

# Death *and* Resurrection



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## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *John 11:11; John 1:1–4; Luke 8:54, 55; John 5:28, 29; Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; John 11:38–44.*

**Memory Text:** “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live’ ” (*John 11:25, NKJV*).

**H**umans have an innate repulsion toward death because we were created only to live and never to die. Death is an intruder; it was not meant to be.

That’s why, during His earthly ministry, Jesus showed immense sympathy toward the bereaved. When He saw the widow of Nain taking her only son to the grave, “He had compassion on her and said to her, ‘Do not weep’ ” (*Luke 7:13, NKJV*). To a heartbroken father of a 12-year-old girl who had just died, Christ consoled him, saying: “ ‘Do not be afraid; only believe’ ” (*Mark 5:36, NKJV*). Every time death strikes our loved ones, Jesus is tenderly moved by our grief. His compassionate heart weeps with us.

But Christ does far more than weep. Having conquered death with His own death and resurrection, He owns the keys of death, and He promises to raise everyone who believes in Him to eternal life. This is, by far, the greatest promise that we have been given in God’s Word; otherwise, if death has the final say, our whole lives and everything we have ever accomplished will be in vain.

\* Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, September 20.

## The State of the Dead

Old Testament writers consistently held that a human is an indivisible living being. The various Hebrew terms usually translated as *flesh*, *soul*, and *spirit* are just alternative ways to describe, from different points of view, the human person as a whole. In harmony with this perspective, the Scriptures use different metaphors to describe death. Among them, sleep stands out as a fitting symbol to reflect the biblical understanding of the condition of the dead (see *Job 3:11–13, 14:12, Ps. 13:3, Jer. 51:39, Dan. 12:2*). Death is the total end of life. Death is a state of unconsciousness in which there are no thoughts, emotions, works, or relationships of any kind (*Eccles. 9:5, 6, 10; Ps. 115:17; 146:4*).

By the time of Jesus, however, this view of humanity, and particularly of death, was challenged by the pagan dualistic concept of the immortality of the soul, which was rapidly propagating throughout the known world.

**How** did Jesus describe the death of his friend Lazarus? See *John 11:11*.

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Despite this and other passages, a number of Christians argue that Jesus believed in the immortality of the soul, for He said to the thief on the cross: “ ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise’ ” (*Luke 23:43, NKJV*). The meaning of this text changes entirely, depending on where the commas are placed. (The oldest Greek manuscripts of the New Testament don’t have punctuation marks.) If the comma is placed after *you*, as most Bible versions render the text, it means that Jesus and the thief went to Paradise that same day; if the comma is after *today*, the text means that Jesus assured the thief his future redemption. Actually, Jesus’ words emphasize assurance of salvation, not the timing of the thief’s entrance into heaven. The context confirms this. To begin with, the thief had not asked for an immediate transfer to heaven at death but rather to be remembered when the Lord would come into His kingdom. Moreover, three days later Jesus Himself affirmed that He had not yet ascended to Paradise (*John 20:17*). This text, therefore, does not teach that the souls of the dead go to heaven after death.

**Because we understand that death is an unconscious sleep, why is the teaching of the resurrection so crucial to us?**

## The Hope of Resurrection

At Creation, “the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.” As a result, “man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7, NKJV*). As long as God maintains the breath of life in the living creatures, they are alive. But when He takes away their breath, they die and return to dust (*Ps. 104:29, Eccles. 12:7*). This is not an arbitrary decision of God; it is the inevitable consequence of sin. But the good news is that, through Christ, there is hope, even in death.

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

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Christ has life in Himself, for He is the life (*John 14:6*). He created everything and has the power to give life to whom He wills (*John 5:21*). Thus, He can raise the dead.

