



Research article

AN EXAMINATION OF THE BIBLICAL POSITION ON THE STATE OF THE DEAD

Dimgba Dimgba Esowe, PhD

Senior Lecturer, Department of Religious Studies, Clifford University, Owerri, Abia State, Nigeria.

Emails: ddeso2001@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 09 Aug. 2021

Accepted 22 Sept. 2021

Available online: 30 Sep. 2021

Keywords: *Breath, Death, Soul, Spirit, Consciousness.*

ABSTRACT

In spite of man's acclaimed advancement in knowledge, death still stares him at his face. The Bible which tells man how God created him is also informative of what cost man his life. However, the knowledge man has acquired seem to have propped up divergent understanding and reasoning as to what happens when man dies. This work examined the biblical position on the state of the dead through the hermeneutical principles of *analogia scriptura* (analogy of scripture), contextual word study and relevant literature review. It found out that the biblical position that the dead know nothing stands the test of time, hence, in this present world, the dead are unconscious, unintelligent, and after their corpses are buried, lose their corporeal form.



Introduction

If death were an experience that affects the non-human species only, it would probably elicit less attention from mankind than it does in this present age. Unfortunately however, it is mankind that triggered the occurrence of death by the choice of her first parents to disobey the Creator and obey a creature. The warning statement was: “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” (Gen 2:17 KJV).

It was for them to obey and live or disobey and die. As White¹ puts it, “God made them [Adam and Eve] free moral agents, capable of appreciating the wisdom and benevolence of His character and the justice of His requirements, and with full liberty to yield or to withhold obedience.” The devil disguised himself and spoke to Eve through the serpent, giving her the false assurance of “ye shall not surely die: For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:4, 5 KJV). Eve chose to listen to the deceiver. She took the fruit of the forbidden tree and ate. Thereafter, she gave it also to her husband Adam and he ate.

God pronounced his just judgment on Adam and Eve and at the crescendo of it He said to Adam “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” (Gen 3:19 KJV). God in delivering this sentence reminded humanity’s first parents of their original composition which reads:”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” (Gen 2:7). Though they did not die immediately, the effect of their sin began to dawn on them when they witnessed the decay that erupted in plant life. White avers that Adam and Eve were so shocked at the sight of drooping flowers and falling leaves that they mourned for these occurrences more deeply than people now mourn for their dead ones.²

Out of his love for mankind, God revealed the plan He had made for the redemption of fallen humanity. This plan He had made as a result of His fore-knowledge. He sent His only begotten Son, Jesus Christ of Nazareth, to come and pay the price of sin by dying a vicarious and substitutionary death shedding His precious sinless blood on the cross at Calvary. Thus God has pronounced through the Messiah Himself that whosoever believes in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life (John 3:16, 17). This hope beyond the grave has been receiving various types of expositions from scholars and religious teachers alike.

1. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890), 48. www.whiteestate.org/books/pp/pp3.html. Accessed April 9, 2015.

2. *Ibid*, 62.



While some believe that death ends it all for man, others are of the view that there is a continuation of life in another realm immediately after death. Yet there are those who hold that there is a period of waiting for now till the second coming of Jesus and that at that time a separation will be effected between true believers and false believers in so much that the former will inherit eternal life while the later will suffer eternal damnation and extinction.

From the biblical point of view, what is the state of the dead in this present world prior to the second coming of Jesus Christ? By adopting the hermeneutical principle of *analogia scriptura* (analogy of the Bible), this work contributes to knowledge in the sphere of biblical studies by answering the question above. Scholarly literatures were reviewed and biblical word studies were carried out to arrive at the conclusions presented.

What is Man's Make-Up?

Omoregbe³ cites Aristotle as saying that:

Man ... is a unified composite of body and soul, none of which can exist separately without the other. Both are essential and complementary elements of the human person. The union between the body and the soul is a substantial union, not an accidental union as Plato and his followers say.

This means that when man dies and the body decomposes that is the eternal end for man. This view is contradictory to the word of God which says that Christ has gone to prepare a place and that after that He will come to take those who believe and are waiting for Him to that place (John 14:1 – 3). Okon⁴ on the other hand aligns himself with the views of Plato that, man is a dual entity composed of body and soul which are separable. Thus he believes that physical death is the end of life and the point of dichotomy between body and soul.

In his analytical presentation Uduigwomen⁵ sees man as a tripartite being consisting of body, soul and spirit. He states further that these three aspects of man may be slightly distinct. He accepts that God created man as is found in Genesis 2:7 and avers that these three parts of man are clear in the text. He explains his position by stating that the spirit is man's God-consciousness; the soul is man's self-consciousness; and the body is man's world-consciousness which encompasses the five senses of sight, touch, smell, taste and hearing. He however creates an ambiguity by averring that the soul stands in-between the body and the spirit as it is not a mixture of both.

