

A Matter of Death and Life

Do we really die when we pass away or does our soul live on in heavenly bliss while our loved ones mourn us down here on earth?

Most of my early life I had been bothered by a nagging question. If, when we die our souls waft off to a joyful eternity in heaven, then why so much mourning at funerals? If the popular teaching and belief is that man has an immortal soul, then why do ministers talk about "death" when administering last rites?

And if our soul lives on after we die, what's the point of a resurrection of the "dead," which the Bible speaks of ?

We hear people say that good ol' Uncle Ben has died. Is Ben really dead? Or do we go to his funeral just to mourn his lifeless body, while our uncle lives on, rolling around heaven, playing his harp and testing the aerodynamics of his wings?

There he is, lounging serenely, propped up by one arm as he peeks over a cloud's edge and smiles down at those glumly carrying his corpse in a casket. Or at least that's what so many think. They want to believe that the dead aren't actually gone; we just can't see them anymore. Let's face it. Most people don't like to talk about this subject. They're too into the present: too busy trying to get ahead, raising a family, getting a promotion, working for retirement – going for the gusto of life. The seriousness of the subject weighs heavily on the conscience, and we'd rather not be reminded of our own mortality.

The philosophy is, why worry about it? Just live a decent life, be an honest citizen, do your share and it will all work out in the end. You'll get to heaven, they believe. But is that true?

Ageless Belief in Immortality

Man has always wanted to be immortal, to live on for eternity, ever since Lucifer planted the notion in Eve's head. Because of their belief that they possess immortal souls, people want to deny that Yahweh can invoke the death penalty because of their sin.

Yahweh said to Adam and Eve, don't eat of the tree or you will die. But man says in effect, "No, I won't die (the serpent said so!). I have an immortal soul. When I die I'll go straight to heaven."

Immortality of the soul is not unique to Christianity. It's an ageless belief of many cultures.

The sacred books of the Hindus speak of personal immortality and individual responsibility after death.

The Chinese say that when a person dies he has returned to his family. Confucius said the spirits of the good were permitted to visit their ancient habitations on earth.

The Egyptians recognized a dwelling place for the dead and also a future judgment by the great Osiris. Osiris sends the wicked to regions of darkness, and the just to dwell with the god of light. The Egyptians bound up the idea of immortality with the preservation of the dead body as a condition of the soul's continued life. That's why they took such pains to preserve bodies through mummification.

But it was the pagan Greeks who gave the modern doctrines its shape and substance. In Plato's writings, we find the body gross and corruptible; while the soul is immortal, eternal, and essentially infallible. The soul is trapped in the body until death when it is liberated. At least, that's man's notion.

Soul Not Perpetual

Is man a dual being with a physical body and an immortal soul?

Shocking as it may be, the doctrine of an immortal soul is foreign to the Scriptures. It isn't in the Old Testament, and it wasn't taught by Yahshua or His disciples.

"But," you ask, "doesn't the Bible speak of souls?" Yes, many times, but never are the words "immortal" and "soul" found together in the Scriptures.

"What about Matthew 10:28; didn't the Savior say not to fear those who can't kill the soul?", you ask. Please read the REST of the passage: "But rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell (*gehenna*)."

From the Savior's own mouth we learn that the soul can be destroyed and therefore is not immortal. "Soul" is the Greek word *psuche* and means spirit or life. "The soul that sins, it shall die," Ezek. 18:4, 20. The word "soul" here is the Hebrew *nephesh* and is comparable to the Greek *psuche*.

The Savior even said His own soul (*psuche*) could die: "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death," Matt. 26:38.

Every Passage Examined

Let's apply a simple test to see whether there is immortality residing in human beings. We'll examine every passage where "immortal" and "immortality" occurs.

The word "immortal" occurs only once, 1 Timothy 1:17, where it is referring to Yahweh: *Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise El, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen.* The only instance where the word "immortal" appears in Scripture applies to Yahweh. We find here no reference to man whatsoever.

