

20th Century Bible Course

Lesson 11

Dear Student:

If you should start down the street and ask the first ten people you meet what they believe happens when a person dies, you would receive five or six different answers. There is no uniformity among professed Christians on the subject of death. Yet everyone wants to know what happens to a person when he dies.

Are the dead really dead? Can the dead come back? Do they know what is going on? Do they know anything at all? Do they go immediately to heaven? Do they go anywhere? Are they simply asleep? Is there some sort of psychic telephone by which you can talk with the dead? And if such a call could be completed, would you be connected with

- ☐ heaven?
- ☐ hell?
- ☐ purgatory?
- ☐ a cemetery?

Or would the operator have to refer you to

- ☐ the seance?
- ☐ a hypnotist?
- ☐ a Flying Saucer Club?

Or tell you to

- ☐ read the latest research book on the topic?
- ☐ go to the latest movie for actual testimonials?

There are so many conflicting ideas about what happens to a man when he dies. Some say that when a person dies, that's all there is. It's all over. Others say that a man never dies-that, in fact, he can't die. And of course, if he can't die, if he isn't capable of dying, he must be alive-somewhere. And there are a lot of ideas about that, too.

Wouldn't it be a wonderful thing if we could talk to somebody who really knows, somebody who has been there, somebody who is there right now? Thousands of people have so reasoned, and that's why the seance is so popular.

But what happens when you keep the appointment? It sounds like your loved one. It looks like your loved one. You want it so desperately that the matter of credibility escapes you.

You may be talking to another world, and it may be the spirit world. But who is on the other side of the line? Who has picked up the psychic telephone? Who is taking the calls?

Is it possible that someone is running an answering service for the dead? What can the Bible tell us about death?

Your friend,

The Bible Instructor

LESSON 11

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

SCRIPTURE READING: 1 CORINTHIANS 15

"The legend says it happened in the streets of Baghdad.

"A merchant sent his servant to the market. But soon he returned, trembling and greatly agitated, and said to his master, 'Down in the marketplace I was jostled by a woman in the crowd, and when I turned

around I saw it was Death that jostled me. She looked at me and made a threatening gesture. Master, please lend me your horse, for I must hasten away to avoid her. I will ride to Samarra and there I will hide, and Death will not find me.'

"The merchant lent him his horse, and the servant galloped away in a cloud of dust.

"A little later the merchant himself went to the marketplace and saw Death standing in the crowd. He said to her, 'Why did you frighten my servant this morning? Why did you make a threatening gesture?'

" 'That was not a threatening gesture,' said Death. 'It was only a start of surprise. I was astonished to see him in Baghdad, for *I have an appointment with him tonight in Samarra!*' " (*Destination Life* by George E. Vandeman, p. 1).

Only a legend, yet it reminds us that every person has an appointment with death-an appointment that looms before us like a brick wall. If only we knew what was beyond! If only we could talk to someone who has been there!

There's news for you! You can! There is One who knows, who has passed through the portals of the tomb, and His Word can be depended upon. And that Word is *LIFE!*

Part 1-- LIFE AFTER DEATH

1. Who has the key of death? Revelation 1:13-18 _____

2. What did Jesus abolish? 2 Timothy 1:10 _____
What did He bring to light? _____ and _____.

The Greek word for death is *thanatos*. A prefix *a* added to it makes *athanasia*, meaning the opposite of death, which is often translated *life*, or *immortality-not* subject to death.

3. For what are we to seek? Romans 2:7 _____

Would God tell us to seek for immortality (eternal life) if we already possessed it? We only seek for something we have lost or don't have. Many honest-hearted people believe that man is immortal, but if this is the case, why should we seek for immortality?

4. Where are we to seek for eternal life? 1 John 5:11,12 _____

Eternal life, or immortality, is ours *only* if we have Jesus. Everywhere the Scriptures proclaim that the moment we accept Christ as our personal Saviour, eternal life is ours. We *have* it-present tense- *NOW!* Nothing is so certain as death, yet the Bible says eternal life begins when we accept God's Son. We have life, but we don't have it! Does that sound contradictory? The secret lies in one little word-*yet!*

5. Where is this eternal life now? Colossians 3:3 _____

6. Where is Christ now? (verse 1) _____ Jesus said His followers would "inherit everlasting life" (Matthew 19:29).

7. Where is this inheritance now? 1 Peter 1:3,4 _____

Paul said our life was "hid with Christ" who "sitteth on the right hand of God" above; Peter says it is "reserved *in heaven*" for us! What a beautiful harmony is seen here!