3. Joseph I. Omeregbe, *A Philosophical Look at Religion* (Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers), 1993.

4. Etim Okon, "Death and Immortality in Christian and African Individual Eschatology," *African Journal of Religion, Culture and Society* 1(2006): 40-47.

5. Andrew F. Uduigwomen, "The Human Soul: Mortal or Immortal?," *African Journal of Religion, Culture and Society* 1(2006): 48-52.



This certainly goes against Genesis 2:7 which says that when God breathed into the nostrils of the molten dust man became a living soul. By this statement of the Bible the soul seems to be an outcome of the union or mixture of the breath (spirit) and the dust (body).

The State of the Dead

The misunderstandings that erupt from the views enunciated above have led to different beliefs about the state of the dead. Peth⁶ intimates on what various people say about the state of the dead thus:

Stop a dozen people on the street and you'll hear many different ideas expressed on the mystery we call death. One will say: 'when a man dies, that's all it – there's no hereafter, no nothing.! Death is the end. Period.' Another says: 'No! You're wrong. You never really die. Death is like a door we pass through to a whole new existence'.

Other scholars hold views that are neither here nor there. Such could be seen in Riley's submission that death is an individual event which no one can explain to himself. He agrees that it is a universal mystery which puzzles humanity and creates fear and uncertainty in human affairs. He makes a transitional statement by averring that death is a "final rite de passage."⁷ However it is not clear from Riley's statements, where the journey heads to. Habenstein affirms that death is a physical extinction of people and a contingency that every human group faces. He states that people react to the death of one of their own emotionally and ritually.⁸ Emotionally, by crying and addressing the dead in a manner that shows them as believing that the dead is listening to them. Ritually people perform certain culturally and religiously determined acts, consequent upon the affiliations of the dead and those burying the corpse. Habenstein intones further that death is a process involving several activities and not just an instamatic event; that time and location change after death, from earthly to sacred in another world, where the spirit is either absorbed or exists to some degree with its individuality.⁹ He accepts physical dissolution of the body, but holds that the force or entity that gave life to the body is never extinguished, rather it is transformed and moves into an otherworldly realm where it is incorporated into a new existence.¹⁰ The difficulty in handling the phenomenon of death is affirmed by Okon who states that one of the fundamental problems of man is how to react to the reality of death.¹¹ He submits that death is a natural phenomenon which occurs physically when the functional abilities of a person wears out, breaks down or develops an irreparable fault, which leaves no room for the one concerned

6. Howard A. Peth, *Solving the Mystery of Death* (Queensland: Truth for Today, 2000), 3, 4.

7. John Riley, "Death and Bereavement," *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Ed. David L. Sills 4 (Baltimore: Crowell Collier and Macmillan, 1968), 19.

8. Robert Habenstein, "The Social Organization of Death," *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, Ed. David L. Sills 4 (Baltimore: Crowell Collier and Macmillan, 1968), 26, 27.

9. Ibid.

10. Ibid.

11. Okon, "Death and Immortality in Christian and African Individual Eschatology," 40.



to perform life's duties anymore. He intimates further that a majority of Christian theologians and philosophers agree that the belief in the immortality of the soul crept into Christian beliefs from ancient Greek thought in the middle of the 2nd century A.D. He further cites the authoritative Jewish Encyclopedia thus:

The belief that the soul continues its existence after the dissolution of the body is a matter of philosophical or theological speculation rather than of simple faith and is accordingly nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture ... the belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strongly blended.¹²

On how the doctrine of the immortality of the soul got ingrained into Christianity, Okon intimates that it gained official status in Christendom by an action of the Lateran Council of A.D 1513, and was enforced by the Catholic Church who in the medieval period threatened those who questioned or refused to accept the doctrine with punishment tagging them heretics.¹³ However, Okon makes a biblically questionable remark by asserting that "it is an acceptable speculation in Christian eschatology that after death, man's soul and spirit continue in a state of conscious existence between death and resurrection."¹⁴ Uduigwomen corroborates Okon's aversion by stating that immortality is the persistence of one's identity, consciousness and memory after death and that the soul of man is self-conscious representing the person (or personal life) or the individual.¹⁵

Consciousness implies the capacity to know and experience activities going on around a person and as such cannot be biblically upheld. The Bible says "For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten" (Ecclesiastes 9: 5).

