

# What Happens When You Die?

or

## Awakened by a Friend!

**D**o you like to sleep? I love to sleep-I mean *really* sleep. I don't like it when I toss and turn in bed for half the night or have wild dreams and nightmares. I like to hit the pillow, talk to my friend Jesus for a few moments, then waken to discover that it's morning with the sunshine streaming through the window (I prefer not to get up before the sun does!). After that kind of night, I feel rested and ready to face another day..

Do you remember taking long trips in the car when you were little-trips when it seemed like you would never arrive? Then, somehow you fell asleep and next thing you knew you were there, being carried from the car in your father's strong arms.

Have you ever had surgery? I have had several. I always liked it best when they put me *all* the way "out" while they fixed whatever needed fixing. I remember being wheeled into the operating room where doctors and nurses briefly talked with me before administering the anesthetic. The world would spin for a moment as I teetered between being awake and asleep-and then, (the next instant?) I would wake up. During the surgery I would feel no pain, have no concept of the passing of time, and have no recollection of what happened.

Jesus often used familiar experiences and events to illustrate important eternal truths. What we call death, Jesus called sleep!

Many years ago the family of a very sick man, sent word to Jesus that one of His friend was dying. Jesus responded by saying, "This sickness is not unto death."

Things got confusing for that family because Lazarus died. Apparently though, it was no big deal to Jesus, because a few days later He said to His disciples, "Our friend, Lazarus is sleeping, but I go that I might wake him out of sleep." (You may want to read the whole story in John 11:1-45.)

Death is nothing to Jesus. He calls it sleep because He doesn't want us to be afraid of it! There are some advantages to sleep, you know. You don't feel pain when you're asleep. Long trips pass more quickly and it's nice to wake up to find that you have arrived. Imagine opening your eyes and seeing Jesus!

If you have ever gone the long walk and come back alone, the best news about death is that one day in Heaven, Jesus will say to the angels, "My friends on earth are sleeping, but I go that I might wake them out of sleep!"

He *is* the Resurrection, the Life, and *your* Friend! What is more, if you should die before He returns, know this: He is coming back for His friends and He will not leave earth without 'em.

*Now also we would not have you ignorant, brethren, about those who fall asleep [in death], that you may not grieve [for them] as the rest do who have no hope [beyond the grave]. For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will also bring with Him through Jesus those who have fallen asleep [in death].*

*1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (The Amplified Bible)*

# What Happens When We Die?

*Lesson eight concluded with a description of the glorious second coming of Jesus as He returns for His friends. But what about those who have died while waiting for His return? Where are they when He comes and what has happened to them since they were laid to rest? This lesson takes a look at what we can learn from the Bible concerning those questions.*

1. According to John 6:40 how and when do we receive eternal life?
2. According to 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 what hope do we have that helps us deal with death and sorrow as we wait for Jesus to come back?
3. Did you notice that the “dead in Christ” rise first? According to John 5:28 where are the dead when they hear the Lord’s voice?
4. Who gets to live forever, and who doesn’t?

*John 3:36*

*John 3:16*

*Notice there are only two choices (they are opposites), perish or everlasting life. When we talk about death, we are commonly referring to the loss of life on this planet. When God talks about death, He is referring to something that has not yet happened to anyone.*

5. According to Matthew 16:27 does man go to his reward (good or bad) at death or at Jesus’ second coming? (see also 1 Thessalonians 4:17 & 5:23)
6. What happens to the spirit, soul and body of those who “fall asleep” now? Ecclesiastes 12:7
7. What does the Bible mean when it refers to “spirit?” Job 27:3
8. So what is taken away, or returns to God at death? Psalms 104:29
9. What is the soul? Genesis 2:7.

*Based on the above texts, the formula for a living soul is: Dust + Breath of Life = Living Soul. According to Webster death is the “opposite of life”. Therefore the formula for death is: Living Soul - Breath of Life = Dust. The combination of electricity and a light bulb produces light. Take away either the current or the bulb and the light is gone. Where did the light go? It didn’t go anywhere! It simply no longer exists. So it is with the soul. At death it no longer exists because the two ingredients that make the soul are separated.*

10. According to Psalms 146:4 is there anything conscious about man in death?

*In the NIV Bible it indicates that when a person dies, their “plans come to nothing.” The Hebrew word which is translated as “plans” in this verse is “eshtonah” which actually means thoughts or thinking. A more accurate translation would be that when a person dies, their thinking or thoughts cease.*

11. According to Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 & 10 do the dead have any thoughts or feelings to communicate with us?
12. Who originated the idea that man does not die? Genesis 3:4.

*This was the devil’s lie. Believing this deception could lead one to conclude that God doesn’t mean what he says (death is not the consequence of sin). It could also prepare the way for Satan to introduce other lies about God by pretending to bring us messages from the dead.*

13. *What did Jesus call what we call death?*

*Matthew 9:24*

*John 11:4*

*John 11:11*

14. *What did Paul call what we call death? 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18.*

*Don't ever forget that Jesus called it sleep! As mentioned on page 1, sleep is not bad! Especially when Jesus is the One who wakes you.*

15. *Who is the Resurrection and the Life? John 11:25-26*

*It's good news that one day in heaven, Jesus will say to the angels, "Our friends on earth are sleeping. Let's go! I'm going to wake them up!" He is coming back for His friends.*

Some time ago in Texas, a six-year-old girl was tragically killed in an accident. After the funeral, her father (an atheist) approached the open casket. Rigid, angry and tight-fisted, he looked down at his child. Through clenched teeth, he muttered, "Good-bye, forever!" then abruptly turned and left. Her mother (a Christian) approached and gazed down. Lovingly, she stroked the little girl's forehead, then bent over and gave her a kiss. "Good-night, honey," she whispered, "Mommy will see you in the Morning, when all the shadows flee."

