



When a Man Dies

Historically, a common form of burial of the dead among the Plains Indians of America involved using a scaffold. It was constructed with four upright poles, each a little taller than human hands could reach and higher than any wild animal could jump.

On top of the poles a number of smaller branches were interwoven to make a raft-like platform to hold the

body. Everything was securely lashed together. The deceased was laid on the platform, with his body tied down and his feet turned toward the rising sun.

Most of these Native tribes believed that a body should have no covering to separate it from the Creator. For this reason they avoided earth burials whenever possible. They believed that as time went by and the body decayed and eroded, it was free to return to where it came from.

Often weapons, pipe and tobacco, fire-making tools, and enough provisions to last a few days were placed by the body to use on its journey to the next life.

Once the body was in position, “as if asleep,” mourning immediately began by family and friends. One way the women mourned for their dead relatives was by cutting their hair short. With the loss of a husband or son some also cut off one or more joints of a finger as an act of grief.

I f we want to know the truth about death we must go to the One who was dead but is now alive—Jesus Christ.

For a month or more, family members and friends went daily to a place near the scaffold to mourn the deceased. Before his death, a husband sometimes told his wife that he would return again to talk to her after his journey to the hereafter. The wife often waited, but she never saw or heard from her dead husband again.

Source: *Cycles of Life*. Time Life Books, 1994, pp.149–153.

Some people believe that after a person dies a part of him goes on living and praising the Lord. Is it true that something within us goes on living a conscious existence after we die? Is there something that “leaves the body” and flies up to heaven or down to a burning hell? There is much misunderstanding about this, because there are so many different ideas of what happens at death. If we want to know the truth about death, we must go to the One who died, but is now alive—Jesus Christ. We can find the answers which He has given to us in the Bible.

Jesus compared death to a peaceful sleep. When He comes again the righteous dead will be called from their graves.

Key Thought. Jesus compared death to a quiet, peaceful sleep. When we are sleeping at night we know nothing of what is taking place around us. The beautiful thing about a good night’s sleep is that we awaken refreshed again in the morning. This is similar to God’s plan concerning death. If we die, we shall awaken again at Christ’s coming, never to know death any more.

The Bible clearly teaches that when Jesus comes again, those who have loved Jesus and died will be resurrected and taken to heaven. A person remains in the grave until that great day. He is not in another form of some kind in another place.

God’s memory holds every detail of people who die, and He perfectly recreates them by His power at Jesus’ coming. When Jesus comes again with His angels, the righteous dead are called from their graves. Then, along

with the righteous who are alive, they will be taken to their eternal reward.

It is important to understand God's plan concerning death. It answers many questions. It is a plan that guards us against the deceptions of Satan such as the idea that a person's soul goes on living after that person dies. If possible, Satan will use deceptions from a supposed spirit world to confuse and prevent many from following God's plan of preparing His people for eternal life.



An understanding of God's plan concerning death guards us against the deceptions of Satan.

BIBLE ANSWERS

1. We all know that we will die, but does a dead person know anything? Ecclesiastes 9:5-6. “For the living know that they will die; But the dead know _____.” *(All quotations from the Bible in these lessons are taken from the New King James Version (NKJV) unless otherwise noted.)*

Note. Living persons know that death will come, but after death they know nothing—their memory, thinking, and feeling cease. When people die they are not aware of what is happening at their funeral or life afterwards.

The Bible says that at a funeral children come to honor their parent who has died, but the parent doesn't know they are present. The children may be brought low (have problems), but the parent isn't aware after his or her death of what happens to the children.



The Bible teaches that a person in death is unconscious in the grave until Jesus comes.



When Jesus comes again with His angels, the righteous dead are called from their graves.

2. Can a dead person praise the Lord? Psalm 115:17.
(Circle one.) (1) Yes. (2) No.

Note. Many believe that when people die they go to heaven or hell. If good people went to heaven when they die, they would surely be praising the Lord. But the Bible says they remain in their graves until Jesus comes again. This may seem like a cruel thing to those who have believed that their dead loved ones have gone on to paradise. But when we think of our loved ones going to heaven at death, we can't take much comfort in thinking that they are looking down, seeing the troubles and heartaches that their children and other loved ones are experiencing.

It also goes against our sense of fairness that unrepentant sinners should go immediately to a place of torment at death. Look at it this way: If a sinner had been sent to a burning hell in Old Testament times, he or she would have at least 2,000 years more punishment than any unbeliever who died today!

God's plan for those who die is a plan that makes sense. Believers who have died will only know life again when Jesus comes the second time.

3. What condition are all the dead in until Christ comes again? Ecclesiastes 3:20. “All go to one place: all are from the _____, and all return to _____.” (See also Daniel 12:2.)

Note. The grave is the resting place for all the dead. There they wait for the call of Jesus at His second coming. Man was created from the dust of the earth and returns to it when he dies. From the dust God recreates that person at the resurrection.

