

Resurrection Necessary?

If we're already in Heaven – that seems so strange!

Introduction

In the days of Elijah the prophet, God directed the prophet to the town of Zarephath, where a widow would take care of him. She had a young son who died while he was there. Elijah petitioned God:

“Then he stretched himself out on the boy three times and cried out to the LORD, ‘LORD my God, let this boy’s life return to him! The LORD heard Elijah’s cry, and the boy’s life returned to him, and he lived’” (I Kings 17:22 – NIV).



Was that a gesture of mercy on God’s part or a cruel miracle – because “**THE BOY HAD TO COME BACK FROM HEAVEN?**”

Body + life → boy lived

Recall our study of Daniel 12. At the end of time when God’s people are “delivered” from the evil and oppression of this world, it notes:

*“Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth **will awake**: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt”* (Daniel 12:2 – NIV).

Dead/”sleeping” – given life – they are then awake/alive.

“Awake” means that they have been asleep (unconscious), another way Jesus referred to those who died. No thoughts.

Paul had resurrection concerns when he wrote to the Corinthian Church (established only five years previously).

“But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen” (I Corinthians 15:13). Some of the Jewish leaders in that day did not believe in a resurrection!

- His words suggest that the “resurrection” is ***incredibly important!***
- ***There must be a relationship between the resurrection of Christ’s body and those of people who have died! But if they’re in heaven, why worry?***

Paul expanded this further:

When Jesus comes again: “*In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the **dead shall be raised** incorruptible, and we shall be changed*” (1 Corinthians 15:52; cf. Matthew 24:32).

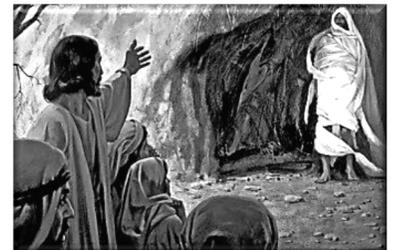


We, therefore, have a pending question:

- If the saints have enjoyed the bliss of being with Jesus and all the host of heaven for months, years, millenniums, ages –
- Why now do they have to return to planet earth and be stuck in a body – forever?

Something seems very strange!

- After Lazarus died, Jesus told Martha: “*I am the resurrection and the life*” (John 11:25).
- Is Jesus saying that Lazarus is living up in glory/heaven? “Don’t weep – I’ll call Him back to enter his dead body so he can be with you again before he dies again!”



Sounds strange, doesn’t it? It simply is not what the Bible teaches.

Our story of this dilemma began 6000 years ago!

Sinless Adam and Eve were Given a Warning

“*You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat from it you will surely die*” (Genesis 2:17 – NET).

- The warning: If you eat, at some point in the future you will die.
- Adam and Eve had never seen death.
- But – I’m sure that God had told those giant minds what it really meant!

That test doesn’t say, “You will surely die and go to heaven!”

Then, here comes Satan – that serpent the devil – waiting for Adam or Eve:



• “*And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall **not** surely die*” (Genesis 3:4).

- Suddenly – Adam and Eve have conflicting messages.
- How do they make a choice?
- Remember – Satan hasn’t seen death yet either!

But – he was contradicting God!

Here is an important principle: Faith is always tied to obedience. The story of Abraham in Hebrews 11 is an amazing lesson on this!

*“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, **obeyed**; and he went out, **not knowing whither he went**” (Hebrews 11:8). He had faith in God’s leadings.*

Horrors – Adam and Eve did eat of that fruit!

- At first it seemed exhilarating. They experienced something new – what it felt like to be “independent of God” – “really in the know!”
- Then something changed – they were naked.
- When Jesus arrived they tried to hide from Him. They felt guilt and shame and wanted to blame – emotions when in the wrong.

Jesus then gave them a promise of a Redeemer who would **die for them** (Genesis 3:15)!

- Wonder of wonders – how could that be? Jesus, I’m sure, spent a long time talking with them.
- **But a question: If Jesus died so we can then go to heaven as soon as we die, why is there a resurrection?**

Something, again, sounds strange! Could the timing of that heavenly journey be different?

Satan just loves confusion and deception.

- Disobedience either means death or no death.
- Who is right? God or Satan?
- Death either means life or no life!

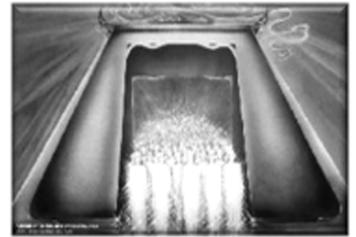
Maybe before we go on, we ought to get a better understanding of “life” and “no life” (death).

