

# 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 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” (*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'ól*, 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 vs. 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 *Gê 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 Lesson in Brief*

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► **Key Text:** *John 11:25*

► **The Student Will:**

**Know:** Recognize the certainty of the resurrection of Christ through whom our resurrection is made possible.

**Feel:** Experience the life-giving power of the resurrection that energizes believers in the present and future life.

**Do:** Live to the fullest, based upon the resurrection power available to all believers.

► **Learning Outline:**

**I. Know: Christ's Resurrection Is That Certainty Upon Which Believers Securely Anchor Their Faith.**

**A** What happens to the church if the central doctrine of Christianity—the certainty of Christ's resurrection—is lost?

**B** In what way are other doctrines rendered useless if there is no resurrection?

**C** Why does the doctrine of the immortal soul detract from Jesus' uniqueness as the Resurrection and the Life?

**II. Feel: The Doctrine of Christ's Resurrection Provides Spiritual Power Now and Everlasting Life in the Future.**

**A** What relief should believers experience now that death is vanquished and holds no power over them?

**B** How might the emotional composition of people who live with eternal hope compare with those who do not?

**C** What sensations accompany the Christian's assurance that he or she will reunite with loved ones who preceded him or her in death?

**III. Do: The Resurrection Vanquished Death, Liberating Believers From Satan's Power.**

**A** How does the resurrection affect the way believers approach temptations?

**B** How does the resurrection empower believers' witness?

► **Summary:** Without the resurrection, our religion becomes just another religious option instead of the unique road to eternal life.



## Learning Cycle

### ►STEP 1—Motivate

**Spotlight on Scripture:** *John 11:25*

**Key Concept for Spiritual Growth:** The resurrection doctrine infuses believers with life and anchors every facet of Christian belief.

**Just for Teachers:** A sports coach was quoted, saying, “Winning isn’t the most important thing. It’s the only thing.” The misapplication of this quote to something relatively trivial and ephemeral as winning a game is unfortunate. Consider rewording it in terms of eternal life: “The resurrection isn’t the most important thing. It’s the only thing.” This phenomenon definitely deserves such emphasis.

Christianity is *not* just another option. Christianity’s radical claims of uniqueness rest upon Christ’s resurrection. Buddha, Abraham, Muhammad, and Confucius remain entombed. Only Christianity claims a living Founder. If His resurrection is merely a religious assumption, untethered to reality, Christianity cannot long survive.

Paul understood this truth as shown in his letters. Combating Corinthian heresy, he exclaims, “If Christ has not been raised, then all our preaching is useless, and your faith is useless. And we apostles would all be lying about God—for we have said that God raised Christ from the grave. But that can’t be true if there is no resurrection of the dead. And if there is no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, then your faith is useless and you are still guilty of your sins. In that case, all who have died believing in Christ are lost! And if our hope in Christ is only for this life, we are more to be pitied than anyone in the world” (*1 Cor. 15:14–19, NLT*).

**Opening Activity:** Review hymns about the Resurrection and Ascension (hymns 165–176), discussing what Christ’s resurrection meant to our ancestors. Compare lyricists from different periods (1700s, 1800s, 1900s), analyzing similarities and differences. Newer arrangements (for example, Samuel Medley’s “I Know That My Redeemer Lives”) might also be included. What stirred their imaginations? What fortified their hopes? What metaphors did they utilize in conveying their thoughts? Ask class members to share which verses are most meaningful and poignant to them. Open class with one of the hymns.

**Consider This:** How do these songs strengthen your hope in the resurrection?

## ►STEP 2—Explore

**Just for Teachers:** One solitary religion has the power to transport humanity beyond planet Earth. One solitary religion moves people. Other religions promote grandiose objectives but remain powerless to take people there. Christianity alone provides living power through the resurrected Christ for spiritual transformation. How can class members be convinced about the uniqueness of a resurrected faith?

### Bible Commentary

**I. Destiny of Hope or Destiny of Despair?** (Review Luke 8:54, 55 and John 5:28, 29 with your class.)

The beloved apostle John records Christ's instruction concerning the resurrection, in the fifth chapter of his Gospel. Elsewhere (*Revelation 20*) John clarifies these statements, making clear that the first resurrection involves the righteous only and precedes the second resurrection by 1,000 years. The two resurrections express divine judgment, "separating the sheep from the goats." The first resurrection includes only those judged favorably. The second judgment includes only those judged culpable. These groups are mutually exclusive.

Apparently, belief in any resurrection was challenged early in church history. Paul's Corinthian correspondence (especially the first letter—chapter 15) dwells extensively on the resurrection, refuting the teaching that dismissed the bodily resurrection of a corpse as fancifully conceived. Ironically, six years earlier (circa A.D. 51), Paul had written the Thessalonians from Corinth, discoursing about the resurrection of the righteous to counteract false teaching there.

