

“Today you shall be  
with Me in Paradise”

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By  
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## Death as annihilation.

W. H. Hudson, author of *Green Mansions and Days in Patagonia*, tells of an incident of his early life in South America. The family dog Caesar died and they lowered him into a grave. The schoolmaster looked around at the boys assembled and said solemnly, "That's the end. Every dog has its day, and so has every man. The end is the same for both. We die like old Caesar and are put into the ground and have the earth shoveled over us."<sup>1</sup>

That is the view of death held by the people who believe in the philosophy of naturalism—a philosophy that is an outgrowth of materialism. To them death is the end of existence; it is when the body ceases to function, when it returns to the earth that produced it. The common conception of death held by a materialist is that “,,death annihilates all sense, all becoming, to replace them with non-sense and absolute cessation.”<sup>2</sup>

The Jehovah's Witnesses hold a similar belief. They say,

When a person dies, he ceases to exist. Death is the opposite of life. The dead do not see or hear or think. Not even one part of us survives the death of the body. We do not possess an immortal soul or spirit.<sup>3</sup>

Humanists stated their conception of death in The Humanist Manifesto II where it says,

... Modern science discredits such historic concepts as the "ghost in the machine" and the "separable soul. " Rather, science affirms that the human species is an emergence from natural evolutionary forces. As far as we know, the total

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<sup>1</sup> Macartney, C. E., *Macartney's Illustrations*.

<sup>2</sup> "Death, nothingness and subjectivity," Naturalism.org. Quote from: F. Gonzalez-Cruzzi, "Days of the Dead" in *The New Yorker*, November 1993.

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.jw.org/en/publications/books/bible-teach/where-are-the-dead/>

personality is a function of the biological organism transacting in a social and cultural context. There is no credible evidence that life survives the death of the body. We continue to exist in our progeny and in the way that our lives have influenced others in our culture.<sup>4</sup>

Although the above views are widely held I have never met anyone completely comfortable with the materialistic view of death. A majority of people prefer to believe that life goes on in some form or another. So, someone may tell you death is a natural thing, but you feel bound to disagree. It may be natural for someone else, but not for you. The most natural thing you can think of is to go on living. Because of this there is a conflict in us between the ever-present threat of death, and the instinctive wish to remain alive. It is a constant battle which in the end we must lose. But has it always been this way?

No. The Bible says in the Book of Genesis, Genesis 2:15-17 So the Lord God took the man and put him into the garden of Eden to cultivate and keep it. And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, 'From any tree of the garden you may eat freely; but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day you eat from it you shall surely die.'"

Man was created to live, not to die. Before the Fall there is only the mention of the possibility of death. The warning and threat of death was not death itself; it was the warning of the awesome consequences that would follow disobedience to the Divine command. Those

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<sup>4</sup> One should always remember that not only does the humanist idea above differ from Christianity, but it does not meet the test of science either. Any scientific principle can be tested, and merely to say that "science affirms" does not make it so.<sup>4</sup> Here, as with other topics, the humanist has co-opted the term "science" for his own use with the implied definition that science is limited to material causes. Author.

consequences would be immediate -- "...in the day that you eat...you shall-surely die." There would be no delay. Adam would die if he ate.

Unfortunately, the threat of death did not restrain Adam. The tragic events that followed are, without doubt, the greatest catastrophe in human history.

### **The materialistic error of a “closed system.”**

The person who believes in naturalism assumes that the universe is a closed system. By this he means that the universe encompasses nothing but matter and its forces, and that there is nothing outside of the universe. Assumptions of this sort are useful at times to solve problems that relate to systems that are a subset of a larger system. For example, in developing large software systems it is useful to divide the larger system into smaller subsystems to reduce the scope of the problem under consideration. A programmer might see his entire problem as limited to a single program with its outputs, inputs and processes, but that hardly limits the universe in which it resides. This is the mistake the proponent of naturalism makes: he limits all of reality to what he has defined as the universe. Naturalism cannot accept the idea that there is something outside the material universe, or its forces. For this reason, naturalism—and, as a consequence, humanism—cannot admit to the possibility of a human spirit (since a spirit is not from natural causes). It follows from belief in naturalism that if there is no such thing as spirit then there is nothing to survive the death of the body.

The fundamental error in the philosophy of naturalism is overturned by the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth from the dead—a miracle that was witnessed and attested by hundreds of people when it happened. Naturalism is wrong at its foundation because the resurrection of Christ was a supernatural event. God—a supernatural Spirit—caused the resurrection of Christ. It was not caused by anything in the material universe. In

this, God acted from outside the material universe to cause something to happen within the material universe. From this historical fact, it follows that the material universe is not a closed system.

