



discover immortality

*Uncover the secret of what happens after death
and take the fear out of your future*

Copyright © 2012 Adventist Media Network

Published by HopeChannel

Written by Clifford Goldstein

Edited by John Gate & Sue Robinson

Art direction by Jared Madden & Shelley Poole

Layout by Elena Janakijovska

Typeset in Unifers

Printed in Australia by Signs Publishing Company®

Unless otherwise stated all Bible texts are from the **New King James Version**

For more information about this series, visit www.beyond.info



discover immortality

In ancient Egypt, when the rich gave a party and the meal ended, a man carried into the room a coffin, carved and painted to look like the real thing. Egyptian coffins, as we've seen in pictures, were often painted and carved to look like people. The man carrying the coffin, anywhere from 18 inches to three feet long, would then show it to the guests and utter these words to each one individually: *Look upon this body as you eat and drink and enjoy yourself; for you will be just like it when you are dead.*

That might seem a little crude by our standards - especially at a party - but who can argue with the point? Death is real, death is cruel, and death is an ever-present reality. Who hasn't struggled with the reality of death, the pain of parting when it comes, the fear of the unknown, or the harsh finality when it does?

And we hate it too. And that's because we *were* never meant to die. Death is, really, the most unnatural act. We're so used to it we just take for granted that death is part of life. Kind of ironic isn't it, to say that death is part of life. Death is the negation of life, not part of it. Life and death are a contrast, like existence and non-existence - *I am and I am not, or something and nothing.*

BLAME GAME?



Therefore, just as through one man sin entered the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men, because all sinned ...

Romans 5:12

Yes, through one man - Adam - sin entered the world, and through sin death followed. But it was never meant to be that way - never - and that's

why we buck and kick and fight so hard against it. It is our natural enemy. See 1 Corinthians 15:26. We were created to have everlasting life. We were never meant to know or experience death. Thus, we hate and fear it so much.

As we have seen, we are in the midst of the great controversy between Christ and Satan, between good and evil, and literally between life and death. Just as Satan brought sin into this world, he has brought death as well.

At the same time, we have been given this wonderful victory over death that Jesus has won for us in this great controversy.



Inasmuch then as the children have partaken of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil.

Hebrews 2:14

ETERNAL LIFE?

That's a powerful promise, a heavy promise, one filled with hope for us in the face of the overwhelming reality of death. Someone, however, might justly ask: *That's nice, but, well ... we all still die, don't we? Where's the victory that we are promised there?*



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

And this:



Most assuredly, I say to you, he who believes in Me has everlasting life.

John 6:47

And this:



For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Romans 6:23

The common and popular answer is: *Well, that's easy. When Christians die, they go soaring off to the bliss of eternal life in heaven. They have gone to be with their Lord. That's the victory.* Let's take a closer look at this commonly held belief.

TWO VIEWS OF DEATH

There are basically only two views of death. One is the Biblical view, and the other, found in one form or another in every other religion, says in essence that we live on in another form and/or another place.

In fact, both these views are found within Christianity too - two views that are mutually exclusive, that is, they are so different that the truth of one automatically means the other must be false.

One belief, the one mentioned above, claims that at death the person goes off to his or her reward or punishment immediately. It's the idea that they go right away to heaven, or to hell, or in some cases to purgatory. This belief is common, not just in many segments of Christianity but also in many other faiths as well.

At the centre of this view is the often assumed notion of an immortal soul, the belief that there's an immaterial and, hence, immortal consciousness that can exist apart from the human body, and this entity goes off to a new realm of conscious existence after a person dies. Where they go, and why, and what happens when they do, depends upon whatever the traditions teach. But the common view among most Christians, and most other religions, is that something in us goes on living, consciously, after death. In other words, you don't really die; you just enter a new existence.

The second belief, though having a long history, is much less common, but is still held by many Christians. In fact, more scholars are leaning this way too. According to this position, the Bible teaches that the dead are asleep - unconscious - and remain that way until Jesus returns and they are resurrected to eternal life in new bodies. The resurrection is the Christian's hope, not the intruding enemy that is death.

Sleep is used as a metaphor for death. They are not asleep in the sense that they are alive, but unconscious. They are dead - no more life. The metaphor illustrates a state of inactivity, emotionless, unconsciousness, resting - but they died with the expectation of waking up.

As stated, these views are mutually exclusive. Either the dead are asleep, unconscious, and oblivious to everything, or they're in the bliss of heaven - or, as the case may be, in the torture of hell, or in some other conscious state.

Which is correct?

IMMEDIATE REWARD? IMMEDIATE PUNISHMENT? IMMEDIATE SLEEP?

The Bible talks a lot about death. After all, we're going to be dead much longer than we are going to be alive, at least the way things are now. Plus, with death being so real, so present, it makes sense that the Bible wouldn't leave us in the dark about this important aspect of human existence.