The word "immortality" is found only five times in the entire Bible.

One is found in 1 Timothy 6:16. With verse 15, it reads, *Which in His times He shall show, Who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Ruler of rulers. Who **only** has immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto; which no man has seen, nor can see.* This again refers to Yahweh Himself. Nothing about man here.

Another appearance of "immortality" is 2 Timothy 1:10: *But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Savior Yahshua the Messiah, Who has abolished death, and has brought life and immortality to light through the Good News.* Yahshua demonstrated in Himself what is meant by Biblical immortality.

Change in our Bodies

Why at sundown on the 14th, after He had been pierced by the Roman's sword, don't we see Yahshua immediately in glory in heaven? Because as a man He did not have immortality! Yahshua was dead in the grave. He was buried in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathaea and had to be raised from the dead three days later to die no more because He was resurrected as the firstfruits of them that slept. This means others will follow – in like manner – at the general "harvest" of the faithful. They must also die and then be actively resurrected at the last trumpet blast (1Thess. 4:16).

Only upon his resurrection did "death no more have dominion over Him," Rom. 6:9.

In Revelation 1:18, we hear Yahshua Himself proclaiming that He had died. The Greek word is *nekros* and without an article it denotes persons who were once alive but now are not alive – they are dead PERSONS as opposed to dead BODIES.

Now notice. Three days later, after His resurrection, the women came to His tomb but did not find the Savior's body. Why not? Because resurrection includes a change in the BODY to immortal substance.

The prophet Isaiah writes of the resurrection, "Your dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise," Is. 26:19.

If you can see a body in a coffin, or the bones, or even just the dust, rest assured, that person is still dead and has not been resurrected. When the women came to Yahshua's tomb after His resurrection, the body itself was missing. Paul in, 1 Corinthians 15, shows us that we will be resurrected in the same way Yahshua was.

Also notice, "Who [Messiah] shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto His glorious body," Phil. 3:21.

In fact, no person will be resurrected from the dead until the return of Yahshua (1 Thess. 4:16).

Immortality and Humans

Romans 2:7 is another occurrence of "immortality." In this passage, we investigate immortality as it relates to man.

Verse 6 tells us that Yahweh renders to every man according to his deeds. We read in verse 7, *To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and immortality, eternal life.* Why seek for immortality and eternal life if we already possess it?

Here is absolute justice based on our own attitude toward the truth and our willingness to follow it no matter what. Those who submit to Yahweh's will and His laws will be rewarded with immortality.

When do the righteous receive their reward of immortality? Verses 10-16 show that it will be at the judgment of Yahshua – when He returns.

Again, please note this truth: immortality is something we must "seek"; it is not something we already have. And the Scriptures say that not all mankind will be given immortality. Some who have "sinned without law shall also perish without law." There is no universal salvation.

Yahshua said, *Not every one that says unto Me, "Master, Master," shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that does the will of My Father Which is in heaven,* Matthew 7:21. The Father's will is His law (Ps. 40:8).

The final two places where we find "immortality" are in 1 Corinthians 15, the resurrection chapter.

Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump; for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, "Death is swallowed up in victory," verses 51-54.

Here the focus is on the resurrection of the body. Paul writes in verse 44 that there is a natural body and a spiritual body.

Immortality is a putting on, not a putting off. The natural and spiritual don't coexist. The spiritual must be put on, which takes a dynamic act from outside of us to accomplish such a supernatural change. We humans do not possess the power to do it in and of ourselves. *What man can live and not see death, or save himself from the power of the grave?* Psalm 89:48.

Everlasting life is not a natural, built-in attribute that automatically takes over following death. Only the power of Yahweh can bring it about.

Through the power of the Holy Spirit, those who died faithful to the Covenant will be resurrected to life. Hebrews 5:9 reads, "He became the Author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey Him."