The same argument that overthrows the philosophy of naturalism also establishes the biblical doctrine of survival after death. As Paul wrote to the Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 15:12 Now if Christ is preached, that He has been raised from the dead, how do some among you say that there is no resurrection of the dead? 13 But if there is no resurrection of the dead, not even Christ has been raised; 14 and if Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is vain, your faith also is vain. 15 Moreover we are even found *to be* false witnesses of God, because we testified against God that He raised Christ, whom He did not raise, if in fact the dead are not raised. 16 For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised; 17 and if Christ has not been raised, your faith is worthless; you are still in your sins. 18 Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. 19 If we have hoped in Christ in this life only, we are of all men most to be pitied.<sup>5</sup>

- If Christ has not been raised...then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished.

But in verse 20 of the same chapter,

1 Corinthians 15:20 But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep.

- But Christ has been raised; therefore, those who have fallen asleep have not perished as the believer in naturalism says. Likewise, the belief of the Jehovah's witness is mistaken.

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<sup>5</sup> *New American Standard Bible*: 1995 update. 1995 (1 Co 15:12–19). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

## **The mistake of the Jehovah's Witness is to misunderstand the context of Ecclesiastes.**

The Jehovah's Witness attempts to limit Solomon's conception of man by citing a passage in Ecclesiastes. A Jehovah's Witness writer said,

After Solomon observed that the living know that they will die, he wrote: "But the dead know nothing at all." He then enlarged on that basic truth by saying that the dead can neither love nor hate and that "there is no work nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom in the Grave." (Read Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10.) Similarly, Psalm 146:4 says that when a man dies, "his thoughts perish." We are mortal and do not survive the death of our body. The life we enjoy is like the flame of a candle. When the flame is put out, it does not go anywhere. It is simply gone.

The Jehovah's witness forgets to mention another context in the same book where Solomon wrote,

Ecclesiastes 12:6 Remember Him before the silver cord is broken and the golden bowl is crushed, the pitcher by the well is shattered and the wheel at the cistern is crushed; 7 then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

The New Bible Commentary says regarding the quotation of Ecclesiastes Chapter 9 that the meaning of it is,

9:4–6 Where there's life there's hope. This life is crucial, and death introduces a decisive change. That the dead know nothing recalls similar statements in Job 14:21–22 and 2 Kings 22:20. It is not asserting that the dead are asleep, but that the dead have no contact with this world. Also men and women of this world soon forget the departed. This

life is the place where reward is reaped. Verse 6 mentions some earthly experiences that will cease.<sup>6</sup> It is clear that Solomon believed that man had a spirit. It was Solomon who said,<sup>7</sup>

Proverbs 20:27 The spirit of man is the lamp of the LORD,

Searching all the innermost parts of his being.

Solomon's statement is similar to that of Paul in 1 Corinthians,

1 Corinthians 2:11 For who among men knows the thoughts of a man except the spirit of the man which is in him? Even so the thoughts of God no one knows except the Spirit of God.

Regarding the idea of survival after the physical death of the body it is informative to consider the conversation between Jesus and the thief on the cross:

Luke 23:42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise."

- Both Jesus and the thief died.
- Yet, both went to Paradise.

It is clear from this conversation that Jesus had a completely different view of what happens to people when they die. His view is different than most other people of that day, and of our own time as well. We know from the gospels that both Jesus and the Thief died—in the physical sense of the term. Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus buried the body of Jesus in Joseph's tomb. We may assume that that body of the thief was also buried, perhaps in the way normally

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<sup>6</sup> *New Bible commentary*: 21st century edition. 1994 (D. A. Carson, R. T. France, J. A. Motyer & G. J. Wenham, Ed.) (4th ed.) (616). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

<sup>7</sup> *The Pulpit Commentary*, H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S Exell, Editors, Vol. 9, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. See Introduction to Psalms, attribution of authorship to Solomon, p. xviii.

provided for criminals: the two thieves who died beside Jesus would have been buried in a common grave.

Yet, Jesus told one of the thieves that both He and the thief would shortly be in Paradise. How could this be?

### **It is also important what Jesus said to the synagogue official, Jairus:**

Jesus returned from Decapolis to Capernaum and a multitude met Him, but a synagogue official named Jairus came to Him and earnestly entreated Him to save his daughter. Matthew wrote,

Matt. 9:18 While He was saying these things to them, behold, there came a *synagogue* official, and bowed down before Him, saying, “My daughter has just died; but come and lay Your hand on her, and she will live.” 19 And Jesus rose and *began* to follow him, and *so did* His disciples....

Matt. 9:23 And when Jesus came into the official’s house, and saw the flute-players, and the crowd in noisy disorder, 24 He *began* to say, “Depart; for the girl has not died, but is asleep.”<sup>8</sup> And they *began* laughing at Him. 25 But when the crowd had been put out, He entered and took her by the hand; and the girl arose. 26 And this news went out into all that land.

