

What Happens After Death? VII

By Greg Rangel

As we have seen during this series, there are too many opinions when it comes to the topic of death. We have dealt with many of them already and have compared them to the light of Scripture and we have seen that those many points of view are erroneous, including the belief of purgatory, the topic that we dealt with in our last article.

Another erroneous point of view on death is the belief that when a person dies he/she goes to sleep. The proponents of this view, which are many, use Scriptures like Job 7:21 which says, “And why dost thou not pardon my transgression, and take away mine iniquity? for now shall I sleep in the dust; and thou shalt seek me in the morning, but I shall not be,” and Job 14:12 as well which says, “So man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep.”

Another portion of Scripture that is so commonly used by many to try to support their idea that a person sleeps after death is found in the letter to the Thessalonians (please see 1 Thessalonians 4:13-14). But is this what the Bible teaches? Does a person go to sleep after death or is it a misunderstanding in doctrines and a false teaching at the same time? The latter is the answer without a shadow of a doubt.

The reason that I believe that many have such erroneous beliefs is because of their failure to study the entire Word of God. There are rules to everything in life. In order to play a game correctly, one must follow its rules. Failure to do so will be a violation of the rules. Having said that, there are also rules to biblical interpretation. In order to study Scripture one must study the context of the Scriptures and the entire Bible itself. Failure to do this will cause anyone to have distorted doctrine and beliefs, like the belief of going to sleep after death.

Now let us deal with the above portions of Scripture that are quoted. What is Job and Paul the Apostle referring to when they mention sleep? Are they teaching soul sleep as many believe? Well, the answer is found within the context of Scripture. Looking at the above references more closely there is no doubt that Job and Paul alike are referring to the body itself and nothing more. When Job wrote, “so man lieth down, and riseth not...,” it is a clear indication that the body lies down in the grave and will not rise again until a futuristic event which the Bible refers to as the resurrection of the body, which will take place in parts (which we will study in the upcoming articles).

Looking at Paul’s reference in 1 Thessalonians, Paul too is making reference to the body alone which will rise again when the resurrection of the body takes place. Neither Job or Paul are teaching soul sleep because if they did there would be a big contradiction within Scripture. To drive the point home, Jesus Christ Himself taught life in heaven or hell after death (see Luke 16:19-31). Jesus said, “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 14:2-3). And Paul wrote in Philippians 1:21, 23, “For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain...having a desire to depart, and to be with

Christ; which is far better.” Jesus taught about a place that He would prepare for us, and Paul wanted to go to that place immediately after death, which is obviously heaven because where Jesus is we will be also.

When a person dies two things take place: first, the body lies down to rest as a sleeping man does, and then begins to decompose. The second thing that occurs is that the spirit of man separates from the body and either goes to heaven or hell. This is what the Bible teaches. In our next article we will deal with the consciousness of man after death, which will show that the belief in sleep after death is a belief that contradicts Scripture.

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