Cotterell¹⁶ remarks that the Bible maintains an unending portrayal of death as the highest crisis which throughout eternity brings to fulfillment humanity's destiny. This destiny he continues is either "with God in heaven or without him in hell." He affirms the truism of the Bible statement concerning life and death, which is that death takes place when the spirit leaves the body, in so much as life exists when the body is indwelt by the spirit.¹⁷ He accepts the fact that death is not just a physical event that can be avoided like an accident or delayed by replacement of body parts, rather, it is theological, and is dependent on our relationship with our Creator.¹⁸

12. Okon, bid, 43.

13. Ibid.

14. Ibid.

15. Uduigwomen, "The Human Soul: Mortal or Immortal?," 48.

16. Peter Cotterell, *I Want to Know What the Bible Says About Death* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1979), 9.

17. Ibid, 10.

18. Ibid, 11.



Jackson in a work he captions *The Biblical View of Death*, portrays death as a fearful event.¹⁹ He cites Psalm 55:4, 5; Job 18:14; and Hebrews 2:15 wherein the various Bible writers use the expressions “terrors of death”, “king of terrors”, and “fear of death” respectively, to describe sentiments of vast multitudes that faced prospects of death, to elucidate his point. He is quick however, to affirm that a few people grow in faith to a height where they together with Paul say that they are ready to die (Phil 1: 23).

He avers that the reference to death as sleep in the Bible has to do with the state of the body in death. He intones that it is that part of man placed in the dust of the earth which sleeps, and since it is the body, it is not the spirit that sleeps. The deprivation of the tree of life to Adam and Eve when they sinned meant they were denied physical immortality. Paul's expression that the earthly house of our tabernacle is “dissolved” by death, he analyzes as fleshly decomposition. This he assumes because the Greek term *καταλύω*²⁰ (*Kataluō*), which is translated as “dissolved” literally means to “loose down”. He therefore laments the huge sums of money being spent on body preservation after death, insisting that physical immortality will never be medically attained.

Jackson further submits that death is a departure. That death occurs when the spirit leaves the body as inferred in James 2:26. He also cites Paul in Philippians 1:23 as seeing death as a departure, with the Greek term *ἀναλύω*²¹ (*analuō*), meaning to “loose up”. Hence he argues that at death, whereas the body is loosed down, the spirit of man is loosed up. Death, he continues, affords the spirit of the deceased the opportunity of reunion with the righteous loved ones. This he insists is the case based on Jesus' statement in Matthew 8:11 that many will sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven, as it implies a reunion among those three. For those who ignore Christ, death will usher in a period of eternal suffering. “They will”, Jackson states, “enter a spirit state characterized by pains, trouble, and sorrow (Psa. 116:3).

They will be immersed in shame and contempt (Dan. 12:2). It will be a realm of anguish, suffering, and torment (Mt 22:13; 25:46; Mk 9:48; Lk 16:24; 2 Thess 1:9; Rev 20:10)”. One cannot live wrong and die right, he submits. He affirms that after death, there is no opportunity for repentance or salvation. Concepts such as “a second chance after death,” “baptism for the dead”, and “purgatory” he submits, are totally without basis in the Scriptures. The scholars whose works have been analyzed above are of divergent views. Therefore the Bible has to be approached and certain words and portions of it re-examined to see the point that we will arrive at on this question of the state of the dead.

19. Wayne Jackson, “The Biblical View of Death,” accessed October 10, 2011, <http://www.christiancourier.com>.

20. Harold K. Moulton, *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978), 218.

21. *Ibid*, 23.



A SURVEY OF WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS THROUGH AN UNDERSTANDING OF THE ORIGINAL VOCABULARIES CONNECTED TO THIS STUDY.

Part of God's acts in history is creation. Humanity is part of that creation (Gen. 2:7). Without human life, there would be no human death. Therefore for the Bible to be able to speak concerning death, it has to be asked about life, especially human life. Ferch pictures it rightly by saying that a number of fundamental biblical concepts are rooted in the divine creation.²² The creation account is recorded in Genesis chapters one and two. The New Testament declarations of Jesus and the Apostles confirm it to be real and not fictitious (Mt. 19:4, Heb11:3).

The Old Testament

The Old Testament speaks about the nature of man by stating that:

מִן־הָאֲדָמָה	עָפָר	אֶת־הָאָדָם	אֱלֹהִים	יְהוָה	וַיִּצֶר
min-hadamah	'aphar	Eth-ha'adam	'Elohim	yehuwah	wayitser
from the ground	dust	of man	God	Jehovah	then formed

וַיִּפַּח	בְּאַפָּיו	נְשֵׁמַת חַיִּים	וַיְהִי	הָאָדָם	לְנֶפֶשׁ חַיָּה
Chayyah	lenephesh	haadam	wayehir	chayim	nishemath
a living	of soul	the man	and became	life	the breath
					into his nostrils
					and breathed

“Then Jehovah God formed man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life and the man became a living soul”²³; “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” (Gen. 2:7 KJV).

