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## What Happens When You Die?

From the smallest to the greatest, from the richest to the poorest, everyone eventually dies. But what happens after death? Can you know for sure?

BY KEVIN D. DENEE

**B**enjamin Franklin wrote, "In this world nothing can be said to be certain, except death and taxes." Every minute on earth, 108 people die. Ultimately, everyone dies. It is not a matter of *if*, but *when*.



Photo: KRT

Sadly, and due to a wide variety of reasons and circumstances, some seek death, considering it the only solution. Others try to delay the inevitable through good health. Still others tragically lose their lives through time and chance. Sometimes disease or other illnesses bring a death sentence, leaving the person with nothing to do but wait for the end.

Many view the end of their lives with uneasiness. They ponder, "What's next?"—"Will I live again?"—"Is this it?"—"Will I ever see my loved ones again?"—"Where am I going after this life?"

In contrast, others view death with fear of the unknown. Some fear the process and the suffering that may accompany death. Others, racked with guilt, have a different type of fear—fear that they will burn forever in "hell fire."

Whatever the viewpoint, feelings or circumstances of one's life—ultimately, life ends. Because of this unavoidable reality, every person at some point in his or her life thinks about the subject of death.

What about you? Have *you* ever considered where you are heading? Some live fast-paced lives, never stopping to consider such a large question.



Photo: KRT

On the other hand, most who are religious—including adherents of traditional Christianity—think they know what happens when one dies. Yet you may be surprised to learn that the religions of this world have deceived them about what occurs at death.

### In the News...

The 1994 genocide in Rwanda; the civil war that has raged on and off in Liberia for the last two decades; the current atrocities in Sudan, where endless numbers of peasants are being slaughtered—news of people dying in wars and conflicts around the world hits the headlines almost on a daily basis. In many instances, horrifying footage and photographs of the dead and dying arise afterwards; much goes unreported.

And then there are natural disasters that end hundreds, even thousands, of lives in an instant. In just the last 18 months, we have seen a devastating tsunami, crushing earthquakes, several destructive hurricanes and cyclones, wildfires and floods. In a matter of hours, families were uprooted, children made orphans, parents made childless.

Then there are criminals who torture, rape, brutalize and murder. For example, in June 2006, a Florida man cut down his son

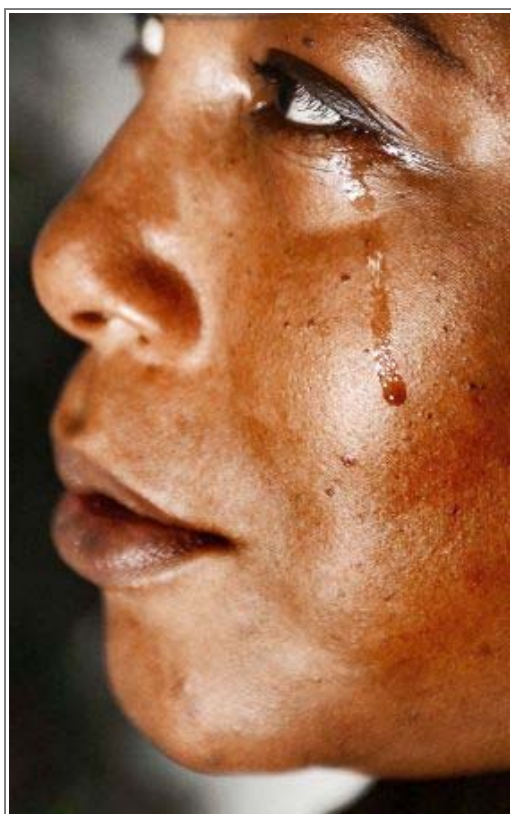
with a machete in front of neighbors, and then killed his wife. For those two individuals, death came suddenly, unexpectedly. Every reasonable human being expresses great sorrow for the victims of such heinous crimes. But what is next for the little boy? Is there any future for him?

There is much controversy surrounding death. For instance, the legality and ethics involving capital punishment is a highly emotional and politicized debate. Also, there have been high-profile cases in the media in which medical patients remain in a persistent vegetative state as family members disagree on whether the person should continue to live. Then there is euthanasia, the question of whether a person should have the right to choose when and how he dies.

On an almost daily basis, we are confronted with the subject of death in various forms.

### A Sea of Emotion

Many of the most powerful human emotions are tied to the cessation of life. The end of life can bring families, communities, nations, and sometimes even the world, to a standstill. When a sudden or tragic death occurs, this becomes a time for contemplation.



