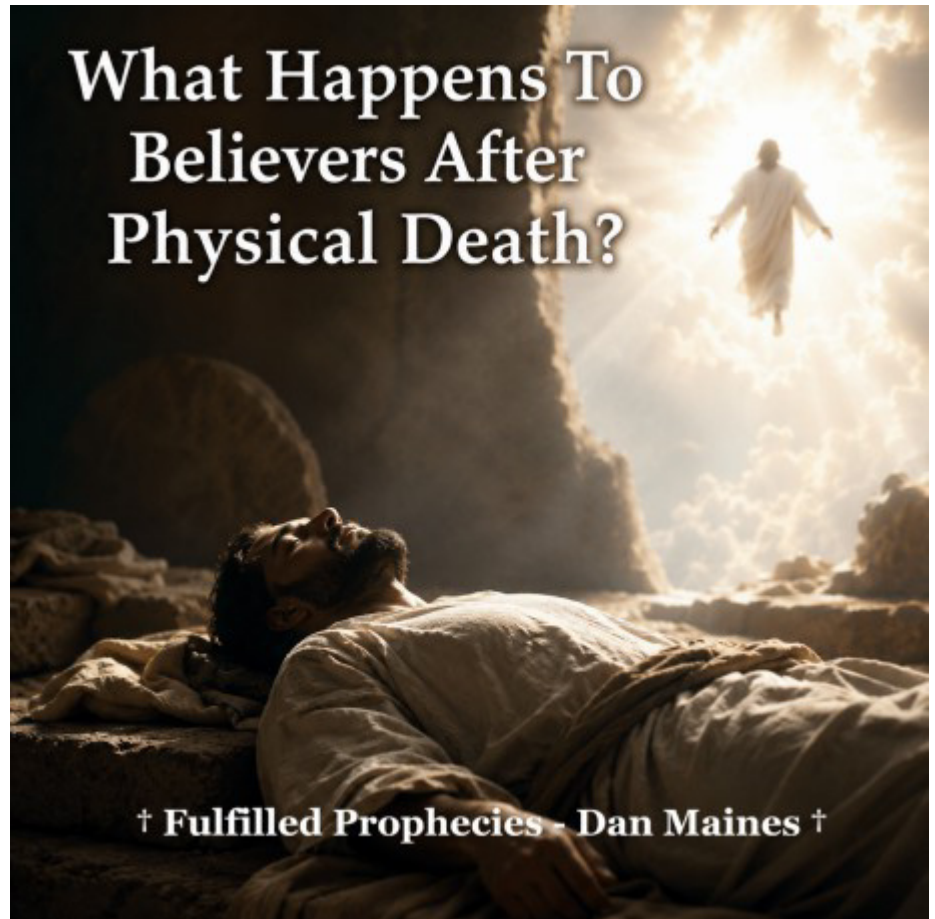


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What Happens To Believers After Physical Death?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† One of the most common questions Christians ask is what happens when a believer physically dies. Many assume the dead remain unconscious in the grave awaiting a future resurrection. However, the Scriptures present a different picture. Eternal life is not something believers begin to receive after death, it's something they already possess in Christ.

† The Bible shows a transition between the old covenant world and the new covenant world. Before redemption was fully

accomplished, the righteous dead waited in Paradise. After Christ completed His redemptive work and the old covenant age came to its end, believers entered directly into the presence of the Lord.

The Believer Already Possesses Eternal Life

John 5:24

Truly, truly, I say to you, the one who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

† Jesus spoke of eternal life as a present possession, not merely a future promise.

† The believer has already passed from death into life. That transfer occurs in Christ, not at physical death.

† If eternal life begins before physical death, then physical death cannot cancel what Christ has already given. (Colossians 3:3-4)

1 John 5:11-12

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. The one who has the Son has the life; the one who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

† John declared that eternal life was already given to believers.

† The issue is not whether someone dies physically, but whether they have the Son.

† Since life is found in Christ Himself, those who belong to Him never lose that life. (John 11:25-26)

Absent From The Body, Present With The Lord

2 Corinthians 5:1, 4, 6-8

For we know that if our earthly tent which is our house is torn down, we have a building from God, a house not made by hands, eternal in the heavens.

For indeed, we who are in this tent groan, being burdened, because we do not want to be unclothed but to be clothed, so that what is mortal will be swallowed up by life.

Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that

while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord- for we walk by faith, not by sight- but we are of good courage and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

† Paul did not teach soul sleep.

† Paul contrasted being in the body with being with the Lord.

† His expectation was not unconsciousness, but conscious fellowship with Christ. (Philippians 1:23)

To Depart And Be With Christ

Philippians 1:21-23

For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. But I am hard-pressed from both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

† Paul called death gain, not loss.

† He expected to depart and be with Christ.

† There is no mention of centuries of unconscious waiting between death and being with the Lord.

