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DEATH AND RESURRECTION

The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, the resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later.

The Philistine army moved into Shunem, set up its camp, and made ready to attack Israel. His mood far from optimistic, King Saul positioned Israel's army on nearby Mount Gilboa. In the past, the assurance of God's presence had enabled Saul to lead Israel against its foes fearlessly. But he had turned from serving the Lord, and when the apostate king had tried to contact God about the outcome of the impending battle, God had refused to communicate with him.

The ominous fear of the unknown morrow weighed heavily upon Saul. If only Samuel were here. But Samuel was dead and could no longer counsel him. Or could he?

Locating a medium who had escaped his earlier witch hunts, the tall king stooped to inquiring through her about the outcome of the next day's battle. He requested, "Bring up Samuel for me." During the seance the medium "saw a spirit ascending out of the earth." This spirit informed the hapless king that not only would Israel lose the war, but he and his sons would be killed (see 1 Samuel 28).

The prediction came true. But was it really Samuel's spirit that made the prediction? How could a medium, condemned by God, have power over the spirit of Samuel-God's prophet? And where did Samuel come from-why did his spirit arise "out of the earth"? What had death brought to Samuel? If it wasn't Samuel's spirit that spoke to Saul, who was it? Let us see what the Bible teaches on the subject of death, communication with the dead, and the resurrection.

Immortality and Death

Immortality is the state or quality of not being subject to death. The translators of Scripture used the word immortality to translate the Greek terms *athanasia*, "deathlessness," and *aphtharsia*, "incorruptibility." How does this concept relate to God and human beings?

Immortality

Scripture reveals that the eternal God is immortal (1 Tim. 1:17). In fact, He "alone has immortality" (1 Tim. 6:16). He is uncreated, self-existent, and has no beginning and no end.

"The Scriptures nowhere describe immortality as a quality or state that man-or his `soul' or `spirit'-possesses inherently. The terms usually rendered `soul' and `spirit'...in the Bible occur more than 1,600 times, but never in association with the words `immortal' or `immortality'".

In contrast to God, then, human beings are mortal. Scripture compares their lives with "a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away" (James 4:14). They are "but flesh, a breath that passes away and does not come again" (Ps. 78-39). Man "comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a shadow and does not continue" (Job 14:2).

God and human beings differ markedly. God is infinite, they are finite. God is immortal, they are mortal. God is eternal, they are transitory.

Conditional Immortality

At Creation "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" (Gen. 2:7). The Creation account reveals that humanity derived life from God (cf. Acts 17:25,28; Col. 1:16,17). The corollary of this basic fact is that immortality is not innate to humanity but God's gift.

When God created Adam and Eve, He gave them free will-the power of choice. They could obey or disobey, and their continued existence depended upon continual obedience through God's power. So their possession of the gift of immortality was conditional.

God carefully spelled out the condition upon which they would forfeit this gift-eating of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." God warned them, when "you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen. 2:17).

Death: The Wages of Sin

Contradicting God's warning that disobedience would bring death, Satan asserted, "You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). But after they transgressed God's command, Adam and Eve discovered that the wages of sin is, indeed, death (Rom. 6:23). Their sin brought this sentence: You shall "return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (Gen. 3:19). These words do not point to a continuation of life but to its cessation.

After giving this sentence, God barred the sinful couple from the tree of life so that they could not "eat, and live forever" (Gen. 3:22). His action made it clear that the immortality promised on condition of obedience was lost through sin. They had now become mortal, subject to death. And because Adam could not transmit what he no longer possessed, "death spread to all men, because all sinned" (Rom. 5:12).

It was only God's mercy that kept Adam and Eve from dying immediately. The Son of God had offered to give His life so that they might have another opportunity-a second chance. He was "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world" (Rev. 13:8).

Hope for Humanity

Although people are born mortal, the Bible encourages them to seek immortality (see, e.g., Rom. 2:7). Jesus Christ is the source of this immortality: "The gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Rom. 6:23; cf. 1 John 5:11). He "has abolished death and brought life and immortality to light: (2 Tim. 1:10). "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). Christ Himself said that His voice would open graves and resurrect the dead (John 5:28,29).

If Christ had not come, the human situation would have been hopeless, and all who died would have perished eternally. Because of Him, however, no one need perish. Said John, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). So belief in Christ not only abolishes the penalty for sin, but it also secures for believers the priceless gift of immortality.

