

## WHAT HAPPENS AT DEATH

Hebrews 2:15 states that many "...through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." God has provided answers to the unsettled questions concerning the topic of death. He has stated in the word that He does not want us "to be uninformed (ignorant, KJV) about those who are asleep (I Thess. 4:13). The Apostle Paul further states: "Behold I tell you a mystery, we shall not all sleep..." I Cor. 15:51). The mysteries of the New Testament have been revealed and what was a mystery under the Jewish system has been explained and what happens at death is no longer a mystery. However, everything that God says is contradicted by Satan, who "is a liar and the father of liars" (Jn.8:44). The first recorded words of Satan was the lie he told Eve in the garden when he assured her that, although God had warned Adam and Eve that they would die if they partook of the forbidden fruit, he assured her that "...*You will not surely die.*" (Gen. 3:4). This lie brought both spiritual and physical death upon all mankind and death is still a mystery to most people but should not be a mystery to Christians. However, the ancient pagan Greek philosophy that taught man has an immortal soul caught on, and by the third century it had been harmonized into a watered-down Christianity, despite not being found in the Bible. Over the centuries outrageous falsehoods have been attached to this grievous doctrine. The vast majority of churches today have embraced this doctrine that originated in the garden by Satan, and death is not looked upon as an enemy (I Cor. 15:26), but as a door to a better life. The idea that there is no such thing as death is a favorite doctrine within most religious circles today and is advocated by the majority of the "men of the cloth" who fill our pulpits (if the church still has a pulpit). Many grieving love ones are assured at funerals that the deceased "is now enjoying a better life in the presence of God." This is a denial that death is real and assures them that their loved one is not really dead.

Scottish Bible scholar Edward Irving in *The Second Advent of Our Lord* wrote "instead of looking to the glorious appearing of the Lord and all the circumstances connected with it, the church has nearly forgotten it, and instead of it, they take up miserable substitutes, such as every man should think only of the day of his death, from which consideration there comes not joy nor strength, but weakness and oppression." Contrast this with Dr. Walter Martin, noted "Christian writer" in his work *The Kingdom of the Cults*, who represents the position of orthodox Christianity on this subject, wrote: "The great hope of the believer is the joy of personal union with the Lord, and this union, the Apostle Paul tell us, takes place at the death of the body." There is no such statement in the thirteen epistles the Apostle Paul wrote nor is such a statement found anywhere else in the Bible. This says the hope of the Christian is his own death and declares the resurrection of the believer unnecessary. If disembodied souls (there is no indication in the Bible that a disembodied soul or spirit lives on after a person is dead) are alive and enjoy the presence of God for eternity, then there is no need of a resurrection and judgment. In fact, believing that the dead are conscious in heaven and hell reduces the resurrection and judgment to insignificance. On disembodiment, Anthony F. Buzzard writes in *Our Fathers Who Aren't in Heaven*: "Paul himself shrank in horror from disembodiment, as any Hebrew would. Throughout the whole New Testament there is not a

single reference to Christians surviving as spirits deprived of their bodies, much less of their having passed into the heavens. For that reason, that favorite text 'absent from the body and present with the Lord' (II Cor. 5:8) ought not be read through Greek spectacles as if Paul meant 'at home' as a disembodied spirit. Throughout his writings he knows of only one homecoming. What he longed for was the body and the life to be gained through resurrection and entrance into the Kingdom of God (I Cor. 15:50-55)."

