

Where are the Dead?

John 11:25-26 “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?’”

Though you “may die,” you “shall never die.” That’s confusing! Thousands of believers have died - over the last two thousand years. We die physically - but do we really “die”? What is death? Is there more than one type - of death? What happens when we die?

Many, of course, have taught that human beings only seem to die. The physical body dies, but the spirit lives on in Heaven with Christ - or - in Hell with Satan. Is this what the Bible teaches? Each student must search the Scriptures, and consider all of the evidence. Where does the weight of the evidence fall?

I personally, do NOT believe that this is a “salvation issue” - that is - one which would cause a loss of salvation for failure to believe a specific doctrine. I do believe that the understanding one holds concerning man’s state in death does strongly affect his or her personal relationship with Christ. I will explain.

JESUS CALLED DEATH A SLEEP

John 11:11-13 “Lazarus is sleeping”

Matthew 9:18, 24 “. . . the girl is not dead, but sleeping.”

NOTE: Jesus did not consider physical death to be “death” at all - but simply a sleep. The “second death” - from which there is no resurrection - that is death.

We will consider the “second death” in the chapter, “Final Judgment - Lake of Fire.”

OTHERS - REFERRED TO DEATH AS SLEEP

LUKE

Acts 7:60 Stephen “fell asleep.”

Acts 13:36 David “fell asleep.”

PAUL

1 Thessalonians 4:14-15 “those who are asleep”

1 Corinthians 15:6,18 “some have fallen asleep”

1 Corinthians 11:30 “many are weak and sick among you, and many sleep”

DAVID – DANIEL – JOB - JEREMIAH

Psalm 13:3 “lest I sleep the sleep of death”

Daniel 12:2 “them that sleep in the dust”

Job 3:13 “then I should have slept”

Job 14:12 “nor be raised out of their sleep”

Jeremiah 51:39 “and sleep a perpetual sleep”

Many seem to find comfort in the thought that a loved one is in heaven, assuming of course, that if they are in heaven, they are happy. But if you were to die and then consciously leave your loved ones, to live without them - would you be happy? And if somehow you were aware of their suffering in this world, suffering you could do nothing to relieve - would you be happy? Such a circumstance, to me seems difficult at best. Thank God it is not so. The LORD has chosen the most simple, kind way for us to pass the time from death to the resurrection -- asleep.

Have you ever had an anesthetic for an operation? You didn't dream. You didn't feel anything. Remember how it seemed like only a moment before you were waking up in the recovery room? You were not conscious of the passage of any time. What if death could be like that? You fall asleep one moment, and the next moment you hear His voice. It's over!! It is the resurrection, the return of Christ in glory, the end of this age.

And if a loved one has not accepted salvation, you know that person is asleep, not in a place of torment. If I could choose, I would want death to be an unconscious sleep. In fact, I believe this is what the Bible teaches.

NO SUCH PHRASE

In the Bible, the two words - immortal and soul - are NOT used together! There is no such expression, or an entity called the “immortal soul.”

1 John 5:11-12 “God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

Acts 17:28 “In Him we live, and move, and have our being.”

***** Without Him we have no existence. *****

SEEK FOR IMMORTALITY

1 Timothy 6:13-16 God “alone has immortality.” *Angels it seems - can die.*

Romans 2:7 “. . . seek for immortality.”

Why would we be told to seek for something which we all naturally possess?

HOW THEN AND WHEN
DO THE SAVED RECEIVE ETERNAL LIFE?

John 6:40 “For this is the will of My Father, that everyone who beholds the Son and believes in Him, may have eternal life; and I myself will raise him up at the last day.”

John 14:3 “I will come again and receive you unto myself.”

NOTE: Christ will not receive us to Himself, UNTIL He comes again.

2 Thessalonians 2:1 We are “gathered together to Him” at “the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

John 6:39 “at the last day”

John 6:44 “I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 6:54 “I will raise him up at the last day.”

John 11:24 Martha said to Christ concerning her brother Lazarus:

“I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.”