Christ brought "immortality to light through the gospel" (2 Tim. 1:10). Paul assures us that it is the Holy Scriptures that are able to make us "wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus" (2 Tim. 3:15). Those who do not accept the gospel will not receive immortality.

The Receiving of Immortality

The moment of the bestowal of the gift of immortality is described by Paul: "Behold, I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will 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 has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: `Death is swallowed up in victory'" (1 Cor. 15:51-54). This makes it very clear that God does not bestow immortality upon the believer at death but at the resurrection, when "the last trumpet" sounds. Then "this mortal" shall "put on immortality." While John points out that we receive the gift of eternal life when we accept Jesus Christ as personal Saviour (1 John 5:11-13), the actual realization of this gift will take place when Christ returns. Only then will we be changed from mortal to immortal, from corruptible to incorruptible.

The Nature of Death

If death is the cessation of life, what does the Bible say about a person's condition in death? What makes it important that Christians understand this Biblical teaching?

Death Is a Sleep

Death is not complete annihilation; it is only a state of temporary unconsciousness while the person awaits the resurrection. The Bible repeatedly calls this intermediate state a sleep.

Referring to their deaths, the Old Testament describes David, Solomon, and the other kings of Israel and Judah as sleeping with their forefathers (1 Kings 2:10; 11:43; 14:20,

31; 15:8; 2 Chron. 21:1; 26: 23; etc.). Job called death a sleep (Job 14:10-12), as did David (Ps. 13:3), Jeremiah (Jer. 51:39, 57), and Daniel (Dan. 12:2).

The New Testament uses the same imagery. In describing the condition of Jairus' daughter, who was dead, Christ said that she was sleeping (Matt. 9:24; Mark 5:39). He referred to the deceased Lazarus in a similar manner (John 11:11-14). Matthew wrote that many "saints who had fallen asleep were raised" after Christ's resurrection (Matt. 27:52), and in recording Stephen's martyrdom, Luke wrote that "he fell asleep" (Acts 7:60). Both Paul and Peter also called death a sleep (1 Cor. 15:51,52; 1 Thess. 4:13-17; 2 Peter 3:4).

The Biblical representation of death as a sleep clearly fits its nature, as the following comparisons demonstrate: **1.** Those who sleep are unconscious. "The dead know nothing" (Eccl. 9:5). **2.** In sleep conscious thinking ceases. "His breath goeth forth,...in that very day his thoughts perish" (Ps. 146:4, KJV). **3.** Sleep brings an end to all the days activities. "There is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going" (Eccl. 9:10). **4.** Sleep disassociates us from those who are awake, and from their activities. "Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun" (verse 6). **5.** Normal sleep renders the emotions inactive. "Their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished" (verse 6). **6.** In sleep men do not praise God. "The dead do not praise the Lord" (Ps. 115:17). **7.** Sleep presupposes an awakening. "The hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth" (John 5:28,29).

The Person Returns to Dust

To understand what happens to a person at death, one must understand what makes up his or her nature. The Bible portrays a person as an organic unity (see chapter 7 of this book). At times it uses the word soul to refer to the whole person, and at other times to the affections and emotions. But it does not teach that man comprises two separate parts. Body and soul only exist together; they form an indivisible union.

At humanity's creation, the union of the dust of the ground (earth's elements) and the breath of life produced a living being or soul. Adam did not receive a soul as a separate entity; he became a living soul (Gen. 2:7). At death the inverse takes place: the dust of the ground minus the breath of life yields a dead person or dead soul without any consciousness (Ps. 146:4). The elements that made up the body return to the earth from which they came (Gen. 3:19). The soul has no conscious existence apart from the body, and no scripture indicates that at death the soul survives as a conscious entity. Indeed, "the soul who sins shall die" (Eze. 18:20).

The Abode of the Dead

The Old Testament calls the place where people go at death sheol (Hebrew), and the New Testament hades (Greek). In the Scripture, sheol most often simply means the grave. The meaning of hades is similar to that of sheol.

All the dead go into this place (Ps. 89:48), both the righteous and the wicked. Jacob said, "I shall go down into the grave [sheol]" (Gen. 37:35). When the earth opened "its mouth" to swallow the wicked Korah and his company, they went "down alive into the pit [sheol]" (Num. 16:30).