Some teachings would place departed ones in heaven or in hell or in a place called purgatory. All of these beliefs are contrary to what the Scriptures say. The Bible says that a person in death is unconscious in the grave until Jesus comes.

4. What did Jesus say death is like? John 11:11-14. (Circle one.) (1) A sleep. (2) A rest. (3) A roaming spirit.

Man was created from the dust of the earth and returns to it when he dies.

Note. Jesus called death a “sleep.” When we go to sleep at night, we don’t know anything until morning, and the same is true of death. We don’t think (Psalm 146:4, KJV); we don’t love (Ecclesiastes 9:5–6); and we don’t praise the Lord (Psalm 115:17).

While on earth Jesus raised three people from the dead: Lazarus, Jairus’s daughter, and the son of the widow of Nain. If these people had gone to heaven at the time of death, surely they would have had some-





If we die, we shall
awaken again at
Christ's second
coming, never to
know death any
more, but to live
eternally.

thing to say about it. But often Jesus resurrected them, nothing was ever recorded about their experiencing the beauties of heaven. If Lazarus had been in heaven after he died, how disappointing it would have been for him to come back to earth and die again.

The Bible says the dead are unconscious, as if in dreamless sleep. They are dead and remain so until Jesus resurrects them.

5. Did King David go to heaven when he died? Acts 2:29, 34. (Circle one.) (1) Yes. (2) No.

Note. Peter makes it clear that David, a man after God's own heart, didn't go to heaven when he died (see Acts 13:22; 2:29-35). David himself said he planned to awake from death on the resurrection morning (Psalm 17:15).



6. What two things happen to us when we die? Ecclesiastes 12:7. “Then

the dust will _____ to the earth as it was, And the spirit will _____ to God who gave it.”

Note. When God first created a man and a woman, He formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (Genesis 2:7). Just the opposite happens when a person dies. The body

During His earthly ministry, Jesus raised three people from the dead. If these people had gone to heaven at the time of death, surely they would have something to say about it, but nothing is said.

goes back to the dust of the earth and the spirit, or power of life, goes back to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

The Bible calls the breath of God “spirit.” (James 2:26; Job 33:4.) The Bible simply teaches that it is the breath of God that makes us alive. The Bible doesn’t teach that the “spirit” is the thinking part of man that goes to heaven. The term “spirit” is used 379 times in the Scriptures, and not once does the word describe something that is able to think or live apart from the body. The spirit of man is described as the “life force” of his being.

7. When does the Bible say we will receive our reward of immortality? Revelation 22:12; cf. 1 Corinthians 15:51-53. (Circle one.) (1) When we die. (2) After 1,000 years. (3) At Jesus’ second coming.

Note. When Jesus comes again, He will reward us with immortality. (Immortality means a person will live forever and never die.) All dead people sleep in the grave

until they are resurrected. Here is an important question: *What would be the need for a resurrection, if the saved were already alive in heaven?*

It is the hope of Jesus that each of us will be ready to meet Him when He comes. If we accept Him as our Lord and Savior today and we die before His coming, He will raise us up in the first resurrection. If we live until Christ's appearing, we will then join other faithful believers who will be taken to heaven with those who have been resurrected at His second coming. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17.) Whether we die before Jesus comes or not, the important thing is to be ready to meet Jesus.

The body goes back to the dust of the earth and the spirit, or power of life, goes back to God who gave it (Ecclesiastes 12:7).





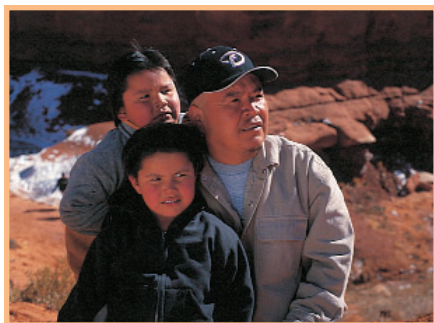
Next Lesson. Closely related to the question of what happens when a person dies is the subject of spiritism and devil harassment. Many today believe that the spirits of the dead float around helping us or harassing us.

What are these evil powers that haunt and harass us? You must study the next lesson to find out.



If we accept Jesus as our Lord and Savior today and we die before His coming, He will raise us up in the first resurrection.





PROMISES FOR LIFE

"I give you peace, the kind of peace that only I can give. It isn't like the peace that this world can give. So don't be worried or afraid"
(John 14:27, paraphrased).



Native New Day

P. O. Box 53055, Los Angeles, CA 90053-0055

EDITORS: NATIVE MINISTRIES NORTHWEST EDITORIAL COMMITTEE;

RUSSELL HOLT

ILLUSTRATIONS: A. J. McCOY

DESIGN & PHOTOGRAPHY: ED GUTHERO DESIGN: MICHELLE C. PETZ

COPYRIGHT © NORTH AMERICAN MULTILINGUAL MINISTRIES