



DEATH

JESUS' GUARANTEE OF VICTORY OVER DEATH

TRY JESUS COURSE BOOK 15

The story of Houdini highlights the enigma of our existence – we are mortal, yet we want to live. We are fascinated with life after death.

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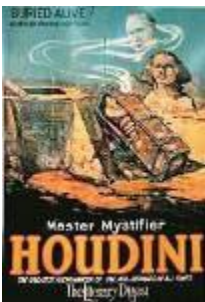
15 – JESUS' GUARANTEE OF VICTORY OVER DEATH



Harry Houdini - escape artist, magician, author of more than 40 books, inventor, star, aviator, showman and psychologist - swept through the world like a hurricane between 1895 and 1926, leaving behind him a trail of vanquished prison cells, vacated handcuffs and gasping audiences. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, creator of Sherlock Holmes, accused him of having "supernatural powers."

A reporter in Germany, stunned by the ease with which Houdini was able to free himself from a sealed packing case without disturbing a single nail, declared, "Houdini has the ability to dematerialise his body and pass it through walls." In Washington, a handcuffed Houdini jauntily escaped from a maximum-security cell in the federal penitentiary. He then playfully moved 18 other locked-up prisoners to different cells before escaping to the outside - all in about 27 minutes.

The year 1913 marked a turning point for Houdini. His mother, who had been a profound force in his life,



died. Unable to reconcile himself either to her loss or to his failure to be at her deathbed, he swallowed his scepticism and began to visit spirit mediums in the hope of communicating with her. They proved charlatans. Ten years later, at the height

of his popularity he talked of retirement and was filled with an impending sense of death.

In 1926 in Detroit he collapsed from a ruptured appendix and peritonitis. On October 29, 1926, a fading Houdini struggled with his final problem.

"Mother never reached me," he gasped to Bess, his wife of 32 years. "If anything happens you must be prepared. Remember this message: 'Rosabelle, believe.' ['believe' was coded in nine other words]." He told her that when she heard these words, she would know that it was him speaking. Shortly afterwards, Houdini died on October 31 - strangely enough, on Halloween.

For the next 10 years Bess also sought the help of spirit mediums. Each year, on the anniversary of his death, she sat in their home before a candle-lit portrait of the master, and waited for his signal. It never came. In 1936 she extinguished the light.

But among magicians there are still those who go out each year at Halloween to the place where Houdini is buried, hoping for a sign that the unconquerable Houdini has been able to make his greatest escape. (J S Gordon, "Houdini, The Man No Lock Could Hold," Reader's Digest. R Fitzsimons, "Death and the Magician: The Mystery of Houdini," Reader's Digest)

This story highlights the enigma of our existence – we are mortal, yet we want to live. We are fascinated with life after death.



Ever since the **Beatles** produced their *Sgt Pepper's Lonely Hearts Club Band* album and then followed the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi to India in the 1960s, Hindu and Buddhist concepts of reincarnation (rebirth of the soul in another body) and the god within have flooded into the West. In this album, voted by *Rolling Stone* magazine as the number one album since the 1960s, the Beatles sang: "*When you've seen beyond yourself—/ then you may find, peace of mind, is waiting there—/ And the time will come when you see/ we're all one, and life flows on within you and without you.*" The seemingly endless cycles of lifetimes are supposedly for the purpose of working off bad karma and progressing to a greater degree of perfection.

Science fiction writer, **Arthur C. Clarke**, of *2001: A Space Odyssey* fame, before he died in 2008, "arranged to have DNA from strands of his hair sent into orbit." It was with the hope that some "super civilization may" clone him so that he "may exist in another time."



Scientist and futurist **Ray Kurzweil** said: "I and many other scientists now believe that in around 20 years we will have the means to reprogramme our bodies' storage software so we can halt, then reverse, ageing. Then nanotechnology will let us

live forever." The "power of our technology will transcend death." In a *Time* cover article, "**2045: The Year Man becomes Immortal.**" A qualifying statement says: "If you believe humans and machines will become one." Kurzweil, it's reported, "hopes to bring his dead father back to life." (Lev Grossman, Feb 21, 2011)

A small lad, walking through a graveyard, stopped to read an inscription on a headstone. He was intrigued by the epitaph:

"Stop, my friend,
as you go by. As
you are now, so
once was I. As I am
now, you soon shall
be.
So prepare yourself to
follow me."

The boy stood there thinking. Then, taking a piece of crayon from his pocket, he wrote:

"To follow you I'm
not content, until I
know which way you
went."

That's rather clever! But what is death?

For atheists, who don't believe there's a God, death is a black hole. Many believe that the dead are not really dead, but are in heaven or hell or some intermediate place. What happens when someone dies? Is it the end, or a new beginning?

Jesus did! Jesus conquered death and He has a message of hope for us!

