



Where are the Dead?

Some say that the righteous dead are in heaven, the wicked dead in hell fire. What does the Bible say?

by NELS P. NEILSEN

WHERE are the dead? A solemn question indeed, for death is everywhere. We meet it on every hand. No land on earth can boast of freedom from its ravages. By millions are its victims tolled in every clime. Each city has its burying place; each hamlet has its "city of the dead." Scarcely can a home be found where death has never come. We all have felt its sting. We all have seen the helplessness of man, when death has laid its hand upon one we loved.

Where are the dead? What is their state in death? Are they unconscious in their sleep, or are they still alive? Do they go to heaven at death, or are they resting in the grave? Do they now experience the joys of heaven, or suffer the pains of a molten hell? These questions — yes, and kindred ones — will throng our minds as we stand beside the form of a loved one who has passed away.

Where are the dead? We speak to them, but they make no reply. We touch them with a fond caress, but there is no response. Our hearts may nearly break with grief, still they lie unmoved by our tears. We follow them to their last resting place. But where are they now? What is their state? Silence reigns supreme. No word comes back from them. Sternly the tomb closes its heavy portals against every attempt to solve our

problem and to catch a glimpse of the unknown beyond. None have returned to answer us.

Where are the dead? Unanswered yet, we leave the grave, and turn to ask the living, those learned men who claim to know. But they do not agree. Some declare that the dead are still alive, that death is but an opening door into a larger life; others say they are asleep, unconscious, in their graves. Some affirm that they know far more than when they were alive; while others say they know not anything. Some say they are in bliss, around the throne of God; others, that they are in purgatory, doing penance for their sins; while still others tell us they are resting in their graves until the resurrection. But not all these conflicting claims can be right. Whom shall we believe? What is the truth?

Only the Bible Has the Answer

Where are the dead? Unanswered still, we turn away from man-made creeds to ask the word of God. Surely here we must find an answer to our questions, or they must forever remain unsolved. God must tell us, or we can never know. His word alone can draw aside the veil and tell what is beyond the grave. Without this Word, we are adrift. Nature is silent. Science has proved itself a blank on this momentous question, and learned men do not agree. With eagerness we turn to read the Sacred Book. Its word to us will be the end of all controversy. Gladly we will lay aside all preconceived ideas. To its decision we will yield.

Where are the dead? What answer does the Bible give? That living Word makes this reply: "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, *in the grave, whither thou goest.*" Ecclesiastes 9: 10. Such language is easily understood. We go to the grave. Neither to heaven, nor to hell, nor yet to purgatory, but to the grave, we go at death. And there we shall remain until the resurrection day; for says the Word, "The hour is coming, in the which *all that are in the graves* shall hear His voice, and shall come forth." John 5: 28, 29. The dead are in the graves. These are the Master's words; and He knows, for He holds the key. He passed through the gates of death; and "the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and *came out of the graves* after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." Matthew 27: 52, 53. These saints who arose with Christ "*came out of the graves,*" it will be noticed, and not down from heaven. They had been in the graves. This surely is apparent to all.

Resting in Quietness and Silence

Where are the dead? — They are asleep. They dwell in the dust; for we read, “Many of them that *sleep in the dust of the earth* shall awake.” Daniel 12: 2. “Awake and sing, *ye that dwell in dust*: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” Isaiah 26: 19. To be asleep is not to be awake. To dwell in dust is not to be with God. This is evident. They are at rest. They go down into silence; for thus it is written, “The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that *go down into silence*.” Psalm 115: 17. “Why died I not from the womb? why did I not give up the ghost? . . . For now should I have *lain still and been quiet*, I should have slept: then *had I been at rest*, with kings and counselors of the earth, which built desolate places for themselves; or with princes that had gold, who filled their houses with silver: or as an hidden untimely birth I had not been; as infants which never saw light. There the wicked cease from troubling; and there the *weary be at rest*. There the prisoners *rest together*; they hear not the voice of the oppressor. The small and the great are there; and the servant is free from his master.” Job 3: 11-19. How clear is this language! How unmistakable are these statements! The dead are asleep; they are at rest; they are still and quiet; they have gone down into silence.

