

MY JOURNEY TO LIFE STATE OF THE DEAD

My Journey to Life, Step 7

Foreword

My Journey to Life provides the keys for living every day with peace of mind, harmony of body and wonderful relationships. As you read through each lesson guide, your daily outlook will be transformed and renewed by the Spirit. We pray you will experience a growing adoration for the greatest Teacher this world has ever known. Let's begin walking, step-by-step, on the pathway towards a new life together with Jesus.

Preface

From burial rituals of the ancient Egyptians to modern questions about life after death, millions have been searching for answers to one of life's greatest mysteries: Is there an afterlife? With so many differing ideas and opinions, where can honest answers be found? Who can you trust? There's only one infallible source: Jesus Christ, the Creator who formed man in the beginning and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.

Step Seven— State of the Dead, Death and Resurrection

What happens when we die? "The wages of sin is death. But God, who alone is immortal, will grant eternal life to His redeemed. Until that day death is an unconscious state for all people. When Christ, who is our life, appears, the resurrected righteous and the living righteous will be glorified and caught up to meet their Lord. The second resurrection, a resurrection of the unrighteous, will take place a thousand years later."—*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 391.

Bible Discovery: Job 19:25-27; Psalm 146:3, 4; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6, 10; Isaiah 25:8; Daniel 12:2, 13; John 5:28, 29; John 11:11-14; 1 Corinthians 15:51-54; Colossians 3:4; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17; 1 Timothy 6:15; Revelation 20:1-10

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Spiritual Gifts*, Vol. 4b, p. 104.1

1. Are our souls immortal? Do we live on after death, as our physical bodies disintegrate? No, only God is immortal*(1 Timothy 1:17). The terms 'soul' and 'spirit' occur in the Bible more than 1,600 times, but never in association with the words 'immortal' or 'immortality.' In contrast, human beings are mortal.**

[*not subject to death][**subject to death]

Bible Discovery: Psalm 82:7; Romans 6:23; Colossians 1:16, 17; 2 Timothy 1:10; James 4:14

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 533.2

2. If our souls aren't immortal, then what is a soul? At Creation, "God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being" * Genesis 2:7. A "soul" in Scripture often means "being" or "person," Ezekiel 18:4; Acts 27:37; Romans 13:1. A person in Scripture is a combination of a physical body and the breath of life from God. "Soul" in Scripture can also mean life, Matthew 10:28; Hebrews 13:17. There are no references in the Bible to "soul" as an independent entity that can think, communicate, or praise God.

The living person is made up of the body and the breath of life that comes from God. Scripture sometimes refers to a living being as a "soul." At death, the breath of God returns to Him. There is no "immortal soul" which experiences life—joy, pain, happiness and sadness—away from the body. Body + God's breath = Soul. Unless the body is combined with God's breath, the soul does not exist.

"soul" instead of "being" in some translations]

Bible Discovery: Genesis 3:19; Job 27:3; Psalm 146:3, 4; Ecclesiastes 12:7; 1 Peter 4:19

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, p. 74.4

3. What about Adam and Eve? Weren't they created immortal? Adam and Eve were created with conditional immortality. God gave them free will—the power of choice. If they obeyed God and did not eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil they would remain immortal. If they disobeyed, they would lose their immortality and be subject to death, Genesis 2:17. Thus, immortality is not innate to humanity but is God's gift. Adam and Eve lost immortality when they sinned.

Bible Discovery: Psalm 78:39; Acts 17:25, 28; Romans 5:12; 6:23; Colossians 1:16, 17

Further Reading: Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 60.2

4. What is death like? What happens when we die? Jesus described death as a sleep (John 11:11-15). The dead remain in an unconscious state until Jesus resurrects them. Those who have died remain in their graves, unable to communicate with the living and unaware of what is transpiring in the world.

Bible Discovery: Psalm 146:4; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; Daniel 12:2; Matthew 27:52; Acts 7:59, 60

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 545.2-3

5. If death is a state of permanent unconsciousness, is there no life after death? There is indeed life after death! After Adam and Eve sinned and became mortal (subject to death), God

promised He would ultimately defeat Satan by giving His life as their substitute, taking upon Himself the punishment for their sin.

Jesus' voice will raise the dead who accepted Him while living and allowed Him to be Lord of their lives. Death holds no fear for those who hope in their Savior, Jesus Christ!

