

What REALLY Happens When People Die?

***"If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, til my change come."* (Job 14:14) Though perhaps being the most Enigmatic Question of all time, It has a Clear and Comforting Biblical Answer!**

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What happens to human beings at death? Do they go to heaven, or might they go to hell, or do they rest somewhere in between? Do they in fact go anywhere? Do we remain alive in another dimension, or do we simply cease to exist? If we study the Bible and believe what it actually says, these questions can be answered comprehensively.

Accommodating an Immortal Soul

Because the belief in the immortal soul is a central tenet of most religions, we find believers to have no real awareness of what the Bible actually says on the subject of what happens after we die. Though the prevailing belief system may provide some comfort, most people avoid thinking about the validity of the common Christian teachings about the deceased going to either heaven or hell when they die. That being the case, those clear and logical scriptures that speak of the state of the dead being something other than a continuing conscious existence are avoided like the plague, simply because they threaten the very foundation of the belief in an immortal soul.

Although the beliefs of Catholics and Protestants differ radically in many respects, both believe in the immortality of the soul. They also believe that humans only die physically, but the spirit (i.e., the soul - the sentient being) remains alive in a sense, conscious, but in heaven, hell, or in some cases, a transitory state in-between.

However, the Catholic / Protestant doctrine of people going to heaven or hell immediately upon death cannot be proven from Scripture. Additionally, the Catholic concept of purgatory as a place or condition of spiritual remediation is also a non-biblical teaching. Neither of these teachings are valid biblical concepts; they are simply figments of societal imagination, which were conceived to explain the state of the dead in the context of humans having an immortal soul.

In fact, researching the matter, a person would find that such ideas were 'borrowed' from pagan religions for the most part!

Two Aspects of Human Existence

In order to correctly understand the state of the dead, it's important to understand what human beings are. The full aspect of what God created as the human being is not visually discernible? Many religions teach, and others believe, that humans have a soul which is a non-physical component. The Bible does say things that would tend to support that, but it also states that humans have a spirit. However, is this spirit a physically derived component or does it represent another dimension of human existence?

The scriptures show that there are two distinct dimensions involved in the formation of human existence, and that we are composed of elements from both dimensions. There's both a physical dimension and a spiritual dimension of existence and each is separate from the other in making us what we are. But, both work together to enable humans to exist on a higher plane of consciousness than the rest of the physical creation:

"And I say to you my friends, Be not afraid of them that kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will forewarn you whom you shall fear: Fear him, who after he has killed has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, Fear him." (Luke 12:4-5 KJV).

"And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell." (Matthew 10:28 KJV).

The English word 'body' in these two verses is the Greek word 'soma,' which means 'a human / animal body' or 'a corpse'. (In other words, referring to our physical form, living or dead, distinct from our

intellect-component.) The Greek word for 'soul' is 'psyche', which can be translated 'life' or 'mind'. (In other words, that gift which allows consciousness and intellect, as opposed to animal-level existence that animals exhibit: instinct without the ability to think creatively. (We should keep in mind that the animation that our physical processes generate (on a physical level) is, in the Old Testament, also referred to as a 'soul'. But that reference incorporates ALL living air breathing creatures, distinct from any degree of intellect. The word there in the Hebrew is 'nephesh', commonly translated as 'soul'.)

These two scriptures mention two distinct elements of human life: physical and non-physical. Moreover, both elements can be completely destroyed by God, but other humans can kill only our physical bodies.

The English word 'destroy' is a translation of the Greek word 'apollumi', which means 'to destroy fully', 'to kill', 'to perish', 'to completely do away with'. There is no doubt that the words used in Matthew 10:28 mean that God has the power to completely destroy all aspects of human life, and that degree of destruction transcends death as it might naturally occur.

Body, Soul and Spirit

Jesus says that there are two major elements of the human existence and we must fear God who can terminate both our physical and our non-physical aspects. Paul also refers to the elements of human existence in his letter to the Thessalonians. In fact, he does so with much greater clarity:

"And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ." (1 Thess. 5:23, KJV).