Alfred Edersheim says that the rabbis—the Jewish teachers of that time—frequently used the term “to sleep” instead of “to die.” This is reasonable because the word “*demakh*” meant “to sleep” in the sense of an overpowering and oppressive sleep.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> καθεῦδω [katheudo /kath·yoo·do/] v. From 2596 and heudo (to sleep); TDNT 3:431; TDNTA 384; GK 2761; 22 occurrences; AV translates as “sleep” 22 times. 1 to fall asleep, drop off to sleep. 2 to sleep. 2a to sleep normally. 2b **euphemistically, to be dead.** 2c metaph. 2c1 to yield to sloth and sin. 2c2 to be indifferent to one’s salvation.

<sup>9</sup> Edersheim, A., *The Life and Times of Jesus the Messiah*, vol. 1, p. 630.

Vine says about the use of the word “asleep” in the passage cited above,

“This metaphorical use of the word sleep is appropriate, because of the similarity in appearance between a sleeping body and a dead body; restfulness and peace normally characterise both. The object of the metaphor is to suggest that, as the sleeper does not cease to exist while his body sleeps, so the dead person continues to exist despite his absence from the region in which those who remain can communicate with him, and that, as sleep is known to be temporary, so the death of the body will be found to be. ...<sup>10</sup>

### **The conversation between Jesus and Martha, sister of Lazarus:**

Lazarus and his two sisters, Martha and Mary, lived in Bethany, a town only a short distance from Jerusalem. While Jesus was in a region beyond the Jordan River Lazarus fell sick. His sisters sent for Jesus to come at once, hoping that Jesus would return and heal him. Before Jesus returned, however, Lazarus died and they buried him in a nearby tomb.

John 11:17 So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. 18 Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off; 19 and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary, to console them concerning their brother. 20 Martha therefore, when she heard that Jesus was coming, went to meet Him; but Mary still sat in the house. 21 Martha therefore said to Jesus, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. 22 “Even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You.” 23

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<sup>10</sup> Vine, W.E. ; Bruce, F.F.: *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*. Old Tappan NJ : Revell, 1981; Published in electronic form by Logos Research Systems, 1996, S. 2:81

Jesus \*said to her, “**Your brother shall rise again.**” 24 Martha \*said to Him, “I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day.” 25 Jesus said to her, “**I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies,** 26 and everyone who lives and believes in Me **shall never die.** Do you believe this?” 27 She \*said to Him, “Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world.”<sup>11</sup>

- Lazarus was physically dead, and had been buried four days.
- Jesus promised that Lazarus would return to physical life.
- Jesus promised that believers in Him shall live even if they suffer physical death.
- Jesus said that believers in Him never die.

## **The death of the son of David and Bathsheba**

In the Old Testament Book of Second Samuel is the story of David and Bathsheba. David had married Bathsheba and she had borne David a son.

2 Samuel 12:15 Then the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s widow bore to David, so that he was *very* sick. 16 David therefore inquired of God for the child; and David fasted and went and lay all night on the ground. 17 And the elders of his household stood beside him in order to raise him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat food with them. 18 Then it happened on the seventh day that the child died. And the servants of David were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they said, “Behold, while the child was

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<sup>11</sup> In all places where scriptural text is highlighted the emphasis is mine, Author.

*still* alive, we spoke to him and he did not listen to our voice. How then can we tell him that the child is dead, since he might do *himself* harm!” 19 But when David saw that his servants were whispering together, David perceived that the child was dead; so David said to his servants, “Is the child dead?” And they said, “He is dead.” 20 So David arose from the ground, washed, anointed *himself*, and changed his clothes; and he came into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he came to his own house, and when he requested, they set food before him and he ate. 21 Then his servants said to him, “What is this thing that you have done? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but when the child died, you arose and ate food.” 22 And he said, “While the child was *still* alive, I fasted and wept; for I said, ‘Who knows, the LORD may be gracious to me, that the child may live.’ 23 “But now he has died; why should I fast? **Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him, but he will not return to me.**”

- The child did not utterly perish, but went somewhere else.
- David expected to go to the child after his death.

## **The incident involving Saul and the Witch of Endor**

The book of First Samuel tells of a conversation between Saul, a living man, and Samuel, a dead prophet. Samuel, the prophet of God, had returned from the realm of the dead to speak with Saul, the king.

1 Samuel 28:15 Then Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?” And Saul answered, “I am greatly distressed; for the Philistines are waging war against me, and God has departed from me and answers me no more, either through prophets or by dreams; therefore I have called you, that you may make known to me

what I should do.” 16 And Samuel said, “Why then do you ask me, since the LORD has departed from you and has become your adversary? 17 “And the LORD has done accordingly as He spoke through me; for the LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hand and given it to your neighbor, to David. 18 “As you did not obey the LORD and did not execute His fierce wrath on Amalek, so the LORD has done this thing to you this day. 19 “Moreover the LORD will also give over Israel along with you into the hands of the Philistines, **therefore tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.** Indeed the LORD will give over the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines!”

