

What Happens When We Die?

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The Bible talks about a spiritual component God gives to every person (Zechariah 12:1). The burden of the word of the LORD for Israel, saith the LORD, which stretcheth forth the heavens, and layeth the foundation of the earth, and formeth the spirit of man within him.

The Bible teaches that this spirit in man imparts aspects of the human mind, including self-awareness, intellect, creativity, personality and temperament—everything that enables human accomplishment and knowledge short of true spiritual understanding (1 Corinthians 2:11). For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him? Even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

Ecclesiastes 12:7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

The above scripture mentions this spirit, saying that the spirit of man returns to God upon death. Some erroneously interpret this as a reference to righteous souls going to heaven. However, the context shows this interpretation is wrong. For one thing, it says that the spirit of *everyone* who dies, not just the righteous, goes back to God who gave it. The preceding verses speak of aging and death taking their natural course in *every* person.

Paul wrote that the righteous dead wait in their graves until the resurrection (1 Thessalonians 4:14-18):

[14]. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him. [15] For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep. [16] For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first: [17] Then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air: and so shall we ever be with the Lord. [18] Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

See All...). And since Christ comes to the earth to reign, the resurrected saints will also be on the earth.

Heaven isn't the reward of Christians. The 1,000 year Millennium will be on earth, and is the reward of Christians.

This verse of Ecclesiastes 12 is part of the chapter's conclusion. In its entirety, the verse reads, "*Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.*" Upon death, the human body decomposes into the dust from which it was created and the spirit in man goes back to God.

What is the spirit in man? Is it the man himself? If that were the case, Ecclesiastes 12:7. . . *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it.*

. . . would not make sense. It plainly says that the body decomposes. Is the spirit in man an immortal soul? Much of mainstream Christianity has adopted the idea of an immortal soul from ancient pagan religion; it is not taught in the Scriptures.

Why would the spirit of man return to God upon death? Consider how God will resurrect the dead. He will not simply put life back into dead bodies. For even if the body remains intact upon death, it will eventually decompose, just as Ecclesiastes 12:7. *Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it..* That is, the bodies of most people will no longer exist by the time of the resurrections.

It is likely, therefore, that the spirit in man serves as the permanent record of every human being, by which God will resurrect him or her at the appointed time (1 Corinthians 15:23). But every man in his own order: Christ the first-fruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming. . .

By way of analogy, it's possible to recreate a destroyed building if one has the blueprints of the original. Similarly, God is able to recreate a person by the record preserved in the spirit in man.

This simple statement of Scripture agrees fully with the Genesis record. At man's creation, what two elements did God combine to make man a living soul?

"And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul". Genesis 2:7

Note: Here are the same two elements mentioned in Ecclesiastes 12:7. *The "dust of the ground" is the body, and the "breath of life" is the "spirit", that comes from God.* God did not put a living soul in Adam! Adam became a living soul *after God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life.* A light bulb cannot turn on without electricity. The light turns on only when the light bulb and electricity unite. When the electricity is turned off, the light ceases to exist. According to the Bible, when the breath departs from the body, the soul ceases to exist. Here is the simple equation:

$$\begin{aligned} DUST + SPIRIT &= LIVING SOUL \\ DUST - SPIRIT &= DEAD PERSON \end{aligned}$$

Let's look at it another way from John 20: 21-23, where *Jesus breathed on the disciples:*

²¹Then said Jesus to them again, **Peace be unto you: as my Father hath sent me, even so send I you.**

²²And when he had said this, **he breathed on them, and saith unto them, Receive ye the Holy Ghost:**

²³**Whosoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained.** (My emphasis')

The impartation of the Holy Spirit by Jesus to His disciples on resurrection day was not the baptism of the Holy Spirit as experienced on the day of Pentecost (Acts 1:5; 2:5). It was an infusing of the disciples for the first time with the regenerating presence of the Holy Spirit and with new life from the risen Christ.

Can we be sure that the Scripture expressions "breath of life" and "spirit" mean the same?

"All the while my breath is in me, and the spirit of God is in my nostrils". (Job 27:3)

Note: Here is the equation once more:

$$\begin{aligned} DUST + BREATH (or Spirit) &= LIVING SOUL \\ DUST - BREATH (or Spirit) &= DEAD SOUL \end{aligned}$$

What Is Death?

Physical death is the separation of the spirit from the body. The dust shall "return to the earth as it was; and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it" (Eccl. 12:7). "The Body without the spirit is dead" (James 2:26). The bible does not say "the spirit is dead without the body" but that the "body is dead without the spirit." The spirit does not die, only the body. On the cross Jesus said "into thy hands I commend my spirit" (Lk. 23:46). Paul spoke of death as a "departure from this life". "I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ..." (Phil. 1:23-24). "The time of my departure is at hand..." (2 Tim. 4:6). In 2 Cor. 5:1 Paul spoke of the tabernacle being dissolved "For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved..." . . .In verses 4-8 he speaks of being "*at home in the body*" and "*absent from the body*."

Now Regarding Ecclesiastes 12:7:

The miracle of bringing persons back to life in Biblical times was simply the returning of the spirit to the body.

Elijah prayed that the son of the widow of Zarephath might be restored to life. "*I pray thee, let the child's soul come into him again...and the soul of the child came into him again, and he revived*" (1 Kings 17:21-22).

When the Ruler's daughter was raised by Christ in Luke 8:55 it is said "*her spirit came again*." Spirit beings exist apart from material bodies. Both God and angels exist apart from material bodies. The spirit of man may exist with or without a physical body. David did not consider his dead child non-existent. "*I shall go to him, but he shall not return to me*" (2 Sam. 12:23). That the dead continue to live is further emphasized by Christ when he said to the dying penitent robber, "*Today shalt thou be with me in paradise*" (Luke 23:43).

The spirits' disembodied state between death and the resurrection is taught in the account of the transfiguration of Christ with Moses and Elias (Matt. 17:1-8). He appeared and talked with them. Moses had been dead about 1500 years and his body buried in an unknown grave. Yet both he and Elias were still in existence, retaining their personal identity and individuality. Mark 12:18-27 "But as touching the resurrection of the dead, have ye not read that which was spoken unto you by God, saying, I am (present tense) the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob?" Then Christ added "God is not the God of the dead but of the living."

Are The Dead Conscious?

What is the condition of the soul after death and before the resurrection? Is the departed soul conscious or unconscious?

Luke 16:19-31 - Two great facts can be learned from this teaching:

- (1) death is not extinction; the spirit survives the dissolution of the body,
- (2) disembodied spirits are conscious between physical death and the resurrection, and either happy or miserable, depending upon the life they lived on earth.

Resource:

Tom Stephens: Full Life Study Bible, kjv; John 20: 21-23; Pg.1636; Copyright 1992; Life Publ., International;

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