

The following study presents beliefs and ideas for you to ponder, explore, and perhaps make your own.

## Death and Resurrection

In the scary Christian sci-fi space trilogy by C. S. Lewis, there's a scene in *That Hideous Strength* where young Jane Studdock meets a reclusive hero named Ransom. She expects an old man, enfeebled by hard experiences and galactic trials. Instead, he appears barely more than a teen, his body rippling with vitality and spiritual energy. He seems the sort of fortunate person who might never age — like the Lord of the Ring elves created by Lewis' friend, J. R. R. Tolkien.



So what would it be like to reach out your hand and accept the gift of immortality?

Photo: MorgueFile

Physically, your body wouldn't just be brand new, with perfect, unassailable flesh — you would feel absolutely whole, brimming over with boundless strength. Eons of good health would beckon like rainbows that never meet the horizon.

Emotionally, all hurts and anxieties and deadlines would melt away. Birthdays and retirement IRAs and planning for a dwindling future would become absurd, meaningless memories.

Spiritually, you would feel a surge of heightened love for the God who blessed you with this indescribable gift. Every moment would shudder with God's presence; you would be wonderfully aware that your infinity will be always abundant, always satisfying because your Creator continues to fill your life cup with joy.

But for now, we get sick. Those we love age and finally slip into the shadows of death. Where do they go? What is it like to be dead? There are a million jokes about meeting St. Peter or about our departed grandma spying on her family through the mystery tunnel of light. But can Bible truth give us comfort as we bury those we love?

One Great, Unifying Promise. Honest Christians do hold to a diversity of beliefs about the state of man in death; admittedly, some Bible statements can be interpreted more than one way. However, everyone who claims Jesus as their Savior accepts the guarantee that those who die in Christ will live again and enjoy an eternity with our loved ones and with God. This is the grand, unifying truth that holds the Christian faith together as a global community with a shared hope. For the wages of sin is death, Paul writes, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 6:23). 1 Corinthians 15 is a powerful essay assuring believers that Jesus' own Resurrection — His permanent victory over death — is the singular, necessary foundation making

our own eternity possible.

**Immortality Is a Divine Gift Bestowed When Jesus Returns.** The Greek philosophies of Plato and others infiltrated even among Christian writers, leading to a fallacy that man's soul is inherently immortal. But 1 Timothy 6:16 explicitly states that only God is immortal; men and women can receive it as a divine gift — but not until Jesus returns to earth. The [last] trumpet will sound, Paul explains, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality (1 Corinthians 15:52, 53). Only then will death lose its victory and sting.

An earlier study outlined the biblical principle of the soul simply being the entire person: body, thoughts, emotions, “breath of life,” etc. Never do Bible writers, in writing about ruach or pneuma, ascribe conscious life to a soul or spirit. And in both Testaments, Bible writers consistently portray death as a sleep, an unconscious state. The living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing; in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). Just before raising them up, Jesus described both Lazarus and Jairus' daughter as sleeping.

**But Doesn't the Soul Go Directly to Heaven?** This is a fascinating Bible discussion; even excellent scholars take a variety of views. Paul did clearly state his eagerness to “depart and be with Christ” (Philippians 1:23); however, in other key passages like 1 Thessalonians 4, he plainly affirms the overall view of saints being resurrected when Jesus returns. John 5:28 describes Christians slumbering in graves who hear Jesus' voice and come forth — an odd description if their souls are already in daily communion with the Lord up in heaven. Of course, if death is an unconscious, dreamless state of rest, even a believer's several centuries of sleep would be immediately followed by the trumpet call and hearing the voice of the Lifegiver: depart . . . (sleep) . . . and be with Christ. Wycliffe, Tyndale, and Martin Luther, all great reformers and theologians, proclaimed the Bible view of “conditional immortality” and soul sleep.

In the 1990s, a young Christian TV executive named Martha Williamson was tapped to produce a CBS pilot about angels. The studio bosses had set up a story line where people who died floated up to heaven and then became angels. “Do the show our way,” they insisted. But Martha was adamant. “The Bible doesn't teach that,” she flatly told them. “Angels aren't people who recently died.” CBS agreed to shoot the series with biblical integrity, and *Touched By an Angel* was a hit for nine seasons.

“Soul Immortality” Opens the Way for Deception. As the discussion continues within the Christian family, we must remember that Lucifer is a deceiver. Even at the gates of Eden, he whispered to Eve, “You will not surely die” (Genesis 3:4). Satan would love to press the fallacy that we can receive communication from departed spirits — especially if he can fabricate those

messages! The nation of Israel was expressly forbidden to make contact with spirit mediums or attend any form of a séance (Leviticus 19:31). “Why waste your time with them when you can come directly to Me?” God asks in Isaiah 8. NIV Bible scholars have long pondered the weird, tragic story where an apostate King Saul disobeys God and seeks out a witch or medium. During the clandestine meeting, it appears that — despite God’s strict injunction — Samuel has come to commune with Saul. But the interfaith scholars suggest: “[Possibly] the woman had contact with an evil or devilish spirit in the form of Samuel by whom she was deceived and controlled.”

Two Deaths — and Two Resurrections. As He’s about to bring Lazarus back to life, Jesus says to Martha: “I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in Me will never die” (John 11:25. 26). Yet even the great saints of all ages do pass away — and we attend their funerals! Clearly Jesus considers the temporary sleep at the end of our few fragile years here on earth to be of little consequence — as long as we can reach out and accept His offered gift of immortality! The book of Revelation (21:5) describes a glorious resurrection when Christ returns, and then a second resurrection of rebellion at the end of the “millennium.” Those who die in the following terrible moment of destruction (21:8), tragically beyond the generous outreach of Calvary grace, will experience the terrifying permanence of the “second death.” From that sleep, there is no awakening.

The Adventist perspective, then, is that the great sweep of Scriptural assurance on this topic — even with hard texts considered — is of one thrilling, galactic moment when all of God’s saints rise up together and experience the City of God and immortality as one vast communion. Just as Jesus came out of the grave a glorified, physical Man, we can look forward to centuries of tangible and everlasting life — eating, playing, sharing, traveling, learning, worshiping. In His great mercy, [God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil, or fade — kept in heaven for you (1 Peter 1:3).