

AFTER DEATH & BEFORE SENTENCED ARE WE SLEEPING OR AWAITING?

by **David Lee Burris**



≈≈≈ And as it is ≈≈≈
APPOINTED UNTO
MEN ONCE TO DIE
BUT AFTER THIS
THE JUDGMENT

Hebrews 9:27



We Believe!

We believe
that Jesus died
and rose again
and so we believe
that God will
bring with Jesus
those who have fallen
asleep in him.

1 Thessalonians 4:14

by www.heartlight.org

Listen, I tell you a mystery:

We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed-- in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. —

1 Corinthians 15:51-53

Mightywarrior







"He does not, however, forbid us altogether to mourn, but requires moderation in our mourning, for he says, *that ye may not sorrow, as others who have no hope*. He forbids them to grieve in the manner of unbelievers, who give loose reins to their grief, because they look upon death as final destruction, and imagine that everythig that is taken out of the world perishes. As, on the other hand, believers know that they quit the world, that they may be at last gathered into the kingdom of God, they have not the like occasion of grief. Hence the knowledge of a resurrection is the means of moderating grief. He speaks of the dead as *asleep*, agreeably to the common practice of Scripture--a term by which the bitterness of death is mitigated, for there is a great difference between *sleep* and *destruction*. It refers, however, not to the soul, but to the body, for the dead body lies in the tomb, as in a couch, until God raise up the man. Those, therefore, act a foolish part, who infer from this that souls sleep."

(Calvin's Commentaries, Volume 21, page 279)

Most believed the soul is immortal and it remains conscious apart from the body after its death. But early reformers Martin Luther and William Tyndale questioned that ancient consensus — asserting that those who've died have no conscious awareness while awaiting the future resurrection.



Luther & Tyndale “The Dead Know Nothing”

Many people today believe the Bible teaches that when a person dies, that person has an immortal soul that remains conscious after death and goes on to live with God in heaven or goes to an eternal torment in hell. But [others believe] that is assuredly not what it teaches. It informs us that man is a mortal soul able to die (Ezekiel 18:4, 20) and that to die is to “sleep the sleep of death” (Psalm 13:3).

The Bible repeatedly compares death to sleep and not conscious existence—a sleep from which we must be awakened in a future resurrection (see Daniel 12:2; Job 14:12-14; 1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). Scripture explicitly states that “the dead know nothing” (Ecclesiastes 9:5, emphasis added throughout). It further assures that “there is no . . . knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going” (verse 10).

Many recognize that the Bible teaches a coming resurrection. The traditional argument is that the immortal soul departs into bodiless yet conscious existence at death and that the resurrection is the raising up of a renewed body in the future for the soul to reinhabit. This concerns what is called the intermediate state of the dead—the nature of existence between the death of the body and future resurrection.

Given the biblical comparisons to sleep, some disparagingly refer to belief in this intermediate state of unconsciousness as “soul sleep.”

It would no doubt greatly surprise many of today’s Protestants to learn that key figures—namely Martin Luther, father of Protestant Reform, and William Tyndale, who suffered for translating the Bible into English—wrote against the idea of conscious awareness in death.

Martin Luther: “The dead sleep in utter insensibility”

In 1517 Martin Luther posted his famous 95 Theses regarding errors of the Catholic Church. In defending many of these later in 1520 he listed the idea “that the soul is immortal” as among “all these monstrosities in the Roman dunghill of decretals” (*Assertion of All the Articles of M. Luther Condemned by the Latest Bull of Leo X, Art. 27, Works of Luther, Weimar ed., Vol. 7*). Luther’s main concern in this was the Catholic conception of the conscious torment of souls in purgatory, which he rejected.

Not long afterward he wrote: “It is probable, in my opinion, that, with very few exceptions indeed, the dead sleep in utter insensibility till the day of judgment . . . On what authority can it be said that the souls of the dead may not sleep . . . in the same way that the living pass in profound slumber the interval between their downlying at night and their uprising in the morning?” (Letter to Nicholas Amsdorf, Jan. 13, 1522, quoted by Jules Michelet, *The Life of Luther*, translated by William Hazlitt, 1862, p. 133).

Regarding the quote we saw from Ecclesiastes, Luther later pointed out: “Solomon judges that the dead are asleep, and feel nothing at all. For the dead lie there accounting neither days nor years, but when are awaked, they shall seem to have slept scarce one minute” (*Expo of Solomon’s Book, Called Ecclesiastes or the Preacher, 1553, folio 151v*).

Luther viewed this as **some sort of comatose existence**, elsewhere stating: “Thus after death the soul goes to its bedchamber and to its peace, and while it is sleeping it does not realize its sleep, and God preserves the awakening soul. God is able to awake Elijah, Moses, and others . . . so that they will live. But how can that be? That we do not know; we satisfy ourselves with the example of bodily sleep, and with what God says: it is a sleep, a rest, and a peace” (*Interpretation of the First Book of Moses, Writings, Vol. 1*). He was trying to explain the preservation of our existence through death until the resurrection.

