

18 -- OUR HIGH PRIEST'S VICTORY OVER DEATH

The tree of life was the abiding symbol of man's total and continuous dependence upon God. It was an enduring reminder that man did not have life in himself. His life was conditioned on obedience. Should he ever be cut off from access to the life-giving tree, his existence must inevitably cease. Sadly man believed the serpent's lie, "*You will not surely die*" (Genesis 3:4), and death came upon the human race (Rom. 5:12). Yet God gave to man hope.

Our great High Priest's guarantee of victory over death is found 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 [grave] and of Death.*"

This verse is a summarizing of the whole message of the Bible concerning victory over death. The keys of the grave are in the hands of a Friend, our best Friend, Jesus Christ. The One whom we can love and trust. What more positive, comforting assurance could ever be given to a grief-stricken world?

When our Great High Priest says He has the "keys" of the grave, what does He mean? First, that He alone can unlock the dark prison house of death and set its captives free. Second, that He alone can unlock the dark mystery of death, and tell us what it means and what it is.

A correct understanding of this subject will prepare the way for our next study on phase two of the Judgment.

1. What are some of the different concepts regarding death?

Among man's theories are these:

1. Life ends and that is all.
2. The dead return as a spirit
3. The dead return in a different life form. (Reincarnation)
4. After death one goes to heaven or hell...etc.

Note: What really happens when one dies? Is there consciousness after death? Do the dead come back to converse with or to haunt the living or do they move on to a "higher" form of life? There is so much confusion and mystery surrounding the subject of death, but what does the Bible really teach on this subject?

2. Do the dead come back to converse with or to haunt the living?

Job 14:21 His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; They are brought low, and he does not perceive it.

Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10 ...But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; Nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun [in this life]... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.

Note: No! The Bible is clear. A dead person does nothing and knows nothing about what is happening on earth. The following texts agree.

Psalms 115:17 "The dead do not praise the LORD, ..."

Psalms 6:5 "For in death there is no remembrance of You:"

Job 7:10 "He shall never return to his house,"

Isaiah 38:18 "... Death cannot praise You;"

Psalms 146:4 "... In that very day his thoughts perish."

3. According to the book of Revelation, who has the keys of death?

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 [grave] and of Death.

Note: The Bible is clear. Only Jesus has the keys of death. We should go to His Word for answers to our questions about death.

4. How did God make man in the beginning?

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 soul [being].

Note: The Hebrew word for spirit is *ruach* and carries the meaning “wind.” The Greek word is *pneuma* which means “air” or “breath.” Thus, two things happened at Creation: (1) God formed man from the dust, or earth, and (2) He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man became a living soul.

5. What happens at death?

Ecclesiastes 12:7 Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it.

Note: What takes place at death is the opposite from what happened during Creation. The body returns to dust and the spirit, or breath, returns to God who gave it. Notice that this text does not say that the “spirit” of good men only returns to God at death. No distinction is made here between good men or bad men. The Bible clearly teaches that the "spirit" that returns to God is simply the breath of life, which God breathed into man in the beginning (James 2:26, margin; Job 27:3, margin; Job 33:4). Psalm 104:29, 30 states: "You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit [breath], they are created."

6. Where do the dead go when they die?

Job 21:32 Yet shall he be brought to the grave, and shall remain in the tomb.

John 5:28, 29 ... all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth....

Note: The dead, both righteous and unrighteous, are in their graves and will hear Jesus' voice calling them forth from the grave to reward or punishment.

7. The Bible makes it plain that King David is saved. Is he in heaven now?

Acts 2:29 Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day.

Acts 2:34 For David did not ascend into the heavens,

Note: No! The apostle Peter plainly stated that David is dead and buried--not alive in heaven. Furthermore, Hebrews 11:32-40 makes it clear that all the faithful of the ages have not yet been rewarded, but rather, will all be rewarded together (verses 39, 40).

8. But isn't it true that the soul is immortal and that only the body dies?

Ezekiel 18:4 ... The soul who sins shall die.

Job 4:17 Can a mortal be more righteous than God?...

1 Timothy 6:15, 16 ... the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality,

Note: We are souls, and souls do die. Man is mortal. Only God is immortal. The word immortal appears only once in Scripture, and the word "soul" in its varied forms, appears over 1600 times in the scriptures, but never once is it connected with the word "immortal." The widely believed teaching of the undying, immortal soul is not found in the Bible. The teaching is man-made.

9. Who brought forth the first deception on the subject of death?

Genesis 2:17 But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.

Genesis 3:4 And the serpent said to the woman, "You will not surely die."

Note: Satan's word contradicted Gods. For Adam and Eve, life was promised on the condition of obedience, but it was lost through disobedience, and they became subject to death.

10. When will the righteous be given immortality?

1 Corinthians 15:51-53 ... 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 this mortal must put on immortality.

1 Thessalonians 4:16 For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.

Note: Yes, the righteous will be given immortality at the resurrection when Jesus returns. The wicked never receive it. (Romans 6:23)

11. How does the Bible repeatedly refer to death?

John 11:11, 14 ... Our friend Lazarus sleeps, ...Lazarus is dead.

Matthew 27:52 And the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus.

Note: The Bible often refers to death as sleep. Death is a state of total unconsciousness, during which 15 minutes or a thousand years seem the same. The dead simply "sleep" in their graves until the resurrection, when all will be raised by Jesus. The teaching that the spirits of the dead are heavenly angels, or some righteous ghost-like entity that can be contacted, is without scriptural foundation.

