

PERSONAL ESCHATOLOGY: WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

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What is death?

James 2:26 The separation of the spirit or immaterial part of you from your physical body.

Death is simply a transition to a different mode of existence,; it is not, as some tend to think, extinction. (Millard Erickson, *Christian Theology*, 1169)

Soon you will read in the newspaper that I am dead. Don't believe it for a moment. I will be more alive than ever before. (D. L. Moody)

Facing death: 8 key biblical thoughts

1. Death is an enemy. (1 Cor 15:26)
2. A believer's victory over death is assured by Christ's victory over death. (1 Cor 15:20-23)
3. Jesus frees believers from the fear of death. (Heb 2:14-15; 1 Cor 15:54-55; Ps 23:4)
4. Death cannot separate a believer from Christ; in fact, it sends him or her to Christ. (Rom 8:38-39; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21-23)
5. God is sovereign over the time and nature of each person's death. (Ps 33:18-19; Ps 31:15; Ps 104:27-29; Ps 116:15; (result: Job 13:15))
6. Death is a final way of glorifying God in this life. (Phil 1:20; Rom 15:8)
7. For believers, the parting of death holds real sadness, but not incapacitating sorrow. (1 Thess 4:13; Phil 2:27; John 11:35)
8. Death is the last aspect of this fallen world that God will remove. (1 Cor 15:26; Rev 21:4)

What happens to believers when we die?

1. Your soul/spirit, the immaterial, you is separated from your body (James 2:26)
2. Believers go directly to the presence of God (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Luke 23:34)

Purgatory: The Bible is silent on the Roman Catholic doctrine of purgatory. This doctrine was brought in from the extra-biblical, historical book, 2 Maccabees. The doctrine of purgatory clearly violates the teaching of Scripture on two counts.

- It contradicts the biblical statements that believers go directly to be with God when they die (2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:23; Luke 23:34).
- It contradicts the once-for-all sacrifice of Christ, the total removal of our condemnation by Christ, and our assurance of peace with God through Christ (Heb 10:14; Rom 8:1; Rom 5:1) .

Question: What about the doctrine of "soul sleep"?

The Bible often describes death as falling asleep (John 11:11-13 of Lazarus).

When Scripture represents death as 'sleep' it is simply a metaphorical expression used to indicate that death is only temporary for Christians As for the passages that indicate that the dead do not praise God, or that there is a ceasing of conscious activity when people die, these are all to be understood from the perspective of life in this world. (Wayne Grudem, Systematic Theology 820)

Rev 6:9-11; 7:9-10; Luke 16:19-31

Did OT believers go directly to God's presence when they died?

Yes. 2 Kings 2:11; Ps 16:10; Matt 22:32

What about Samuel's appearance in 1 Samuel 28? Was it really Samuel?

Background: Leviticus 19:31; 20:6

Reasons why the apparition in 1 Samuel 28 was Samuel:

- The witch was shocked in v. 12 when she saw Samuel, suggesting it wasn't a demonic spirit (which she was used to), but Samuel himself.
- The text assumes all through the passage that this was Samuel.
- If it had been a demonic spirit, the text would have said so rather than "deceiving" us into thinking it was Samuel.
- Samuel's appearance was a divinely ordered rebuke of Saul's wickedness (Samuel announces Saul's death). Saul's evil act here is in no way to be imitated by believers, as if God would give them a secret message by contacting the dead.

What happens to unbelievers when they die?

1. Their soul/spirit is separated from their body (James 2:26)
2. They go directly to a place of conscious torment called *Hades* (Luke 16:19-23; Rev 19:20 in contrast with Rev 20:11-14)

Are unbelievers given a "second chance" to believe in Christ after death?

No. Heb 9:27

What about the African idea of zombies—living dead who are called up by witchdoctors to torment people?

- The biblical examples of people temporarily returning from the dead (Moses, Elijah, Samuel, Lazarus, etc.) have no relationship to the concept of zombies.

- Luke 16 and Hebrews 9:27 clearly teach that the spirits of unbelievers who have died go directly to conscious torment. They are not available to become "zombies."

The Final Judgement: The Great White Throne Judgement

Hades is not the final dwelling place of unbelievers; the lake of fire is.

Final Judgement: Rev 20:11-15; Rom 2:5-7; Acts 17:30-31; Matt 12:36

The Great White Throne Judgement is not the same as the Sheep and Goat judgment which takes place at Christ's return. The GWT Judgement takes place after the Millennium.

- Christ is the Judge: John 5:26-27; 2 Tim 4:1
- Believers will have some role at the GWT Judgement: 1 Cor 6:2-3
- Every sinful thought and deed of unbelievers will be exposed and judged by Christ: Ecc 12:14; Ecc 3:16-17; Matt 10:26
- Judgement will be more severe for those who had more revelation of God's truth: Luke 12:47-48; Matt 11:22
- All those who are judged at the GWTJ will be cast into the lake of fire: Rev 20:14-15
- The lake of fire is eternal, conscious torment.

Its descriptions:

lake of fire	5x in Rev	burning of chaff	Matt 3:12
perpetual decay	Is 66:23-24	outer darkness	Matt 8:12, 25:30
torture	Matt 18:34	being cut to pieces	Matt 24:51
burning in furnace	Matt 13:42	eternal destruction	2 Thess 1:9
ground to powder	Matt 21:44		

- Does 2 Thess 1:9 teach annihilationism?