God’s Beautiful Creation

Mankind was the last creation act of God – and the most important.

His plan: *“And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over.... the earth” (Genesis 1:26).*

His action: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and **breathed into his nostrils the breath of life**; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7).



What is this saying?

Life-less man (Adam)	+	Breathed (<i>napah</i>) (<i>be•ap</i>) into his nostrils “Life” – breath (<i>nashama</i>)	=	Living soul (<i>chay</i> – living; <i>nephesh</i> – soul) (= living being – Genesis 12:5)
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What then is a soul (*nephesh*)?

- Simply put: A living being – a living person (body plus life)
- Interestingly, *nephesh* (soul) can die (Judges 16:30, Numbers 31:19).



It’s stunning – that word “*soul*” is also applied to fish, birds and mammals (Genesis 1:20-21, 30).

- It is: Body + life (breath of God) → “*living soul*” – living being
- That breath is the mysterious gift of life that God has given each of us, and that makes us a soul!
- The same **life** is in your pet dog, the fish in your aquarium and the birds flying in the air.

What did Jesus say? “I am ... life” (John 11:25).

Well – you protest!

The Bible says:

- “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the **spirit** shall return unto God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).
- “Spirit” is *ruach* (H). It literally means “**air in motion.**”
- Here – the life-giving breath of God returns to Him.



There is **nothing** to suggest that it thinks, talks, loves or moves!!!

It is what God said that man lost when he died in the flood (Genesis 7:21-22).

You're now uncomfortable! There must be other places to prove that we go to heaven when we die! Let's look.

1. Departing Soul

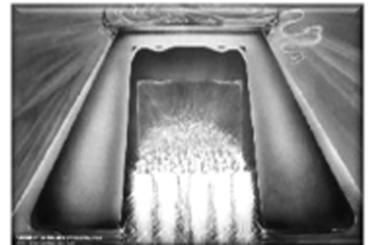
- “*And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin*” (Genesis 35:18).
- The NIV and NET Bibles translate it “*with her dying breath*” (*nephesh*). It really means “with her dying being.”

2. Soul Return

- “*And he stretched himself upon the child three times, and cried unto the LORD, and said, O LORD my God, I pray thee, let this child's soul come into him again. And the LORD heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived*” (I Kings 17:21-22).
- Let this child's “being” (*nephesh*) be restored – give him his life/breath back.

3. Souls under the Altar

- “*And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held: And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?” (Revelation 6:9-10).*
- This is a **prophetic allegory**. The word for souls here is a different word in the Greek. It is *psuche* (*psychas*), meaning “breath” or “life.”
 - If these are saved, living “spirit beings” called “souls” – why are they in distress, crying out?
 - Why are they praying for “vengeance”?
 - Why did God put them “*under the altar*”?
- They actually represent/symbolize the cry of those still awaiting Christ's coming. “**How long is this going to go on?**”



4. Absent from the Body

- “*We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord” (II Corinthians 5:8).*
 - If we look at verses 1-7 – the “*earthly house*” is Paul's body.

- Unclothed or naked refers to death.
- Paul desires to be clothed (living) in his heavenly “house” (body).
- That is a new body, which is changed to have immortality at Christ’s Second Coming (I Corinthians 15:20-23, 51-54).
- Paul would rather be there in that heavenly body than in this old world in his earthly body.
- We all, really, would prefer that also.

5. Thief on the Cross

“And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise” (Luke 23:43).

- Note how a **simple comma** makes a difference!
- There was no punctuation in the original.
- Jesus did not go to paradise that day (John 20:17).
- Thus, a more plausible rendering would be:

“Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.”



6. Rich Man and Lazarus

- Luke 16:19-31
- Nothing is said of an immortal soul leaving the body:
 - The rich man has “eyes” and a “tongue” (body parts)
 - Lazarus has a “finger.”
 - How could a spirit have body parts if the body is in the grave?
 - And are heaven and hell that close together?
- ***This parable shows that destiny is decided in this life – that’s the lesson.***
 - “certain rich man” – all men/women who make wrong use of life’s opportunities.
- This parable teaches key principles – not doctrine.
 - He erred in thinking his Abrahamic descent (Jewish) would save him – rather than character (cf. Ezekiel 18).
 - Lesson: ***Whether good or bad when one dies, the eternal future is fixed.***

If one assumes that our reward is right after we die, it contradicts what Jesus said:

1. He rewards every man when He “*shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels*” (Matthew 16:27; cf. 25:31-41, I Corinthians 15:51-55, I Thessalonians 4:16-17, Revelation 22:12).
2. Jesus introduced this parable by alluding to the beliefs of those he was talking to. Many believed that a wicked person went straight to hell.