Because of the disagreement about death, it's crucial to look at the following texts in the light of these two differing views. And, as we read, we need to ask this question: *Do these texts make sense if the dead go immediately to another conscious state, or do the texts make better sense if the dead sleep, unconsciously, in the grave until the Second Coming, when they are resurrected and given new physical bodies?*

Keep in mind, too, what we studied in Booklet 6 about the Second Coming and the promise of the resurrection of the dead. That is a crucial factor in understanding what happens after death.

For starters, here's Jesus talking about the dead and what awaits them:



Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which 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 damnation.

John 5:28-29

Do these words give the idea that the dead have gone, right at death, to their reward or punishment? Or do they give the idea that they are in the grave, awaiting end-time judgment? Which view makes the most sense? Which view makes the only sense? Jesus gives the idea that the fate awaiting *all that are in the graves* hadn't happened yet, even though millions of people had already died by the time Jesus spoke these words! If they had already gone off to their reward or punishment what is Jesus talking about?

Or how about this text?



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 many that sleep in the dust of the earth *shall awake*? The Hebrew verb is in the future tense. What does that mean, if the dead were already being rewarded or punished as soon as they died? What does the text mean when it says that they are asleep in the dust of the earth, if the common and popular view is biblical?

Both those who face everlasting life and those who face everlasting contempt are in the same place - the dust of the earth - until they awake, and only then do they face reward or punishment. Nothing in that text indicates that they got either a reward or a punishment at death. In fact, it says the opposite. They are asleep until they awake to one fate or another.

Look at this text. Does it sound as if the dead are in some conscious state in another existence, or asleep in the ground?



For in death there is no remembrance of You; in the grave who will give You thanks?

Psalm 6:5

This text makes sense if one accepts the idea of the dead in an unconscious sleep, but it's nonsensical if they have gone at death to their final fate.

PAUL AND THE RESURRECTION

In his letter to the much-troubled Corinthian church, the apostle Paul confronted the teaching among some that there would be no resurrection of the dead. See 1 Corinthians 15:12. What would be the result of such a teaching, were it true? Again, as we read these words, we need to ask which of the two positions makes sense?



But if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, then our preaching is empty and your faith is also empty. Yes, and we are found false witnesses of God, because we have testified of God that He raised up Christ, whom He did not raise up - if in fact the dead do not rise. For if the dead do not rise, then Christ is not risen. And if Christ is not risen, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins! Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

1 Corinthians 15:13-18

Look at the last verse: *Then also those who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.* Paul linked the resurrection of Christ with our resurrection.

Because Christ was raised from the grave, we will be too. But if Christ were not resurrected, then we aren't either - and if not, then those who *have fallen asleep in Christ* have perished? And our faith is *empty* and *futile*? How, though, could that be if those who are *asleep in Christ* have, at death, already gone off to their eternal bliss?

On the other hand, if the dead are in an unconscious sleep until the resurrection, then the texts make sense, because if there were no resurrection, then the dead remain asleep in their graves, which means they have *perished* forever. So the faith of his readers is futile, because they have no eternal life. In other words, if there is no resurrection there is no hope beyond the grave!!

It seems clear that Paul understood the dead in Christ to be asleep in the ground until the resurrection, which occurs at Christ's Second Coming.

THE SECOND COMING

In fact, here's Jesus referring to the Second Coming:



And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

Revelation 22:12

He's bringing His reward with Him? What does that mean, if the faithful get their reward immediately at death? Many of Christ's faithful followers have been dead for centuries. Certainly they should have been enjoying their reward long before now, rather than when the Second Coming happens.

Here's Jesus, again in reference to the resurrection when He returns:



Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.

John 6:54

Raise him up at the last day? If they are already up in heaven, what is Jesus referring to when He says that He will raise them up? Supposedly they already are up in heaven. If, though, the dead are in the ground, in an unconscious sleep, the text makes perfect sense.

THE STATE OF THE DEAD

The Bible speaks with one voice on this. Note these texts:



His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.

Psalm 146:4 KJV



The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence.

Psalm 115:17



For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing.

Ecclesiastes 9:5

Again, which view is revealed in these texts? The answer is obvious.

WITH ME IN PARADISE?

What, though, about Jesus' words to the thief on the cross?



And Jesus said to him, Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.

Luke 23:43

Is Jesus telling the thief that he - the thief - will be with Jesus that day - *today* - in paradise? If so, what about all the texts that we have just looked at?

The answer is found in the punctuation. Here are the same words of Jesus, the words originally written down in the Greek manuscripts, only now with a punctuation change - punctuation that, by the way, wasn't in the original manuscripts but was added centuries later! *Truly I say to you today, you shall be with Me in Paradise.*

What's the difference? The text that had Jesus telling the thief he would be in paradise that day now has Jesus saying something completely different. The comma, commonly placed before the word - *today* - *Truly, I say to you, today you shall ...* - is now placed after it - *Truly, I say to you today, you shall ...* - and the meaning changes. Jesus wasn't telling the thief where he would be immediately after death. He simply wanted to assure the dying thief at that moment - *today* - that he will one day have a place in Christ's kingdom. The context of the story is about the promise of eternal life; it wasn't about the nature of death.

