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Revelation's Keys of Death

If you want the truth about death, the best source of information is Someone who has been there. In Revelation 1:18, Jesus assures us that He has passed through death, is now alive forevermore, and has the keys to death and hell!

Ecclesiastes 12:7 gives us the Bible formula for death: When we die, our bodies return to dust, and our "spirit" goes back to God. Genesis 2:7 gives us the opposite formula. When God first created life, He took dust, breathed into it "the breath of life" and man **BECAME** a living soul. The "spirit" of Ecclesiastes 12:7 and the "breath of life" of Genesis 2:7 are synonymous. Our "spirit" is the "breath" or the gift of life that God gives to us. Job 27:3 informs us that the "spirit of God" is in our nostrils. Sometimes the word "spirit" in the Bible simply refers to "breath."

The Bible's formulas for life and death are simple:

DUST + BREATH OF LIFE = LIVING SOUL

LIVING SOUL - SPIRIT/BREATH = DUST

According to the Bible, we do not *have* a soul, we *are* a soul (Genesis 2:7). When we die, we simply rest in the grave until Jesus returns. Psalm 146:3, 4 tells us that after we die, we no longer have any thoughts. Psalm 115:17 clearly states that the dead "do not praise the Lord."

Job 7:9, 10; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6 and Ecclesiastes 9:10 all make it very clear that once we are dead, we stop functioning. We have no thoughts, we experience no emotions, we have no wisdom or knowledge, and we have nothing to do with this earth anymore.

In John 11:1-14, when Lazarus died, Jesus referred to it as a "sleep"—a description of death used by the Bible more than 50 times! In John 11:23, 24, we see what people in Jesus' day understood to be the truth about death: Martha expected that she would see her brother again after the resurrection on the *last day*. This is the teaching on the subject of death all through the Bible. 1 Thessalonians 4:15-18 makes it clear that the dead sleep until the Second Coming, when Jesus will open the graves and raise the dead. 1 Corinthians 15:51-55 teaches that the dead who are sleeping will be raised at the last trump and given glorious, immortal resurrection bodies like the one Jesus rose from the dead with (compare with Philippians 3:20). Peter ran into trouble with the Pharisees because he was preaching the hope of the resurrection (Acts 4:1, 2).

Nowhere does the Bible teach the concept of an "immortal soul." 1 Timothy 6:15, 16 makes it clear that only God is immortal. We are not! In fact, Ezekiel 18:4, 20 states unequivocally that "souls" that sin will die! (Remember: The wages of sin is *death*, Romans 6:23.)

So what actually happens when we die? Job 14:12-14 gives an excellent summary: (1) We sleep until the heavens be no more, (2) we are resurrected when the wrath of God is past, and (3) we rest in the grave until

our change comes. These things all happen in connection with the Second Coming of Christ! (See Revelation 6:14; 2 Peter 3:10; Revelation 15:1; and 1 Corinthians 15:51.) Job didn't expect to live again until the return of Christ!

The concept that the dead do not really die comes straight from the serpent's mouth. Satan has always tried to downplay the consequences of sin. "Ye shall not *surely* die," he told Eve (Genesis 3:1-4). But the Bible clearly teaches that death is really death. Notice in Acts 2:29, 34 that Peter publicly taught that David is not in heaven yet! He will remain in the grave until Jesus returns to give out our eternal rewards (Revelation 22:12). In 2 Timothy 4:7, 8, when Paul realized that he was about to die, he told Timothy that he expected his reward on "that day"—the day of Jesus' "appearing." When Jesus comes, death will lose its sting. That is why Paul tells us to "comfort one another" with the teaching of the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:18). Finally, on that glorious morning, we will be able to say, "Death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?"

HANG ON A MINUTE! WHAT ABOUT . . .

(1) Luke 23:42, 43 — In this story, Jesus seems to tell the thief that he will be joining Him in heaven that very day. There are three problems with that understanding:

- The thief asks to be remembered when Jesus sets up His kingdom. That doesn't happen until the Second Coming—remember the stone in Daniel 2?
- Jesus didn't go to heaven that day. John 20:17 informs us that three days later, Jesus still had not been to heaven!
- The thief didn't die that day. John 19:30-34 tells us that at sundown, they had to break the thieves' legs because they were *still alive*.