Bible Discovery: Genesis 3:15; John 3:16; 5:28, 29; Romans 6:23; 1 Corinthians 15:22; 2 Timothy 3:15

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, p. 449.3

6. So, do the righteous then receive immortality at the first resurrection when Jesus comes?

Yes! Remember, God is infinite—we are finite. God is immortal—we are mortal. God is eternal—we are transitory. But when Jesus returns to claim His own, He gives the gift of immortality to those who have accepted Him as Lord. The redeemed will live forever with Jesus! Sin and death will not rise up the second time. See Nahum 1:9. Because of Jesus, none of us need perish!

Bible Discovery: John 3:16; 1 Corinthians 15:51-55; 1 John 5:11-13; Revelation 20:6

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 644.3-645.1

7. If the Bible does not teach that the soul is immortal, where did that theory originate? The separation of the soul from the body, a concept known as *dualism*, stems largely from Greek philosophers Socrates, Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics. Others since the Age of Enlightenment have defined humanity as only a cog in the universal cosmic machine. Unlike dualism, this view does not present the soul as immortal, but neither does it offer hope, since humans exist only in a machine-like universe driven by involuntary forces.

Both views are a denial of the biblical account of the origin of death, and cast doubt on the biblical teachings regarding the resurrection, the final punishment of the wicked, and the reward of heaven for the righteous. Dualism also impacts what we believe about our present life, particularly fostering negative views of the body in contrast with the positive role of the soul. In the dualistic theory, our redemption through Christ becomes merely an internal experience of the soul as opposed to a complete transformation of the whole person.

Many belief systems are derived from anthropological dualism. Consider the intercessory roles of Mary and the saints, or popular beliefs about paradise, purgatory, hell—all unsupported by biblical teachings regarding mortality. Since Plato considered material components of earth to be evil, the Christian's hope of ultimate restoration of creation and its creatures (Romans 8:19-23) is reduced to some sort of eternal, ethereal contemplation in a spiritualized heavenly state. In contrast, the Bible's emphasis on our need to act as God's steward of our whole person

impacts our response to today's challenges such as war, racism, poverty and economic imbalance.

Bible Discovery: Micah 6:8; Romans 6:23; 8:19-23; 1 Corinthians 10:31; Colossians 2:8

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Medical Ministry*, p. 89.1

8. What happens to the dead who never accepted Jesus as their Savior, or who did not remain faithful to Him? The Bible describes two separate general resurrections. At His Second Coming, those who have died with faith in Jesus will be raised in the first resurrection (Revelation 20:6). One thousand years after Jesus' appearing (see *My Journey to Life*, Step 6—The Second Coming), there will be a resurrection of condemnation for the unjust. This is the second general resurrection which takes place at the end of the millennium (John 5:29). Those whose names are not found in the Book of Life will be raised at this time and "cast into the lake of fire" (Revelation 20:15) to experience the second death.

The good news is that no one needs to experience the resurrection of condemnation. God tells us how to escape: "Repent! Turn away from all the offenses you have committed, and get a new heart and a new spirit. Why will you die?... For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone, declares the Sovereign Lord. Repent and live!" (Ezekiel 18:30-32, NIV) Jesus promises that "he who overcomes shall not be hurt at all by the second death" (Revelation 2:11).

Bible Discovery: Malachi 4:1-3; Acts 24:15; 2 Peter 2:4; 3:9; Revelation 20:7, 13-15

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 673.3-674.1

9. Is death a part of God's creative process? Though many Christians believe in theistic evolution, evolutionary creationism or God-guided evolution, the Bible says that death entered our world through sin, Romans 5:12. The entrance of sin into Planet Earth is described in Genesis 3, when Adam and Eve disobeyed God and subsequently suffered sin's penalty—death. Today, instead of the clear biblical teaching that death is a result of humanity's sin, revisionists are presenting death as a means through which God made humanity! But the theory that God creates through means of suffering, violence, catastrophe, and death is another effort of Satan to misrepresent the loving character of God. The God who notes the falling of a sparrow did not create through means of predation over millions of years!

Revelation 14:7 gives us a compelling reason to worship God: He is Creator of heaven and earth, the sea and springs of water. Notice the parallels between the language of the message of the first angel and the language of the fourth commandment. God is reminding the neo-Darwinian world that the seventh-day Sabbath, the final judgment message, and a recent divine creation are inextricably linked.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 1:1; Psalm 33:9; John 1:1-3, 10; Acts 17:26; Romans 1:20; 6:23; 1 Timothy 2:13; Revelation 14:7

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 130.3, 5

10. Didn't Saul speak to Samuel after Samuel died (1 Samuel 28)? Saul did not speak to Samuel, because the Bible says that “the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything,” Ecclesiastes 9:5. Saul consulted a witch, which God had expressly forbidden, and Satan produced an apparition that looked and sounded like Samuel when he was alive.

