

SEED & BREAD

FOR THE SOWER ISA. 55:10 FOR THE EATER
BRIEF BIBLICAL MESSAGES FROM

THE WORD OF TRUTH MINISTRY

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IF A MAN DIE?

The question that forms the title of this study is one from the Word of God. It was asked by the patriarch Job as he was giving an answer to his three friends. Seeing it set forth in bold type, many will be inclined to say: There is no "if" about it. It is appointed unto men once to die, as the writer of Hebrews boldly declares (Heb. 9:27). However, the title above is only part of the question, for the thrust of Job's query is in the second part. The full question is: "**If a man die, shall he live again?**" (Job 14:14).

To the adherents of traditional, orthodox theology, who accept without reserve the Platonic theories of death and life, Job's question must sound quite foolish. Since, according to their views, no one ever dies, they simply leave their bodies to live on some higher plane of existence, why ask the foolish question, "If a man die," there being to them no such thing as death. And why ask if he shall live again, since the dead are always alive? As one prominent minister of traditional orthodoxy declares it: "The true man is a soul, and once it is created it is immortal and will continue forever, either in bliss or in torment."

But where in God's Word do we find anything about the creation of an immortal soul? We read of the creation of man in Genesis 2:7, and we also find that this man became a living soul by a further act of God. Therefore, since it was a man that God created, and if this man dies, how can the living soul which he became continue to live? Furthermore, why ask the question, "Shall he live again?" if the man is not dead?

The Biblicist, who has purged himself of Plato's philosophy, will recognize immediately that Job's question is a sensible and proper one. We

answer it in the affirmative, declaring that if a man dies he will live again - not because he survives the experience of death, but because of the fact of the resurrection of the dead, the only thing that can bring anyone forth from the state of death.

Resurrection is God's answer to death. It is not a natural *process*, but an eminently supernatural and miraculous one. There is no such process in nature as a resurrection from actual death. Men may find some faint analogies to resurrection in one awakening from sleep, in the budding of trees in the spring, in the quickening of seeds in the ground, or in the transformation of the grub into a winged butterfly. However, these are all living processes. There is no actual death in any of these. A dead tree never lives again, dead seed will not sprout, and a dead grub will never develop into a butterfly. And, even so, if a man dies and that man lives it will be because of supernatural power that transcends all natural laws that raises him from the dead and makes him a living soul once again.

It is certainly logical and reasonable to say that if a man dies, then that man is dead. There is no value in denying this, and Scripture most certainly affirms it. Even as Peter declared in his inspired message on the day of Pentecost: **"Let me freely speak to you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day"** (Acts 2:29).

In considering the question "If a man die?" we need to make a clear distinction between "dying" and "death." Paul declares that **"in Adam all are dying,"** which is an honest translation of the Greek of 1 Cor. 15:22. This truth is based upon the divine record of the entry of death into the world. And in view of the fact that death was threatened to Adam as the penalty for disobedience, we need to seek and find an honest answer to the question: "What was the 'death' that was threatened, and what was the 'death' that was incurred?" In the KJV it reads:

And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die. Gen. 2:16,17.

These words raise the question, Did God mean that a complete cessation of life would immediately follow the act of disobedience? There are those who argue that since Adam did not "drop dead" on the day that he ate of the forbidden fruit, that the word "death" here has some other meaning than we

usually give to it. It is said here to mean "spiritual death," and this is defined as being "separation from God." However, there is no such thing as "spiritual death" in the Bible, and there is no evidence that Adam was separated from God. The next thing recorded after he had sinned is that God was seeking fellowship with him (Gen. 3:8,9).

While the word "death" is used in a figurative sense in the Bible, these occurrences are quite clear and should not be used to define literal death. God made it very plain to Adam what He meant by "death" when He repeated and interpreted the nature of Adam's punishment after he had transgressed.

Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return. Gen. 3:17,19.