1 Corinthians 15:51-52 “For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” - “at the last trumpet.”

The dead will be raised, and the living will be changed at the same event - at the Second Coming - the last day of this age.

1 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 air and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”

Job 14:12 “So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep.”

NOTE: The heavens pass away at the second coming of Christ (2 Peter 3:10).

WHERE ARE THE DEAD WHEN THEY HEAR THE LORD'S VOICE?

John 5:28-29 “The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice, and shall come forth.”

Daniel 12:2 “Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake.” NIV

WHAT IS OUR BODY LIKE IN THE RESURRECTION?

Luke 24:36-39 Jesus' body was made up of "flesh and bones" [*but not blood*] after His resurrection.

Philippians 3:21 "Who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body . . ."

Our body will be like His resurrected body! After the resurrection, Christ appeared in the upper room - without entering through the door. He appeared physical - as "flesh" - when in the physical dimension. It seems the spiritual body can pass back and forth between the physical dimension and the spiritual/heavenly dimension. We are promised that when we are "changed," we will be like Him. We will have bodies --just bodies that are different than those we have in this life. They will be "spiritual" bodies.

I Corinthians 15:44 "It is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body."

Psalms 17:15 David said, "I shall be satisfied when I awake in Your likeness."

Job 19:26 "Though after my skin, worms destroy this body yet in my flesh shall I see God." KJV

I Corinthians 15:49 "And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man."

BODY AND SPIRIT

James 2:26 "The body without the spirit is dead."

At the death of the body, does some essential part of us leave the body, to continue a conscious existence - either in "heaven" or in a place of torment?

Each living person has two parts - a physical body & the spirit. At death each part is returned to its source. The physical body returns to the dust, and the spirit returns to God, who gave it. The spirit of God quickens, or makes alive the body.

THE BODY

Genesis 2:7 "God formed man of the dust of the ground . . ."

Genesis 3:19 "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

YOU came from dust. YOU are dust. YOU will return to dust.

NOT - Part of you will return to dust, while the other part lives on in heaven or in hell.

Whether it becomes fish food, is burned in fire, or is wrapped in satin and encased in marble - it really does NOT MATTER what happens to the body after death. It will return to the elements. Jesus will give us a new "spiritual body" when He returns.

BUT DOESN'T THE SPIRIT RETURN TO GOD?

Ecclesiastes 12:7 “Then the dust [body] will return to the earth as it was,
and the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

God “gave it.” God gave the spirit.

God made the body, and then He “gave” life to that body – by the inflow of His spirit.

Without that spirit - life (and consciousness) ceases.

*According to this verse, “the spirit” returns to God regardless of the character of the person to whom it was given!
Upright or evil - the spirit returns to God.*

Question: If the “spirit” is not the person,
then what is the spirit that will return to God?

THE SPIRIT

Job 33:4 “The spirit of God hath made me,
and the breath of the Almighty gives me life.”

Genesis 2:7 “He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,
and man became a living soul.”

Job 27:3 “As long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils.”

We today monitor the electrical activity in the brain, to determine if a human being is “living.” A doctor can stop the breathing, and even stop the heart for awhile, without killing the patient. The ancients watched the breathing. They equated the breath with life - something shared with God, who breathed that life into Adam.

Isaiah 42:5 “God . . . who gives breath [*neshamah*] to the people on it,
And spirit [*ruwach*] to those who walk on it:”

Two Hebrew words are translated “spirit” in the Old Testament: 1. “neshamah” (breath or wind #05397) and 2. “ruwach” (of God, breath, wind, temper, mind, heart #07307). The wind or breath represented the unseen power or life force - the spirit of God - the “breath of the Almighty.”

*In the New Testament the word translated “spirit” is the Greek (*pneuma*) also meaning breath or wind. This same “spirit” was given to the disciples on the Day of Pentecost, and it was described as a “rushing mighty wind” (Acts 2:2). In another scene, Jesus “breathed on them and said to them, ‘Receive the Holy Spirit’”(John 20:22). The same spirit which was breathed into Adam, giving him life, was breathed upon the disciples, giving them power.*

It is God’s own spirit, HIS breath - which returns to HIM.

