

They say there are only 2 things we can all be certain of in life – do you know what they are? Death and taxes. In this lesson we explore the important question: What happens when a person dies?

It's a question that has puzzled people all through the ages.

And today we have many theories.

Some say the dead go to **heaven**, others say they go to **hell** or **purgatory**, and still others say the dead **sleep in the grave** until the resurrection, and there are also those who believe in **reincarnation**.

However, we want to know what the Bible says, for none of us have died and come back - except Jesus.

In fact the Bible says that He alone has the answer to this important subject

Revelation 1:18 ¹⁸*I am the Living One; I was dead, and behold I am alive for ever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and Hades.*

When we know Jesus, we don't have to fear death. Jesus alone has the keys to this very important subject we are studying tonight. Since the garden of Eden, in the very beginning, the devil has sought to deceive people about death.

Let's go back to the very beginning. In *Genesis 3:1* the devil questioned Eve. ¹ *Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?"*

Eve was quick to run to God's defense in verses 2-3 ² *The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³ but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'*

And then came the first recorded lie in the Bible. Verse 4, ⁴ *"You will not surely die," the serpent said to the woman*

How cunning! Here the devil admits you are going to die, but not "surely."

And that lie has come down through the ages so that the majority of people in the world believe that people are dead, but not "surely dead!"

That's why the majority of people would not take a walk in a dark grave yard at midnight for anything. The reason is they believe all those folks are dead, but not "surely dead."

Again, for every one of God's beautiful truths, Satan has a counterfeit. He said, "You will not surely die" and he was a liar! **John 8:44** says he is the father of lies. Let's go then to the Word and see the truth. Going back to the beginning of life.

Genesis 2:7 ⁷ *the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*

Here we have two elements: a clay body and God's breath of life. Through the union of these, the Bible says man *became* a living being. It's important to note that man was not given a "soul" as something separate from the body, but *became* a soul through the union of body and God's breath.

If we write this as an equation, we have **Body + Breath = Soul.**

Let's see this procedure in reverse in Psalms 104:29

²⁹ *When you hide your face, they are terrified; when you take away their breath, they die and return to the dust.*

Take away the breath, it equals DEATH.

Psalms 104:30 **Verse 30** puts it again in forward, ³⁰ *When you send your Spirit, they are created, and you renew the face of the earth.*

You send forth "spirit" or breath and they are created – Same word. (ru-wach)

Now let's discuss the teaching some of us are acquainted with regarding the "never dying soul" or "immortal soul." You will often hear people say when a man dies his "soul" goes on to heaven or hell.

Now it may come as a surprise to learn that there are over 1,700 references to the word "soul" in the Bible, but not even *once* it is mentioned as immortal or undying. There is only *one text* in the Bible that even uses the word immortal. Let's read it together; its in 1 Timothy 1:17,

1 Timothy 1:17

¹⁷*Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory for ever and ever. Amen.*

But the Bible does use the word immortality.

1 Timothy 6 :15 ¹⁵*which God will bring about in his own time—God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, ¹⁶who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.*

What does this verse say? Only God is immortal.

You say what about the "immortal soul?" It's *not* taught in the Bible! The word "immortality" is used only five times in the Bible and it never speaks of the "immortal soul." The Bible is clear - the body and breath equals a soul. **YOU are a soul.** A soul is not a little person inside you who upon your death goes flying out! So if that's not what happens at death, let's ask the question – What does?

What does happen when a person dies?

Ecclesiastes 12:7 answers simply, ⁷ *and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*

Now that word *spirit* is the Hebrew word "ruwach" [Strong's H7307]. It is translated 117 times as "wind" and 33 times as "breath."

This word "spirit" in any concordance or dictionary means "breath." That's why it *returns* to God who gave it.

Friends, if the spirit is the essence of a man, meaning his thoughts, feelings and personality, then this verse says, you existed before you were born. The verse says the spirit RETURNS to God. Something can't return to somewhere it has never been. For example, did you exist before you were born? No – we cannot return in death to a place you have never been before we were born. This verse is simply talking about the breath of life.

