

What Comes Next?

A look at what God has revealed about life after death...

What happens when a person's time on this earth comes to an end has always been a topic of interest for many people. God has "put eternity in their hearts," creating in each of us a curiosity for what awaits us beyond this life. Thankfully, God has not left us without answers! He has told us plainly in His Word what happens after death.

What state of existence do we enter when we die?

- While Job struggled through a time of deep depression, he spoke with God, questioning Him as follows. Job was very wise, and walked closely with God. Notice how he described the state of those who die:
 - **Job 3:11-18** ¹¹ "Why did I not die at birth? Why did I not perish when I came from the womb? ... ¹³ For now I would have **lain still** and **been quiet**, I would have been **asleep**; then I would have been **at rest** ¹⁴ with kings and counselors of the earth, who built ruins for themselves, ¹⁵ or with princes who had gold, who filled their houses with silver; ¹⁶ or why was I not hidden like a stillborn child, like infants who never saw light? ¹⁷ There **the wicked cease from troubling**, and there **the weary are at rest**. ¹⁸ There the prisoners rest together; they **do not hear** the voice of the oppressor.
- It's clear that Job understands death to be a state of unconscious rest, which can be aptly described as a *sleep*. When does Job understand that this state of sleep will come to an end?
 - **Job 14:12** "So man lies down and does not rise. **Till the heavens are no more**, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep."
- Will those who are in this sleep be conscious of anything happening on the earth?
 - **Job 14:21** "His sons come to honour, and **he does not know it**; they are brought low, and **he does not perceive it**."
- In the Psalms, King David expressed the same understanding:
 - **Psalms 13:3** "... O LORD my God; enlighten my eyes, lest I sleep **the sleep of death**."
 - **Psalms 6:5** "... In death **there is no remembrance** of You; in the grave **who will give You thanks?**"
 - **Psalms 115:17** "The dead do not praise the LORD, nor any who go down into **silence**."
 - **Psalms 146:4** "His spirit departs, he returns to his earth; in that very day **his plans perish**."
- King Solomon, the man God gifted with wisdom above all others, echoed this truth as well:
 - **Ecclesiastes 9:5** "For the living know that they will die; but **the dead know nothing** ..."
- And Jesus Himself described death as a sleep when His friend Lazarus died:
 - **John 11:11-14** ¹¹ "... **Our friend Lazarus sleeps**, but I go that I may **wake him up**." ¹² Then his disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." ¹³ However, **Jesus spoke of his death**, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus said to them plainly, "**Lazarus is dead**."

But don't the dead go straight to heaven or hell?

- Despite this being such a popular teaching, when all of the verses about death are considered together, it simply doesn't fit. In fact, on the day of Pentecost, when Jesus poured out His Spirit upon His awaiting disciples, Peter preached a powerful sermon in which he confirmed this important truth concerning King David:
 - **Acts 2:29, 34-35** ²⁹ "Men and brethren, let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that **he is both dead and buried**, and his tomb is with us to this day. ... ³⁴ For **David did not ascend into the heavens**, but he says himself: 'The LORD said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand, ³⁵ Till I make Your enemies Your footstool.'"
 - Of King David it was said that he was "a man after [God's] own heart." If he didn't ascend into heaven when he died, why would any other follower of God have gone to heaven?
- In Paul's writings, he tells us exactly what has happened to Christ's followers who have passed away:
 - **1 Corinthians 15:20** "But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of **those who have fallen asleep.**"
- **Seeming Contradiction?** – Jesus' conversation with the thief who was crucified beside Him is often quoted as proof that Christians who die go straight to heaven...
 - **Luke 23:42-43** ⁴² "Then he said to Jesus, "Lord, remember me when You come into Your kingdom." ⁴³ And Jesus said to him, "Assuredly I say to you, **today you will be with me in Paradise.**"
 - But in fact, this verse poses no contradiction, as the original Greek manuscripts had **no punctuation**. Capitalization and punctuation were added afterwards according to the translators' discretion. The confusion here is caused by the placement of the comma after "you," when it should have been placed after "today," to be consistent with the rest of the Bible. The comma placement completely changes the meaning of Jesus' statement:
 - "Assuredly **I say to you today**, you will be with Me in Paradise."
 - Notice what Jesus said to Mary, when she met Him after His resurrection:
 - **John 20:17** "Jesus said to her, "Do not cling to Me, for **I have not yet ascended to My Father**; but go to My brethren and say to them, "I am ascending to My Father and Your Father, and to My God and your God."
 - Jesus was in the grave for 3 days, and after He arose, He told Mary that He had not yet ascended to His Father. Therefore, if He had told the thief that he would be in heaven with Him on that very day, He would've had to have been either lying to the thief, or lying to Mary!

