

WHERE ARE THE DEAD?



WATCH TOWER BIBLE & TRACT SOCIETY

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No. 1

WHERE ARE THE DEAD?

*"For David is not ascended into the heavens."
"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but
he that came down from heaven, even the Son
of Man."—Acts 2:29-34; John 3:13.*

FOR a man to declare himself uninterested in this subject would be to proclaim himself idiotic, thoughtless. If the ordinary affairs of this present life—food, raiment, finance, politics, etc.—which concern us but for a few years, are deemed worthy of thought, study, how much more concern should we have in respect to the eternal future?

Of course so important a question has had the most profound study, ever since the reign of sin and death began, six thousand years ago. By this time the subject should be threadbare. The entire world should be so thoroughly informed respecting this question that there would be nothing new to say and nobody curious to hear. But the large audiences of intelligent, thoughtful people who come to hear, and who listen with breathless interest to what we have to say, imply that, after all the study the subject has had, but few are thoroughly satisfied with their conclusions.

The Agnostic Answers the Question

Before presenting what we claim is the Scriptural and only satisfactory answer to our query, we think it but proper respect to the intelligence and thought of our day and of past centuries to make general inquiries on the subject and to have before our minds the most profound thoughts of

the most astute thinkers of our race. We cannot, however, go into this matter elaborately and give lengthy quotations. We must content ourselves with brief, synoptical answers, which will be stated kindly and truthfully, with a desire not to offend anybody, however much we may disagree with his conclusions. We recognize the right of every man to do his own thinking and to reach his own conclusions, whether these agree with our conceptions or not.

We begin our examination by asking our agnostic friends, who boast of their untrammelled freedom of thought: What say you, Free-thinkers, in reply to our query, Where are the dead? Their answer is: "We do not know. We would like to believe in a future life, but we have no proof of it. Lacking the evidences our conclusion is that man dies as does the brute beast. If our conclusion disappoints your expectations in respect to having joy for the saints, it certainly should be comforting to all as respects the vast majority of our race, who certainly would be much better off perished like the brute beast than to be preserved in torture, as the majority believe."

We thank our agnostic friends for the courteous reply, but feel that the answer is not satisfactory, either to our heads or to our hearts. These cry out that there must, or should be, a future life; that the Creator made man with powers of mind and heart so superior to the brute that his pre-eminence in the divine plan should be expected. Furthermore, the brevity of the present life, its tears, its sorrows, its experiences, its lessons, will nearly all be valueless, useless, unless there be a future life—an opportunity for making use of these lessons. —We must look further for a more satisfactory answer.

The Heathen Answer to Our Query

Since three-fourth of the world is heathen, the weight of numbers implies that they next should be asked for their solution to the problem, Where are the dead? Heathenism gives two general answers:

(1) Prominent are those which hold to trans-

migration. These reply to us: "Our view is that when a man dies, he does not die, but merely changes his form. His future estate will correspond to his present living and give him either a higher or a lower position. We believe that we lived on earth before, perhaps as cats, dogs, mice, elephants, or what not, and that if the present life has been wisely used, we may reappear as men of nobler talents, as philosophers, etc.; but if, as usual, life has been misspent, at death we shall be remanded to some lower form of being."

(2) The other large class of heathen believe in a spirit world with happy hunting grounds for the good and a hell of different torments for the wicked. We are told that when people seem to die they really become more alive than ever, and that the very minute they cross the river Styx they go to the realms of either the blessed or the ever doomed, and that there are steps or degrees of punishment and reward. We inquire, "Where did you receive these views?" The answer is, "They have been with us for a long, long time. We know not where they came from. Our learned men have handed them down to us as truths, and we have accepted them as such."

But heathenism's answer is not satisfactory to our heads and hearts. We must look further. We must not trust to speculation. We must look for divine revelation, the message from him with whom we have to do—our Creator.