Notice the many other Scriptures where spirit simply means the breath of life.

Now I want us to look at Jesus on the cross in Luke 23:46 ⁴⁶*Jesus called out with a loud voice, "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." When he had said this, he breathed his last.*

Jesus is saying here, "Into thy hands I commit my spirit" and then Jesus died. Now let's think this through because this is important...if the spirit is the person, the essence, thoughts and feelings, then Jesus returned to heaven, right?

But here there is a problem, we know three days later, Jesus still had not ascended to his father.

John 20:17

¹⁷*Jesus said, "Do not hold on to me, for I have not yet returned to the Father. Go instead to my brothers and tell them, 'I am returning to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God.'"*

If the spirit returned to God when He dies how can that be? It can't - the spirit is simply the breath of life. So when a man dies, his breath or spirit returns back to God, and the body returns to dust. The same happens with animals. The Bible clearly teaches this. Ecclesiastes 3:19- 20

¹⁹ Man's fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath ; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. ²⁰ All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

Next question, What happens in the grave? Where are the dead? Are they in heaven or hell? Let's see what the apostles said in Acts 2:29,

²⁹"Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day

Peter says that David is still in the grave

Vs 34 *³⁴For David did not ascend to heaven, and yet he said, " 'The Lord said to my Lord: "Sit at my right hand*

Friends, David is *not* in heaven. Let's see what Jesus said, and here we come to a very important key. The Bible tell us of an experience when one of Jesus closest friends died; Lazarus. Word as reached Jesus that Lazarus was sick. Jesus seemingly ignored this. Then after a few days, Jesus headed to Bethany. Lazarus has already died.

Now Jesus explains this to his disciples.

John 11:11- 14 *¹¹After he had said this, he went on to tell them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up." ¹²His disciples replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better." ¹³Jesus had been speaking of his death, but his disciples thought he meant natural sleep. ¹⁴So then he told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead,*

Death is referred to as a sleep: In fact death is referred to as a sleep 66 times in the Bible. Notice these references:

Old Testament:

Job 3:13 *¹³ For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest*

Job 7:21, *²¹ Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more*

Daniel 12:2, ² *Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt.*

And some examples in the New Testament:

Matthew 9:24, ²⁴ *he said, "Go away. The girl is not dead but asleep."*

1 Corinthians 15:6, ⁶ *After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom are still living, though some have fallen asleep.*

1 Thessalonians 4:13 ¹³ *Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope*

2 Peter 3:4, ⁴ *They will say, "Where is this 'coming' he promised? Ever since our fathers died, everything goes on as it has since the beginning of creation."*

"Sleep" is clearly the biblical term for death. Clearly, then, in both Old and New Testaments this is the term the Bible writers used to describe death. To them it was a sleep in Jesus.

Sleep is a beautiful illustration of death. It is like going to bed at night, when we are tired, with assurance of waking in the morning.

This takes fear out of death for the Christian. They lie down to sleep, with the quiet assurance that Jesus will awaken them in the morning of the resurrection at His second coming. We are to regard death as a sound, dreamless sleep. A person may have been in the tomb 1,000 years, but when raised at the resurrection it will seem to him that he merely dozed off for a moment. When angels meet God's resurrected saints at their grave side, it will be like a loving mother greeting her child after a brief nap.

Let's see how the Bible describe that great day in Matthew 24:31

Matthew 24:31 ³¹ *And he will send his angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather his elect from the four winds, from one end of the heavens to the other..*

Man is not immortal. He is subject to death, but God's people do, indeed, have the promise of eternal life now. Eternal life is that miraculous, new, Jesus-filled life, which begins at conversion and will be continued in heaven. God's promise is that His faithful people, who now have eternal life, will not suffer the second death.

The Second Death

Revelation 2:11 ¹¹ *He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. He who overcomes will not be hurt at all by the second death."*

From this death there is no resurrection. The first death, which all men must die, does not remove the gift of eternal life. It only interrupts it while the saints sleep briefly. It continues in heaven after the resurrection.

