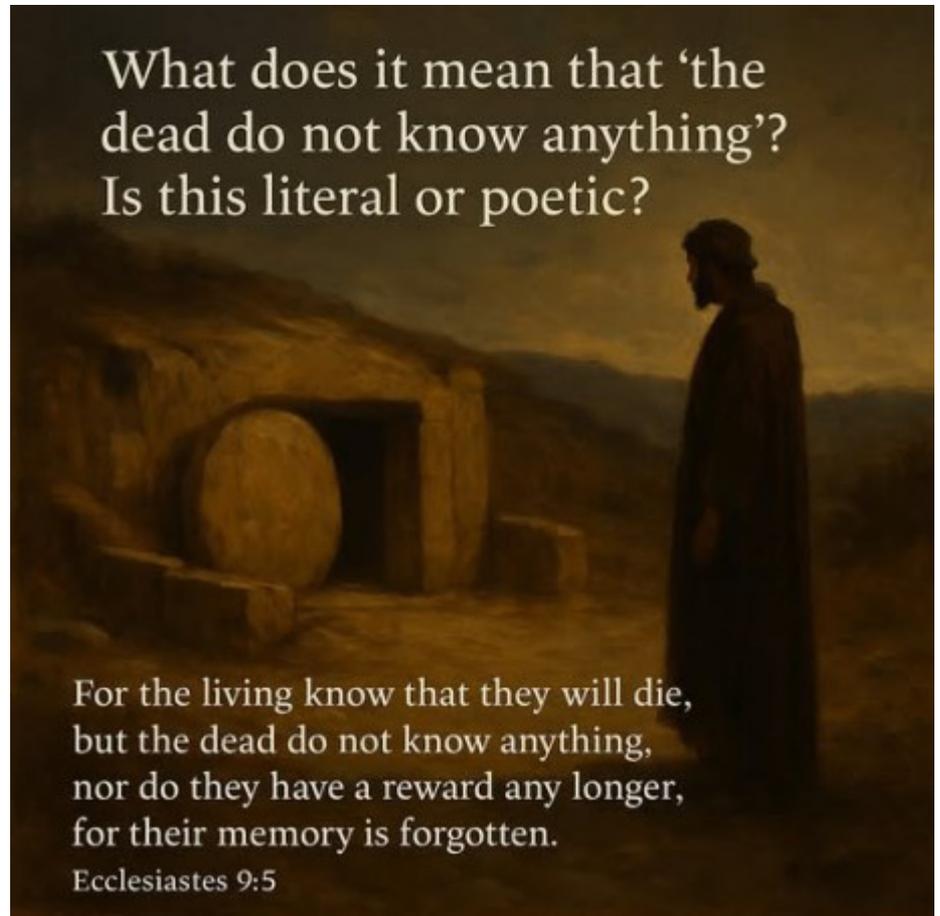


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Death - What does it mean that "the dead do not know anything" (Ecclesiastes 9:5)? Is this literal or poetic ?



By Dan Maines

What does it mean that "the dead do not know anything" (Ecclesiastes 9:5)? Is this literal or poetic ?

The phrase "the dead do not know anything" in Ecclesiastes 9:5 is best understood poetically, not literally. Here's why:

1. Context of Ecclesiastes:

The book often speaks from an "under the sun" perspective, that is, from the human point of view, apart from divine revelation. Ecclesiastes wrestles with life's apparent

meaninglessness when viewed strictly from an earthly standpoint.

In that view, the dead no longer participate in the world of the living. They don't know or experience the things of this life anymore, no love, no hatred, no toil, no reward under the sun (verse 6).

2. Figurative Expression of Finality:

Solomon is not denying the afterlife. He's saying that in this world, the dead are cut off. They are no longer conscious or aware here. Their lives have ended, their earthly influence fades, and their memory eventually disappears (Ecclesiastes 1:11, 9:6).

3. Not a Denial of the Soul's Existence:

If taken literally, this verse would contradict other scriptures that describe awareness after death:

Luke 16:22-23 – The rich man and Lazarus are both aware in the afterlife.

Revelation 6:9-10 – Souls under the altar cry out for justice.

Philippians 1:23 – Paul desired to depart and be with Christ.

2 Corinthians 5:8 – To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

Conclusion:

The verse is poetic and reflects the human experience of death, a picture of silence, stillness, and disconnection from the world. It doesn't teach soul annihilation or unconsciousness after death. It simply shows that once someone dies, their earthly

journey is over. From this earthly perspective, "they do not know anything."

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