to be, that in reality there is no death. To the extent that he could induce people to believe this, he would be proving that he told the truth when he said to Mother Eve, "Ye shall not surely die,"

you will only seem to die, and when you seem to die you will, in reality, be more alive than ever.

To those who have confidence in the Word of God, there shall be no difficulty in deciding which of the statements made in the Garden of Eden should be accepted. It was the Creator who declared, "In the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die," and we know that God told the truth. It was Satan who said, "Ye shall not surely die," and we know that he did not tell the truth. Jesus said of Satan, "He is a liar, and the father of it."—John 8:44

Not only is Satan a liar, but, as Jesus declared, he is the "father of it." In other words, Satan fathered the first lie, and it was the most devastating and far-reaching lie that ever was told. This falsehood, stemming from the Garden of Eden, has corrupted the truth on the subject of death in the minds of the people of all nations and religions; while the truth, as expressed by God in the statement, "Thou shalt surely die," has been believed by only a comparatively few.

THE "SEPARATE ENTITY" FALSEHOOD

It has been apparent to all that the human body dies. Satan knew that there was no possible way he could deceive the people with respect to this, so he began to spread the notion that there is something within the human body which is separate from the body, an entity which escapes from the body when it dies, and

continues to live. In professed Christian circles, this indefinable something is designated the “immortal soul.”

The ancient Egyptians held to this view. It was later adopted by Grecian philosophers, and after the apostles fell asleep in death it was introduced into the Christian church by pagan philosophers. While described in various ways, this theory that there is something within man that cannot die, hence that there is no death, has been the common belief of all heathen religionists.

The Bible indicates that it was prevalent among the heathen in the days of King Solomon, and we find him combating this error with the truth. He wrote, “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: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth [or who can prove] the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?”—Eccles. 3:19-21

How clearly Solomon states the truth of God, affirming that in death man and beast are alike, that they have all one breath, or “spirit,” as the same Hebrew word is translated in verse 21. After thus setting forth the truth, he asks, who can prove otherwise? He evidently knew that the surrounding heathen nations believed otherwise, that they held to Satan’s lie that there is no death, that while the body dies, there is a

“spirit” which goes “upward” and continues to live. But this, Solomon shows, is not true. He says, rather, that in death, man and beast are alike. Man’s preeminence over the beast is in the fact that God has promised to restore dead humans to life in the resurrection, but has not promised to do this for the lower animals.

NO “IMMORTAL SOULS”

The expression, “immortal soul,” does not appear in the Bible, nor does the Bible even remotely teach that a “separate entity” dwells within the human body and escapes to live elsewhere when the body dies. The first use of the word soul in the Bible is in Genesis 2:7. In this text we are told that God created man from the dust of the ground, breathed into his nostrils the “breath of life,” and man “became a living soul.”

A “living soul” is simply a living being, or a living creature, which, as this text reveals, results from the union of the breath of life with the organism, or body. The body is not the soul. The breath of life is not the soul. It is when, through divine favor and power, the breath gives life to the body that the combination of the two result in a “living soul.”

Solomon said that man and beast have all one breath, and he was right. Concerning humans and lower animals destroyed in the Flood we read, “All flesh died that moved upon the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth

upon the earth, and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land, died”—Gen. 7:21,22

Because the brute creation lives by means of the same “breath of life” which enables man to live, all animals are also “living souls,” and this is clearly established in the Word of God. This important truth is concealed from the casual reader of the Bible through the inconsistency of translation. For example, Genesis 1:24 reads, “God said, Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind, cattle, and creeping thing, and beast of the earth after his kind: and it was so.”

In this text the expression “living creature” is a translation of precisely the same Hebrew words as those which are translated “living soul” in Genesis 2:7, where the reference is to Adam—the words “creature” and “soul” both being translations of the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Only because the translators endeavored to establish a difference between man and beast, which the Scriptures do not warrant, did they use the word “creature” when the reference was to the lower animals, and “soul” when the text referred to man. No wonder Solomon wrote, “As the one dieth, so dieth the other.”

