



My Bible School Lessons

Exploring the Word of God

Lesson #21: "Beyond Death"

Where are the Dead?

What did God mean when He told Adam that if he sinned he would die? What is death anyway? Are we really "dead" when we die or do we go on living in some other form? There are so many different ideas about it. So much mystery, so much fear and dread of the "other side" for some people, and yet others describe it as an adventure, a beginning of a new and higher existence. Which is it? The only reliable answers are found in the Bible. In this story we will see the answers one woman's search led her to.

Did My Mother Come Back?

The year 1918 had been a good one. The harvest yielded a bountiful crop on our homestead in Idaho. The five-year struggle for shelter for the farm animals had been climaxed with a huge red barn. The cistern was dug and cemented, and a pump was installed. A badly needed two-story house was under way to accommodate the ever-increasing family of my parents, Hainrich and Leisa Verwornadt.

The downstairs was finished by October; and we five small girls, assisted with the moving from the cramped two-room shack to the big beautiful new home.

Time sped rapidly. The convenient new home and the joy of being together kept my mother singing as she worked. Dad had come to America first, then sent for his wife and daughter. Ours was a happy, God-centered home. We were but dimly aware of the rash of bad colds and flu reaching epidemic proportions in the area about us. Gradually at first, then gaining momentum, the graveyards began to fill. The schools were closed and all public gatherings discontinued.

At the end of December we began to have symptoms of the flu. The two babies caught colds that resisted the standard goose-grease-and turpentine treatment. One by one, all five of us became ill.

Frantic with worry, Momma and Dad kept their vigil by our beds praying that God would spare their family. After Christmas Momma became ill and Dad shortly thereafter. Mothers can ill afford to be sick; so Momma got up and tended to us the best she could.

My nine-year-old sister and I, age four, were the first to recover. It became our lot to carry the wood and coal from the cellar to keep the fire going.

The cold was bitter; the wind whistled through uninsulated walls. We ran low on food and fuel. One day our neighbour who was to milk the cow and set the milk on the veranda, did not show up. The cow broke out of the barn and headed down the road. Momma got up, fought her way through the icy wind and drifting snow, and brought the cow back. All the animals needed to be tended, but Momma was too ill.

Lesson 21: Beyond Death

She came back to the house and banked the fires. She raised the front bedroom window and hung a black cloth from the sill and closed the window. This signified to anyone who might be concerned that there was death in the house then she went to bed.

The wind stopped before morning and the temperature dropped well below zero. Both fires went out, and the house became frigid.

The babies awoke and cried for attention. My sister and I didn't know what to do; so we tried to awaken Momma. She was very cold and didn't move. With our three-year-old sister we climbed into the bed beside her and tried to warm her so she could get up again. In the other bedroom Dad moaned in delirium and called her name.

As the day wore into night, the three of us huddled around Momma's cold body and listened to the moaning wind. We had had no food for several days, and our stomachs ached from hunger. Somehow we knew Momma couldn't get up; yet, frightened by a situation we didn't understand, we were loathe to leave her side. Dad cried out during the night sometimes, but the babies were quiet. My older sister got up and put another quilt over them and came back to Momma's side. Gradually the cold seeped through the feather quilts. By the next morning we sank into a stupor.

Starting from the town, the doctor and visiting nurses began their daily round through the community with horses and a sleigh. As they approached the area northwest of town, they could see no smoke rising from the chimney of the new, two-story house on the hill. As they drew nearer, the black cloth fluttered forlornly from the front windowsill.

While the doctor and one nurse checked the patients, the other started the fires. The situation in our house was grim. We three children huddling in the quilts beside Momma were scarcely aware that we were being rescued.

One of the nurses, Mrs. Huellar, was our neighbour. In a short time she had the fires going and a pot of broth bubbling in the kitchen. While the doctor and the other nurse attended to Dad, Mrs. Huellar took care of us. A cursory examination placed both babies beyond human aid, and they were covered and left. Momma was removed from the bed and placed in a coffin. (The doctor carried several wherever he went during those grim days.)

Dad was still delirious and required a great deal of attention; so Mrs. Huellar stayed while the doctor and his assistant finished their round and went back to town to arrange for Momma's burial.

After they left, Mrs. Huellar stood compassionately by the two babies and dropped some warm broth into their mouths. She cried when they responded. They weren't dead after all! She fed them at regular intervals through the days that followed. Our parent's prayer was answered. God had spared their children.