This passage shows that man is a constitution of dust of the ground and the breath of life. In other words the introduction of the life animating air into the system of the molten dust by the creator God resulted to a living being called man who is equal to a living soul not an immortal soul.²⁴ It was not a soul that God breathed into the lifeless body, rather the life-giving air. Even now, anyone whose system fails to inhale oxygen dies. The Old Testament in this regard intimates us in Ecclesiastes 9:5 “the living know that they shall die.”

22. Arthur Ferch, “What Creation Means to Me,” *Adventist Review* (1986): 11-13.

23. Dimgba Dimgba Esowe’s Translation Demonstration, he is the writer of this article, 26/7/2021.

24. Robert Leo Odom, *Is Your Soul Immortal?* (Georgia: Discovery Reading, 1989), 7.



As to what happens at death Ecclesiastes 12:7 says:

	וַיָּשָׁב	הָעֶפְרָר	עַל־הָאָרֶץ	כַּשֶּׁהָיָה	וְהָרוּחַ	תָּשׁוּב
thashub	weharuach	keshehayah	'a-lha'arets	he'aphar	weyashib	
she is returning	and the spirit	as which he was	the earth	the dust	and he returning	
	נָתַןָּהּ	אֲשֶׁר	אֱלֹהִים			
	nethanah	'asher	'el-ha'elohim			
	he gave her	who	to the 'Elohim			

“The dust returns to the earth as it was and the spirit returns to God who gave it.”²⁵ “Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it” (KJV).

A comparison of what happens at death to what happened at creation will suffice here, and would enable us identify what the spirit is. At creation the human being was said to consist of dust and breath of life (Gen. 2:7). At death, the composition is referred to as dust and spirit (Eccl. 12:7). When dust is removed from both expressions, breath of life and spirit remain in the balance. In Genesis, God gave the breath of life and in Ecclesiastes the spirit returns to God who gave it. It then follows that the spirit in Ecclesiastes 12:7 is logically and ontologically the same thing as the breath of life in Genesis 2:7.

The Hebrew term in Genesis 2:7 that has been translated “living being” or “living soul” is *nephesh chayyah*.²⁶ It describes man's total nature.²⁷ *Nephesh* is used variously in the Old Testament to denote breath, blood, person, corpse and tomb, as well as expressions of the will. Jacob shows that all of these uses of *nephesh* are in line with the actual composition of the human person.²⁸ As *נְשָׁמָה* *neshamah*, breath²⁹, it establishes the fact that humans are breathing creatures that become dead when they cease to breathe (Job 11:20; Jer 15:9). Its usage for blood simply denote the vital force (Gen 9:4; Lev 17:11; Deut 12:23). The usage of the term for person is in most cases connected with a form as it has no existence without the corporeal body that can be counted (Gen 12:5; 46:18; Josh 10:28; 11:11). In reference to corpse and tomb *nephesh* applies only while there still exists the distinguishing features before decomposition (Num 19:13; Hag 2:13). As expression of the will the term does not refer to only one and a particular organ. Rather, it could apply to various parts of the

25. Esowe, Ibid.

26. See Esowe's translation above.

27. Jacob, “The Anthropology of the Old Testament”, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* IX. Ed. Gerhard Friedrich (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1974), 620.

28. Ibid, 617 – 621.

29. Page H. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1992), 389.



organism, and could be used as synonym for any such organ (Ps 27:12; Pr 13:2).³⁰ Porteous sums it up by saying that the Old Testament in using the word *nephesh*, never intends to say the immortal soul, instead, it means to talk of the life principle, or the living being, or the self with the tendency of appetite and emotion, and sometimes of volition.³¹

In Ecclesiastes 12:7 the Hebrew word translated spirit is רִיחַ³² (*ruach*). *Ruach* occurs severally in the Old Testament and is most frequently translated “spirit”, “wind”, or “breath”. Kneller adds to the variants, “a sensible exhalation”, and includes Ezekiel 37:14 to the list of passages where the term is used.³³ Commenting on Ezekiel 37:9, Plumptre and Whitelaw agree that the prophet received a command to prophesy unto the wind, or breath, or spirit, and direct it from the four winds to come into the slain, that they might live again.³⁴

One could then say that the spirit that returns to God at death is his breath, i.e. man stops breathing and the live-giving breath ceases to enter into him and returns to the Giver. As to whether this breath remains conscious, Jemison replies: *Ruach* is used 388 times in the Old Testament, but not once does it denote a conscious, intelligent entity capable of existence apart from a physical body. The concept of such an entity is entirely without Bible foundation.”³⁵ Here Jemison talks about human ontology. The Holy Spirit exists in several forms, being God and capable of things beyond human comprehension.