In verse 23, the English words 'spirit', 'soul', and 'body' are translated from Greek words: 'pneuma', which means 'the physical breath' ¹ or 'the soul';

¹ This passage identifies the three aspects of our existence. Soul in this place is consistent with Old Testament references, which can mean that air-breathing characteristic of all of the animal kind. It is the crossover of or blending together of the terms 'soul' and 'spirit' which can cause confusion. Correctly identified, we should never regard the 'soul' as the conscious aspect of our existence! More correctly, the word

'psyche', referring to 'the spirit' or 'the mind'; and 'soma', 'our physical body'.

The Physical Element

In our determining what the physical element of human life is, the accounts of the creation of mankind should be reviewed:

"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) Breath in this place is 'ruwach', a necessary function of the Hebrew 'nephesh', the word commonly rendered 'soul', as it applies to either mankind or animals.

"In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return to the ground; for out of it you were taken: for dust you are, and to dust shall you return" (Genesis 3:19 KJV). Reminding us of our physical material existence.

"Thou hidest thy face, they are troubled: thou takest away their breath, they die, and return to their dust." (Psalm 104:29);

"Who hath given him a charge over the earth? or who hath disposed the whole world? If he set his heart upon man, if he gather unto himself his spirit and his breath; All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again unto dust." (Job 34:13-15). This explains that IF God should recall man's breath, he would altogether revert to the material elements of which he was composed.

In Genesis 2:7, the English word 'soul' is translated from the Hebrew word 'nephesh', which means 'a breathing creature or animal', 'vitality', 'beast', 'body', or 'breath'. Those are some of the ways the word is translated. There is absolutely nothing in the word 'nephesh' that indicates anything other than a temporary physical life: human or animal. The Hebrew word 'nephesh' literally means 'a state of being alive'. God created a likeness of Himself, a lifeless body forming man and made it a living soul (nephesh) by breathing air into his lungs; thus, He gave him life.

However, the same is true of lesser air-breathing life forms also. There is nothing in the Hebrew

refers to the physical air-breathing function which sustains our physical life.

word, 'nephesh' to indicate a conscious life apart from the physical.

"The spirit of God has made me, and the breath of the Almighty has given me life" (Job 33:4 KJV).

Physical Life is Sustained by Blood

"For the life of the flesh is in the blood; ... Therefore I said to the children of Israel, No soul of you shall eat blood,... For it is the life of all flesh; the blood of it is for the life thereof:..." (Leviticus 17:11-14 KJV).

In this modern age, we can understand the biological implications of this scripture. The heart circulates the blood to the lungs, then throughout the body, which in turn performs its life sustaining functions.

If God had not generated Adam's life functions by inflating air into his lungs, Adam would not have begun living. But, is human life no more than a chemical-electric reaction of a well-designed structure of gas, fluid, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli? Is this the sum of what God created as physical man? If so, humans would be no different from any other animal.

But humans are different from animals and the rest of creation in many obvious ways. Humans are on a higher plane of life existence than the rest of creation. But, what is it that makes mankind different? The unseen physical and spirit elements of the human creation makes it different from the rest of creation.

The All-Important Spiritual Element

There is another element to human life besides the physical. This element is the spirit in man that sets mankind apart from the rest of creation:

"But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty gives them understanding" (Job 32:8 KJV).

Here, the English word 'spirit' is a translation of the Hebrew word, 'ruwach', which means 'wind' or often can mean 'mind'. It does not mean a physical being or even a being at all. Rather, it denotes something that is not physical.

"The burden of the word of the Lord for Israel, says the Lord, which stretched forth the heavens,

and laid the foundation of the earth, and forms the spirit of man within him" (Zechariah 12:1 KJV). Also see Ecclesiastes 12:5-7.

What we are being told is that the human spirit is a non-physical element of the human being that truly separates humans from the rest of the physical creation. God calls this non-physical element the spirit in man and he has designed it to be a part of the human. It is this spirit that gives mankind the ability to exhibit a higher thought-plane than all other physical creatures on earth. We can think, reason and plan in ways that animals cannot. We possess what is recognized as intellect and emotion, whereas animals are in-stilled merely with instinct that dies when they do.

The spirit in man is the other of the two elements of human life that the scientific community does not understand, which they ascribe to human life function. Nevertheless, the spirit in man is of major importance to humans after death.