- Samuel was dead.
- Yet, Samuel retained his identity and spoke intelligently to Saul.
- Samuel said that Saul and his sons would be with Samuel the next day in the realm of the dead.

### **Some will dine with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob?**

On one occasion Jesus healed the servant of a centurion. In this instance the centurion exhibited great faith in Jesus. Matthew wrote of Jesus’ response,

Matt. 8:10 Now when Jesus heard *this*, He marveled, and said to those who were following, “Truly I say to you, I have not found such great faith with anyone in Israel. 11 “And I say to you, that many shall come from east and west, and recline *at the table* with Abraham, and Isaac, and Jacob, in the kingdom of heaven; 12 but the sons of the kingdom shall be cast out into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

- “many” will have close fellowship with three Patriarchs who—as far as the world is concerned—are dead.

Jesus, however, confidently mentions them in connection with good fellowship in the kingdom of heaven.

## **Moses and Elijah at the Mount of Transfiguration**

In a passage whose main purpose is to show the pre-eminence of Christ there is an incidental reference to two other people who appeared with Jesus. Moses and Elijah had been—as far as the world was concerned—dead for many centuries. Yet, both of them appeared with Jesus in recognizable form.

Matt. 17:1 And six days later Jesus \*took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and \*brought them up to a high mountain by themselves. 2 And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. See also Mark 9:2-4.

- Moses and Elijah are not dead (in the sense of annihilation).
- Moses and Elijah retain their identities.
- Moses and Elijah were summoned from that other realm to the Mount of Transfiguration.
- Moses and Elijah spoke with Jesus—thus implying conscious intelligence, and an ability to communicate.
- Moses and Elijah, although dead to this world, were recognizable.

## **The Parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus**

In the parable of the Rich Man of Luke Chapter 12 the Scriptures tell of a man whose focus in life lay upon his material possessions. It says in the Gospel,

Luke 12:17 “And he began reasoning to himself, saying, ‘What shall I do, since I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I will do: I will tear down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. 19 ‘And I will say to my soul, “Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years to come; take your ease, eat, drink and be merry.” ’ 20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your soul is required of you; and now who will own what you have prepared?’

It was Ambrose Bierce who said, “To know that one will be hanged on the morrow does wonderfully focus the mind.” In like fashion, God put an end to this Rich man’s focus on material wealth, but the parable also says something important about the condition of life in this world,

12:15 ...“for not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions.”

A man’s life consists also of moral and spiritual components and for these there comes a day of reckoning.

In the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus Jesus said that the rich man died and went to the place of torment, and Lazarus died but went to the place of comfort called Abraham’s bosom. The Lord, when He was crucified, referred to this realm as “Paradise.”<sup>12 13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> ABRAHAM’S BOSOM. A figure of speech used by Jesus in the parable of \*Lazarus and Dives (Lk. 16:22–23), illustrating ‘the great gulf fixed’ between the bliss of paradise and the misery of Hades (cf. Mt. 8:11–12). The dead Lazarus is portrayed as reclining next to Abraham at the feast of the blessed, after the Jewish manner, which brought the head of one person almost into the bosom of the one who sat above him, and placed the most favoured guest in such a relation to his host (e.g. Jn. 13:23). To sit in Abraham’s bosom, in Talmudic language, was to enter \*Paradise (cf. 4 Macc. 13:17). Such Oriental imagery should not be regarded as evidence of Jewish belief in an interim state. J. D. Douglas.

Readers of the parable understand that **the bodies** of the two men did not go either to torment, or to Paradise, but were buried. At death the spirits of the men went to the Hadean realm and remained recognizable, aware of surroundings, and retained the ability to remember and communicate. Yet, because of the way the men had lived, one was in torment and the other a place of comfort, and neither could cross over to the other. Moreover, when the Rich Man wanted to warn his brothers about the place of torment, Abraham told him that they were not likely to respond to the warning even if someone rose from the dead. Luke 16:19-31.

As they had Moses and the Prophets to admonish them, we have Moses and the Prophets, and Jesus and the Apostles to warn us. We would do well to listen.

## Death and believers in Christ

What happens to a person when they die? Is it the same for everyone, or is it different depending whether the person is religious? Further examination of the statement Jesus made to one of the thieves on the cross beside Him throws interesting light on the subject. Luke tells of the conversation between the two criminals and Jesus in the 23<sup>rd</sup> Chapter of his gospel.

