

What Happens When We Die?

While most people who think of themselves as Christians believe that their future lies in Heaven, or in Hell when they die, true Christians understand that the real answer to this question can only be found in the Word of God.

The Bible tells us that death came to all men because of sin, Romans 5:12, *'Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned.'* Sin is the transgression of the law – 1 John 3:4, *'Whosoever commits sin transgresses also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.'* Many 'Christians' do not believe that God's commandments should still determine their conduct, but God's Word is clear, *'If you love me, keep my commandments.'* 1 John 14:15. Breaking the commandments, is sin, *'For the wages of sin is [still] death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.'* Romans 6:23.

Despite this misunderstanding, all Christians, look forward to eternal life, but not all of them understand what happens when we die. Today we will examine what the Bible says about this subject and because we want to avoid any ideas of man, let us concentrate directly on the words of God.

The first thing that we should learn is found in Genesis 3:19, *'By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.'* Although our bodies return to the earth, there is a part of man which is not physical and which returns to God who gave it – Job 32:8, *'But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Almighty giveth them understanding.'* And also 1 Corinthians 2:11, *'For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.'* Ecclesiastes 12:7, *'and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.'*

So it is that on our death, God retains 'the things of a man' – the spiritual record of our character, personality and make up.

We ourselves though, know nothing after our death, for death is a sleep, 1 Kings 2:10, *'Then David slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of David.'* Revelation 14:13, *'And I heard a voice from heaven saying, "Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on." "Blessed indeed," says the Spirit, "that they may rest from their labours, for their deeds follow them!"'*

Jesus Christ has shown us that though the dead know nothing, but simply sleep in the grave, the time is coming when they will be awakened out of their sleep, John 11:11-14, *'After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep.' Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died."* Ecclesiastes 9:5 *'For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten.'*

Most of us are mistaken in believing that on death we go to heaven or hell, - we simply await the time when Jesus Christ will call us to our resurrection, Job 14:10-15, *'But a man dies and is laid low; man breathes his last, and where is he? As waters fail from a lake and a river wastes away and dries up, so a man lies down and rises not again; till the heavens are no more he will not awake or be roused out of his sleep. Oh that you would hide me in Sheol, that you would conceal me until your wrath be past, that you would appoint me a set time, and remember me! If a man dies, shall he live again? All the days of my service I would wait, till my renewal should come. You would call, and I would answer you; you would long for the work of your hands.'* John 3:13, *'No one has ascended into heaven except he who descended from heaven, the Son of Man.'*

All physical human beings who have ever lived have returned to the earth from which they were taken, and simply await their resurrection, those who have qualified to become the Bride of Christ, to the first resurrection, and others, the vast majority, to a resurrection of judgement. John 5:28-29 *‘Do not marvel at this, for an hour is coming when all who are in the tombs will hear his voice. and come out, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgment.’* Daniel 12:2, *‘And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.’*

Though there will be a resurrection for all who have ever lived then, two quite separate resurrections are described in the Bible. Acts 24:15, *‘having a hope in God, which these men themselves accept, that there will be a resurrection of both the just and the unjust.’*

The first resurrection is the resurrection of God’s firstfruit harvest of His Saints, all those from Adam, who have walked in the paths of righteousness. On their resurrection they will take part in the marriage of the Lamb, as His espoused Bride, Revelation 19:7-8, *‘Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him: for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints,’* and Revelation 14:4, *‘These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb.’* (See our article ‘Virgins?’)

For Christians today, the only way into the first resurrection is through Jesus Christ, John 11:25, *‘Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live.”* To believe in Jesus Christ means to believe in His words, His teaching and example, and follow it. When Jesus Christ came to this earth, He came preaching the gospel of the Kingdom of God, Mark 1:14-15, *‘Now after John was put in prison, Jesus came into Galilee, preaching the gospel of the kingdom of God, And saying, The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent, and believe the gospel.’* The apostle Peter explained to the Jews what was needed of those who repent, Acts 2:38-39, *‘Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.’*

It is the possession of the Holy Spirit, given to those who have repented and been baptised and who have diligently sought to follow Christ’s instructions, who will qualify to become the Bride of Christ and take part in the first resurrection, 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16, *‘For this we declare to you by a word from the Lord, that we who are alive, who are left until the coming of the Lord, will not precede those who have fallen asleep. For the Lord himself will descend from heaven with a cry of command, with the voice of an archangel, and with the sound of the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first.’* 1 Corinthians 15:51, *‘Behold! I tell 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 trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we shall be changed.’*