While Luther was perhaps not always consistent or clear, we should recognize that he definitely did not advocate the conscious bodiless existence of an immortal soul in heaven or hell immediately after death, as today's Lutherans and other Protestants believe.

William Tyndale responds to Thomas More

About the same time, William Tyndale defended the teaching of death as a form of sleep against public denunciation by the English Catholic philosopher and statesman under King Henry VIII, Sir Thomas More, who also wrote *Utopia*.

Tyndale responded to him in 1530, contending: "And you, in putting them [departed souls] in heaven, hell, and purgatory, destroy the arguments wherewith Christ and Paul prove the resurrection . . . And again, if the souls be in heaven, tell me why they be not in as good [a] case as the angels be? And then what cause [or reason] is there of the resurrection?" (Answer to Thomas More's *Dialogue*, Book 4, chap. 4).

In the same response, Tyndale castigated the Catholic position on the matter as embracing pagan teaching, declaring: "**The true faith puts [forth] the resurrection. Heathen philosophers, denying that, did put forth that souls did ever live [immortal]. And the pope joins the spiritual doctrine of Christ and fleshly doctrine of pagan philosophers together;** things so contrary that they cannot agree, no more than the Spirit and the flesh do in a Christian man. And because the fleshly-minded pope consents unto heathen doctrine, therefore, he corrupts the Scripture to establish it."

Elsewhere in his response, William Tyndale notes that the concept of the faithful dead having consciousness already in heaven was contrary to Christ's teaching. He points out: "And when he [Thomas More] proves that the saints be in heaven and in glory with Christ already, saying, 'If God be their God, they be in heaven, for he is not the God of the dead.' "

Moreover, Tyndale makes poignant use of the apostle Paul's statement that Christians are most pitiable, or miserable, if there is no resurrection (1 Corinthians 15:16-19) and of his instruction that Christians should comfort one another over lost loved ones with the hope of the resurrection at Christ's return (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). This instruction would make no sense if those loved ones are now awake in heaven. As Tyndale presents it:

"Nay, Paul, you are unlearned; go to Master [Thomas] More, and learn a new way. We be not most miserable, though we rise not again; for our souls go to heaven as soon as we be dead, and are there in as great joy as Christ that is risen again.' And I marvel that Paul had not comforted the Thessalonians with that doctrine, if he had wist [known] it, that the souls of their dead had been in joy; as he did with the resurrection, that their dead should rise again. If the souls be in heaven, in as great glory as the angels, after your doctrine, then show me what cause should be of the resurrection."



Soul Sleep

The doctrine of soul sleep holds that the soul becomes unconscious at death and that it continues in that condition until the resurrection. According to this doctrine the souls of the dead are sleeping in the grave, that is, in a silent world in which there is no knowledge, consciousness or activity.

Doubtless the idea of soul sleep has arisen in part from the appearance of the body after death, which condition resembles that of physical sleep. The body is ordinarily placed in a recumbent position, and particularly among Christians it is cared for with a special sense of love and tenderness, similar to putting a child to bed for rest in sleep. The dead body and the body asleep are so alike in appearance that it becomes a natural thing to speak of death as an unending sleep. Even those who are firm believers in the continued conscious activity of the soul after death often speak of it in this manner. And similarly, the Bible, as was said earlier, sometimes describes things as they appear rather than as they are actually known to be.

This doctrine is one of the distinctive tenets of Jehovah's Witnesses, and also of the Seventh-day Adventists. Historically, it has been held only by small groups, and has always been opposed by the main body of the Christian Church. During Medieval Period there were so-called Psychopannychians, and during the Reformation this error was advocated by some of the Anabaptists. Calvin even wrote a treatise against them under the title Psychopannychia. In the nineteenth century this doctrine was held by some of the Irvingites in England, and in our day it is one of the favorite doctrines of the Russellites.

According to the latter, body and soul descend into the grave with the soul in a state of sleep, which really amounts to a state of non-existence. What is called the resurrection is in reality a new creation.

Seventh-day Adventists illustrate their doctrine by comparison with what happens when the light bulb is loosened in the socket so that the current is broken. The light goes out. It stays out until the bulb is re-connected with the current. Then it again gives light. Says one writer: "A man's light, or life, goes out at death, and he doesn't live again until the resurrection."

But the fallacy of this argument is that it assumes the very thing that is to be proved, which is, that the soul, like the light, ceases to exist at death. No proof is offered for that assumption, except we no longer see it.

The fact is that the two cases are quite different. It is not the same light that comes back into existence when the current is again contacted, but entirely new light, which is continuously re-created. On the other hand, the soul of man is a continuing, abiding reality. The soul that is rewarded in heaven or punished in hell is the same soul that lived on earth. If the soul ceases to exist at death, and a new soul is then created at the resurrection, it could not possibly be the same soul, and could not justly be rewarded or punished for what the former soul has done. If as has been said of the disembodied soul, "its light goes out at death," it can not possibly be the same soul that is brought back in existence at the resurrection. This becomes quite clear when we remember that a soul apart from a body is simply a conscious spirit. The essential characteristic of a spirit is life. It has no material substance in which its identity can be carried.