The GOD of Spirits

The scriptures show that God formed a unique spirit that functions within the human body.² This spirit component, unique to man, is what provides him with conscious intellect. Animals do not have that, nor do they possess what carries with it, the potential for immortality. Animals possess pre-programmed instinct which functions to preserve their species and dictate their habits. They do not and cannot relate to their Creator in the same way as humans. They lack the ability to worship or interact with God like humans do. (Rom. 8:14-16):

"And they fell on their faces, and said, O God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, shall one man sin, and will you be angry with all the congregation?" (Numbers 16:22).

"Let the Lord God, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation" (Num. 27:16)

The spirit in man is not an undefinable essence nor can it exist mysteriously apart from man. The spirit of man is what makes a man, man. The physical

² We should recognize that the spirit in man is not the same as the righteous Spirit of God. It is a spirit that imparts human intellectual ability, but does not exhibit the character of God in and of itself. Not until it receives the Spirit of God. That spirit in man is what we recognize as being human nature.

body is the habitation of the spirit, which is the sentient and conscious element of the human creation. But that spirit requires a functioning brain for it to add its intellectual contribution. It does not produce thoughts independent of our mentality! It is this spirit which should be the focus of our interest, not the soul! The soul is the life component that activates the physical body. It is not immortal any more than the body is!

The Human Life Form

Human life is unique in all of creation; a human being is the only life form on earth that is both physical and spiritual and has the opportunity to be elevated to the highest of all life forms: a spirit-being in the Family of God.

WHAT HAPPENS At Death?

The Bible describes two major events that take place at the death of a human being and these events are of extreme importance to the final destiny of each individual, because each event decides whether or not each individual will have a future existence. The Bible describes what happens to a human being's physical body and spirit at death.

What the Bible says about the physical and spirit record and the events that happen to humans after death is very different from what is taught by the religions of this world. According to the Bible, after a human dies, there are two records of their existence: one permanent that is kept in heaven and one temporary that remains here on earth.

NO Mental Activity After Death

At death the cerebral functions cease; there is no more thought process, no reward, no memory, no knowledge, and no access to anything ongoing in this world. Death terminates an individual's consciousness and interactions with this physical dimension of existence. The Psalmist wrote:

"Put not your trust in princes, nor in the son of man, in whom there is no help. His breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish" (Psalm 146:3-4 KJV).

Solomon wrote: *"For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing; they have no further reward, and even the memory of them is*

forgotten. Their love, their hate and their jealousy have long since vanished; never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 9:5-6 NIV). (We'll discuss the 'never again' consideration later.)

"Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, where you go" (Ecclesiastes 9:10 KJV)

"The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down into silence" (Psalm 115:17 KJV).

The reason the dead cannot praise God is because they are no longer alive; their life has been silenced. In death there is no thought process.

"Return, O Lord, deliver my soul: oh save me for your mercies' sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give you thanks?" (Psalm 6:4-5 KJV).

"Behold, for peace I had great bitterness: but you have in love to my soul delivered it from the pit of corruption: for you have cast all my sins behind your back. For the grave cannot praise you, death cannot celebrate you: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for your truth. The living, he shall praise you, as I do this day: . . ." (Isaiah 38:17-19 KJV).

It is obvious by the abundant scriptural proof that all conscious thought and life-functions cease at death. The scriptures that speak of human speech, desires, and admonitions after death are either poetic metaphors or analogies, or they are speaking of demonic impersonations of dead people in some cases.

There is nothing throughout the entire Bible which indicates that the human life function continues in one state or another after death. Moreover, the Bible indicates just the opposite; it clearly shows that the physical life of a human is a temporary condition, which can be terminated forever.

The SLEEP of DEATH

Many scriptures speak of the state of the dead as being analogous to sleep. Because the dead do not have a conscious thought process (Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5-6), sleep is an appropriate comparison to the condition of death.

Below we see a few references that show how God views the condition of death:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt" (Daniel 12:2 KJV).

"He said these things. And after this He said to them, Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I am going that I may awaken him. Then His disciples said, Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover. But Jesus had spoken about his death, but they thought that He spoke of the sleep of slumber. Then Jesus said to them plainly, Lazarus has died" (John 11:11-14)

"While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, 'Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.' Then he fell on his knees and cried out, Lord, do not hold this sin against them. When he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:59-60 NIV).