Luke 23:39 And one of the criminals who were hanged *there* was hurling abuse at Him, saying, “Are You not the Christ? Save Yourself and us!”  
40 But the other answered, and rebuking him said, “Do you not even fear God, since you are under the same sentence of condemnation? 41 “And we indeed justly, for we are receiving what we deserve for our deeds; but this man has done

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<sup>13</sup> Douglas, J. D. (1996). Abraham’s Bosom. In D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer & D. J. Wiseman (Eds.), *New Bible dictionary* (D. R. W. Wood, I. H. Marshall, A. R. Millard, J. I. Packer & D. J. Wiseman, Ed.) (3rd ed.) (9). Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press.

nothing wrong.” 42 And he was saying, “Jesus, remember me when You come in Your kingdom!” 43 And He said to him, “Truly I say to you, today you shall be with Me in Paradise.”

- The three were about to be victims of crucifixion.
- Jesus promised one of them that he and Jesus would go to a better place—on the same day.

Luke’s description shows the sharp difference of opinion the two criminals had regarding Jesus, and regarding what Jesus promised to His followers. It was a remarkable exhibition of faith for one of the criminals to ask that Jesus remember him, especially in view of their immobility and imminent death because of their crucifixion. In spite of their condition—each nailed to his respective cross—Jesus confidently promises the sympathetic criminal that on that same day both of them would be in Paradise.

The words of Jesus indicate that the penitent criminal did not face oblivion. Quite the contrary, he would retain his identity; i.e., “...you shall be...” Also, there was a temporal immediacy about the experience of Paradise. It would be “today.”

Paul speaks of this same Paradise in his 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians, where in the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter he wrote,

2 Cor 12:2 I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago—whether in the body I do not know, or out of the body I do not know, God knows—such a man was caught up to the third heaven. 3 And I know how such a man—whether in the body or apart from the body I do not know, God knows—4 was caught up into Paradise, and heard inexpressible words, which a man is not permitted to speak.

The third heaven is the Jewish way of referring to heavenly realm, and in this passage it is identical with Paradise. In the fourth verse the Apostle indicates that there are words spoken there. From these two passages

we conclude that in Paradise there are identifiable individuals, and that they speak. Since it is called “Paradise” it is clear that they have sensation about quality. Further, it is there that we find the tree of life—not the shadow of death.

Rev. 2:7 ‘He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes, I will grant to eat of the tree of life, which is in the Paradise of God.’”

## **The Land and Shadow of Death**

People tend to consider this present world as the place where life exists. The belief is true in its own fashion, but Scripture adds a startling contrast. Matthew in his gospel speaks of Jesus coming into this world as a “great light,” and the provinces of ancient Israel are described as “...the land and shadow of death.”

Matt. 4:12 Now when He heard that John had been taken into custody, He withdrew into Galilee; 13 and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali. 14 *This was* to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet, saying, 15 “The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles— 16 “The people who were sitting in darkness saw a great light, And to those who were sitting in the land and shadow of death, Upon them a light dawned.”

Luke uses the term also referring to the work of John the Baptist,

Luke 1:76 ... For you will go on before the Lord to prepare His ways;  
77 To give to His people the knowledge of salvation By the forgiveness of their sins,  
78 Because of the tender mercy of our God,

With which the Sunrise from on high shall visit us,  
79 To shine upon those who sit in darkness and the  
shadow of death,  
To guide our feet into the way of peace.”

- The land and shadow of death are here—in this world.
- Therefore, it is there—in the Paradise of God—where there is light and life.

## **The Meaning of the word “death”**

W. E. Vine, in his *Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* says of “death”<sup>14</sup>,

Death is:

- the separation of the soul (the spiritual part of man) from the body (the material part), the latter ceasing to function and turning to dust, e.g., John 11:13; Heb. 2:15; 5:7; 7:23.
- the separation of man from God; Adam died on the day he disobeyed God, Gen. 2:17, and hence all mankind are born in the same spiritual condition, Rom. 5:12, 14, 17, 21, from which, however, those who believe in Christ are delivered, John 5:24; 1 John 3:14.
- Death is the opposite of life; it never denotes non–existence. As spiritual life is “conscious existence in communion with God,” so spiritual death is “conscious existence in separation from God.”
- “Death, in whichever of the above–mentioned senses it is used, is always, in Scripture, viewed as the penal consequence of sin, and since sinners

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<sup>14</sup> “Death” as used in the Scriptures: Greek: thanatos (θάνατος).

alone are subject to death, Rom. 5:12, it was as the Bearer of sin that the Lord Jesus submitted thereto on the Cross, 1 Pet. 2:24.

## **The judgment of death is upon this world.**

The world in which we live today is the land and shadow of death. Death prevails in the world because it is under the curse. Satan, who wields the power of death, is the ruler here. But the servants of Christ are the citizens of another land where there is no death. The writer of Hebrews said concerning Jesus,

**Hebrews 2:14** Therefore, since the children share in flesh and blood, He Himself likewise also partook of the same, that through death He might render powerless him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, 15 and might free those who through fear of death were subject to slavery all their lives.