There can be no such thing as a non-living spirit, for the reason that consciousness, or life, is the thing which constitutes it a spirit.

In opposition to the doctrine of soul sleep we insist that death is not extinction, but only the separation of the soul from the body. The soul continues to exist, fully conscious and active, and at the resurrection this same soul, not a new one, is reunited with the body.

We may well ask, 'How can a non-existent person be brought back into existence?' In what sense would this person be the same person who formerly lived? And as regards the wicked we may then ask, 'Why should non-existent sinners be brought back into existence at all?' Or why should they be brought back into existence only for the purpose of putting them out of existence for a second time?

The main Scripture references relied on by those who teach soul sleep are the following:

(1) From the New Testament: "Our friend Lazarus is fallen asleep; but I go, that I may wake him out of sleep.... Then Jesus therefore said unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead," John 11:11-14.

Concerning the ruler's daughter who had died Jesus said, "The damsel is not dead, but sleepeth," Matthew 9:24. The first martyr, Stephen, died as a result of being stoned, and we are told that "he fell asleep," Acts 7:60. Paul uses this expression on several occasions. "Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed," 1 Cor. 15:51. "But we would not have you ignorant, brethren, concerning them that fall asleep; that ye sorrow not, even as the rest, who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also that are fallen asleep in Jesus will God bring with him," 1 Thess. 4:13, 14.

(2) From the Old Testament: "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. As well their love, as their hatred and their envy, is perished long ago; neither have they anymore portion forever in anything that's done under the sun," Eccl. 9:5, 6. "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there's no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in Sheol, whither thou goest," Eccl. 9:10. "

Consider and answer me, O Jehovah my God: Lighten mine eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death," Psalms 13:3. "For in death there is no remembrance of thee: In Sheol who shall give thee thanks?" Ps. 6:5. "The dead praise not Jehovah, Neither do any that go down into silence," Psalm 115:17. "His (man's) breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; In that very day his thoughts perish," Ps. 146:3, 4. Daniel refers to "them that sleep in the dust of the earth," 12:2.

But these verses present no real difficulty. It should be clear to any one that these verses describe the dead person only as he appears from the human viewpoint, not as he really is. The language is that of appearance only. Similarly, the Bible speaks of "the four corners of the earth," Rev. 20:8; of "the ends of the earth," Zeck. 9:10; of the sun rising and setting; etc. Outwardly the dead person does look as if "at rest" or "asleep." He can no longer hear, nor speak, nor even move, nor in any way take part in the activities of this world. But not one of the verses quoted is intended to give real description of the person or his activities in the next world, nor does any one of them make any attempt whatever to enter into the reality that underlies death.

Everyone acknowledges, of course, that the body does sleep until the resurrection, that is, it becomes unconscious, insensible. The sleep spoken of is that of the body, not of the soul. Those who teach soul sleep have simply confused the sleep of the body with that of the soul. Soul sleep is not taught anywhere in the Bible. In every instance in which the word sleep is used in connection with the dead the context makes it clear that it applies only to the body.

The parable of the rich man and Lazarus, which tells so much about the intermediate state and to which we find it necessary to refer so often, answers this question completely. There we have a picture of both the saved and the lost immediately after death. Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom, or Paradise, and the rich man was in hell. Abraham and the rich man recognized each other. They talked back and forth, and remembered the scenes of earth. What could better picture-perfect consciousness? Poor consolation it would have been for Lazarus to be in Abraham's bosom if he were not conscious, as some would have us believe, and didn't know that he was there!

It will do no good for anyone to object that this was only a parable. For the parables spoken by Jesus were true to life and based on realities. The parables of the sower, of the prodigal son, of the vine, fig tree, etc., are given because in real life there are sowers, prodigal sons, vines, fig trees, etc. A parable must give a true picture of the thing it illustrates if it is to be of any service. Otherwise, it becomes misleading. Furthermore, these events are spoken of as having taken place during the earth time, that is, before the end of the world. Jesus Himself told the parables. Surely, He knew what the realities were, and surely, He would not have used words that would have deceived His hearers.

But apart from this parable there is still abundant Scripture to prove that believers do enjoy a conscious life in connection with God and Christ immediately after death. To the penitent thief on the cross Jesus said, "Today shalt thou be with me in Paradise," Luke 23:43. Those words would have afforded little comfort if he were to sink into a state of dead unconsciousness, only to be awakened by the judgment trumpet.

Instead of a long unconscious sleep he had the assurance that that day he would be with Christ in Paradise. The spirit of Jesus went immediately to the Father, and with him went the spirit of this poor victim. To transpose the word "today," as the Adventists do, making the verse read, "Today I say unto thee, thou shalt be with me in Paradise," is characterized by the best exegetical authorities as entirely unauthorized and as simply forcing the sense of the passage.

