



RIP

Rest

in the

Prince of Peace

5

A matter of life and death

If a man dies, shall he live again? Man gives up the ghost, and where is he? Job 14:14,10.

THAT is the big question. Where do we go when we die? Well, it depends, some say, whether you were naughty or nice. Conventional thinking says, “Up if you’re good; down if you’re bad. It’s either heaven or hell in a hurry—when you die at last the die is cast, and your reward, for better or for worse, is dished out immediately on the spot.”



However, the Bible paints a very different picture. Jesus said, “Behold, I come quickly and my reward is with me to give to every man according as his work shall be.” Rev. 22:12. Jesus hasn’t come yet, so the rewards are still future.

In fact, God “has appointed a *day*, in which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he has ordained” Acts 17:31. So, there is a specific day of

judgment that has already been appointed by God, and a specific man who has been ordained to do the judging: our “Advocate, Jesus Christ the righteous.” 1John 2:1.

But what happens to all those who will have died before Christ comes back with his rewards? The Bible has a lot to say about that! Job suffered the assaults of Satan, pain and loss until he wished he had never been born. “Why didn’t I die in the womb?” he asks (Job 3:11), “I should have **slept**: then had I been at rest” (verse 13). “For now shall I **sleep** in the dust” Job 7:21. “The grave is my house... our rest together is in the dust” Job 17:13,16. There they “**sleep** the **sleep** of death” Psalm 13:3.

Now let’s see what happens when Jesus returns. In 1Thessa-lonians 4, Paul writes about “them which are **asleep**”, “those which **sleep** in Jesus.” Verses 13-15. “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” 1Cor. 15:51,52.

The last trump is sounded at the Second Coming when “the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and the trump of God, and the **dead** in Christ shall rise first” 1Thes. 4:16. “And then he shall send his angels with the great sound of a trumpet” “and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part

of the earth” Matt. 24:31; Mark 13:27. The sleeping dead in Christ, hear the Lord’s voice when he shouts and the trumpet sounds.

Jesus referred to this as well. “...the dead shall **hear the voice** of the Son of God: and they that **hear** shall live” John 5:25. Then he said, “...all that are in the graves shall **hear his voice**, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damn-ation.” Verses 28, 29.

And what does Jesus say when he shouts so loud it raises the dead? “**Awake** and sing, ye that dwell in dust!... and the earth shall cast out the dead.” Isaiah 26:19. Then “many of them that **sleep in the dust** of the earth shall **awake**, some to everlasting life, and some to shame *and* everlasting con-tempt.” Dan. 12:2. These verses tell of a time when “many” people will be resurrected from the dead. They



will awake from their sleep.

Jesus also called death a sleep. Once he received word that his friend Lazarus was sick. But Jesus

waited two more days and then said to his disciples, “Our friend Lazarus **sleeps**; but I go, that I may awake him out of **sleep**.” John 11:11. “Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” Verse 14.

Next, Jairus had a 12 year old daughter who died before Jesus could arrive. But the Son of God told the grieving father, “Be not afraid, only believe and she shall be made whole!” (Luke 8:50; Mark 5:36). And when they arrived at the house, with all the weeping and wailing, “a tumult” the Bible says (Mark 5:38), Jesus said, Why are you making all this fuss and weeping? “The damsel is not dead, but **sleeps**.”

Jesus could speak this way because he was able to raise the dead from their sleep. He said, “For as the Father raises up the dead, and gives them life; even so the Son gives life to whom he will” John 5:21.

The Father raised One from the dead—His own Son. “Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father” Rom. 6:4. “God the Father, who raised him from the dead” Gal. 1:1. “The Prince of life, whom God has raised from the dead” Acts 3:15. “God, having raised up his Son Jesus” Acts 3:26. “Jesus Christ of Nazareth...whom God raised from the dead” Acts 4:10. “God raised him from the dead” Acts 13:30; Col. 2:12. “Him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead” Rom. 4:24. “Him that raised up Jesus

from the dead” Rom. 8:11. “He which raised up the Lord Jesus” 2Cor 4:14. “The God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory...raised him from the dead” Eph. 1:17,20. “The living and true God ...raised him from the dead” 1Thes. 1:9,10. “Confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved” Rom. 10:9.

The resurrection of Jesus, the Son of God, from the dead is vital to our salvation. The Father raised His Son, (“the first fruits of them that **sleep**” 1Cor. 15:20) and then the Son will raise all who died trusting in Him as the Son of God, their Saviour, but who now **sleep** in the dust.

Because “the Father has life in Himself so has He given to the Son to have life in himself” John 5:26. Thus the Son, “the second Adam was made a life-giving spirit” (1Cor. 15:45) to give life to whomever he will. “But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ’s at his coming” 1Cor. 15:23.

Until Jesus returns and calls the sleeping dead up from their graves, “they shall not **awake**, nor be raised out of their **sleep**... His sons come to honor and he knows it not” Job

14:12, 21. The dead are totally unaware of what’s happening. Why?

Because “the dead **know not** anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished... for *there is* no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave” Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10. “For in death there is no remembrance of Thee, in the grave who shall give Thee thanks?” Psalm 6:5. “His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his **thoughts perish**” Psalm 146:4.

Yet God’s thoughts about those who sleep do not perish! “In His hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all man-



kind.” Job 12:10. Job was confident that “my witness is in heaven, and my record is on high” Job 16:21. He believed in the resurrection; that “at the latter day upon the earth, though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: whom I shall see for myself” Job 19:25-27.



So, what happens at death? “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” Ecclesiastes 12:7. Does this mean that the body sleeps in the dust, but the soul lives on in the spirit? What is the difference between the soul and the spirit anyway?