How long will the dead sleep for?

- Paul continues in his letter to the Corinthians:
 - **1 Corinthians 15:21-26** ²¹ "For since by man came death, by Man also came **the resurrection of the dead.** ²² For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ **all shall be made alive.** ²³ But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward **those who are Christ's at His coming.** ²⁴ Then comes the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. ²⁵ For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶ **The last enemy that will be destroyed is death.**"

- Those who have received Jesus as their Saviour, and have died, will not awaken from their unconscious rest until Christ's second coming. And it will not be until He delivers the kingdom to His Father that the final enemy, death itself, will be destroyed for ever. Until that point, death retains its hold on those who have passed away.
 - **Isaiah 26:19** *"Your dead shall live; together with my dead body they shall arise. **Awake** and sing, **you who dwell in dust**; for your dew is like the dew of herbs, and **the earth** shall cast out the dead."*

The Gift of God:

- **Romans 6:23** *"For the wages of sin is death, but **the gift of God is eternal life** in Christ Jesus our Lord."*
- How can we know for sure that those who die in Christ do not receive the gift of eternal life immediately? Well, if we claim to be Jesus' followers, we should trust His own words!
 - **Matthew 16:27** *"For the Son of Man will **come in the glory of His Father** with His angels, and **then** He will reward each according to His works."*
 - **Matthew 25:31-34** ³¹ *"**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. ... ³⁴ **Then** the King will say to those on His right hand, 'Come, you blessed of My Father, **inherit the kingdom** prepared for you from the foundation of the world:'"*
 - According to Jesus, this gift of eternal life will not be given to anyone before He returns.
- How are we told that this first resurrection—that of Christ's followers—will take place?
 - **1 Thessalonians 4:13-18** ¹³ *"But **I do not want you to be ignorant**, brethren, **concerning those who have fallen asleep**, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him **those who sleep in Jesus**. ¹⁵ For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord will by no means precede those who are asleep.*

*¹⁶ For **the Lord Himself will descend** from heaven with **a shout**, with the voice of an archangel, and with **the trumpet of God**. And **the dead in Christ will rise first**. ¹⁷ Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words."*
 - **1 Corinthians 15:51-54** ⁵¹ *"Behold, I tell you a mystery: We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—⁵² 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**. ⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ 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 up in victory**."*
- Scripture is clear that all who have died will sleep peacefully until Jesus returns in His glory. At this time, His mighty voice will call His followers from their graves to receive the gift of eternal life. Amen!

The Wages of Sin:

- What about those who choose to remain disconnected from God, the only Source of life, and reject the gift of eternal life—reconnection to Him—that He has given in His Son?

