

IS THERE LIFE AFTER DEATH?

The question as to whether one continues to live after death has engaged the minds of men across the ages. Attempts to provide satisfactory answers to this all-important question have all met with failure as men have ended up being drawn more and more into the Devil's web of confusion and lies. We thank God that it has pleased Him to illuminate, through His word, what some have called "this dark subject."

Life means the state of being alive as a human being; the power of existence. The Almighty God Jehovah is the Source of life. He is the Creator; all others are creatures. – Isaiah 42:5; Acts 17: 24-26.

Death, which is the cessation of life is, to the living, a distressing experience to which man was reduced because of sin. But what happens to man when he dies? Does he have an immortal soul such that he continues to live after death in one form or another? If not, what is the fate of man after death? These are some of the questions that we shall address in this sermon.

Diverse Beliefs

Many people in the world believe that "death is not the end of human existence but a change of place or condition in which conscious existence continues". The Egyptians of old believed that "after death man would continue to live exactly as on earth, provided that a large supply of food, drink, and representations of servants be placed in the tomb to serve the soul as they had the man, and provided that the body was well preserved through embalming and mummification." They also believed that "the body as well as the soul, persisted in the hereafter, but the soul would not recognize the body unless it had escaped decomposition. The soul was believed to take the form of a bird, which after the death of the body, flew at will through the world, yet could also return to the tomb." – *Black's Bible Dictionary*, page 131.

Prevalent in the many forms of Hinduism, in Buddhism, and also in the works of Plato, is the belief in Transmigration (or Metempsychosis) – the rebirth of the soul in one of many other forms such as lower animals and even in insects, trees and other plants. "According to some transmigrationists, if one has been cruel to lower animals in this life, in the next life he will reappear as a lower animal and may experience like treatment. If one kills an insect, he may reappear as an insect." Vide *The American Educator Encyclopedia*, page 164

Several of the world's religions, including Traditional African Religion, believe in *Reincarnation*, which is the "rebirth of the soul in another body". In an article entitled "Reincarnation Is a Truth of Life" carried at page 15 of *The Guardian on Sunday* of November 15, 1998, Mr. Wale Akande, quoted the book "*Life After Life*" by Dr. Raymond A. Moody Jr., as containing case histories of people who claim to have had "out of body experience" such that they were able to see their own bodies on the sick bed or theatre table. Arguing that the spirit of a dead person returns to earth at some stage and takes up residence in someone else, often a member of the same family, he adds: "Reincarnation happens mid-way during pregnancy... when the pregnant woman feels the first movement of the foetus in her womb. After the birth of the one who has taken the body, the person could live for a period on earth, and shed the body, i.e. die. If he/she is given the chance of coming back to earth, he/she will pass through the same natural process of birth, either in the same family or in a different one."

Mr. Akande quoted Luke 8 verse 55 and 1 Corinthians 15:44-49 to reinforce his argument on

reincarnation insisting that “there is difference between body and spirit”. We must point out that the portions quoted do not support reincarnation. In Luke 8, verse 41-42, 49 to 56, we read of the raising back to life of the daughter of Jairus, a ruler of the synagogue. At Jesus’ command, the Bible says that “her spirit came again, and she arose straightway...” The “spirit” that came back to her is not a living entity that was existing somewhere but “the breath of life”, also called soul in 1 Samuel 24:11; 26:21; “life” in 1 Samuel 23:15; 26:4; Genesis 1:20,30; “breath of life” in Genesis 7:15, 22; “breath”, Job 12:10; Psalm 104:29; and “spirit” in Job 34: 14,15; Psalm 104:30. It is the same breath of life that operates in both man and beast. (Ecclesiastes 3:18-21) In 1 Corinthians 15:44, St. Paul made a distinction between the earthly or terrestrial and the celestial or heavenly bodies and spoke of how they (the apostles) will be changed from earthly to spiritual beings and be taken to heaven. There is nothing in that passage we repeat that supports reincarnation.