What happens, then, when a person dies, both Christian and unbeliever? The Bible is plain on this subject, but is vehemently denied by most commentators, preachers and Christians alike. There are at least 53 scriptures God chose to use the expression "sleep" or the equivalent, with reference to the death of man, both believer and non-believer: 41 passages in the Old Testament and 12 in the New Testament. We list a few from the Old Testament and all twelve in the New Testament: Job 14:12: "Man lies down and does not rise, he will not be aroused out of his *sleep*." Psalm 13:3 "I will *sleep* the *sleep* of death." Psalm 115:17: "The *dead* do not praise the Lord, nor any who go down in silence." Psalm 146:4 "In mortal man, his spirit departs, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts *perish*." Ecc. 9:5: "The *dead* know not anything." Ecc. 9:10: "There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the *grave* where you are going." Dan. 12:2: "Many of those who *sleep* in the dust of the ground will awake, these to everlasting life but others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." Matt. 9:24: "He said, 'the girl is not dead but is *asleep*,' And they began laughing at him." Matt.27:52, 53: "The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had *fallen asleep* were raised; and coming out of the tombs after his resurrection they entered the holy city." Luke 8:52, 53: "Now they were all weeping and lamenting for her; but he said, 'Stop weeping, for she has not died, but is *asleep*.' And they began laughing at him, knowing that she had *died*." John 11:11-14: "He said to them, 'Our friend Lazarus has *fallen asleep*. I go that I may awaken him out of *sleep*.' The disciples said to him, 'Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover.' Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought he was speaking of literal sleep. Jesus said to them plainly, 'Lazarus is *dead*.'" Acts 7:60: (the stoning of Stephen) "And having said this he *fell asleep*." Acts 13:36: "For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, *fell asleep*, and he was laid among the fathers and underwent decay." I Corinthians 15:6: "After that he appeared to more than five hundred brethren at one time, most who remain until now, but some have *fallen asleep*." Ver. 18: "Then those who have *fallen asleep* in Christ have *perished*" Ver.20: "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are *asleep*." Ver. 51: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we shall not all, *sleep*, but we will be changed." I Thess. 4:13 & !5: "we do not want you to be uninformed about those who are *asleep*, so you do not grieve as others who have no hope...we shall not precede those who are *asleep*." II Peter: 3:4: "Since the fathers *fell asleep* all things continue just as it were from the beginning of creation." None of these verses of scripture state or even implies that at death one becomes instantly conscious or that at death the saints go immediately to heaven to receive their reward, as is preached so often and so vehemently believed by most Christians. Yet anyone who insist that death is a sleep, is dismissed and ridiculed today by the "learned" clergy.

We have been considering what happens at death, not the destiny of those who are *asleep*. Jesus stated in John 5:28, 29: "An hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs will hear his voice and will come forth; those who did good to a resurrection of life, those who have committed evil to a resurrection of judgment." This is echoed by the apostle Paul in Acts 24:15: "...there will certainly be a resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked." These scriptures confirm the prophesy of Daniel in Daniel 12:2: "Many who sleep in the dust of the ground will awake, some to everlasting life, but others to disgrace and everlasting contempt." These scriptures show that it is at the resurrection not at death that the saints receive everlasting life and the wicked receive judgment and everlasting contempt. As Curtis Dickinson wrote in *The Witness*: "It is the common lot of all to die, fall asleep. But there is a vast difference in the conditions, since only those who are Christians 'fall asleep in Christ' and will awake in his likeness. All the rest die in the fear of awaking to judgment and condemnation to the punishment of destruction. Only the Christian, redeemed from sin and its penalty has any promise that his mortality may be 'swallowed up in life.'"

Further, in speaking of the believer, the Apostle Paul shows it is at resurrection, when the last trumpet sounds and the dead are raised, that they receive immortality. I Corinthians 15:51-54: "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound and the dead will be raised incorruptible and we will 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." Many who pride themselves in being "Born Again, Fundamentalist, Evangelical, Bible believing (King James Version only) Christians," and most modern, main stream, seminary educated Pastors who still profess to be giving attention to the scriptures, will say that Paul in this passage is speaking of the body only, and the "immortal soul" has been with the Lord and here "God is bringing them with him" (I Thess. 4:14) to be reunited with the body. If the soul is immortal and has been existing in a disembodied state in Paradise or Heaven, how can the believer "put on immortality" if it is already enjoying immortality in the presence of the Lord?