Death as Sleep

1. When talking to His disciples about his friend Lazarus, who had died, what did Jesus call death? John 11:11-15 (page 760 in NIV Bible: International Bible Society, 00195)

a new life reincarnation a sleep entrance to heaven

The term cemetery (Greek = “sleeping place”) was first used to refer to burial grounds by the early Christians, reflecting their belief in resurrection of the dead. Over 50 times the Bible refers to death as a sleep.

2. Speaking to Martha, at the graveside of Lazarus, what did Jesus say He was, and what would happen to those who believe in Him?

Jesus said to her, “I am the RESURRECTION and the LIFE. He who BELIEVES in me will LIVE, even though he DIES.” (John 11:21-25 (page 760))

A man, in Birmingham, UK, loaned his phone to a 15-year-old boy who needed to call his father to be picked up after a night of bowling with friends. As the boy walked away the man hit redial and told the boy’s father his son has “just been killed”. CCTV, at the time, captured the man as he howled with laughter. “It chilled me,” the father said. “I nearly sunk to the floor ... it was the worst 40 minutes of my life.”

That was a cruel hoax! But death is no hoax – it’s real and it’s horrible! Jesus feels our pain when we lose a loved one. At the graveside of Lazarus Jesus wept (verses 33-36). He demonstrated the truth that He was the “resurrection and the life” by raising Lazarus from the dead (verses 38-44).

3. What did Jesus accomplish by His death? Hebrews 2:14, 15 (page 847)

Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his he might him who holds the power of death – that is, the – and those who all their lives were held in slavery by their

What Happens When a Person Dies

4. To understand what death is, we need to go back to the beginning and see how God made humans in the first place. What two elements were used by God to make the first man into a living being? Genesis 2:7 (page 2) The Lord God formed the man from the _____ of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the _____ of _____, and the man became a _____.

God formed a body out of earth, *then* breathed life into it. The combination of the breath of life and body made Adam a living being. The expression “living being” is from the Hebrew word *nephesh*, and in earlier Bible versions was translated “living soul”. It literally means “living creature” as in chapter one verses 20 and 24, in reference to the animals.

5. What did God say would happen to Adam and Eve if they ate from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil? Genesis 2:15-17. What did the serpent (devil) say would happen? Genesis 3:4, 5 (page 2)



God: "You will _____."

Devil: "You will _____ surely die."

Who should we believe? _____

6. What did God say happens to the body at death? Genesis 3:19 (page 3)

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you _____ to the _____, since from it you were taken; for _____ you are and to _____ you will return.

Comedian Woody Allen expresses the view of many when he says: "It's not that I'm afraid to die—I just don't want to be there when it happens."

On the humorous side a little boy asked his mother, "Is it true, Mummy, that we are made of dust?" "Yes, darling."

"And do we go back to dust again when we die?" "Yes."

"Well, Mummy, when I said my prayers last night and looked under the bed, I found someone who is either coming or going."

7. What happens to the "breath of life" or the "spirit," at death? Ecclesiastes 12:7 (page 478)

... the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit [breath] returns to _____

This spark, or principle of life, is called the *spirit* or *breath* of life (Hebrew, *ruach*, Greek, *pneuma*). These terms are used interchangeably and indicate only the element of life, not consciousness or intelligence. See Job 27:3 (page 373). Death is the reverse of what took place at Creation. The body returns back into dust, and the principle of life (breath or spirit) returns to the One who originally breathed life into Adam. **Death is likened to sleep with our identity and personality secure in God's hands until the resurrection.**

New Testament scholar and former principal of Ridley College, Melbourne, and Canon of St Paul's Cathedral, Melbourne, Leon Morris says:

"It seems better to understand death as something that involves the whole man. Man does not die as a body. He dies as a man, in the totality of his being. He dies as a spiritual and physical being. And the Bible does not put a sharp line of demarcation between the two aspects. Physical death, then, is a fit symbol of, and expression of, and unity with, the deeper death that sin inevitably brings.

"It is significant that the NT can speak of believers as 'sleeping' rather than as 'dying' (eg 1 Thessalonians. 4:14). Jesus bore the full horror of death. Therefore for those who are 'in Christ' death has been transformed so that it is no more than sleep."

"In keeping with this the NT understands eternal life not as the immortality of the soul, but in terms of the resurrection of the body. Nothing could more graphically illustrate the finality and the completeness of death's defeat." (The Illustrated Bible Dictionary, IVP, Vol 1, pages 374-6.)

God Alone Is Immortal

8. Does the word soul refer to an immortal part of humans that cannot die? Ezekiel 18:4 (page 597)

The soul who sins is the one who will _____.

9. What did Jesus say about whom we should fear? Matthew 10:28 (page 688)

Do not be afraid of those who kill the _____ but cannot kill the _____. Rather, be afraid of the One who can _____ both _____ and _____ in hell.