WHAT THEN IS "A LIVING SOUL?"

Body + Breath = a living Person.

Body + Spirit from God = a living Being.

Body + Spirit = a living soul.

Genesis 2:7 "He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living soul." *He became a "nephesh" - a breather - that which breathes - a living soul.*

The Hebrew word "nephesh" ("psuche" in the Greek) has been translated variously as "person," "living being," "one who breathes," "breather" or "soul" (Strong's #05315). God breathed "spirit" ("neshamah") into the nostrils of Adam, and he became a living "nephesh."

The problem arises because "nephesh" has also been translated as "life," "heart," or "mind." In Genesis 35:18 for example, the "soul" of Rachel "was departing." Your understanding of this text will depend upon your doctrinal bias.

If a text can be understood in more than one way, depending upon the doctrinal leanings of the reader - if word usage or context is ambiguous, then the text should not be used to teach doctrine. It is not what we would call a "proof text."

NO BODY - NO LIFE

Accounts from the Bible of persons resurrected or translated help to clarify this concept.

Genesis 5:24 Enoch's body was never found after he was translated to heaven without seeing death (*Heb. 11:5*).

2 Kings 2:11,16-17 Elijah went up in a fiery chariot to heaven.

The empty shell of his body didn't fall back to earth. Elijah was a type of those who will be living to see Christ come - who will be translated without seeing death. (Their bodies will be changed, not shed.) Moses was a type of those who will be resurrected when Christ returns. (They will receive new bodies.) On the Mount of Transfiguration Christ stood with Moses and Elijah (Mark 9:2-4). This was a miniature representation of His coming kingdom - all who would be saved by His coming sacrificial death.

Jude 9 Michael contended with Satan for the body of Moses.
Why would Satan want the body?

If Moses (as a spirit) had already gone to Heaven, why this conflict over possession of the His corpse? Why? Because Jesus wanted to resurrect that body, and restore life to it.

At this point in time, no person had ever been resurrected from the dead. I believe that God wanted to resurrect Moses and take him to Heaven. Satan wanted Moses to stay dead. No doubt he pointed to Moses' sin as the reason why he should not be resurrected. Jesus had not yet died on the cross. The penalty for sin had not yet been paid. But God's word is sure. He would raise Moses from the dead, setting aside his sin, because He had promised to give His Son as the ultimate sacrifice and payment for sins. To God, who sees the future, it was as if the payment had already been made.

Romans 5:14 “. . . death reigned from Adam to Moses.”

NOTE: Jesus was raised from the dead by His Father (Rom. 6:4, Gal. 1:1, Eph. 1:17-20, Act. 3:15). Like Moses, He was raised before “corruption” could destroy His body. Life was restored to His body, and a corpse was never found. The Tomb was empty.

Matthew 27:52-53 When Jesus rose from the dead, a special group of saints was resurrected also. Jesus presented them in heaven as the “first fruits” of the great harvest that would follow at His second coming. These saints are mentioned in Revelation 4:4 and 5:8-10, as the 24 Elders “redeemed from among men.” These saints were resurrected with bodies that could be seen because they witnessed in Jerusalem. Christ, speaking through the Old Testament prophet Isaiah says of this resurrection, “together with my dead body shall they arise” (Isa. 26:19).

WHAT IS LEFT - SO THAT A PERSON CAN BE RESURRECTED?

A friend shared this concept with me, and she could not remember where she heard it, so please forgive me if I'm quoting without giving credit. Here goes. As the spirit of God flows through each human being during his lifetime, it is changed by that interaction. When the spirit returns to God at the death of the body, the LORD retains a “memory” from that person's mind - every experience and thought. At the resurrection, He forms a new body for that individual, and as His spirit flows through that new body He will fill the new “brain” with the memory He has retained (saved).

