

## 16) Our Condition in Death

Satan's first lie to humans involved the topic of death, and more broadly whether God and His truth could be trusted. Ever since, Satan has continued his deceptive lies to humanity about life and death, and trust in God. He often gives his deceptions new "window dressing", in this case with labels such as reincarnation, immortal soul, purgatory, eternal burning in hell, etc, but at its core it's still his same old lie. So what is death and what really happens when a person dies?

Lets discover what the Bible teaches us about death ...

Job 14:14. Job's question is one countless numbers of people have asked or thought; what happens when we die? Is there life after death?

John 5:25,28,29. Fortunately, Jesus answers that question. He said all who die will eventually take part in a resurrection. But Scripture makes it clear that there are two separate resurrections, separated by 1,000 years (the millennium). The first resurrection is for the righteous (the redeemed) and the second resurrection is for the wicked (the unrepentant). Which resurrection a person takes part in depends on their choices, and it also makes a tremendous difference in their eternity.

1 Thessalonians 4:15-18. There was a concern among early believers as to who would get to heaven first - the redeemed who would still be living at Christ's return, or the redeemed who die before His return. Paul answers that concern when he writes that all the redeemed will get there at the same time! The first resurrection occurs at the return of Christ, when the redeemed, those who died having a firm belief in Christ, are resurrected and, along with the redeemed who were still living, are taken up together to meet Christ in the clouds. These truly are comforting words! The dead do not know, cannot see, can not partake in what is happening in the lives of the living.

The Bible speaks of two different deaths (see Revelation 20:6). The first death, or what the Bible will refer to as "sleep", is what every human will experience, except the redeemed still alive when Christ returns. Sadly, as a result of sin, people die; from accidents, illness, even "old age". The Bible refers to this death as "sleep" since all who die will take part in one of the two resurrections. The second death, which we still study in a separate lesson, is eternal; there is no coming back from it.

Genesis 2:7. To understand death, it is important to understand what life is. You could think of death as life in reverse. At creation, God formed man's shape from the dirt, then He breathed into this shape the breath or life, the essence of life. Once he did this, man BECAME a living being, or what is sometimes called a living soul. Scripture points out that a living human does not have a soul, he/she IS a soul! It might be easier to think of a soul

as who you are, not just your physical features, but also your personality, your character. Maybe this illustration can help...think back to your school days, especially algebra when you were taught the simple equation "A + B = C". Lets fill in this equation with the Bible's help, "The Body + The Breath/Essence of Life = A Living Being/Soul.

Death is life in reverse, it is the separation of body and breath. When that happens, the soul ceases to exist; it disappears, or, as the Bible terms it, it "sleeps".

Ecclesiastes 3:19,20. God is the Author, the Source, of all life. He personally formed the shape of Adam after He had spoken the rest of the animals into existence. But when He created the animals He also gave them the breath/essence of life, just as He did mankind. When death occurs, human or animal, the body returns to the elements. With time, the body decays and returns to the soil. Cremation simply speeds up that process.

Genesis 3:19. Death, the first death, sleep death, is a result of sin and the curses it brought.

Ecclesiastes 12:7. You may be wondering, if the body returns to the ground, what happens to the breath or essence of life at death? Simple, it returns to God who gave it. Many people have become confused by this text and its use of the word "spirit". Please don't let it confuse you. The actual Hebrew word used here means wind, breath, or spirit. The same Hebrew word is also used in other places, (like Genesis 7:15) but is translated with the word "breath".

Job 27:3 makes it clear the terms breath and spirit are used interchangeably here. This text in Ecclesiastes is teaching us that the breath, also referred to here as the "soul", returns to God. God is the source of life and the breath of life came from Him.

The Bible counsels us to search, study, and compare what the Bible teaches on a given topic in various texts, to clear up any confusion, so lets continue.

Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10. When a person dies, they no longer have any emotions, thoughts, memories, work, or plans. Those things end when death occurs.

Psalms 146:2-4. Scriptures instructs us to do what we will, including serving and praising God while we are alive, because when we die, the breath of life (yep, the same Hebrew word meaning breath, wind, spirit is used here) returns to God, and the body returns to the ground and elements. At death a person's life and plans end.

Psalms 115:17. If a person died and went to heaven, hell, purgatory, or was reincarnated, they would have something to say. But Scripture says the dead are silent, they cannot praise God (or curse God).

Psalms 6:5. The dead do not have any thoughts, not even thoughts of God.

Now, friend, obviously the dead are not reincarnated; and they do not immediately go anywhere like purgatory, hell, or heaven. Instead, they are silent, emotionless, with no work, thoughts, or plans. Their bodies go into the grave and return to the soil, while their breath or essence of life returns to God. This results in the first death, or the “sleep” death.

John 11:11-14. Jesus used this terminology and said that Lazarus was sleeping (compare with David’s sleep death in 1 Kings 2:1,10). His disciples misunderstood so He rephrased His remark to help them clearly understand what He meant. He said, and meant, that Lazarus was dead even though He, Jesus, compared death to sleep!