The position of the Old Testament on Human death in this present world could be summarized by the submission of The Expositor's Bible Commentary on Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6. It says that the setting has to do with the possibility of planning and execution among people. The living know that they would certainly die. However, from the human angle, the dead have not been shown yet what their future would be. They have no place where they can congregate to sing the praises of God (Ps 115:17). They cannot come back here to do or undo anything. That is how much God has revealed to us now.³⁶

The New Testament

In the New Testament, the word for soul is ψυχή³⁷ and is transliterated *psuche*. It occurs 103 times in 14 chapters and is also translated as life, breath, and self.³⁸

30. Jacob, Ibid.

31. N. W. Porteous, “Soul.” *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 4 Ed. George Arthur Buttrick (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962),

32. Kelley, *Biblical Hebrew: An Introductory Grammar*, 395.

33. **Sam Kneller**, “Ruach, The Core Senses of Sentient Beings,” March 6, 2020 accessed 16/8/2021, <https://medium.com/the-explanation/ruach-the-core-senses-of-sentient-beings-5b181bf73bc3>

34. E. H. Plumptre & T. Whitelaw, “Ezekiel,” *The Pulpit Commentary* 28. Eds H. D. M Spence, & Joseph S. Exell. (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, n.d.), 265.

35. T. Housel Jemison, *Christian Beliefs* (California: Pacific Press, 1959), 138.

36. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 5 (Gen. Ed.) Frank E. Gaebelein, Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991), 1181/1182.

37. W. Larry Richards, *Read Greek in 30 Days [or less]* (Berrien Springs, Michigan: Breakthrough Books Company, 2012), 197.

38. William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003), 405, 441.



It is used in Matthew 10:28 which reads thus: "... but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell". Jemison intimates that whereas *psuche* is the New Testament equivalent of *nephesh*, *ruach* finds equivalence in $\pi\nu\epsilon\tilde{\upsilon}\mu\alpha$ ³⁹ transliterated *pneuma*.⁴⁰ Dana and Mantey translate *pneuma* as "spirit", "wind", and "breath."⁴¹ Jemison sums up his treatment of *pneuma* like this: "... in not one of the 385 times it appears does it indicate an entity that has been part of a human being and that lives on after his death, capable of separate conscious, intelligent existence."⁴²

The Expositor's Bible Commentary examines the word *psuche* in Matthew 10:28 and intimates that it is also closely related to לֵב *leb*⁴³ translated as "heart," or "inner man" in the Old Testament. It continues by saying that the idea is not laying much emphasis on a part of the body that can be really distinguished as a separate entity. Instead, it talks of the inner state of the mind that could either lead to salvation or damnation, citing 1Peter 1:9; 2:11, 25; 4:19 to buttress the point. It also submits that the context makes it acceptable for one to believe that hell is a place of torment for the complete person after there would have been a resurrection of the just and the unjust.⁴⁴

Another important passage that needs interpretation in the context of this work is Luke 16:19-31 which deals with the issue of the rich man and Lazarus. Frew explains that the word Lazarus is Hebrew, and is used to denote a person destitute of help. He goes on to say that the rich man does not refer to any particular individual in real history since there is no evidence to that effect. Furthermore, he suggests that the narrative should be considered as a parable meant to teach of things that could happen in future. Finally, he exhumes the context of the story by referring to the previous conversation of Christ with the Pharisees. This he does by showing that Christ had taught about the danger of the love of money and the vanity of stockpiling wealth without regard to the scripture and its requirements from man.⁴⁵

39. Richards, *Read Greek in 30 Days or less*, 194.

40. Jemison, *Christian Beliefs*, 138.

41. H. E. Dana, and Julius R. Mantey, *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament* (Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955), 347.

42. Jemison, 138, 139.

43. Further information on various other less used meanings of *leb* could be seen as accessed on 17/8/2021 <https://www.biblestudytools.com/lexicons/hebrew/kjv/leb.html>.

44. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 254, 255.

45. Robert Frew, *Barnes Notes on the New Testament 9* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985), 114, 115.