The word *hell* is translated from the Greek *Gehenna* that referred to the "Valley of Hinnom" south of Jerusalem. Here the Israelites followed the barbaric heathen rite of burning children to the idol Molech (2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:1, 6, pages 325, 330). Because of this wicked practice the prophet Jeremiah (about 626-586 BC) predicted that God would make it a "valley of slaughter" (Jeremiah 7:32, 33, page 540). This led to it becoming known as a place of judgment on the wicked.

The word *Gehenna* occurs 11 times in the New Testament and is used symbolically for the final destruction of those who have chosen to follow Satan, rather than accept God's free gift of eternal life through Jesus. It takes place at the end of the millennium (discussed in Guide 13, Revelation 20:11-15, page 1249). Jesus said that Gehenna was "prepared for the devil and his angels" (Matthew 25:4, page 702).

The Bible is very clear that God alone is immortal at the present time.

God ... ALONE IS IMMORTAL and ... lives in unapproachable light. 1 Timothy 6:15, 16 (page 841)



Is There Consciousness in Death?

10. Where do all the dead go at the time of death? Ecclesiastes 9:10 (page 477) (Hebrew, Sheol. See also Acts 2:22-28, page 771)

heaven hell purgatory the grave

11. How much do people know when they are dead? Ecclesiastes 9:5, 6 (page 477)

The dead know _____.

The writer of Psalms says when a person dies, "THEIR PLANS COME TO NOTHING." (Psalm 146:3, 4 (page 447) "No one remembers you when he is dead. Who praises you from the grave?" "It is NOT the dead who praise the Lord" (Psalm 146:3; 6:5; 115:17, pages 385, 435)

If, as is commonly thought, some people go to heaven at death, could you imagine them not praising God! The truth is, they are asleep in death.

12. What is God's view of trying to contact the dead? Deuteronomy 18:9-12 (page 138). See also Leviticus 19:31 (page 85)

Let no-one be found among you who ... practises divination or sorcery, interprets omens, engages in witchcraft, or casts spells, or who is a medium or spiritist or who consults the dead. Anyone who does these things is _____ to the Lord.

We are not to turn to such people for information, guidance or revelation. Rather, we are to listen to God's true prophets in the Bible (Deuteronomy 18:14-22; Isaiah 8:19, 20, page 489).

13. Some members of the Corinthian church were saying that there's no resurrection. If this were so, what would happen to those who have died while believing in Jesus? 1 Corinthians 15:16-18 (page 815)

Then those also who have fallen _____ [died] in Christ are _____.



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God Will Not Forget Our Loved Ones!

14. When do those who have accepted Jesus' gift of eternal life receive immortality? 1 Corinthians 15:51-54 (page 816)

For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be _____ imperishable, and we will be _____. For the perishable must clothe itself with the _____, and the mortal with _____.

15. What does Paul say will happen at the Second Coming to those who have died believing in Christ?

The dead in Christ will RISE FIRST. (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17, page 837)

16. Who will enjoy eternal life?

For God so loved the world that he GAVE his one and only Son, that whoever BELIEVES in him [Jesus] shall not PERISH but have ETERNAL life. (John 3:16, page 752)

It was June 18, 1815, the Battle of Waterloo.* The French under the command of Napoleon were fighting the Allies (British, Dutch and Germans) under the command of Wellington. The people of England depended on a system of signals to find out how the battle was going. One of these signal stations was on the tower of Winchester Cathedral. Late in the day it flashed the signal:

"W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D!"

Just at that moment one of those sudden English fog-clouds made it impossible to read the message. The news of defeat quickly spread throughout the city. The whole countryside was sad and gloomy when they heard the news that their country had lost the war. Suddenly the fog lifted, and the remainder of the message could be read. The message had four words, not two. The complete message was: **"W-E-L-L-I-N-G-T-O-N D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D T-H-E E-N-E-M-Y!"** It took only a few minutes for the good news to spread. Sorrow was

turned into joy, defeat was turned into victory!

This experience illustrates the meaning that the disciples read into Christ's crucifixion. The sun refused to shine on the scene. Darkness covered the earth. Hope had died even in the hearts of Jesus' most loyal friends. After the frightful crucifixion the fog of disappointment and misunderstanding reduced the message to two words: **"J-E-S-U-S D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D!"**

As they laid His lifeless body in a borrowed tomb, the disciples' hopes were shattered. They said, "We had hoped that he was the one who was going to redeem Israel" (Luke 24:21, page 1061).

But as the light broke on that resurrection morning, their despair changed to amazement and joy. **"J-E-S-U-S D-E-F-E-A-T-E-D D-E-A-T-H!"** The message of the New Testament is that Jesus defeated Satan, sin and death. His resurrection is the guarantee of our resurrection "when he comes" the second time (1 Corinthians 15:23, page 1156). How do you respond to this guarantee?



How do you respond to this guarantee?

- I'm thankful that Jesus has defeated death. I
- trust in Jesus and am thankful that there will be a resurrection when He comes again.

Death is a curse that causes fear to most people. How has what you've learned about this subject brought comfort to you?

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