Thus we see that while something drastic happened to Adam on the day that he transgressed, it was not the sudden cessation of life. The key to what happened is found in the Hebrew original of Genesis 2:16-17 where the verb "die" is repeated in two different forms. The phrase should read "**dying thou shalt die.**" Thus on the day that Adam sinned, death began to work in him and it continued to work until he reached the age of 930 years. This is an enormous life-span, but the first man was of such perfect physical health that it took the working of death a long time to wear him out.

The Apostle Paul enlarges upon this truth in his great declaration: "**Therefore, even as through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death passed through into all mankind, on which all have sinned**" (Rom. 5:12). So we can truthfully say that if a man die, death has been working in him from the day of his birth. Much of the time it has probably been quite dormant, and again it may have manifested itself in active ways: illness, diseases, deformities, aging, but it works on until man keeps that appointment that none can cancel.

In this day when many who have been near to death are using their aberrational experiences and illusions to establish the nature of death, even to prove that death is a continuation of life, it will be good for all who love the truth to look away from all such experiences and consider the case of one

who actually died as it is recorded in the Word of God. We find the record of the actual death and resurrection of Lazarus as set forth by the Holy Spirit. We have, therefore, a more exact view than if we had been present and saw it with our own eyes. Open your Bible to John 11.

Lazarus, who lived in Bethany with his two sisters, Mary and Martha, was sick. The process of death, which ever worked in him even as it does in all men, had suddenly flared up. The smoldering fire of death which slowly but surely consumes every man had burst into an open flame. It was evident to the sisters that this was no ordinary illness, so they sent to the Lord Jesus saying that the one whom He loved was sick.

When Jesus heard this He said: "**This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God**" (11:4). He did not say that Lazarus would not die, but only that the illness was not unto death. Since Lazarus was on the verge of death, we see that by these words He did not promise natural healing or miraculous healing, but the miracle of resurrection that would bring Lazarus back to life. That which does not end in death must end in life for there is no middle ground.

We know that the Lord loved Lazarus, Mary, and Martha; still He remained in the same place for two more days; after which He said to His disciples, "**Let us go into Judea again.**" This brought a protest from the disciples due to the great personal danger it involved for all of them. Our Lord reassured them, and then declared: "**Our friend Lazarus sleepeth: but I go, that I may awake him out of his sleep,**" using one figure of speech to describe death, and another figure to speak of resurrection from the dead. Death is not sleep, no more than sleep is death. As Rudolf Stier has said: "Since the days of old, men on earth, and among them the children of Israel, used this euphemism in speaking of dreadful death because of the outward similarity and in order to cast a soft veil over the grave; but in the mouth of the Lord this figure of speech turns into reality." Sleep is a good figure of death, since normal sleep is without sensation, without knowledge, and should be of unbroken oblivion.

The disciples, loath to face the fact that Lazarus was dead and that the Lord had permitted it, took the figure as a statement of fact and said, "**Lord, if he sleep, he will do well,**" for they took it that the Lord spoke of taking rest in sleep. But our Lord corrected this at once, and dropping all figures of speech said unto them plainly, "**Lazarus is dead.**"

In view of this direct statement we can ask every reader of these lines the question, "Was Lazarus dead or alive?" And by the answer they give we can divide the truth lovers from the tradition lovers, the believers from the twisters, the faithful from the faithless, and the Biblicist from the Platonist.

When Jesus arrived in Bethany, He asked to be shown the grave, and then requested that the stone which closed the tomb should be rolled away. This brought a protest from Mary that Lazarus had been dead for four days, that decomposition was well advanced, and that the whole scene would be offensive to smell and sight. Nevertheless, the stone was removed, and the Lord cried out, "**Lazarus come forth!**" And the faithful record tells us that, "**he that was dead came forth.**"

This record of the death and resurrection of Lazarus provides a full answer to the Biblical question, "**If a man die, shall he live again?**" The man Lazarus died. He was in the state of death for four full days. He came out of the state of death when his name was spoken by the Lord Jesus. Of his experiences while in the state of death, he said nothing, and we are told nothing. This demonstrates the truth of Ecclesiastes that: "**There is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave (*sheol*) whither thou goest**" (Eccl. 9:10).

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