

Death and Resurrection (Return to Life)



SABBATH—SEPTEMBER 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: John 11:11; John 1:1–4; Luke 8:54, 55; John 5:28, 29; Matthew 5:22, 29, 30; John 11:38–44.

MEMORY VERSE: “Jesus said to her [Martha], ‘I am the resurrection and the life. Anyone who believes in me will live, even if he dies’ ” (John 11:25, NlrV).

HUMANS HAVE AN INNER FEAR OF DEATH BECAUSE WE WERE CREATED AT THE BEGINNING ONLY TO LIVE AND NEVER TO DIE. Death is an invader. It was not meant to be.

That is why, during His earthly ministry (work done for God), Jesus showed great sympathy toward mourners. When He saw the widow of Nain taking her only son to the grave, “He felt sorry for her. So he said, ‘Don’t [do not] cry’ ” (Luke 7:13, NlrV). To a heartbroken father of a 12-year-old girl who had just died, Christ comforted him, saying, “ ‘Do not be afraid; only believe’ ” (Mark 5:36, NKJV). Every time death hits our loved ones, Jesus is touched by our grief. His merciful heart weeps with us.

But Christ does far more than weep. He has beaten death with His own death and resurrection. So He owns the keys of death. And He promises to raise everyone who believes in Him to eternal life. This is the greatest promise that we have been given in God’s Word (the Bible). Suppose death had the final say. Then our whole lives and everything we have ever done would be for nothing. Praise God that Jesus gets the final word!

THE STATE (CONDITION) OF THE DEAD (John 11:11)

Old Testament writers always believed that the spirit of humans cannot live separately from the body. The different Hebrew words translated as *flesh*, *soul*, and *spirit* are just different ways to describe the human person as a whole. In agreement with this idea, the Bible uses different metaphors (word-pictures) to describe death. Among them, *sleep* stands out as a perfect example, showing the Bible's teaching of the condition of the dead (read Job 3:11–13; Job 14:12; Psalm 13:3; Jeremiah 51:39; and Daniel 12:2). Death is the total end of life. Death is nothingness in which there are no thoughts, emotions, works, or relationships of any kind (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10; Psalm 115:17; Psalm 146:4).

But, by the time of Jesus, the people's understanding of death was challenged by the pagan idea that the soul was immortal (lived forever). This idea spread quickly throughout the known world.

**How did Jesus describe the death of His friend Lazarus?
Read John 11:11.**

Many Christians argue that Jesus believed that the soul lives forever. They argue that Jesus said to the thief on the cross: “ ‘Assuredly [Surely], I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise’ ” (Luke 23:43, NKJV). The meaning of this verse changes entirely, depending on where the commas are placed. (The oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament do not have punctuation marks.) If the comma is placed after “you,” as most Bible versions say, it means that Jesus and the thief went to Paradise that same day. But if the comma is after “today,” the verse means that Jesus promised the thief his future salvation. Jesus' words really mean the promise of salvation, not when the thief was to enter into heaven. The Bible supports this. To begin with, the thief had not asked for a quick entry into heaven at death. Instead, the thief asked that he be remembered when the Lord would come into His kingdom. What is more, three days later Jesus Himself said that He had not yet gone to Paradise (John 20:17). So, this verse does not teach that the souls of the dead go to heaven after death.

Because we understand that death is a sleep without knowing anything, why is the teaching of the resurrection so important to us?



The Bible uses sleep as a way of describing what happens to the dead.



Jesus promised the thief on the cross that he would be saved.

THE HOPE OF RESURRECTION (John 1:1–4)

At Creation, “the LORD God formed a man. He made him out of the dust of the ground. He breathed the breath of life into him. And the man became a living person” (Genesis 2:7, NIV). As long as God keeps the breath of life in people, they are alive. But when He takes away their breath, they die and return to dust (Psalm 104:29; Ecclesiastes 12:7). This is not a decision of God based on His judgment. It is the sure result of sin. But the good news is that, through Christ, there is hope, even in death.

Read John 1:1–4. What is suggested in these verses that shows us the power of Jesus to raise the dead?

Christ has life in Himself. This is because He is the Life (John 14:6). He created everything and has the power to give life whenever He wishes (John 5:21). So, He can raise the dead.

How does resurrection happen? Read Luke 8:54, 55.

According to the Bible, *resurrection* is the opposite of death. Life is restored (made new) when the breath of life comes back from God. That is how Luke explained the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter. After learning that the 12-year-old girl had passed away, Jesus went to the house and told the mourners that she was sleeping. Then He “took her by the hand and called, saying, ‘Little girl, arise.’ Then her spirit [*pneuma*] returned, and she arose immediately [quickly]” (Luke 8:54, 55, NKJV). At Jesus’ divine command, the breath of life taken away by God returned to the girl. The Greek word that Luke used, *pneuma*, means “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit.” When the Bible uses this word, it never means a spirit living separate from the body. In this verse, it clearly means the breath of life.

Death is so common that we accept it as a fact. But how can we learn to trust in God’s promises about eternal life, even though, for now, death seems to be the victor (winner)?



When God takes away the breath of life, we die and return to dust.



“Little girl, arise.”

THE RESURRECTION AND THE JUDGMENT
(John 5:28, 29)

What we have studied so far could lead us to think that the resurrection will be for only a few people. But Jesus promised that a time will come when “*‘all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth’*” (John 5:28, 29, NKJV; emphasis added). Believers and unbelievers, the righteous (holy) and the sinners, saved and lost—all will be raised. As Paul said, “*‘There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just [good] and the unjust [bad]’*” (Acts 24:15, NKJV).

All are raised from the dead. And all will face only one of two eternal ends. What does John 5:28, 29 say that they are?