Writing at page 320 of his book *CHRISTIAN DOCTRINE*, Walter Thomas Conner speaks of an intermediate state between death and the resurrection, which he says is “a state of consciousness both for the wicked and the righteous.” He adds that the story of Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) is not meant to teach that at death the righteous are in a state of unconsciousness, but that, compared with the turmoil and strife of this life, it is a condition of rest and peace, a “state of conscious fellowship with the Lord.” Still basing his argument on the same text, another writer Bishop D. A. Thompson adds that “at death the spirit of the believer passes from the body, guarded and carried by angels through the air” to heaven. He states further that after the death of the body, the immaterial spirit of man lives on eternally, in full consciousness of happiness or misery...” (*THE BELIEVER AT AND AFTER DEATH*, page 5) It is because of such beliefs that obituary announcements are being substituted with such misleading expressions as “Transition” and “Call to Eternal Glory” while prayers such as “Eternal Rest Grant him O Lord”, “Rest In Peace” (*RIP*) are made for the dead who are said to have “passed on”.

We must point out that the story of Lazarus and the Rich man is a parable and so should not be interpreted literally. The parable tells of the blessedness that will be the lot of the humble, sincere children of God who seek God’s help (as shown by the name *Lazarus*) and, after God would have gathered His sheep into His fold by the truth, the shame, weeping and gnashing of teeth and eventual destruction which await all unrepentant false prophets (symbolized as the rich man) when their falsehood would have been exposed. These false prophets deceive the people and feed them with crumbs (lies) rather than the truth. (Jeremiah 16:14-16; 2 Thessalonians 2:1; Jeremiah 5:27-31; Matthew 15:7-14; Zechariah 13:4-6) The parable did not even say Lazarus was taken to heaven but to “Abraham’s bosom”, which means God’s side of favour. (Isaiah 41:8; Genesis 12:1-3; Galatians 3:7-9,16) How could Lazarus had gone to heaven when Jesus Christ had not opened the way to heaven by his ransom sacrifice? He himself declared: “AND NO MAN HAD ASCENDED UP TO HEAVEN, BUT HE THAT CAME DOWN FROM HEAVEN, EVEN THE SON OF MAN WHICH IS IN HEAVEN.” -John 3:13.

The Bible shows that those who will go to heaven started from the twelve apostles of Jesus Christ and Abraham is not among them. (Luke 6:12,13; 22:28-30; Hebrews 11:32-40) However, Abraham, and other ancient worthies including John the Baptist, will be among the rulers in God’s Kingdom here on earth. (Matthew 8:11; Luke 13:28,29) Hence Jesus Christ declared: “Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he.” The “Kingdom of heaven” in the text under reference means God’s Kingdom in heaven, not the entire universal Kingdom of God covering the heavens and the earth. The argument of some that the reference is to God’s Kingdom generally is therefore spurious else it would mean that John the Baptist as well as all those before him approved for salvation will not inherit God’s Kingdom. (*For more details on the subject “Lazarus and the Rich Man”, please write for the Weekly Sermon Volume 1, No. 49.*

Ye shall not surely die?

The basis of the erroneous belief in life after death is the teaching that the soul continues to live after the person had died. This was the Devil's argument with which he deceived Eve. God gave Adam the law in Genesis 2:16,17 to wit: "...Of every tree of the garden thou mayest freely eat: But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it: for in the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die." But the Devil in the guise of a serpent deceived Eve by saying "Ye shall not surely die" – in other words she shall not die (Genesis 3:4). THIS IS THE FIRST AND ONE OF THE MOST HEINOUS LIES THAT HAS BEEN FOISTED ON MANKIND BY THE DEVIL – hence Jesus Christ called him "the father of lies". (John 8:44) It is highly unfortunate however that rather than believe God Almighty, people prefer to follow the Devil. It is not true, we must reiterate that the soul is an "entity which is regarded as being the immortal or spiritual part of the person". When God created man, he did not infuse any other thing into him other than the breath of life, as it is written: "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 soul." (Genesis 2:7) From this text it is evident that a "living soul", that is, man, is composed of the dust of the ground and the breath of life. When man disobeyed the perfect law of God in the garden of Eden God Almighty passed the sentence of death on him as it is written: "In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Genesis 3:19. See also Romans 5:12; 6:23) Since the fall of man, all mankind have been born in sin and are therefore subject to death. Hence St. Paul declared: "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23; see also Psalm 51:5) God declared through the prophet Ezekiel thus: "Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die" -Ezekiel 18:4,20. See also Psalm 89:48.

