

Concerning Them Which Are Asleep

By Burr Eggleston Of South Vernon, Massachusetts

www.CreationismOnline.com

“But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.” –1 Thess. 4:13. This is a mooted question. Perhaps there is more disagreement on this question than on any other Bible question. To some it seems of little interest, while to others it is of great importance. In writing on this subject our only desire is to honor God, publish his truth and inform those who have been deceived.

One great reason why there is so little rational understanding of God’s Word, is because so few study the Bible, and secondly, because so many, usually the leaders in the church, follow along lines of tradition in their expositions. Tradition may have some elements of value, but truth is of priceless value. To illustrate, truth may be compared to a spring of pure water, the fountain head, while tradition may easily be compared to the stream running from the spring, as it trickles its noisy way for miles through the valley. The water in the spring is pure, reviving, life-giving. In the stream below, the water is foul, contaminated. Every great truth has battled for its rightful place.

“Careless seems the great avenger; History’s pages but record, One death grapple in the darkness ’Twi’x old systems and the Word; Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne— Yet that scaffold sways the future, And behind the dim unknown, Standeth God within the shadow, Keeping watch above his own.”

We believe that these words of Lowell ring true today. Like our other literature, this tract is written for the masses, the common people, and can easily be understood. Our proof for the statements made herein, will be the Word of God, either that spoken by God himself, his Son, or his holy prophets and apostles. It may seem to be rather uphill work, to fight religious beliefs that are almost universally accepted, but if we can see a few, or even one, turn from tradition to honor God by believing his truth, our reward will be complete.

We confess that nearly all believe that when death ensues, the soul is either wafted to a place of bliss and perpetual happiness, or is consigned to a place of misery, possibly of torture. This has been the belief of the professed church for centuries. Occasionally, leaders like Tyndall and Luther have had the courage to speak out, and condemn such God-dishonoring teachings, and have received some following. We steadfastly with these leaders refuse to accept the orthodox belief that the dead are alive between death and the resurrection, and search still farther for the truth. Will the reader lay aside all prejudice for a few moments, and turn to the Bible for instruction.

In both the Old and New Testaments, men are exhorted to get right with God, and in the light of Psalm 6:5, the reason is plain, “For in death there is no remembrance of thee: in the grave who shall give thee thanks?” This makes it very plain and clear that when death comes, all thought and action ceases. A very convincing Bible argument of man in death is recorded in Isaiah, 38th chapter, commencing at the 1st verse. Here is given a chapter in the life of Hezekiah the King, who was a righteous man. Please open your Bibles, and beginning at the first verse, please follow us as we look over these verses carefully. We note that Hezekiah the King became sick, and the Lord sent Isaiah, the prophet, to the king saying, “Set thine house in order; for thou shalt die, and not live.”

Here then is the Bible definition of death. It is God’s definition if you please. He says that to die is to cease to live. If we could remove the inconsistencies of present day theology, and the superstitions surrounding the same concerning death, it would be easy to accept Bible teaching. As the majority of the professed followers of Christ do not study their Bibles, they are ignorant of its teachings, and may easily be compared to young birdlings in the nest, ready with open mouths to swallow whatever their educated leaders give them.

Little do they heed the Apostolic command in 2 Tim. 2:15, “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.”

It is a fact that the present day teaching by pulpit and press, that men are alive, when the Bible plainly states that they are dead, was borrowed from the Catholic church, and brought in the Protestant church, with a lot of other theological bunk, such as infant baptism and the like. If the followers of the Pope were to discard that generally believed teaching, that men are alive when God says they are dead, the purgatory of the Papist would be gone forever, and not nearly so many would be qualifying for the priesthood as a large percentage of their immense incomes would cease. Again, if Protestants would believe what God and his holy prophets and apostles have said of man’s condition between death and the resurrection, that God-dishonoring doctrine of eternal conscious misery, would soon be forgotten like a horrible nightmare.

