The Key to Eternal Life

Summary

A second look at the same core doctrine covered in Article 58 — no immortal soul, death as unconscious sleep — this time built around Job, Solomon, and Paul's argument that the resurrection of every believer stands or falls with the Messiah's own.

- The same three-stage sequence of resurrections as Article 58, tied to the Messiah's own resurrection as its guarantee.
- Job's and Solomon's statements about the dead.
- Paul's argument in 1 Corinthians 15 that believers' resurrection depends on the Messiah's own.
- A personal, autobiographical closing note from the article's unnamed author, describing the comfort this understanding brought regarding the deaths of loved ones.

The full article begins on the next page.

The Key to Eternal Life

The key to the mystery of life after death is revealed in the resurrection of Yah'shua the Messiah. It is because the Messiah was resurrected from the grave that we can be assured that we too, will be resurrected.

Of Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph and Moses, to name some of those listed in Hebrews 11 - not one has ascended to heaven. In fact, says verse 39 of Hebrews 11. "These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised" *(NIV)*. If they aren't in heaven, where are they? And what was it they were promised, if it wasn't heaven?

Many people are surprised to discover what the Bible really says about what happens to us when we die. Yet, when we remove our preconceived notions, the answer becomes quite clear from the Scriptures - and it is immensely encouraging to all.

Notice what Yahweh inspired King Solomon to write about the state of the dead: "For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten" *(Ecclesiastes 9:5)*.

Scripture clearly tells us that at death we cease to know anything. The dead are unconscious and unaware. All our emotions, thoughts, knowledge and feelings go to the grave with us. No consciousness continues living in another place or state. We do not have an immortal soul that goes on living somewhere else. In Ezekiel 18, verses 4 and 20, Yahweh plainly tells us that "the soul who sins shall die " - not continue living apart from the body.

The patriarch Job echoes Solomon's words. He writes: "... Man dies and is laid away; indeed he breathes his last and where is he? As water disappears from the sea, and a river becomes parched and dries up, so man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep" *(Job 14:10-12)*. Job goes on to ask the most crucial question about life after death: "If a man dies, shall he live again?" *(verse 14)*.

His answer is found in Yah'shua the Messiah's own words. The key to the mystery of life after death is revealed in the resurrection of Yah'shua the Messiah. He said, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:25-26). It is because the Messiah was resurrected from the grave that we can be assured that we, too, will be resurrected *(1 Corinthians 15:12-21)*.

Throughout the 15th chapter of I Corinthians, the apostle Paul eloquently argues this important fact, that since Yah'shua was resurrected from the grave, He will resurrect all those who have been faithful to Him. Job, as we saw above, raised the question of life after death. Notice how he answered it: "O that thou wouldest hide me in the grave, that thou wouldest keep me secret, until thy wrath be past, that thou wouldest appoint me a set time [the time of the resurrection], and remember me! If a man die, shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait, till my change come. Thou shalt call, and I will answer thee..."*(Job 14:13-15. King James Version).*

Job understood that life after death comes about by Yahweh's divine power. Speaking of each person whom the Father would call to understand His truth, Yah'shua explains, "I will raise him up at the last day" *(John 6:44).* The promise of life after death hinges on Yah'shua the Messiah's resurrection *(1 Corinthians 15).* The fact that Yah'shua the Messiah was resurrected to become "the firstborn from the dead" *(Colossians 1:18; Revelation 1:5)* means that He has opened the way for others to follow in a resurrection from the grave.

The raising of the dead is a mighty and magnificent part of Yahweh's great master plan. Through it, mankind has the opportunity to live again, as faithful Job knew and confirmed, even before the birth of the Messiah. The doctrine of the resurrection is listed among the fundamental doctrines of the Bible *(Hebrews 6:1-2).* It is the hope of all true Israelites, for it nullifies and makes void death itself *(I Corinthians 15:54).*

Paul confirms that many people were eyewitnesses to the fact that Yah'shua the Messiah had indeed risen from the grave:

"For I delivered to you first of all that which I also received: that the Messiah died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures, and that He was seen by Cephas *[Peter],* then by the twelve *[apostles].*