So how do we understand Luke 23:43? It's simple. There was no punctuation in the original Greek; move the comma, and the verse makes more sense: "And Jesus said unto him, 'Verily I say unto thee today, shalt thou be with me in paradise.'" The *promise* was made that day. The fulfillment of that promise takes place when Jesus returns.

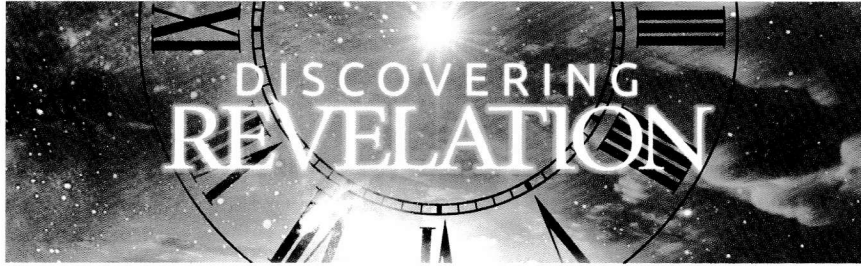
(2) 2 Corinthians 5:8 seems to tell us that the moment we die, we go to be with the Lord. However, when you consider that elsewhere (1 Thessalonians 4; 1 Corinthians 15) Paul clearly taught a *resurrection*, to make this passage teach an immortal soul is to take it out of context. Read it in the context of what comes before it (2 Corinthians 5:1-8). Paul talks about three possible states of being:

1. "Our earthly house," "at home in the body," "in this we groan." This is speaking of the earthly, corruptible bodies that we have right now.
2. "A building of God," "a house not made with hands," "eternal in the heavens," "our house which is from heaven." This is speaking of the glorious resurrection bodies we will receive when Christ returns.
3. "Unclothed," "naked." This is the state of human beings when they are between their earthly and their heavenly house. We are dead. We are naked. We have no home.

With the context of the rest of Scripture, it is impossible to read an "immortal soul" into this passage. In verse 8, Paul is simply saying that he would rather be absent from his *earthly* body and present with the Lord. There is no time frame given. He desires to be present with the Lord *in the heavenly body or "house"* (see verse 1). It doesn't say that he will be present with the Lord without a body!

DEATH AS A SLEEP

Deuteronomy 31:16; 2 Samuel 7:12; 1 Kings 1:21, 2:10, 11:21, 11:43, 14:20, 14:31, 15:8, 15:24, 16:6, 16:28, 22:40, 22:50; 2 Kings 8:24, 10:35, 13:9, 13:13, 14:16, 14:22, 14:29, 15:7, 15:22, 15:38, 16:20, 20:21, 21:18, 24:6; 2 Chronicles 9:31, 12:16, 14:1, 16:13, 21:1, 26:2, 26:23, 27:9, 28:27, 32:33, 33:20; Job 7:21, 14:12; Psalm 13:3, 76:6; Jeremiah 51:39, 51:57; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 9:18, 9:23-24, 27:52; Mark 5:39; Luke 8:52-53; John 11:11-14; Acts 7:60, 13:36, 1 Corinthians 11:30, 15:6, 15:18, 15:20, 15:51; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17, 5:9-10; 2 Peter 3:4



Revelation's Keys of Death

“What happens when I die? What lies beyond? Heaven? Hell? Nothing?”

If we want the truth about death, it makes sense to listen to Someone who has experienced it—and who has come back to life to tell us about it. Jesus says, “I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive.” (Revelation 1:18) Only Jesus can tell us what death is like and what we can expect when we die.

WHAT JESUS SAYS ABOUT DEATH

1. When His friend Lazarus died, what was Jesus' reaction?
(John 11:32-36)

The first thing to understand from Jesus about death is that He feels the same pain and grief we feel when a loved one dies. He stood at the grave of His friend—and cried!

2. What did Jesus do next? (John 11:41-44)

The second thing Jesus can tell us about death is that He has overcome it. Jesus can raise His people to life after death!