Paul tells us that man is composed of “spirit and soul and body” 1Thes. 5:23. Read this and you will find that he is praying to God that “your whole spirit and soul and body will be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ”—not just your soul or your spirit. They are an integrated, functioning package in life and cease to operate or function when separated at death.

In the beginning, when “God who created all things by Jesus Christ” (Eph. 3:9) said, “Let us make man in our image” (Gen. 1:26), he “breathed into” Adam’s nostrils “the breath of life, and man became a living soul” Gen 2:7. Before “the breath of the Almighty” (Job 33:4) gave him life, Adam was just “the dust of the ground” (Gen. 2:7). There was no life, no breath, no spirit, no thought, no consciousness. So, consequently, Adam was not yet a living soul, a living being.

Notice that Adam was not *given* a living soul—he *became* one. Not until both the breath and the body are combined does a person really live as a conscious, thinking human being. The soft-ware cannot function apart from the hardware, and the hardware cannot operate without the soft-ware installed and running.

“All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils” Job 27:3. “The Spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life” Job 33:4. If the Almighty “gather unto Himself His spirit and His breath, all flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust.” Job 34:14,15.

When we die, our Creator saves our software in backup storage, preserved until the resurrection. When he returns to “receive us” unto himself, our software will be loaded into new upgraded hardware with an eternal lifetime

warranty! Then Jesus reboots us and we are resurrected, once again becoming a living soul.

But the reverse is also true. “You take away their breath, they die, and return to their dust” Psalm 104:29. Remove the software and the program no longer functions, calculations stop, operation ceases. “His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his **thoughts perish**” Psalm 146:4. The software is the mental life of a computer. Physical life may continue, the power is still connected; the light is on but nobody is home. But pull the plug and even the hardware dies.

Even the righteous person who dies stops thinking at death. “For the grave cannot praise thee, death can *not* celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise thee” Isaiah 38:18,19.

So, the spirit goes back to God, the body returns to the dust. But what happens to the soul? Who does it belong to? “All souls are mine,” says the Lord, “as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sins, it shall die” Ezekiel 18:4. Even the soul dies. Remember, the soul came into existence after breath entered the body of Adam; so also, the soul ceases to exist when the breath leaves the body.

In all things we must consider the truth as it is in Jesus. At his death on the cross, Jesus said to his Father who was as near to His Son

as He was on the mount of transfiguration—then in a cloud of glory, now enshrouded in deep darkness—“Father, Into Thy hands I commend my spirit” Luke 23:46.



His spirit, His life history, His character and memory, His software, went back to God his Father, who gave it to him in the beginning (John 5:26). And now the Father keeps the spirit of His Son until resurrection morning when “God the Father, who raised him from the dead” (Gal. 1:1) gave His Son the commandment to take up his life again (John 10:18).

Jesus “poured out his soul unto death” Isaiah 58:12. But he became a living soul again when his Father raised him from the dead and gave him back his Spirit, his divine software. Once again he was begotten. “God raised him from the dead...he hath raised up Jesus **again**; as it is also written in the second Psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee” Acts

13:30,33. His Father had begotten His Son again, giving him to have life in himself once again.

Jesus, the Son of the living God and express image of his Father's person (Matt. 16:16; Heb. 1:3), will resurrect his sleeping saints just as his Father resurrected him. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which **sleep** in Jesus will God bring with him" 1Thes. 4:14.

Will Jesus return to this earth bringing with him all the saints from heaven? Or, will he return to this earth and bring with him all the saints back to his Father's house as he promised? "I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there you may be also." John 14:2,3.

The Son of God will come in the clouds of heaven sitting on the right hand of power, next to his Father in all his glory and in the glory of the angels, to raise his sleeping children and change them in "the twinkling of an eye", to put on immortality and join him in the cloud with glorified bodies.

Paul is remembered for saying, "To be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord" 2Cor. 5:8. But he also said at the end of his life, "The time of my departure is at hand... there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing." 2Tim. 4:6,8. He looked forward to receiving his reward on the day when Jesus, the judge of all, will "appear the second time" Heb. 9:28.



There is no question that “the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the living and the dead at his appearing” (2Tim. 4:1) does not reward us when we die, but when he returns to this earth and appears the second time. “It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” Heb. 9:27. Likewise, this appointed day of judgment takes place in the future.

Peter confirmed this fact on the day of Pentecost. “Let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day... For David is not ascended into the heavens” Acts 2:29,34.

Paul also used David as an example. “For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on **sleep**, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption” Acts 13:36. Corruption is decay, returning to dust, where David to this day sleeps.

In the book of Hebrews it is made very plain that those who die are not rewarded before those who will be alive when Jesus comes again. “These all died in faith, not having received the promises” Heb. 11:13. This is called “the faith chapter” because it is a list of many in the Bible who lived and died in the faith of a better land, looking for the city of God. “And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received

not the promise: [they didn’t enter into the city, they didn’t reach the Promised Land, the heavenly Caanan] God having provided some better thing for us [who remain living today], that they without us should not be made perfect” Heb. 11:39, 40.

Those who have died in the faith and those who still live by faith will receive the promise to-gether at the same time. “The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive *and* remain shall be caught up **together** with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so



shall we ever be with the Lord” 1Thes. 4:16,17.

The Bible does not teach that death is the ticket to heaven, that we receive our final rewards when we die. Rather, both the living and the dead will meet the Lord together when he comes in the clouds to gather His children and take them to His Father’s house where there are many mansions prepared for them.