No. Hell is a process of destruction that continues eternally, never reaching an end: Rev 14:9-11; 20:10. According to Matthew 25:46, Hell's duration is the same as heaven's.

- Christ supervises Hell, not Satan; nonetheless, hell is also complete seclusion from God: Rev 14:10; 2 Thess 1:9; Matt 7:23
- Those who know God best—saints in glory and holy angels—believe Hell is the correct punishment for unbelievers: Rev 16:5-7; 19:1-6

What Happens to Believers when they die?

The Bema Seat Judgement of Believers

Rom 14:10-12 2 Cor 5:10 (timing: after the rapture)

- What it cannot refer to—punishment: John 5:24; Rom 8:1; 1 John 4:16-18
- What it does refer to—a time of reward: Rev 11:18; 1 Cor 3:12-15

Evil works or good works done from wrong motives are burnt up. Those who served Christ most faithfully will be most rewarded.

Two conclusions:

- Degrees of ability to enjoy the blessings of heaven seem a better way of interpreting these texts than some idea of pain or punishment.
- The intensity of one's reward is not related to whether your service was public or private, or in a humanly esteemed position or not.

Matt 10:41-42 Mark 9:41

Glorification

Two-steps:

1. Being made incapable of sinning by God—logically this must happen the moment you enter God's presence at death, since receiving your glorified body happens only at Christ's return.
2. Being given a real, physical body which will both be like Christ's resurrection body and recognisable as you.

OT references to bodily resurrection:

Ps 16:10-11; Ps 49:14-15; Is 26:19; Dan 12:2; Ex 3:6 (Matt 22:32); Job 19:25-27

NT references to glorification: Rom 8:17, 30; Phil 3:20-21; Jn 6:39-40; 1 Cor 15:35-53

What will our glorified bodies be like?

The fact that our new bodies will be "imperishable" means that they will not wear out or grow old or ever be subject to any kind of sickness or disease. They will be completely healthy and strong forever [Rev 21:4] our resurrection bodies will have no sign of aging, but will have the characteristics of youthful but mature manhood or womanhood forever. (Grudem, Systematic Theology, 831)

Three key points:

1. The term *glory* suggests profound beauty, perhaps even a radiance or brightness similar to the *shekinah* glory of God. (Matt 13:43; Dan 12:3).
2. The term *power* in 1 Cor 15:43 suggests we will have powers we do not have in our current bodies. Jesus could, for example, both eat and pass through walls unhindered (Luke 24:36-43).
3. There will be a high level of continuity between your present earthly body and your heavenly, glorified body.
 - It is *this* body that is changed (Phil 3:21; Rom 8:11)
 - Jesus was still recognisable as Jesus (Luke 24:36-43)
 - Moses and Elijah were still Moses and Elijah (Matt 17:1-3)

The Eternal State for Believers: Heaven

After the final judgement, believers will enter into the full enjoyment of life in the presence of God forever. (Grudem, Systematic Theology, 1158)

We shall then have rest without sleep, for God will be our rest. Richard Baxter

Biblical uses of the word *heaven*:

- the atmospheric heavens
- the astral heavens
- the celestial heavens—called the third heaven by Paul in 2 Cor 12:2

The eternal state includes:

- A new heavens and earth:
 - The uncreation of this universe: Rev 20:11; 2 Peter 3:10-11
 - The creation of a new universe: Jn 14:2-3; Is 65:17; 66:22; 2 Pet 3:11-13; Rev 21:1
- Believers will enjoy this new earth in fulfilment of God's promise: Rom 4:13; Matt 5:5
- The Curse and all its effects will be removed: Rev 21:4-5; 22:3
- There will be no sin in heaven: Rev 21:27
- Believers will enjoy an extraordinarily heightened relationship with God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit .

Randy Alcorn: *Our longing for Heaven is a longing for God. (Heaven, 171)*

*Heaven is His realm. He has gone there to prepare a place for us to live with Him forever. That truth is what makes heaven so precious for the Christian That is heaven's chief appeal for the Christian whose priorities are straight. Christ Himself is the glory of heaven. (John MacArthur, *The Glory of Heaven*, 12)*

John 17:3 1 John 3:2 Rev 21:3, 6-7, 22-23 Rev 22:3-4

Jonathan Edwards:

*God is the highest good of the reasonable creature, and the enjoyment of him is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied. To go to heaven fully to enjoy God, is infinitely better than the most pleasant accommodations here. Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, children, or the company of earthly friends, are but shadows. But the enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, God is the ocean. (quoted in Alcorn, *Heaven*, 185)*

- Heaven will not be merely the absence of pain; it will be full of joy and pleasure dispensed by God personally: Ps 16:11
- There will be a sense of time in heaven: Rev 22:2
- Heaven will be eternal: Rev 22:5; Matt 25:46

To understand the Bible's view of eternal life, we must emphasise both duration and quality: John 10:10

Fanny Crosby, "My Savior First of All"

*When my life work is ended, and I cross the swelling tide,
When the bright and glorious morning I shall see,
I shall know my Redeemer when I reach the other side,
And His smile will be the first to welcome me*

*Thru the gates of the city in a robe of spotless white,
He will lead me where no tears will ever fall;
In glad song of ages I shall mingle with delight
But I long to meet my Savior first of all.*