Some argue that it is only the body that dies while the spirit or breath of life continues to live. But the breath of life is not a conscious being that could exist of itself. It is the power of God which animates all creatures on earth. When it leaves one, the organs cease to function. In that sense it is like electricity which when switched on, energizes machines and modern appliances generally. Otherwise, the gadget or machine will remain dead or useless.

In Ecclesiastes 12:7 king Solomon made a declaration that the dust shall return to the earth as it was "and the spirit shall return unto God Who gave it". This does not mean that each person has a soul specific to him or that God has a place He keeps the souls of the dead or even that the soul continues to live after death. The breath of life returns to God in the sense that once it leaves the creature it goes back into the air, which is under the control of God Almighty. It also means that God who gave the man life (Genesis 2:7) has caused or allowed it to cease. In other words God takes account of each person that dies – Matthew 10: 29-31. Romans 14:7-10; Job 34:14,15; Psalm 104:29,30.

From the vision of the valley of dry bones, it is evident that the breath of life is present in the air. In the vision, God asked the prophet Ezekiel to prophesy to the breath to come not from heaven but from "the four winds", as it is written: "Then said he unto me, Prophesy unto the wind, prophesy, son of man, and say to the wind, Thus saith the Lord God; Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live. So I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood up upon their feet, an exceeding great army." – Ezekiel 37: 9,10

In Job 7:9-10 it is written: "As the cloud is consumed and vanisheth away; so he that goeth down

to the grave shall come up no more. He shall return no more to his house, neither shall his place know him anymore.” This directly contradicts the false doctrines which say the dead are conscious and that they come back to be reborn several times. If the dead are reborn, then who reincarnated into Cain and Abel?

Witch of Endor

The case of the witch of Endor who is purported to have raised up Samuel is often quoted as proof that one continues to live after death and so could be contacted through appropriate mediums. In 1 Samuel 28:3-25 it is recorded that King Saul went at night in disguise with only two servants to seek help from the witch of Endor. He knew that witchcraft is an abomination to God and His people hence God Almighty commanded “thou shalt not suffer a witch to live.” – Exodus 22:18; see also Deuteronomy 18: 11; 1 Samuel 28:3-25; Isaiah 8: 19, 20.

That Saul fell prey to the tricks of Satan the Devil is evident in verse 13 of the chapter under reference when he asked “what sawest thou?”, to which the woman replied, “I saw gods ascending out of the earth.” How could Samuel whom Saul asked for turn to be gods? It is certain that the “gods” being referred to are demons who of course are in league with witches and wizards. King Saul went on to ask in verse 14: “What form is he of?” To this, the witch replied: “An old man cometh up; and he is covered with a mantle.” The witch did not even identify whom she saw to be Samuel. The passage says: “Saul perceived that it was Samuel, and he stooped with his face to the ground, and bowed himself.” In other words Saul had to draw his own conclusions as to what the witch claimed to have seen.