I will use a familiar object - a computer - to illustrate. Imagine a heavenly version of a memory stick. At the moment of death the LORD makes a copy of all the stored memory from the mind. At the resurrection, He simply uploads the memory into the new body, and the person is restored.

Our brains are wonderfully created bio-computers. When the LORD wanted to disrupt the building and divide the human race, He simply “uploaded a language program,” and instantly the builders of the Tower of Babel were speaking several different languages. On the Day of Pentecost, when the disciples began to preach in Aramaic with a Galilean dialect, Jews from widely different regions “heard” them speak - each in the language of his own residence location (Acts 2:6,8,11). We today, are familiar with electronic language translators. The LORD just used a more sophisticated version.

IS MAN CONSCIOUS AFTER DEATH?

Psalm 146:4 “His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.”

Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10 “For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know nothing. Their love, their hate, their envy, is perished.”

Job 3:11,13,17,18,19 “Why did I not die at birth?”

“ . . . For now I would have lain still and been quiet, I would have been asleep; Then I would have been at rest . . . There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest. There the prisoners rest together, they do not hear the voice of the oppressor . . .”

CAN THE DEAD COMMUNICATE WITH THE LIVING?

Ecclesiastes 9:6 “Neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.”

NOTE: Stories of angry ghosts are abundant, but the Bible does not support the idea that these spirits are the departed dead. They are Satan and his angels, who seek to deceive men.

Leviticus 20:27 In Moses’ time a man or woman who claimed to communicate with the dead was to be stoned to death.

DIDN’T SAUL SPEAK WITH THE SPIRIT OF SAMUEL?

The Story is found in 1 Samuel Chapter 28.

First: God had commanded, “Give no regard to mediums and familiar spirits; do not seek after them to be defiled by them” (*Lev. 19:31*). “A man or a woman who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death” (*Deut. 18:9-12*). “There shall not be found among you one who conjures up spells or a medium, or a spiritist or one who calls up the dead” (*1 Sam. 28:7*).

NOTE: The above verses tell us how very serious a thing it is - to “contact” the dead. God absolutely forbade this practice. Why? Because the one who thinks that he has made contact with the dead, is actually communicating with Satan or with one of his evil angels. The Harry Potter series is very popular right now, but godly parents must understand that these stories of spells and wizards are preparing a generation for deception.

Second: God had departed from Saul and would not communicate with him through any living prophet. Why would He then allow a “visitation” with Samuel?
(*1 Sam. 28:6,15*).

Third: Samuel was supposedly “brought up”- “out of the earth” during the seance, and was described by the witch as an “old man.”

*Can any witch cause a saint of God to appear at her bidding?
And is this how the saints look - old?*

Fourth: God punished Saul with death, for his action in “asking counsel of one that had a familiar spirit, to inquire of it” (1 Chr. 10:13,14).

The “familiar spirit” and apparition, was most likely Satan - who will certainly use deceptions of this sort in the last days!

AREN'T THERE HUMAN BEINGS ALIVE IN HEAVEN NOW?

ANSWER: YES!

Genesis 5:24 Enoch was translated “without seeing death” (Heb. 11:5, Rom. 5 14).

Jude 9 Moses was resurrected by Christ just after he died, and taken to heaven.

2 Kings 2:11 Elijah was “translated without seeing death.”

Matthew 27:51-52 Many Saints - were raised by Christ, immediately after He was raised by the Spirit of His Father. These people - from “all nations, kindreds, tongues and peoples” ascended with Christ to the throne room of Heaven, where He presented them before His Father’s throne as the “Spring Harvest.” (Rev. 5:8-9).

NOTE: All of these people were either raised from the dead, or translated without seeing death. They were alive - with bodies - when taken to Heaven. Matthew 27:51 says “many bodies” were raised. Why would God raise the bodies of these saints, if they had already gone to heaven as spirits?

NOTE: These saints were the exception. They were granted resurrection or translation ahead of the time. We do not know exactly why. I personally think it may have something to do with having human witnesses to all the events of this great war.