Let us return to Isaiah, 38th chapter. Here Hezekiah, standing in the presence of death, would doubtless have great regard for the truth. He says in the third verse, “‘Remember, now, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee in truth and with a perfect heart and have done that which is good in thy sight.’ And Hezekiah wept sore.” If as the most of our modern teachers say that people “go to heaven at death,” if “sudden death is sudden glory,” if “death is the gate to glory,” if “We should not mourn departing friends, nor shake at death’s alarms,” that, “‘Tis but the voice that Jesus sends, To call the love ones to his arms,”

Why did this good man weep as he stood in the presence of death? It was because he believed God and His word. Read Eccl. 9:5, “For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.” Or shall we turn to Psalm 146:4, for more evidence? “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” The old prophet of Uz speaks in sweet accord with the word of God in Genesis, Job 14:10-12: “But man dies and wastes away: Yea, man giveth up the ghost, and where is he? As the waters fail from the sea, and the floods decays and dries up: So man lies down and rises not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”

Let us look to our blessed Redeemer for authority: John 3:13, “And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven.” Friends, for years, the writer of this tract has been offering to pay one dollar for each and every verse of Scripture that states that good people go to heaven at death. No one has ever found those Scriptures. Find those verses friends and send them in, and we will send you your money. But if you cannot find them will you be honest enough to renounce your unscriptural belief and honor God in the future by believing his word? Jesus said, Matt. 5:5, “Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth,” and the Bible is silent about God’s people living anywhere else after the resurrection.

Turning now again to Isaiah, 38th chapter, we note that the Lord heard the prayer of his servant Hezekiah and in his great mercy added fifteen years to his mortal existence. In the 9th verse of this chapter we read that Hezekiah wrote of his sickness, and of the dire effects that would have followed had not the Lord whom he loved and served performed a miracle and given him life. Let us note some of his words in the verses following. In verse 10 he says, “I shall go down to the gates of the grave.” Also verse 11, “I said, I shall not see the Lord, even the Lord in the land of the living.” (This is Bible.) But popular theology says that good people go directly to the Lord at death. That the mind, the powers, the faculties, are magnified or intensified ten thousand fold. Or, as we heard one minister say, “Death is not a calamity: it is only a change of residence; like going out of the kitchen into the parlor.” Or, as we heard another at the funeral service of an unsaved man, say, “We wish these mourning ones to know, that death is the messenger that opens the portals to the eternal home.” But King Hezekiah declares in verse 17, as he speaks to the God of mercy, “but thou hast in love to my soul, delivered it from the pit of corruption.” Read verse 18 please: “For the grave cannot praise thee, death cannot celebrate thee; they that go down into the pit cannot hope for thy truth.” And in verse 19, we read, “The living, the living (not the dead) he shall praise thee, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known thy truth.”

Shall we now return to Eccl. chapter 3, verses 19-21, “For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies 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 knows the spirit of man that goes upward, and the spirit of the beast that goes downward to the earth.” If you say that the spirit of man goes upward, we do not disagree and carry you back to Gen. 2:7, “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.”

In pronouncing the curse upon this man (Adam) for his disobedience, in Gen. 2:19, the Lord says, "For dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." And to these words agree the words of the wise man in Eccl. 12:7, when in speaking of man's dissolution he says, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Let us now dodge this fact, that it was the man made of dust, into whom God breathed the breath of life, thus causing him to live. In Gen. 7:21-22, we are made acquainted with the conditions following the flood, "And all flesh died that moved upon the face of the earth, both of fowl, and of cattle, and of beast, and of every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth, and every man: all in whose nostrils was the breath of life, of all that was in the dry land died." We note that these words of Moses agree with the words of Solomon just quoted, viz., that the giving of the breath of life by the great creator, to the dust man constituted man a living soul; so in Eccl. 3:19-20, we read that the giving up of the breath of life brings death, not only to the beast, but to man. Let us note carefully the words of inspiration concerning both man and beast, "All are of the dust, and all turn to dust again."

We now quote Eccl. 9:10, "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 wither thou goest." Martin Luther, the great reformer, commenting on this verse said, "This is another proof that the dead are insensible." Having found in Gen. 7:21-23, that it was the same breath of life given to the beasts of the field, that later was given to man, and having found in Eccl. 3:19-21, it is the same breath of life that leaves man and beast causing death, we now wish to examine in particular the 21st verse over which there seems to be some discussions, viz., "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goes upward and the spirit of beast that goes downward to the earth." In the Standard American Editions of the revised version of the Bible, 1901, we find this exegesis of Eccl. 3:21, "Who knoweth the spirit of man, whether it goes upward, and the spirit of the beast, whether it goes downward to the earth?" There can be but one conclusion in the face of accumulated Bible evidence, that the breath of life, that actuates man and beast, proceeds from the same fountain of life, and when death ensues, the same breath, or spirit of life, returns to God, the great fountain of life from whence it came.