That Holy Spirit, which His people possessed at the time of death because of their obedience (Acts 5:32), will draw them like a magnet from the grave.

Death Like a Deep Sleep

Unlike pagan beliefs, you can't find anywhere in Scripture where death is an automatic gate to another life.

The following passages reveal that all consciousness ceases at death:

For in death there is no remembrance of You: In the grave who shall give You thanks? Psalm 6:5.

His breath goes forth, he returns to this earth; in that very day his thoughts perish, Psalm 146:4.

For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, Ecclesiastes 9:5.

Death is likened to sleep:

Now shall I sleep in the dust; and you shall seek me in the morning, but I shall not be, Job 7:21.

And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt, Daniel 12:2.

And he [Stephen] kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, "Master, lay not this sin to their charge." And when he had said this, he fell asleep, Acts 7:60.

For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of Elohim, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption, Acts 13:36.

Paul called the risen Messiah "the firstfruits of them that slept" – and afterward "those who are the Messiah's at His coming," 1 Corinthians 15:20, 23.

Enoch, Elijah, and Lazarus –Alive in Heaven?

What about Enoch? Didn't he go to heaven? Doesn't Hebrews 11:5 say that Enoch was "translated" that he should not see death?

The word "translated" is from the Greek *metatithemi*, and means carried. Yahweh simply carried him to a different location because Hebrews 11:13 tells us that Enoch died, along with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and a host of others – none of whom have yet to receive the promises of everlasting life, verse 13.

The tense is future conditional, that is, he "would not die" (meaning the second death of judgment).

What about Elijah in 2 Kings 2:9-11? Wasn't he taken to heaven by a chariot of fire? If he was, then evidently the Postal Service has an office in heaven, because in 2 Chronicles 21:12 here comes a letter from Elijah – arriving years after his translation.

Actually, he is back on earth after his flight, writing to King Jehoram and telling him that because of his misbehavior he was going to be punished.

Finally, turn to Luke 16 – the parable of Lazarus and the rich man. This is THE most quoted text used in an attempt to show the living state of the dead.

What most don't realize is that this is a parable, used to illustrate a point. Yahshua is talking to the Pharisees, the nation of Judah, illustrated by the rich man who dressed and ate well. They have all the resources and history to know the truth, yet, they reject it.

Converted Gentiles are represented by the beggar Lazarus, who lives by the scrap of truth given him and is thus rewarded in the end.

As to the imagery, we find Lazarus dead and buried. "Abraham's bosom" is an idiomatic expression meaning he joined Abraham and the other dead forefathers in the grave. Abraham was not in heaven because as we have shown, Hebrews 11:13 says Abraham and others also "died in faith not having received the promises."

Verses 22-23 in Luke 16 read, "the rich man also died, and was buried; and in hell he lifted up his eyes." The Vulgate and Syriac versions exclude part of this and simply read, "and was buried in Hades." Hades is the grave.

Realize that this is a parable. Yahshua animates these dead men to prove a point – that Judah could be shut out of the promises, only to discover it after it is too late.

The rich man's tongue is dry because of his anxiety and he wants a drop of water. (If he is in hellfire, then why not a FLOOD of water?!)

The gist of the parable is that there is no repentance after death. Once we die, it is too late. Psalm 88:10 asks, *Will you show wonders to the dead? Shall the dead arise and praise you?*

Not Many Want to Obey

Most people don't want a Heavenly Father. They want a heavenly grandfather, a kind, doddering Being whose plan for man is simply to say in the final analysis, "A good time was had by all."

How often in matters of obedience do people choose to focus on Yahweh's grace and forget His many other attributes, such as His swift justice, His intolerance to sin, and His soon-coming eradication of evil and evildoers from this planet?

May you be found worthy to reign with the Messiah Yahshua when He returns to establish His Kingdom on earth, and men everywhere will at long last find true happiness and peace through obeying their Creator.

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