

THE AFTERLIFE

The Most Frequently Asked Question

In my many years of teaching the Scriptures, the most frequently asked question I have fielded concerns about what happens when a person dies and passes into eternity. This question wells up when a loved one is lost, or one is forced to deal with his or her own mortality (medical diagnosis, accident, or tragedy). We are not talking about heaven or hell. Many Christians are taught that the next stop is something called Heaven and they have no idea what it is, other than it is good. Hell, on the other hand, is understood very well.

The question that I am asked is more to do with what happens with your soul and spirit. There is no question that God has promised us eternal life and the hope of the resurrection. However, many want to know what happens the moment they die and where they will be.

Let me be up front and say that I do not know what happens as I have not transitioned out of my mortal frame yet. But we do have evidence to consider that comes from Scripture in order to weigh this question.

The Bible is emphatic that there is life after you give up your mortal body. Your spirit/soul moves into some other dimension and joins others there. And still further, the Bible promises us a new body in the future, a body like the Messiah after His resurrection.

The most significant evidence on this matter is the resurrection of Yeshua of Nazareth. He was seen three days after His death and burial by a host of witnesses. He had promised to give eternal life (life after death to His believers) and His

resurrection confirms that His promise is real and can be expected by us all.

He had also raised Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, prior to His final journey to Jerusalem. It was then that He emphatically spoke of life after moral death.

Yeshua said to her [Mary], "I am the resurrection and the life; the one who believes in Me will live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me will never die. Do you believe this?"

JOHN 11:25,26

But the Bible also provides additional evidence of the experiences of others (non-believers) after they have left their mortal bodies. Yeshua spoke of two men, by specific names, and shared a discussion that ensued after they had died. It is the story of Lazarus and the rich man.

"Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, enjoying himself in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed from the scraps which fell from the rich man's table; not only that, the dogs also were coming and licking his sores. 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. And he cried out and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me and send Lazarus, so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame.' But Abraham said, 'Child, remember that during your life you received your good things,

and likewise Lazarus had things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set, so that those who want to go over from here to you will not be able, nor will any people cross over from there to us.' And he said, 'Then I request of you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not come to this place of torment as well.' But Abraham said, 'They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them.' But he said, 'No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent! But he said to him, 'If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead.'"

LUKE 16:19–31

This story is not a parable; it is a conversation after their mortal lives ended. Consider how profound what Yeshua has told us about the afterlife is. First, a person who belongs to God (a believer) at his death is gathered by angels and transported to God. The place is where Abraham is (the bosom of Abraham; paradise). An unbelieving man (the rich man is buried in a grave) awakens to find himself in a place of torments (outer darkness).

Complete darkness is held in reserve for his treasures, and unfanned fire will devour him; it will consume the survivor in his tent. The heavens will reveal his guilt, and the earth will rise up against him. The increase of his house will disappear; His possessions will flow away on the day of His anger. This is a wicked person's portion from God, The inheritance decreed to him by God.

JOB 20:26–29

Even angels that have fallen are kept in the same place as unbelievers.

And angels who did not keep their own domain but abandoned their proper dwelling place, these He has kept in eternal restraints under darkness for the judgment of the great day, ... for whom the gloom of darkness has been reserved forever.

JUDE 1:6, 13b

The man in torment called out to Abraham, asking for the poor man, Lazarus, to put a drop of water on his tongue. Abraham explains his location, as compared to where the rich man is, and states they cannot reach each other. They cannot cross over. This answer ends the rich man's request for assistance from Lazarus and anyone else there.

The rich man then makes another request. Can someone go from where Abraham is and return to his mortal brothers and explain the two locations? Abraham deflects his request as well. Mortals have the testimony of the afterlife from Moses and the Prophets. He even goes further when he explains that those who ignore the future and what happens after you die will not believe even the evidence of one who is resurrected and returns from the grave. Abraham's statement seems to speak to how the world will respond to the resurrection of Yeshua in the future.

Let us step back for a moment and glean what Yeshua shared with us.

One, a believer who passes is gathered by angels and goes to a very pleasant waiting area. There are others waiting there as well. They include, at a minimum, our father Abraham, the other patriarchs, and our other believing family members before us. God told Abraham about this waiting place before he passed.

As for you [Abraham], you shall go to your fathers in peace; you will be buried at a good old age.

GENESIS 15:15

Jacob knew he would be with his fathers upon passing and instructed Joseph as to what was to be done for his burial.

But when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said."

GENESIS 47:30

When Moses met God at the burning bush, God explained that He was the same God that held all of the patriarchs, including Moses' father.

God furthermore said to Moses, "This is what you shall say to the sons of Israel: 'The LORD, the God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, has sent me to you.' This is My name forever, and this is the name for all generations to use to call upon Me.

EXODUS 3:15

Even the prophet Daniel is told that when he dies, he will be with his fathers, waiting for the resurrection and the kingdom.

And he said, "Go your way, Daniel, for these words will be kept secret and sealed up until the end time. But as for you, go your way to the end; then you will rest and rise for your allotted portion at the end of the age."

DANIEL 12:9, 13

It seems that the rest that Daniel would experience in the afterlife is a waiting period until the end comes.