- **John 5:28-29** *“Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to **the resurrection of condemnation.**”*
- What will happen to those who are raised at this resurrection? Popular Christianity teaches that they will suffer eternal torment in a place called *Hell*. Let’s look at what the Bible says:
 - **Romans 6:23** *“The wages of sin is **death**, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”*
 - According to the Word of God, the wages of sin is **death**, **not eternal torment**. In fact, eternal torment would be a form of eternal *life*, but God is the only Source of life! Therefore, when one chooses to remain disconnected from Him, the result is that **their life will end**.
- So what type of “death” is meant here? Is it the same death which is likened to sleep?
 - **Revelation 21:7-8** ⁷ *“He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God and he shall be My son.”* ⁸ *“But the cowardly, unbelieving, abominable, murderers, sexually immoral, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars shall have their part in **the lake which burns with fire and brimstone**, which is **the second death.**”*
 - All of humanity will be raised from the first death, the one that is likened to a sleep. But the death which results from holding onto our sinfulness, and not receiving the gift of life Christ offers to all, is called **the second death** because it is final. It is the natural consequence of choosing to remain disconnected from the only Source of life.
- The second death is described as a *lake of fire*. What causes this fire?
 - **Exodus 24:17** *“The sight of **the glory of the LORD (Yahweh)** was like a consuming fire on the top of the mountain in the eyes of the children of Israel.”*
 - **Hebrews 12:29** *“For **our God is a consuming fire.**”*
 - **1 Corinthians 3:13** *“each one’s work will become clear; for **the Day** will declare it, because it will be revealed by fire; and **the fire will test each one’s work, of what sort it is.**”*
 - God Himself is described as a consuming fire, because of His perfect holiness. He is also described as pure light, in whom there is no darkness at all. Just as darkness cannot exist in light, sinfulness cannot exist in the presence of pure righteousness.
 - **Exodus 33:20** *“You cannot see My face; for **no man shall see Me, and live.**”*
 - God has veiled His glory for 6000 years for the sake of mankind, so that we have not been consumed. This is why He had to send His Son as the channel through which He could reveal His love for humanity, to offer us a new life in Him, that we may be freed from the stronghold of sin, and brought back into fellowship with God. In the day when the Father’s glory is finally unveiled, all sin—all that is contrary to His perfect love—will be consumed by the holiness of His presence.
- What will happen to those who have clung to their sin when God’s glory is revealed?
 - **Malachi 4:1-3** *“For behold, the day is coming, burning like an oven, and **all the proud, yes, all who do wickedly will be stubble.** And the day which is coming shall **burn them up,**” says the LORD of hosts, “That will leave them neither root nor branch.”*

- **Psalm 37:10, 20** ¹⁰ *“For yet a little while and **the wicked shall be no more**; indeed, you will look carefully for his place, but it shall be no more.. ... ²⁰ But **the wicked shall perish**; and the enemies of the LORD, like the splendor of the meadows, shall vanish. **Into smoke they shall vanish away.**”*
- The testimony of Scripture is that those who refuse the gift of life in Christ will be completely consumed and vanish away. They will not continue living on in a state of torment and agony, but will, as **Romans 6:23** says, **perish** in the fire of God’s glory.
- How will those who have received Christ *not* be consumed?
 - The consuming fire of God is **the same fire** by which He purifies our hearts and lives today, if we let Him! When we invite Him to dwell within us by His Spirit, He works in us to cleanse our lives from all that is sinful—all that is contrary to His holiness.
 - **Luke 3:16** *“John answered ... “I indeed baptize you with water; but One mightier than I is coming, whose sandal strap I am not worthy to loose. He will baptize you with **the Holy Spirit and fire.**”*
 - **Psalms 66:10-12** ¹⁰ *“For You, O God, have tested us; **You have refined us as silver is refined.** ...¹² We went **through fire** and through water, but **You brought us out to rich fulfillment.**”*
 - When we surrender to this refining fire *now*, God will fulfill His promise to cleanse us from sin and clothe us with His own righteousness. This is why we must go through trials in this life, to refine our faith—to teach us how to surrender fully, to receive and experience this new life in Him.
 - **1 Peter 4:12** *“Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the **fiery trial** which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you;”*
 - **1 Peter 1:6-7** ⁶ *“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, **if need be**, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that **the genuineness of your faith**, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is **tested by fire**, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ,”*
- Why must the Father finally unveil His glory?
 - **2 Peter 3:5-7, 10-13** ⁵ *“For this they willfully forget: that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of water and in the water, ⁶ by which **the world that then existed perished**, being flooded with water. ⁷ But the heavens and the earth which are now preserved by the same word, are **reserved for fire** until the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men. ...*