The Catholic Answer to Our Question

Turning from heathenism we address our question to that intelligent one-fourth of the world's population known as Christendom. We say, Christendom, what is your answer to the question? The reply is, "We are divided in our opinion, more than two-thirds of us holding the Catholic and nearly one-third the general Protestant view." Let us then hear the Catholic view (Greek and Roman) first: for age, as well as numbers, suggests such precedence.

Catholic friends, give us, please, the results of your labors and studies, the conclusions of your

ablest thinkers and theologians, in respect to the Revelation which you claim to have from God on this subject, Where are the dead? We will hear you thoughtfully, patiently, unbiassedly. Our Catholic friends respond: "Our teachings are very explicit along the lines of your question. We have canvassed the subject from every standpoint in the light of divine Revelation. Our conclusion and teaching are that when any one dies, he goes to one of three places. First, the saintly, of whom **we claim there are but a few**, go immediately to the presence of God, to heaven. These few saintly ones do not include our clergy, nor our bishops, cardinals and popes; for you will find that when any of these die, it is a custom of the church that masses be said for the repose of their souls. We would not say masses for any we believe to be in heaven; for *there* surely is repose for every soul. Neither would we say masses for them if we believed them to be in eternal hell; for masses could not avail them there. We might remark, however, that we do not teach that many go to the eternal hell. It is our teaching that only incorrigible heretics—persons who have had a full knowledge of Catholic doctrines and who have wilfully and deliberately opposed them—these alone meet the awful, hopeless fate.

"The dead in general, according to our teaching, pass immediately to purgatory, which is, as the name indicates, a place of purgation from sin, a place of penances, sorrows, woes, anguish indeed, but not hopeless. The period of confinement here may be centuries or thousands of years, according to the deserts of the individual and the alleviations granted. The vast majority are there. The billions of the heathens are there; for ignorance does not save, does not qualify for the heavenly condition. All who enter heaven must previously have been fitted and prepared in a manner impossible to the heathen. Millions of Protestants are there. They could not enter heaven, except through the portals of the Catholic church; neither would God deem them worthy of eternal

hell; for their rejection of Catholicism was due to the confession of faith under which they were born and envired. Nearly all Catholics go to purgatory also; for notwithstanding the good offices of our church, our holy water, confessions, masses, holy candles, consecrated burying ground, etc., nevertheless, not having attained to saintship of character, they would be excluded from heaven. until the distressing experiences of purgatory would prepare their hearts for heaven. We hold, however, that for the reason stated, Catholics will not need to remain as long in purgatory as will the Protestants and the heathen."

We can thank our Catholic friends for so kind a statement of their case. We shall not ask them where their purgatory is, nor how they obtain the details of information respecting it: for such questions might offend them, and we have no desire to offend. We merely wish for their ripest, clearest, maturest thought respecting our question. We regret to say that the answer is not all that we might have hoped for in clearness, reasonableness and Scripturalness. Neither our heads nor our hearts are yet satisfied. It cannot be wrong to look for something better.

The Protestant Answer to Our Question

I class myself as a Protestant without thereby meaning any disrespect to anybody else. I assume that the majority of my readers are Protestants. I remind you that many of us in times past have been inclined to boast a little of Protestant "breadth of mind," "intelligence," "education," etc. May we not reasonably expect from Protestants a clear, logical, satisfactory answer to our question? Having found all the other answers unsatisfactory, and having now come to the one-twelfth portion of our race which has had most advantage every way, we might reasonably expect to find in its answer the quintessence of wisdom and proof from every quarter and from every age. But what do we find, dear friends? With shame I say it, We find the very reverse! We find the voice of Protestantism as a whole (bar-

ring numerically insignificant denominations) giving the most absurd answer to my question that could be conceived—an answer which is put to shame by the Catholics, the heathen and the agnostics. Is not this marvelous?