At the transfiguration scene, Matthew 17:1, Moses and Elijah appeared talking with Jesus. They weren't soul-sleeping. Moses had been dead fifteen centuries and his body had long since mingled with the dust of the earth, but now he appears, alive and conscious. Elijah, too, had been taken out of the world centuries earlier. But here he is, very much alive.

Our Lord, in His arguing with Sadducees, appealed to the Old Testament to prove that Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, were then living and enjoying communion with God: "Moses showed, in the place concerning the Bush, when he calleth the Lord the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now he is [present tense] not the God of the dead, but of the living," Luke 20:37, 38.

The bodies of those men were dead, but their spirits were alive. Let it be kept in mind that the angels, who are pure spirits entirely apart from any bodies, aren't soul-sleeping. Why should it be thought human souls must sleep when separate from their bodies? This was the argument of the Pharisees against their rivals, the materialistic minded Sadducees, that the existence of angels proves that spirits can and do live apart from the body. The old Sadducees differed from the modern soul sleepers to this extent: they were more consistent in that they denied completely any future life, whereas the moderns believe that after an unconscious period of the soul will be brought back to consciousness at the resurrection to be united with the body.

It should be kept in mind that resurrection applies not to the soul, but only to the body. It isn't the soul, but the body, that rises. This is the teaching of the Bible when, for instance, we are told that at the crucifixion of Jesus "the tombs were opened; and many bodies of the saints that had fallen asleep were raised," Matthew 27:52. The soul needs no resurrection, for it doesn't die.

The dying martyr, Stephen, with the full light of inspiration in his mind, declared he saw the heavens opened and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God—standing there, waiting for him (Acts 7:56). So, Stephen wasn't going into a state of sleep.

Paul indicates the Christian at death is immediately present with Christ: "For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But I am in a strait betwixt the two, having the desire to depart and be with Christ; for it is very far better," Phil. 1:21, 23. That can only mean that he expected to be conscious in the presence of the Lord and to receive an immediate blessing. Again, he says: "Whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord ... willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord," 2 Corinthians 5:6, 8. He certainly would not have spoken after that fashion about an unconscious existence, which is a virtual non-existence. What possible satisfaction could there be in being unconsciously "at home with the Lord?" These words can have no other meaning than that he did expect to be conscious immediately after death.

With his burning desire to render needed service to the newly established churches, he would've preferred to have lived and labored, even amid great sufferings, rather than to have died if death only meant entering into a state of unconsciousness and inaction. To be at home with the Lord loses all meaning if there is no consciousness.

These and various other passages teach clearly that souls do exist and they are conscious between death and the resurrection. All of these relate to time before the resurrection. Surely there is no room left for the erroneous doctrine of soul sleeping.

In the light of all this evidence we must conclude that the intermediate state is a state of consciousness, recognition and remembrance. There is no reason to believe that at death either the good or the evil enter into a state of abeyance or suspense. The innate activity of the soul would of itself make it probable that the soul would continue conscious and that it would enter upon the preliminary state of reward or punishment.¹

¹ Boettner, L. (1956). [*Immortality*](#) (pp. 108–117). Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Company.



18 BIBLE VERSES
about
SOUL SLEEP

Psalm 115:17

Psalm 146:4

Matthew 27:52

Matthew 10:28

Ecclesiastes 9:5

Hebrews 9:27

John 5:28-29

Ecclesiastes 12:7

Psalm 6:5

1 Corinthians 15:20-23

James 2:26

John 6:44

Daniel 12:2

John 3:13

2 Corinthians 5:6-8

Genesis 2:7

Ecclesiastes 3:20

Matthew 9:24

Apologetics Press Soul Sleep Series

The Biblical Concept of Sleep

The concept of “sleep” is used many ways in the Bible. A study of these usages yields many valuable lessons.

Since sleep is such a significant part of the human experience, it's no surprise biblical writers should allude to it frequently. There are many ways this term is employed in Holy Scripture.

Sleep as a Symbol

The term “sleep” is used symbolically in several senses in the Bible. A consideration of these makes for fascinating study.

Does God sleep?

The concept of sleeping is biblically employed with figurative language to stress certain truths about God.

In emphasizing the fact that the Lord is ever watchful of our needs, a psalmist wrote:

“He will not allow your foot to slip; he who keeps you will not slumber. Behold, he who keeps Israel will neither slumber nor sleep” (Psa. 121:3-4).

As a result of the Lord's providential care, the faithful saint takes consolation.

“In peace will I both lay me down and sleep; for you, Jehovah, alone make me dwell in safety” (Psa. 4:8).

On the other hand, when the Hebrew people drifted into sin, and the Lord allowed them to suffer the consequences of their rebellion, it was **as if** he was asleep (i.e., he did not intervene to deliver them from certain calamities). They exclaimed:

“Awake. Why do you sleep, O Lord? Arise, do not cast us off forever” (Psa. 44:23).