Corroborating what has been said above, The Expositor's Bible Commentary begins by saying that the Lukan context of the story is of primary significance. The Pharisees spoke about their belief in a future life and a future judgment, yet they did not live their lives in tune with their belief. They kept on accumulating wealth just like the rich man in the parable. Not even the resurrection of Jesus would convince them to believe the scriptures. The account implies that one's attitude to God and his word is sealed up in the here and now because it cannot be changed hereafter. It further states that a difficult anachronism would be introduced should one interpret the story literally that the man is already being tormented by fire. This is because the event of Revelation 20:14 has not yet taken place. It will only take place after God's universal judgment. Therefore it seems best to interpret it as a parable given its Lukan context and stressing those elements that are plainly supported in other Bible passages.⁴⁶ This submission shows that the dead are still in their graves awaiting the second coming of Jesus Christ (1Cor 15:51-58; 1Thess 4:13-18). At his coming (Matt 25:31-46), he shall separate the righteous from the wicked before rewarding each one according to his or her deeds.

From the survey so far, it could be said that the Bible teaches of the unity of the elements that make up the human person. It could also be stated that at death, given the separation of dust from the life principle, the human person ceases to exist in a conscious intelligent corporeal state. Furthermore, it could be submitted that the life principle which has been variously called breath of life, spirit, wind and a sensible exhalation, is not capable of its own separate identifiable conscious existence. The soul is the human person, the living being. When death occurs, the person, the living being dies, thus the soul in the real ontological sense ceases to be. What is sometimes called soul is the life animating air which ceases to function in man, whose demise invalidates the functioning of his body organs. Atmospheric air and all that exists belong to God and are under His care. In view of the afore stated, this study posits that one is only capable of proving oneself worthy of God's reward of eternal life, or his retribution of eternal destruction, in the here and now, never in the hereafter. Hence it would be beneficial for every human person to conduct himself or herself positively and in keeping with biblical standards in every of life's endeavors, while we here exist.

Types of Death

According to the Bible, everyone has sinned and the penalty for sin is death (Rom 3:23; 6:23). This is the bitter pill that chills the spine of concerned humanity. But a puzzle arises when the same messenger of God, the apostle Paul writes, "we shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed... the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1Cor 15:51, 52).

The puzzle's solution lies in his submission that God gives a gift and that is eternal life through Jesus Christ (Rom 6:23b). Using the term sleep for death is seen both in the Old and New Testaments of the Bible (Deut. 31:16; 1Kings 1:21; 2:10; 11:43; 2Chron 14:1; 16:13; Job 14:12-15; John 11:11-14; 1Cor. 11:30b; 15:51; 1Thess 4:13-16).

46. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, 991, 993.



A clear understanding of the word sleep shows that it is a state of being from which one can come back to life with full consciousness. Why then, one may ask, does the Bible employ that term “sleep” for death. The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of death presented in the Bible – first death and second death.

First Death

The death humanity and other creation face today, which began as a result of Adam's sin both in its spiritual facet and in its physical dimension, constitute the biblical first death. It is this first death that is termed sleep. Under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, both Old Testament and New Testament writers understood the ability of God through Jesus Christ to raise the dead back to life (Jn 11:38-44), after the first death. Given this divine plan, the first death rightly attracted the accompanying description of sleep.

Out from sleep, people ordinarily wake-up to continue their activities of life. No one who has really been sleeping ever woke up to give an eye witness account of what transpired during the period he or she was asleep. But the Bible assures that when Jesus comes again, dead people will rise from their graves which are in the dust of the ground (Daniel 12:2; 1Thess. 4:16; Rev.20:5). The fact that after this present physical death people can still rise to live makes it understandable that it is like sleep. Hence one can properly say that the first death is a temporary death. It affords those who experience it an opportunity to rest out of existence. Job captures this view and states it thus:

So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more. They will not awake nor be roused from their sleep. Oh that You would hide me in the grave, that You would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait, till my change comes. You shall call, and I will answer You; You shall desire the work of Your hands (Job 14:12-15 NKJV).

Because he understood this present death to be temporary, Job pledged to wait till the time he is called back to a new life. This new life John depicts in Revelation 21:1, 2. Paul the apostle talks confidently about the mystery of change that will occur in a very minutely inconsequential split-second. The momentous literal change he pictures in this passage (1Corinthians 15:50 - 52), will be an end to the power of the first death which had been symbolically demonstrated by God in Ezekiel 37:1-10. The first death is temporary rest. It is like sleep and awaits every living being. White intones that Christ portrays the first death as a sleep to those who believe in Him. She goes on to assert that until when the trumpet of Christ's second coming shall sound, those who are dead will continue to sleep in Him.⁴⁷ The first death is a universal curse inherited from Adam (Rom. 5:12). But it is not as serious and devastating as the second death shall be.

47. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1956), 527.



