

What Happens to Us When We Die?

A Study Outline

I. The vast majority of people in this nation believe that they “go to heaven” at death, despite an avalanche of evidence to the contrary.

II. What the Scriptures tell us about life after death is clear and powerful.

A. Death is like sleep.

1. Job 7:21. *“And why do you not pardon my transgression, and take away my iniquity? For now shall I **sleep** in the dust, and You shall seek me in the morning, but I shall not be.”*
sleep (7901) = *shakab*, “to lie down (for rest, death, or any other purpose)”.
2. Job 14:12. *“So man lies down, and rises not; till the heaven be no more, they shall not awake, nor be raised out of their **sleep**.”*
sleep (8142) = *shenah*, “sleep”; from 3462, *yashen*, to be slack or languid, i.e. (by impl.) sleep”.
3. Psalm 13:3. *“Consider and hear me, O Lord my God; lighten Your eyes, lest I **sleep the sleep of death**.”*
sleep (3462) = *yashen* (see above).
4. Daniel 12:2. *“And many of them that **sleep** in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt.”*
sleep (3463) = *yashen*, “sleepy”.
5. Matthew 9:24 [the raising of Jairus’ daughter; see also Mark 5:39 and Luke 8:52]. *“He said unto them, Give place, for the maid is not dead but **sleeps**. And they laughed Him to scorn.”*
sleep (2518) = *katheudo* “to lie down to rest, i.e. (by impl.) to fall asleep.”
6. John 11:11-15. (v. 11) *“These things He said; and after that He said unto them, Our friend Lazarus **sleeps**, but I go that I may awaken him out of sleep.”* v. 14. *“Lazarus is dead.”*
sleep (2837) = *koimao*, “to put to sleep, i.e., to slumber, fig. to decease.”
7. I Corinthians 11:30. *“For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many **sleep**.”*
sleep (2837). See 2 above.
8. I Corinthians 15:51. *“Behold, I show you a mystery: we shall not all **sleep**, but we shall all be changed”*
sleep (2837). See 2 above.
9. I Thessalonians 4:14. *“For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which **sleep** in Jesus will God bring with Him.”*
sleep (2837). See 2 above.
10. I Thessalonians 5:10. *“... who died for us, that, whether we wake or **sleep**, we should live together with Him.”*
sleep (2518). See 1 above.

B. The dead are not conscious and active.

1. Psalm 6:3-5. *“My soul is also sore vexed, but You, O Lord, how long? Return, O Lord, deliver my soul; oh save me for Your mercy’s sake. For in death there is no remembrance of you: in the grave who shall give You thanks?”*
2. Psalm 115:17. *“The dead praise not the Lord, neither any that go down in to silence.”* Yet,

those who say there is spirit life immediately after death claim that these saints are praising God in His presence.

3. Psalm 146:4. *"His breath goes forth, he returns to the earth; in that very day his thoughts perish."*
4. Ecclesiastes 9:5-6, 10. *"For the living know that they shall die, but the dead know not anything, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy is now perished, neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun Whatsoever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in the grave, where you go."*
5. Isaiah 38:18-19. *"For the grave cannot praise You, death cannot celebrate You: they that go down into the pit cannot hope for Your truth. The living, the living, he shall praise You, as I do this day: the father to the children shall make known Your truth."*
6. Acts 2:29, 34. *"Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulcher is with us unto this day For David is not ascended into the heavens ...",* even though David was promised a heavenly reward (Ezekiel 34:23-24; Psalm 23:6). Also, we know from Philippians 1:21-24 that the "real person" of Paul was his spirit ... for "he" spoke of either staying with the physical saints at Philippi, or departing to be (at the resurrection) with Christ. Thus, if David is dead, then he is not possibly conscious and active.

III. The Scriptures make plain that the consciousness of the saints is revived at the resurrection, which is at the second coming of Jesus Christ. This great event has not yet occurred, so therefore the saints are yet in the grave and are not conscious.

