

DYING, DEATH &
DESTINY

HERBERT
LOCKYER



WHITAKER
HOUSE

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DYING, DEATH, AND DESTINY **A Book of Hope**

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To Mrs. Ruth Weise and her three noble sons.

CONTENTS

Preface.....	7
1. Reason and Reality of Death.....	8
2. Distinction Between Death and Dying.....	16
3. Three Months to Live	23
4. Death: A Beginning or an End?	32
5. When Death Is Gain.....	39
6. The Auction of Souls.....	46
7. Death and Destiny.....	55
8. Outer Darkness.....	61
9. How to Prepare for Death and Destiny.....	78
10. The Man Who Died for Me	84
11. Things Missing in Heaven	103
12. Some May Never Die	113
Conclusion.....	122
About the Author.....	124

PREFACE

The Foundation for the Advancement of Christian Evangelism in Colorado Springs, Colorado, has my sincere gratitude by allowing me to put the material in their tapes *On Dying, Death, and Destiny* into printed form. I would urge all believers to use one of their tape albums when visiting the suffering, the dying, and the bereaved.

Because death has passed upon all men, how essential it is, if we have a dying period, to possess the assurance that when we meet this last enemy, it cannot rob us of the life beyond, in which there is no death!

May He who “*was dead*” but is “*alive for evermore*” (Revelation 1:18) be pleased to bless and use this further study for the salvation of both the healthy and the dying, who hitherto have lived without hope of eternal life!

—Herbert Lockyer

CHAPTER 1

REASON AND REALITY OF DEATH

There are some aspects of life more pleasant to dwell upon than others, yet those aspects we may deem unpleasant to think about often prove to be the most profitable. There may be features of life's pilgrimage that are not altogether welcome; nevertheless, they are true, and Paul's exhortation reads, "*Whatsoever things are true... think on these things*" (Philippians 4:8).

Among these undeniable, somber facts of life are those of death and dying—inescapable events we tend to push into the background of our thinking and action, until grim necessity overtakes us. This is the prime reason why I have undertaken to prepare this book dealing with dying, death, and life beyond the grave.

Some readers might query my qualifications for dealing with the inevitable end awaiting us all, the imperative need of preparing for the road to death, and our continuance in another world in which there are no graves.

First, throughout a long pastoral ministry, I had an almost daily contact with the sick, the dying, and the bereaved. This caused me to constantly seek the aid and guidance of the Holy Spirit—the Comforter. Through Him, I found strength to pray and talk with those stricken with a fatal illness or accident and to help bring peace to those relatives who buried their dead in God's green acre. Pastors who live and labor in the light of eternity and who believe that Scripture offers the only authentic revelation of the cause and certainty of death—and of the only way to meet

it—are under the solemn obligation to emulate the faithful witness of John Bunyan’s Interpreter. He not only bore His Great Commission in His look, but He also had the law of truth written upon His lips.

My next qualification for covering all subjects associated with dying and death is a most personal, never-to-be-forgotten one that I am somewhat reluctant to describe. During the last six or seven years of our sixty-six years of marriage, my dear wife was practically dead to the world. She became mentally afflicted with no consciousness of past or present, unable even to recognize her dear ones. Speechless and, for the most part, blind, deaf, and bedridden, she was my daily care, and she had to be fed like a baby, with baby food. Often, as I looked upon her afflicted, helpless form, I would look up and cry, “Oh, my God, why?” Unashamedly, I confess that often I prayed that if it was His will, He would take her to be with Himself. At last, one Sunday afternoon when we were alone, the death throttle—so painful and distressing to hear and watch—came from the throat of my ninety-two-year-old partner. In a few minutes, she died in my arms. Through such a hard experience, I have what the hymn describes as “thoughtful love, through constant watching wise” and a “heart at leisure from itself, to soothe and sympathize”—a sentiment I trust this volume will reflect.

