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1-800-611-8080 / [www.cgom.org](http://www.cgom.org)  
PO Box 54621, Tulsa, OK 74155-0621

## When Someone Dies

**It's a sad day when a loved one dies. Will you meet again? Is there life after life?**

**What really happens when you die?**

by James McBride

Most adults have experienced the awful trauma of losing a loved one. An accident, a prolonged disease, or sudden illness blights the lives of the loved one's family and a wider circle of friends and colleagues. Tears well up in private and public grief. An awesome and unfillable gap breaches the orderliness of humdrum life. There's the gnawing pain of loss. Silence shrouds life's business.

*Why?* is often our first question. Why has this beloved person been taken? Death was so undeserved! Why, when so young? Why, when there was so much good being done? Why, when so beloved by all? The questions - seemingly unanswerable questions - crowd in thick and fast.

Less often asked is: *Where to?* Few like to pose that one!

It's easier when a dear one has led a godly life; easier when you can't find anyone who can in all honesty say a contrary word, when the life has glowed with joy and helpfulness and faithfulness and sound wisdom and encouragement; when life's winter follows a productive harvest of good deeds and love and generosity. Then you can rejoice when the minister says that the loved one is "with the Lord" and is happier than conceivably possible. Then you feel you can say *Amen* when he tells you that the loved one is even now beholding the face of Jesus in heavenly splendor.

### **Infant Reward**

But what if it's an infant who has barely drawn his first breath that's being lowered in the cold earth? Where are the good deeds to praise? Where the life of accomplishment? Where the belief? Or what if everyone knows the person of mature years has lived a life of selfishness, of greed, or miserliness? What if the individual was untrustworthy or an inveterate liar? Or a callous murderer or unrepentant child molester? Are you

comfortable to hear such a person, beloved or not, "preached into heaven"?

Further, have you ever heard the preacher announce someone has reaped the fruit of an evil life and is even now screaming in agony in the flames of hell? In evangelical circles it's the only available alternative - yet, usually unannounced in the "respectable" funeral service!

Then there are the in-betweens - most of us. We've done a bit of good. And there's been a dash of courage, a flash of generosity, a streak of loyalty... But no claim to be a "born again Christian." No profession - in a long lifetime - of faith in Christ as Savior and Lord. And probably lots of activities we would rather our friends didn't know about! What of these folk? Where are they after death?

### **Failed Missionaries**

How about the countless billions who have lived, have done good works, and have died - and the missionary didn't reach them in time to tell them salvation comes only through Jesus Christ? Where are *they*? After all, they *never had a chance* to accept or to reject salvation! Yet the Scriptures inform us that God wants all mankind to come to repentance.

And can we really believe that a loved one whom we believe to be in heaven can't see the agonies of those in "hell"? Can't hear the screams of pain? Has *forgotten* that a loving spouse (or an innocent infant son or daughter) never "accepted Jesus" - and, supposedly, went to the other place? Where is the untrammled joy in that? And can we believe that our omnipotent and totally loving Father in heaven can ignore their cries? Can permit them to suffer throughout all eternity? (Imagine holding a loved one's hand in a match-flame until it expires - and that's only a few seconds!)

## When Someone Dies

Certainly God is also a just God, a righteous God. But am I more righteous than Him? After all, I give my children more than one chance to “get it right”! Do you give up when your child fails to walk at his first attempt? Perhaps some of us never will get it right in this life, but does that mean we are fit only to burn for ever and ever? Surely God has infinitely more patience, more love!

### Source of Belief

These are logical questions and situations. They are questions that most of us don't face - *won't* face! Yet they are questions that are firmly and clearly addressed in that source of Christian belief - the Bible.

The fact is, even for most Christians, much of our belief about death and the hereafter *doesn't come from the Word of God*. They are unproven hand-me-down ideas from childhood. Yet, for Christians, the Bible is supposed to be the sole source of our belief. And what we find there-if we are indeed willing to take an unbiased look at it - is infinitely more satisfying than the concepts outlined earlier in this article.

So let's take a look at the clear Bible teachings. Recall what Jesus said: Man must live by every word of God! As Christians we must be willing to see what God is saying to us. And - dare I say it - not simply accept unquestioningly the powerful assertions of a minister (however well-liked, however charismatic, however caring and sympathetic) at a funeral oration.

There are some clear and simple Bible statements we need to examine and reconcile:

1. God *only* has immortality (1 Timothy 6:16).
2. There is a spirit in man (Job 32:8).
3. The spirit returns to God (Ecclesiastes 12:7).
4. The dead know nothing; the memory of them is lost (Ecclesiastes 9:5).
5. All in Christ shall be made alive (1 Corinthians 15:52).
6. They shall be made alive at the “last trump” (1 Corinthians 15:52).
7. The rest of the dead will live again at the end of the thousand years (Revelation 20:5).

