

Spring 2022 Newsletter
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IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH? Part 1

For God had such love for the world that he gave his only Son, so that whoever has faith in him may not come to destruction but have eternal life. – John 3:16, (Bible in Basic English)

With war raging in Ukraine, and the fear that it could escalate into a possible Third World War, plus by the continuing specter of COVID-19, death is more than usually presented to people's minds. Military cemeteries, like the one pictured, stand as mute testimony to the terrible carnage of war. In fact, every cemetery stands witness that death is the common inescapable enemy of all mankind. No one has been able to avoid it, so people of every society have tried to find ways to get around accepting the finality of the sentence, "thou shalt surely die." (Gen.2:17)

The elaborate tombs and mummification practices of the ancient Egyptians were done in the belief that the deceased would pass on to an earth-like realm called Duat. The ancient Greeks believed souls lived on and entered a netherworld which was ruled by the god Hades and his wife Persephone. The ancient Greek writer Plato argued at length for the immortality of the soul in his dialogue, *Phaedo*.

Although death is universal, contemporary life-after-death beliefs differ widely, but all are contingent on the existence of an immortal [death-proof] soul that survives after the body dies. Several eastern religions teach that souls live on by means of reincarnation, passing into other persons or into

animals to live again in that new form. Regardless of the specific expectation, religions the world over comfort their adherents with the hope that in some way they will escape death. Christianity, like all the rest, has not been immune to Satan's lie, "You shall not surely die." (Gen. 3:4; John 8:44)

All religions have their own sacred books, so if Buddhists, Hindus, Moslems, and other non-Christian religions nurture beliefs like transmigration of souls they reflect the theology of their unique scriptures. However, the holy book of Christianity is the Bible so Christians should take their instruction from what their Scriptures say regarding life, death, and the hereafter.

Jesus taught his disciples from the Law, the Psalms, Isaiah (Mark 4:12; Isa. 6:9,10), and all the prophets, showing how the Old Testament (Matt. 12:40; John 3:13) pointed to him. When teaching the two disciples on the way to Emmaus, Jesus then explained everything written about himself in the Scriptures, "beginning with Moses and all the Prophets." (Luke 24:27)

For the early Christians during the Apostolic era, the only Bible available to the church was the Old Testament Hebrew scriptures. Therefore, it is a mistake to marginalize

the Old Testament Scriptures as some are inclined to do. The Lord and the Apostles proved their ministries by them, and the infant churches were established upon them. The compilation of the Gospels and letters of the Apostles into what we know as the New Testament was yet future.

The Apostle Paul stressed to his young disciple Timothy, "...The Holy Scriptures...are able to make you wise to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. **All Scripture is God-breathed**, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be perfected, thoroughly furnished to every good work." (2 Tim. 3:15-17 *Modern King James Version*) Therefore, if we claim to believe in God, we must be guided by his whole word. All of the **God-inspired** text deserves our attention. What do the Hebrew Scriptures say about the condition of death? Two descriptive words are used—**prison** and **sleep**.



Righteous Job, who had lost his children, all his wealth, and his physical health, and who cried for release from his suffering used both these terms saying: "Why did I not die at birth, come out from the womb and expire?... For then I would have lain down and been **quiet**; I would have **slept**; then I would have been **at rest**, ...There the wicked cease from troubling, and there **the weary are at rest**. There the **prisoners are at ease** ..." (Job 3:11-18)

The prophet Isaiah also used the prison metaphor for those sleeping in death. "I am the LORD; I have called you in righteousness...To open the blind eyes, to bring out the **prisoners from the prison**, and them that sit in darkness **out of the prison house**." (Isa. 42:6,7)

The description of "sleep" is used in thirty-six verses of the books of Kings and Chronicles concerning the deaths of the kings of Israel saying, "he **slept** with his fathers and ...reigned in his place." Daniel said that many "that **sleep** in the dust of the earth shall awake..." (Dan.12:2) The Psalmist David said, "Consider and answer me, O LORD my God; light up my eyes, lest I **sleep the sleep** of death" (Psa. 13:3)

Unconsciousness is also used to describe the condition of death. David wrote in Psalm 146:4, "When his breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day **his thoughts perish**." Nor did he expect that any praise was

possible from the dead. "What profit is there in my death, if I go down to the pit? Will the dust praise you? Will it tell of your faithfulness?" (Psa. 30:9)

"A living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but **the dead know not anything**, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished." ... "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is **no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom**, in the grave, whither thou goest." (Eccl.9:4-6,10) Is this true? Peter wrote, "For no prophecy ever came by the will of man: but men spake from God, being moved by the Holy Spirit." (2 Pet.1:21) These scriptures tell us that in death there is no sense of place or time, only dreamless sleep.