The Scriptures do not speak "going to heaven but the Apostles spoke of a treasure being prepared now with God in heaven" (Matt. 6:20; 19:21), a reward "reserved in heaven" as "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (I Peter 1:4, 5), at Christ's return to earth. The promise of a life after death is never said to be "going to heaven," rather "inheriting or entering the kingdom" (Matt. 25:34; Gal. 5:21; I Cor. 6:9; Eph. 5:5). In II Peter 1:11 after listing some spiritual qualities that should be evident in every believer's life he states: "In this way the entrance into the *eternal Kingdom* will be abundantly supplied to you." Nigel Tuner observed in *The Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges* that the Greek word *aiionios* (eternal) means "belonging to the future age." Paul states that in this present age "the anxious longing of the creation waits eagerly for the manifestation of the sons of God...the creation itself will be set free from the slavery of corruption into the glory of the children of God" (Rom. 8:19-22). The earth being renewed and transformed becomes the destiny of the believer who will have "been made to be a kingdom of priests to our God, and they will reign upon the earth" (Rev. 5:10).

The Scriptures we have cited in this article shows there will be a resurrection of judgment and of everlasting contempt of the wicked and unbelieving, but does the Bible show what this means? We believe it does. The soul is not immortal, and the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), not eternity in Hell. If the wages of sin is eternal punishment, then Christ would have had to have been punished eternally in order to pay the wages of sin. When he died the wages of sin against the sinner was paid in full. Destiny in eternity is not a question of heaven or hell, but a question of life or death. At resurrection the Christian is given immortality and the sinner perishes. The unrepentant will be punished, but this period of conscious punishment will be temporary then they will be destroyed and cease to exist.

There are many questions and much controversy about the Scriptural teaching on Hell. There are two reasons for this: first, the way three words in Scripture is translated and second, the failure of Bible expositors to identify the meaning of New Testament words with the meaning of the same Old Testament words. It is not our purpose in this article to discuss these two subjects. Rather we want to discuss the actual words used to reference to the destiny of the unbeliever.

"*Death*:" Rom. 3:23: "The wages of sin is *death*" (not unending torture). The word "death" is usually interpreted as "separation" or "death of the body," and the soul lives on in a disembodied state. Scripture never says that at death the soul survives in another realm. Death is a cessation of life. James states "the body without the *spirit* (not the soul) is dead" (James 2:26). Ezek. 18:4: "The soul (person) who sins shall die."

"*Perish*:" John 3:16: Jesus did not say "he that believes not shall spend eternity in hell." Rather, "he shall *perish*." II Peter 3:9: The Lord does "not wish any to *perish* but all to come to repentance." II Thessalonians 2:10: "...with all the deception of wickedness for those who *perish* because they did not receive the love of the truth so as to be saved." Luke 13: 3, 5: "I tell you unless you repent you will all likewise *perish*." John 10:28: "I give eternal life to them, and they will never *perish*." Acts 13:40, 41: "Take heed, so that the thing spoken by the prophets come upon you: 'Behold, you scoffers, and marvel, and *perish*.'" I Cor. 1:18: "The word of the cross is foolishness to those who are *perishing*, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God." II Cor. 2:15: "For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are *perishing*." II Cor 4:3: "And if our gospel is veiled it is veiled to *those* who are *perishing*."

"*Destroy, destruction*:" Matt. 10:28: "Do not fear those who kill the body but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to *destroy* both body and soul in Gehenna." II Thess. 1:9 "Those who do not know God and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus will pay the penalty of *eternal destruction* from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his power." II Peter 2:1,3: "There will be false teachers among you who will secretly introduce destructive heresies, even denying the Master who bought them, bringing swift *destruction* upon them...and their *destruction* is not asleep." I Cor. 3:16, 17: "Do you not know you are the temple of God, and God dwells in you? If any man destroys the temple of God, God will *destroy* him..." Rev. 11:18: "Your wrath came...to *destroy* those who destroy the earth." II Pet. 3:7: "By His word the present heavens and earth are being reserved for fire, kept for the day of judgment and *destruction* of ungodly men."