After that He was seen by over five hundred brethren at once, of whom the greater part remain to the present, but some have fallen asleep [in death]. After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time" *(I Corinthians 15:3-8).*

The writers of the Bible describe our experience after death not as going to heaven or hell, but simply as sleep. Notice, for example, how Daniel refers to the state of the dead in this prophecy of the resurrection: "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt" *(Daniel 12:2).*

When an individual is in a deep sleep, he has absolutely no conscious awareness of the passing of time or any knowledge of events that are occurring while he is asleep. Paul repeatedly compared death to sleep *(1 Corinthians 11:30; 15:6,18,20,51; I Thessalonians 4:13-15).* Peter similarly writes of the patriarchs who "fell asleep" in death *(2 Peter 3:4).*

Yah'shua Himself also spoke of death as sleep. Speaking of a deceased girl whom He intended to raise from the dead, He told the mourners, “Do not weep: she is not dead, but sleeping” (Luke 8:52; compare *Matthew 9:24).*

The dead in the Messiah will be resurrected to immortal life at Yah’shua the Messiah's return to earth, along with those faithful servants who are still alive at that time. The mystery of what happens to human beings after they die is incontrovertibly solved in the vibrant life of the resurrected Messiah.

Our future life beyond the grave is directly connected to the resurrected Yah’shua the Messiah and the fact that He is the One who will raise us.

Too many credible witnesses saw and interacted with Yah’shua the Messiah after He was raised from the dead for His resurrection to be denied.

Paul also offers a simple but incontestable logic about how our resurrection from the dead is directly tied to Yah'shua's resurrection: "But if it is preached that the Messiah has been raised from the dead, how can some of you say that there is no resurrection of the dead?

If there is no resurrection of the dead, then not even the Messiah has been raised. And if the Messiah has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith. More than that, we are then found to be false witnesses about Yahweh, for we have testified about Yahweh that he raised the Messiah from the dead. But he did not raise him if in fact the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, then the Messiah has not been raised either. And if the Messiah has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in the Messiah are lost.

If only for this life we have hope in the Messiah, we are to be pitied more than all men. But the Messiah has indeed been raised from the dead, the first-fruits of those who have fallen asleep [in death]. For since death came through a man *[Adam],* the resurrection of the dead comes also through a man [Yah’shua the Messiah]" (1 Cor. 15:12-21).

All of the dead - good and not so good alike - will eventually be resurrected, each in his own time *(I Corinthians 15:20-23)*. The dead in the Messiah will be resurrected to immortal life at Yah’shua the Messiah's return to earth, and those faithful servants who are still alive at that time will be changed from mortal to immortal.

Specifically, this happens at the sounding of "the trumpet of Yahweh" *(I Thessalonians 4:15-17),* called "the last trumpet" in 1 Corinthians 15:52 and corresponding to the seventh trumpet of Revelation 11:15.

This event is called "the first resurrection" in Revelation 20:5. In John's vision of the future, those in this resurrection came to life and "reigned with the Messiah for a thousand years" *(verse 4),* during the period commonly known as the Millennium.

Notice that they do not go to dwell in heaven - they live and reign with Yah'shua on earth, to which He has returned to establish Yahweh's Kingdom! And they must obviously reign over someone!

Verse 6 goes on to explain: "Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection. Over such the second death has no power *[because they will then be the resurrected, immortal children of Yahweh],* but they shall be priests of Yahweh and of the Messiah, and shall reign with Him a thousand years." Revelation 5:10 confirms that they will be "a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" *(NIV).*

Since the Messiah is coming back to earth *(Zechariah 14:3-4)*, it makes good sense that that's where we will be. After all, Yah'shua said that we would be with Him: "And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself; that where I am, there you may be also" *(John 14:3; compare Isaiah 11:1 -9).* Clearly, Yah'shua is coming back to earth and we will reign with Him here, not in or from heaven.

Another resurrection follows. So if there is first resurrection in which Yahweh's faithful servants are raised to immortality to reign with Yah'shua the Messiah, will there be other resurrections? And what happens to those who lived and died without ever knowing or hearing the name of Yah'shua, the only name by which we can be saved *(Acts 4:12)*?