"But man dies and is cut off, and man expires; and where is he? As the waters go from the sea, and a river wastes away and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Until the heavens are no more, they shall not awake, nor be roused out of their sleep. Who will grant that You would hide me in Sheol; You would hide me until Your anger turns back; that You would set a limit for me and remember me? If a man dies, will he revive? All the days of my warfare I will wait, until my change comes" (Job 14:10-14)³

In these passages, there is reference to the idea of a resurrection from the dead. While death is an unconscious state, that 'sleep' is not permanent. This fact too exposes a consequence of the false teaching that the 'soul' is immortal and remains conscious after death.

Those billions of humans who have lived and died over the centuries are completely unconscious and remain unaware even of the passage of time. The interim period between the moment of death, when their conscious thoughts ceased, and the instant when they will awaken to life again at the resurrection does not exist for them. It will be as if they had gone to sleep and awakened without

dreaming. The passage of time is meaningless to them.⁴

Where DOES The Body GO At Death?

Science defines death as the cessation of the life function (i.e., all systems cease to operate—the heart stops circulating blood, the brain stops sending orders to the organs, all thought process cease, the body becomes immobile, all regeneration processes stop, and the body starts to decay).

The Bible defines physical death in the same way as does science:

" 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 KJV).

God says He made our bodies were from the elements of the earth and they will return to these same elements once our life functions cease.

"All flesh shall perish together, and man shall turn again to dust" (Job 34:15 KJV).

King Solomon Wrote: *" For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again." (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20 KJV).*

Solomon insightfully explains that both man and beast have the same death process; they both die and return to the elements from which they were made. This is true of the body, but also the life of that body, the soul! There is no quarrel with the scientific definition here. At death the physical body in which God placed the spirit of man ceases to function. However, there is more to the physical body than the visible elements from which it is made.

Where Does The SPIRIT Go At Death?

" Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth

³ See also 1.Kg.2:10, 1.Cor.11:29-30; 1.Thes.4:13-17.

⁴ Request our 96 page booklet on "Understanding the Resurrections From the Dead and Eternal Judgment."

downward to the earth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:21).

Solomon, in his inspired wisdom, asked the same question many have asked over the centuries. He asks about the destination of the spirit in man. However, the great difference between Solomon and most others who ask this question is that Solomon knew the correct answer:

"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7 KJV).

Here is one important detail. The spirit of man returns to God who gave it. King David and Jesus also understood that God was both the source of and the custodian of the human spirit after we die. Both He and Stephen acknowledged this.

"Into your hands I commit my spirit: you have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" (Psalm 31:5 KJV).

"And crying with a loud voice, he said, Father into your hands I commit my spirit. And saying this, He breathed out the spirit" (Luke 23:46).

"And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep." (Acts 7:59-60)

At death, this spirit, which is composed of essence from the spirit dimension of existence, returns to God whose presence creates and sustains both the material and the spirit-world.

The Spirits Cry Out

The Book of Revelation has an allegorical reference to the spirits of the righteous dead crying out for God to avenge their death:

"And when he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those having been slain for the word of God, and the witness which they had. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O lord, holy and true, do you not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth?" (Revelation 6:9-10 KJV). .

Although the spirits under the altar are unconscious and unaware of anything happening on earth or anywhere else, they symbolically cry

out for justice. This scripture confirms that these human spirits have been returned to the Father from their earthly habitation. (See Genesis 4:10, Habakkuk 2:11; James 5:4).

Is MAN Mere Flesh and Blood?

The scriptures show that the human body is just a chemical-electric reaction of a well designed structure of gas, fluids, and solid matter reacting to internal and external stimuli, but with the spirit of man inhabiting it. At death, the body becomes lifeless and useless:

"Then shall the dust [physical body] return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return to God who gave it" (Ecclesiastes 12:7 KJV). (See also Genesis 2:7, Deuteronomy 32:18).

"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also." (Jas. 2:26 KJV).

This last reference by James is interesting in that it shows the need for our spirit to be functioning in order for us to be a whole person. There are cases where the human spirit is not functioning, often due to a brain injury, rendering the living person into what we call a 'vegetative state'! This phenomenon alone should clearly show how the brain is needed to allow the conscious state that the spirit in man provides.