- A. I Corinthians 15:51-52. *"Behold, I show 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 trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed."* Here the resurrection of the dead is said to occur at a particular time in the future, at the last trumpet (see Revelation 11:15), so the idea that people are resurrected to be with Christ right after death on a continuous basis is untenable.
- B. John 11:23-24. *"Jesus said unto her, Your brother shall raise again. Martha said unto Him, I know that he shall rise again in the resurrection **at the last day.**"*
- C. Job 14:14. *"If a man die shall he live again? All the days of my appointed time will I wait until my change comes."*
- D. I Corinthians 15:22-23. *"For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But every man [will be made spirit] in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, and afterwards they that are Christ's at His coming."*
- E. We will be raised to eternal spirit existence like Jesus Christ was, for He is the "firstborn of many brethren" (Romans 8:29).
- F. Acts 1:9. *"And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld, He was taken up, and a cloud [of angels] received Him out of their sight."* The very same things will occur for the saints at their resurrection: Matthew 24:30-31. *"And then shall appear the sign of the Son of man in heaven: and then shall all the tribes of the earth mourn, and they shall see the Son of man coming in the **clouds of heaven** with power and great glory. And **He shall send His angels** with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other."*
- G. It is apparent, from these scriptures, that heaven (the spirit realm) is a "mirror-image" of the physical earth, just in a different dimension, for the dead are raised from out of their graves which are located at various places across the earth and in the sea. That must be where they have been "sleeping", for Jesus dispatches the angels to all parts of the earth to retrieve them.

IV. If the dead saints are raised throughout this age as soon as they die, then what is the purpose of the resurrection at a specific time in the future? Will those raised to eternal life return to their graves on earth to be raised a second time? Does that make sense?

V. How did the lie of the saints going to heaven directly at death originate?

A. Its idea springs from the “immortal soul” idea which originated with Satan himself. Genesis 3:4-5. “*And the serpent [Satan] said unto the woman, **You shall not surely die:** for God knows that in the day you eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and you shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.*”

1. Yet, God says, “*The soul that sins, it shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4, 20).

2. Matthew 10:28. “*And fear not them which kill the body but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell [Gehenna fire].*” Incidentally, this verse also does away with an ever-burning hell that tortures evil men for eternity: the soul and body are **destroyed** in gehenna, not tortured forever.

3. Romans 2:7. “*... to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honor and incorruptibility, eternal life.*” If men already had eternal life, then why seek after it? As of now, only Jesus Christ has immortality (I Timothy 6:16).

4. If a person already has immortality, then what is the purpose of a resurrection? The idea of an “immortal soul”, of pagan origin, is in direct opposition to the resurrection.

5. Could it be that Satan, knowing he will be utterly destroyed (Revelation 20:10), cannot bear the thought of permanent erasure of himself, and is doing all he can to promote the belief that all living beings have a perpetual existence that transcends the grave?

6. In recorded history, the Egyptians strongly promoted the immortality of the soul, but we can be sure that the idea was injected into human culture from the time of Adam, on down through every civilization that followed.

VI. How can we counter the supposed proofs put forward by theologians who claim that the spirits of the saints travel to the Father in heaven directly after death?

A. **Counter the misplaced punctuation of Luke 23:43.** “*And Jesus said unto him [the thief on the stake next to him], Verily I say unto you, Today you shall be with Me in paradise.*” The sentence should read, “*Verily I say unto you today, you shall be with Me in paradise.*”

1. The first rendering is patently false in its punctuation, because Jesus had not even ascended to heaven yet on the third day after the crucifixion: “*Jesus said unto her [Mary], Touch [detain] Me not, for I am not yet ascended to My Father ...*” (John 20:17). How then could He have meant He would be with the thief in paradise (heaven) the very day they hung on the stakes? Note below what differences in punctuation can do.

Version 1

Dear John,
I want a man who knows what love is all about. You are generous, kind, thoughtful. People who are not like you admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me for other men. I yearn for you. I have no feelings whatsoever when we're apart. I can be forever happy — will you let me be yours?