Those who died without knowing the Messiah will be resurrected to physical life and given their time to repent and receive salvation 1,000 years later *(Revelation 20:11 -13)*. Verse 5 tells us clearly that "the rest of the dead did not live again until the thousand years were finished."

Many mistakenly believe that this group "has no excuse" for they claim that Yahweh has made Himself known to all men through His very creation. That is true, but He did not make His Messiah known to all men through His very creation, and it is only through the Messiah, that one can be saved!

Ezekiel 37 vividly describes a second resurrection to a temporary physical existence, when human beings who have never understood Yahweh's truth in this life or who have never heard of Yah'shua the Messiah as their only Saviour, will be raised from the dust of the earth to learn Yahweh's way and about their Saviour for the first time.

Yahweh is "not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance" and "desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth" *(2 Peter 3:9; 1 Timothy 2:4).* He will not unjustly condemn those who never had an opportunity to come to that knowledge, repent and receive His gift of eternal life through His Messiah.

Each person raised to life again in this great resurrection will be given sufficient time to learn Yahweh's way of life *(see Ezekiel 37:12-14, 23-24),* during which they will then be judged or evaluated according to their works, by the standards and values "which were *[then]* written in the books" *(Revelation 20:12).*

These "books" *(biblion in Greek, from which we get the word Bible)* are the Scriptures, the only source of the knowledge of eternal life and the basic standard by which all are ultimately judged. Most, probably the vast majority, will go on to receive eternal life because the Bible tells us that "all Israel will be saved" *(Romans 11:26)* - and by extension most of the gentile world likely will be saved as well, as in the Messiah, all have become as one.

Some individuals, regrettably, will stubbornly choose to reject this marvellous opportunity for eternal life. But rather than suffer torment for eternity in hell *(as many people incorrectly assume the Bible teaches),* Scripture shows their fate will be to be consumed in the lake of fire, "the second death."

As Malachi 4:3 states, they will be burned to ashes and simply cease to exist. Obviously, one cannot suffer the second death unless one is mortal, and one also cannot suffer the second death if one does not die the first time, but simply “passes” on to heaven.

You CAN take something with you! People of many ancient cultures, such as the Egyptians, buried items of physical worth with their dead. They believed that the deceased would be able to use those important things in the next life. Yet the patriarch Job refuted this idea: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there" *(Job 1:21).* This may be where we get the oft-repeated saying, "You can't take it with you."

However, this old cliché is not entirely true. In a sense, Yahweh will allow you to take something with you when you die - your godly character. A true Israelite is one who builds Yahweh's character for the duration of his natural life *(1 Corinthians 3:9-15)*. When raised to life again in the resurrection, that same character will be a part of us in our new life.

For the true Israelite, that godly character will be with him forever *(1 John 2:15-17).* The Egyptians and many other long-dead peoples didn't know this, or they would not have buried valuable physical objects with their dead.

But a young man learned this truth from Yahweh's Word, the Bible. That young man is the author of this article. Eventually he came to understand the purpose of life and the fact that the dead are not lost in the grave; that all men, women, children and babies who have ever lived will be resurrected, each in his or her own time. All will eventually have the opportunity to learn of Yahweh's truth and of Yahweh’s Saviour for mankind, Yah’shua the Messiah.

In time he came to comprehend that the common denominator to all human death was and is the resurrection of Yah’shua the Messiah to eternal life, and that His resurrection guarantees our resurrection, too. Although death is a great enemy of human beings - and it has hurt and stung many deeply with the passing of loved ones - we can take great comfort in Yahweh's truth. As Paul explains in 1 Corinthians 15:54-58, the resurrection from the dead removes this great enemy and its sting!

Yah’shua the Messiah reveals that in time Yahweh the Father will come to the earth *(Revelation 21:1-3, 10).* Listen to Yah’shua the Messiah's description of this time: "And Yahweh will wipe away every tear from their eyes: there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain, for the former things have passed away" *(Revelation 21:4).*

Knowing Yahweh's ultimate plan for mankind - that human death doesn't end it all - gives us a great and wonderful comfort and sets us free from the myth of a passive eternity in heaven or eternal torment in hell.

Finally, the apostle Paul in I Thessalonians 4:18 urges us to share this holy truth with others: "Therefore comfort one another with these words."

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