Abraham was correct. There are many places where the afterlife is spoken of in the Law and the Prophets.

Yeshua gave even more information about the resurrection and the fact that we will receive new

immortal bodies, but that is another discussion for later.

But Yeshua clearly stated that those who have died in the Lord are still alive but not in a mortal body. In fact, He emphasized this in defining God Himself.

Now He is not the God of the dead, but of the living; for all live to Him.

LUKE 20:38

But the last word Yeshua gave on the afterlife was to one of the condemned men with Him at the crucifixion.

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

LUKE 23:43

Paradise is apparently that place with Abraham, the fathers, and other believers who are waiting for the kingdom.

The Apostle Paul pictured a person living as a mortal today and compared it to a tent. He explains that our future, after being a mortal, is to be present with the Lord, living in a house.

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, in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, since in fact after putting it on, we will not be found naked. 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. Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a pledge. 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. Therefore we also have as our ambition, whether at home or absent, to be pleasing to Him. For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive compensation for his deeds done through the body, in accordance with what he has done, whether good or bad.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:1–10

The book of Revelation also weighs in on the example of the afterlife. During the Great Tribulation, before the Lord makes His return, there are a lot of believers worshipping God in preparation for His return.

Then I looked, and I heard the voices of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them [believers waiting] was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slaughtered to receive power, wealth, wisdom, might, honor, glory, and blessing.”

REVELATION 5:11–12

There is also a question raised by Tribulation Saints who had died, and they wanted to know how much longer they would be waiting for the kingdom.

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been killed because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; And they cried out with a loud voice, saying, “How long, O Lord, holy and true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who live on the earth?” And a white robe was given to each of them; and they were told that they were to rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and

their brothers and sisters who were to be killed even as they had been, was completed also.

REVELATION 6:9–11

Here is confirmation for the rest to be a period of waiting. But it also explains how they are attired without their mortal body, ... but before they have an immortal body.

This attire is similar to the description for Moses and Elijah on the mount of transfiguration with Yeshua, as seen by Peter, John, and James.

About eight days after these sayings, He took along Peter, John, and James, and went up on the mountain to pray. And while He was praying, the appearance of His face became different, and His clothing became white and gleaming. And behold, two men were talking with Him; and they were Moses and Elijah, who, appearing in glory, were speaking of His departure, which He was about to accomplish at Jerusalem.

LUKE 9:28–31

There is also another source of information offering insight on the afterlife. It comes in the form of anecdotal stories and testimonies of people who died and then came back to life. Many of them describe a common experience.

They see themselves separate from their former body, a tunnel of sort passageway, a light waiting for them, and family welcoming them. They also explain that there is not concern; it is very peaceful and pleasant.

Whether those stories are true or not is not the proof of the afterlife. I hold that the Scripture has more weight in determining the truth. But the testimonies seem to agree with the Scripture.

On a personal note, my own mother shared two afterlife experiences with my family. The first came when my sister and I were just toddlers. She

was very ill, in the hospital. She saw the doctor give her the needed medicine and resisted going away in concern for the care of my sister and myself. The second came later when my two other siblings were children and, again, she refused to leave due to concern for them. She later became a nursing home administrator with a degree in gerontology (the study of the aged). Her experiences changed her and she referred to mortal death as just a passing moment, nothing to be concerned about.

I was with my mother the day she died, along with my other siblings. We had been with her for a few days as she was on oxygen, morphine, in the hospital and about to pass at any time. The fatigue of those days while waiting took their toll on me, and I found myself not getting any relief from prayer. But then as I began to pray, I sensed that the Lord was right there. Seizing the moment, I explained to the Lord that we were done there. She was ready to go. There was no need to wait any longer. I asked God to send two angels to collect her (this was before I had done any real study on this subject). It just seemed to be the right thing to ask.

Suddenly, my mother awoke, was alert, and began to smile. It was big smile lifting the oxygen mask off her face. She also was looking up over my shoulder. Her look was so pronounced that all in the room turned to look up expecting to see what she was seeing. I turned back and watched her eyes track something coming toward her until she closed her eyes.

I do not know if she saw the angels coming or not. But I am going to believe it until I get to eternity myself. I will ask her then about it.

As I recall, the Scripture recounts Stephen seeing things at the moment of his mortal passing.

But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Yeshua 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."

ACTS 7:55–56

The afterlife is waiting for every one of us. Many are hoping that the Lord will return and we will go right to the resurrection. They are naturally hesitant to pass as mortal. But, as a believer, I do not think we should be concerned about leaving our mortal bodies. Being in paradise, hanging out with the patriarchs, our loved ones before us, and the — LORD! — seems much better than being here.

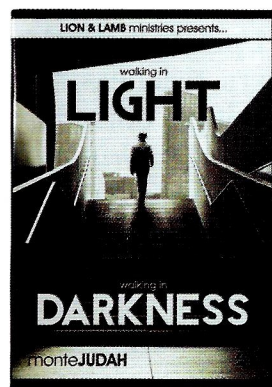
If a bright light suddenly shines on me, I will walk toward it. ■

Shalom,



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* Scripture references from NKJV



**Walking in Light vs
Walking in Darkness**

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