

Living and Dying Up to Three Times

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At first blush, the title of this study appears preposterous. In order to explain how this is possible, it would be instructive to delineate the life-and-death scenarios possible to created human beings. There are just five.

1. *Live once and never die.* The Bible provides exactly two such accounts: that of righteous Enoch, who was translated to Heaven in the very year of the Flood (Gen. 5:24; cf. 1SP 70, in SR 63), and Elijah, who was famously transported thence in a fiery chariot (2 Ki. 2:11). As is painfully obvious, the Fall of our first parents made this scenario nearly universally impossible of fulfillment for the sinful human race. But for the remnant alive at Christ's Second Coming, the experience of Enoch and Elijah will be repeated (1 Thess. 4:16, 17).
2. *Live once and die once.* This scenario applies to a special class that in King James Bible language "shall be as though they had not been" (Obad. 16). Though this group may well include a variety of special cases, while in vision Ellen White described one in particular. "I saw that the slave master will have to answer for the soul of his slave whom he has kept in ignorance; and the sins of the slave will be visited upon the master. God cannot take to Heaven the slave who has been kept in ignorance and degradation, knowing nothing of God or the Bible, fearing nothing but his master's lash, and holding a lower position than the brutes. But He does the best thing for him that a compassionate God can do. He permits him to be as if he had not been, while the master must endure the seven last plagues and then come up in the second resurrection and suffer the second, most awful death. Then the justice of God will be satisfied"(EW 276.).
3. *Live twice and die once.* This group logically includes those who were raised to life after passing to their graves and will join the other righteous dead called forth to life everlasting in the first resurrection (Rev. 20: 4, 5). Eleven Biblical examples include Moses (see further comments below); the widow of Zarephath's son (1 Ki. 17:17–23), the Shunammite woman's son (2 Ki. 4:18–37); the man whose bones upon being buried touched those of Elijah (2 Ki. 13:20, 21); the widow of Nain's son (Lk. 7:11–15); Jairus's daughter (Mt. 9:18–25; Mk. 5:22–43; Lk. 8:41–55); Lazarus (Jn. 11:1–44); many saints at Christ's crucifixion (see further comments below); Christ Himself (Mt. 28:1–7; Mk. 16:3–7; Lk. 24:1–7; Jn. 20:1–9); Tabitha (Dorcas) (Acts 9:36–41); Eutychus (Acts 20:7–12).

Further comments on Moses. Though he died at 120 years of age (Deut. 34:5–7) and was buried, not long afterward Moses was restored to life and taken to Heaven by Christ Himself (Jude 9; cf. DA 421; MS 69, 1912, in 10MR 159). Ellen White also records the fact that Moses was in Heaven to welcome Christ upon His ascension (PP 476). It is instructive to recall that Moses also appeared to Christ at His transfiguration, representing *all* risen saints (Mt. 17:3; Mk. 9:4; Lk. 9:30).

Further comments on the saints raised at Christ's crucifixion. Immediately after the crucifixion, the Bible has this to say: "And. Behold, the veil of the Temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and 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" (Mt. 27:51–53). Ellen White elaborates on this extraordinary event by depicting this multitude as colaborers and martyrs later ascending with Christ "as trophies of His victory over death and the grave" (DA 786).

4. *Live twice and die twice.* Unfortunately, this will be the lot of the vast majority of humankind, who will suffer the second death after being raised to life in order to answer for their rejection of Christ's free offer of salvation (see Rev. 20:5, 6). Amazingly, wonderfully, our Saviour Himself suffered what might well be considered the second death in our stead! "Satan with his fierce temptations wrung the heart of Jesus. The Saviour could not see through the portals of the tomb. Hope did not present to Him His coming forth from the grave a conqueror, or tell Him of the Father's acceptance of the sacrifice. He feared that sin was so offensive to God that Their separation was to be eternal. Christ felt the anguish which the sinner will feel when mercy shall no longer plead for the guilty race. It was the sense of sin, bringing the Father's wrath upon Him as man's substitute, that made the cup He drank so bitter, and broke the heart of the Son of God" (DA 753).
5. *Live thrice and die thrice.* Revelation 1:7 mentions some who at Jesus' Second Coming will be part of a special resurrection, in these words: "Every eye shall see Him, and they also which pierced Him." Ellen White informs us that this group includes "those that mocked and derided Christ's dying agonies, and the most violent opposers of His truth and His people" (GC 637); as well as "those who by evilspeaking and wrongdoing are piercing Him today" (ST, Jan. 28, 1903). This rogues' gallery of Earth's all-time worst evildoers will be extinguished by the brightness of Christ's Second Coming (2 Thess. 2:8; cf. DA 108), only to await His return at the close of the millennium, whereupon they will be resurrected for the third and final time to face Judgment and utter annihilation in the second death (the third death for these "special" ones) (Rev. 20:12–15).

The inevitable conclusion is that in one or the other of these five scenarios, every human being who ever lived or ever will live must take part. As such, we close with an earnest prayer that everyone reading these words will be among the finally saved. "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20)!