Further personal fitness to meditate upon what dying and death signify and involve arises from the fact that I am now ninety-three years old and, naturally, not far away from proving, with the poet Longfellow, that “[t]here is no death! What seems so is transition.” At such an advanced age, one is found to be living more in the light of eternity than ever before, with the things of earth growing dim in the light of His glory and grace. With my face toward sunrise, before long, I shall hear my beloved Savior say, “*Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away*” (Song of Solomon 2:10). Assured, then, that I shall see my Pilot face-to-face, when

I have crossed the bar, I am eager to share with you the comfort of the Scriptures regarding God's care for the dying and the dead and for those bereaved ones who live on, even though half of their hearts are in heaven.

DEATH IS REAL

At the outset of this meditation on the doctrine of last things, I deem it essential to deal with the reality of death itself. In these turbulent days, when death so freely rides the winds of the world, there is scarcely a newspaper or radio report that does not bear some reference to it, whether it comes naturally or by accident; whether by suicide, murder, or war. Death is always a tragedy to somebody. Never a day passes without death breaking some heart. Never a corner is safe from the dripping rain of death's tears. Death is the skeleton at every feast, the bitterness in every cup, the discord in our music, the nameless dread that has haunted man; it has threatened us since grief had its first birthplace in a mother's broken heart, as she knelt by the side of her boy who had been murdered through the personal violence of his brother. Death never loses its fearful countenance but remains a tremendous and solemn event all of us have to meet. Ignore it we cannot, seeing it is continually intruding into our circle of loved ones and acquaintances.

Surely, then, it is incumbent upon us to discover all we can of such a prominent incident in life as death, an event as conspicuous as our birth.

Thou, O Death
What is thy meaning?
Some there are of men deny thee quite.
"There is no death," they say.
But ever with veil'd aspects com'st thou still.
—Author Unknown

As soon as we are placed in a cradle, we commence our funeral march to the grave. Joseph Hall, in his *Epistles*, wrote, "Death borders upon our birth, and our cradle stands in the grave." Too often, babies die soon after they leave the womb, with the grave quickly following the cradle. Death is with us from our earliest consciousness; and if, as Solomon reminds us, "*The day of death [is better] than the day of one's birth*" (Ecclesiastes 7:1), is it not utter foolishness to neglect consideration of all that death involves? We have been reminded that many things may be done by proxy; other things may be bought off and evaded; but we cannot evade our physical dissolution. Each person, whether saint or sinner, must pass through the portal of the tomb.

Life, in some respects, is like a game of chess. Upon the board, during the progress of the game, the pieces occupy different positions and different values; but when the game is over, all alike—bishop, kings, knights and pawns—go into the common box. In life here below, one man is a king, another a bishop, another the master of a great business, another a menial, a mere pawn. But when death—the great leveler—comes, all men are equal in the solemn stillness of the sepulcher.

The Bible, God's infallible revelation, states the reason and reality of death in this terse and authoritative way: "*Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned*" (Romans 5:12). Because all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, the soul that sins must die. (See Romans 3:23; 5:12; Ezekiel 18:4, 20.)

Although death is inevitable as the result of sin, we ought not to look upon death with horror, as if it were altogether a monster or robber, waiting to snatch us from all that we cling to in life. While death is a necessary law of nature to which we must submit, it need not be a catastrophe. It is but a stopping place on our journey to the world beyond—a slowing down into the station, not a

terminus. According to the natural law of increase, if people never died, this world would not be habitable. Our responsibility is to realize that the date is fixed when we must look death in the face, and a spot is marked where our dust will rest when it returns to its natural abode. At that time, the world's ambitions, the strife of tongues, and the conflict of passions will float past, as night winds sighing over a deserted shrine.

Queen Elizabeth I of England is said to have cried in her last hour, "All my possessions for a moment of time," but there was no one near to barter with her. Beloved, if we live with our hearts and faces toward sunrise, then, when the divine Voice says, "It is time to depart," craving will not be ours for further moments of time, for our death will be a birth. As the eyes of a babe open upon the sunlight of earth, or as the tiny mass of humanity leaves the darkness of the womb, so when we close our eyes in the darkness of death, we shall open them in a "light that never was on sea or land." I hope to prove, as we come to the truth in these meditations, that death, for the child of God, is not a permanent state but an art; it is not an abode in which he is to dwell but a gate to pass through into a richer, fuller life in the world above, a place where, as John assures us, "*There shall be no more death*" (Revelation 21:4).