All people will be raised from the dead. But this does not mean that at the final day everybody will end up with a happy and joyful eternal life. “*‘Huge numbers of [many] people who lie dead in their graves will wake up. Some will rise up to life that will never end. Others will rise up to shame that will never end’*” (Daniel 12:2, NIV).

The Bible teaches that God will judge the lives of every person. He will decide the eternal end of each person who ever lived (Ecclesiastes 12:14; Romans 2:1–11). But God’s punishment does not happen quickly after the death of each person. It will happen only after his or her resurrection. Until then, both the saved and the lost sleep unknowingly in the dust. The resurrection, by itself, is not a reward or a punishment. It just follows up on the choices people make.

Speaking of the two resurrections, Jesus showed that our future ends will be decided on how good or bad our deeds (actions) are. But this does not mean that works save us. Jesus clearly taught that our salvation depends on our faith in Him as Savior (John 3:16). Then why are works considered? It is because our works show whether our faith in Christ and our surrender to Him are true or not (James 2:18). Our works show whether we are still “*dead because of [our] sins*” (Ephesians 2:1, NIV) or “*dead to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus*” (Romans 6:11, NIV).

Think about the future end that awaits each of us. If anything is standing between you and eternal life, why not choose to get rid of it now? After all, is there anything more precious or of greater value than our eternal life?

WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT HELL (Luke 16:19–31)

Jesus used two Greek words, *hadēs* and *gehenna*, to speak about death and the punishment of the wicked. Based on what most people believe about the meaning of hell, we need to study it carefully.

Hadēs is the same as the Hebrew word *she'ôl*. *She'ôl* is the most common Old Testament word for the home of the dead. These names simply mean the grave. All people go to this place when they die. There is no knowledge of punishment or reward. But there is one verse where *hadēs* appears to be connected with punishment. It is in the parable of the rich man and Lazarus.

Read Luke 16:19–31. What is the basic lesson that this parable (very short story that teaches a lesson or truth) gives (read especially verses 27–31)? What is wrong with using this parable to teach that humans go to paradise or hell right after death?

This parable does not discuss the condition of man in death. A popular but false belief of the people during Jesus' time gave the background for this parable. The parable teaches an important lesson. It teaches that our future depends on the decisions we make daily in this life.

What warnings did Jesus give about hell? Read Matthew 5:22, 29, 30 and Matthew 23:33.

In many Bible translations, the word *hell* appears 11 times on Jesus' lips. He actually used the Greek word *gehenna*, from the Hebrew name *Gê Hinnom*, "Valley of Hinnom." According to the Old Testament, in this canyon south of Jerusalem, Kings Ahaz and Manasseh offered children to Molech as burnt offerings (2 Chronicles 28:3; 2 Chronicles 33:6). Later, the godly King Josiah stopped this practice (2 Kings 23:10). Because of the sins done in it, Jeremiah prophesied (foretold) that God would make the place a "valley of slaughter [murder]" (Jeremiah 7:32, 33; Jeremiah 19:6). So, for the Jews, the valley became a symbol of the last judgment and the punishment of the wicked. Jesus used the name as a word-picture without explaining about the time and place of the punishment. We find these two details in other Bible verses. But hell does not mean a place of eternal punishment.

JESUS CONQUERED (DEFEATED) DEATH
(John 11:38–44)

Why was Lazarus’s resurrection the most wonderful miracle of Christ’s earthly ministry? Read John 11:38–44.

Jesus had raised two others from the dead. But none was as wonderful as this. Lazarus had been dead for four days. Martha herself said it too at the graveside. Jesus did the miracle in the full light of day before a crowd of trustworthy witnesses from Jerusalem. The proof could not be ignored.

Still, far more important than Lazarus’s resurrection was Jesus’ own resurrection. Since He has life in Himself, He has the power to raise the dead and give life to whom He wills (John 5:21). But He also has the power to lay down His own life and take it again (John 10:17, 18). His resurrection proved this truth powerfully.

What is the relationship between Christ’s resurrection and ours? Why is His resurrection so important for our salvation? Read 1 Corinthians 15:17–20.

Christ’s power to break the chains of death cannot be questioned. He arose from the sepulcher (tomb; cave) as the firstfruits of those who slept in Him. His resurrection is the guarantee of every believer’s resurrection. This is because He has the keys of death (Revelation 1:17, 18).

“To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Savior the life that was lost through sin is returned. This is because He has life in Himself to save whom He wishes: He has been given the right and power to give eternal life. The life that He laid down in human form, He takes up again and gives to humans.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 786, 787.

Death is so powerful that only the One (Jesus) who first created life can return it. What does this truth tell us about why we must trust that Jesus can, and will, bring us back to life as He promised?

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, “ ‘Lazarus, Come Forth,’ ” pages 524–536, and “ ‘The Lord Is Risen,’ ” pages 779–787, in *The Desire of Ages*.

“The voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon their graves. Then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye [you] that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Throughout the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. . . . From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal [eternal] glory [great beauty and perfection], crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ 1 Corinthians 15:55. And the living righteous and the risen saints unite [join as one] their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 644.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① We have all struggled with the idea that death is real, final, and senseless. Many believe there is no God, no hope of eternal life, and no resurrection. Then what does human life itself mean? What can it mean if, sooner or later, everyone who ever lived dies and every memory of them is forever gone? How does our understanding of the resurrection answer this problem that cannot seem to be solved?
- ② What are some of the dangers in the belief that the soul lives forever? Why is Satan eager to encourage this belief that is not from the Bible? How will this idea compare¹ with the religious beliefs at the time of the end?

DEFINITIONS

1. compare—show how two or more things are the same or different.