¹⁰ *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will **pass away with a great noise**, and the elements will **melt with fervent heat**; both the earth and the works that are in it will be **burned up**. ¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be **dissolved**, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for **new heavens and a new earth** in which righteousness dwells.”*
 - God must unveil His glory in order to completely dissolve and purify the heavens and the earth of all sin, so that He can create a new heavens and new earth in which sin will never again exist!

- What about the verses that say that the lake of fire will burn “forever and ever”?
 - **Revelation 20:10** “The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night **forever and ever.**”
 - **Revelation 14:11** “And the smoke of their torment ascends **forever and ever**; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”
 - These verses are often quoted to uphold the idea of eternal torment, though we’ve seen that this contradicts with so many other verses. However, a simple study of the Greek is all that is needed to clear up this confusion. The Greek word translated as “forever and ever”, simply means to burn **to completion**, or to the end of the age. This will take a certain amount of time, but it will not go on indefinitely. As we’ve seen, those who don’t receive life in Christ will be completely consumed, “into smoke they shall vanish away.” Notice also how **the end of the devil’s life** is prophesied:
 - **Ezekiel 28:18-19** ¹⁸ “You have **defiled your sanctuaries** by the multitude of your iniquities, by the iniquity of your trading; therefore I will bring forth **a fire from the midst of you; it shall devour you, and will bring you to ashes upon the earth** in the sight of all who behold you. ¹⁹ All who know you among the people shall be astonished at you; you have become a horror, and **shall be no more forever.**”
 - Why would God permit the devil to live on in a place called “hell” where he torments humans for eternity? This doctrine was brought into Christianity by the devil himself to paint a horribly twisted picture of God’s character, and deny his own impending death. The truth is that Satan’s sinfulness will cause him to be consumed in the presence of God’s holiness, and he will be brought to nothing but ashes upon the earth.
 - Anyone who rejects the free gift of new life in Christ will unfortunately meet this end as well. The sinful life they have clung to will be consumed by fire when God’s glory is revealed, and their existence will end. They will share the fate of Satan and be “no more forever,” and this causes God more anguish than we can ever know. God desires to save every one of His precious children from this end, but He will never take away our free will to choose.

The Purpose of it All:

- God must finally unveil His glory so that the heavens and earth can be purified of all sin, and all can be restored to perfect harmony. Only then will our Father once again be able to dwell with His children in perfect fellowship, face to face.
 - **Revelation 21:1-5** ¹ “Now I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for **the first heaven and the first earth had passed away**. Also there was no more sea. ² Then I, John, saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, “Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and **He will dwell with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God.** ⁴ And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes; there shall be **no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying**. There shall be **no more pain**, for the former things have passed away. ⁵ Then He who sat on the throne said, “Behold, **I make all things new.**” And he said to me, “Write, for these words are true and faithful.”

- **Revelation 22:4-5** ⁴ ***“They shall see His face, and His name shall be on their foreheads. ⁵ There shall be no night there: They need no lamp nor light of the sun, for the Lord God gives them light. **And they shall reign forever and ever.”*****
- If you haven't accepted Jesus as your personal Saviour, God is entreating you today. He wants you to live with Him and His Son forever in perfect joy and peace, as a member of His eternal family. That's why He created you! He sent His Son to conquer the sin and death humanity was bound by, so that He could send the gift of His victorious Spirit into our hearts, to free us from this bondage and give us *new* life in Him.
 - He's offering this gift to you today. Will you accept it?
 - **2 Peter 3:9** *“The Lord is not slack concerning His promise, as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, **not willing that any should perish** but that all should come to repentance.”*
 - **John 3:16** *“For God **so loved the world** that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have **everlasting life.**”*