We got our name Protestants from the fact that our intelligent, well-meaning forefathers, who were Catholics, thought that they discovered inconsistencies and unscripturalness in Catholic doctrines in which they had been reared. They protested against these, and hence came the name Protestants. We cannot defend all that they did to their enemies nor all that their enemies did to them.

One of their points of protest was that our forefathers could find nothing of purgatory anywhere on earth, nor any declaration respecting it in the Bible. With a simplicity that is certainly marvelous to us, they concluded that they would merely pick up their views of purgatory and throw them away forever. This left them heaven and hell, into one of which, they said, every member of the race must go at death and there spend his eternity. The theory of Calvin and Knox prevailed at that time amongst Protestants and led each denomination to hope that it was God's "elect" and would go to heaven, while all the remainder of mankind would be consigned to an eternity of hellish torture.

Both Catholics and Protestants, looking back to that period which we often term the dark ages, have reason to give thanks to God for the anointing of the eyes of our understanding, which enables us, we believe, to think more logically than our forefathers. Even those of us reared under the doctrine of predestination have lost the idea that the heathen were passed by because they were predestinated to damnation; instead, those who accepted the Westminster Confession of Faith are today the most zealous in the preaching of the Gospel amongst the heathen by missionary effort. We are glad of this. It is a sign that our hearts are in truer and nobler condition, even though our heads are not yet properly adjusted.

Theoretically, Protestant doctrines stand with the Bible and with Catholics and declare that heaven is a place of perfection; that there can be no change to any who enter there; hence that all trial, all refinement, all chiseling, all polishing of character must be accomplished in advance of an entrance into the abode of the saints. In a word, we agree that only the saints will ever enter there, the "pure in heart," the "overcomers," the "little flock," who now walk in the footsteps of Jesus. What about the remainder of mankind? Ah! there is the difficulty.

The Best of People Perplexed

Our creeds perplex us; for, as our hearts will not permit us to think of these poor creatures going to an eternity of misery, neither will our heads permit us to say that they are fit for heaven. Indeed it would be at variance not only with the Scripture, but also with reason itself, to suppose heaven with three-fourths of its inhabitants unregenerate in every sense of the word. Our forefathers merely spoiled things for us when they threw away purgatory and kept the remainder of the arrangement. If we must object to purgatory as being unscriptural, must we not equally object to the eternal torment of all the families of the earth as being unscriptural, especially when the Bible declares that all the families of the earth shall be blest through the Christ—blest with a knowledge of the truth and opportunity to come into heart harmony with God and attain everlasting life through Christ? I believe that it is necessary to press this point of the unreasonableness of the eternal torment doctrine. Nevertheless, I will remind you of what our prominent Protestant theories are on the subject:

(1) The Calvinistic thought is that divine Wisdom and Power planned for mankind in advance—knew of the fall of man in advance, and prepared therefor by the creating of a great place called *hell* and the manning of it with fire-proof devils for the torment of the race—all except the

"little flock," the "elect." Love and Justice were left out of this calculation. (2) The other prominent Protestant theory, the Arminian, held to-day probably by the majority, insists that both Love and Justice created the world and arranged the torment, and that Wisdom and Power were not consulted; hence that God has gotten into difficulty, while endeavoring to do justly and lovingly by his creatures; because lacking in power to render the needed aid. The entire difficulty, dear friends, is that in our reasoning on the subject we have not sought the Word of the Lord.

What Say the Scriptures

All of the foregoing theories, be it noticed, are based upon the assumption that death does not mean death—that to die is to become more alive than before death. In Eden it was God who declared to our first parents: "*Ye shall surely die.*" It was Satan who declared: "*Ye shall not surely die.*" Notice that the heathens, as well as the Christians, have accepted Satan's lie and correspondingly rejected God's truth. Do they not all agree with the serpent's statement, "*Ye shall not surely die?*" Do they not all claim that the dead are alive—much more alive than before they died? This, dear friends, has been our common point of mistake. We have followed the wrong teacher; the one of whom our Lord said: "*He abode not in the truth,*" and that he is "*the father of lies.*"—John 8:44.

