

What happens when a **person dies**?

An Age Old Question

Is death the end? What really happens at death? Is there life after the grave? These are questions that have been on the collective mind of all peoples since the very dawn of time. Various religions and philosophies seek to provide answers to this ever-important, ever-relevant question. As we have discovered in our previous lessons, the Bible provides clear answers to life's toughest questions. The subject of death is no different. In this lesson we will address the question of life after death from a biblical perspective. The answers we'll discover are thrilling and, for some, shocking!

What Exactly Is Death?

It is difficult to arrive at the right answers when the wrong questions are asked. One of the reasons for the prevalent confusion on the subject of death is a misunderstanding of what death actually is. Here's a simple, working definition:

› the cessation of life; the end of life

Now, before trying to answer the question of whether there is there life after death, we must first lay a good foundation by asking a related and very important question: What is life? As we'll see, in order to understand what death is, we must first understand what life is.

What Exactly Is Life?

The Bible gives us an accurate record of the origins of life on earth. It reveals foundationally important details regarding the first humans—Adam and Eve. Notice Genesis 2:7:

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being."

Note carefully the elements employed in the creation of human life. The text says that there were two such elements: 1) the dust of the ground and 2) the breath of life. When these two "ingredients" were joined, man "became a living being." The King James Version (KJV) Bible says that man "became a living soul." This is simple formula crucial in correctly understanding death. Man was not given a soul, rather he became a soul. This one point alone will save

us from much confusion regarding death. It is commonly believed today that people have souls. But it is more accurate to say that people are souls. By way of analogy, consider a light bulb. In order for a bulb to produce light there needs to be two elements: 1) the physical bulb and 2) electricity. If all you had was the bulb, but no electricity, you have no light. And vice versa.

So it is with humankind. Both the body ("the housing") and the breath of God ("the electricity") are necessary for life. Here it is:

› Body + Breath = a living being, or "soul"

The breath of God is not some separate, conscious entity. Many people incorrectly think of it as a "soul" or a "spirit" that consciously lives on after we physically die. But this is not Biblical. The breath of God is not a separate conscious entity that exists and acts as man's "soul", it is simply the life giving spark and vitality that come from God alone. See Job 27:3; 33:4.

Also, this point becomes clearer still when the Bible records that the animals are also a union of the same two ingredients. See Genesis 7:15, 22.

Death: The Rewind Effect

Now that we understand what constitutes human life, it's easier to understand what happens at death. Notice Genesis 3:19:

"In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

There it is. Death is simply rewind. The two elements go back where they came from! See also Ecclesiastes 12:7 and Psalm 146:4. There is no soul that continues to live on after death! (Note: the word "*Spirit*" in Psalm 146:4 is the Hebrew word *ruach*, which means, you guessed it, breath!) Also, when the animals die, the same process of rewind occurs. Notice Psalm 104:25, 29 and Ecclesiastes 3:18-21. Both man and animal go to the same place after death—the body simply returns to the earth (you know, "ashes to ashes, dust to dust") and the breath returns back to God. There is no eternal or immortal soul that continues to live on after death.

'Rest' in Peace

Interestingly and profoundly, the Bible actually refers to death as a sleep more than 70 times! See, for example, John 11:11-14, 20-26; 1Cor. 15:51; 1Thes. 4:15; Acts 7:60.

"So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep." Job 14:12

"... lest I sleep the sleep of death." Psalm 13:3

The Bible is unmistakably clear: death is like a sleep. It is not a continued life in some "spirit form".

The Dead Are Not Conscious

It is amazing how a misunderstanding about life after death can lead people into false hopes and deceptions. Many, for example, are trying to contact the dead through spiritual mediums and "channelers", but the Bible teaches that the dead are not conscious and cannot communicate with us. See Psalm 6:5; 115:17; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10. Consider also that in ancient Israel witches and spiritual mediums—people who supposedly were talking to dead people—were strictly forbidden and punished. See Leviticus 19:31; 20:6, 27; Deut. 18:10, 11.

Waking Up From the Sleep of Death

Though the Bible does not teach that the dead continue to live on immediately after dying, it does teach that the dead will live again! This idea of living again was understood by all the Bible writers. Notice what it says in Job 14:1, 2, 7, 9-15. In verse 15, Job says, *"you will call and I will answer."* What was he referring to? Jesus provides the answer in John 5:28, 29—*"those who are in the graves will hear His voice."* Now the important thing about this is that it takes place at the end of time, when Jesus returns. In John 6:39, 40, Jesus says that the dead awake and rise *"at the last day."*

If Not From The Bible, Then From Where?

We have discovered that the dead return to an unconscious state that the Bible calls sleep. There is no soul that continues to live after death. The dead are dead until the resurrection *"at the last day."* So if this misunderstanding about death did not come from the Bible, where did it come from? The answer is quite disturbing, but not surprising. Notice Genesis 3:4:

"Then the serpent said to the woman, 'You will not surely die.'"

This is how Satan tricked Eve into taking the forbidden fruit. He lied to her about what God said in regard to death. This lie, or some form of it, has been variously adopted and believed by most pagan cultures. The Egyptians, Babylonians, and Greeks are just a few. They were simply following in the naïve footsteps of Eve—believing Satan rather than God!

The Key to the Grave

One of the most beautiful promises in the Bible is in Revelation 1:18: *"I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of Hades and of Death."* Hades is the grave. Death is a sleep. He who puts his confidence and hope in the capable, death-defying hands of Jesus can face death without fear! Jesus has the keys! His resurrection from the death is a guarantee to all who put their faith and trust in Him!