

WHAT REALLY HAPPENS WHEN WE DIE?

The Bible says those who have died know nothing. That means we aren't aware of the passage of time after death. We aren't aware of what's happening in the world.

Death is like a deep sleep. Your body and spirit rests as the breath of life—which makes body and soul one, and alive—has returned to God until the resurrection.

Whether you've lost a loved one or want to know what happens when you die, it's a question that weighs on everyone's mind at some point.

“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. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 9:5,6).

“and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

In the beginning God made man in the Garden of Eden from the dust of the earth. Then, He breathed the breath of life into Adam's nostrils.

In that moment Adam became a living being.

“Then the LORD God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature” (Genesis 2:7).

Notice the verse says Adam became a living creature when God breathed the breath of life into his nostrils. The King James Version says it this way:

*“And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and **man became a living soul**” (Genesis 2:7).*

His breath is what made him a living soul – a living creature. When we die, we stop breathing and we rest. Nowhere in the Bible does it say the soul is separate from the body.

A soul is a living creature (see Genesis 2:7 above). A soul is the combination of a body plus the breath of life. The soul cannot exist without the body or the breath.

“...the body apart from the spirit is dead” (James 2:26).

“as long as my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils” (Job 27:3).

We can see this idea illustrated by looking at a light bulb. Without electricity, a light bulb has no light. In order to produce light, both the lightbulb and the electricity are needed. Similarly, the body has no life without the breath of God. Your soul is not a separate being.

Some religions or denominations teach other ideas about what happens when we die. For instance, some people believe in purgatory, reincarnation, immortality of the soul, the afterlife, etc.

It is important when looking at different ideas about the state of the dead to weigh each teaching according to the Bible.

“If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isaiah 8:20).

The Bible says death is like a sleep and the dead know nothing. There is no need to worry about a loved one who has passed away. They are resting peacefully in the grave. They are not in pain. They are not somewhere else being tormented. They are simply waiting in the grave until Jesus comes back.

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THE FIRST AND SECOND RESURRECTIONS

THE FIRST RESURRECTION

When Jesus returns at the end of time, all who have died believing in Christ will have a bodily resurrection and go to Heaven with Him. This is the first resurrection.

This is the Good News! Believers have the hope of eternal life because they place their trust in the Lord Jesus.

“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. Then we who are alive, who are left, will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air, and so we will always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:16, 17).

The first resurrection happens when Christ returns. This resurrection is for those who were faithful to Christ and died. These resurrected people will join all the faithful Christians who are still living. Together they will go to Heaven.

THE SECOND RESURRECTION

The second resurrection happens after the thousand years have passed. This resurrection is for those who were unfaithful to Christ. These are the lost people who decided not to follow Christ during their life on earth.

“The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended. This is the first resurrection” (Revelation 20:5).

Unfortunately, these people are not raised to eternal life, but instead will face the second death.

WHAT IS THE SECOND DEATH?

Those who are raised in the second resurrection will face judgement. They will die a final death that lasts forever.

“Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14).

The second death is the eternal consequence of being separated from God. You may have pictures in your mind of eternal torment and suffering for the lost sinners – an eternal hell where fire burns the lost forever and ever.

But what does the Bible say? Those who die without a faith in Jesus will face eternal separation from God – *not* eternal suffering.

If the wicked were tormented in hell forever, they would be immortal souls. The Scripture says God alone is immortal, and only those who choose redemption through Jesus will be granted eternal life (John 3:15-16; 17:3).

“... the King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone has immortality, who dwells in unapproachable light, whom no one has ever seen or can see” (1 Timothy 6:15, 16).

And when the lost die the second death, they will be like no more, like ash on the ground. They are destroyed forever, *not* forever burning.

The fire is an all-consuming fire. And when all wickedness has been destroyed, the fire will go out.

“Behold, they are like stubble; the fire consumes them; they cannot deliver themselves from the power of the flame. No coal for warming oneself is this, no fire to sit before!” (Isaiah 47:14).

When Jesus died on the cross, He experienced what the second death would be like—the separation from God’s presence that all the wicked will experience when they die the second death at the end of the thousand years.

It was a devastating feeling for Jesus and He cried out just before He died:

“And about the ninth hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, “Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?” that is, “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46).

WHAT HAPPENS TO GOD’S FAITHFUL PEOPLE?

After the final death of the unfaithful, God will create a new earth free of sin and death. God’s people will live free of pain and sorrow. They will enjoy a life of eternal happiness where sin is no more. *“Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more... and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away” (Revelation 21:1-4).*

HOW DO WE PREPARE FOR DEATH AND THE RESURRECTIONS?

If you want to be a part of the first resurrection, you need to seek a relationship with God. Accept Jesus as your Savior today.

“For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16).

You can live a life of faith and be a part of God’s faithful people at the end of time through prayer and Bible study!

“For the Lord loves justice; he will not forsake his saints. They are preserved forever, but the children of the wicked shall be cut off. The righteous shall inherit the land and dwell upon it forever” (Psalm 37:28,29).

Through reading God’s Word you will learn more about Him. As you study the Bible and pray you will build a relationship with Him. You can accept Jesus as your Savior and follow Him in just a few easy steps. It will be the best decision you ever make!

“Because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9).

5 SIMPLE STEPS TO SALVATION

1. Believe in the name of Jesus Christ.
2. Recognize that you are a sinner in need of a Savior.
3. Acknowledge the penalty for sin is death.
4. Ask God for forgiveness and repent from your sin.
5. Accept Jesus as your personal Savior and follow him.

Once you've accepted Jesus as your personal Savior, it's important to live a life as Christ lived in response to what God has done for you. We want to be like Jesus—not as a means of salvation but out of our love for Him.

Jesus is our example! We can live a Christ-like life by following the guiding principles found in the Bible. Here are a few of those principles:

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law” (Galatians 5:23).

“Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things” (Philippians 4:8).

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another” (John 13:3).

Christians are to be a light in the community. Wherever you go, others should see Jesus in you. Jesus is love. Let's follow His example!

A prominent founder of the Adventist Church once said,

“The Christian pilgrim cannot be sour, gloomy, depressed. It is a misrepresentation of the Christian faith to be surly, unreasonable, or sour in spirit. My brethren and sisters, no longer cherish such a spirit. Heed the apostle's admonition to provoke one another unto love and good works.

How can you do this?—By conscientious, consistent behavior. Occasionally pause to sum up the results of such a course, to ascertain whether it is the wisest course to pursue. You will find that careful regard for one another's needs, kindly words of sympathy, and thoughtful assistance in helping others in their work, encourages not only them, but yourselves as well, because you thus become laborers together with God.” – Ellen White, *Manuscript Releases, Volume 7*, p. 99

This seemingly grim subject is important to Adventist Christians because it brings about hope to those who are hurting. Whether you've lost someone you loved and wonder if they will be in heaven – or you've wondered if they are presently suffering in hell, understanding the truth about the death, the state of the dead, and the resurrection offers you peace.

If you've ever wondered about what happens when we die, it's reassuring to know God isn't vindictive. He's not the kind of god who would torment his wayward children forever and ever. He's a God of mercy.

We also have the hope of the resurrection and of one day seeing our loved ones who have died in Christ resurrected to life again one day soon.