

## Personal Questions that the Bible Answers

### What happens after death for believers? . . . For others?

**W**e'll start answering this question as it relates only to be-  
lievers.

Be ready to read the following Scriptures: [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#); [Luke 23:43](#); [John 3:16, 18, 36](#); [17:24](#); [2 Corinthians 5:1-2, 6-8](#); and [Philippians 1:23](#).

Within the Christian faith, there's a significant amount of confusion regarding what happens after death. Let's find out what you now think. I've got a few questions to get you started.

**Q. 1** What happens to a believer's soul/spirit when he or she dies? . . . What happens to the dead body? . . . Okay, do you have a different opinion about the spirit? How about the or body?

**Q. 2** Where might "judgment day" fit into your answer? . . .

**Q. 3** Does your dead body or your alive spirit *immediately* meet Jesus?

**Q. 4** When a believer dies, does he or she *immediately* face the Lord's judgment? . . . Or does a period of time pass before a Christian is judged by Jesus? . . . Or, do you think that our soul or spirit will be immediately sent to a "temporary" heaven where we'll await our final resurrection and judgment? . . .

**A.** There's an "intermediate state" when a believer's spirit or soul exists between our physical death and our body's resurrection. Though the Bible doesn't say much about this intermediate state, there are three basic conclusions we can make from the Scriptures.

1. Spirits of departed believers meet Jesus: [Ecclesiastes 12:7](#).

2. At death, the believer's spirit enters into Christ's presence. Jesus promised the dying robber on the cross that his soul would be with him *immediately* after death: [Luke 23:43](#).

3. Apostle Paul also taught that believers would be in Christ's presence *upon their death*: Read [2 Cor. 5:1, 2, 6-8](#). Now read that passage written in [The Message version](#) . . .

For believers, it's also important to realize that when we die, our body becomes distinct from our spirit. We leave our body and find ourselves at home with our Lord Jesus. Let me repeat that: When we die, we *immediately* leave our dead body and immediately arrive at home, in heaven with Jesus.

Paul also wrote that *his death would be far better for him than remaining alive because he'd be in Christ's presence*: Take a look at what he wrote in [Phil. 1:23](#). . . . Yes, indeed! Paul says about his living in the body: *"I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far."*

Jesus himself talked about believers being with him in the next world. See exactly what Jesus prayed: [John 17:24](#).

It's important to distinguish between "primary" and "secondary" theologies. Divorce and marriage are "secondary" issues, which are controversial! [See Warren's list](#) highlighting both theologies.\*

**Review: Q.** What does the Bible say happens after Christians die? **A.** For those who believe in Christ Jesus, our Bible tells us that, after death, believers' souls/spirits are immediately taken to heaven — there's no judgment day upon death! Why? Because our sins were already forgiven the day we asked Jesus to become our Savior. **Q.** Do you agree with that answer? . . . Let's find out what God says in his holy Word. Read these three key verses: [John 3: 16, 18, and 36](#).

I've got a follow-up question to ask you: **Q.** If believers' souls go to Christ *immediately after death*, what's the purpose of this resurrection for believers? . . . **A.** It seems that, while *our souls/spirits* go to be with Christ *immediately at death*, the *physical body remains in the grave* (some call it "sleeping"). **But**, at every believer's resurrection, *our physical body is resurrected, glorified, and reunited with our soul/spirit*.

Elsewhere in the New Testament, Paul clarifies a Christian's after-death existence. He advises us that **we'll be resurrected!** He adds that **we'll be given glorified bodies!** [Amen and amen!]

Let's find those specific passages and read them now. Start with [1 Cor. 15:35, 50–54](#). The NIV interprets that passage terribly, in my humble opinion. The NLT and The Message provide very clear interpretations of what I'll call our "resurrection bodies." I've got both here: the [NLT version](#). . . Here's [The Message version](#).

**Q.** Where in the Bibles can we find detailed descriptions of the new heavens and new earth of God's kingdom? . . . **A.** Apostle John gives us an eye-witness account of what a heavenly angel revealed to him. (You can read the full account of the new heaven, which he calls the City of Light, or the Holy City," or the New Jerusalem. . . Read Revelation 21 – 22).

**Q.** When will Jesus come and resurrect his children's bodies?  
**A.** No one, including Jesus, knows that date! Nowhere in the Bible is there a definitive timetable for the resurrection of all of Jesus' believers.

However, I found something that ought to provide some help with timing. Got Questions Ministries writes the following:

"This event comes *after* the tribulation, *after* the Lord's second coming, *after* the millennial kingdom, *after* the final rebellion, *after* the final judgment of Satan, and *after* the Great White Throne of Judgment. Its brief description of the new heavens and the new earth is the Bible's final glimpse into eternity."

Here's my reminder about the *intermediate* state between our death and our resurrection body: Though we have some information from the Bible on the *intermediate* state, that's not what we're to emphasize. **We believers are to put our hope in the coming of Christ.** That's when all dead *believers* will: (1) be raised in a glorified body, (2) be judged, and (3) receive their rewards. The *intermediate* state is only a short interval between this life and the fullness of God's promises. . . hence the lack of emphasis.

**Q.** What do you think will happen to deceased non-believers when Christ returns? . . . **Q.** When will **non-believers** be sent to hell? . . .

**A.** (*From Got Questions Ministries*) For non-Christians, death means everlasting punishment. However, unbelievers go immediately to a temporary holding place to await their final resurrection, judgment, and eternal destiny. [Luke 16:22–23](#) describes rich-man Lazarus being tormented immediately after death. [Revelation 20:11–15](#) describes all the *unbelieving* dead being resurrected, judged at the great white throne, and cast into the lake of fire. *Unbelievers* are not sent to hell (the lake of fire) *immediately* after death but are sent to a temporary realm of judgment and anguish. The rich man cried out, “*I’m in agony in this fire*” ([Luke 16:24](#)).



**Question:** What happens after death for believers? For others?

**Answer:** After death, people reside in a place of comfort or torment. These realms act as a temporary “heaven” and a temporary “hell” until their resurrection.

The first resurrection is for the “*blessed and holy*” believers who’ll enter the new heavens and new earth (Rev. 21:1). The other resurrection involves the wicked and unbelieving who’ll be “*judged according to what they’d done*” (Rev. 20:13).

Those whose names are *not* in the *book of life*, will be sent to the *lake of fire* to experience their “*second death*” (Rev. 20:14–15).

The new earth and the lake of fire are *final, eternal destinations*. People go to one or the other, based entirely on whether they’ve *truly* trusted Jesus for their salvation (Matt. 25:46; John 3:36).

For believers: (1) Upon death, the soul or spirit of the believer goes immediately to God and remains in Christ’s presence; (2) believers’ souls are alive and conscious in the intermediate state; (3) though it’s not our final reward, it’s a place of rest, waiting, activity, and holiness; (4) Scripture focuses on Christ’s return when he’ll raise and judge the dead, reward believers, punish everyone else, then set up his everlasting kingdom for all his devoted children.

\* Open and print Warren’s “[Primary and Secondary Theologies](#).”