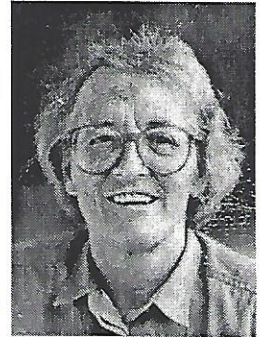


What Happens to an Individual at Death?

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In our modern society death is practically banished from human consciousness. When an answer is given by someone apart from biblical revelation, the view generally lacks any scriptural support. Who has not heard of the widely held view that the individual at the moment of death feels a deep inner peace? Then there follows a sensation of floating up through a tunnel towards a brilliant light. There the person is welcomed by angels and a guide who accompany the departed into a beautiful kingdom.

This view was popularized by the Swiss-American researcher on death and dying, Elizabeth Kübler-Ross, and propagated in dozens of her popular books. One of her best-known studies is entitled *The Tunnel and the Light: Essential Insights on Living and Dying* (1999). Her conclusions are based on case studies of so-called Near Death Experiences (NDE's) in which dying people report mystical sensation before being resuscitated. Dr. Kübler-Ross observes that once we have passed through the tunnel we are embraced by light, "called 'Cosmic Consciousness' which most people in our western hemisphere call 'Christ' or 'God' or 'Love' or 'Light' " (p.93). After this "we no longer have the need for a physical form. [We will] resume again the form that we had before we were born and the form we will have in eternity between life times, and the form we will have when we merge with the Source, with God, when we have finished our destiny" (p. 94).



Some observations are in order. First, the good doctor seems to dabble in oriental mysticism with her view of human preexistence, reincarnation, our existing as entities without bodies until we are absorbed forever by God. Furthermore, not until some years later does she acknowledge that the individuals in her research were not really dead. Also, it should be added that many doctors explain these vision of NDE's as a result of a lack of oxygen in the human brain.

The strange tales of resuscitated people—even some by evangelical Christians who claim to have been in heaven—cannot be the basis of Christian belief and hope. Finally, Kübler-Ross ignores the many studies done documenting the individual's fright and horror as death approaches. A quick search of the internet will help locate studies such as the one by the science writer of the British *Telegraph* entitled "Patients Near Death See Visions of Hell."

The only dependable information concerning the individual's experience at the time of death is God's inspired Word. It is a sure guide in life, death and the hereafter.

The dictionary defines death as "a permanent cessation of all vital functions: the end of life" (*Webster's Seventh Collegiate Dictionary*). Death for humans involves basically separation. The moment of death the material and immaterial of the individual separate.

This is true for believers and unbelievers. However, this is the only similarity between their destinies.

Erwin Lutzer has stated the matter well:

One minute after you slip behind the parted curtain, you will either be enjoying a personal welcome from Christ or catching your first glimpse of gloom as you have never known it. Either way, your future will be irrevocably fixed and eternally unchangeable (*One Minute after You Die*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1997, 9)

1A. The Death of the Believer.

1b. The place of the believers after death:

At the moment of death the believer in his immaterial state (soul, spirit, heart etc., that is, the true individual) is summoned immediately into the presence of the Lord. The Scriptures do not leave room for some kind of passage through a tunnel.

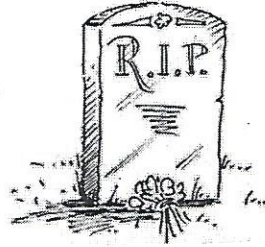
Paul teaches the glorious truth, "Absent from the body. . . present with the Lord" (2. Cor. 5:8). Paul assures the believer that his destiny is "to depart and be with Christ" (Phil. 1:23). The place is called "the third heaven," (2. Cor. 12:1), "paradise" (2. Cor. 12:4) and the "Father's house" (John 14:2).

Before the death of Christ the saints went to a place called "Abraham's bosom" (Luke 16:22). Apparently when Christ ascended after his death and resurrection, He took the saints in that location with him. This would have included every believer since Adam and Eve. Now they wait for the rest of the saints to join them and the completion of their eternal home, the New Jerusalem (John 14:3; Rev. 21:1-22:5).

2b. The provisions for the believer at the moment of death.

Many Bible students see evidence that each believer, at the moment of death, will receive a temporary or intermediate body (2. Cor. 5:8). While his earthly body is placed in the ground, said to be sleeping and awaiting its resurrection at the time of the Rapture (1. Thess. 4:14-16), the temporary body will permit the individual to express himself in fellowship and worship.

It should be remembered that when poor and sick Lazarus died, he had a body, as observed by the rich man in hell. The latter asked that Lazarus place his finger in water and place a drop on the rich man's tongue, because of his excruciation torment (Luke 16:24). It may further be rightly inferred from Scripture that the believer, like Lazarus, will be



accompanied by angels—perhaps his guardian angels—into the presence of the Lord. What a blessing to realize that this long journey, which will barely take an instant, we will not have to make alone!

2A. The Death of the Unbeliever:

1b. The place of the unbeliever after death:

The decision where we spent eternity is made in this life. For the unbeliever the destiny is hell or more correctly, *hades*, the unseen world where unbelievers are punished.

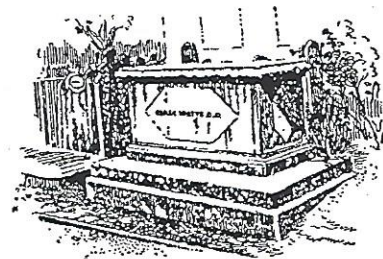
The writer to the Hebrews warns that “it is appointed unto men once to die but after this the judgment” (Heb. 9:27). There is no purgatory, no being embraced by light, but utter darkness and endless torment in hell where the fire will not be quenched (Mk. 9:43-48). There is no second chance for unbelievers to be saved, nor are any of them able to appear to their loved ones (Lk 16:31).

The rich man in hell, like Lazarus in paradise, has a temporary body. Since he has a tongue (Lk. 16:24) that presupposes a mouth, a head and a body. The final resurrection of unbeliever’s body will be at the Great White Throne Judgment at the end of the Millennial Kingdom (Rev. 20:11-15). This body will be suited to the everlasting punishment in the Lake of Fire awaiting Satan, his demons and all the unbelievers.

Neither is it possible for the living to communicate with the dead. Any contact that appears to be with the nether world is through demon spirits.

2b. The provision for the unbeliever before death:

With all the bad news for the future of the unbelievers, it is only proper to conclude with good news. Hell with its torments was never prepared for man but for the devil and his angels (Mt. 25:41). For fallen mankind God the Father sent a Savior. When Jesus Christ died on the cross in our place He tasted “death for every man” (Heb. 2:9). The gift of salvation is extended to every individual. When a person accepts Christ as Savior, at that moment, he becomes eternally a child of God. The Holy Spirit encourages ever unsaved individual reading these lines to make that decision today (Heb.3:15) so that at the time of death he can join the other saints in God’s eternal rest (Heb. 4:9).



The After-Life for Believers and Unbelievers

GREAT WHITE
THRONE
JUDGMENT