Second Death

The irony of death is that death itself will one day die. It shall be destroyed and therefore cease to exist. John writes in Revelation 20:14, 15 that death, hades and the unbelievers in the Lord Jesus, will be cast into the lake of fire. Paul the apostle lends credence to this assertion when he avers that “the last enemy that will be destroyed is death” (1Cor 15:26 NKJV). This death that will swallow up the first death ultimately is called by the Bible, second death (Rev. 20:14b).

The second death is for the wicked unbelievers who refuse to accept Jesus Christ as Lord and personal Saviour. It will be powerless over those who believe in Jesus even though they die the first death (Rev. 20:6). The reason is that by Christ's death, every believer has partaken of the grace that exonerates one from eternal damnation (John 3:16). The second death is individually particularistic (Ezek. 18:4, 20), in that after the first death everyone faces judgment based upon his or her deeds here on earth (Heb 9:27; Rev 20:13). The grace of God does not guarantee sinfulness and wickedness. God forbids that we should continue to sin that grace may abound, instead, He calls all men and women everywhere to repentance (Rom 6:1, 2; Acts 17:30). Those who take God's grace for granted, will realize later that the second death is not sleep, therefore, no one that experiences it will ever be remembered, let alone waking up from it.

State of the Dead

Man's thought about his future after death has biblical insights. Deaths of human beings have been on record since Abel was killed by his elder brother Cain (Gen. 4:8). That incident gave Adam the privilege to conclusively realize that Satan is a deceiver and a liar. When God said to Adam do not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil which is in the midst of the garden, neither touch it or you shall surely die (Gen. 2:17; 3:3), it was not in parables. But Satan came and told Adam's wife that “you shall not surely die” (Gen 3:4). The duo believed a lie and this has continually recurred in human history.

Man does not want to die because life seems attractive to him. But sin has already overwhelmed humanity and the consequence of sin, which is death, man has refused to accept.

The Bible states that “In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. For out of it you were taken: For dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Gen. 3:19). God molded man out of dust and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus he came into existence. Prior to this creative work of God, man was non-existent. After sin God told man whom He created that a reverse process of his coming into existence will take place and thus send him back into non-existence. To be able to understand such mysteries is to understand Theosophy (this researcher's construct from the Greek Theos - God, and Sophia – wisdom), God's wisdom.



Paul the apostle of Jesus Christ tells us that when the trumpet shall sound and the Lord shouts with the voice of the Arch-angel, the dead in Christ shall rise first. After rising, certainly from the ground (compare Ezek 37:1-10), then the living on earth will join the risen and continue the upward journey to heaven. Meeting the Lord in the air means above the surface of our earth. Descending means that, the Lord comes from a higher plane, while rising means that the dead are in a lower plane. The earth and sky are in-between.

The dead are unconscious and non-existent in any recognizable form. The Bible records, both in the Old and New Testaments, events of people who died and were brought back to life (1Kings 17:17-24; 2Kings 4:18-37; Jn 11:38-44; Acts 19:36 - 43; 20:8-12). In none of these reports, do we get a hint, either from the dead who were restored to life, or from those who witnessed those occurrences, of conscious state or activity, during the time they were dead.

Evidence to prove that the dead know nothing until they are raised back to life abounds in Egypt. By their philosophical thinking, Ancient Egyptians buried so much gold and other property including kingly golden chairs in the graves of their dead. Archaeologists who went to those areas, dug deep into the tombs, exhumed those treasures, carted them away and no spirit of the dead stopped them. Joseph the son of Jacob compelled his brothers under oath to make sure they carry his bones back to the land of Canaan when God shall take them out of Egypt. He desired his remains from which he would rise when the Lord shall call him, to be among his people. If the dead are conscious after death and can communicate to the living, Joseph would have waited till the time of God's visitation before inspiring his brethren through vision or dream. He was an expert dreamer and divinely, the most accurate interpreter of dream in Bible history. If the dead are conscious and can act, the Bible will be faulted for stating that "a living dog is better than a dead lion" (Eccl. 9:4b).

The authoritative revealer of the will of God to man, which is the Bible, submits thus, on the state of the dead:

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not anything, 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 forever in anything 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, or wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest (Eccl. 9:5-10).

In a Christian setting as is the case with this section of the work, when God speaks, man obeys. This is the only way to avoid one falling into the ditch that Adam fell into in the beginning.

Remedy for Death

The earth and indeed the entire universe belong to God. Nothing is too hard for God to do, because with him all things are possible (Gen 18:14; Ps 24:1; Mk 10:27). Death was not part



of God's original creation. It came as a consequence for sin. It shall end when sin shall be no more. Jesus Christ came to solve the sin problem vis-a-vis the death problem. Having thus averred, it can be inferred that in Christianity, death has a remedy and that it is found in, with, through and by Jesus Christ.