Sheol receives the whole person at death. When Christ died, He went into the grave (hades) but at the Resurrection His soul left the grave (hades, Acts 2:27,31, or sheol, Ps. 16:10). When David thanked God for healing, he testified that his soul was saved "from the grave [sheol]" (Ps. 30:3).

The grave is not a place of consciousness. Since death is a sleep, the dead will remain in a state of unconsciousness in the grave until the resurrection, when the grave (hades) gives up its dead (Rev. 20:13).

The Spirit Returns of God

Though the body returns to dust, the spirit returns to God. Solomon said that at death "the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). This is true of all, both the righteous and the wicked.

Many have thought that this text gives evidence that the essence of the person continues to live after death. But in the Bible neither the Hebrew nor the Greek term for spirit (ruach and pneuma, respectively) refers to an intelligent entity capable of a conscious existence apart from the body. Rather, these terms refer to the "breath"-the spark of life essential to individual existence, the life principle that animates animals and human beings.

Solomon wrote, "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 ["spirit," margin; ruach]; man has no advantage over the animal....All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit [ruach] of man rises upward and if the spirit [ruach] of the animal goes down into the earth?" (Eccl. 3:19-21, NIV). So, according to Solomon, at death there is no difference between the spirits of man and beast.

Solomon's statement that the spirit (ruach) returns to God who gave it indicates that what returns to God is simply the life principle that He imparted. There is no indication that the spirit, or breath, was a conscious entity separate from the body. This ruach can be equated with the "breath of life" that God breathed into the first human being to animate his lifeless body (cf. Gen. 2:7).

Harmony Through the Scriptures

Many honest Christians who have not studied the complete teaching of the Bible on death have been unaware that death is a sleep until the resurrection. They have assumed that various passages support the idea that the spirit or soul has a conscious existence after death. Careful study reveals that the consistent teaching of the Bible is that death causes the cessation of consciousness.

Spiritualism

If the dead are completely insensate, with whom or what do spiritualist mediums communicate?

Every honest person will admit that at least some of these phenomena are fraudulent; but others cannot be

explained as such. There obviously is some supernatural power connected with spiritualism. What does the Bible teach on this point?

1. The basis of spiritualism.

Spiritualism originated with Satan's first lie to Eve-"You will not surely die" (Gen. 3:4). His words were the first sermon on the immortality of the soul. Today, throughout the world, religions of all sorts unwittingly repeat this error. For many, the divine sentence that "the soul who sins shall die" (Eze. 18:20) has been reversed to say "the soul, even though it sins, shall live eternally."

This erroneous doctrine of natural immortality has led to belief in consciousness in death. As we have seen, these positions directly contradict the Biblical teaching on this subject. They were incorporated into the Christian faith from pagan philosophy-particularly that of Plato-during the time of the great apostasy (see chapter 12 of this book). These beliefs became the prevailing view within Christianity and continue to be the dominant view today.

Belief that the dead are conscious has prepared many Christians to accept spiritualism. If the dead are alive and in the presence of God, why could they not return to earth as ministering spirits? And if they can, why not try to communicate with them to receive their counsel and instruction, to avoid misfortune, or to receive comfort in sorrow?

Building on this line of reasoning, Satan and his angels (Rev. 12:4, 9) have established a channel of communication through which they can accomplish their deception. Through such means as spiritualistic seances they impersonate departed loved ones, bringing supposed comfort and assurance to the living. At times they predict future events, which, when proved to be accurate, give them credibility. Then the dangerous heresies they proclaim take on the patina of authenticity, even though they contradict the Bible and God's law. Having removed the barriers against evil, Satan has free rein to lead people away from God and to certain destruction.

2. Warning against spiritualism.

No one need be deceived by spiritualism. The Bible clearly exposes its claims as false. As we have seen, the Bible tells us that the dead do not know anything, that they lie unconscious in the grave.

The Bible also strongly forbids any attempt to communicate with the dead or the spirit world. It says that those who claim to communicate with the dead, as spiritualistic mediums do today, are actually communicating with "familiar spirits" that are "spirits of devils." The Lord said these activities were abominations, and that those who perpetrated them were to be punished by death (Lev. 19:31; 20:27; cf. Deut. 18:10,11).

Isaiah expressed well the foolishness of spiritualism: "When they say to you, 'Seek those who are mediums and wizards, who whisper and mutter,' should not a people seek their God? Should they seek the dead on behalf of the living? To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them" (Isa. 8:19,20). Indeed, only the teachings of the Bible can safeguard Christians against this overwhelming deception.

