

What Happens When You Die?

What happens when you give up your last breath and die? You go to the grave. There you stay until you are resurrected. Upon death your "thoughts perish": you have no consciousness and know nothing:

"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish." (Psalm 146:4)

While you remain in the grave, you know nothing and are unaware of the passage of time:

"For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten." (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

Many times the Bible refers to death as a figurative "sleep." Those who are dead are "asleep" in death, unaware of what is going on. Jesus referred to Lazarus being asleep - dead - before He resurrected him:

"These things said he: and after that he saith unto them, 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)

In Daniel 12:2 we have this reference to the dead and their resurrection:

"And many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt."

There are two times of future resurrection. The first is when Jesus returns. The apostle Paul described this resurrection in 1 Thess 4:13-17 and in 1 Cor 15:50-54. The first resurrection is for "the dead in Christ," who "sleep in Jesus," in the grave. Paul wrote:

"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.
For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first:
Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17)

In a letter to the Corinthians, Paul gave another description of the resurrection at Jesus' return. Jesus returns "at the last trump" - the seventh of seven trumpet soundings described in detail in Revelation chapters 8 through 11. At His return the dead in Christ will be resurrected "incorruptible": immortal. At the same time those in Christ who are alive at His return, not "asleep" in death, will also receive immortality:

"Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory." (1 Corinthians 15:51-54)

Those in the first resurrection have eternal life and will reign right here on earth with Jesus for 1000 years:

"Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection: on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years." (Revelation 20:6. Also see Luke 22:28-30; Matthew 8:11,12; Rev 5:9,10; Isaiah 2:4; Daniel 2:44; Daniel 7:14,18,22,27)

The other, second resurrection - of everyone else left in the grave - comes much later, after the end of Jesus' thousand year rule here on earth:

"But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished . . . " (Revelation 20:5).

Jesus gave this description of the second resurrection:

"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." (Jesus, in John 5:28,29; also see Daniel 12:2)

Just to clarify, a person can be resurrected either to mortal life, or, to immortal life. Jesus resurrected Lazarus (John 11:1-45) to mortal life. Jesus was the first to be resurrected immortal. Those in the resurrection at Jesus' return will be resurrected immortal, like Jesus:

"But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming." (1 Corinthians 15:23)

In the last resurrection - after the 1000 years - it is evident that some are raised mortal, to "damnation" and "contempt." Others, apparently, are raised to eternal life: these would be people who died in Christ during the 1000 years.

Now . . . many today hold beliefs which conflict with the scenario of resurrections I've just outlined.

- First example: many believe the righteous, like Moses and Abraham and David, have gone to heaven . . . so, what would they need a resurrection for?
- Second example: Didn't Jesus tell the thief on the cross he'd be in paradise with Him that same day? So, it seems, there is no need to wait for a resurrection.
- Third example: Didn't Paul believe he'd be with Christ immediately upon his death? That he'd prefer to die, to "depart, and be with Christ"? Didn't Paul say that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord?

There are answers for these questions.

First, perhaps you have been taught that people like Abraham, David and Moses have gone to heaven. Not true. Jesus said none of them have gone to heaven:

"And no man hath ascended up to heaven, but he that came down from heaven, even the Son of man which is in heaven." (Jesus, in John 3:13)

They are still in the grave. The apostle Peter confirmed this when he spoke about David:

"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day." (Acts 2:29)

"For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, Until I make thy foes thy footstool." (Acts 2:34,35)

Abraham, David, Moses and the others are still in the grave, waiting for the promised resurrection.

Second, about the thief on the cross. Here's the account in Luke 23:43:

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43, KJV).

Actually, neither Jesus nor the thief were in paradise the same day. Jesus was in the tomb for three days and three nights, just as He said He would be:

"For as Jonas was three days and three nights in the whale's belly; so shall the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth." (Matthew 12:40)

Was Jesus really dead? Yes, He said so:

"I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death." (Revelation 1:18)

Even after His resurrection, over three days later, He told Mary He had not yet ascended to the Father:

"Jesus saith unto her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father: but go to my brethren, and say unto them, I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God." (John 20:17)

In the original texts there was no punctuation as we have today. The commas in Luke 23:43 were added, by later transcribers and translators. The second comma was added in the wrong place, giving the impression Jesus and the thief would be in paradise the same day:

"And Jesus said unto him, Verily I say unto thee, To day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (Luke 23:43, KJV).