A symbol of laziness

Sometimes sleep is used as the equivalent of being lazy.

“Do not give sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids Go to the ant, O sluggard. Observe her ways and be wise How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest. And your poverty will come in like a vagabond, and your need like an armed man” (Prov. 6:4-11).

The destruction of the wicked

Sleep can portray the utter and final punishment of a wicked power standing in opposition to God. Jeremiah foretold the complete destruction of the evil Babylonian regime.

“Babylon shall become heaps, a dwelling-place for jackals, an astonishment, and a hissing, without inhabitant When they are heated, I will make their feast, and I will make them drunken, that they may rejoice, and sleep a perpetual sleep, and not wake, saith Jehovah” (51:37-39).

Spiritual apathy

Sometimes spiritual lethargy is represented as a sleep. To the brethren in Rome Paul wrote:

“And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we first believed” (Rom. 13:11).

The apostle subsequently amplifies the significance of the figure by suggesting that the **pursuit of an ungodly lifestyle is tantamount to a spiritual coma** (v. 13). A similar thought is suggested in Paul’s letter to the Ephesians:

“Awake, you who are sleeping, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall shine on you” (Eph. 5:14).

Being unprepared

Sleep can suggest the notion of being unprepared to meet the Lord at the time of his return. Jesus warned:

“Watch therefore: for you do not know when the lord of the house is coming ... lest he come suddenly and find you sleeping” (Mk. 13:35-36).

When Paul corresponded with the brothers in Thessalonica, he warned about a false sense of security. Folks will be relaxing in a delusional state of “peace and safety,” when suddenly a force of destruction will come upon them. And so he admonished:

“let us not sleep, as do the rest, but let us watch and be sober” (1 Thes. 5:3-6).

To be awake is thus to be vigilant, ever prepared.

The dead are asleep

Sleep is commonly used as a designation for death, both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament. David petitioned the Creator:

“Consider and answer me, O Jehovah my God: Lighten my eyes, lest I sleep the sleep of death” (Psa. 13:3).

When Lazarus of Bethany died, Jesus informed the disciples: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep....” The Master’s men did not comprehend the nature of his language. They initially thought that Christ spoke of natural sleep; he therefore had to tell them plainly: “Lazarus is dead” (Jn. 11:14).

Why is death figuratively depicted as sleep?

First, there is a common appearance between a sleeping body and a corpse. The analogy is thus quite natural.

Second, just as the soul of a sleeping person still exists but is oblivious to its material surroundings, even so, in death the soul of man is not extinct; rather, it is only **unaware of earth’s environment**. Solomon asserted that the dead have neither knowledge of, nor reward for, anything transpiring “under the sun,” i.e., on earth (Eccl. 9:5-6).

Third, as the sleeping person awakes and rises from his bed. Even so, the dead will rise from their graves at the time of the Lord’s return. It is not the case, as alleged by some, that the dead are unconscious, i.e., they are in a state of mindless sleep, awaiting the day of judgment. There is ample evidence that the dead are entirely conscious in their realm of existence.

Whenever the Bible describes death as a **sleep**, it's only the **body** that is under consideration.

For example, Daniel referred to those who “sleep in the dust of the earth” (12:2). Note that the part of man which sleeps is that part which is **planted in the dust**.

The Greek word for the “sleep” of death is *koimaomai* (Mt. 27:52), a kindred term to *koimeterion*, from which derives our word “cemetery,” the abode of dead bodies (see “Asleep,” W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary*).

Finally, as suggested above, the term “sleep” implies the **future resurrection** of the body.

Paul argues that Christ “is the first-fruits of them that are asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20). This is a clear affirmation that Christ’s bodily resurrection is the pledge of Heaven that we shall be raised similarly—with first-fruits being the initial harvest (Exodus 23:16), and the guarantee of that which is to follow. As the Lord awoke from the dead, so shall we.

He Restores My Soul

The Great Shepherd of Psalm 23 promises to restore our souls.

Psalm Twenty-three is often called the “nightingale song” because, like the bird of that name, it sings so sweetly at the midnight hour.

And life does have its midnight hours! In that song, the poet extols the qualities of the great Shepherd who, among other things, “restores my soul.”

The Soul that Needs Restored

In the Hebrew Bible, the term “soul” is **nephesh** (756 times). The word can refer to “life” (Gen. 1:30) or simply the “person” (Deut. 10:22).

It also can designate the immaterial part of a human, equivalent to the “spirit” (Gen. 35:18; Jas. 2:26; see: Clarke, 212).

Materialists (both secular and some quasi-religious) deny that human beings have been endowed with souls. An example of secular materialist would be the atheist, while an illustration of the latter is the “Jehovah’s Witnesses” organization.

But we are not mere hunks of molded “dust” (Genesis 2:7). There is an inner essence, the soul (Matthew 10:28) that has been made in the very image of God himself (Genesis 1:26-27).