The Lord of the Christian faith says that he has come that we might have life more abundantly (Jn 10:10). He fulfilled that promise by ransoming humanity through his death on the cross of Calvary. "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them" (Heb. 7:25). Christ's death on the cross was both vicarious and substitutionary. It is the second death, which is the eternal death that he died for humanity (Heb. 10:9, 10). Those who die in Christ are promised resurrection at the second coming of Jesus. This the Bible calls, "first resurrection" (Rev. 20:6). It will be a time when what is presented symbolically in Ezekiel 37 concerning dry bones that came back to life, will be literally fulfilled by God. He will then recreate those that accepted Jesus as Lord while they lived on earth. Thus Christianity has a remedy for death. However, it will remedy death only for those who by faith accept Christ and his gracious offer of sanctification and ultimately salvation from eternal damnation.

Conclusion

The Bible though written by God through several authors whom He inspired over a very long span of human history, has a central idea on human nature and the state of man at death. Deceptive exploits which began at the Garden of Eden which led the first human pair to sin is still at work. Contextual interpretations of texts that are parables help a lot to put the teachings of the Bible in their proper perspective. Philosophical approaches that spite inspired revelations would not be capable of presenting the true position.

Having examined biblical passages that speak on the composition of man at creation and the separation effect at death as evinced in Genesis 2:7 and Ecclesiastes 12:7, coupled with the various biblical scholarly analysis of key words in Hebrew and Greek that describe the elements which man is made of, it is the submission of this work that at death, man is unconscious and ceases to exist in any intelligent state. Though several human cultures have evolved, developing varying philosophies, the key fact about the state of the dead is just as the Creator asserts. That is, that the dead know nothing.

Bibliography

- Cotterell, Peter. *I Want to Know What the Bible Says About Death*. Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1979.
- Dana, H. E. and Julius R. Mantey. *A Manual Grammar of the Greek New Testament*. Toronto: The Macmillan Company, 1955.
- The Expositor's Bible Commentary* 5 Gen. ed. Frank E. Gaebelein. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991.
- Ferch, Arthur. "What Creation Means to Me." *Adventist Review* (1986): 11-13.



- Frew, Robert. *Barnes Notes on the New Testament* 9 Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Book House, 1985.
- Habenstein, Robert. "The Social Organization of Death." *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Science* 4 Ed. David L. Sills. New York: Crowell Collier and Macmillan, 1968.
- Jackson, Wayne. "The Biblical View of Death ." accessed October10, 2011.
<http://www.christiancourier.com>.
- Jacob. "The Anthropology of the Old Testament." *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*. IX. Ed. Gerhard Friedrich. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishers, 1974.
- Jemison, T. Housel. *Christian Beliefs*. California: Pacific Press, 1959.
- Kneller, Sam. "Ruach, The Core Senses of Sentient Beings," March 6, 2020 accessed 16/8/2021,
<https://medium.com/the-explanation/ruach-the-core-senses-of-sentient-beings-5b181bf73bc3>
- Moulton, Harold K. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon Revised*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1978.
- Mounce, William D. *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 2003.
- Odom, Robert Leo. *Is Your Soul Immortal?* Georgia: Discovery Reading, 1989.
- Okon, Etim. "Death and Immortality in Christian and African Individual Eschatology." *African Journal of Religion, Culture and Society*1(2006): 40-47.
- Omeregbe, Joseph I. *A Philosophical Look at Religion*. Lagos: Joja Educational Research and Publishers, 1993.
- Peth, Howard A. *Solving the Mystery of Death*. Queensland: Truth for Today, 2000.
- Plumptre, E. H. & T. Whitelaw. "Ezekiel." *The Pulpit Commentary* 28. Eds H.D.M. Spence & Joseph S. Exell. New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, n.d.
- Porteous, N. W. "Soul." *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* 4 Ed. George Arthur Buttrick Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.
- Richards, W. Larry. *Read Greek in 30 Days [or less]*. Berrien Springs, Michigan: BreakthroughcBooks Company, 2012.
- Riley, John. "Death and Bereavement." *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences* 4 Ed. David L. Sills. Baltimore: Crowell Collier and Macmillan, 1968.
- Uduigwomen, Andrew F. "The Human Soul: Mortal or Immortal?" *African Journal of Religion, Culture and Society* 1(2006): 48-52.
- White, Ellen G. *Desire of Ages*. Mountain View, California: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1956 accessed 27/7/2021 www.whiteestate.org/books/da/da58.html.
- - - *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1890 accessed 27/6/2021 www.whiteestate.org/books/pp/pp3.html.