Today some Bibles have the second comma in the correct place, removing the suggestion that Jesus and the thief would be in paradise the same day. Here's some examples:

"And Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you today, you shall be with Me in paradise."
(Faithful Version)

"And יהושע said to him, "Truly, I say to you today, you shall be with Me in paradise." (The Scriptures 2009)

The translation of the early Curetonian Syriac text even leaves out the comma in question and still delivers the correct meaning:

"Amen, I say to thee to-day that with me thou shalt be in the Garden of Eden." (F. C. Burkitt, "The Curetonian Version of the Four Gospels," Vol. I, Cambridge, 1904)

Jesus was not in paradise the same day. Jesus was in the tomb three days and three nights, just as He said He would be. The thief is still in the grave, waiting for the promised resurrection of the dead.

Third, regarding Paul's statements about preferring "to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord" and "to depart, and to be with Christ."

When the elect who "sleep in Jesus" are resurrected at Jesus' return their consciousness returns. Then, along with those "which are alive and remain," they rise to meet Christ. Nowhere does the Bible say they meet Christ before then. And they meet Him "in the air," not in heaven:

"For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord." (1 Thessalonians 4:16-17)

Paul understood that upon death a man's "thoughts perish" - his consciousness stops:

"His breath goeth forth, he returneth to his earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."
(Psalm 146:4)

To those resurrected, it will seem like no time had passed since their last conscious moment at death. Paul understood that after departing in death, the very next thing he would know would be that he had been resurrected and was meeting Christ. That seemingly immediate meeting with Christ was what Paul was referring to when he wrote "For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ; which is far better" (Philippians 1:23).

Paul was confident and willing to die, knowing that as soon as he died the next thing he would know would be that he was with Christ:

"We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord." (2 Corinthians 5:8)

Paul was not a hypocrite, believing he would go to meet Jesus at the moment of his death, but, telling the Thessalonians they would have to wait for their resurrection at Jesus' return before they could meet Jesus. No, Paul wrote that he hoped to attain the very same resurrection he told the Thessalonians about:

"That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death; If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead." (Philippians 3:10,11)

Now, continuing with what happens when we die. We've seen that after the 1000 years, all that are left in the grave will be resurrected for judgment. Some will receive eternal life. The rest will die a second time, with no further hope of life or promise of resurrection. This is called the second death. Once again they have no consciousness and know nothing, and, without hope of resurrection or ever

living again they have been destroyed. They will never again exist or "be." To be "[cast into the lake of fire](#)" means to be destroyed, much like trash was destroyed by being thrown into Jerusalem's dump - into gehenna fire - two thousand years ago. In that gehenna dump constant fire and maggots were sure to destroy all that was thrown in. Here's Revelation 21:8, showing the fate of the wicked, the second death:

["But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."](#) (Revelation 21:8)

With the wicked removed and destroyed through death, only those who have received eternal life will remain. They'll never die, so death - from then on - will not happen any more. The apostle Paul wrote,

["The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death."](#) (1 Corinthians 15:26)

Death will have been destroyed, never to happen again, after the wicked have been destroyed through death.

From that time forward, all who remain will have eternal life. Never again will anyone go to the grave. All that had been in the grave were already resurrected for judgment, so the grave will not "happen" any more: like death, it will have been destroyed. Revelation 20:14,15 describes the destruction of death and the grave: they are figuratively "cast into the lake of fire":

["And death and hell \[Greek hades, the grave\] were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.](#)

[And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire."](#) (Revelation 20:14,15)

So, what happens to those with eternal life? Jesus said:

["Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth."](#) (Matthew 5:5)

In fact, they inherit a brand new, re-created earth where God will dwell with them:

["And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.](#)

[And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.](#)

[And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.](#)

[And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away."](#) (Revelation 21:1-4)

Note that nothing was said about living in heaven forever. Shocking as it may seem, there is no verse anywhere in the Bible that says our eternal life will be spent in heaven. Yes, there's a reward stored for us in heaven:

["Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you."](#) (Matthew 5:12)

That does not mean we go to heaven to get the reward: Jesus will bring the reward when he returns:

["And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be."](#) (Revelation 22:12)

Many have been taught differently about the fate of the wicked. Many believe the wicked live forever, in conscious torment, in some sort of fiery hell. Others believe hell is eternal life in separation from God.