The REMAINS of the Body

Scriptures clearly show two separate components that combine to form the creation called a human being. There is the material (physical) form and the spirit in man. It is also extremely clear that at death the body returns to the earth and the spirit returns to God. However, how do we answer the scriptures which suggest that a dead person is both in heaven and on the earth?

A brief study into physical and spiritual law will show that an object cannot occupy two different dimensions of time and space simultaneously. This knowledge helps solve the mystery surrounding the scriptures that seem to indicate that the dead are in two places at the same time. (See Ecclesiastes 12:7, Psalm 31:5; 49:14-15 Luke 23:46, Acts 2:27-29;34; Hebrews chapter 11, etc.). We know that the body remains on earth.

There is a visible physical element to the body that is preserved on earth after the body dies. This element of the human creation is more important to the destiny of each individual than is generally realized.

Without an understanding of what this element is, much of the Bible does not seem to make sense when it comes to the state of the dead and the various resurrections.

The Rephaim

Who or what is the 'rephaim'? Bible Scholars have had great difficulty discovering the intended meaning of this Hebrew word, because its usage indicates that all dead humans remain on earth instead of being wafted off to heaven or hell which is commonly believed. The Hebrew word rephaim is often used as an allegory that describes the dead and gives vital insight into an extremely important unseen element of the human body.

The Hebrew word 'rephaim' has three basic meanings: 'giant men', 'ghost of the dead', or 'shades' (i.e., shadows). There are many references that refer to the dead as 'rephaim'. These references also indicate that the 'rephaim' occupy 'sheol', (referring to the place of the dead) which is located within the confines of earth's environment. The following scriptures reveal the allegorical use of the word 'rephaim' to describe dead humans:

"Sheol below is excited for you, to greet your coming, waiting for you rephaim, all the rulers of the earth. Rising them from their thrones, all the kings of the earth" (Isaiah 14:9 Literal Translation) The King James Version words it this way: *"Hell from beneath is moved for thee to meet thee at thy coming: it stirreth up the dead for thee, even all the chief ones of the earth; it hath raised up from their thrones all the kings of the nations."*

"The dead will not live, rephaim will not rise, therefore you have punished and eliminated them, and caused their memory to perish" (Isaiah 26:14 Literal Translation).

"The dead will live, their corpses will rise, Awake and shout for joy, dwellers in the dust! For dew of lights [morning] is your dew, and earth will give birth to rephaim." (Isa. 26:19 Literal Translation).

In verse 14, Isaiah laments the state of the dead. But, in verse 19, he speaks of the hope of the resurrection. He says that the 'rephaim' (the dead) that are dead in the dust of the earth will be resurrected. Notice, it indicates that dead bodies will rise again. This is not just the spirit component being brought to a conscious state, but a reuniting of body and spirit.

Not Presently Conscious

Psalms 88 speaks of those who are dead in the depths of the earth being devoid of life or conscious thought.

"For the dead will you do a wonder? Will the rephaim rise and praise you? Selah!" (Psalm 88:10 Literal Translation). The KJV has: *"Wilt thou shew wonders to the dead? shall the dead arise and praise thee? Selah."*

Proverbs shows that the foolish will occupy sheol where the rephaim are:

"The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. "Let all who are simple come in here!" she says to those who lack judgment. "Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!" But little do they know that the dead [the Rephaim] are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave" (Prov. 9:13-18 NIV).

"And he does not know that the rephaim are there. In the depths of sheol are her invited guests" (Proverbs 9:18 Literal Translation).

There is no doubt that this thing spoken of as a 'rephaim' is a part of the human creation. The question is what part? The scriptures show that the rephaim are in sheol, have no conscious thought, are lifeless, and will be resurrected. (See also Psalm 6:5, 31:17, Proverbs 9:18,21:16, Isaiah 14:19; 26:14-19).

Yes, A REAL Body!

The rephaim cannot be any part of the spirit of man, because the spirit of man returns to God at death. But the rephaim are in a state of preservation on earth. A rephaim is the part of a physical human

body that continues to exist on earth. Even after the human body decomposes and returns to the elements from which it came there is a record of the person kept by God for the purpose of resurrecting our bodies. The rephaim is the record of the human body that will be used when the body is resurrected to a physical existence. When humans are resurrected, they will be restored to their physical form and image in which they were provided during their lifetimes. That body will be reunited with the spirit in man which they once possessed. The resurrection from the dead will replicate that living form, together with the personality which the persons were once endowed.