1 Corinthians 15:22,23. Have you ever slept so soundly that when you do wake up you have no recollection of dreams or the passing of time? Perhaps that's why God used the analogy of sleep to describe the first death. In that respect, death can have these blessings: the dead have zero thoughts or sense of time. Like someone who is asleep, the dead will awaken. For the redeemed who belong to Christ, that will occur at His second coming.

Genesis 3:1-6. When Satan, disguised as a serpent, tempted Eve, the goal of his temptation was for Eve to distrust God and His’ promise that to eat from one specific tree would result in death. Satan’s lie was that she could distrust God and not suffer any consequence. She could disobey God, the Source of life, and not die. He lied in saying that she could transcend the plan that God had for her; that God was trying to hold her back. The deception worked; Eve was deceived, she ate, and then took the fruit to Adam. But Adam was not deceived, he knew what he was choosing by eating the fruit – to disobey God. And as a result of Adam’s sin, sin and death entered this world. All of humanity would be affected by his choice. All of mankind would now be born with a fallen nature.

Isaiah 59:2. God is holy; sin causes a separation between God and sinner. It is not God’s desire or choice that humanity sins. Humanity that was originally made in His image, made with the intimacy of His own hands.

1 Timothy 1:17. Scripture is very clear, God alone is immortal. Man does not have an immortal soul. Eternal life, immortality, is a gift, a reward, God gives to the redeemed at the first resurrection.

Genesis 3:4. Satan continues to repeat his lies today – disobey God and nothing bad will happen, you will still live, you will even be better off because God’s plans are restrictive and unfair. Satan even deceives some people that there is no God, or devil. And tragically, people believe his lies.

Genesis 2:16,17. God’s word is just as certain today as it was for Adam and Eve. Sin leads to separation from God, and separation from God leads to death. All of us are now

born in sin – born with a fallen nature that can not resist Satan or sin. Fortunately, we have a loving God who does not want anyone to perish. Immediately after Adam and Eve sinned, God gave them the promise and hope of a Savior (Genesis 3;15). Jesus Christ, God the Son, would come to earth as a baby, live a perfect life as a human, and die for our sins. He would conquer Satan, sin, and death. He would succeed where Adam failed. His death at Calvary would provide redemption. His sacrifice would pay the price of sin for all sinners. Eternal life would be given to those who choose to accept it.

Isaiah 8:19,20. Some people think ghosts, witchcraft, zombies and such are harmless fun. Some people try to communicate with the dead. Saul tried, but since the dead are asleep in the grave, know nothing, and have no works or plans, they can not respond. But Satan and his fallen angels can, and they do, just like they did with King Saul. Satan so convincingly disguised himself as a serpent that he was able to deceive Eve. He is a master at deception, and as the former covering cherub has powers we can't understand. That is why God warns us not to even try communicating with the dead. Satan is a dangerous and deadly enemy.

Deuteronomy 18:10-15. Similar warning is given for involvement in or with any type of occult practices. While they may sometimes appear harmless and fun, keep in mind that Satan has a goal – to deceive and destroy you by separating you from God.

Isaiah 47:13,14. God warns that those who do not repent from occult practices will be destroyed. So why do so many look to them and their practices? Why seek their ways or counsel when it leads to destruction? Look to God and His truth instead!

John 11:25,26. Jesus conquered death by dying and living again. He paid the price for our sins and offers us the gift of salvation and eternal life (see Romans 6:23). But that gift is only received by accepting Him as Lord and Savior, by giving Him your heart.

Luke 23:43. Some people struggle with and misunderstand Jesus' promise to the thief on the cross, so lets look at it quickly. Now keep in mind there was no punctuation in the original Greek text. Where a comma is placed can make a tremendous difference. But God said we can (and should) compare Scripture with Scripture so we can gain a balanced and correct truth.

Jesus certainly promised eternal life to the repentant man as they both hung on crosses, but would the man actually receive eternal life that day? No! It was the promise that he received that day. Jesus Himself states, in John 20:17, that after His resurrection He hadn't yet returned to heaven, so He could not have taken the thief to heaven of Friday is Jesus still hadn't gone there Himself by Sunday morning.

The message Jesus was giving to the thief is simple. Please allow me to rephrase the essence of His promise: "Today, as I die on the cross and My ministry ends in apparent agony and shame; today, as blood runs down My face and nails pierce My hands; today,

when it doesn't look as if I can save anyone, not even myself, and My claim to be the Son of God appears false; today, when My own disciples have forsaken Me, today, in my darkest hour, you have come to understand who I am and have chosen to call on me as Savior and Lord. And I give you the assurance today, in spite of how things seem to look, you will be with me in paradise.”

Friend, God so loves you, that He gave up His Son, Jesus Christ, to pay the price for your sins (John 3:16-17). He wants to give you eternal life. His promise is today, it is certain and assured today even if the reality will not happen till the same time the repentant thief will receive it – at the second coming.

Friend, if you haven't already, will you make the choice to believe and follow the Bible's teaching about death, and in faith accept Jesus as your Lord and Savior?