

GLORIFICATION

What happens after death? As Christians, we should never define death as “loss of life”? The Old Testament shows us that **death is** rather to be seen as an **alteration of location**, (from earth to Sheol) **and change of composition** (from the body-soul unity of life on earth to the separate life of the soul in Sheol). The New Testament expands upon this concept by changing the *location* from Sheol to heaven!

God defines death as “*Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return*” (Genesis 3:19). By the very essence of our creation, we are more than dust (Genesis 2:7). The essence of our life is set forth in Ecclesiastes 12:7: “*Then shall the dust return to the earth ... and the spirit ... to God ...*” This understanding of death is consistent throughout the Bible.

In the Old Testament, the life of the soul in Sheol is revealed as continuous with the present earthly life in terms of character and personality. David expected to meet his lost child and to know him (2 Samuel 12:23); Samuel, recalled from the grave, is recognizable as the Samuel who was known on earth (1 Samuel 28:11ff.); and Job (19:25–27) and the Psalmist (49:15) expected to *personally* survive death.

Does the Old Testament indicate that moral character will affect the condition of the soul after death? For the wicked, there is the hint of adversity in Sheol after death (cf. Psalm 9:7; Proverbs 5:5; Psalm 88:7–12; Job 31:12). There is the indication that wickedness will speedily terminate life on earth (Ezekiel 3:18)—the context suggests that there is a special doom awaiting a man who dies unrepentant (cf. Daniel 12:2).

However, the Old Testament teaching on the reward of the righteous is more comprehensive (cf. Isaiah 25:8; 26:19; Proverbs 14:32; Daniel 12:2; Psalm 16:8ff.; 17:14f.; 49:14, 15). However, Psalm 73:23, 24 is the most prominent in this regard. The theme of this psalm regards the prosperity of the godless and the suffering of the godly. The psalmist’s solution to this problem is that at every point of life and in all circumstances, the man who has God is richer than the man without God. In these verses, the godly man counts his wealth, has the assurance that God is with him, and will not let him go (v. 23). As he looks ahead, he sees a life ordered by divine providence (24a), and “*afterward*” entrance upon “*glory*.”

The verb “*receive*” is also found in Psalm 49:15 as well as in Genesis 5:24—it is a technical term for the divine act of glorification of the saints.

The New Testament presents a clear declaration of the bliss of the people of God as well as the condemnation of the unsaved after death. Jesus illuminated immortality when He

said, *“These shall go away into eternal punishment: but the righteous into eternal life”* (Matthew 25:46).

Along with the clear assertion of opposite eternal destinies, the New Testament is certain that death, the termination of life on earth, is the end of man’s probationary period. When a man dies, his eternal destiny is decided.

For those who die without Christ, the New Testament emphasizes the absolute justice of the judgment which God passes on those who die without forgiveness. Revelation 20:12ff. indicates that it is a judgment based on exact evidence as recorded in the “book of life” and in the book of human works.

Of course, Jesus is our authority in this matter: in His story of the rich man and Lazarus, He placed particular stress on the fact that after death, a great gulf separated the Just and the unjust, and He emphasized the impossibility of reversing that situation after death (Luke 16:26; cf. Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:12).

As evidenced in the story of Lazarus and the rich man, those who rejected God do not seem to have a change of mind or heart in their judgment—they do not repent even though they are cut off from all hope! The rich man did show concern for his loved ones still alive on earth, but he seemed to agonizingly accept his fate. It’s hard to comprehend that in appearing before God, sinners do not repent and cry out for forgiveness.

The judgment which God passes: In its *duration*, “**eternal**” (Matthew 25:46; 2 Thessalonians 1:9; Revelation 20:10), and in its *form* “**fire**” (Matthew 25:41; Revelation 20:14, 15), “**punishment**” (Matthew 25:46), “**destruction**” (2 Thessalonians 1:9), and “**the second death**” (Revelation 20:14). When Jesus used the word, eternal, He eliminated the idea of universalism—“great gulf *fixed*.”

In considering God’s plan for the “lost,” there is no joy to contemplate, but it should burden us to our God-given task of proclaiming the Gospel—particularly as we consider the glories which God has reserved for those who love him (1 Corinthians 2:9).

According to 1 Thessalonians 4:16ff, *“the dead in Christ we shall rise first: then we that are alive, that are left, shall together with them be caught up in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air; and so shall we ever be with the Lord.”* Thus, we have the immediate prospect for the believer at death, as well as the ultimate prospect at the final resurrection.

According to the New Testament, our death is followed at once by the conscious enjoyment of the presence of the Lord. This was the expectation of Paul, to whom to depart and be with Christ was “*better by far*” (Philippians 1:23), for then he would be “*at home with the Lord*” (2 Corinthians 5:6ff). Obviously, the apostle Paul did not expect any “sleep of the soul” after death, and such was clearly not the experience of Lazarus (Luke 16:23ff; cf. Revelation 6:9f).

Even this blissful enjoyment of the Lord at the instant of our death does not exhaust God’s promised blessings for His people. The redemption accomplished by the Lord Jesus is total in its effectiveness, the redemption of the whole man. In that respect, the New Testament provides the prospect of “*the redemption of the body*” (Romans 8:23; Ephesians 1:14), the *consummation of glorification*, when we shall see Him and be like Him (1 John 3:2).

Our life in heaven will be marked by glory, love, continuity, and transformation (1 Corinthians 15:35ff.):

- As regards **loved ones**: just as Moses and Elijah were recognized on the Mount of Transfiguration (Luke 9:30), so we shall see and know our loved ones (Luke 9:30).
- As regards the **toils of life**: the promise of blessed rest (Revelation 14:13).
- As regards **sickness, pain, and suffering**: no mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore (Revelation 21:4)
- As regards a **dwelling**: house not made with hands (2 Corinthians 5:1)
- As regards **deficiencies**: clothed incorruptible in white robes (2 Corinthians 5:4; Revelation 7:14).
- As regards **sorrows**: comfort and joy (Revelation 7:14–17).
- As regards **relationships**: “the church of the firstborn” with their common testimony to the blood of the Lamb (Hebrews 12:23; Revelation 7:9).
- As regards **trials and uncertainties**: provision and security, Jesus promised: “My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish—ever; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. “My Father, who has given *them* to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch *them* out of the Father’s hand. “I and the Father are one” (John 10:27-30).
- As regards God, the consummation of glorification, when we shall see him and be like him (1 John 3:2) The song of the redeemed proceeds not from faith but from sight, and His word is fulfilled: “*Forever with the Lord.*”