The Soul's Restoration

But what is the meaning of the verb “restores” (used about 1,060 times in the Old Testament)?

Some suggest that the sense is this. Soul (life) is “refreshed” by God.

While the word can signify “to refresh,” it certainly is not the physical life that is in view in this text. This is evidenced by the Psalmist’s appeal to the “law of Jehovah” as accomplishing the restoration (Psalm 19:7).

The basic word indicates a “movement back to the point of departure” (Unger & White, 333). A noun form is found in Hosea 14:4, where the Lord promises:

“I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely: for my anger is turned away from him.”

It hardly needs to be pointed out that David “slid” backward on occasion. When he did, his soul was plunged into distress (cf. Psa. 32; 51).

The term can also carry the sense of “converting,” “reviving” or “transforming.” The passage in Hosea suggests a “healing.”

The word hints of the **damage** that sin can do to the soul. Or as we might express it, to the “psyche,” the emotions, one’s mental state of well-being.

In this regard, we cannot but think of such mental turbulence as worry, guilt, regret, sadness, unrest, frustration, and fear.

Did Solomon Teach the Doctrine of Soul-Sleeping?

A critic writes to argue that Ecclesiastes teaches that the dead are not conscious. What are the real facts?

A passage in the book of Ecclesiastes reads as follows:

“For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again. Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth? Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?” (3:19-22).

A reader, who subscribes to the notion that the dead are “unconscious,” appeals to this passage and draws from it the following conclusions.

1. The dead have no knowledge.
2. They have neither memory nor feelings.
3. Man and beast have one breath and all go to one place, to the dust of the earth.
4. A dead man cannot be brought to see what will be after him.

We are happy to respond to the gentleman’s comments.

In logic, there is a principle known as the “law of rationality,” which simply suggests that, in analyzing a position, one must draw only such conclusions as are warranted by the evidence. Our respondent has seriously ignored this concept. He has drawn inferences that aren’t justified by any fair analysis.

Let us consider each of the four points argued above.

“The dead have no knowledge.”

There is absolutely nothing in this context that asserts or implies that the dead are bereft of all knowledge. There is a passage, later in the book, which states that “the dead know not anything” (9:5). But the statement is then qualified by the immediate context which shows the writer has in mind events that occur “under the sun” (vv. 3,6). That text merely affirms that once a person is dead, he is no longer an observer of what transpires upon the earth.

Verse 5 also says: “. . . neither have they any more a reward.” Are we to surmise that this phrase then denies any reward following death? Of course not; such a view would contradict numerous passages of clearest import.

Again, the meaning obviously is this — those who have died have no further reward *relative to any achievements being accomplished on this planet.*

“They have neither memory nor feelings.”

This assertion similarly finds no support in the context cited. It most likely has been borrowed from 9:5b as well. Again, the text does not provide the evidence coveted by our critic. It simply says that men die and, as a rule, soon are forgotten.

It is not that “*their* memory” is erased by death; it is the “memory *of them*” that soon fades. Admittedly, it reflects a rather dismal view of life (not uncommon in that day of limited revelation); it is not, however, an affirmation of materialism.

“Man and beast have one breath and all go to one place, to the dust of the earth.”

Solomon does suggest both man and beast have a common appointment — death. Just as animals expire, so do human beings. All are subject to the same consequences because of the introduction of sin into the environment (Romans 5:12).

Note that in Psalm 49:12, the writer says that man “is like the beasts that perish,” and yet, only three verses later he affirms that “God will redeem my soul from the power of Sheol.”

What if one were to extract the expression — “man hath no preeminence above the beasts” — from this context, arguing on the basis of that phrase, that human beings are no better than beasts? There are horrible implications flowing from that premise! But such a procedure would reflect the same sort of interpretative fallacy of which our critic has been guilty.

“A dead man cannot see what will be after him.”

It is quite true that the dead cannot be “brought” back to earth’s domain in a post-mortem state to observe what is transpiring in this environment. But what does that have to do with the matter of his perception *in the realm of the dead*? Not a thing.

Two Common Mistakes

Those who are determined to argue the dogma of “soul-sleeping,” from passages in the Old Testament, commit two common mistakes.

First, they do as the inquirer under review did — **they wrest the passage from its context and thrust upon it an application not intended by the original author.** The old saying: “A text out of context is but mere pretext,” was never truer than in this case.

Second, materialists frequently fail to recognize the principle of progressive revelation. In this case, they appear to be unaware of the fact that those of the Old Testament era did not have nearly the insight into the subject of the state of the dead as was revealed later by the illumination of the New Testament.

Paul speaks to this very point when he declares that Christ, by means of his redemptive mission, “brought life and immortality *to light* through the gospel” (2 Timothy 1:10). While the hope of immortality was not completely absent in earlier ages, it was shrouded in considerable obscurity (cf. Job 14:7-14; 19:23-27).

The New Testament makes it emphatically clear that the dead *are* conscious.

Revelation 6:9 – Are the Dead Ones’ Sleeping?