The word "hell" appears 23 times in the KJV New Testament. But those 23 instances of "hell" do not come from one Greek word: they come from three different Greek words, with different meanings. Translating them all as "hell" has caused endless and needless confusion. Other Bibles have cleared up some or all of this confusion, using correct translations of the original Greek words.

One of the three Greek words is γέεννα "geenna" or "gehenna," translated as "hell" 12 times in the KJV New Testament. Gehenna refers to the dump just outside of Jerusalem in Jesus' time. Rubbish and bodies were thrown there to be permanently destroyed by the constant fire - "hell" fire - and by worms: maggots. Here is an example of γέεννα being translated as "hell":

"And if thine eye offend thee, pluck it out: it is better for thee to enter into the kingdom of God with one eye, than having two eyes to be cast into hell fire" (Mark 9:47)

Jesus used "hell [gehenna] fire" to illustrate the future permanent destruction of the unsaved, like being thrown into the dump. The "lake of fire" in Revelation pictures the same destruction.

Jesus referred to "everlasting punishment" in Matthew 25:46:

"And these shall go away into everlasting punishment: but the righteous into life eternal" (Matthew 25:46).

The "everlasting punishment" is the second death: it is everlasting in the sense that it is permanent, final and irreversible punishment, like the execution of a criminal. It is not perpetual, ongoing, active punishing.

We have many verses showing the wicked will be destroyed and will not "be" any more. Here are a few:

"For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be: yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not be" (Psalms 37:10).

"When the wicked spring as the grass, and when all the workers of iniquity do flourish; it is that they shall be destroyed for ever" (Psalms 92:7).

My video "[Hell and the Immortal Soul](#)" has many similar verses. That video also goes into detail about the other two Greek words ᾗδης "hades" (meaning the grave) and ταρταρώ "tartaroo" (meaning restraint) that were also translated as "hell" in the KJV New Testament.

Now we come to one more stumbling block regarding the destruction of the unsaved: the idea that we have immortal souls, souls that must always be alive and conscious in one place or another. The same concept is at play with the idea that the saved consciously meet Christ immediately upon death. The immortal soul idea comes to us via pagan philosophers such as Plato, who wrote:

"Do we believe that there is such a thing as death? And is this anything but the separation of soul and body? And being dead is the attainment of this separation; when the soul exists in herself, and is parted from the body and the body is parted from the soul . . . beyond question the soul is immortal and imperishable, and our souls will truly exist in another world!" (Plato, in Phaedo, about 360 BC)

"Soul" in the Bible has a different definition: it is a person, the self, a being, a life. An example from the apostle Paul:

"And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls." (Acts 27:37)

Here is Jesus saying I am very sorrowful:

"Then saith he unto them, My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death: tarry ye here, and watch with me." (Matthew 26:38)

When God formed Adam out of the dust, He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and Adam became a living soul:

"And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul." (Genesis 2:7)

That's right: Adam became a living soul. God did not give Adam a soul. The Bible and pagan religion have different definitions of "soul." In the Bible we are souls - persons - and we can perish in death. According to pagan religion we have an immortal soul that floats out of our body when we die, and remains alive and conscious forever.

The Bible says the person - the soul - that sins will die:

"The soul that sinneth, it shall die." (Ezekiel 18:20)

Here is Paul in the New Testament:

"For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:23).

That's right: the "wages" of sin is death, not life as an immortal soul. We either receive eternal life as a gift from God, or, we perish in death because we did not receive the gift of eternal life.

Salvation is not about - and never was about - where we'll spend eternity. That paradigm is completely incorrect. The truth is, we won't even have an eternity, of any sort, anywhere, unless we receive from God the gift of eternal life.