**SOBERING REALITY:** For many—such as the woman above, who discovered that she was infected with HIV by her husband—facing the reality of one's own death comes suddenly.

*Photo: KRT*

In the 9/11 World Trade Center attack, the entire world stopped in its tracks. People of every nation found themselves asking, "What if I had lost my family members?" Witnessing other people die on their television screens—in real time—was an emotionally overwhelming experience. What about all the victims of that tragic day? Do they have a future beyond death? Or are their lives over—forever?

Consider the destructive aftermaths of the earthquake in Pakistan in October 2005 and the December 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia. The struggle for survival; thousands left homeless; stories of those who would never see their families again—all tugged at the heartstrings of the entire world and stirred a sea of emotions.

And then there is the personal grief one feels when a close family member or friend dies, which can almost seem unbearable. There are few things in life starker than facing the harsh reality that you will never again see that person in this life. All that remains are photographs and memories.

Is this all there is to life? Is there *anything* after death?

### Religious Views

Religions abound in this world, thus opinions are plentiful. Some feel that all "good people" go to heaven or some form of paradise once they die, and that all "bad people" go to hell. Some believe that only the body dies, while the soul moves on to a "different plane of existence."

Just as religions vary, so do beliefs surrounding the burial of the dead. Some are buried in watertight caskets so the body is not exposed to the elements underground. Others are not buried in caskets, but rather cloth so that the body does not touch the dirt. Some corpses are buried in warm clothes so they do not get cold underground. Some mourners will cook a chicken for the last meal and

put it in the casket of the dead. Many hold viewings with open caskets before funerals, yet others feel that seeing the corpse is disrespectful. The list of superstitions and taboos surrounding dead bodies is endless.

But again, what happens to human beings after they die?

Consider the traditional beliefs of professing Christianity, which teaches that the saved go to heaven when they die. Presumably, this view is founded on the Bible—or is it?

Jesus Christ emphatically and clearly stated, "And *no man has ascended up to heaven*, but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of man [Christ]" (John 3:13). Billions of professing Christians believe that when one dies, he or she goes to

heaven—but this contradicts what Jesus said! And keep in mind that when Christ said, “no man has ascended up to heaven,” scores of God’s servants from the Old Testament had already died. Take King David, for example, described as a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22). The Bible explains that he will rule in God’s kingdom. Certainly, he would be in heaven, right?

But notice: “Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both *dead and buried*, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day...For David *is not ascended into the heavens*” (Acts 2:29, 34). If we believe Christ’s words, then these faithful servants of God DID NOT ascend to heaven.

Surprisingly, the very groups that profess to follow the Bible do not actually read or understand what is found in it! God’s Word is very clear—heaven is not the reward of the saved. (To learn more, read our booklet *Do the Saved Go to HEAVEN?*)

Again, we must ask: What is the truth about life after death? What happens when you die?

### Agnostics and Atheists

We have seen that the teachings of professing Christianity do not agree with the Bible. But what about atheists, who do not believe God exists—or agnostics, who believe that evidence for and against God’s existence is inconclusive?

For the atheist and agnostic, what happens after death is not important. According to their philosophy, life should be enjoyed in the “here and now.” But what if, like the teachings of traditional Christianity, they are wrong? What if God does exist and He offers an awesome future beyond the grave, not taught by the religions and philosophies of men?

Now consider this. Suppose you came to a fork in the road—how would you decide which way to turn? If you had been told that one road leads to a dead end in a desert, and another to a beautiful oasis, would you not want to know which one to choose? Wouldn’t it be best to do some research to determine for sure *which is which*, and which path you should be on?

No matter our age or background, we are ALL on a path that leads to the same sobering destination: death.

### What Does Happen?

Now let’s examine Scripture more closely. The Bible can be proven to be God’s Word, and it is His INSTRUCTION MANUAL to mankind. It provides all the answers necessary to enjoy a wonderful, happy and successful way of life.

First, the Bible is emphatic and clear that *everyone* dies: “For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yes, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity. All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again” (Ecc. 3:19-20). This reveals that a human being simply dies and returns to dust like any other living creature on earth.

The Bible provides even more detail of what happens after death. Notice Psalm 146: “His [man’s] breath goes forth, he returns to his earth; in that very day *his thoughts perish*” (vs. 4). A human being no longer thinks once he is dead; he simply is not conscious.

Now read Ecclesiastes 9: “For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but *the dead know not any thing*, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten” (vs. 4-5). Again, the Bible is clear about the state of the dead.