When the news of Momma's death spread, several families gathered at the church to decide our fate. They unanimously decided that it would be impossible for a man to raise five small girls by himself. The logical conclusion was to put us into an orphanage for adoption. An emissary was sent to our house to inform Dad and to get his signature on the necessary papers. Still too ill to think rationally, he was almost persuaded, asking only for time to think about it overnight.

Mrs. Huellar was still with us, and things were improving under her tender care. We were fed and put to bed as usual after the emissary left that night. A kerosene light was turned low in the bedroom where Mrs. Huellar slept near the two babies.

In another bedroom Dad tossed restlessly in the dark, then fell into a troubled sleep. Hearing his name, he awoke to see an apparition in white standing at the foot of his bed. "Leisa?" he questioned

Lesson 21: Beyond Death

unbelievably. The apparition began to cry and in a quavering voice said, "Hainrich, don't give our babies away. I'll help you." Then weeping uncontrollably, it disappeared. Bewildered, Dad stared at the empty space at the foot of his bed. Sure that his wife had been there, he called her name again and again until Mrs. Huellar came in with a light. She talked to him soothingly, and he calmed down. His answer to the committee the next day was, "I will not give my children up for adoption. Leisa talked to me last night and promised to help me raise them."

The committee stared at him in amazement. Shaking their heads, they left, positive his mind had snapped. We stayed with Dad.

Before long the family recovered and Mrs. Huellar went home. She lived over the hill from us and spent much time teaching Dad the art of cooking and baking bread. My nine-year-old sister was taught the art of housekeeping. Whenever Dad had to be away from the house for any length of time, Mrs. Huellar took the two babies to her home.

We became a tight-knit, self-reliant family. Dad encouraged unbiased Bible study and spent many evenings, especially during the long, cold winters, reading the Bible to us and encouraging us to think for ourselves.

The five of us spent much time by Momma's grave in the summer and at home in the winter pleading with God to let Momma come back again.

After six years, Dad decided to move away for our sake. I walked beside the wagon loaded with furniture, looking back and weeping. I kept breaking away and trying to run back home till my father made me sit in the wagon. Later I had nightmares dreaming that Momma came back and couldn't find us because we had moved away.

Dad remarried when I was twelve, and a son and daughter were added to that union.

The years passed rapidly. Almost before I knew it, my own daughters were grown and I had grandchildren. Dad had long since passed to his rest with the mystery still unresolved. Who talked to him that night? Was it Momma?

Left by myself again, I went back to my first love, the Bible, and decided to do a study on death, I had to know! Could Momma have come back?

In my search I read David's statement in the book of Psalms, "Put not your trust in ... the son of man.... His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." Psalm 146:3,4. That sounded pretty definite. If Mother stopped thinking when she died, as David said, how could she have talked to Dad about the children several weeks afterward?

Then in Job I read, "Man lieth down, and riseth not: till the heavens be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their sleep." Job 14:12. If it really was Momma that talked to Dad she would have had to be raised out of her sleep--and Job said that sort of thing didn't happen.

I soon saw King Solomon agreed with Job. He wrote, "The living know that they shall die; but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more A reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." Ecclesiastes 9:5. That part about not having a portion in anything done under the sun surely looked as if Momma would not have been able to have any part in what was done for us children.

I kept on studying. In the New Testament I found another text that seemed very important. Jesus told His disciples, "I will come again and receive you unto Myself; that where I am ye may be also." John 14:3.

Lesson 21: Beyond Death

If Jesus must come before He receives us, then Momma could not have come back from heaven because Jesus had not yet welcomed her into heaven. Her body was still in the dust.

I was deeply disturbed by the statement of Solomon I mentioned earlier; "neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun." That *for ever* bothered me. Did it mean that Momma wouldn't ever live again: What about the rest of the good people who had died?

Then I read Matthew 27:51-53. These verses describe what happened when Jesus died. "The earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after his resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many." That surely seemed to be telling me that at least the good people who die can live again.

When I got down to Revelation, the last book in the Bible, I read, "They shall hunger no more; neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them nor any heat. For the lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto the living fountains of waters; and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Revelation 7:16,17. So the dead will live again!

By then I knew that when Jesus comes for us we will never mourn or be separated again. Our blessed Saviour will be our light through all eternity. I became convinced from reading all the Bible statements that my mother did not come back to talk to my father. She couldn't. have. But this did not clear up the mystery. My father saw someone. Who? Was it perhaps an angel sent by God to instruct him?