These false doctrines have prevailed amongst the heathen for many, many centuries, but they gained an ascendancy in the church of Christ during the dark ages, and had much to do with producing the darkness thereof. If our forefathers had believed God's testimony, "*Thou shalt surely die,*" there would have been no room for the introduction of prayers for the dead, masses for their sins, frightful thoughts respecting their torture. The Scriptures agree from first to last that "*the dead know not anything*" (Eccl. 9:5); and that "*their sons come to honor and they know it not; they come to dishonor and they perceive it*

not of them." (Job 14:21) It is the Scriptures that tell us where the dead are and their condition; that they are experiencing neither joy nor sorrow, pleasure nor suffering; that they will have no knowledge of anything done under the sun until their awakening in the resurrection. I remind you of the wise man's words, "Do with thy might what thy hand findeth to do, for there is neither wisdom nor knowledge nor device in [sheol] the grave, whither thou goest." (Eccl. 9:10) I remind you that both in the Old Testament and in the New Testament it is written of both the good and the bad that they fell asleep in death. I remind you that the Apostle speaks of those who "sleep in Jesus," and of those who have fallen asleep in Christ," who he declares *are perished*, if there be no resurrection of the dead. Could they perish in heaven or in purgatory or in a hell of torment? Assuredly no one so teaches. They are already in a perished condition in the tomb; and the perishing would be absolute, complete, unless a resurrection be provided for their deliverance from the power of death. Hence we read: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him should not *perish*, but have eternal life."

In a word, then, the Bible teaching is that man was made superior to all the brute creation—in the image and likeness of his Creator; that he possessed life in a perfect degree in Eden and might have retained it by full obedience. But in his trial, his testing, he failed and came under the death sentence. "In the day that thou eatest thereof, dying thou shalt die." (Gen. 2:17) There the dying began, which, after nine hundred and thirty years, brought father Adam to the tomb and involved all of his children in his weaknesses and death sentence. He died in that very day, which the Apostle Peter explains was not a twenty-four-hour day, but a thousand-year day, saying, "One day is with the Lord as a thousand years," (2 Pet. 3:8) During six of these great days the

death sentence has brought man down in some respects to the level of the brute and left him without hope of future life, except as God might take compassion upon him and bring relief.

But not until four of the great thousand-year days had passed did God send forth his Son to redeem the race, by paying father Adam's penalty, by dying, "the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God." (1 Pet. 3:18) As a result of that redemptive work accomplished at Calvary there is to be "a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and of the unjust"—a recovery from the death sentence, from the prison-house, the tomb.

Death, Not Torment, the Penalty

Note well the mistake made in assuming that eternal torment is the wages of original sin, when the Scriptures explicitly declare that "the wages of sin is death"—not eternal torment. (Rom. 6:23) We search the Genesis account of man's fall and the sentence imposed, but find no suggestion of a future punishment, but merely of a death penalty. Repeating it the second time the Lord said: "Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return." (Gen. 3:19) But he said not a word respecting devils, fire and torment. How, then, did the Adversary deceive our fathers during the dark ages with his errors, which the Apostle styles "doctrines of devils?" Note the fact that none of the prophecies mention any other than a death penalty for sin. Note that the New Testament likewise declares the same. St. Paul, who wrote more than one-half of the New Testament, and who assures us that he did "not shun to declare the whole counsel of God" (Acts 20:27), says not a word about torment. On the contrary, discussing this very matter of sin and its penalty, he says: "Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and *death* by sin; and so *death* passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12) Note that it was not eternal torment that passed upon one man nor upon all men, but *death*. If some one

suggests that death would not be a sufficient penalty for sin, all we would need to do would be to point him to the facts and thus prove his suggestions illogical. For the sin of disobedience Adam lost his paradisaic home—lost eternal life and divine fellowship, and instead got sickness, pain, sorrow, death. Additionally all of his posterity, reasonably estimated at twenty thousand millions, disinherited so far as the blessings are concerned, have inherited weaknesses, mental, moral and physical, and are, as the Apostle declares, “a groaning creation.”—Rom. 8:22.

