



What Happens After Death?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WORD BIBLE STUDY SERIES

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What happens after death? As we encounter death on a regular basis – and attempt to come to the realization that we will die, surely this question is bound to cross our minds (likely on a regular basis). Of course, we have not experienced death so as to understand what is waiting for us – and those who have died are not here to tell us about what they are experiencing. In addition, science and observation cannot tell us even *one thing* about what we will experience after we die! It is only God (who is Spirit, John 4:24) who can accurately tell what is waiting for us after life on this earth is over. Therefore, let's observe what God has said about what is waiting for us after death – in His word, the Bible.

Death Is A Certainty

Death is a certainty. We can know this fact by our own observation. Plants die. Animals die. People die. Death is all around us. In addition, the fact that our bodies are aging demonstrates that we are all in the dying process.

Furthermore, the Scriptures assure us that we will not escape physical death. No matter how many medicinal advances are made by mankind, man's existence on this earth will always be a temporary one. God says, "And as it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment" (Hebrews 9:27). So, begin by simply coming the understanding that you have an appointment with death (though you do not know when that appointment is). Just as we observe the world dying around us, we will also go "the way of all the earth" (in reference to death, Joshua 23:14).

Death Is Not The End

Does death represent the end of our existence? A proper understanding of what happens after death begins with the understanding that we will each continue to exist beyond death. If we are only physical beings, the end of our physical lives also marks the end of our existence. However, if there is more to our existence than our physical qualities, then we need to consider what is awaiting us after death.

The Scriptures teach that we are *not* just physical in nature; but, that we also possess spirits/souls that continue to exist – even after our physical deaths. Many passages demonstrate this truth. However, please simply notice that when God created man, He created him in His own image: “Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them” (Genesis 1:26-27). Therefore, passages like 2 Corinthians 5:1-6 refers to the continued existence of man apart from his physical body.

Hades

Where does your spirit go when you die? Does it go directly to Heaven or Hell? The Scriptures identify that there is a place called “Hades” in which the dead are awaiting the return of Jesus Christ and the final Judgment. So, whenever an individual dies, he/she goes to this temporary realm of the dead. Jesus Himself demonstrates this to be so – as Jesus went to Hades after dying on the cross (see Acts 2:27).

Luke 16:19-31 provides the most information of any passage in Scripture about this place. In this passage, Jesus identifies two individuals (a rich man and Lazarus) who both experienced physical deaths. However, they continued to exist in two very different places within this Hadean realm. The rich man found himself in a place of torment (vs. 23) where he could find no relief (vs. 24); but, Lazarus found himself in a place of great comfort (vs. 22, 25). So, this Hadean realm (the realm of the dead) is composed of two distinct sections – a section of those who have been faithful to the Lord and are being comforted and a section of those who have not been faithful to the Lord and are being tormented. However, the Scriptures teach that this place is only temporary – and those who are in Hades will be brought out when the Lord Jesus returns for final Judgment (1 Thessalonians 4:16; Revelation 20:13).

The Second Coming Of Christ

When Jesus Christ was living on this earth, He promised that He would come again. In John 14:1-3, Jesus told His disciples that He would go to prepare a place for them – and that He would come again to receive them to Himself. However, Jesus also identified the fact that this Day would come at a time that would not be specifically announced. In Matthew 24:36, Jesus said: “But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only.” Later, in Matthew 24:44, He said, “Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect.”

But, what will happen when Jesus Christ returns? The Scriptures tell us the following things will take place: Christ will come in the clouds (Acts 1:9-11), He will descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God (1 Thessalonians 4:16), the dead will be raised (John 5:28-29), the dead in Christ will rise first (1 Thessalonians 4:14, 16), the

living will meet the Lord in the air (1 Thessalonians 4:17), the earth will be destroyed (2 Peter 3:10-14), the resurrection and transformation into our spiritual bodies will take place (1 Corinthians 15:50-54), Judgment will take place (Matthew 25:31-46), vengeance will be taken upon those who were disobedient and eternal rest will be given to the faithful (2 Thessalonians 1:7-9), death and Hades will be destroyed (Revelation 20:13-14), and the kingdom will be turned back to God (1 Corinthians 15:24-28).

The Judgment

As just mentioned, the Scriptures teach that the final Judgment will take place whenever Jesus Christ returns. Matthew 25 demonstrates this to be true. Matthew 25:31-32 says, “When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then He will sit on the throne of His glory. All the nations will be gathered before Him, and He will separate them one from another, as a shepherd divides his sheep from the goats.”

As you consider this great Day of Judgment, recognize (as the previous passage stated) that you will be present for this Judgment. No one will escape it! 2 Corinthians 5:10 says, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.” Jesus Christ will be the Judge (Acts 17:30-31) – and we will each be judged according to the criteria of God’s word, the things written in Bible (John 12:48; Romans 2:16; Revelation 20:11-15).

Based on how we have lived our lives (compared to this standard) Jesus will issue His final Judgment upon each one of us! To some (who had lived in a way that was faithful to Him during their earthly lives), He will say, “Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world” (Matthew 25:34). But, to others (who had failed to live in a way that was faithful to Him during their earthly lives), He will say, “Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels” (Matthew 25:41). Then, upon the conclusion of the Judgment, Matthew 25:46 says, “And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.” Therefore, we see that the way we live our lives on this earth directly impacts where we will spend our eternities (see also Galatians 6:7-8)!

Eternity

The Bible presents only two options as to where we will spend our eternities: Eternal life in Heaven or eternal punishment in Hell fire. Take a moment to consider how each of these two places are described in the Scriptures. Note that while we do not have all of the information we may like to have about each of these places that we do have all of the information we *need* to have! Particularly note that the Scriptures (i.e. Matthew 25:46) identify both of these places as being *eternal* in nature. Therefore, these are places we will live and experience their various conditions forever and ever!

Eternity in Heaven is described as eternal life (Matthew 25:46). It is described as being a beautiful place (Revelation 21-22). It is a place in which there will be no pain, sorrow, or death (Revelation 21:4). It is a place which will be without evil (Revelation 21:27). And, it will be a place in which we will spend eternity with God (Revelation 21:22-23; Revelation 22:1-5).

Eternity in Hell is described as eternal punishment (Matthew 25:46). It is a place that is depicted by fire and brimstone (Mark 9:43-48; Revelation 21:8). It is a place depicted by darkness, weeping, and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 25:30). And, it is a place of eternal separation from God (Matthew 25:41; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 21:8), spent with the devil and his angels (Matthew 25:41).

Conclusion

This is an overview of what the Scriptures teach will happen after death (though there is much more that could be said). As you have been able to see, these facts are either very comforting or they are terrifying. It simply depends upon how you are living while you are on this earth – because you will reap what you have sown (read Galatians 6:7-8). Therefore, your focus in life must be to prepare yourself for death and to meet your God (Amos 4:12) so that you will be found faithful on the Day of Judgment and be welcomed to spend eternity in Heaven!

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