Let those who claim that God gave man an immortal soul at creation or birth, remember that their claim will prove much more than they desire, for as we have found it was the same "breath of life" that God gave to both, and if man received an immortal soul the beast of the field did also. Their proof proves too much. Again and again in God's Word the condition of man between death and the resurrection is spoken of as sleep. A few references will suffice. In 1 Kings 2:10, the statement is made that "David slept with his fathers." First Kings 11:43, "Solomon slept with his fathers." First Kings 16:28, "Omri slept with his fathers." First Kings 22:40, "Ahab slept with his fathers." We could quote many, many other instances, but these already given show that both good and bad men slept with their fathers.

So far we have been searching for truth regarding the condition of man in death, as recorded by the Old Testament writers. In 2 Peter 1:21 we read that "holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." We now plan to compare these notes with the teachings of a few of the New Testament writers. In John 11:11, the greatest teacher of all time, says, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep." As the disciples did not understand him clearly, he speaks again in the 14th verse, "Then said Jesus unto them plainly, 'Lazarus is dead.'" Pretty good Bible argument for the "sleep of the dead." In this same chapter, verse 25, and in the two preceding ones Jesus and Martha are conversing about the resurrection. Jesus says, "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth in me though he were dead (or though like Lazarus) yet shall he live; and whosoever lives and believeth in me shall never die. Believe thou this?" (v. 26).

In 1 Cor. 15:51, Paul says, "Behold I shew you a mystery; we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed." So Jesus and Paul agree that when the dead are raised, the living will be translated and never die. In Acts 7:60, the first Christian martyr, Stephen, prays, "'Lord, lay not this sin to their charge.' And when he had said this, he fell asleep." And in 1 Thess. 4:13-14, the apostle talking about the last things pleads for wisdom and light to be given the church. He says, "But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him." Here comes the doctrinal significance of baptism. The only possible way the young convert can prove to the world that he believes that Jesus died and rose again, is to be immersed, to follow him into the liquid grave in likeness of Christ's death and burial and be raised in likeness of Christ's life and resurrection. Christ's resurrection is a victorious pledge of our resurrection.

At the resurrection the language of the 14th verse will be fulfilled, God brought his Son from the dead, and if we meet the conditions of the Gospel and believe God's Word, though we sleep, as he brought his Son from the dead, even so He will bring us from the dead.

Job, the patient old prophet, mourning the loss of his children, deploring the fact that the wife of his youth had apparently lost her faith in God, himself suffering the most excruciating pain, and wondering perhaps when he might be called upon to bid adieu to the things of this life, in Job 14:14, asks the most oft-repeated question of all time, "If a man die, shall he live again?" Submissive to the Divine will, he declares, "All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come." So he continues in Job 17:13-14, "If I wait, the grave is mine house: I have made my bed in the darkness.

"I have said to corruption, Thou art my father: to the worm, Thou art my mother, and my sister." This would be a dark picture indeed, were it not for the promises of the living God. In Eden the loving Creator promised a Life giver, and in due process of time, Jesus the Saviour came saying, "The thief cometh not, but for to steal and to kill and destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10). Again, our Lord declares in John 10:27-30, "My sheep hear my voice, and I know them and they follow me: And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any man pluck them out of my hand. My Father, which gave them to me, is greater than all; and no man is able to pluck them out of my Father's hand. I and my Father are one."

And God has given his immutable promise, confirmed by an oath to Abraham, when he was tried, and was found willing to offer Isaac his son as a sacrifice. In Gen. 22:18, God says, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed, because thou hast obeyed my voice." Paul speaks of this in Heb. 11:17-19, "By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 'Of whom it was said, 'That in Isaac shall thy seed be called.' Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure." Returning now to Gen. 25:8-10, we read, "Then Abraham gave up the ghost, and died in a good old age, an old man, and full of years; and was gathered to his people.

"And his sons, Isaac and Ishmael buried him in the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar, the Hittite, which is before Mamre; "The field which Abraham purchased of the sons of Heth: there was Abraham buried, and Sarah his wife." Having noticed the promise given to Abraham, "And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed," we turn to Galatians 3:16 and read, "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, 'And to seeds,' as of many, but as of one, 'and to thy seed,' which is Christ." We are pleased to add the 9th verse of this chapter, "So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham."