When Mr. Parker's estate was probated, his 16-year-old son Jack inherited \$45,000, which was to be held in trust until he became of age. During the five-year period before Jack turned 21, to whom did this \$45,000 belong? Did the bank own it? No. Was it Jack's? Absolutely! He often talked of the day when he would have *his* money. Yes, it was his, but he could not use it until a specified time.

So it is with eternal life. The moment we accept Christ, eternal life is ours. Jesus said again and again, "He that believeth on the Son *hath* everlasting life" (John 3:36), yet it is equally plain that we cannot actually take possession of it until a future time.

8. When may we take possession of our inheritance of life eternal? John 6:54 _____

9. When will the dead in Christ be raised? 1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17 _____

10. How does Paul describe this climactic moment when the dead are raised? 1 Corinthians 15:51-53 _____

"We shall all be changed, in a _____, in the _____: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised _____, and we shall be changed. For this _____ must put on _____, and this _____ must put on _____

How clear this is! Immortality is not ours until Jesus comes to take us home.

11. What kind of bodies will the righteous dead receive? Philippians 3:21

Said John, "When he shall appear, we shall be like him" (1 John 3:2, NT 208 [165]).

Part 2-- WHAT IS DEATH LIKE?

1. Where are the dead between the moment of death and the resurrection? Job 17:13

Jesus said that all who are "in the grave" will hear His voice (John 5:28, 29). If they hear His voice from the grave, it must be because that is where they are resting. The words "At Rest" carved on many tombstones, describe perfectly the condition of the dead, for Job says, "There the wicked cease from troubling; and the weary be at rest" (Job 3:17). John says the dead "rest from their labours" (Revelation 14:13). Death is called a sleep 54 times in the Bible! Evidently there is a definite correlation between death and sleep.

When Jesus came to the home where a little maiden had died, He said, "Weep not; she is not dead, but sleepeth" (Luke 8:52). The story of Lazarus in John 11 confirms this. Jesus said, "Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." His disciples thought He was speaking of natural sleep. "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead" (verses 11-14).

Many people are taught that we go immediately to heaven when we die (or to hell if we are bad). The truth is, neither the good nor the bad go any where at death except to the grave, where they will sleep until the resurrection day. With a loud voice Jesus called, "Lazarus, come forth!" What a picture! Responding to the Saviour's call, Lazarus comes stumbling out, still wrapped in grave clothes. Jesus didn't say, "Look, Lazarus, you've been in heaven four days. Come down and get back into your poor decayed body." Nor did He say, "Lazarus, come out of those flames. I'm going to give you another chance." He simply said, "Lazarus, *come forth!*" Lazarus had no story to tell; nor did any of the others whom Jesus raised. Do other Bible writers agree with this concept? Let us check a few more texts.

2. Can the dead think? Psalm 146:3,4 _____

3. Do the dead know anything at all? Ecclesiastes 9:5 _____

4. Can they hate or love, or be envious? (verse 6) _____

5. Can the dead praise God? Psalm 6:5; 115:17 _____

6. How much of man's knowledge and accomplishments will go with him when he dies? Ecclesiastes 9:10 _____

Job emphatically declares that the dead are unable to watch the activities of their living loved ones. Their sons may come to great honor-perhaps become an astronaut, or the president of the United States, but "he knoweth it not." Or his son may fall into terrible disgrace, "but he perceiveth it not" of him (Job 14:21).

7. What about haunted houses? Job 7:9,10

Thought question: If Jesus is right in saying that the dead "sleep" until the resurrection at His coming, how can the dead go immediately to heaven or hell?

Is it disturbing to learn that the dead are quietly sleeping, that they cannot communicate with us? Would a conversation with someone who doesn't know what is going on, and cannot think, and, in fact, doesn't know anything at all, be very satisfactory?