Are the wicked tormented in an everlasting hell?

We are informed:

“Then shall he say [at Jesus’ coming] also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels ... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment [not punishing]: but the righteous into life eternal” (Matthew 25:41, 46).

“And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

The word for “*everlasting*” (***aionios***) is used in many settings. It actually refers to an “**end**” – **until all life is gone** (Matthew 13:39, Colossians 1:26, Ephesians 1:21, II Timothy 4:10, I Corinthians 2:7).

Malachi said that the “*day cometh*” (future time) when the wicked will suffer the torment of ***consuming*** fire (Malachi 4:1-3).

- What does “*consuming*” mean?
- Does that occur when they die – **or**
- At the very end of planet earth? (Revelation 20)

Sodom and Gomorrah suffered the “*vengeance of eternal fire*” and is given as an example of God’s eternal judgment (Jude 7, II Peter 2:6).

- They are not burning today.
- In fact, their remains are likely buried in the area of the Dead Sea.

Conclusion: “*everlasting punishment*” means that ***the end result won’t change! They will die – as Adam and Eve were told – and never live again.*** (Fire is only the means by which death/destruction comes, as water was at the time of the flood.)



What does happen when a person dies? Does the Bible actually tell us?



“But man dieth, and wasteth away: yea, man giveth up the ghost [gawa – H], and where is he?” (Job 14:10). (Life was spent – done – breath was given up.)

“His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish” (Psalm 146:4).

“The dead praise not the LORD, neither any that go down into silence (Psalm 115:17).

“Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day” (Acts 2:29, 34).

*“Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, **and receive you** unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also” (John 14:1-3). Jesus doesn't receive saints until He comes.*

“I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing” (II Timothy 4:7-8). (The Lord's reward is given at His Second Coming.)

“For the grave cannot praise thee, death can not celebrate thee: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth” (Isaiah 38:18).

“For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward [temporal]; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun [temporal].... Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest” (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10).

*“For, behold, the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven; and all the proud, yea, and all that do wickedly, **shall be stubble**: and the day that cometh **shall burn them up**, saith the LORD of hosts, that it **shall leave them neither root nor branch**. But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall. And ye shall tread down the wicked; for they **shall be ashes under the soles of your feet** in the day that I shall do this, saith the LORD of hosts” (Malachi 4:1-3).*

Challenge?

Are there problem texts hard to understand regarding the dead and the hereafter?

Yes – several.

They all must be understood in light of other related Biblical Scriptures! Many Bible texts must be compared to others to fully understand them.

What do you think of the “religions” that teach people to pray to saints? What do you think of those who believe that “Mary” – the mother of Jesus – is in heaven?



What do you think of people, like Hillary Clinton, having séances with people who have died, like Eleanor Roosevelt?



What do you think of the Biblical King Saul going to the “witch of Endor” to talk with the “spirit” of Samuel (who had already died)?

Those questions relate to a fearful belief called “spiritualism.” It is an identity with the spirit world that relates to non-human beings.

Summary Thoughts

1. Death is “swallowed up” or ended when Jesus comes – not before (I Corinthians 15:54).
2. We are advised to seek immortality (Romans 2:7).
If a “soul” already has it, why seek for it?
3. II Timothy 1:10: Eternal life is a gift of God for those loyal to Him. If the soul is already in bliss, why does Jesus need to bring that gift when He comes?
 - a. If we go to heaven when we die and get a spiritual glorified “thinking self” – “being” – why do we need a resurrection of an old body?
 - b. If we need a body, why resurrect a corrupt body that has to be changed? (I Corinthians 15:13-14). The dead are raised to affirm Christ’s resurrection.
 - c. If immortality comes at His coming, how do saints survive in heaven before then?
4. What is usually “taught” at funerals? Most often, that they are in heaven! The amazing truth of Christ’s victory over death is lost with His future gift of eternal life.



5. God only has immortality (I Timothy 6:16). But we are promised that, if saved, we will have immortality also when God's rewards are given (I Thessalonians 4:17, John 3:16).

Because Jesus has power over life and death, He told His disciples, "*Lazarus sleepeth*" (John 11:11).

"And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust" (Acts 24:15).

"The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death" (I Corinthians 15:26).

When one dies, he is in the tomb awaiting Christ's life-giving call at His coming.



This is what we need to focus our hope on. That is when the dead will be raised and when the living saints will be gifted with eternal life.