**UNIMAGINABLE GRIEF:** Many parents must bear the weight of their children dying prematurely. Above, a mother suffers the loss of her son, who succumbed to cancer.

Photo: KRT

But this leads to the age-old question asked in the Book of Job: “If a man die, shall he live again?” (14:14). The second half of



the verse begins to answer the question: "...all the days of my appointed time will I wait, *till my change come.*"

God's Word speaks of this "change" in scores of places, but what is it?

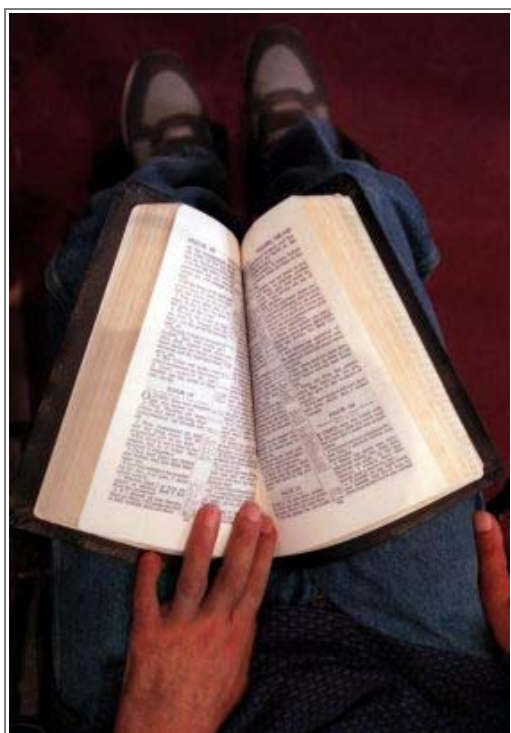
### God's Ultimate Goal

Most people believe that they are born with "immortal souls." But the Bible states otherwise: "*For the wages of sin is death*," but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Rom. 6:23). Eternal life is a gift. People are not automatically born with it. Since "all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23), and "*sin is the transgression of the law*" (1 John 3:4), there is a penalty—wages earned—for breaking God's Law!

Some religionists try to reason around Romans 6:23, saying that "death" merely means separation from God. But these scriptures are plain. God declares, "Behold, all souls are Mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is Mine: the soul that sins *it shall die*...The soul that sins, *it shall die*" (Ezek. 18:4, 20).

When a person dies, he is *dead*. Death is the ultimate "separation."

However, there is hope after death! Everyone who has ever lived will be resurrected: "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*. For this corruptible must put on *incorruption*, and this mortal must put on *immortality*" (1 Cor. 15:52-53). This is the "change" of which Job spoke—a change from this temporary, physical existence to eternal life. This is God's ultimate goal for humanity.



**SEARCHING FOR ANSWERS:** When death is imminent, some turn to the Bible for comfort, encouragement and answers. But sadly, the churches of this world—whose beliefs are founded upon the traditions and commandments of men—fail to teach the truth of what God's Word teaches regarding life after death.

Photo: KRT

Those who are being called by God *now*—who are being judged (1 Peter 4:17) and are building holy, righteous character—will be a part of the first resurrection upon the Return of Jesus Christ (1 Thes. 4:16-17; Rev. 20:6).

For the following 1,000 years, God's government will be administered across the world, bringing peace and prosperity for all (Isa. 9:7). Then will come the second resurrection, in which every man, woman and child who has ever lived—but who had not yet received an opportunity for salvation—will be brought back to physical existence (Ezek. 37:5; Rev. 20:12-13). All will be given a chance to learn God's way of life and to overcome the way of sin. Those who do will be given the precious opportunity to change to immortality.

No one is currently eternally burning in an everlasting hell—and no one ever will. What kind of God would send someone to an ever-burning hell to be tortured forever, without end? What kind of God would inflict such eternal punishing on those who never had the chance to learn His way of life?

Certainly *not* the God of the Bible! He will give all human beings the opportunity for salvation.

### A Future for You

Death is terrible. The Bible describes it as a "sting."

But there is coming a time when death will lose its sting—a time when death will no longer exist: "So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, *Death is swallowed up in victory*. O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory?" (1 Cor. 15:54-55).

Death has no place in mankind's incredible future!

There are many questions that cannot be answered fully in a few short pages. Take time to study our booklets *Is there LIFE AFTER DEATH?* and *How Religion Deceives You About YOUR INCREDIBLE FUTURE*.

In the study of your future, as well as everything else you do for the rest of your life, apply Ecclesiastes 9:10: "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."

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