Unfortunately for Paul, such false teachings were not isolated events. Another theological error about the resurrection circulated, fomented by "Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have swerved from the truth by claiming that the resurrection has already taken place" (*2 Tim. 2:17, 18, NRSV*). More pernicious, perhaps, was the Docetism that emerged during the second century A.D., being especially favored by Gnostics and later (fourth century) by Manicheans. Believing that matter was inherently evil, their Christology rejected the Incarnation because, from their viewpoint, actual flesh compromised Christ's purity. Christ masqueraded as human, but that appearance was merely phantasmal. Because, in their view, Christ possessed no body, no bodily resurrection was possible. Authentic incarnational Christology, however, postulates that Christ was thoroughly human and thoroughly divine. Jesus, having suffered factual, not apparent, bodily death could actually experience bodily resurrection.

Modern Christological revisionists have produced theologies reminiscent of ancient Docetism. Their efforts to separate the “historical Christ” (i.e., tangible person) from the “mythological Jesus of religious faith” (i.e., object worshiped by believers) move strangely parallel with the more ancient interpretations of Christ’s resurrection. These interpretations suggest that whether Christ was bodily resurrected is inconsequential. What matters is “Christ rising within your hearts” (subjective feelings), not “Christ rising from the grave” (objective reality). God’s Word is not silent but radiantly clear: Christ’s resurrection is real, constituting the only power that successfully brings humanity home.

**Consider This:** How might believers ensure that they have part in the first and not the second resurrection?

## II. Jailbreak *(Review John 11:38–44 with your class.)*

The expression most frequently translated “hell” in the New Testament is *hadēs*. This universal location for the dead suggested neither reward nor punishment. No movement or conscious thought transpired there. Thus, Jesus compared their stay to “sleep.” This repose, however, was temporary, for eventually all would hear His voice and be resurrected in either of two resurrections. Death’s prison house would be emptied. Everything depended upon Christ’s personal resurrection; but three resurrections, recorded during His earthly ministry, presaged Jesus’ ultimate triumph: (1) Jairus’s daughter, (2) the widow of Nain’s son, and (3) Lazarus. Lazarus’s resurrection was surely the most dramatic, for his corpse had been entombed for four days. Following Jesus’ resurrection, several dead persons’ lives were likewise restored (*Matt. 27:51–53*). These “early releases” foreshadowed the jailbreak that happens when Christ returns and crowbars the padlocks off Satan’s dungeon.

**Consider This:** Imagine the resurrection scene during Christ’s return.

### ►STEP 3—Apply

**Just for Teachers:** The resurrection not only forms the foundation for the blissful afterlife; it provides for spiritual transformation now. Paul reasoned, “Just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life” (*Rom. 6:4, ESV*). Murderers, prostitutes, terrorists, embezzlers, thieves, and other sinners are promised a heavenly future and a contemporary spiritual makeover. Conversion includes justification and sanctification. Christ’s death, burial, and resurrection underpin both. How can believers ensure that this second emphasis is not forgotten?

**Thought/Application Questions:**

- ① How might the spiritual power provided through Christ's resurrection be applied in Christians' daily battles with Satan's temptations, feelings of depression, and anxieties regarding the future?
- ② How might the resurrection help to prepare believers for their loss of loved ones?
- ③ How does properly understanding Christ's resurrection safeguard believers against spiritualism or modernistic tendencies to spiritualize away the resurrection event?
- ④ How does properly understanding the resurrection prevent believers from falling prey to the pernicious doctrine of the ever-burning hell?
- ⑤ How can believers share their resurrection-rooted hope with those mired in hopelessness?
- ⑥ How can believers pass this torch of hope to future generations?

**►STEP 4—Create**

**Just for Teachers:** Well-written dramatic productions release their punch during the final scenes. Christ's apocalyptic drama conforms to this pattern. Accompanied by legions of angels, Christ unleashes an incomparable trumpet blast. Earthquakes shake the earth, while thunder awakens the sleeping redeemed. Graves erupt with volcanic energy, while their former occupants are propelled heavenward into Christ's awaiting arms. Rejoicing swells as loved ones reunite. Joyful teardrops fall as voices unite through praise. Injecting fresh meaning into ancient words, the redeemed shout, "It is finished!"

**Activity:** Distribute stationery to class members, inviting them to write letters describing what they hope to do after being reunited with their loved ones. If supplies are not available, ask them to describe what they hope to do after being reunited with their loved ones. These letters should serve to creatively and concretely express faith in Jesus' resurrection of the just, anticipating their future joy.