When Adam died, his body returned to the dust—“Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.” (Gen. 3:19) The God-given right to live, implemented by the breath which God breathed into his nostrils, reverted to God. The thought is clearly stated by Solomon, who, in

describing what happens when a man dies, wrote, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."—Eccles. 12:7

The simple truth set forth in this text is confused in the minds of many by a misunderstanding of the word "spirit." It translates a Hebrew word which simply means "breath," or, as in this instance, the invisible power of life. In his sermon on Mars' hill, Paul said that in God, "we live, and move, and have our being."—Acts 17:28

This text does not even remotely suggest that when a man dies there is a conscious entity which escapes from his body and is taken up to God in heaven. The word "return" used in the text precludes the possibility of such an interpretation. The body returns to the dust because it came from the dust. If the "spirit" was a separate entity which returned to God, it would mean that the conscious entity previously dwelt with God and was permitted to come to earth temporarily to inhabit a human body. How unreasonable such a conclusion would be!

How consistent, though, is Solomon's definition of death with the facts set forth in the Bible concerning the human living soul, or being. When the body and the breath return to their original sources, man is left as though he had never existed. The living soul, or being, no longer exists. It has died, and death is the penalty for sin. Ezekiel 18:4 declares, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die."

DEATH CHANGED TO “SLEEP”

Because God has promised to restore dead humans to life, the Bible refers to those who have died as being “asleep.” This important truth of the Bible is highlighted by Jesus in his reference to the death of Lazarus, the brother of Martha and Mary. He said to his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth.” The disciples thought Jesus referred to natural sleep, so he said to them plainly, “Lazarus is dead.”—John 11:11-14

Thus Jesus set forth one of the basic teachings of the Word of God. Lazarus was dead, yet he was also “asleep.” When God said to Adam that disobedience would result in death—“Thou shalt surely die”—he referred to extinction of life. This extinction of life would have been permanent but for the fact that God still loved his human creatures and provided redemption for them through the gift of his beloved Son to be the Redeemer and Savior from death.—John 3:16; I Tim. 2:3-6

Jesus gave his “flesh,” his humanity, for the life of the world. (John 6:51) Thus provision was made for setting aside the sentence of death that was entered against Adam and his race. And, although all have continued to die, because of the redemption provided through Christ Jesus, there is to be an awakening of the dead. Because the dead are to be awakened, the Bible uses the term “sleep” to describe their temporary absence of life.

Those who are asleep are unconscious, and so are those who are dead. They see nothing,

hear nothing, know nothing. The Bible says, "The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not any thing." (Eccles. 9:5) Those who are asleep can be awakened; so those who are "asleep" in death can, and will, be awakened. As Jesus said of Lazarus, "I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." (John 11:11) So all who are "asleep" in death are, by divine power, to be awakened in the morning of earth's new day. That is why we read, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning."—Ps. 30:5

MARTHA COMFORTED

Jesus and the little family at Bethany—Martha, Mary, and Lazarus—were special friends. When Lazarus became ill, Jesus and his disciples were in Galilee, which was some distance from Bethany. The sisters sent word to Jesus concerning Lazarus' illness, but he did not go to them immediately. He waited for two days, and then announced that Lazarus had died, and was "sleeping," and that he was going to "awake him out of sleep."

Martha went out to meet Jesus as he approached their home. Gently chiding him, she said, "Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." (John 11:21) Martha was heart-broken, and this was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to comfort her, which he did. But what reassuring words of comfort did the Master speak to Martha in this time of her great need? Did Jesus say to her, as has often been said

under similar circumstances, “Martha, your brother is not really dead, he has merely cast off his outside shell, his body”? Did Jesus say that the real Lazarus was more alive than ever? Did he say to Martha that it was quite likely the “soul” of Lazarus was hovering nearby? Did he say, “Martha, there is no death”?

