

Job's Question Answered

“If a man die, shall he live again?” **No subject is of more universal interest than that contained in this compelling question asked by Job. Under normal circumstances, no one wants to die, yet all realize that as far as mankind's foresight is concerned, death awaits every member of the human race. Thus, the question in the hearts of all and upon the lips of many is whether or not there is life after death.**

—*Job 14:14*

People throughout the ages, in their sorrow over the death of their loved ones, and in the certainty of their own ultimate collapse before the great enemy, death, 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 adopted the belief that death is not what it seems to be; that it is a means by which humans enter into another and more sublime realm of life or, in some cases, to a condition of eternal torment.

Where are the dead? What actually happens when a person dies? Are the dead more alive than the living? Thousands of years ago the righteous man

Job asked the words quoted in our opening verse, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Here God's prophet spoke for billions 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, for he had just asked God to let him die. (vs. 13) 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 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

Job, however, had no intention of cursing God. He trusted God even though he did not understand why he was allowed to suffer so greatly. 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 go into death. So, he asked, in the words of our opening text, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Job inquired

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 such a manner that is in keeping with the truth of God's Word on the subject.

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

The Resurrection Hope

It is this hope of the resurrection that Job had, which 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) In this text, the perfect "man" Adam transgressed the divine law and brought upon himself and his progeny the penalty of death. The perfect

“man” 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

Why the Confusion?

The basis for much of the confusion on the subject of life after death 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?” Eve confirmed what God had said, including his statement that death would be the penalty for disobedience.—Gen. 3:1-3

Then Satan, replying to Eve, said, “Ye shall not surely die.” (vs. 4) This was a blatant 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 lie 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 Eve, "Ye shall not surely die"; you will only seem to die, and when you seem to die you will actually be more alive than ever.

Jesus said of Satan, "He is a liar, and the father of it." (John 8:44) In other words, Satan fathered the first lie, and it was the most devastating and far-reaching lie that has ever been told. This falsehood, stemming from the Garden of Eden, has corrupted the Truth on the subject of death in the minds of 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 and reverts back to the elements. Satan knew that there was no possible way he could deceive the people with respect to this. Therefore, he began to spread the notion that there is something within the human organism that 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 Greek and Roman philosophers. 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 most religionists, Christian and non-Christian alike.

The Bible indicates that this thought was prevalent among many even in the days of King Solomon, and we find him combating this error with the Truth. He wrote, "That which befallerh the sons of men befallerh beasts; even one thing befallerh 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 [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 knoweth [can prove otherwise]?" He evidently knew that the surrounding heathen nations 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. However, this, Solomon shows, is not true. He says, rather, that in death, man and animals are alike. Man's preeminence 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.

"Immortal Soul" not Scriptural

The expression, "immortal soul," does not appear anywhere in the Bible, nor do the Scriptures 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 verse we are told that God created man from “the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.”

Notice that the verse says that man “became” a living soul, not that he “has” a 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 power, the breath gives life to the body that the combination of the two results 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 animal creation lives by means of the same “breath of life” which enables man to live, animals are also “living souls.” 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 phrase “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*. Because the translators endeavored to establish a difference between man and animals, which the Scriptures do not warrant, they used 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 dies, so dies the other.”

The correct 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 the Hebrew word *ruach*, which simply means “breath,” or, as in this instance, the invisible power of life.

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 above 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 it 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, the

living soul, or being, no longer exists. It has died, and death is the penalty for sin. Ezekiel 18:4 declares in simple words, “The soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

Death Referred to as “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

Here 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—“Ye shall 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 mankind’s Redeemer and Savior from death.—John 3:16,17; I Tim. 2:3-6

Jesus gave his “flesh,” his humanity, as a “ransom [Greek: corresponding price] for all,” “for the life of the world.” (John 6:51) The disobedience of the perfect man Adam brought sin and death upon all of his descendants. God’s justice required “life for life”—the death of the perfect man Jesus—to offset the disobedience and death penalty placed upon Adam. The death of Jesus provided the “ransom,” or corresponding price, for Adam. Consequently,

it was Jesus that “by the grace of God should taste death for every man.” (Exod. 21:23; Rom. 5:12-19; Heb. 2:9) Thus provision was made for paying the penalty, the sentence of death, which was entered against Adam and his race. Although all have continued to die, because of the redemption provided through Christ Jesus, there is to be an awakening of the dead. Therefore, the Bible uses the term “sleep” to describe their intervening absence of life.