What happens to the “soul” at the point of death? Is it conscious, or does it exist in a state of “sleep,” totally oblivious to its environment?

There is much Bible evidence to demonstrate that the soul is entirely conscious in the after-death state. One of the biblical contexts which sheds light on this subject is Revelation 6:9-11. Read this narrative very carefully

“And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of them that had been slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: and they cried with a great voice, saying, How long, O Master, the holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth? And there was given them to each one a white robe; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little time, until their fellow-servants also and their brethren, who should be killed even as they were, should have fulfilled their course.”

Note the following facts:

The Revelator sees the “souls” of those killed for the cause of Christ under the altar of God. These persons are martyrs, hence their slain bodies remain upon the earth. And yet they, as souls, are also existing in the presence of God. Therefore, there is a soul that exists independent of the human body!

Regarding these souls, scripture & logic indicate:

- (1) They are vocal — they cry out to God.**
- (2) They are intellectually curious — they desire to know how long persecution will continue.**
- (3) These souls have memory — they recall earth's bloody circumstances.**
- (4) They are morally sensitive — they believe that the wicked who persecute God's righteous cause on earth should be punished.**
- (5) They are capable of receiving blessings —each is given a white robe.**
- (6) They are able to comprehend admonition — they are told to be patient and rest until the divine plan is fulfilled.**

This context strikes a death blow to the doctrine of materialism, and its kindred dogma of soul-sleeping!

Are the Dead “Asleep”?

This question is occasionally posed: “Why do Christians teach that the dead are conscious, when the Scriptures refer to death as ‘sleep’”? Wayne Jackson addresses this.

“Why do some teach that the “soul” is conscious after death, when the Bible plainly teaches that the dead are ‘asleep’?”

There are two significant words in the Greek New Testament for the English term “sleep.” Each of these is utilized literally and figuratively, both that is, for natural sleep, and also as a symbol for death.

The term *katheudo* occurs 22 times in the New Testament. In a literal sense it is used of “natural sleep” (Matthew 13:25; 25:5).

The term is employed with reference to death in only one passage. The daughter of a Jewish synagogue ruler, whose name was Jairus, had died (Mark 5:35). Christ was bidden to the place where the girl was. When he arrived at the home, the Lord with confident said: “the child is not dead, but is sleeping” (v. 39).

That the maiden actually was dead admits of no doubt. **The Savior used the term “sleep” figuratively, in view of the fact that this death was to be a temporary heartache.** He then raised the twelve-year-old girl from her state of death. Luke says that her “spirit returned” and she rose up immediately (Luke 8:55).

Another term in the New Testament for “sleep” is *koimaomai* (a form of *koimao*). The word is found eighteen times. While *koimaomai* may refer on occasion to normal sleep (Mt. 28:13; Lk. 22:45), predominately (15 of the 18 times) this word is used figuratively for the “sleep” of death (see Mt. 27:52; 1 Cor. 15:20).

This metaphorical use of “sleep,” to describe the death of a body, is ancient. It is found in classical Greek (e.g., Homer, *Illiad* 11.241; Sophocles, *El.*509) and in the Septuagint (e.g., 36 times in 2 Kgs. & Chron, as in “he slept with his fathers”).

The Body Sleeps, Not the Soul

Here is a fact to be underscored. When the term “sleep” is used to depict the death of a person, the allusion is always to **the disposition of the body**, not the soul. There is no passage in the Scriptures that reflects the notion that one’s **soul** sleeps or is unconscious in death. A contrary case may be argued briefly in the following fashion.

Daniel affirmed that those who “sleep [kathēudontōn] in the dust of the earth shall awake” (Daniel 12:2). Note that the part of man that “sleeps” is that which is deposited in the “dust of the earth.” This obviously is a reference to the physical body. The awakening, then, is a reference to the bodily resurrection.

Jesus once said to his disciples: “Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep (*kekoimetai* — the perfect, passive of *koimao*); but I go that I may awake him out of sleep” (John 11:11). In view of the subsequent context, the “awakening” here clearly refers to the resurrection of Lazarus’ body (vv. 43-44). **The verb *koimao* derives from the root *keimai*, “to lie down.” In death, it is only the “body” that lies down (not the soul); hence, it is the body that sleeps.**

W. E. Vine notes that *keimai*, “to lie down,” stands as antonym to “resurrection” (*anastasis* — from *ana*, “up,” and *histemi*, “to cause to stand” — see: *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* under “Asleep”).

Since that which will “stand up” is the body; it follows that the element of man that “lies down” or “sleeps” likewise is the body. Early Christians even called their burial grounds *koimeteria*, “sleeping places,” and from this term derives our modern word, “cemetery,” a place to which we transport the bodies of loved ones. The term sleep says absolutely nothing about the state of the soul after death.