Those whom Christ has freed pass out of death into life,

John 5:21 “For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes. 22 “For not even the Father judges anyone, but He has given all judgment to the Son, 23 in order that all may honor the Son, even as they honor the Father. He who does not honor the Son does not honor the Father who sent Him. 24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

- The believer in Christ has eternal life.
- The believer does not come into judgment but has escaped death.

Jesus once said to his Jewish opponents,

John 8:51 “Truly, truly, I say to you, if anyone keeps My word he shall never see death.” 52 The Jews

said to Him, “Now we know that You have a demon. Abraham died, and the prophets also; and You say, ‘If anyone keeps My word, he shall never taste of death.’ 53 “Surely You are not greater than our father Abraham, who died? The prophets died too; whom do You make Yourself out to be?” 54 Jesus answered, “If I glorify Myself, My glory is nothing; it is My Father who glorifies Me, of whom you say, ‘He is our God’; 55 and you have not come to know Him, but I know Him; and if I say that I do not know Him, I shall be a liar like you, but I do know Him, and keep His word. 56 “Your father Abraham rejoiced to see My day, and he saw it and was glad.” 57 The Jews therefore said to Him, “You are not yet fifty years old, and have You seen Abraham?” 58 Jesus said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, before Abraham was born, I am.” 59 Therefore they picked up stones to throw at Him; but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple.

- Jesus obviously knew about physical death.
- Yet His statement, “never see death,” stands in stark contrast to our conception of death.
- Abraham saw the days of the Messiah. How could this be?

In the days of Jesus the Sadducees held a philosophy that was similar to the humanists of our day. Josephus “...spoke of the Sadducees’ rejection of “the immortal duration of the soul, and the punishments and rewards in Hades” (*War* 2.8.14). “Souls die with the bodies” was what they said (*Antiquities* 18.1.4).<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the Sadducees took a stand against belief in angels and in life after death. Luke wrote of an incident in which the

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<sup>15</sup> Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). *Tyndale Bible dictionary*. Tyndale reference library (1150). Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers.

Sadducees attempted to ensnare Jesus in a difficult question,

Luke 20:27 Now there came to Him some of the Sadducees (who say that there is no resurrection), 28 and they questioned Him, saying, “Teacher, Moses wrote for us that if a man’s brother dies, having a wife, and he is childless, his brother should take the wife and raise up offspring to his brother. 29 “Now there were seven brothers; and the first took a wife, and died childless; 30 and the second 31 and the third took her; and in the same way all seven died, leaving no children. 32 “Finally the woman died also. 33 “In the resurrection therefore, which one’s wife will she be? For all seven had her as wife.” 34 And Jesus said to them, “The sons of this age marry and are given in marriage, 35 but those who are considered worthy to attain to that age and the resurrection from the dead, neither marry, nor are given in marriage; 36 for neither can they die anymore, for they are like angels, and are sons of God, being sons of the resurrection. 37 “But that the dead are raised, even Moses showed, in the passage about the burning bush, where he calls the Lord the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. 38 “Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him.” 39 And some of the scribes answered and said, “Teacher, You have spoken well.” 40 For they did not have courage to question Him any longer about anything.

- There is no death in heaven.
- Those who attain unto the resurrection of the dead do not die any more. They are like angels in heaven.
- Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob are alive.
- “He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him.”

Luke wrote of the stoning of Stephen,

**Acts 7:54** Now when they heard this, they were cut to the quick, and they began gnashing their teeth at him. 55 But being full of the Holy Spirit, he gazed intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, “Behold, I see the heavens opened up and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God.”

- Stephen saw the other realm.
- Stephen saw Jesus—alive—in the other realm.

In His trial before the Roman Governor, Pontius Pilate, Jesus alluded to the location of His kingdom, John 18:33 Pilate therefore entered again into the Praetorium, and summoned Jesus, and said to Him, “Are You the King of the Jews?” 34 Jesus answered, “Are you saying this on your own initiative, or did others tell you about Me?” 35 Pilate answered, “I am not a Jew, am I? Your own nation and the chief priests delivered You up to me; what have You done?” 36 Jesus answered, “My kingdom is not of this world. If My kingdom were of this world, then My servants would be fighting, that I might not be delivered up to the Jews; but as it is, My kingdom is not of this realm.”

- Jesus is a king; yet His kingdom is not of this world (Greek: *kosmos*). His kingdom is not of this realm (this place, meaning the material world known to Pontius Pilate.) His kingdom is of another realm.

Jesus plainly said that His servants go to be with Him. John wrote,

John 12:20 Now there were certain Greeks among those who were going up to worship at the feast; 21 these therefore came to Philip, who was from Bethsaida of Galilee, and began to ask him,

saying, “Sir, we wish to see Jesus.” 22 Philip \*came and \*told Andrew; Andrew and Philip \*came, and they \*told Jesus. 23 And Jesus \*answered them, saying, “The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. 24 “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains by itself alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. 25 “He who loves his life loses it; and he who hates his life in this world shall keep it to life eternal. 26 “If anyone serves Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall My servant also be; if anyone serves Me, the Father will honor him.