Where are the dead? Are they still alive? Do they know more than they did before they passed away? This may be the belief of many, and may be taught by learned men; but let us turn to the living Word, the Book of books, for an answer to the question. What does the Bible say? — “The living know **that** they shall die: but *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; neither have they any more a portion forever in anything that is done under the sun.” Ecclesiastes 9: 5, 6. “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day *his thoughts perish*.” Psalm 146: 4. “*The grave cannot praise Thee*, death cannot celebrate Thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Thy truth. The living, the living, he shall praise Thee, as I do this day.” Isaiah 38: 18, 19. Thus the Word states that the dead know not anything, and that they have no portion in anything that is done under the sun. They are unconscious. They are asleep. They are at rest until the resurrection. These are the plain statements of the word of God, which we cannot change, and would not contradict.

Lazarus in the Grave, Not in Heaven

Where are the dead?—They are at rest. They have entered the house of the grave. The troubles of life oppress them no more. The strife and commotion of this old world are unheard by them. “They hear not the voice of the oppressor.” Job 3: 18. The sorrows of earth roll by unnoticed. Said Job, that patient man of God: “If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness. . . . They shall go down to the bars of the pit, when *our rest together is in the dust.*” Job 17: 13, 16.

In speaking of Lazarus, our Saviour said, “Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep.” “Then said His disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that He had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead.” John 11: 11-14. Lazarus did not go to heaven when he died; but he was at rest. He was dead four days, but he was not in heaven during that time. Christ did not call him back to this dark world from the bliss of heaven, but He called him forth from the grave. He said, “Lazarus, come forth.” Martha did not believe that her brother was in heaven; for she said, “I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” John 11: 24. Yes, the dead are at rest. They are awaiting the voice of the Life-giver. They are asleep until He comes.

Where are the dead? What is their state?—They are unconscious. They feel no pain. They know no grief. The psalmist describes their state thus: “His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” Psalm 146: 4. Their minds have ceased to work. They rest in an unconscious sleep, and do not measure time. To them, it will seem but a moment from the time they closed their eyes in death, until they are awakened. Centuries may roll away, but to them it will seem but the twinkling of an eye. They said good-by to their loved ones and fell asleep. They closed their eyes. They knew no more. The next moment, to them, they will hear the voice of the Life-giver calling them forth. If faithful, they will embrace their loved ones again. The separation will be but brief. Here in life, we retire at night, we fall asleep; and if we sleep soundly, the night is gone before we know it. The morning comes, and we awake. The night was short to us. Even thus it is in death.

“Asleep in Jesus! Blessed sleep,
From which none ever wake to weep;
A calm and undisturbed repose,
Unbroken by the last of foes!”

But many protest that this is a gloomy view. It seems dreadful to them to think of their friends as being asleep beneath the sod. They shudder at the thought. But is it such a gloomy view? The grave may seem to us dark and cold; but with the psalmist we may say, "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for Thou art with me." Psalm 23: 4. Our God is with us, watching over us, though we may be asleep. A mother lays her child to rest, tucks the robe about it, gives it a good-night kiss and the little one falls asleep. Though unconscious in its sweet rest, it is not forgotten by its mother, and it awakes again in the morning. Even thus it is with those who "sleep in Jesus"; for "precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of His saints." Psalm 116: 15. God watches over their dust. He knows just where they lie; and in His own good time, He will call them forth again.

Which Is the Gloomier View?

But on the other hand, consider what it means if all the dead are still alive. Many who die have not accepted Christ and His salvation. The great majority are unprepared when summoned by death. We read: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and *many there be* which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and *few there be* that find it." Matthew 7: 13, 14. If, then, it be true, as is asserted, that the righteous go to their reward at death, and the wicked go to their punishment, there must now be an untold number of human souls in the place of punishment. And some have been there many years, yea, some for long ages. There is Cain, who for more than five thousand years has been in hell, if this doctrine is true; and still he suffers on, with ever increasing pain, while his brother Abel, whom he slew, looks down from the glorious heights above and views it all.

We ask, Which is gloomier,— to know that the wicked are in their graves at rest until the Judgment Day, or to believe that they are in punishment before their cases have been tried? We can but think of the millions who have been called from this life when they were not at peace with God. Perchance some friend of ours was taken away last year when unprepared to go. Which now would be the gloomier,— to think of this friend as being in the grave, asleep and unconscious, or to believe that he was plunged into the molten flame the very hour he died, and that he has been there ever since? Which is the gloomier view? Ah, you need not answer, for the answer is apparent.