Is death different in the New Testament? In fact, it provides us with our most unimpeachable witness regarding the condition of death—Jesus himself.

In John 11, we have the account of the death of Lazarus. Jesus and his disciples had left Judea because the people had tried to stone him. After two days away Jesus surprised his disciples by telling them he was ready to return. They reminded him of his danger, but he said, "**Our friend Lazarus sleepeth** but I go, that I may **awake him out of sleep**." They thought he was talking about sleep after a fever has broken and protested that it would be better not to awaken him. Then



Jesus told them plainly, "**Lazarus is dead**." (John 11:1-15) Lazarus' sister Martha came to meet Jesus and he told her, "**Thy brother shall rise again**." She, affirming her faith in him, repeated what he must have taught her, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 11:23,24) But Jesus told her "**I am the resurrection**..." He knew what she did not, that he would restore Lazarus to life that very day. (See also, Mark 5:35-42 regarding the synagogue ruler's daughter).

Since the scriptures clearly describe death as sleep or unconsciousness, why do Christian ministers teach that souls leave the body to fly off into either bliss in heaven or into torment in a hell or purgatory. Is this concept of life, death, and the soul taught in the Bible?

In his creation of man as recorded in Genesis 2:7 (*King James Version*) it states, "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.” In funeral services, however, this text is often modified to say that God put an immortal soul into man when he was created, and pairing this with Ecclesiastes 12:7 which reads, “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the **spirit** shall return unto God who gave it,” the assertion is made that the soul goes to heaven.

Two problems arise in using these scriptures in this way. First, nothing in the Genesis text says that God gave man a soul. On the contrary, it says, “a living soul” is what the man **became**. Second, if at death God reclaims the souls of those that return to the dust of the earth, that means the souls of all go to God, everyone, good, bad, pagans, Jews, Christians, since all die and return to dust. This would hardly fit the idea of some souls going upward and others going down into hell.

In God’s pronouncement of the actual curse upon Adam. (Gen. 3:16-19) “In the sweat of thy face 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,” (v.19) there is no hint of anything not returning to dust.

Our Bibles are translations of Hebrew or Greek and translators are rarely able to translate word for word. They must read and then convert what they have read into the grammar of their own language according to their own understanding. Words are often given multiple meanings. Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible is a great help in sorting out such veiled words.

Newer translations of Genesis 2:7 use the term, “living being,” or “living creature” rather than “living soul.” The use of the word “soul” was a theological choice since by the time of the Reformation, the Platonic concept of the soul was already a firmly entrenched tradition.



In this verse, the words “breathed,” “breath” and “soul” come from verb and noun forms of one Hebrew word, *nephesh* [Strong’s #5315], which means literally “wind” or “breath” or, in the verb form, “to puff” or “inflate.” In

Genesis 1:20, 21, and 24, the words “creature” and “life” come from this same word, *nephesh*, and refer to various **animal** creations. Does this suggest that animals and man have souls, or **are** they souls?

Ecclesiastes 3:19 says, “...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.”

The Hebrew word in Ecclesiastes 12:7 for “spirit” and in 3:19 for “breath” is the word *ruach*, which, according to Brown-Driver-Briggs Bible Dictionary, means “wind, breath” and by extension “mind or spirit,” as in “animation, vigor, disposition, courage.” The Contemporary English Version of this text by-passes theological biases to render the passage literally, “So our bodies return to the earth, and the life-giving breath (*ruach*) returns to God.”

Additionally, it must be noted that there is no text of scripture anywhere in the Bible where the word “immortal” is coupled with the word “soul.” In fact, the words “immortal” or “immortality” don’t occur anywhere in the Old Testament, and in the New Testament, “immortality” is only used five (5) times and is held out as a prize for faithfulness to be striven for, never shown to be an inherent quality in man. (Rom. 2:7; 1 Cor. 15:53,54; 1Tim. 6:16; 2 Tim.1:10)

That souls do die the Scriptures emphatically state, “The soul (*nephesh*) that sinneth, it shall **die**.” (Ezek.18:4,20) God told Adam that disobedience would mean, “thou shalt surely die.” It was Satan who said, “Ye shall not surely die.” (Gen. 2:17; 3:4) Jesus said of Satan, “**He was a murderer from the beginning, and does not stand in the truth... for he is a liar and the father of lies.**” (John 8:44) Whose voice do you attend to?

If death is death, do all our hopes end with our final breath? The Bible holds out a sublime hope, but it is not the hope of life **in** death. Instead, the hope held forth in the Bible is the RESURRECTION **out of death**. [to be continued in Part 2]

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LIFE AFTER DEATH

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