- The servant of Christ is present with Christ. It makes no sense to think the servant would be unconscious, or insensible.

The Apostle Paul spoke of two places for the servant of Christ to be,

2 Cor. 5:6 Therefore *we are* always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord: <sup>7</sup>(For we walk by faith, not by sight:) <sup>8</sup>We are confident, *I say*, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord. <sup>9</sup>Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.<sup>16</sup>

- There are two states: (1) in the body and absent from the Lord, or (2) absent from the body and present with the Lord.
- If there is not conscious existence when “present with the Lord” then

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<sup>16</sup> endēmeō (ἐνδημέω, (1736)), lit., to be among one’s people (*en*, in, *dēmos*, people; *endēmos*, one who is in his own place or land), is used metaphorically of the life on earth of believers, 2 Cor. 5:6, “at home (in the body);” in ver. 8 of the life in Heaven of the spirits of believers, after their decease, “at home (with the Lord),” R.V. (A.V., “present”);

how would one know of being  
present with Him?

Vine says regarding verses 8 and 9,

...in ver. 9, “at home” refers again to the life on earth. The implication in being “at home with the Lord” after death is a testimony against the doctrine of the unconsciousness of the spirit, when freed from the natural body.<sup>¶17</sup>

Paul also wrote, referring to the suffering of this life as “Christ,”

Philippians 1:21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better; 24 yet to remain on in the flesh is more necessary for your sake.

- Paul did not expect an intermediate state between his death and his presence with Christ.
- It is true that Paul was an Apostle, but there is no reason to believe that the Apostles had different experiences after death than other Christians.

The writer of Hebrews said,

Heb. 12:22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the first-born who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of righteous men made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

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17 Ibid., Vine, W. E.,.

- This description of the heavenly kingdom admits no idea of dead saints, unconscious spirits or of lives in an intermediate state. Quite the contrary, the “spirits of righteous men made perfect” indicates conscious existence in a better state, for how could a spirit be “perfect” if it is dead, unconscious, or unaware of its surroundings and condition?

Revelation pictures those we consider dead to be quite alive,

Rev. 6:9 And when He broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; 10 and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, wilt Thou refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?” 11 And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, should be completed also.

- John saw the souls of persecuted servants of God, and they “cried out,” they wore robes, and other communication was given them indicating that they are indeed alive and intelligent.

### **The distinction in the New Testament between body and soul, or spirit.**

Matt. 10:28 “And do not fear those who kill the body, but are unable to kill the soul; but rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.

- The body may be killed by man, but man cannot kill the soul.

- God is able to destroy both.
- This indicates that man is more than flesh, and while united with the body is more than a soul; he is in this life both body and soul.

1 Thessalonians 5:23 Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you entirely; and may your spirit and soul and body be preserved complete, without blame at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 Faithful is He who calls you, and He also will bring it to pass.

James 2:26 For just as the body without the spirit is dead, so also faith without works is dead.

- The animating force within the body is the spirit. The body, according to the scriptures, is the dwelling place of the spirit.

The Apostle Peter spoke of his physical body as his “earthly dwelling,” his “tent.” For so does the body of this life compare to the “mansion” the Lord has prepared for His servants in Paradise. Tabernacle, or tent is used as a reminder of the frailty and temporary nature of the earthly body. The comparison of the body to a tent suits the general conception of this life as a pilgrimage.

The words of the song “I’ve got a mansion just over the hill top...”<sup>18</sup> does not refer to a building; it refers to the grandeur of the spiritual body that the Lord provides for his servants. In his second letter Peter wrote,

2 Peter 1:13 I consider it right, as long as I am in this earthly dwelling, to stir you up by way of reminder, 14 knowing that the laying aside of my earthly dwelling is imminent, as also our Lord Jesus Christ has made clear to me. 15 And I will also be diligent that at any time after my departure you will be able to call these things to mind.

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<sup>18</sup> “Mansions over the hilltop,” *Sacred Selections for the Church*, Comp. and Ed. by Ellis Crum, Sacred Selections, Kendallville, Indiana, 1960.

In this passage Peter also uses another expression to refer to death. He speaks of his way out, his exodus.<sup>19</sup> Luke also uses the same term when he refers to death (Luke 9:31). Peter was also present on the Transfiguration mount when the talk was about the "exodus" of Jesus from earth.

## Thomas Paine

Benjamin Franklin helped Thomas Paine immigrate to America in 1787. Paine had leaped from obscurity to fame after writing some brilliant pamphlets on freedom. But then he began to write his "masterpiece" which he called *The Age of Reason*. In that book he scoffed at Christianity and its doctrines. His book was published in London in 1794.