Notice again why our Lord *died* for our redemption, and see in that another evidence of the penalty. If the penalty against us had been eternal torment, our redemption from it would have cost our Lord that price. He would have been obliged to suffer eternal torment, the just for the unjust. But eternal torment was not the penalty; hence Jesus did not pay that penalty for us. Death was the penalty; and hence “*Christ died for our sins.*” “By the grace of God he tasted *death* for every man.” Whoever could pay Adam’s penalty could settle with divine Justice for the sins of the whole world, because Adam alone had been tried, Adam alone had been condemned. We, his children, were involved through him. Behold the wisdom and the economy of our Creator! The Scriptures assure us that he condemned the whole world for one man’s disobedience, in order that he might have mercy upon all through the obedience of another—Christ. We were condemned to death without consent or knowledge. We were redeemed from death without consent or knowledge.

Some one may inquire: “Are we, therefore, without responsibility? Will there be no individual penalty upon us for individual wrong doings?” We answer: “A just recompense of reward” will be meted out to all. But our eternal destiny can be settled only by ourselves, by our individual acceptance or rejection of the grace of God. The Scriptures clearly inform us that every sin, in proportion to its wilfulness, brings a meas-

ure of degradation which involves "stripes," chastisements, corrections to regain the lost standing. Thus the more mean and the more wicked a person may be, the greater will be his disadvantage in the resurrection time, and the more he will then have to overcome to get back to all that *was lost* in Adam and *redeemed* by Christ.

"And the Dead Came Forth"

The most notable miracle our Lord performed was the awakening of Lazarus, his friend. Jesus was gone several days when Lazarus took sick, but remained where he was and allowed Lazarus to die and a rude shock to come to the dear sisters. Then he said to his disciples: "Our friend Lazarus sleepeth." (John 11:11) Then, coming down to their comprehension, he added: "Lazarus is dead; and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there."—John 11:14, 15.

He was glad to let his friend fall *asleep in death*; for it would provide a special opportunity for a special miracle. Then, with his disciples, he began the three-days journey to Bethany. We cannot blame the sorrowing sisters that they felt hurt that the Messiah should apparently neglect their interests. They knew that he had the power to relieve them. Martha's gentle reproof was: "Lord, if thou hadst been here my brother had not died. Jesus said unto her, Thy brother shall rise again. Martha said unto him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection at the last day." (John 21:23, 24) Notice that our Lord did not say: "Thy brother is not dead; thy brother is more alive than he ever was; he is in heaven or in purgatory." Nothing of the kind! Purgatory had not yet been invented, and he knew nothing of it. And as for heaven, our Lord's testimony is in our text: "No man hath ascended into heaven, but he that came down from heaven." Martha was also well informed. The errors of the dark ages had not yet supplanted the truth. Her hope for her brother was the Scriptural one; that he would rise in the resurrection, in the last day, the Millennial day.

Our Lord explained that the power of resurrection was vested in himself, that he was there with her, and could give relief to them without waiting. Martha told our Lord that it was too late; that putrefaction had set in by this time. But Jesus insisted on seeing the tomb; and when he arrived at it, he said: "Lazarus, come forth." and we read: "He that was dead came forth." (John 11:43, 44) Mark well that it was not the living that came forth, but that Lazarus was really dead. Mark well that he was not called from heaven nor from purgatory.

"All That Are in Their Graves"

What Jesus did for Lazarus he intimated he would ultimately do for Adam and his entire race. Note his words: "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth." (John 5:28, 29) Does this astonish us? If so, the reason is not far to seek. It is because we have gotten so far away from the teachings of the Bible—so fully immersed in the "doctrines of devils," so fully to believe in the serpent's lie, "Ye shall not surely die"—so blinded to the divine declaration: "Ye shall surely die," and "The wages of sin is death."