So it is through Christ the Life-giver that the resurrection hope has come into this dark world. "But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept" (1 Cor. 15:20). Christ demonstrated his resurrection power, in the raising of the daughter of Jairus, and at Nain, when the widow's son was restored, also at Bethany, in the raising of Lazarus to life and health. We need not fear to lie down in sleep, for Christ has graced the dark portals of the tomb, and has come forth a glorious conqueror forever. Thus we hear him shout with glad acclaim to John on Patmos, "Fear not; I am the first and the last: I am he that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive forevermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell (or grave) and of death" (Rev. 1:17-18).

The luminous forces of Christ's glorious appearing shall search the darkest nooks and caverns of the earth for the loved and lost ones; while from the oceanic depths shall come rich deposits of reanimated dust. They will all be there, not a single one missing. Each one created in the likeness and impress of Jehovah, shall receive reanimation where he fell. "For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive" (1 Cor. 15:22). "For the Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first. Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord" (1 Thess. 4:16-17).

We hear the apostle speaking again, "Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, "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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory? The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law, But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:51-57).

Again, Job speaks to us of the wonderful Gospel hope (Job 19:25-26), “For I know that my Redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: “And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God: Whom I shall see for myself, and mine eyes shall behold and not another; though my reins be consumed within me.” And David the sweet singer of Israel, breaks forth in language of wondrous beauty in Psalm 15:17, “As for me, I will behold thy face in righteousness; I shall be satisfied, when I awake with thy likeness.”

As we have found, there is an abundance of Scripture to show that the resurrection is a necessity, to insure the Christian’s eternal happiness, so there is a multiplicity of evidence to prove that there will be a literal, corporeal resurrection. In Isa. 25:8, the prophet in speaking of the Lord’s work at the consummation of all things, declares, “He will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces; and the rebuke of his people shall he take away from off all the earth; for the Lord hath spoken it.” And the same prophet in chapter 26:19, continuing the same thought of resurrection glory, writes, “Thy dead men shall live, together with my dead body shall they arise. Awake and sing, ye that dwell in the dust: for thy dew is as the dew of herbs, and the earth shall cast out the dead.” The dew of herbs is universal, it falls everywhere: men have fallen in death everywhere; so the resurrection will be worldwide.

In Dan. 12:2, Daniel the man greatly beloved, gets a vision of the end, and the resurrection of the saved and the unsaved; he writes, as Gabriel makes plain the message, “And many that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.” That we may gain more knowledge of Jehovah’s vast plan concerning the last things and the giving of rewards, we will read the words of Jesus in Luke 14:13-14, “But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee; for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.” Much unbelief abounded when Jesus was carrying on his earthly ministry. The Pharisees believed there would be a resurrection, while the Sadducees did not. Coming now to some splendid testimony by the greatest teacher, we read in John 18:37, “To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Everyone that is of the truth heareth my voice.” Let us listen to his voice concerning the truth of the resurrection. In John, 6th chapter, we not only get knowledge of man’s resurrection, but also of the time of his resurrection. In the 39th verse, we have Jesus’ own words, “And this is the Father’s will which hath sent me, that of all which he hath given me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up again at the last day.” And he continues in the 40th verse, “And this is the will of him that sent me, that everyone which seeth the Son, and believeth on him, may have everlasting life: and I will raise him up (not call him down) at the last day.”

In continuing his discourse on this same subject, he that came to bear witness unto the truth, gives us still greater light, in verses 44 and 54 he says, “No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him; and I will raise him up at the last day.” “Whoso eats my flesh, and drinks my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” And do when those who sleep in Jesus have been brought forth to eternal life, and God’s living ones have been translated, and those who have done evil have been brought forth to the resurrection of damnation, and destroyed, then will be fulfilled the word of the Lord as recorded in Hosea 13:14, “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plague; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.”

When God’s people receive eternal life, and Satan, who brought sin and death into the world, is destroyed and sin and sinners are no more, death automatically ceases to exist, for “The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.” Then shall be brought to pass the Word of the Lord as recorded in Numbers 14:21, “But as truly as I live, all the earth shall be filled with the glory of the Lord.” “Christ will come with car of state, Cherub legions round him wait, Then from grass-grown graveyards old, Coral caves and mountains bold, Desert sands, and flowery plain, Dust shall leap and live again; Then from earth and sea and air, Forms shall spring, respondent fair; Then from flame, and stone, and sod, Saints shall rise to meet their God.”

Burr Eggleston, South Vernon, Massachusetts, publication date unknown. Reprinted by the Advent Christian General Conference of America, Inc., Charlotte, North Carolina, 2004.

www.CreationismOnline.com