"This will destroy the Bible," he predicted. "Within 100 years, Bibles will be found only in museums or in musty corners of second-hand bookstores. When Paine showed Franklin the manuscript of his book, Franklin advised him not to publish it, saying, "The world is bad enough with the Bible; what would it be without it?"<sup>20</sup> Paine published it anyway and his book became "...a best-seller in the United States, where it caused a short-lived deistic revival.

*The Age of Reason* advocated reason in the place of revelation. The book promoted natural religion and argued for the existence of a creator-God who can be discovered through reason and observation of the natural world. A deist<sup>21</sup>, Paine rejected the miracles reported in the Bible and viewed the Scriptures as 'an ordinary piece of literature rather than as a divinely inspired text'.

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<sup>19</sup> μετὰ τὴν ἐμὴν ἔξοδον τὴν τούτων μνήμην ποιεῖσθαι: after my departure you may recall these things to mind.

<sup>20</sup> C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 30c.

<sup>21</sup> Deism is related to naturalism because it credits the formation of life and the universe to a higher power, using only natural processes.

Paine rejected Christianity and vigorously opposed the doctrines of the Bible.

A day came when Paine fell ill, and some of his friends came to visit him. They, like Paine, were not believers in Christ or the Scriptures. One of them said to Paine in a loud voice, “Tom Paine, it is said that you are turning Christian, but we hope you will die as you have lived.”

After the men had left, Paine turned to a lady named Miss Roscoe who had heard what the visitors had said. “You see what miserable comforters they are.”

Paine asked Miss Roscoe if she had read any of his writings. She told him that she had started to read *The Age of Reason*, but it made her so miserable that she threw it into the fire. Paine answered, “I wish all had done as you did,” he said. “For if the Devil ever had any agency in any work, he had it in my writing that book.”

Paine became a bedridden invalid until his death in 1809. He died friendless and alone.<sup>22</sup> People observed that during Paine’s illness that he wrote a great deal, but as nothing has ever been seen concerning these writings, many now presume that his unbelieving friends destroyed them because they did not conform to his former views.

Paine once said, “I have gone up and down through the Christian Garden of Eden, and with my simple axe I have cut down one after another of its trees, till I have scarce left a sapling standing.” He lived to say, “I would give worlds—if I had them—if the *Age of Reason* had never been published.

Miss Roscoe heard Paine saying over and over, “O Lord, Lord God,” and “Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!”

It is said that Lord Byron, an infidel to the end, tried to rally Paine’s courage. Byron on his own death-bed exclaimed: “Shall I sue for mercy?” After a long pause,

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<sup>22</sup> Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (176). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

he added, “Come, come, no weakness; let’s be a man to the last.”<sup>23</sup>

So that is what the living infidel says to the dying, but there is nothing in it for the dying infidel to sustain his courage. He is like the atheist when lying on his death-bed felt himself adrift with terrible feelings of doubt and uncertainty. His friends urged him to hold on to the end. He replied, “I have no objection to holding on, but will you tell me what I can hold on by?”<sup>24</sup>

Thus it was for a man who denied the God of revelation, and rather spent his life opposing Him.

How different was the encouragement a mother offered her son who faced death under a persecution near Lyons during the reign of Marcus Aurelius.

Symphorinus, a young man of good family, having refused to fall down before the image of Cybele, was condemned to be beheaded. On his way to the place of execution his own mother called to him: “My son, be firm and fear not that death, which so surely leads to life. Look to Him who reigns in heaven. To-day is thy earthly life not taken from thee, but transferred by a blessed exchange into the life of heaven.”<sup>25</sup>

In the Book of Revelation we read that the Lord said to the church at Smyrna,

Revelation 2:10 ‘Do not fear what you are about to suffer. Behold, the devil is about to cast some of you into prison, so that you will be tested, and you will have tribulation for ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life.

In the catacombs of Ancient Rome, on each side of the narrow passages that lead to the underground chambers, are the niches into which the bodies of the

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<sup>23</sup> Tan, P. L. (1996). *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (309). Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc.

<sup>24</sup> Foster, Elon, *6000 Sermon Illustrations*, p. 378.

<sup>25</sup> Schaff, P., & Schaff, D. S. (1910). *Vol. 2: History of the Christian church* (56). New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons.

dead were pushed; and on the stone or cement that seals the rough tombs we can still read the names in Latin and Greek. One inscription reads: “Gordian, the courier from Gaul, strangled for the faith. Rests in peace.” Another says: “Victoria, in peace and in Christ.”

Then we see an inscription in Latin that reads: “Tentianus vivit” –that is,  
**“Tentianus lives!”**<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> C. E. Macartney, *Macartney's Illustrations*, p. 172. And another unknown author.