Noted scholar D. Edmond Hiebert observed:

“[T]he figure of death as sleep cannot be pressed to establish the teaching that in the intermediate state the soul is in an unconscious repose (soul sleep) the body only is thought of as being asleep, no longer is it in communication with its earthly environment. As sleep has its awakening, so the body of the believer will have its awakening. The theory of soul sleep is inconsistent with Paul’s assertion in [1 Thessalonians] 5:10 that God’s purpose for us is the whether we live or die we should live together with Christ. At death the believer’s ‘earthly house of our tabernacle’ is dissolved (2 Corinthians 5:1) and returns to the dust, but the spiritual part of man, the soul, his self-conscious personality, departs ‘to be with the Lord’ (2 Corinthians 5:8). Since to depart from the world in death to ‘be with Christ’ is described by Paul as ‘very far better’ (Phil. 1:23) than the present state of blessed communion with the Lord and happy activity in His service, it is evident that ‘sleep’ as applied to believers can’t be intended to teach that the soul is unconscious” (188-89).

Is the Soul Conscious After Death?

There are those, who identify themselves with Christianity, who contend the dead aren't conscious in the intermediate state, i.e., in that condition of existence between the time of one's death and that of the resurrection of his body. Martin Luther once taught that the condition between death and the resurrection is "a deep and dreamless sleep without consciousness and feeling" (Althaus, 414-416).

There have been some among the churches of Christ who have occasionally advocated this concept. For example, in a speech delivered at Pepperdine University in April of 1988, F. LaGard Smith asserted the theory of "soul-sleeping." But this position is seriously flawed and is refuted by considerable biblical evidence.

The narrative regarding the rich man and the beggar Lazarus unquestionably demonstrates the consciousness of humanity (of both the evil and the righteous) in the intermediate state (Luke 16:19). While some would dismiss this account as a mere parable, the evidence is against that view.

- The text has traits that suggest it is not a parable (e.g., Lazarus and Abraham being named).
- It would not matter if it were, for a parable portrays circumstances that are true to life (unlike, for example, the fable).

On the mountain of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah appeared and spoke with Christ regarding his impending death in Jerusalem (Luke 9:30-31). These Old Testament worthies certainly weren't in a state of "dreamless sleep."

On the cross, Jesus promised the penitent robber, “Today you will be with me in Paradise” (Luke 23:43). The language demands association and consciousness later that day in the realm of the righteous dead. If not, of what value was the pledge?

Paul described the state of departing to be with the Lord (dying in Christ) as being “very far better” than any earthly Christian fellowship (Philippians 1:23). Could one affirm that unconsciousness is “very far better” than sweet communion among the children of God? Moreover, what value would be there in desiring to “depart” to be “with Christ” if one was unconscious, and did not even know that he **was** “with Christ.”

In the book of Revelation John saw a vision of the “souls” of those who had been slain upon the earth (Revelation 6:9-11). These souls were petitioning God for information as to when their blood would be avenged, and they were encouraged to wait patiently until Heaven’s plan had reached fruition. It is impossible to eliminate post-death consciousness from this sacred scene.

These arguments represent but a fraction of the case that can be made for the conscious state of the dead in the post-death, pre-resurrection state of human existence. Those who deny this clear biblical teaching reveal they have been influenced by doctrines that are alien to the scriptural view of man.

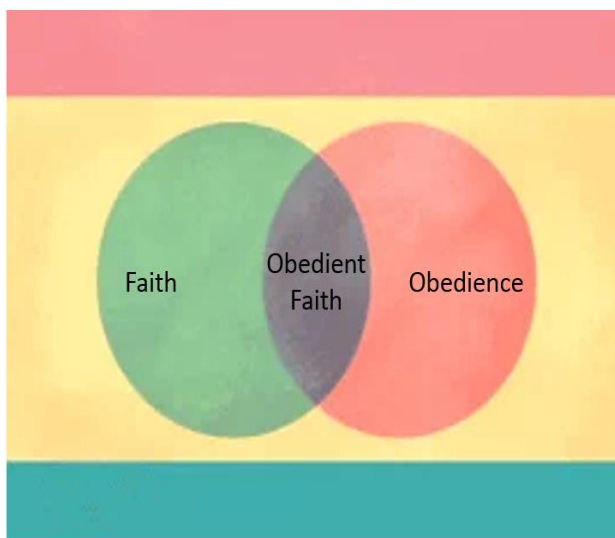
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AT THE NEXUS OF GRACE & GLORY

Five Steps For Saving:

- **HEARING:**
- Romans 10: 17; Matthew 7: 24 - 27
- **BELIEVING:**
- Hebrews 11: 6; Mark 16: 15, 16
- **REPENTING:**
- Acts 2: 38; 17: 30; Luke 13: 3
- **CONFESSING:**
- Matthew 10: 32, 33; Acts 8: 36, 37
- **BAPTISM:**
- Romans 6: 3 – 5; Acts 8: 36 – 38



O That Will Be Glory

2. *Who that will be glory for me, e grace,*

I an Glory for me, glory for me; ce,

When by His grace I shall look on His face, e

That will be glory, be glory for me. me.