Death is a state of unconscious sleep. The dead rest quietly in their graves until Jesus comes. And when we stop to think it through, how could this be improved upon? As always, God has arranged what is best. Instead of permitting the departed one to look down from heaven and see the distress and grief his departing has caused; instead of allowing a departed husband or wife to see his spouse quickly transfer his love to another; instead of permitting parents to witness their children choosing a dishonorable course, Jesus has arranged death to be a short period of unconscious sleep. There is no hardship on the departed ones, for they are not conscious of passing time. They fall asleep; the next moment (so it seems) they awake and are reunited with their loved ones.

And isn't this the only way God can be perfectly fair? Why should Cain have to suffer in hell 5000 years longer than Hitler just because he died that much sooner?

"But," you ask, "If this is the case, where did we ever get the idea that when we die we go directly to heaven?" Once again, the Word provides the answer.

Part 3-- SATAN'S LIE

1. What did God tell Adam and Eve would happen if they disobeyed? Genesis 2:17

"The wages of sin is *death*" (Romans 6:23). Would an intelligent God announce a penalty that He knew He could never carry out?

2. What did the serpent tell Eve that contradicted what God said? Genesis 3:1-4

3. Did Satan tell Eve the truth, or a lie? John 8:44

Thought Question: Who, then, would you say originated the popular belief that man is immortal and cannot die? _____

From that day to this Satan has kept right on insisting, "You can't die-you've got an immortal soul." And people have been believing it and peddling it for him ever since.

Thought question: What if one of your deceased loved ones were to appear to you? Would it really be your loved one? _____ Who would be impersonating him? _____ (Read Revelation 16:14, 2 Corinthians 11:13-15, and Isaiah 8:19, 20.

Part 4--WHAT IS THE SOUL?

The phrase "immortal soul," is not found a single time in all Scripture, although the word "soul" is used approximately 1600 times, and "spirit" over a thousand times. Not once in all these 2,600 times is the soul called immortal! The Bible *always* says man is mortal (Job 4: 1 7); it *always* says immortality is received only from Christ.

1. Who only has immortality? 1 Timothy 6:15, 16

Oh, if people would only study God's Word, they would know the truth and Satan could never deceive them. The Bible says humans *do not* have immortality until the resurrection day. It is just that simple. Perhaps we can better understand what the soul is if we review how man came into being. Misconception on this point has confused this whole issue.

2. Of what two elements is man composed? Genesis 2:7 "The Lord God formed man of the _____, and breathed into his nostrils the _____; and man became a _____."

God did not *give* man a soul; man *became* a soul. Most modern translations read, "and man became a living person." A soul is a living being- the combination of *body* and *breath*. God's word does not teach that I *have* a soul, but that I *am* a soul.

Thought question: If a soul is a living being, can it die? _____ Check your answer with Ezekiel

18:20 and Revelation 16:3.

3. What happens when a man dies? Ecclesiastes 12:7

4. How does Job indicate that the terms "breath of life" and "spirit" are used inter-changeably? Job 27:3

It was this breath, or spark of life that God breathed into man's nostrils at creation. The Greek word for spirit (or breath) is *pneuma*, meaning "air." From it we derive such words as *pneumonia* and *pneumatic* tires.

Part 5-- CONCLUSION

A correct knowledge of what happens when we die frees us from erroneous concepts of God and His justice, and protects us from the deceptions of spiritism. While the Bible reveals all that we need to know, let us never forget that life is still a mystery and will always remain so. It can never be fully explained or understood. The same is true of death. But thank God, we can know that Jesus paid our death penalty- He died *my death* on Calvary (Hebrews 2:9), and has abolished my greatest enemy- death (2 Timothy 1: 10). In that glorious day when man receives his inheritance -eternal life- from the hand of His Saviour, "then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory" (1 Corinthians 15:54).

At the same time, let us never forget that those who refuse to believe the Son "shall not see life" (John 3:36).

Yes, there *is* life after death. We may not escape the sleep of natural death here on this earth, but Christ has made it possible for everyone to face it with a heart full of hope and assurance. Because He lives we too shall live and come forth in that resurrection morning. "Comfort one another with these words" (1 Thessalonians 4:18).

Suggested Reading: *Destination Life* and/or *Psychic Phenomena* by George E. Vandeman.