3. To what does Jesus compare death? (John 11:11-14) _____

When you go to sleep, you are unaware of what is going on around you until you wake up. Jesus says death is like being fast asleep until the resurrection.

4. Are the dead aware of anything going on in the world?
(Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10)
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When we die, we rest unconscious in the grave until the resurrection. We have no thoughts or emotions. We have nothing to do with this earth anymore until the resurrection.

DOES A PERSON GO TO HEAVEN OR HELL IMMEDIATELY WHEN HE OR SHE DIES?

5. Do the righteous dead praise God? (Psalm 115:17) _____

If a righteous person went directly to heaven when he died, surely he would be praising God there. Yet the Bible says that this is not the case—because that righteous person is asleep in the grave.

6. According to the Apostle Paul, when will the righteous dead be raised to life? (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18)

The righteous dead will be resurrected at Jesus' second coming. Until then, they sleep in the grave. (1 Corinthians 15:51-55; John 11:22-24; Job 14:12-15)

7. What did Peter say about King David? (Acts 2:29, 34)

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8. Didn't Jesus promise the thief on the cross that he would go to heaven that day? (Luke 23:39-43)

When we look more closely at what Jesus said, we find three problems with that conclusion:

- (a) The thief asked Jesus to remember him when "You come into Your kingdom." (Luke 23:42) That doesn't happen until the second coming. (Luke 22:15-18; 1 Corinthians 15:24; Revelation 11:15)
- (b) Jesus Himself did not go to heaven that day. (John 20:17)
- (c) The thief didn't die that day. His legs were broken at sundown that day, because he was still alive. (John 19:30-34)

So how do we understand Jesus' words to the thief, "I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise"?

It's a matter of punctuation. The original Greek manuscripts contained no punctuation. If we move the comma slightly, the verse reads, "I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise."

Now the verse harmonizes completely with all the Bible's teachings about death. Jesus is saying to the thief, "I'm promising you right now—today—that you will be with me in Paradise." And He will fulfill that promise when He returns.

THE BIBLE'S FORMULA FOR LIFE AND DEATH

9. How does the Bible describe the process by which God created human life? (Genesis 2:7)

The process can be expressed as a formula—the Bible's "Formula for Life":

DUST OF THE GROUND + BREATH OF LIFE = A LIVING BEING

Humans are made up of a body (the dust of the ground) plus an animating element that comes from God (His breath of life). When these two things are combined, a living human being is the result.



10. What is the Bible's formula for death? (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Death reverses the "Formula for Life":

A LIVING BEING – BREATH OF LIFE = DUST OF THE GROUND (DEATH)

Some versions use the word "spirit" instead of "breath of life." For example, some Bible versions of Job 27:3 say, "the spirit of God is in my nostrils" (RSV, KJV), while others say, "the breath of God is in my nostrils" (NKJV, NIV).

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11. But don't human beings have an immortal soul that goes on living after death? (1 Timothy 6:15, 16)

We are not immortal, nor do we have an immortal soul. Ezekiel 18:4, 20, states that "the soul who sins shall die." According to the Bible, we do not *have* a soul, immortal or otherwise. Instead, we *are* a soul. The Bible often uses the word "soul" interchangeably with "a living human being." (Genesis 2:7; Acts 2:41; 1 Peter 3:20; 2 Peter 2:14)

12. Where did the idea of an immortal soul originate? (Genesis 3:1-4)

The concept that the dead don't really die, but go on living—in heaven or hell—came straight from the mouth of the serpent in Eden. God says that the wages of sin is death (Romans 6:23), but Satan has always tried to downplay the consequence of sin.

COMFORT ONE ANOTHER WITH THESE WORDS

After describing the glorious return of Jesus and the resurrection of the dead in Christ, Paul writes, "Therefore comfort one another with these words." (1 Thessalonians 4:18) When we understand the truth about death, it truly is a comfort to know that our loved ones who have died in Jesus are peacefully sleeping in the grave until He calls them forth to live again—eternally.

MY DECISION

- I choose to follow Jesus and His truth, so that I may meet Him in joy and peace—whether I live to see Him come or whether I am raised from death to eternal life when He returns.

MY PRAYER

Father, I give my life to You. Thank You for Your great love for me. In Jesus' name, Amen.