On my way home from visiting my daughter and grandchildren, I decided to stop in and see our dear friend and neighbor of long ago. Mrs. Huellar gave me a grand tour of the senior citizens apartment complex where she now lived, and she fixed me a light lunch. We had an animated conversation which eventually touched on the flu epidemic.

Suddenly she became very grave and said, "I'm so glad you stopped by. I've had a heavy burden on my heart for many years."

"Really?" I asked.

"Yes. It is about your mother. I didn't realize it would take the turn it did, or I would never have begun the conversation that night. I had been listening to the church elders discussing your future. Having worked in an orphanage for a number of years, I had seen what happened to many of the children placed for adoption. They became slaves to their adoptive families. I knew your father could do better himself. I didn't set out to deceive him. I merely wanted to talk to him. When he mistook me for your mother, it confused me, and I blurted out the first thing that entered my mind. Appalled by what I had said, I burst into tears and left the room. I am not sorry that the experience helped keep the family together. I am sorry there was so much deception. Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?" The whole confession just poured out of her heart. When she finished, her eyes were full of tears.

I put my arms about her and kissed her. Forgive her? Of course I could and did. I'm grateful that God had sent her to our family to help in our time of need, and I told her so. God always knew my father would be a good mother, and I wouldn't trade the years with him for all the riches on earth.

And how wonderful to know that soon--when Jesus comes--I will be with him again and with Momma, too, and there will be no more pain or sorrow or parting.

What a loving heavenly Father we have to care for us now and to provide us such a bright future!

Adapted from *Signs of the Times* April 1980, by Elsie Parworn Fox

Mr. Who?

Mr. Williams looked with satisfaction at the nearly finished house and the pleasant homestead. "Maybe I haven't found the gold and riches I had wanted," he thought, "but certainly Ida will love this home. At least we can be back together again." He set about to prepare for the trip back east to claim his lovely young wife and baby boy.

It was the year of the California Gold Rush! Unfortunately that trip home was not to be. The dreaded epidemic, typhoid fever struck Mr. Williams, and instead he was taken to a crude building they were using as a hospital. He was placed in a room with another typhoid fever victim, Mr. Shafer. The two men were very ill, their fevers raged and their condition deteriorated, both went into a peak crisis the same night. Both became delirious and death claimed a victim that night.

The next morning the nurses gathered the few personal belongings to send them to the family of the deceased. When they found Mrs. Williams' address they realized there was no way to contact her on the east coast. They wrote a note telling her as gently as possible that her husband had passed away and sent the note along with the things they had gathered.

That very day, back east, Ida was startled to see her husband walk in through the door. Her joy turned to sorrow, however, as he told her that he had just died and had come to let her know. "In a few days," he said, "you will be getting my things along with a note that I have died." Ida wept from the crushing grief and her husband cried with her.

As he tried to comfort her, he told her. "I love you, Ida. I don't want you to be alone. I want my little boy to have a daddy. One of your neighbors, Mr. Clayburn admires you, and when he hears of my death he will come and propose to you. Please accept that proposal."

Everything happened as predicted. But Mrs. Williams couldn't bring herself to accept this man's proposal. She didn't love him. Once again her husband appeared to her and pled with her to marry this man. "I love you," he said, "I know he will take care of you." Finally, she accepted and married Mr. Clayburn.

It turned out to be a miserable mistake. Mr. Clayburn was an abusive alcoholic.

Meanwhile, back at the hospital, something strange happened. Mr. Williams recovered! The man who had died was *Mr. Shafer* but no one seemed to realize that a note had been sent to the wrong wife.

When strong enough, Mr. Williams wrote a letter home. Mr. Clayburn got the letter and was startled to find Ida's former husband was still alive. He tore the letter up and decided they were going to have to move. Mr. Williams couldn't figure out why he wasn't getting any letters back from his wife. He wrote her another letter but months went by with no response. Finally he packed up and went home. He found his old home deserted, but upon inquiry found where his wife had moved. She came to the door with a new baby in her arms. Tragedy had wrecked their home.

It is hard to imagine the fiendish delight that Satan's forces must have had as they impersonated Mr. Williams to his unsuspecting wife. It was the same trickery he used when he impersonated the prophet Samuel for King Saul at the witch of Endor's home. It makes me abhor a being who could so basely destroy the peace in that home. The real tragedy is that it could have been avoided if only Mrs. Williams had understood the truth of the Bible teaching on the subject.

May the Lord guide you with His Holy Spirit as you search for truth in the Scriptures with an open heart so that you will know for yourself "What saith the Lord."