**DIDN'T JESUS SAY THAT
ABRAHAM, ISAAC AND JACOB WERE LIVING
AT THE TIME OF MOSES?**

Matthew 22:31-32 “But concerning the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God, saying, ‘I am the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob?’ God is not the God of the dead, but of the living.”

Compare the following verses:

Romans 4:17 “God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did;”

The dead do not have life. They are not alive - just living somewhere else. That is why God must give “life to the dead.” It’s called resurrection!

Luke 20:37-38 “But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord ‘the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.’ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him.”

NOTE: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob died many years before God spoke to Moses at the burning bush. But to God they were alive. How? Because He retained their memory. He could resurrect them at any time. They had only died physically, so to Him they were not dead -just sleeping.

DOESN'T THE BIBLE SAY THAT WHEN A MAN DIES HE IS “GATHERED TO HIS FATHERS?”

Genesis 49:29 “I am to be gathered to my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave . . .”

2 Kings 22:20 “. . . I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace;”

NOTE: The expression “gathered to your fathers” made reference to ancient burial practice in Mesopotamia. The body was laid in a family burial cave. After the flesh was consumed, the bones were “gathered” and placed together with the bones of “the fathers.” The bones were “gathered,” sometimes in a small area of the cave, later in bone boxes called “ossuaries” carved from sandstone. This was still the practice at the time of Jesus’ death.

THE THIEF ON THE CROSS

Didn't Jesus tell that man
that he would be with Him - in Paradise - that day?

Luke 23:43 “And Jesus said to him, “Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.”

First: In the original text there were no punctuation marks. The comma was supplied by the translators. Therefore the text could just as easily read; “Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with me in Paradise.”

I'm telling you today (present tense), you will be (future tense) with me in paradise.

Second: Christ himself had not yet gone to Paradise on the third day - on Sunday morning. He said to Mary, “I have not yet ascended to my Father” (*John 20:17*).

Jesus was asleep in death. He rested during the hours of the Sabbath.

DOESN'T PAUL DESCRIBE A STATE OF BEING
 "ABSENT FROM THE BODY" AND "PRESENT WITH THE LORD" ?

2 Corinthians 12:2,3 Paul here was speaking of his own condition while in vision.

2 Corinthians 5:1-8 This verse is more clearly understood if it is diagrammed:

MORTAL BODY	NEW SPIRITUAL BODY	NO "BODY"
"earthy house" "this tent"	"a building from God" "a house eternal in the heavens"	
"in this we groan"	"further clothed" "clothed with our habitation from heaven" "mortality swallowed up of life."	"being clothed we shall not be found <u>naked</u> "
"at home in the body" "absent from the Lord"	"absent from the [<i>physical</i>] body" "present with the Lord"	" <u>unclothed</u> "

To be "naked" (without a "house") is to be dead.

We receive our new "spiritual" body at the resurrection. Until then - we sleep.

OUR NEW HOUSE

Romans 8:22,23 We wait for "the adoption, the redemption of our body."

NOTE: If we are waiting to be adopted until our bodies are redeemed, then we are not adopted into the heavenly family as disembodied spirits immediately after death. We will be received and adopted as whole persons with transformed, immortal bodies, when Jesus returns.

Philippians 3:20-21 "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body . . ."

Romans 8:11 "He who raised Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies."

Why would we want to live in a body again, if we had been doing just fine without one? The answer of course is that without a body, we are not living persons. We do not exist as disembodied spirits.

Philippians 1:21-24 Paul said that he desired most of all "to be with Christ." "To die is gain" he wrote. He was not afraid to die [to "*depart*" this life], because he knew that it will seem to him only a moment of sleep, and he will wake again at the resurrection. But he said, "To remain in the flesh is more needful for you." He would labor on in his tired mortal flesh as long as God willed.

2 Timothy 4:8 [Paul writing] “Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that day, and not to me only, but also to all who have loved His appearing.”

THE RICH MAN AND LAZARUS?