No, Jesus said nothing of the kind. Jesus had previously said to his disciples, “Lazarus is dead,” and he would not now contradict this truth by saying to Martha that her brother was more alive than ever. What he did say to comfort Martha was in keeping with the testimony of the entire Word of God. Knowing that Lazarus was actually dead, he said to Martha, “Thy brother shall rise again.”—vs. 23

If Lazarus was ever to live again he would have to be restored to life, and Jesus assured his sister that this would be done: “Thy brother shall rise again.” Martha was not sure just what Jesus implied. She knew that Jesus had awakened others from the sleep of death, and she had said to Jesus, “Whatsoever thou wilt ask of God, God will give it thee,” but she was not certain that Jesus would at that time ask God to awaken her brother from the sleep of death. So she replied, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”—vss. 22-24

Martha knew that there was to be a general resurrection of all the dead, and that then Lazarus would be awakened from the sleep of death. She was acquainted with the promises recorded in the Old Testament, and she had

given reverent and believing attention to the teachings of Jesus, so she knew that there was a glorious hope of resurrection for all mankind.

Martha also understood that the general resurrection would take place in "the last day." The last day is not "doomsday," as many have supposed. The word "day" in this instance refers to an era, or age, the final age in the great plan of God for the redemption and salvation of the human race from sin and death.

There are various ages in the divine plan of salvation. Prior to the first advent of Jesus there was the Patriarchal Age, and also the Jewish Age. Beginning with the first advent of Christ, there has been the Gospel Age. These have been preparatory ages in which God has selected and prepared those who were to cooperate with Jesus in the final age of the divine plan, the last day, that period of time when God's plan would reach its consummation in the awakening of the dead and the restoration to perfection of life of all who then would believe and obey the laws of Christ's kingdom.

Martha knew about this final age, or last day, in the plan of God, and she knew that her brother, and all who had died, would then be awakened from the sleep of death. But Martha did not know whether or not this is what Jesus meant when he said, "Thy brother shall rise again." Nor did Jesus explain to her directly just what his immediate intentions were. Instead, he replied, "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.” (vss. 25,26) Martha had expressed faith in the general resurrection at the last day. Now Jesus explained that he was the “resurrection, and the life,” the one who would awaken the dead in the last day, and give everlasting life to all who then believed on him.

In this reply to Martha, Jesus mentions two classes of those who receive life through him. First there are those who now believe, and yet go into death. These, he assured Martha, would he awakened from death. And there are those who, being awakened in the resurrection, then believe on him. These, he said, would never die again. The *Rotherham* translation reads, “He that believeth on me, even though he die, shall live again! And no one who liveth again and believeth on me shall in anywise die.”—vss. 25,26

After thus assuring Martha of the awakening of both the believers and the unbelievers in the resurrection, Jesus asked her, “Believest thou this?” Martha replied, “Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God.” (vss. 26,27) Martha understood, and properly, that the Christ, or Messiah of promise, would be sent into the world to save mankind from death, and that this would be accomplished through an awakening of those who “sleep” in death. She believed that Jesus was the promised Messiah, the Christ who was to come, and that in him was the power of the resurrection.

LAZARUS AWAKENED

After Martha had thus confessed her faith in Jesus as the Messiah, and in his ability to restore the dead to life, she returned to her home and asked Mary to go with her to meet Jesus, which she did. Like Martha, Mary said to the Master, "If thou hadst been here, my brother had not died." (vs. 32) Jesus' heart was touched with this scene of sorrow and great loss, and, together with the others, he also wept. Then he asked to be shown to the tomb where Lazarus was buried.

Standing by the tomb, Jesus asked that the stone in front of the entrance be rolled away. Then Martha protested. She had previously confessed faith that Jesus could restore her brother to life, but now she wondered, and said to Jesus, "Lord, by this time he stinketh: for he hath been dead four days." (vs. 39) But to Jesus this did not matter. He was about to demonstrate what would ultimately be accomplished by divine power for all who have died, and where divine power operates it does not make any difference whether a person has been dead four days or for thousands of years; life can be restored. He who created life in the first place is abundantly able to restore life.

Standing before the opened tomb, after an appropriate prayer Jesus cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth." (vs. 43) It is interesting to note what the account does not say. It does not say concerning Lazarus that he who had gone to heaven returned. Lazarus had

not gone to heaven. It does not say that he who had gone to purgatory returned. It does not say that he who had gone to an abyss of eternal torture was released from the torment. There is no abyss of eternal torture.