Each of these statements demands a complete article! Each can be supported by a whole body of Scripture. However, it can readily be seen - since we are looking only to the Scriptures to inform us of God's teachings - that when that beloved one dies, the human spirit is safe with God until the resurrection, when consciousness will be revived.

### Resting in Peace

What does this mean? Simply that when someone dies - whether they were good or bad, righteous or unrighteous,

child or senior citizen, Christian or Hindu or animist, born-again or not - whatever their status, they will, when they die, remain *at rest* until the resurrection.

The Bible leaves no doubt as to when these resurrections (The Bible mentions several) take place. Paul tells us it is “every man in his own order” (1 Corinthians 15:23). He tells us that Jesus was the first to be resurrected in this sense. Then there's a “pause” until His return - an event now imminent! It is at this specific point in time (the return of Christ) - represented in Bible prophecy as the “last [seventh] trumpet” - that the dead in Christ arise from the grave, their spirit united with a resurrected body. Notice Paul's words: “For the trumpet shall sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and this mortal nature must [at this point in time] put on immortality” (verses 52-53).

That's the time gloriously celebrated in the famed Handel's *Messiah!*

The spirit of every righteous person since Adam has - according to Scripture - been preserved in God's care since death, and will remain in His care until the resurrection. *But they have not been conscious of the passage of time!* Nearly six thousand years in some cases! Yet - get this - in their minds they will at the moment of their deaths seem to be instantly with Christ! The intervening millennia will appear to have been obliterated - just like the effects of an anaesthetic!

But what about *unbelievers*?

### What of the “Heathen”?

The Bible clearly informs us that *all mankind* is to enjoy this rest. *Their* human spirit, too, is preserved by God. Whether a righteous Abraham or Paul, or an “ignorant savage,” or an evil Hitler, or the average unconverted man-in-the-street - all will remain in the grave oblivious of the passage of time *until their resurrection*.

Jesus took time to instruct the Jews in this very matter. He told them: “The hour is coming when *all* that are in the tombs will hear His [the Son's] voice and come forth, those who have done good to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil to the resurrection of judgement” (John 5:28-29). This same author (John), in fact, tells us when these two events will occur. He writes: “they (martyrs) came to life again [were resurrected] and reigned with Christ for a thousand years” (Revelation 20:4). This is in perfect harmony with Paul's statement that “the dead in Christ” (together with Christians then living) will become immortal at Christ's coming, at the last trumpet sound.

Thus, in one instant the whole universe will burst in joy as

## When Someone Dies

the family of God is resurrected to be with Christ! It is at that time - the Second Coming of Christ - that our beloved "dead in Christ" will receive their just reward (Revelation 11:18).

And the rest of mankind?

John enlightens us: "The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years [the Millennium] were at an end" (verse 5).

Isn't that clear!

### A Second Resurrection!

If we really want to believe what God tells us in His word we can't escape the conclusion that at least *two* resurrections - separated by one thousand years - lie ahead of us. The first for God's own chosen people, the second for the rest of mankind. (In his book *The Scripture Testimony to the Messiah*, John Pye Smith mentions ancient authors proving that this concept of a "second resurrection" for "all the rest of mankind" was agreed by the ancient Rabbinical writings.)

In this "second resurrection" all those whom God has never called in this life - the good, the bad, the indifferent - will be restored to physical flesh and blood life. In their former existence, Satan had successfully blinded and deceived them (Revelation 12:9; II Corinthians 4:4). But with this evil rebel safely out of the way for ever (Revelation 20:10), they will (just like Christians now) be judged out of the things written in the Scriptures. Then the Book of Life will be opened - sufficient evidence that God's grace for salvation will be freely available for them! Note again the word given to the apostle John: "And I saw the dead, small and great, stand [resurrected] before God, and the books were opened (of the Bible): and another book was opened which is the Book of Life; and the dead [now resurrected] were judged out of those things which were written in the books according to their works" (Revelation 20:12).

In other words, all women and men and children who have never heard of Jesus Christ or who were not during their lifetime specifically called by God (read, for example, John 6:65) will at that time have their very first real opportunity to be converted and to receive the Spirit of God.

### An End to Evil

Only after this final grand chance of salvation will "all hell break loose" in the evangelical use of the term! For all those *who fail to then repent* will suffer "the second death" in a hell-fire that is so fervently hot it will completely obliterate the remaining evil on earth (Revelation 20:14-15; 21:8), ushering in a "new heavens and a new earth."

In God's grand design for mankind, every man, woman, and child ever born in whatever age, in whatever part of the world, and no matter what their religion or their life-style, will be given - in God's good time - the glorious opportunity to freely choose life for all eternity.

What a beautiful and complete and fair plan! It makes sense of the mystery surrounding the death of our loved ones!

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