

What happens when we die?



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There are many thoughts and beliefs today about what happens when we die. One belief is that we are reincarnated, reborn into another body. Others believe we go to purgatory, a place of punishment where we make amends for our sins before going to heaven. There is also the belief that we go immediately to hell or heaven based on your moral choices and relationship with Christ. How can we determine what is true? Does it even matter what you believe? Yes, most definitely! In this bible study guide we will explore what God has to say about the subject of death.

Before we look at what the Bible says about death, let's first look at how we came to exist.

How did we come to exist?

Genesis 2:7 (NKJV) 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.



First, let's ensure we understand what a soul is. The Hebrew word for soul is 'nephesh'. It is commonly believed that the soul is the non-physical, immortal essence that is contained or trapped within the body that is released upon death, but this is not what the bible teaches.

A nephesh is simply a living creature. In Genesis both humans and animals are called a 'living nephesh' (Genesis 1:21). A soul or nephesh is not immortal, it can die and only God is immortal (Ezekiel 18:20; Revelation 16:3; 1 Timothy 6:15,16). In the bible, nephesh refers to the whole person or being. For example, there were thirty-three souls [or persons] in Jacob's family (Genesis 46:15). In Exodus we see that it is possible for a soul [or person] to be cut off from the congregation of Israel (Exodus 12:19). The Bible teaches that we are a soul not that we have a soul. Genesis 2:7 tells us that a soul or a living human being is made up of the breath of life and dust of the ground. [Dust + Breath of life = living soul/human being].

What happens when we die?

Ecclesiastes 12:7 (NET) and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the life's breath returns to God who gave it.

Psalms 146:4 (NKJV) His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; In that very day his plans perish.

Psalms 104:29 (NKJV) You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust.

Genesis 7:22 (NKJV) All in whose nostrils was the breath of the spirit of life, all that was on the dry land, died.

Job 34:14,15(NLT) If God were to take back his spirit and withdraw his breath, all life would cease, and humanity would turn again to dust.

The bible teaches that at death the breath goes back to God and the dust goes back to the earth. At this point the soul or living being ceases to exist. The dead know nothing, their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished. Nevermore will they have a share in anything done under the sun (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6).



Do persons who are saved go to heaven when they die?

John 5:28,29(NKJV) All who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth.

Acts 2:29,34(NKJV) David ...is both dead and buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. ... For David did not ascend into the heavens.

Job 14:12,21(NKJV) Man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep. ...His sons come to honor, and he does not know it; they are brought low, and he does not perceive it.

John 11:11-14(NKJV) These things He said, and after that He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead."

The bible teaches that we remain in our graves, and describes death as a sleep, until the second coming of Christ (Daniel 2:2, 2 Kings 20:1). There are many other instances in the bible where death is referred to as a sleep, a state of temporary unconsciousness until the resurrection. The dead cannot communicate with us. There is no knowledge or wisdom in the grave (Ecclesiastes 9:10). The dead do not praise the Lord (Psalm 115:17).

What will happen to those who have died in Christ at the second coming?

Revelation 22:12(NKJV) Behold, I am coming quickly, and My reward is with Me, to give to everyone according to his work.

1 Thessalonians 4:16,17(NKJV) The Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout. ... And the dead in Christ will rise....And thus, we shall always be with the Lord.

1 Corinthians 15:51-53(NKJV) We shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye ... and the dead will be raised incorruptible. ... For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

They will arise with an incorruptible body and be rewarded for the work they have done. It is at the second coming of Christ where we will finally be with the Lord. What a wonderful time that will be!

Absent from the body and present with the Lord. What does this verse teach us?

2 Corinthians 5:8 (NKJV) We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.



Many Christians will reference this scripture text to support the doctrine that when persons who have accepted Jesus die, they will go to heaven, but is this what the text is really saying? Let's take a closer look. Read 2 Corinthians 5:1-8. Paul, through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, begins by telling us that if our earthly house [our human bodies] is destroyed we have a building [our incorruptible, immortal bodies] from God (verse 1).

We long to be clothed with our habitation [our incorruptible, immortal bodies] from heaven (verse 2) because when we are, our mortality will be swallowed up in life (verse 4). While we are in our earthly body we are not with the Lord (verse 5), but we would rather be absent from the body [this earthly body] and be present with the Lord.

Most times, when I hear people recite this text they will say "To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord". However, the text reads "willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord". Paul is not saying to be absent from the body is equal to being present with the Lord. He would rather be absent from this fragile body, this body that grows old or can be corrupted with disease and receive his immortal, incorruptible body from heaven. He also wants to be present with the Lord. I also long for a new body and to be with my Savior. But when does this happen? When do we receive our heavenly bodies? The bible clearly tells us.

Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 15:51–53. “Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep [when we die, we are asleep in our graves], but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will 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 has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed [our mortal bodies are swallowed with immortality] up in victory.” We receive our heavenly bodies at the second coming not immediately after we die.

When will we be present with the Lord? The bible tells us that when Jesus returns with a commanding shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, the Christians who have died will rise from their graves [we are asleep, in our graves when we die]. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. Then we will be with the Lord forever. (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17). Paul also wrote this verse under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The bible clearly teaches that at the second coming, at this moment, then we will be with the Lord forever, not immediately after we die. I look forward to this day!

I hope that this study has been a blessing to you. I was surely blessed by preparing it. If it was, share it with a friend and let's globalize the gospel together!