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

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According to the Bible, resurrection is the reversal of death. Life is restored when the breath of life comes back from God. That is how Luke explained the resurrection of Jairus’s daughter. After learning that the twelve-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” (*Luke 8:54, 55, NKJV*). At Jesus’ divine command, the life principle imparted by God returned to the girl. The Greek term that Luke used, *pneuma*, means “wind,” “breath,” or “spirit.” When the Bible uses it in relation to human beings, it never denotes a conscious entity capable of existence apart from the body. In this text it clearly refers to the breath of life.

**Death is so common that we take it for granted. How, though, can we learn to trust in God’s promises about eternal life, even though for now, death seems to be the victor?**

## The Resurrection and the Judgment

What we have studied so far could lead us to think that the resurrection will be for only a few people. But Jesus affirmed 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, righteous and sinners, saved and lost, all will be raised. As Paul declared, “ ‘There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust’ ” (*Acts 24:15, NKJV*).

**Though all are, eventually, raised from the dead, all will face only one of two eternal fates. What are they?** *John 5:28, 29.*

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The universality of the resurrection doesn't mean that at the final day everybody will be ushered into a blissful and joyful eternal life. “ ‘Those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt’ ” (*Dan. 12:2, NKJV*).

The Bible teaches that God will judge the lives of every human being, deciding the eternal destiny of each person who ever lived (*Eccles. 12:14, Rom. 2:1–11*). The execution of the divine sentence, however, does not occur immediately after the death of each individual but only after his or her resurrection. Until then, both the saved and the lost sleep unconsciously in the dust. The resurrection, by itself, is neither a reward nor a punishment. It is the precondition to receiving eternal life or condemnation.

Speaking of the two resurrections, Jesus indicated that our destiny will be decided on the basis of the moral quality of our deeds (good or bad). This fact, however, doesn't mean that works save us. On the contrary, Jesus clearly taught that our salvation depends exclusively on our faith in Him as our Savior (*John 3:16*). Why, then, are works taken into consideration? Because they show whether our faith in Christ and our surrender to Him are genuine or not (*James 2:18*). Our works demonstrate whether we are still “dead in trespasses and sins” (*Eph. 2:1, NKJV*) or “dead indeed to sin, but alive to God in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:11, NKJV*).

**Dwell on the ultimate destiny that awaits each of us. If anything is standing between you and eternal life, why not, right now, choose to get rid of it? After all, what possibly could be worth losing eternity for?**

## What Jesus Said About Hell

Jesus used two Greek terms, *hadēs* and *gehenna*, to speak about death and the punishment of the unrighteous. Given the popular belief in the meaning of the term *hell*, we need to consider it carefully.

*Hadēs* is equivalent to the Hebrew *she'ōl*, the most common Old Testament term for the realm of the dead. These names simply represent the grave or the place to which all descend at death, with no connotation of punishment or reward. There is one text, however, 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 sets forth (see especially vss. 27–31)? What's wrong with using this parable to teach that human beings go to paradise or hell immediately after death?

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This parable is not focused on the state of man in death. A popular but unbiblical belief that many of Jesus' contemporaries held provided the background for this parable. Nevertheless, the parable teaches an important lesson: our future destiny is determined by the decisions we make daily in this life. If we reject the light God grants us here, there is no opportunity after death. Any attempt to interpret this parable literally leads to many insoluble problems. Actually, the details of the picture seem purposely awkward in order to show us that Jesus did not intend His words to be taken literally, but figuratively.

**What** warnings did Jesus pronounce regarding hell? See Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 23:33.

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In many Bible translations, the word *hell* appears 11 times on Jesus' lips. He actually used the Greek term *gehenna*, from the Hebrew name *Gē Hinnom*, "Valley of Hinnom." According to the Old Testament, in this gorge south of Jerusalem, kings Ahaz and Manasseh conducted the horrendous pagan rite of burning children to Molech (2 Chron. 28:3, 33:6). Later, godly king Josiah brought the practice to a halt (2 Kings 23:10). Because of the sins perpetrated in it, Jeremiah prophesied that God would make the place a "valley of slaughter" (Jer. 7:32, 33; 19:6). Hence, for the Jews, the valley became a symbol of the last judgment and the punishment of the impenitent. Jesus used the name figuratively, without explaining any details regarding the time and place of the punishment, which we find in other biblical passages. Hell, though, is not a place of eternal punishment.