Susan

Version 2

Dear John,
I want a man who knows what love is. All about you are generous, kind, thoughtful people, who are not like you. Admit to being useless and inferior. You have ruined me. For other men, I yearn. For you, I have no feelings whatsoever. When we're apart, I can be forever happy. Will you let me be?

Yours, Susan

2. What happened to Luke 23:43? Many years after the KJV was completed there was punctuation added ... and added in the wrong place.
 3. Note on the next page how changes in punctuation can seriously change the meaning of a message.
- B. Counter the idea that Lazarus and the rich man (Luke 16:19-31) is a story of two men who speak to each other, one in heaven and the other in an ever-burning hell, after their death and immediate resurrection.**
1. It is a parable, not an actual event.
 2. There is considerable symbolism in this narrative, such as the following:
 - * *“died and carried to Abraham’s bosom”* (v. 22) => the resurrection of the dead and establishment of the Kingdom of God (see Hebrews 11:8-13)
 - * *“Lazarus”* (v.20) => a form of the Hebrew name *Eleazar*, the name for Abraham’s gentile servant from Damascus who was to be heir of all of Abraham’s wealth until Isaac’s birth. In this parable is typical of all gentiles who may inherit salvation, if the Father calls them.
 - * *“fed with the crumbs that fell from the rich man’s table”* (v. 21 => a takeoff on Matthew 15:27, where a gentile Canaanite woman tells Jesus, *“Truth, Lord: yet the dogs [gentiles] eat of the crumbs which fall from their master’s table.”*
 - * the *“rich man”* (v 22) => related to Abraham, for three times he calls Abraham “father” (v. 24, 27, and 30); he was very rich, clothed with robes of purple and fine linen, and he lived in an exalted position
 - * *“I have five brethren”* (v. 28) => does not this sound like he was one of the sons of Leah, Jacob’s wife, who bore six sons, one of whom was Judah? (Genesis 30:20; 35:23) To Judah was given the promise of the Messiah (I Chronicles 5:2; Genesis 49:10).
 - * *“clothed in purple and fine linen”* (v. 19) => alluding to the Tabernacle, and the clothing of Aaron (as in Exodus 39:2), the choice favor given to Israel (Ezekiel 16:13), and the righteousness of the saints (Revelation 19:8)
 - * *“dip the tip of his finger in water, and cool my [the rich man’s] tongue”* (v. 24) => living water available from God, from the rock at Horeb (Exodus 17:6), to the water given by the Samaritan woman (John 4:7-14), to the living water coming from the New Jerusalem (Revelation 22:1), to the water of life from God Himself (Revelation 22:17)
 - * *“a great gulf fixed, so that they which would pass from hence to you cannot”* (v. 26) => the great rift valley of the Jordan River separated the land of Israel from the land of the gentiles. As this great geological “gulf” divides the “holy land” from the gentile’s land, so there is a great spiritual gulf between believers and non-believers. *“... what communion has light with darkness?”* (II Corinthians 6:14).
 3. The real meaning of the parable is not about “heaven and hell” at all, but a description of the blessings that will fall on those whom God calls and who believe in Jesus Christ as the Messiah, and the promise of inheriting the Kingdom of God and eternal life, versus those (modern-day descendants of Judah and other Israelites who reject Jesus) who refuse to believe on Him, and reject the promises.
- C. Counter the idea that the soul is immortal by understanding that this myth originated with Satan** (Genesis 3:4), who is terrified at his own fate of eternal death and has been infesting all of civilization since Adam with the belief that a person cannot die. Thus, eat, drink, and be merry without concern for tomorrow, since you cannot die anyway.
- D. Counter the thought that, while many scriptures confirm that the individual, in spirit, continues after death (II Corinthians 5:8; Ecclesiastes 12:6-7; Isaiah 26:19; etc.), none of these prove that the individual is alive and active immediately after death.**
- E. Counter the claim that the souls of the martyrs in Revelation 6:9 are actually in heaven**

and alive, having been raised at death to the Father's throne. See the paper "The Souls Under the Altar".