Trial and Judgment Must Come First

Our sense of justice demands that a person shall not be punished for an alleged crime until he has been allowed a hearing; until he has had his trial, and has received his sentence. He may be "locked up" while awaiting his trial; he may be placed in "safe keeping" to protect him against mob violence before the sentence has been pronounced upon him; but to punish him before the trial, would be mob violence and lawlessness. Our God is just. "He hath appointed a day, *in the which He will judge the world in righteousness.*" Acts 17: 31. "For we must *all appear* before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad." 2 Corinthians 5: 10. Yes, this is just and right. It is like our God.

But how inconsistent it would be to plunge the sinner into punishment at death, and then, after he had spent years of untold agony in the liquid flame, bring him out for his trial in the Judgment! How unreasonable it would be to bring poor Cain out of hell after more than five thousand years of suffering, and arraign him before the bar of justice to try his case! Again, how incongruous to bring the saints from glory, after they have enjoyed the bliss of heaven so many years, and try them before the judgment bar of God, to determine if they are worthy to be in heaven! No, no, this cannot be! "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?" Genesis 18: 25.

The Bible Says the Wicked Are "Reserved unto Destruction"

The doctrine which teaches that the wicked go direct to punishment, and the saints direct to heaven, at death, must necessarily set aside the Bible doctrine of the Judgment in the last great day. The two cannot be harmonized. But God is just. He will lock the prisoner up within the grave, until the case is tried before the bar of God in the great Judgment Day; for thus we read: "The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to *reserve the unjust* unto the Day of Judgment to be punished." 2 Peter 2: 9. "Have ye not asked them that go by the way? and do ye not know their tokens, that *the wicked is reserved* to the day of destruction? *they shall be brought forth* to the day of wrath." Job 21: 29, 30. Again we read: "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.

These words are surely plain and clear. God will "reserve the unjust unto the Day of Judgment to be punished." Hence they are not receiving their punishment now. Neither do the righteous receive their reward at death; "for *thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.*" Luke 14: 14. We read still further, "Behold, I come quickly; and *My reward is with Me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*" Revelation 22: 12. It is at the coming of Christ that the righteous receive their reward, and not at death.

But is death the end of all? — No, thrice no! There will be a glorious resurrection. There will be a grand reunion of the people of God. "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and with the trump of God: and 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." 1 Thessalonians 4: 16, 17. The patriarch of old asked the same question: "If a man die, shall he live again?" But he answers it in language full of hope and confidence. He says: "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer Thee: Thou wilt have a desire to the work of Thine hands." Job 14: 14, 15. The great apostle Paul said that "*there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.*" Acts 24: 15. Yes, there will be a resurrection. We shall come forth again. We may be laid to rest in the silent tomb; but the Lord watches over the dust, and the voice of the Son of God will awaken us in the resurrection morning.

Death is an enemy, and the grave may be cold and dark. We may shrink from entering this dark abode; but if the Lord is our refuge, we need not fear. We may shrink from death; but —

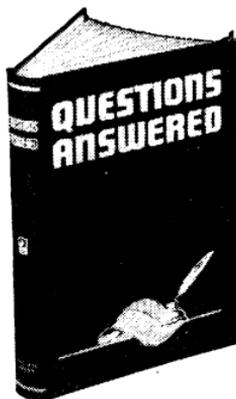
"There is a blessed hope,
More precious and more bright
Than all the joyless mockery
The world esteems delight.

"There is a lovely star
That lights the darkest gloom,
And sheds a peaceful radiance o'er
The prospects of the tomb."

Yes, there is a blessed hope. This hope reaches beyond the tomb, and lays hold upon the life of God through the resurrection. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." 1 Thessalonians 4: 14. Our Saviour said, "I am the resurrection,

and the life: he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live." John 11: 25.

This blessed hope will cheer us on our way. It will buoy us up amid the storms of life. It will rob death of its terror, and the grave of its gloom. With joy we can look forward to the time when God's people shall be taken to the home above. There the saved of all the ages will be gathered, never more to part. What a gathering that will be! Our longing hearts look forward to that glad day. Says the Word, "Looking for that *blessed hope*, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." Titus 2: 13. May that day soon dawn! Then there will be no more death. No more will we receive the sad message that a loved one has passed away; for death will be swallowed up in victory. Then shall we be forever with our Lord. Hasten on, glad day!



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