Those who are asleep are unconscious of the external world, 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) 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—Mary, Martha, and Lazarus—were special friends. When Lazarus became ill, Jesus and his disciples were 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. Jesus then announced that Lazarus had died and was sleeping, and that he was going to “awake him out of sleep.”—John 11:1-15

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 heartbroken, and this was an excellent opportunity for Jesus to comfort her, which he did. What reassuring words of comfort did the Master speak to Martha in her time of 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 he say that the real Lazarus was more alive than ever? Did Jesus say to Martha that quite likely the "soul" of Lazarus was hovering nearby? Did he say, "Martha, there is no death"?

Jesus said none of these things. He 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

Martha was not sure just what these words 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. She replied, "I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day."—vss. 22,24

Martha clearly 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 a period of time, a time in the great plan of God for the redemption and salvation of the human race from sin and death.

There are various periods of time, or ages, in God's plan of salvation, both prior and subsequent to the First Advent of Christ. These have been preparatory ages in which God has selected and prepared those who would cooperate with Jesus in the final period of the divine arrangement, the age of God's righteous kingdom, under the rulership of Christ. (Jer. 23:5; Matt. 6:10) It is then that God's plan will reach its consummation in the awakening of the dead and the restoration to perfection of life to all who then believe and obey the laws of Christ's kingdom.

Martha knew about this final age, or last day, in the plan of God, and that her brother, and all who had died, would then be awakened from the sleep of death. However, 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 whoever lives and believes in me shall never die." (John 11:25,26) By identifying himself as "the resurrection, and the

life," Jesus showed that he was the one who would awaken all the dead in the last day. Then, during the kingdom, he will give everlasting life to all who will become obedient to God's principles, and who will at that time have whole-heartedly believed on him.

After reassuring Martha of the awakening of mankind in the resurrection, Jesus asked her, "Believest thou this?" Martha replied, "Yea, Lord: I believe that thou art the Christ, the Son of God." (John 11:26,27) 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 all those who sleep in death. She believed that in Jesus was "the resurrection, and the life."

Lazarus Awakened

After Martha had 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. 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.—vss. 28-35

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) To Jesus this did not matter. He was about to demonstrate with Lazarus 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 as God's instrument created life in the first place is abundantly able to restore life.

Standing before the opened tomb, and 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 had gone to heaven and returned. Lazarus had not gone to heaven. It does not say that he had gone to an abyss of eternal torture and 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." Lazarus, "he that was dead," had been awakened from the sleep of death. Released from his grave clothes, Lazarus mingled and reunited 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 an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and come out, 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, *English Standard Version*) Here we are assured that just as Lazarus was called forth from the grave, 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 evil or have failed to do good. Those who have done good are referred to in verse 24 as the “believers” of the present age. These will not come into future judgment, for they pass their trial successfully in the present life. Having done “good” by believing and following faithfully in the footsteps of Jesus, they have been proven worthy of being called forth from death to a resurrection of “life.” 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 translated “judgment” in John 5:29 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. 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 his righteous kingdom, which will then be in control of the affairs of all mankind. If they 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. Of that time Peter

said those who do not obey “will be completely cut off” from among the people.—Acts 3:23, *New International Version*

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 die with Jesus that they might live with him. As joint-heirs with Jesus in his kingdom, these will also be co-judges with him during that judgment period.—I Cor. 6:2; Rev. 3:21; 5:10

What a happy consummation of God’s plan this will be! The reign of sin and death which was brought about by the transgression of Adam in Eden is not to last forever. 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 live forever upon the earth.

This is a glorious hope for mankind, and God’s prophet David sets it forth symbolically and beautifully. We quote: “Say among the nations, The LORD reigns. The world is firmly established, it cannot be moved; he will judge the peoples with equity. Let the heavens rejoice, let the earth be glad; let the sea resound, and all that is in it. Let the fields be jubilant, and everything in them; let all the trees of the forest sing for joy. ... He comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples in his faithfulness.” (Ps. 96:10-13, *NIV*) 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.■