Worthy of note is verse 15 which says: “And Samuel said to Saul, Why hast thou disquieted me, to bring me up? And Saul answered, I am sore distressed; for the Philistines make war against me, and GOD IS DEPARTED FROM ME, AND ANSWERETH ME NO MORE, NEITHER BY PROPHETS, NOR BY DREAMS: therefore I have called thee, that thou mayest make known unto me what I shall do.” In the following verse the demon who impersonated Samuel asked:

“Wherefore then dost thou ask of me, seeing the LORD is departed from thee, and is become thine enemy?” The question now arises: If by Saul’s own admission God has departed from him and is become his enemy and “does not answer him by prophets nor by dreams”, is it from witches that Saul will receive answer from God? Any discerning mind can see from the story that what transpired between Saul and the witch was under the influence of the Devil and so nothing about it should be associated with God. We cannot agree more with a Bible scholar who said: “But to think that God, who had denied a man the benefit of his own institutions, would suffer him to reap any real advantage by a cursed diabolical invention, was very absurd.” – *Matthew Henry’s commentary* (on 1 Samuel 28).

The Dead Unconscious

The Bible makes it clear that the dead are unconscious. Thus the argument of Robert Ervin Hough at page 30 of his book, *THE CHRISTIAN AFTER DEATH*, that “Death is not a state of sleep and insensibility” is false. David the Psalmist exhorted: “Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish.” (Psalm 146:3,4) What is more the prophet Solomon stated: “For

the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.” – Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10; see also Psalm 6:5; 115:17; Isaiah 38:18,19.

Resurrection

The dead will remain silent and unconscious in the grave until the time of resurrection, which is the act of God Almighty in bringing the dead back to life. It is for the purpose of securing for man the privilege of resurrection that Christ came, died and rose again. Resurrection is the basis of the Christian faith. (1 Corinthians 15: 12-22)

Thousands of years ago, Job, a prophet of God declared: “O that thou wouldst hide me in the grave, that thou wouldst keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldst appoint me a set time, and remember me !” (Job 14:13) He then posed the question: “IF A MAN DIE, SHALL HE LIVE AGAIN?” He followed up with the answer. “ALL THE DAYS OF MY APPOINTED TIME WILL I WAIT, TILL MY CHANGE COME.” (Job 14:14,15) The “change” spoken of by Job is the resurrection. The period Job must wait “until his change comes” is the period of death. In other words the dead must wait in the grave until the resurrection. (Job 17:13-16). This contrasts with reincarnation, transmigration and similar teachings which imply a continuous life which never really ceases.

It is evident therefore that there is no immaterial part of man that at death “is truly conscious, and is either in great happiness (in heaven) or awful woe (or hell fire)”. John Bunyan in his *Pilgrim’s Progress* speak of people arriving in heaven after they have died, and being welcomed at the gates by St. Peter and others. This is sheer fantasy. Apart from the saints who are changed into spirits and taken into heaven during this age of Christ’s second presence, the rest of the human race who will be saved will dwell in God’s Kingdom here on earth in perfect peace and happiness. The earth, the Bible says God has given “to the children of men.” -Psalm 115:16. Moreover Christ declared that all who are to be resurrected will come from the grave – not some from heaven, others from hell fire and so on. “Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, IN THE WHICH ALL THAT ARE IN THE GRAVES shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation.” – John 5:28-29.

From all we have said in this sermon, it is evident that one does not continue to live after death. The dead will only live again at the resurrection. St. Paul in his letter to the Hebrews asserted “And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment.” (Hebrews 9:27) This statement is a clear, unambiguous and categorical repudiation of the teaching that life continues to exist after death, presupposing multiple births and deaths. The judgment being referred to by St. Paul is the judgment of the dead, which shall take place at the resurrection.

Furthermore the Bible says “I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death: O death, I will be thy plagues; O grave, I will be thy destruction: repentance shall be hid from mine eyes.” -Hosea 13:14 See also Acts 24:15; Daniel 12:2; Isaiah 26:19 etc.

We must emphasize that because “it is appointed unto men once to die” Christians are enjoined

to make full use of the time they now have to do the will of God so as to be counted worthy to live in God's Kingdom fully established by God's grace and power. – Ephesians 5:16; Amos 8:11-14; Isaiah 55:6; Ecclesiastes 9:10; Isaiah 65:17-25; Revelation 21:1-5.