Think of it for a moment. If someone you loved has died and was in heaven, would they be happy? How could they enjoy paradise when every time they look down here they are seeing their loved ones without them, not to mention war, poverty, problems, and hardship? God's makes it simple and clear! Our loved ones are peacefully sleeping.

Let's go on now and see what the Bible says about our dead love ones.

Ecclesiastes 9:5- 6, ⁵ *For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten..*⁶ *Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun*

The "dead know not anything, no love, hate," et cetera.

Here, however, we run into a real question. If the dead sleep in Jesus, and they know not anything, then what about all we read and hear about dead people who seem to return and appear to others? What about the spirits of the dead that communicate with the living, and these people who claim to channel messages?

What about those who actively communicate with various loved ones who have died? If this is really our deceased loved ones and truly the dead who have come back, then the Bible is a lie.

Make no mistake about it, the devil can work miracles too.

Revelation 16:14, ¹⁴*They are spirits of demons performing miraculous signs, and they go out to the kings of the whole world, to gather them for the battle on the great day of God Almighty.*

2 Thessalonians 2:9, ⁹*The coming of the lawless one will be in accordance with the work of Satan displayed in all kinds of counterfeit miracles, signs and wonders*

How does Satan do it? We must never forget that when God cast Lucifer to the earth, He also banished the fallen angels with him – Revelation 12 indicates that up to a third of the angels fell from heaven with him. These beings carry an intimate knowledge of our lives and our loved ones, and are able to counterfeit the appearance and presence of those whom now sleep in death.

The devil takes advantage of grieving hearts and knows people would do anything to see their loved ones, and he can impersonate them to make people believe his lie, that "you shall not surely die."

All the spiritualism, the New Age, and witchcraft is based on this teaching. Satan can deceive us unless we know the truth.

The Bible says a lot about this subject, so let's keep going.

Job 7:8- 10 " ⁸ *The eye that now sees me will see me no longer; you will look for me, but I will be no more.* ⁹ *As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return.* ¹⁰ *He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more.*

Ecclesiastes 9:10, God says ¹⁰ *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.*

A friend of mine tells the story as a young boy, he remembered going to his first funeral. There in an open casket lay a deceased man. As the service went on the minister said, "I can just see Mr. Jones up in heaven, walking on streets of gold, in the company of angels." But he remembered thinking, "That's funny, I am looking at Mr. Jones and he's right here in the casket!" It became more complicated though when he got to the grave site where the casket was lowered. Here the same minister then spoke of how we didn't have to grieve because on the resurrection day Mr. Jones would rise from the grave and be caught up to heaven! Now he was really confused! He saw Mr. Jones in the casket, then the preacher said he was in heaven, and now he said he's in the grave waiting for the resurrection? Friends can you tell something is wrong!

Where is He? Let's make it simple.

Let's put it all together. One passage of Scripture makes it so simple.
Turn to Job 14:12

Job 14:12- 14 ¹² *so man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from their sleep.*

¹³ *"If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me!*

¹⁴ *If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service. I will wait for my renewal to come.*

Three points. Man is in the grave until:

- A. "Till the heavens are no more."
- B. "Till your wrath is past."
- C. "Till my change comes."

When will the heavens be no more?

2 Peter 3:10, ¹⁰*But the day of the Lord will come like a thief. **The heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire, and the earth and everything in it will be laid bare***

When will God's wrath be passed?

Revelation 15:1, ¹*I saw in heaven another great and marvelous sign: seven angels with the seven last plagues—last, because with them **God's wrath is completed.***

When will the dead be changed? At the second coming!

1 Corinthians 15:51- 54, ⁵¹*I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²*in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. **For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.** ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has been swallowed up in victory."**

Notice all three passages refer to the second coming of Jesus. It just makes sense! If you really didn't die, then why would you need a resurrection?

So when we die, we wait to be resurrected, and while we wait for the resurrection, we sleep in the grave.

And God will not forget you. He has a guardian angel that follows you through life, death and the funeral. This angel marks the grave site when the Lord comes He will tell that angel to "gather my elect from the four corners of the earth."