Didn't Jesus say that Hell is going on now? (*Luke 16:19-31*)

Matthew 13:34 “Jesus spoke all these things to the crowd in parables; he did not say anything to them without using a parable.” (NIV)

We must remember that this story was a parable! The Jewish people had a long tradition of stories called “Midrash.” These stories were handed down through generations. They illustrated or clarified the lessons of Scripture. Everyone understood that these stories were not always to be taken literally. Heaven and Hell are not within shouting distance. People in Heaven cannot see people in Hell suffering.

First: Christ wanted to teach the uselessness of riches to the dead.

Second: Christ was predicting the hardness of the Jewish leaders (represented by the rich man and his brothers) who would not be convinced even if “one rose from the dead.” True to the parable, the leaders were not convinced after Lazarus and then Christ Himself “rose from the dead.”

“Father Abraham, please send someone to warn my five brothers,” the rich Jew pleaded. Judah (father of the Jews) did indeed have five full-blood brothers. They were all sons of Leah. Their names were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Issachar and Zebulun (Genesis 29-30).

Third: This parable was a warning to the Jews, concerning their true destiny, should they remain unrepentant. The “rich man” represented the Jewish leaders who thought themselves “rich” in the things of God. They believed that they would go to the “bosom of Abraham” at death, just because they were Jews - and “righteous” Jews at that (so they thought).

The poor beggar Lazarus, sitting outside the gate, represented the Gentiles, who were “outside” of the kingdom, in the eyes of first century Jews. They were ceremonially “unclean,” and the beggar in the story was covered with sores - making him literally unclean.

FINALLY: Yeshua put a different “twist” to a common parable, and His teaching was in direct opposition to commonly held beliefs of His day. This parable IS ABOUT consequences. It is not a detailed description of the afterlife. **We cannot build a whole doctrine on a single use of a word translated as “hell” - especially one located in a parable on an entirely different subject.** Hell is NOT an unending place of horrors situated within shouting distance, from a heaven of joy and delights. We will go into detail about the concept of “Hell,” and how that word got into the Apostolic Writings, in our next chapter.

DIDN'T CHRIST PREACH TO SOULS IN HELL?

1 Peter 3:18-20 “For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the unjust, that He might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in prison, who formerly were disobedient, when once the Divine longsuffering waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight souls, were saved through water.”

First: The word “Hell” is NOT in this passage.

Second: The preaching was done back “in the days of Noah.”

Third: “The Spirit of Christ” testified through Old Testament prophets (*1 Pet. 1:11*). Jesus preached through Noah - to the wicked people of Noah’s time.

Compare 1 Peter 4:6: “The gospel was preached (past tense) to those who are dead” (present tense). It was preached to them in the past, while they were still alive.

Fourth: The people of Noah’s day were in bondage to Satan and sin. This is why they are referred to as “spirits in prison.” There are other passages where these words are used in this descriptive way (*Psalm 142:7; Isa. 42:6,7; Isa. 61:1; Luke 4:18*).

WHAT IS THE BAPTISM FOR THE DEAD?

1 Corinthians 15:29 “Otherwise, what will they do who are baptized for the dead, if the dead do not rise at all? Why then are they baptized for the dead?”

Paul begins in verse 20, saying “Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep . . .” He is making a point about the resurrection. Why be baptized on behalf of (or in the name of) a dead man? It is useless-if He is still dead. “If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty” (1 Cor. 15:14).

Isaiah 38:18 “For the dead cannot praise Thee, death cannot celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit [a symbol of death] cannot hope for [to hear] thy truth.”

NOTE: Baptism or prayers for human beings who have died are useless.

DOESN'T PAUL SAY THAT GOD WILL "BRING WITH HIM"
- ALL THOSE WHO HAVE DIED?

1 Thessalonians 4:14 "If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him all who sleep in Jesus."

We cannot use this verse to either support or reject any doctrine, because it can be understood in more than one way. The Greek word translated here as "bring" (Strong's #71) has also been translated as "take." This verse may be saying that God will take to heaven with Him, all those who now sleep in Jesus. Another possible meaning of this verse is that God will "bring" from the dead all those who sleep in Jesus - just as He "brought" Jesus "from the dead." This is the meaning of "brought again from the dead" in Hebrews 13:20.

