

What Happens When We Die?

SEEING THE GLORIOUS HOPE OF THE GOSPEL IN A STUDY OF LAST THINGS

Jesus comforts believers by showing us the life that awaits us after death and before he returns.

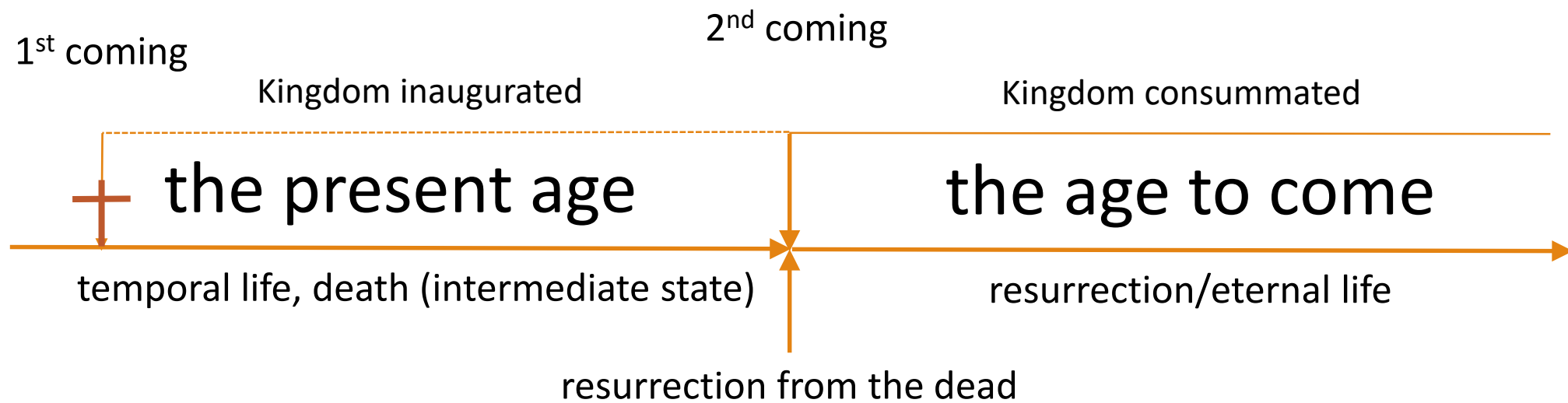
Face Death Thoughtfully

Ecclesiasties 7:2-5

2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for this is the end of all mankind, and the living will lay it to heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of face the heart is made glad. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

5 It is better for a man to hear the rebuke of the wise than to hear the song of fools.

Death is a reality in the present age



Our lives reflect the “already and not yet”

2Co 4:16 So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day.

Ro 8:11 If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies through his Spirit who dwells in you.

Old Testament on Life After Death

The OT deals with the afterlife only in very broad categories.

Many errors have arisen from not recognizing this.

Sheol is the Hebrew word used to describe the afterlife. It means “realm of the dead.” Either:

- the state of death
- the grave

→ Thus, both the righteous and the wicked enter Sheol at death (Ps. 88:3).

This realm is figurative and does not indicate a specific location.

Old Testament on Life After Death

Psalm 49:14-15

14 Like sheep they are appointed for Sheol; Death shall be their shepherd, and the upright shall rule over them in the morning. Their form shall be consumed in Sheol, with no place to dwell.

15 ¶ But God will ransom my soul from the power of Sheol, for he will receive me.

The wicked will remain in Sheol as their destiny, but the righteous will be delivered from it.

The wicked have no hope in death, but the righteous have great hope:

Prov. 11:7 When the wicked dies, his hope will perish, and the expectation of wealth perishes too.

Prov. 14:32 The wicked is overthrown through his evildoing, but the righteous finds refuge in his death.

Old Testament on Life After Death

The OT does not address the state of consciousness of the dead.

What about passages such as Psalm 6:4-5?

4 Turn, O LORD, deliver my life; save me for the sake of your steadfast love. 5 For in death there is no remembrance of you; in Sheol who will give you praise?

The OT rightly sees the earth as the primary theater of God's glory in the present age. We do not hear any praise or thanksgiving coming from the grave.

The New Testament sheds greater light here. The Old Testament must not be interpreted so that it contradicts the New.

New Testament on Life After Death

The NT is a clearer revelation of God's redemptive plan and should therefore be used to interpret OT passages on this subject.

The NT term for the realm of the dead is "Hades" (Greek translation of Sheol):

- Acts 2:27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One see corruption.
- Psalm 16:10 For you will not abandon my soul to Sheol, or let your holy one see corruption.

Hades, however, can also refer to a place of torment (Luke 16:19-31 – rich man and Lazarus).

- 22 The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side.

Life After Death for Unbelievers

Very little information, but the Bible reveals a state of misery.

The rich man also died and was buried, 23 and in Hades, being in torment, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham far off and Lazarus at his side. 24 And he called out, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus to dip the end of his finger in water and cool my tongue, for I am in anguish in this flame.' 25 But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish. ...28 for I have five brothers—so that he may warn them, lest they also come into this place of torment.' Luke 16:22b-25, 28

The Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials, and to keep the unrighteous under punishment until the day of judgment. 2 Peter 2:9

Life After Death for Believers

Philippians 1:21 ¶ For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. 23 I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. 24 But to remain in the flesh is more necessary on your account.

2 Corinthians 4:6 So we are always of good courage. We know that while we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord, 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight. 8 Yes, we are of good courage, and we would rather be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

Luke 16:25 But Abraham said, ‘Child, remember that you in your lifetime received your good things, and Lazarus in like manner bad things; but now he is comforted here, and you are in anguish.

42 And he [the thief on the cross] said, “Jesus, remember me when you come into your kingdom.” 43 And he said to him, “Truly, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.”

Soul Sleep?

Some teach that believers who die are in an unconscious state until the resurrection.

1Co 15:6 Then he appeared to more than five hundred brothers at one time, most of whom are still alive, though some have fallen asleep.

Does sleep = unconsciousness?

Indicates the temporary nature of the condition as well as the ease and comfort experienced.

Mt 9:24 he said, "Go away, for the girl is not dead but sleeping." And they laughed at him.

1Th 4:14 For since we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so, through Jesus, God will bring with him those who have fallen asleep.

Dread of Death

Joh 11:35 Jesus wept.

1Co 15:26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death.

Death is a real enemy, and the defeat of death is worth celebrating!

1Co 15:54b-57: Then shall come to pass the saying that is written: “Death is swallowed up in victory.” 55 “O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?” 56 The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. 57 But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

We don't grieve over death or dread it the way unbelievers do:

1Th 4:13 But we do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about those who are asleep, that you may not grieve as others do who have no hope.

The intermediate state is temporary

Believers will exist only as souls.

Complete human nature is both a body and a soul.

We will be conscious, happy, and blessed in the intermediate state in the presence of Christ.

We will not experience the final state of blessedness until the resurrection when we receive resurrection bodies.

1 Corinthians 15:51 ¶ 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 imperishable, and we shall be changed. 53 For this perishable body must put on the imperishable, and this mortal body must put on immortality.

Our Hope

The focus of our hope is not the intermediate state but the resurrection:

Romans 8:23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies.

- We will be fully equipped to worship the Lord.
- We will be fully equipped to serve the Lord and reign with him on the new heavens and new earth.
- We will be fully equipped to enjoy the Lord.

Conclusion and Preview

- Believers will experience conscious blessing and the presence of the Lord after death as we continue to await the age to come and the resurrection of our bodies when Christ returns.
- Preview: What happens after this? Jesus returns. When? How?