There will be two groups of people when Jesus comes. The righteous and the wicked. Both will come up at one of two resurrections. And both are in the grave until then. None of the dead are in purgatory or in heaven, all are waiting until Jesus comes.

1 Thessalonians 4:15 ¹⁵*According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. ¹⁶For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. ¹⁷After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever. ¹⁸Therefore encourage each other with these words.*

That's beautiful! The dead shall rise! *What will they do? Rise! If they were already in heaven they couldn't rise.*

When will they rise? When Jesus comes! Then we *all* go together. The Lord will raise our loved ones who have been sleeping! All are going *together*, getting excited *together*, and are *changed together!* Then this mortal becomes immortal and this corruptible puts on incorruption.

Let's see what Jesus said in John 14:1, ¹*"Do not let your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in me. ²In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you. ³And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.*

When Jesus comes, the wicked will be slain by the brightness of His coming. Let's read about it

2 Thessalonians 2:8, ⁸*And then the lawless one will be revealed, whom the Lord Jesus will overthrow with the breath of his mouth and destroy by the splendor of his coming*

They will not live again until after the 1,000 years.

Revelation 20:5, ⁵*(The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the first resurrection.*

In **verse 6**, God says blessed are the ones in the first resurrection!

Therefore we can look forward to that glorious day as did Paul!

2 Timothy 4:6- 8, ⁶*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. ⁷I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. ⁸Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

Paul knew he would receive his reward on *that* day - Christ's appearing.

Let's determine that whether we live to see Jesus come, or if we die and sleep until the resurrection day, we will be ready at each moment to meet our Lord.

Now a want to take a couple of minutes to explain some Bible passages that might raise some questions.

Question: Didn't Jesus tell the thief "Today you will be with me in paradise?"

The text in question is Luke 23:42- 43

⁴²*Then he said, "Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom."* ⁴³*Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."*

From reading this it appears that Jesus did promise the thief he would go to paradise that day. However if that's true we are faced with three problems.

1. The thief did not ask to go that day. He had his theology straight, and asked to be remembered when Jesus comes in His kingdom.
2. Jesus did not go that day. Three days after He told Mary not to touch Him, for He had not ascended to the Father (John 20:17).

The simple answer to this is in the Greek text. Greek does not have punctuation as we know it. This is supplied by scholars as they translated into English. However in Luke 23:43 the scholars simply misplaced a comma that changed the entire meaning of the verse. They put the comma *before* the word today. Change it, and the text is in perfect harmony with all the other Bible verses.

It now reads **"Verily I say unto thee today, you will be with me in paradise."** Jesus gave the thief the assurance of salvation that day, and will remember him just when he asked to be, when Jesus comes in His kingdom.

Now before you get alarmed, this is the only place in scripture where the punctuation changes the meaning.

Question: Doesn't Paul teach "to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord?"

This text has been misquoted for so long, people assume that's what it says. It doesn't. Let's read it - 2 Corinthians 5:8,

2 Corinthians 5:8, *⁸We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord..*

The question here is WHEN will this take place? Paul would rather be absent from the body and present with the Lord. So would all of us!

Notice this is Second Corinthians or the second letter Paul wrote the Corinthians. In the first letter **I Corinthians 15** Paul had already told them WHEN he would be absent from the body and with the Lord.

Verses 51- 55, *⁵¹Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed— ⁵²in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. ⁵³For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. ⁵⁴When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: "Death has*

been swallowed up in victory."
⁵⁵"Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?"

Also in His closing testimony Paul again affirmed when. 2 Tim 4:6- 8, ⁶*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.* ⁷*I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith.* ⁸*Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing.*

May God greatly encourage you as you have learned the Bible truth on this important subject. In this lesson we have covered the first death – or the death described as a sleep in the Bible. We will study the Second Death – the death from which there is no resurrection – in greater detail in the lesson entitled *"Revelation's Lake of Fire"* and *"The thousand years of Peace."*

Next Lesson #10 – "What and Where is Hell?"