In fact, why would Jesus tell the thief that he would be in paradise that day when Jesus didn't even go to paradise that day? Jesus died on Friday,

was in the tomb on Saturday, and was resurrected on Sunday. When Mary appeared to Him on Sunday morning, what did Jesus say to her?



Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God.

John 20:17

What does He mean when He says that He had not yet ascended to the Father, to heaven, to paradise, when two days earlier - on Friday - He supposedly told the thief that both would be in paradise that Friday? It means that Jesus hadn't told him that he would be in paradise that Friday. Instead He wanted to give the thief the hope of eternal life right there and then - *today*.

THE GOOD NEWS AND DEATH

The biblical evidence is powerful. The dead are unconscious and decayed until the resurrection. From the perspective of the living, that might not sound so pleasing, but for the dead it's another matter.

Have you ever been under general anaesthetic? If so, you know that from the instant you go under until you awake - be it twenty minutes or ten hours - no time seems to have passed. You closed your eyes, and the next thing you know is that you are awake.

Imagine, then, what it must be like for those who aren't merely in an induced sleep but, in fact, are dead. Whether they died thousands of years ago, or a week before the Second Coming, as far as they are concerned, as far as their own experience goes, it's the same - they close their eyes

and the next thing they know is that Jesus raises them from death and they have eternal life in Him. In the realm of time, what the dead in Christ experience is not that different from what they would experience were they, as the false teaching has it, to go right to their reward at death.

A POWERFUL DECEPTION

What about all those who claim to have met the dead or to have talked to them? What are we to make of that?

Most importantly, we must not forget that Satan *deceives the whole world* (Revelation 12:9), and false teaching about death remains one of his most evil and cunning deceptions. As long as someone understands the truth about what happens at death, however, that person is completely safe from all sorts of occult or New Age deceptions, almost all of which are premised on the idea of an immortal soul, a concept that is Greek, and not biblical in origin. God is the only one with inherent immortality. See 1 Timothy 6:16. And where humans are concerned, Jesus is the only one who has life in Himself. See John 5:26, and John 10:17-18.

The Bible teaches that the soul can be destroyed and, in some cases, it will be. Jesus Himself said:



And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

Matthew 10:28

Many confuse spirit and soul. Of man's creation God says: *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 soul. Genesis 2:7 (KJV) Dust forms our physical body; the spirit of life is *breathed* into us, and we *become a living soul, or being* as stated in the NKJV, with consciousness, intelligence, emotions and feelings. Adam did not exist before he was created. And death is the reverse of the creation process:



... till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return.

Genesis 3:19

What about near-death experiences? So many stories have been told about people who, having been clinically dead, are revived, and then have given incredible accounts about an existence in another realm, including conversations with the dead.

So, what is going on here?

Again, we must remember that we are in the midst of a great controversy, and so we urge great caution, especially with such overwhelming biblical evidence that the dead are in unconscious sleep. Remember the conflict between Christ and Satan was brought to earth when God said, *You will surely die* (Genesis 2:17), and the devil countered with, *You will not surely die*. Genesis 3:4 It is the same issue we have to deal with. Who will you believe?

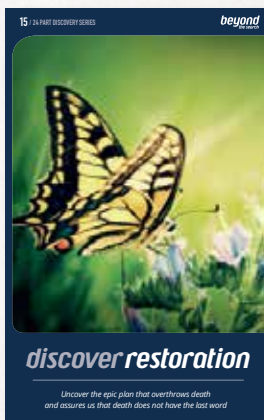
Also, these are not called near-death experiences for nothing. They're only near death, and to be near something isn't the same as to be there. None of these people were dead - as in rigor mortis dead - so we should be careful about what conclusions we draw from them about death. Just as you can't learn much about cirrhosis of the liver from looking at a beer commercial, you shouldn't draw too many conclusions about death from

the near death phenomenon. Having a near death experience is like nearly winning the lottery. It's vastly different to winning the lottery. And so it is with death, and near death experiences.

Thus, our only safety is to stick with the overwhelming number of Bible texts which make it clear that our beloved dead are asleep, and safely remain that way until waking up time - the resurrection - at the end of this world.



NEXT IN THE SERIES:



*Uncover the epic plan that overthrows death
and assures us that death does not have the last word*

BEYOND THE SEARCH – DISCOVERY SERIES

- 01 Discover Tomorrow
- 02 Discover Meaning
- 03 Discover Truth
- 04 Discover the Saviour
- 05 Discover Insight
- 06 Discover Hope
- 07 Discover Eternity
- 08 Discover Peace
- 09 Discover Steps
- 10 Discover New
- 11 Discover Freedom
- 12 Discover Rest
- 13 Discover Authenticity
- 14 Discover Immortality**
- 15 Discover Restoration
- 16 Discover Justice
- 17 Discover Judgment
- 18 Discover Allegiance
- 19 Discover Safety
- 20 Discover Loyalty
- 21 Discover Wellness
- 22 Discover Intimacy
- 23 Discover Tribute
- 24 Discover Belonging