## Jesus Conquered Death

**Why** was Lazarus's resurrection the crowning miracle of Christ's earthly ministry? See *John 11:38–44*.

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Though Jesus had raised two others from the dead, none was as dramatic as this. Lazarus had been dead for four days, a fact that Martha corroborated at the graveside. Jesus performed the miracle in the full light of day before a crowd of respected witnesses from Jerusalem. The evidence couldn't be dismissed.

Still, far more important than Lazarus's resurrection was Jesus' own resurrection. Since He has life in Himself, He not only 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 convincingly.

**What** is the relationship between Christ's resurrection and ours? Why is His resurrection so important for our salvation? See *1 Cor. 15:17–20*.

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Christ's power to break the bonds of death is undisputed. He arose from the sepulcher as the first fruits of those who slept in Him. His resurrection is the guarantee of every believer's resurrection, for He has the keys of death (*Rev. 1:17, 18*).

"To the believer, Christ is the resurrection and the life. In our Saviour the life that was lost through sin is restored; for He has life in Himself to quicken whom He will: He is invested with the right to give immortality. The life that He laid down in humanity, He takes up again, and gives to humanity."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 786, 787.

**Death is so powerful that only the One who first created life can restore it. What does this truth tell us about why we must trust that Jesus can, and will, resurrect us as He promised?**

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

“The voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Throughout the length and breadth of 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 glory, 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 their voices in a long, glad shout of victory.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 644.

### Discussion Questions:

- ① We’ve all struggled with the reality of death, the seeming finality of it, and the seeming senselessness of it. If, as 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 otherwise unsolvable dilemma?
- ② What are some of the dangers inherent in the idea of the immortality of the soul? Why is Satan eager to propagate this nonbiblical belief? What role will this concept play in the religious scenario at the time of the end? Think about all the potential deceptions out there from which those who understand death as a sleep until the resurrection are spared.

## The Story Box

Muka [*moo-KAH*] is the third wife of a Himba headman living in northern Namibia.

While some Himba children have gone to school, few who remain in the settlements can read or write. They pass their history and culture to their children during story times around a fire in the evening.

For more than fifteen years, Seventh-day Adventist missionaries have been working with the Himba, befriending them, teaching them about God, showing they care. They prayed for Muka when she was seriously ill, and God healed her. Muka's husband respects the missionaries for what they are doing to help his family and his people.

Muka enjoys the missionaries' visits and eagerly takes part in their prayer times. She wishes she could attend worship services, but the nearest worship service is too far away to walk, and the family is too large to ride in a donkey cart. So Muka contents herself with praying when she has free moments.

Recently the missionaries held a special camp meeting for the Himba people. Everyone was invited, and nearly everyone went. At the meetings the missionaries gave the headmen a special gift, a solar-powered MP3 player. They showed the men how to lay the MP3 player in the sun to charge the batteries and how to turn the player on so they can listen to God's stories in their own language.

Returning home, Muka's husband gave the MP3 player to his first wife to listen to. When she finished listening to the stories, she passed it on to Muka so she and her children could hear God's stories. She passed it on to the next wife, and so around the circle of families the stories of Jesus are being woven into the fabric of Himba life.

"I understand God better now after hearing the stories the missionaries have given us on the little story box," Muka says. "I want to learn more about God and know how to follow Him better."



The MP3 players have proven a breakthrough among the Himba, and a recent Thirteenth Sabbath Offering is providing hundreds more MP3 players and the funds to record more stories in the Himba's language. Thank you for your offerings, which help people such as Muka and her family meet the Savior and learn to follow Him.

MUKA (left) lives in a rural settlement in northern Namibia with her extended family.