

After Death: What?

Introduction

Can anyone think of a more relevant question? All of us pass through the narrow passageway leading from this life to the next—the passageway we call death. We shall all experience the transition into a new realm, another existence beyond this life and world we know today.

Let us for a moment consider the personal experience we shall have with death. One day our hands will be folded across our lifeless breast and our eyes will be closed as our body takes its last ride to the cemetery. The purple curtains will be drawn. "The black camel of death," said one, "will kneel for each of us at our door, and we shall have no choice but to mount and ride off into the desert of darkness." Death is no respecter of persons.

Beyond Life...What?

We may only speculate on certain aspects of the future, not knowing much that it holds, but we do know the One who holds the future in His hands. And it is He who has revealed much of the future to us.

He who knows the end from the beginning, the future as well as the past, reveals in His Word that at death the body returns to the earth, while the soul goes to a temporary destination to await final judgment. Each of us determines in this life what our destiny will be; it will depend upon our response to the redemptive plan that God designed for the sinner's deliverance from eternal doom.

We may ascend to a place of peace in the presence of God, as Paul declared in II Corinthians 5:8. It is possible for us to dwell eternally in a place of happiness, bliss, and contentment, knowing that our redemption has been completed, that we have finished our course in faith, and that we are being rewarded. Or we may descend into a place of suffering, there to be detained until the final judgment and then to be sentenced to the everlasting punishment of the lake of fire. (See Matthew 25:46; Luke 16:22-26; Revelation 20:11-15.)

Both places are, in a sense, temporary, for we shall wait until our souls are reunited with our bodies in the resurrection. Jesus described the resurrection in John 5:28&29, and Paul spoke in detail of the first resurrection in I Thessalonians 4:16-17.

The resurrection of the just and the resurrection of the ungodly are separated by one thousand years of peace on earth (Revelation 20:2-7). The just of the present age will be those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb—baptized in His name and filled with His Spirit; the ungodly will be those who have refused to surrender to the terms of the gospel.

Final Reward to the Righteous

For those who are saved, there will be the city not made with hands—the New Jerusalem. This city is described in Revelation 21 as the eternal home of the redeemed.

Missing in this city will be the evil things that are found in every large earthly city. Gone will be all crime and violence. God's people will walk the golden streets without fear of molestation.

Revelation 21:18 describes the wall of this city as jasper and the city itself as pure gold. There will be no need for the sun or moon there, for the Lamb will be the light of the city (Revelation 21:23).

And, wonder of wonders, the redeemed will enjoy the blessings of this city eternally. The poet exulted:

When we've been there ten thousand years, Bright shining as the sun, We've no less days to sing God's praise Than when we'd first begun.

The Fate of the Wicked

In contradistinction, for unbelievers there is "the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone" (Revelation 21:8). The only emotions there will be agony and regret, and from that place there will be no escape.

The Present Determines the Future

Eternity-never-ending ages! A person's state there is totally dependent upon the present-what he does during time. His eternal destiny will be decided by whether or not he trusts in the redeeming blood of Christ and avails himself of its merits through faith and obedience.

Let us consider today the nearness of our souls to the rendezvous with death. David solemnly declared, "There is but a step between me and death" (I Samuel 20:3). Death is a certain step, and yet it is an uncertain step as to time, place, and manner. It is, further, a solitary step so far as other human beings are concerned. Only Christ can go with us through that dark valley.

Are you ready for that moment and for the eternity to follow?

The Bible proclaims how to prepare for eternity and enjoy eternal life with Christ: "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38).

JRE

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