A casual reading of 1 Thessalonians 4:14, would seem to teach that the righteous dead - "which sleep in Jesus" - will come with Jesus from Heaven when He returns. But the next three verses make it clear that this could not possibly be the case. The "dead in Christ" are raised from their graves when "the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout" (v.16).

1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16 "For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first. Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air." And thus we shall always be with the Lord."

(We are not "with the Lord" while we are dead.)

John 14:1-3 "I will come again, and receive you unto myself;"

We are not received as disembodied spirits, prior to His coming.

1 Corinthians 15:23 "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept . . . But every man in his own order: Christ the first fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming."

DIDN'T JESUS SAY THAT WE WILL NEVER DIE?

We have come back to where we began this study.

John 11:26 "And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die."

NOTE: Jesus thought of the first death as merely a moment of sleep (Matt. 9:24). The death He refers to in our text, is the "second death" in the lake of fire, which is permanent (Rev. 21:8).

John 11:25 Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live."

The one who believes will live again - "at the last day."

Luke 20:35-36 “Those who are counted worthy to obtain that age, and the resurrection from the dead . . . nor can they die anymore.”

*Those raised to eternal life at the Second Coming - cannot die again.
But those who come up in the last great resurrection CAN die again.*

The last great resurrection takes place 1000 years after the first resurrection (Rev. 20:5). Raised with mortal bodies, they can die physically (the first type of death) and they can die the “second death” in the “lake of fire” (Rev. 21:8). We will take a close look at the last great resurrection, and a close look at the “second death” in a later chapter.

WHERE DID THE IDEA COME FROM?

HOW DID WE GET THE IDEA THAT MAN DOES NOT REALLY DIE?

Genesis 3:4 “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.’”

Satan implied, “God has lied to you. ‘You will be as gods.’ Actually you will go on to a higher sphere of existence.” This idea - that an essential mind or essence of man will go on to another existence - has been taught by mystic religions from the beginning of recorded history.

Plato taught the Greeks that there is an immortal man which continues to exist after the death of the body. As the Jews became Hellenized - this teaching influenced Jewish thought, and then passed into Christian teaching. The Septuagint translators (300BC) used the Greek word “hades” to translate the Hebrew “sheol.” But the Greek “hades” had a vastly different meaning within Greek culture, than the Hebrew “sheol” - which simply meant “death,” or “where the dead wait” or “the abode of the dead.” All of the dead - the righteous and the wicked - went to “sheol.”

CONCLUSION

It is especially important to understand the state of man in death, because Satan would use any misunderstanding to his advantage, to come between us and our Father in Heaven. Satan seeks to portray the Father as a cruel tyrant who would allow His own children, wayward as they have been, to be tortured for centuries without end. God is made to seem worse than King Nebuchadnezzar, who threw Daniel’s three friends into the fire because they refused to worship his likeness.

The concept of “unending conscious torment in fire” has driven many to reject any belief in God. Others have been driven mad with fear. Most are simply confused. How can we believe that “God is love” - and “His mercy endures forever” (*Psalm 106:1, 1John 4:8*) while at the same time believing that God will allow his own children to be tortured without end?

During the inquisition, the doctrine of “unending conscious torment” was used to justify torture in order to “save” the soul of the poor victim from “eternal Hell.” This doctrine has resulted in no good whatsoever to the Kingdom of God. Our Father in Heaven does not want obedience motivated by fear.

CHAPTER SUMMARY

In Scripture:

1. God alone possesses immortality.
2. Immortality is always presented as God's gift to the redeemed.
3. The immortal are always portrayed as whole embodied persons
- never as disembodied spirits.
4. Death is presented as sleep.
5. The dead will sleep until the return of Christ in glory.
6. At the Second Coming the righteous will be resurrected to eternal life.
7. The righteous (thru Christ) will be given immortal spiritual bodies.

May we be drawn closer to HIM, as we understand more clearly - His plan.

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