3. Manifestations of spiritualism.

The Bible records a number of spiritualistic activities—from the magicians of Pharaoh and the magicians, astrologers, and sorcerers of Nineveh and Babylon to the witches and mediums of Israel—and condemns them all. One example is the seance the witch of Endor conjured for Saul with which we began this chapter.

Scripture says, "When Saul inquired of the Lord, the Lord did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets" (1 Sam. 28:6). God, then, had nothing to do with what happened at Endor. Saul was deceived by a demon impersonating the dead Samuel; he never saw the real Samuel. The witch saw the form of an old man while Saul only "perceived" or concluded that it was Samuel (verse 14).

If we are to believe that that apparition truly was Samuel, we must be prepared to believe that witches, wizards, necromancers, sorcerers, spiritualists, or mediums can call the righteous dead from wherever they go when they die. We must also accept that the godly Samuel existed in a conscious state in the earth, because the old man ascended "out of the earth" (verse 13).

This seance brought Saul despair, not hope. The next day he committed suicide (1 Sam. 31:4). Yet the so-called Samuel had predicted that on that day Saul and his sons would be with him (1 Sam. 28:19). If he were correct, we would have to conclude that after death the disobedient Saul and the righteous Samuel dwelt together. Instead, we must conclude that an evil angel brought about the deceptive events that occurred at this seance.

4. The final delusion.

In the past the manifestations of spiritualism were confined to the realm of the occult, but more recently spiritualism has taken on a "Christian" appearance so that it might deceive the Christian world. In professing to accept Christ and the Bible, spiritualism has become an extremely dangerous enemy to believers. Its effects are subtle and deceptive. Through the influence of spiritualism "the Bible is interpreted in a manner that is pleasing to the unrenewed heart, while its solemn and vital truths are made of no effect. Love is dwelt upon as the chief attribute of God, but it is degraded to a weak sentimentalism, making little distinction between good and evil. God's justice, His denunciations of sin, the requirements of His holy law, are all kept out of sight. The people are taught to regard the Decalogue as a dead letter. Pleasing, bewitching fables captivate the senses and lead men to reject the Bible as the foundation of their faith."

Through this means right and wrong become relative and each person, or situation, or culture becomes the norm as to what is "truth." In essence each person becomes a god, fulfilling Satan's promise that "ye shall be as gods" (Gen. 3:5, KJV).

Before us is "the hour of trial which shall come upon the whole world, to test those who dwell on the earth" (Rev. 3:10). Satan is about to use great signs and miracles in his final effort to deceive the world. Speaking of this masterful delusion, John said, "I saw three unclean spirits like frogs....They are spirits of demons, performing signs, which go out to the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty" (Rev. 16:13,14; cf. 13:13,14).

Only those who are kept by the power of God, having their minds fortified with the truths of Scripture, accepting it as their only authority, will be able to escape. All others have no protection and will be swept away by this delusion.

The First and Second Deaths

The second death is the final punishment of unrepentant sinners—all whose names are not written in the book of life—that takes place at the end of the 1000 years (see chapter 26). From this death there is no resurrection. With the destruction of Satan and the unrighteous, sin is eradicated and death itself is destroyed (1 Cor. 15:26; Rev. 20:14; 21:8). Christ has given the assurance that everyone "who overcomes shall not be hurt by the second death" (Rev. 2:11).

Based on what Scripture has designated the second death, we can assume that the first death is what every person—except those who are translated—experiences as a result of Adam's transgression. It is "the normal outworking on humanity of the degenerative effects of sin."

Resurrection

Resurrection is "the restoration of life, together with fullness of being and personality, subsequent to death." Because humanity is subject to death, there must be a resurrection if they are to experience life beyond the grave. Throughout the Old and New Testaments, God's messengers have expressed hope in a resurrection (Job 14:13-15; 19:25-29; Ps. 49:15; 73:24; Isa. 26:19; 1 Cor. 15). The hope of the resurrection, for which we have solid evidence, encourages us that we can enjoy a better future beyond this present world in which death is the destiny of all.

Christ's Resurrection

The resurrection of the righteous dead to immortality is closely associated with Christ's resurrection because it is the resurrected Christ who eventually will raise up the dead (John 5:28,29).

