

Question of the Week

Temporarily Dead

Email from M.J.:

I was reading Lambert Dolphin on the subject of [Time and Eternity](#). In a paper called, "The Complexities of Time" he quoted Ray Stedman at length about what the Bible says about where we go when we die:

"They say, 'Well, if the building of God is the resurrection body, then what does a believer live in while he is waiting for the resurrection body? Resurrection won't occur till the second coming of Jesus. What about the saints who have died through the centuries? Their bodies have been placed in the grave and won't arise until the resurrection; what do they live in during the interim?'" (R.C.S.).

I guess that asks my questions about as well as I would. What do you say about where the dead are? Is there a "Temporary Tent"?

MJ

My Reply:

MJ,

Hi, I'm Ted Wise and a friend of Lambert Dolphin's. Dr. Stedman was my mentor, friend and teacher. He was rare among teachers of the Bible. His view of God outside of time has helped a lot of people understand death and resurrection better.

The subject of what happens to us when we die has puzzled mankind for years. For some, it still distress them to think about what happens to us during what appears from an Earthly perspective to be a length of time before the resurrection. There is a Biblical warning that we all must make note of when considering these issues. Paul wrote, "But avoid worldly and empty chatter, for it will lead to further ungodliness, and their talk will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, men who have gone astray from the truth saying that the resurrection has already taken place, and thus they upset the faith of some. (2 Tim 2:16-18).

Paul makes one fact plain. The resurrection has not happened yet. In addition, as you can see, worldly speculation is not of any help and is actually harmful because it leads to "empty chatter" that somehow rots the truth. How amazingly graphic gangrene is for an illustration. Let me show you how I learned to view time in a less Earth bound manner.

Year ago my son taught me something in one of those "out of the mouths of babes" moments. One Monday morning around the breakfast table my daughter had complained that she didn't like Mondays. I pointed out that it was a new day, not Monday again. This resulted in a round of making up funny names for new days. My son was unusually silent during this silliness. He said, "No, Dad, you are wrong. The sun doesn't go off and on, the Earth revolves and gets a shadow on one side. There's only one day". My mind reeled with thoughts like "Today is the day of salvation..", and "...today, as long as it is called today, don't fail to enter the rest...", along with a bunch of other "todays" from the Bible.

In the reverse of a cliché, My thinking was too earthly to be of any heavenly good. Counting days is about as significant as watching anything else go around and around. This is what days are, the number of times the

earth has rotated. Out in the vastness of the cosmos they mean nothing. God lives outside of time. Add to that the statement that my name and your name were written in the book of life before the foundation of the world and it sounds like past, present and future are all before him at the same moment. Once my mind was freed from the constraints of Earthly time, I began to think about what happens when we die in a different manner than I had before. I began to think of the resurrection as being at a peculiar distance from here. What is strange about that great day is that no matter when we die, we all get there at the same time.

I read Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones and found an answer.

"The hand of the LORD was upon me, and He brought me out by the Spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of the valley; and it was full of bones. And He caused me to pass among them round about, and behold, there were very many on the surface of the valley; and lo, they were very dry.

And He said to me, 'Son of man, can these bones live?' And I answered, 'O Lord God, Thou knowest.' Again He said to me, 'Prophesy over these bones, and say to them, 'O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord.' 'Thus says the Lord God to these bones, 'Behold, I will cause breath to enter you that you may come to life. 'And I will put sinews on you, make flesh grow back on you, cover you with skin, and put breath in you that you may come alive; and you will know that I am the Lord.'" (Ezek 37:1-6)

"So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and behold, a rattling; and the bones came together, bone to its bone. And I looked, and behold, sinews were on them, and flesh grew, and skin covered them; but there was no breath in them. Then He said to me, 'Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they come to life.' 'So I prophesied as He commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they came to life, and stood on their feet, an exceedingly great army. Then He said to me, 'Son of man, these bones are the whole house of Israel; behold, they say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope has perished. We are completely cut off.' 'Therefore prophesy, and say to them, 'Thus says the Lord God, 'Behold, I will open your graves and cause you to come up out of your graves, My people; and I will bring you into the land of Israel. 'Then you will know that I am the Lord, when I have opened your graves and caused you to come up out of your graves, My people. 'And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life, and I will place you on your own land. Then you will know that I, the Lord, have spoken and done it,' declares the Lord.'" (Ezek 37:7-14).

Well there certainly wasn't any mention of God calling forth a bunch of rather annoyed folks from some temporary paradise or a bunch sleepy eyed people who had just been wakened from a snooze on old Abraham's bosom.

In fact, the only thing on the scene are the ingredients for a bunch of corpses. The life comes from God, "...And I will put My Spirit within you, and you will come to life,...". Could this be the recipe for His future resurrection of His people?

If I told you that you had a box of homemade cookies in your kitchen cabinet and you didn't, you would point out that I was mistaken. I, in turn, could show you that you have a bag of flour, some shortening, sugar, chocolate chips and whatever else you might need to make a batch of cookies and say here they are. All you need to do is mix them up and bake them. One could argue whether ingredients actually equal cookies but that's not the point. I think when we die, we get un-cookied. I think that Genesis shows us that life is a body assembled by God and breathed into existence by Himself. Like the de-cookied state, in death God could reverse the creation process. There is no need to have a pre-existent Adam, no matter when he is brought to life.

Let me rave on. Life is a very little like bringing two magnets into proximity with each other. (I say "very little" because I don't believe life is electro-magnetic in nature). At a certain point one begins to feel either the tug or the repulsion. At some distance apart the magnetic field can no longer be measured, even though it still could exist. Bring them back together and the "life", if you please, can be observed. No need to store it

anywhere.

In ancient times, life was thought to be in the breath of a man. That is rather easy to understand, as the most obvious difference between a living and a dead body is the lack of breath. Of course one could begin hacking off parts off an enemy, soon reaching a state where the chop-ee is most certainly dead, and conclude just as easily that life is in the body. I believe death needs no soul storage and resurrection is the repositioning of all the necessary physical and spiritual parts plus God's voice and enlivening breath. He doesn't even need the original bits of matter that we were made of; any properly fashioned clay will do.

Have you ever thought about how very different the idea of a "big bang" and the creation described in the Bible are? John begins his gospel by saying, "In the beginning was the Word...". The bang seems so violent. It reminds me of old Frankenstein movies where life comes out of flashes of lighting and thunder accompanied with whirling buzzing sparking madness. But in Genesis we have God describing Himself as a wind-like being in a quiet pre-spoken moment. And instead of BOOMing, He speaks light into existence. There is such a wonderful life-loving difference between Dr. Frankenstein's BIG BANGs and this passage: "After the earthquake came a fire, but the Lord was not in the fire. And after the fire came a gentle whisper." (1 Ki 19:12). Did He whisper, "Let there be light"?

Then there's the fact that He is Spirit, "...the Spirit of God was moving over the surface of the waters." He sounds like a swimmer gracefully hovering, not even making a wave. No violent actions, no bangs. He's just dancing on air.

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Bible verses and quoted Kings,
When in context read,
Can mean different things,

**"...And all the people answered and said, 'That is a good idea.'"
(1 Ki 18:24).**

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