The remainder of John 5:29 explains that there will be two general classes of the dead to come forth: the first, those who have had their trial and who have passed it successfully; the second, all the remainder of mankind who have thus far failed to have divine approval. The approved will come forth from the tomb unto a resurrection of life—perfection. The disapproved will come forth unto a resurrection of judgment. (see Revised Version) The coming forth is one thing. The resurrection is another. The Apostle explains that they will come forth "every man in his own order." (1 Cor. 15:23) On thus being awakened the privilege will be theirs of *rising*, up, up, up out of present degradation, mental, moral, physical, to the glorious perfection which father Adam enjoyed in the image and likeness of his Creator. The uplifting or resurrection work St.

Peter refers to as the "restitution of all things which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began."—Acts 3:21.

Nor does this mean universal everlasting life, for the Scriptures declare that such as refuse to profit by the glorious opportunities of the Millennium, such as refuse to be uplifted to perfection, shall be destroyed from amongst the people in the second death. "They shall be as though they had not been." (Obad. 16) I remind you again of our Lord's teaching on this subject. He entered the synagogue at Capernaum and, being asked to read the lesson, he chose Isaiah, the sixty-first chapter, and read respecting himself and his work—that a part of it would be "to open the prison-doors and set at liberty the captives." The prison-house which Christ will soon open is the great prison-house, the tomb, which now holds approximately twenty thousand millions of our race. At his second advent our Lord will open this great prison-house and allow all the prisoners to come forth, just as truly as he did in the example—in the case of Lazarus. Nor will he call them from heaven, purgatory and hell, but, just as he said, "Lazarus, come forth," "all that are in their graves shall hear his voice and come forth."

My dear friends, you have had before you the answers to our question from the highest to the lowest earthly authorities. None of them was satisfactory. Now you have heard the testimony of God's Word, the divine declaration as to where are the dead. Harkening to the voice from heaven we are assured that they are really dead and that all their hopes as respects the future are centered, first, upon the redemptive work of our Lord Jesus, accomplished at Calvary, and, secondly, upon the work of resurrection which, at his second advent, he is to accomplish for those whom he redeemed. If perchance you have a shade of disappointment as respects a saintly brother or sister, father or mother or child, who you hoped was already in heaven, then as a consolation look at the other side of the question.

Behold how many of your loved ones, kith and kin, friends and foes and neighbors, according to your theory and all the prevalent theories, have been suffering untellable woe since their deaths and would be suffering similarly for long centuries to come. Consider the relief of mind and heart you get from the knowledge of the truth; that they are not alive anywhere, but simply dead, or more poetically, they are "asleep in Jesus," in the sense that he is their Redeemer, in whom all their hopes of a future awakening reside.

Just a closing word! Our subject would lack a proper finish if we did not explain Scripturally why God has delayed the world's blessing, the resurrection, nearly two thousand years since the death of Jesus. The reason is so glorious that it must appeal to every true Christian heart.

God purposed the selection of the church before the blessing of resurrection should go to the world. The promise to these is not the resurrection of restitution promised to mankind during the Millennium. On the contrary, these have a heavenly calling." After their consecration they are begotten of the holy Spirit, and then instructed in the school of Christ and submitted to trials and disciplines in various ways, for the purpose of chiseling and polishing their characters as new creatures. These are a "little flock," gathered one here and one there; "saints" from all denominations and from outside of all denominations; for "the Lord knoweth them that are his." When the predestined number of the elect shall have been selected and polished, the present age will end. Our Lord will come in second advent glory and power. His elect bride will constitute the first resurrection class, from earthly to heavenly nature, "changed in a moment;" for "flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God."

Then will come the holy, invisible Millennial kingdom, the binding of Satan, the destruction of his unholy, invisible kingdom, and the setting loose of agencies for the enlightening and uplifting of the whole race of mankind.