In the future, Satan will again produce apparitions of people who have died, as well as other supposed communication with the dead, such as séances, fortune tellers, channelers, and near-death experiences. But the Bible strongly forbids any attempt to communicate with the dead or with the spirit world.

Today's media and entertainment culture are saturated with references to the occult, near-death experiences and communication-with-the-dead themes. Movies, music, popular literature, sit-coms, TV drama, Broadway and video games—in a thousand forms, Satan attempts to make other-world communication enticing and credible. This emphasis is preparing masses to accept a deception of Satan and could affect our eternal destiny.

Bible Discovery: Leviticus 19:31; 20:27; Deuteronomy 18:10, 11; Isaiah 8:19, 20; Revelation 12:4, 9; 16:14

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 551.1-2; 553.1

11. What about the thief on the cross? Didn't Jesus promise the thief he would go to Paradise the day he died? Let's carefully consider the passage in Luke 23:42, 43: “He said to Jesus, ‘Lord remember me when You come into Your kingdom.’ And Jesus said to him, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise.’”

First, let's note that the thief didn't ask to go to heaven that day. He asked that Jesus remember him when Jesus came into His kingdom. Further, Jesus couldn't have meant that the thief would be with Him that very day, because on the Sunday morning after His death, the resurrected Jesus told Mary he had not yet been to heaven (John 20:17).

To understand what Jesus could be telling the thief, it is essential to know that the Bible was written without punctuation. Commas and periods were added by scribes centuries after the Old and New Testaments were complete. In this instance, the translators put the comma in the wrong place! Jesus wanted to encourage the thief by assuring him that his sins were forgiven and he would be resurrected at the Second Coming of Jesus. If the thief had gone directly to heaven the day that he died, there would be no need for a resurrection!

Let's change the position of the comma to read: "Assuredly, I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise." Now the passage fully harmonizes with the rest of Scripture.

Bible Discovery: Psalm 115:17; John 5:28, 29; 11:25; Acts 2:29, 34; 1 Thessalonians 4:16

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 751.3

12. Why does the biblical teaching on what happens when we die matter? Many people have been comforted by the thought that their dead loved ones are now in a "better place," that is, they are in heaven. But this unbiblical teaching is actually a deceptive device used by Satan through which he will try to convince people that Jesus' Ten Commandment law has been abolished.

Imagine that your beloved aunt passes away. One night an apparition which sounds and looks exactly like your late aunt appears to you and describes events that only you and she knew about. Then she tells you that she has been living in heaven since her death and that God told her that seventh-day Sabbath observance has been changed to Sunday observance, through which all the world will achieve unity and world peace.

Though your aunt's alleged testimony sounds plausible, its authenticity is based on the assumption that the dead can communicate with the living, a notion the Bible denies. In spite of the clear biblical testimony concerning the state of the dead, various individuals, and even demons, will impersonate Christ and His apostles, perform supernatural acts of healing, and claim to have messages from heaven that are not in harmony with the Word of God. But those who have fortified their minds with the truths of Scripture will recognize the deception. In this time "such as never was," Daniel 12:1, the Scriptures must be the anchor for the people of God.

Bible Discovery: Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6; Isaiah 25:9; Isaiah 65:17; Matthew 24:3-5; 1 Corinthians 2:9; 1 Corinthians 15:55

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pp. 557.1; 562; 651

Reflection...

In contrast with the spiritualized eternity of dualism, God ultimately recreates Planet Earth, with no more possibility for pain, tears, funerals, sorrow or crying (Nahum 1:9). We can never begin to comprehend the experience of heaven, free from death and Satan's temptations forever! Language is inadequate to describe heaven's wonder and the depth of joy God's redeemed will share in seeing and engaging in personal loving communication with Christ Himself.

Next Step...

The Bible cryptically describes the nature of God as one single entity composed of three distinct beings. How can we make sense of this, and what impact does it have on our personal relationship with Christ?

Discussion Questions

1. What is your understanding of what happens to a person at death?
2. Why does Satan oppose the biblical teaching of soul sleep?
3. In what ways are you comforted knowing your deceased loved ones are not presently in heaven or hell?

Further Reading

Official Adventist Website: <https://www.adventist.org/death-and-resurrection>

Contact Information

Ellen G. White Estate: mail@whiteestate.org

Request a personal Bible study: <https://www.bibleschools.com/en/personal-studies>

Visit your local Seventh-day Adventist Church: <https://www.adventistlocator.org>

Online prayer room: <https://www.wepray.mobi>