Jesus makes all the difference! As you read this weeks Scriptures, you are getting better acquainted with your Friend, the Resurrection and the Life.

*Begin each session with prayer - maybe something like this: "Lord, help me to come to know you better as we spend time together..."*

*Read the passage - several times noticing as many details as you can.*

*Imagine the setting - put yourself in the picture. Try to imagine the sounds, smells, sensations.*

*Summarize the passage - in your own words.*

*Apply the passage - what message is God giving you?*

*Meditate and pray - meditate on how this passage makes Jesus more real. Talk to Him about the passage and about using the information you have learned to deepen your friendship with Him. Listen for impressions He is giving you.*

Passages for This Week

John 18:1-11

John 18:12-14

John 18:15-18

John 18:19-24

John 18:25-27

John 18:28-40

John 19:1-16

# The Tomb

Sabbath came and went. I slept little and moved as if in a dream. I kept hoping I would waken to find the nightmare over. I remember walking numbly to the edge of town and sitting beside the empty tomb where Lazarus had been buried. There I recalled that Jesus had said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

He had given life to others. How could it be that His own could be taken? When Lazarus came forth, I had thought that death had met its match. Now the grave had taken Him who said that He was the way, the truth and the life. Death was victorious after all, and even the best of men could not prevent its sting. Such were my thoughts as the hours dragged painfully by.

Out of exhaustion I finally slept a few hours during the second night after Jesus' death. Some time after midnight I awoke with the overwhelming desire to return to the tomb where Jesus was. I knew that the tomb was sealed and that a Roman guard had been posted. I knew that it would be impossible to see His body, but I just wanted to be near Him. I had always known comfort in His presence before; perhaps the same could still be mine even now. And so in tears I walked the two or three miles to Jerusalem.

Along the way, I met Joanna, Salome and Mary the mother of James taking more spices to the tomb. I joined them and we continued walking together. About a mile from the grave we were suddenly thrown with violence to the ground. The earth heaved and shook and a sound like thunder filled my ears. In the distance I could hear the clatter of rocks tumbling down a hillside, and my heart became fearful. Was this death's way of boasting, or was all creation groaning without Jesus?

The tremors subsided, and cautiously we rose to our feet. We continued toward the tomb, wondering whether the quake had disturbed His body or affected the hillside that contained His grave. It had! The guard had fled, but how I wished they had stayed, for the sepulcher was rent and Jesus' body had been taken.

My grief knew no bounds! Not only was Jesus dead, but they had taken away his body, and I did not know where they had taken Him. Being robbed of His body was more injustice than I could bear. In despair I turned and ran to tell the disciples.

When Peter and John heard the news, they raced to the tomb, and I followed, some distance behind. By the time I got there, they had gone, and I was alone. I went to the entrance of the tomb and looked inside.

Through my tears I saw two men sitting where the body of Jesus had lain. One of them asked why I was crying, and I told him that I had wanted to be near Jesus but that someone had taken His body and I didn't know where it was. I didn't feel like talking more, so I turned away, and when I did I saw Someone standing in my path. It was another Man, and he too asked me why I was weeping.

At his question I began sobbing uncontrollably. I tried to talk, but could only moan. I struggled to gain composure, but it would not come. I thought He was the gardener, and brokenly I tried to ask if He knew where they had taken my Lord.

Perhaps Joseph's sepulcher was considered too fine for a carpenter. If that was the case, I knew of another empty tomb just outside of Bethany. I could take Him there if they would let me. Through my tears, I told Him so.

And then I heard Him speak my name. "Mary," He said, and my heart stood still. "Mary!" It was Jesus!

I fell at His feet and cried, "Master!"

He told me not to touch Him yet, and then He gave me a message for His friends. He said that He was going to the Father and that everything was going to be all right. I'd heard Him talk about "going" before. At *that* time He had said He would come again and receive us to Himself. He said we would be able to be with Him there, and now that is what I live for.

One day He will do for others what He did for our family and for Lazarus. He will come to waken His friends from their long sleep. I expect to hear Him call my name again then. I understand He plans to give us each a crown and I can hardly wait to cast mine at His feet!

# The Tomb

**John 6:40** “And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.”

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-17\*** “Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. According to the Lord's own word, we tell you that we who are still alive, who are left till the coming of the Lord, will certainly not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will come down from heaven, with a loud command, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet call of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first. After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

**John 5:28\*** “Do not be amazed at this, for a time is coming when all who are in their graves will hear his voice.”

**John 3:36\*** “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on him.”

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life.”

**Matthew 16:27** “For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works.”

**1 Thessalonians 4:17\*** “After that, we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever.”

**1 Thessalonians 5:23\*** “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Ecclesiastes 12:7** “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, And the spirit will return to God who gave it.”

**Job 27:3** “As long as my breath is in me, And the breath of God in my nostrils,”

**Psalms 104:29** “You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.”

**Genesis 2:7** “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being.”

**Psalms 146:4** “His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.”

**Ecclesiastes 9:5-6\*** “For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun.”

**Ecclesiastes 9:10\*** “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.”

**Genesis 3:4** “Then the serpent said to the woman, ‘You will not surely die.’”

**Matthew 9:24^** “he said, ‘Go away; for the girl is not dead but sleeping.’ And they laughed at him.”

**John 11:4\*** “When he heard this, Jesus said, ‘This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.’”

**John 11:11** “After he had said this, he went on to tell them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.’”

**1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** Please see text #2 near top of this page

**John 11:25-26\*** “Jesus said to her, ‘I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?’”

*(Unless otherwise mentioned, all quoted scripture is from the New King James Version)*

*\* New International Version*

*^ New Revised Standard Version*