Believers Have Already Been Transferred Into The Kingdom

Colossians 1:13

For He rescued us from the domain of darkness, and transferred us to the kingdom of His beloved Son,

† Believers are not waiting to enter Christ's kingdom after death.

† God has already transferred His people into the kingdom of His Son.

† Physical death changes our location, but it does not change our covenant standing in Christ.

Paradise Before Redemption Was Complete

Luke 16:22-23

Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's arms; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he raised his eyes, being in

torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his arms.

† Before the completion of redemption, both righteous and unrighteous dead were in Hades, but in separate conditions.

† Lazarus was comforted in Abraham's bosom while the rich man was in torment.

† This was the condition before Christ completed His redemptive work. (Luke 23:43)

Luke 23:43

And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

† Jesus promised the thief immediate entrance into Paradise.

† Paradise was the place of comfort for the righteous dead before the full opening of heaven.

† This demonstrates conscious existence after physical death.

Christ Opened The Way Into Heaven

Ephesians 4:8-10

Therefore it says,

"WHEN HE ASCENDED ON HIGH,
HE LED CAPTIVE THE CAPTIVES,
AND HE GAVE GIFTS TO PEOPLE."

(Now this expression, "He ascended," what does it mean except that He also had descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is Himself also He who ascended far above all the heavens, so that He might fill all things.)

† Christ descended into the realm of the dead and ascended in victory.

† He led captivity captive, bringing redemption to completion.

† The old covenant waiting period was ending and access into God's presence was being revealed. (Hebrews 9:8)

Hebrews 12:22-24

But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the

righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† Believers have already come to the heavenly Jerusalem.

† The spirits of righteous people made perfect are pictured in God's presence.

† The focus is not a future arrival but a present covenant reality.

Stephen Entered Christ's Presence

Acts 7:55-59

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God." But they shouted with loud voices, and covered their ears and rushed at him with one mind. When they had driven him out of the city, they began stoning him; and the witnesses laid aside their cloaks at the feet of a young man named Saul. They went on stoning Stephen as he called on the Lord and said, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit!"

† As Stephen died, his focus was on Christ, not on a future period of unconsciousness.

† Stephen committed his spirit directly to the Lord Jesus.

† This is consistent with the believer entering the presence of Christ.

Hades Was Abolished

Revelation 20:13-14

And the sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades gave up the dead who were in them; and they were judged, each one of them according to their deeds. Then Death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death, the lake of fire.

† Hades was never intended to be permanent.

† Hades gave up its dead and was itself abolished.

† If Hades has been cast into the lake of fire, believers do not

go there today.

Blessed Are The Dead Who Die In The Lord

Revelation 14:13

And I heard a voice from heaven, saying, "Write: 'Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on!'" "Yes," says the Spirit, "so that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow with them."

† This blessing points to a covenant transition that was drawing near.

† Those who died in the Lord were blessed because redemption was reaching its completion.

† The believer's hope is not in the grave but in the Lord.

Historical References

† Ignatius spoke of believers being united with Christ beyond physical death.

† Polycarp expressed confidence that faithful believers would be with the Lord.

† Irenaeus acknowledged the hope of the righteous and the certainty of life through Christ.

† Early Christian writers consistently spoke of conscious fellowship with Christ after death.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Christians don't need to fear physical death.

† Our life is hidden with Christ in God. (Colossians 3:3-4)

† Death cannot separate believers from the One who is their life.

† Physical death ends our earthly journey, but it doesn't end our fellowship with Christ.

† Because we already possess eternal life, we can live with confidence and hope. (1 John 5:11-12)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Do believers sleep unconsciously in the grave until a future resurrection?

A: No. Paul expected to depart and be with Christ, not to enter unconsciousness. (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8)

Q: Do believers go to Hades today?

A: No. Hades gave up its dead and was cast into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:13-14)

Q: What happens when a believer dies today?

A: The believer enters the presence of Christ and continues in the eternal life already received through Him. (2 Corinthians 5:8; Philippians 1:23)

Q: Where did Old Covenant believers go before Christ completed redemption?

A: They awaited redemption in Paradise, also called Abraham's bosom, until Christ completed His work. (Luke 16:22; Luke 23:43; Ephesians 4:8-10)

Q: Can physical death separate a believer from Christ?

A: No. Our life is in Christ, and death cannot separate us from Him. (Colossians 3:3-4; Romans 8:38-39)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† John 5:24; 1 John 5:11-12; 2 Corinthians 5:1, 4, 6-8; Philippians 1:21-23; Colossians 1:13; Luke 16:22-23; Luke 23:43; Ephesians 4:8-10; Hebrews 12:22-24; Acts 7:55-59; Revelation 20:13-14; Revelation 14:13; Colossians 3:3-4; John 11:25-26; Romans 8:38-39

† Ignatius; Polycarp; Irenaeus

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