And, we should say at this point, with the exception of those raised to immortal spirit form in the first resurrection, people will be resurrected with the same record of sins once committed back in their former lives! The resurrection from the dead (the second resurrection, after the 1000 years) will see the full restoration of the physical bodies of those who died throughout history, and they reunited with their former spirits and personalities! This is SO different from what main-stream Christianity teaches.

If this were not the case, how could the person retain guilt for sins committed?

Spirit and Physical Dimensions

Many scriptures show that spirit-beings and spirit-essence can exist in this physical dimension (See Genesis chps.18,19; Numb. chps.22; Job 1:6-12; Luke chps.24; Revelation 12:7-9). However, the scriptures also show that physical beings cannot exist in the spirit dimension (See John 3:3-5; 8:13-23; 13:33-36; 1.Cor.15:50).

Therefore, it makes sense that the spirit component of the human creation returns to God at death (Psalm 31:5; Ecclesiastes 12:7; Luke 23:46), and the physical component of the human creation remains on earth at death (Genesis 3:19; Job 34:15; Ecclesiastes 3:19-20).

Because God designed the human life-form with both spirit and physical elements, both of these elements will be used to reconstruct the individual at the time of their resurrection.

The DEAD Shall Rise FIRST

In Paul's writings to the Corinthians and the Thes-

salonians, he speaks of the first general resurrection of the dead at which time the elect of God will be given immortality at Christ's coming:

"Behold, I show you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed" (1.Cor.15:51-52 KJV).

"But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which sleep [are dead], that you sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep [are dead] in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain to the coming of the Lord shall not prevent [precede] them which are asleep [are dead]. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead shall rise first" (1.Thes.4:13-16 KJV).

These scriptures are insightful, because Paul says that the dead shall be raised and it is obvious that Paul understood that the dead remained on earth awaiting their resurrection. (See 1st Sam.2:6; Psalm 49:14-15; John 3:13; Acts 2:29-34; Hebrews 11). Note: These in the first resurrection are raised in an incorruptible body, not a physical body, as are all others.

The Resurrection of Ethnic Israel

Another key to understanding the rephaim is found in Ezekiel, chapter 37. This chapter speaks of the resurrection of the twelve tribes of Israel to physical life some time after the millennium.

"The hand of the Lord was upon me, and carried me out in the spirit of the Lord, and set me down in the midst of the valley which was full of bones. And caused me to pass by them round about: and behold, there were very many in the open valley; and, lo, they were very dry" (Ezek. 37:1-2 KJV).

This profound event will transpire on earth, and these bones represent a massive congregation of people who will be brought back to life in physical form.

"And he said to me, Son of man, can these bones live? And I answered, O Lord God, you know. Again he said to me, Prophecy upon these bones, and say to them, O you dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones; Behold I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live: And I will lay sinews upon you, and will bring up flesh upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord" (Ezek.37:3-6).

Here, God promises to resurrect these dead Israelites to physical life (Ezk.37:11). The word for 'bone' in Hebrew can also be used allegorically to refer to dead persons: 'rephaim'.

"And when I beheld, lo, the sinews and the flesh came up upon them, and the skin covered them above: but there was no breath in them. Then said he to me, Prophecy to the wind, prophesy son of man, and say to the wind, Thus says 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 upon their feet, an exceeding great army" (Ezek. 37:8-10).

There are graphic similarities between this resurrection and the creation of Adam and Eve. God made Adam's body from the elements of the earth; then, he took a bone from Adam's body and made Eve. In this resurrection, God takes the bones (an allegory of the dead Israelites) to use as the foundational substance with which to reconstruct each individual Israelite. Adam, Eve, and these resurrected Israelites are constructed from the elements of the earth. And like Adam, these Israelites have no life force until air is placed into their lungs and they begin to breathe.