VII, What do we make of cases where there are contacts with people after their death?

A. I Samuel 28:14-15. *"And he said unto her, What is his form? And she said, An old man comes up, and he is covered with a mantle. And Saul **perceived** that it was Samuel And Samuel said to Saul, Why have you **disquieted** me, to bring me up?"*

perceived (3045) = *yada*, "to know, to ascertain by seeing."

disquieted (7264) = *ragaz*, "to quiver (with any violent emotion, especially anger or fear)."

1, Some will claim that this being was not really Samuel, but rather a demon impersonating Samuel. However, the text clearly states that Saul **knew** it was Samuel, and the name "Samuel" is used in verses 14, 15, 16, and 20 to describe who the individual was. It was not an "impersonator of Samuel."

2. Apparently the spirits of the dead can be "called up" in some way by certain people who have contact with the spirit world. What better reason to have them exterminated, as God commanded them to be (Leviticus 19:31; etc.)?

3. Notice that Samuel was "disquieted", or called up from a state of "sleep", which is the condition of the spirits of the dead.

B. Matthew 17:1-3. *"And after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, and brought them up into a high mountain apart, and was transfigured before them: and His face did shine as the sun, and His raiment was white as the light. And behold, there appeared unto them Moses and Elizah talking with Him."* Again, this appears to be as case of a temporary awakening of saints who were in a state of spiritual "sleep".

C. Matthew 27:51-53. *"And behold, the veil of the temple was rent in twain from the top to the bottom, and the earth did quake, and the rocks rent; and the graves were opened; and many bodies of the saints which slept arose, and came out of the graves after His resurrection, and went into the holy city, and appeared unto many."* Here there were many saints who were raised at least temporarily right after the resurrection. Presumably they returned to the grave and resumed the sleeping state after a certain period of time.

VIII. Some people believe that all people will be given eternal life, but the Scriptures are plain that there will be at least a certain number that will not repent and accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ for their sins.

A. This includes those not written in the Lamb's Book of Life (Revelation 20:15).

B. God made some vessels of His for wrath, that they may be destroyed (Romans 9:20-22).

C. The wicked will be burned up, as will be Satan and the demons and other wicked spirits, and they will be ashes under the feet of the saints (Malachi 4:3; Ezekiel 28:18).

D. There are some individuals who are "born wicked" from the womb, and will apparently never repent of their sins, leaving them open to destruction at the end (Psalm 58:3).

E. There is a resurrection of condemnation, wherein those who are raised from the grave who are wicked and will not repent will be destroyed (John 5:28-29). See also many other scriptures that indicate the wicked (tares, etc.) will be burned up at the end of the age (Revelation 19:20; 20:14-15; Matthew 13:30, 38-42, 49-50; 18:8-9; 22:13; 24:51; 25:30, 41, 46).

IX. Why will the wicked be raised at a resurrection if they are to be destroyed?

A. The key here is that a spirit **can** be destroyed if brought up from the dead into the physical realm; in fact, that appears to be the **only** way they can be destroyed.

B. Note the citations in VIII above, especially Malachi 4:3 and Ezekiel 28:18.

C. In various Greek and other sources, the gods had to be careful when they transitioned into the

physical realm lest they harm or even kill themselves. See “Dying and rising god” in *Wikipedia*: “The motif of a dying deity appears within the mythology of diverse cultures – perhaps because attributes of deities were derived from everyday experiences, and the ensuing conflicts often included death. These examples range from Baldr in Norse mythology to the feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl in Aztec mythology to the Japanese Izanami.”

- X. When we die our consciousness will cease, but, as far as we know, our next moment of consciousness will be the resurrection, rising from the earth to meet Jesus Christ and His holy angels in the atmosphere. What a momentous meeting to anticipate — the time of God’s government being restored — when we can begin ruling on earth with great power, along with Jesus Christ, to finally make the earth a beautiful, worthwhile place in which to live!