Those who rise to meet Christ as He returns for His Bride, will arise with a spiritual body, the kind of body Jesus Christ possessed *after* His resurrection, with all the characteristics and abilities He then displayed, Romans 8:18, *‘For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.’*

The resurrected Christians are next pictured in Revelation 14:1-3, *‘And I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on mount Zion, and with him a hundred and forty-four thousand, having his Father’s name written in their foreheads. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty-four thousand, who were redeemed from the earth.’* They now have Christ’s Father’s name written in their foreheads because they have married Christ and taken the Bridegroom’s family name. This takes place on the Sea of Glass before the Father’s throne in Heaven. Revelation 15:2, *‘And I saw as it were a sea of glass*

*mingled with fire: and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, **stand on the sea of glass**, having the harps of God.’ They are not long in Heaven though, Revelation 12:14, ‘*And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.*’ (Three and a half years)*

They then return with Jesus Christ to serve Him in His Kingdom, Zechariah 14:4-5, ‘*And his feet shall stand in that day upon the mount of Olives, which is before Jerusalem on the east, and the LORD my God shall come, **and all the saints with him.***’ Revelation 20:4-5, ‘*Then I saw thrones, and seated on them were those to whom the authority to judge was committed. Also I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for the testimony of Jesus and for the word of God, and those who had not worshiped the beast or its image and had not received its mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*’

Only at the end of the millennium are the rest of the dead resurrected, Revelation 20:11-15, ‘*Then I saw a **great white throne** and him who was seated on it. From his presence earth and sky fled away, and no place was found for them. **And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne**, and books were opened. Then another book was opened, which is the book of life. And the dead were judged by what was written in the books, according to what they had done. And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them, **and they were judged**, each one of them, according to what they had done. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire. And if anyone’s name was not found written in the book of life, he was thrown into the lake of fire.*’

This is the resurrection of all those who did not qualify to become the Bride of Christ, though some did qualify for special positions because they repented *during* the Great Tribulation, after the first resurrection, Revelation 7:14 – 17, ‘*And I said unto him, Sir, you know. And he said to me, These are they who **came out of the great tribulation**, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple: and he that sits on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun strike them, nor any heat. For the Lamb who is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.*’

These will be resurrected as spirit beings and assist Christ and His Bride during the 100 years of the Great White Throne Judgment, when the rest of the dead will have their chance to fully understand God’s way and gain their membership of God’s family, if they have repented, Isaiah 65:20, ‘*No more shall there be in it an infant who lives but a few days, or an old man who does not fill out his days, for the young man shall die a hundred years old, and the sinner a hundred years old shall be accursed.*

Apart from those who repented during the Great Tribulation, the rest of the dead arise then as physical human beings, and are judged on their conduct during their lifetimes of one hundred years.

Any who refuse to repent, including those who fully understood but rejected God’s way during this present age, will be consumed in the lake of fire, Revelation 20:14, ‘*And death and hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death.*’ 2 Peter 3:11-13, ‘*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in all holy conduct and godliness, Looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, in which the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, in which dwells righteousness.*’

Obviously, most Christians have been misled by false teaching. Or should that read, ‘false churches’?

What about ‘Hell’?

Hell in the Bible is the translation of four quite different words.

1. Gehenna – Greek, the ever burning dump at the time of Christ, in the valley of Ge-Hinnom, West of Jerusalem, pictures the lake of fire – the ultimate destination of the irredeemably wicked, Revelation 21:8, *‘But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the detestable, as for murderers, the sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their portion will be in the lake that burns with fire and sulfur, which is the second death.’*
2. Hades – Greek, Corresponds to the Hebrew word -
3. Sheol – and means the place in which the dead rest, until their resurrection, ie, death or the grave. In the parable of the rich man, Luke 16:23, *‘and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.’* The rich man is in torment *at his resurrection*, at the sight of his fate in the lake of fire. Acts 2:27, *‘Because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.’* Here Jesus Christ is also pictured as resting in hell or the grave, until His resurrection three days later. John 5:28, *‘Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice.’*
4. Tartarus – Greek, the place of restraint where Satan and the demons are held during the millennium, and some demons now, 2 Peter 2:4, *‘For if God did not spare angels when they sinned, but cast them into hell and committed them to chains of gloomy darkness to be kept until the judgment.’*

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