The record states that when Jesus cried, "Lazarus, come forth . . . he that was dead came forth." Jesus had said that Lazarus was dead. Now the dead Lazarus had been awakened from the sleep of death. Released from his grave clothes, Lazarus mingled and fellowshiped with his family and friends as he had done before. Restored to life, he was neither a phantom nor a ghost. He was the same Lazarus as before. He was glad to be alive again, and his family was glad to have him restored to them.

"MARVEL NOT"

On a former occasion, when speaking of the resurrection of the dead, Jesus said, "Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come forth, those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of judgment." (John 5:28,29, *Revised Standard Version*) Here we are assured that just as Lazarus was called forth from the tomb, so all the dead will be called forth at the time of the general resurrection.

We note that Jesus here also speaks of two general classes in the resurrection—those who have done good, and those who have done ill, or

have failed to do good. Those who have done good are referred to in verse 24 as the believers of the present age. Of these it is said that they have everlasting life, and will not come into judgment. This means that upon the basis of faith, believers are no longer under condemnation to death, and are assured of everlasting life in the resurrection. These will not come into future judgment, for they pass their trial successfully in the present life.

These are the ones who, having done "good" by believing and following faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus, prove worthy of being called forth from death to a resurrection of "life." But those who have not thus proved worthy are awakened from death and come into judgment, for their awakening will take place during the world's thousand-year judgment day.—Acts 17:31; II Pet. 3:8; Rev. 20:6

The Greek word here translated "judgment" is *krisis*, and has the same meaning as our English word "crisis". All who do not now prove worthy of life will face a crisis when awakened from the sleep of death. They will, of course, then be fully enlightened as to the issues involved, and the opportunity will be given them, based upon full understanding, of accepting the provision of life made for them through Christ and obeying the laws of the kingdom of Christ which will then be in control of the affairs of all mankind. If they do accept and obey, they will be restored to perfection of human life and live forever. This will be their

full resurrection. If they do not accept and obey, they will be returned to death. Peter said concerning that time that those who do not obey “shall be destroyed from among the people.”—Acts 3:23

The believers of this age, who have proved worthy to live and reign with Christ, will come forth in the resurrection to “glory and honour and immortality.” (Rom. 2:7) Immortality is thus seen to be, not an inherent quality of man, but a glorious reward offered to those who are willing to suffer and to die with Jesus that they might live and reign with him. As joint-heirs with Jesus in his kingdom, these will also be co-judges with him during that future judgment day period.—I Cor. 6:2,3; Rev. 3:21; 5:10

Then the unbelieving world will be given an opportunity to believe, the dead being awakened from death that they might be given this opportunity. Those who do then believe will be restored to that perfection of human nature which was lost by Adam when he disobeyed God’s law and was sentenced to death, and they will live on the earth as humans forever.—Rev. 21:4

What a happy consummation of the divine plan this will be, for it means that the reign of sin and death which was brought about by the transgression of Adam in Eden is not to last forever and that all who have died during this long period of weeping are to be awakened and given an individual opportunity to obey the laws of God and to live forever.

The Scriptures state that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son that whosoever believeth in him might not perish but have everlasting life. (John 3:16) But in order to believe on him they must receive a clear knowledge concerning him, and this they will receive during the future judgment day when awakened from death. This is a glorious hope for mankind, and God's prophet David sets it forth symbolically and beautifully. We quote:

“Say among the heathen that the Lord reigneth: the world also shall be established that it shall not be moved: he shall judge the people righteously. Let the heavens rejoice, and let the earth be glad; let the sea roar, and the fulness thereof. Let the field be joyful, and all that is therein: then shall all the trees of the wood rejoice Before the Lord: . . . for he cometh to judge the earth: he shall judge the world with righteousness, and the people with his truth.”—Ps. 96:10-13

Indeed, there is life after death, because by divine power the dead will be restored to life. This is the great hope that is held out to us in the Word of God. It is the hope of the resurrection of the dead.