1. Its importance.

What would have happened if Christ had not been resurrected? Paul summarizes the consequences: a. There would be no use in preaching the gospel: "If Christ is not risen, then our preaching is vain" (1 Cor. 15:14). b. There would be no forgiveness of sins: "And if Christ is not risen,...you are still in your sins!" (verse 17). c. There would be no purpose in believing in Jesus: "And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile" (verse 17). d. There would be no general resurrection from the dead: "Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?" (verse 12). e. There would be no hope beyond the grave: "If Christ is not risen,...Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished" (verses 17,18).

2. A bodily resurrection.

The Christ who came from the tomb was the same Jesus who lived here in the flesh. Now He had a glorified body, but it was still a real body. It was so real that others did not even notice a difference (Luke 24:13-27; John 20:14-18).

Jesus Himself denied that He was some kind of spirit or ghost. Speaking to His disciples He said, "Behold My hands and My feet...Handle Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see I have" (Luke 24:39). To prove the physical reality of His resurrection, He also ate in their presence (verse 43).

3. Its impact.

The Resurrection had an electrifying impact on Christ's disciples. It transformed a group of weak and frightened men into valiant apostles ready to do anything for their Lord (Phil. 3:10,11; Acts 4:33). The mission they undertook as a result of it shook the Roman Empire and turned the world upside down (Acts 17:6).

"It was the certainty of Christ's resurrection that brought point and power to the preaching of the gospel (cf. Phil. 3:10,11). Peter speaks of the 'resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead' as producing a 'lively hope' in believers (1 Peter 1:3). The apostles considered themselves ordained to be witnesses 'of his resurrection' (Acts 1:22), and based their teaching of the resurrection of Christ on the Messianic predictions of the Old Testament (Acts 2:31). It was their personal knowledge of 'the resurrection of the Lord Jesus' that gave 'great power' to their witness (Acts 4:33). The apostles drew the opposition of the Jewish leaders when they went forth preaching 'through Jesus the resurrection from the dead' (verse 2)...When arraigned before the Sanhedrin, Paul declared that it was because of his 'hope and resurrection of the dead' that he had been 'called in question' before them (Acts 23:6; cf. 24:21). To the Romans, Paul wrote that Jesus Christ was 'declared to be the Son of God with power...by the resurrection from the dead' (Rom. 1:4). In baptism, he explained, the Christian testifies to his faith in the resurrection of Christ (Rom. 6:4,5)."

The Two Resurrections

Christ taught that there are two general resurrections: a "resurrection of life" for the just and a "resurrection of condemnation" for the unjust (John 5:28,29; Acts 24:15). The 1000 years separates these resurrections (Rev. 20:4,5).

1. The resurrection of life.

Those who are raised in the first resurrection are called "blessed and holy" (Rev. 20:6). They will not experience the second death in the lake of fire at the close of the 1000 years (verse 14). This resurrection to life and immortality (John 5:29; 1 Cor. 15:52,53) takes place at the Second Advent (1 Cor. 15:22,23; 1 Thess. 4:15-18). Those who experience it cannot die anymore (Luke 20:36). They are united with Christ forever.

What will the resurrected body be like? Like Christ, the resurrected saints will have real bodies. And as Christ arose a glorified being, so will the righteous. Paul said that Christ "will transform our lowly body that it may be conformed to His glorious body" (Phil. 3:21). He calls the unglorified body and the glorified one the "natural body" and the "spiritual body," respectively; the former being mortal and corruptible, the latter immortal and imperishable. The change from mortality to immortality takes place instantaneously at the resurrection (see 1 Cor. 15:42-54).

2. The resurrection of condemnation.

The unrighteous are raised in the second general resurrection, which takes place at the end of the 1000 years (see chapter 26 of this book). This resurrection proceeds to the final judgment and condemnation (John 5:29). Those whose names are not found in the

book of life will be raised at this time and "cast into the lake of fire" and experience the second death (Rev. 20:15, 14).

They could have avoided this tragic end. In unmistakable language Scripture presents God's way to escape: "Repent! Turn away from all your offenses; then sin will not be your downfall. Rid yourselves of all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die?...For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!" (Eze. 18:30-32, NIV).

Christ promises that "he who overcomes shall not be hurt at all by the second death" (Rev. 2:11). Those who accept Jesus and the salvation He brings will experience an indescribable joy at His climactic return. In never-fading happiness, they will spend eternity fellowshiping with their Lord and Saviour.