Perhaps a fitting conclusion to this, our first consideration of such an important theme, is the way in which the Bible approaches it.

DEATH IS SLEEP

In John 11, it is recorded that when Martha and her sister, Mary, saw that their brother, Lazarus, was sick, they sent word to Jesus, saying, "*Lord, behold, he whom thou lovest is sick*" (John 11:3). But Jesus' answer appears to be somewhat perplexing, in view of what actually befell Lazarus, for He said, "*This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified*

thereby” (John 11:4). Lazarus, however, did die as the result of his sickness—a seeming contradiction of our Lord’s declaration. The logical explanation is that when He said, “*not unto death*,” He meant not unto a *permanent* state of death. Lazarus would die, but his death would be only a temporary one—as it was. For when Lazarus had been dead four days, God and the Lord Jesus were glorified when Lazarus, still bound in grave clothes, stepped out of his tomb. However, before Jesus pronounced the all-commanding words “*Lazarus, come forth*” (John 11:43), He had said to His disciples,

Our friend Lazarus sleepeth; but I go, that I may awake him out of sleep. Then said his disciples, Lord, if he sleep, he shall do well. Howbeit Jesus spake of his death: but they thought that he had spoken of taking of rest in sleep. Then said Jesus unto them plainly, Lazarus is dead. (John 11:11–14)

The apostle Paul, writing of those who died before the Lord’s return, used the same metaphor for the dead:

But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. (1 Thessalonians 4:13–15)

Sleep indicates the absence of terror and the presence of repose; thus, ancient believers called their cemeteries *cubiculi*, meaning “sleeping places.” Martin Luther once wrote, “A man who is asleep is much like one who is dead.” The ancient sages said, “Sleep is the brother of death.”

Sleep brings rest to the body. In sleep, weariness vanishes, and we rise in the morning—joyous, fresh, and strong. It is thus with

death, for the grave is the quiet resting place in which our bodies sleep until the resurrection morn. It must be borne in mind, however, that sleep is associated only with the body, never with the soul. The Bible clearly asserts continuance of consciousness and activity of the soul after death, "*absent from the body...present with the Lord*" (2 Corinthians 5:8).

DEATH IS A DEPARTURE

Facing his martyrdom, Paul wrote to young Timothy, "*For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand*" (2 Timothy 4:6). The word "depart," we are reminded, literally means "to pull up anchor and set sail." In life, we are anchored to this fleeting world and to material possessions; in death, the anchor is hauled in, and we set sail for the golden shore. John Neale, the famous hymnist, reckoned that his favorite hymn was the one entitled, "Safe Home, Safe Home in Port." Tennyson, in his expressive poem "Crossing the Bar," portrayed a similar idea.

DEATH IS AN EXODUS

When Moses and Elijah appeared on the Mount of Transfiguration, we are told that they conversed with Jesus about "*his decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem*" (Luke 9:31). Peter used the same term for death: "*that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance*" (2 Peter 1:15). It is common with us to refer to one who has passed away not as being dead but "decease." The word *decease* means "a going out" or "exodus."

The second book of the Bible is entitled Exodus, seeing that it describes the Israelites "going out" from the bondage of Egypt into liberty—out of a land of anguish and affliction and into a land

flowing with milk and honey. Thus is it with death, which is our way out from the partial to the perfect. “*For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face*” (1 Corinthians 13:12). “The tomb is not a blind alley,” wrote Victor Hugo, the brilliant Frenchman. “It is a thoroughfare; it closes in twilight, to open with dawn.”

DEATH IS AN EXCHANGE

Paul would have us know that death has no terror, seeing that it simply means changing the fragile tent of the body for a more beautiful and eternal covering for the redeemed soul. The mortal body is not a permanent residence but only a temporary abode, until one is clothed with the resurrection body.

For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens. For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven.
(2 Corinthians 5:1–2)

To the believer, death is not a leap in the dark or a gateway into the great unknown but a quick journey home to Christ, whose glorified body will be the pattern for our deathless new bodies.