12. Since wizards, witches, and psychics cannot contact the dead, whom are they contacting?

Revelation 16:14 For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles,

Note: Heaven's angels are called "ministering spirits" (Hebrews 1:14) who help people on earth. The angels who were cast out of heaven with Satan (Revelation 12:7-9) are also spirits--evil spirits who deceive people by working miracles (Revelation 16:13, 14). They use "all power and signs and lying wonders" (2 Thessalonians 2:9), and can even make "fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men" (Revelation 13:13). When psychics claim to be contacting spirits of the dead, they are really in touch with Satan's fallen angels (Isaiah 8:19, 20).

13. Why does Satan want us to believe that the spirits of the dead are really alive?

Matthew 24:24, 25 For false christs and false prophets will arise and show great signs and wonders to deceive, if possible, even the elect. See, I have told you beforehand.

Note: Satan's first lie to mankind was "*Ye shall not surely die.*" Genesis 3:4. He wants people to believe that the spirits of the dead are alive so his angels can pose as saints, prophets, and righteous leaders who have died and so that he can pose as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:13-15). Thus, he can deceive people by the millions. Utilizing these evil spirits is called "spiritism." It is based on a two-part belief: (1) the dead are alive, and (2) they can contact you, or you can contact them. This is one of Satan's most damaging teachings. Yet almost the whole world believes it today.

14. How effective will Satan's use of these evil spirits be in the last days?

Revelation 18:23 ...by your sorcery all the nations were deceived.

Revelation 18:2 ... Babylon the great is fallen, ... and has become a habitation of demons, a prison for every foul spirit,

Revelation 12:9 ... that serpent of old, called the Devil and Satan, who deceives the whole world....

Note: By Satan's miracles (sorceries) through his evil angels, he will deceive virtually the entire world.

15. How does God regard these miracles by evil angels?

Leviticus 20:27 A man or a woman, who is a medium, or who has familiar spirits, shall surely be put to death;

1 Timothy 4:1 ...some will depart from the faith, giving heed to deceiving spirits and doctrines of demons.

Ephesians 5:11 And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness,

Galatians 5:19-21 Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lewdness, idolatry, sorcery, hatred, contentions, jealousies, outbursts of wrath, selfish ambitions, dissensions, heresies, envy, murders, drunkenness, revelries, and the like;

Revelation 21:8 ...sorcerers...shall have their part in the lake which burns with fire and brimstone, which is the second death.

Note: In Moses' day, God commanded that all psychics be put to death. Today He insists that sorcery is a work of the flesh, for which people will be destroyed. He warns that when you dabble with psychics you leave the faith, and He tells us that all sorcerers will die the second death in the lake of fire.

16. What glorious power does God offer His people?

Philippians 3:10 That I may know Him and the power of His resurrection,

Note: Our Great High Priest offers us the same power to live right that raised Him from the dead. Fantastic! How can we fail with such incredible power given us--and that with no cost to us? Jesus, because He loves us, solemnly warns us away from the power and miracles of evil angels and offers to work the divine miracles needed to prepare us for His kingdom (Philippians 1:6).

Your Response

Would you like to accept Jesus' offer to give you the power of the resurrection in your life?

ANSWER: _____

The Thief on the Cross (Additional Study)

Did Jesus promise the thief on the cross immediate access to heaven when He said, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"? The meaning of Christ's statement in Luke 23:43 is determined by a scriptural answer to one very important question: Did Jesus Himself go to heaven on that day?

Not according to Scripture. On the day of the resurrection, when He met Mary at the garden tomb, His words were: "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." John 20:17. Jesus could not have gone to paradise on Friday if He hadn't yet ascended to the Father by Sunday!

Why then did Jesus say, "To day shalt thou be with me in paradise"? The apparent problem vanishes when you consider that the original Greek manuscripts had no punctuation. The commas and periods were introduced into the text of Scripture by translators, who inserted them where they thought they should be. And believe it or not, a single comma can change the meaning of an entire sentence! The Lord's statement in Luke 23:43 should read: "Verily I say unto thee today, Thou shalt be with me in paradise." This is what Jesus was really saying. Today, when all seems lost; today, when I do not look like a Lord or King, and after even My disciples have fled; today, although My hands are nailed to a cross, I can still save you! Someday that thief, along with all others who have accepted Christ, will claim the promise of the resurrection and be with Jesus in paradise.

What Do the Words "Spirit" and "Breath" Mean in the Bible?

Job 27:3 points out that a person's "spirit" and "breath" are the same. Job further states that this spirit, or breath, is in his nostrils. Please remember that God placed the "breath" in Adam's nostrils at Creation (Genesis 2:7). So the spirit that returns to God when a person dies is the breath of life--not a disembodied soul. Never in the Bible is a disembodied soul said to return to God at death.

Where Does the "Soul" Go When a Person Dies?

At Creation, two things combine to make a soul--body and breath. Until these two things combine, a soul does not exist. At death, these two components separate. The body returns to dust, and the breath returns to God. The soul goes nowhere; it simply ceases to exist.

A simple illustration may help clarify this point. Suppose I combine lumber and nails to make a box. Lumber + nails = box. Then suppose that I no longer want the box, so I pull the nails and place them in a pile, then I stack the lumber in another place. What happens to the box? Where does it go? It goes nowhere; it simply ceases to exist. The box is a combination of two things. I do not have a box unless the lumber and nails are combined to make it. The nails and lumber still exist, but there is no box until the two components are joined together. So it is with the soul. The breath exists and the body returns to dust, but the soul does not exist unless the two are combined.