

3.—THE THIRD KEY — WHAT HAPPENS TO THE BODY AT DEATH

Gen. 3 : 19: "Till thou return unto the ground . . . Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return."

This text requires no explanation. There is no element of mystery here. All human experience confirms this plain statement of the Bible.

4.—THE FOURTH KEY — WHAT HAPPENS TO THE SPIRIT AT DEATH

Because there is some confusion among Christian people at this point, we should consider the following Bible facts very carefully:

Eccles. 12 : 7: "The spirit shall return to God who gave it."

This text does not say that the "spirit" of good men only returns to God at death. No distinction is made here between good men or bad men. According to this passage, the "spirit" of all men returns to God at death.

What is the "spirit"?

According to the Bible, the "spirit" is the life principle, or "breath of life", which God originally gave to man (Gen. 2 : 7), and beast (Gen. 7 : 15, 21, 22). The common Hebrew word for "breath" (RUACH) is many times translated as "spirit". (See Job 33 : 4; 34 : 14, where "spirit" and "breath" are used interchangeably.)

Eccles. 3 : 19-21: The "spirit", or "breath of life", is a gift from God which man shares with the lower animals, so that in this respect man has no pre-eminence over the beasts.

Job 27 : 3: The "spirit" or "breath" from God resides in man's "nostrils".

Ps. 146 : 3, 4: Man's "breath goeth forth", and "he returneth to his earth". According to this passage, death is the separation of the breath of life from the body—the simple reversal of that process by which God originally gave life to man.

James 2 : 26: "The body without the 'spirit' [margin, 'breath'] is dead." Therefore, the simplest definition of the "spirit", when used in this sense, is: **That which keeps life in the body, and returns to God at death.**

NOTE: A further significant fact should be observed here: Whilst life and consciousness result from the union between the "spirit" (or breath) and the body, the Bible never suggests that the "spirit" is a kind of SECOND, LIVING PERSONALITY—AN INDEPENDENT CENTRE OF SELF-CONSCIOUSNESS—which can enjoy personal existence when SEPARATED from the body. Nowhere does the Bible teach that the human "spirit" has the power of INDEPENDENT CONSCIOUSNESS, INTELLIGENCE, EMOTIONS, SENSATIONS, MEMORY, OR WILL, prior to, or subsequent to, its union with the body. The recognition of this fact will also save us from a great deal of confusion.

5.—THE FIFTH KEY — WHAT HAPPENS TO THE SOUL AT DEATH

Gen. 2 : 7: As a result of the union of the breath of life with the body, man "became" a living soul.

The text does not say that man was "given" a soul, or that he "had" a soul, but that he was a soul.

What is a "living soul"?

According to the Bible, a "living soul" is a living being; a conscious person, or personality; an individual. (See Gen. 12 : 5; 36 : 6; Lev. 4 : 2; where "soul" obviously means "person".)

Compare Matt. 16 : 26 with Luke 9 : 25, where the Bible uses the terms "soul" and "self" interchangeably. Obviously the "soul" means the "self"; the whole man, the total, conscious, living, breathing personality, as it functions normally in life.