*"Therefore prophesy and say to them, Thus says the Lord God; Behold, O my people, I will open your graves, [sheol] and cause you to come up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves, O my people, and brought you up out of your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel. And shall **put my spirit in you** and you shall live, and I shall place you in your own land: then shall you know that I the Lord have spoken and performed it says the Lord" (Ezek.37:12-14 KJV).*

In order for these reconstructed bodies to function as sentient beings, the spirit of man must be put back into the body:

"For as the body without the spirit is dead..." (James 2:26).

At death, the body dies and becomes useless to the spirit that inhabited it.

The Records of the DEAD

God has not only promised to resurrect all of the Israelites who have ever lived and died without an opportunity for salvation but also he has promised to resurrect the rest of humanity who have not had this opportunity. In order to accomplish this task, he has a record of each person's intellect (mind). And this record is stored in heaven.

God has made provisions for a record to be kept of each individual that has ever existed. Humanly, we can understand that everything in the physical universe operates under a system of immutable laws, which control and sustain the physical creation. The physical record of man does not exist in some mysterious magical non physical dimension of time and space; it exists as a physical thing, which was created as a part of the human being and exists under the specific laws that regulate its physical existence.

The rephaim or the record of a dead human body, which occupies sheol, is not spirit, does not have conscious thought, and is not animated or alive. However, it is real and was and will again be made of physical substance that occupies physical time and space within this dimension of existence.

Because of the abundance of allegorical and factual references about sheol and the rephaim (record of dead bodies) that occupy it, the rephaim must be the physical record and pattern of each human body.

The Resurrection Process

The spirit record of a human is kept in heaven, the physical remains are stored on earth, and each is ready in God's Mind for the resurrection process. The scriptures show that there will be two kinds of resurrections: one is to spirit life as a spirit-being, and the other is to physical life as a human being. Therefore, it is important to know the process involved in each.

Resurrection to Immortality

It is important, before concluding this subject, that we recognize that there are two different kinds of resurrections. One is the resurrection directly to life which involves the Saints of God, converted prior to the Second Coming. This chapter is more oriented to the resurrection that all the unconverted from all ages will experience. Every human being who ever lived will experience a resurrection, that in order to stand alive and conscious before the Judgment Seat of Christ for Sentencing.

Paul, in this place in 1st Thessalonians refers to that first resurrection.

"The dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the Clouds, to meet the Lord in the air." (1st Thes.4:16-17 KJV).

During the resurrection of the **righteous** dead, the following will occur:

- Each person's unique body form will be reconstructed in the spirit dimension, using the pattern that is stored in God's memory,
- Each person's unique spirit will be returned to earth from where it was stored in heaven and placed into their reconstructed body, restoring their personality, intellect and character,
- Each person, not yet deceased, will, with them, then be changed to an immortal spirit-being.

Resurrection to Physical Life

During the resurrection of the **unconverted** dead to physical life for the purpose of giving them an opportunity for salvation (only after the 1000 years are completed) or for destroying them because of their incorrigible wickedness, (after the second resurrection era is completed) the following will occur:

- Each person's unique physical body will be reconstructed using the pattern that is stored in God's memory,
- Each person will then have the breath of life placed into their lungs to restore the physical life processes,

- Each person's unique spirit will be returned to earth from where it was stored in heaven; then, it will be placed into the reconstructed body.

These who are raised just after the millennium for the purpose of giving them their opportunity for salvation, which their first life did not provide them, will be sentenced at the ends of their restored lifetimes, as we read in Revelation 14:14-20. Those converted during the millennium and during the second resurrection era, will then be enjoined with the others of the first resurrection, (the 'firstfruits') being changed into Spirit-form Immortals.


IN SUMMARY

The dead are simply dead; they have no life function; they are not conscious; they are as if they were **asleep** and await a resurrection.

Scriptures, both Old and New Testaments clearly and abundantly support this understanding.

Some of the dead will be resurrected to eternal life and immortality at Christ's Return. These are the select few which are the 'firstfruits' unto salvation. The rest will later be resurrected to a physical life, with some will be consigned to the punishment of eternal death, from which there is no resurrection: the Lake of Fire.

This Final Sentencing event is well described in Christ's own words in Matthew 25:31-46:

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory: And before him shall be gathered all nations: and he shall separate them one from another, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats: And he shall set the sheep on his right hand, but the goats on the left. Then shall the King say unto them on his right hand, Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: ... Then shall he say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels: ... And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal." 

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