



# A Traveler's Guide to the Afterlife

*A Bible Literacy Study Guide on the Eternal Destiny of the Individual*

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Death and the Mortality of Man

# Death and the Mortality of Man



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This icon shows Christ standing over the broken gates of hell depicted as the lids of Adam & Eve's coffins. This icon by Nick Papas portrays Daniel and other Old Testament Prophets to our right and St. John the Baptist, King David and King Josiah to the left. The lost still lie bound in Hades. Adam and Eve are being lifted up from their graves. The locks and chains of death are broken.

# The Afterlife

Hades (NT)

Paradise

New Heaven & New Earth  
(Rev. 21:27)



**Body Dies**  
(Eccl. 12:7)

**Spirit** →

← **Spirit**

Paradise  
Lazarus, Jesus,  
thief on cross,  
OT righteous  
dead



**Great Gulf**  
(Luke 16:26)

Tartarus  
rich man,  
angels who  
sinned, OT  
wicked dead



Sheol (OT)

**Eph. 4:8-9**

**1 Thess. 4:13-18**

**2nd Coming & Resurrection**

**2nd Coming & Resurrection**

**Judgment**  
2 Cor. 5:10

**Mt. 25:46**

**Mt. 25:41**

Hell  
(Rev. 21:8)

# Significant Scriptures



- Romans 5:12—Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and *death* through sin, and so *death* spread to all men because all sinned.
- Romans 6:23--For the wages of sin is *death*, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
- 1 Corinthians 15:26, 56—26 The last enemy to be destroyed is *death*. 56 The sting of *death* is sin, and the power of sin is the law.
- Hebrews 9:27—And just as it is appointed for man to *die* once, and after that comes judgment,
- Revelation 20:13-14—13 And the sea gave up the *dead* who were in it, *Death* and *Hades* gave up the *dead* who were in them, and they were judged, each one of them, according to what they had done. 14 Then *Death* and *Hades* were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the *second death*, the lake of fire.

# Significant Scriptures



- Genesis 2:17—but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely *die*."
- Psalms 116:15—Precious in the sight of the LORD is the *death* of his saints.
- Eccl. 12:1-7—1 Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth...6 before the silver cord is snapped, or the golden bowl is broken, or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain, or the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, *and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*
- Ezekiel 18:23—Have I any pleasure in the *death* of the wicked, declares the Lord GOD, and not rather that he should turn from his way and live?



# A Psalm of Mortality

## Psalm 90:1-10



- 90:1 A prayer of Moses the man of God.
- Lord, you have been our dwelling place throughout all generations. 2 Before the mountains were born or you brought forth the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God.
- 3 You turn men back to dust, saying, "Return to dust, O sons of men." 4 For a thousand years in your sight are like a day that has just gone by, or like a watch in the night. 5 You sweep men away in the sleep of death; they are like the new grass of the morning — 6 though in the morning it springs up new, by evening it is dry and withered.
- 7 We are consumed by your anger and terrified by your indignation. 8 You have set our iniquities before you, our secret sins in the light of your presence. 9 All our days pass away under your wrath; we finish our years with a moan. 10 The length of our days is seventy years — or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away. NIV

# Death Defined



- A term which, when applied to the lower orders of living things such as plants and animals, means the end of life.
- With reference to human beings, however, death is not the end of life.
- The Bible teaches that man is more than a physical creature; he is also a spiritual being.
- For man, therefore, physical death does not mean the end of existence but the end of life as we know it and the transition to another dimension in which our conscious existence continues.
- The Bible speaks of death in a threefold way: physical, spiritual, and eternal.
- The first physical death of a human being recorded in the Bible is that of Abel, who was murdered by his brother Cain (Gen 4:8).
- However, death itself, in both the physical and spiritual sense, is first mentioned by God Himself (Gen 2:17).
- In the Genesis account of the fall of man, both physical and spiritual death come as a result of sin (Rom 5:12-21).

# Death Defined



- Various attitudes toward death are expressed in the Bible, from dread to anticipation.
- The ancient Hebrews regarded death as entrance into *sheol*, where they were cut off from everything dear in life, including God and loved ones.
- But God revealed to the psalmist that the Redeemer God is both in heaven and in *Sheol* (Ps 139:7-8), and He is able to bring a person out of *Sheol* ("the grave"; 1 Sam 2:6).
- Because "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom 3:23), all men are spiritually dead-separated from God who is the Source of spiritual life.
- Sin makes a person hate the light and despise the truth; it causes one to break God's laws and to become insensitive to holy things.
- Everyone who has not been redeemed by Christ is spiritually dead (Luke 15:32; Eph 2:1-3; Col 2:13).



# Death in the OT



- In the Old Testament death is usually seen as a natural part of human existence: Adam was not seen as created immortal.
- The goal was to live a long, full life and to die in peace.
- An early death was a great evil (2 Kings 20:1-11) and indicated God's judgment for sin (Gen 2-3; Deut 30:15; Jer 21:8; Ezek 18:21-32).
- As death cut one off from the people of God, worship, and God himself (only rarely and in later literature does God comfort one in the face of death or is present to the dead, Ps 73:23-28; 139:8), it was not a good thing.
- Thus, suicide was rare (1 Sam 31; 2 Sam 17:23) and the death penalty ("he shall be cut off from his people") severe.

# Death in the Intertestamental Period



- In the intertestamental period the idea that death itself is an evil, first seen in Eccl. 3:19-29, grows under Greek influence and further reflection.
- Not just premature death, but all death is the result of sin (2 Apoc. Bar. 54:19; 2 Esd. 3:7).
- There is also the growth of the idea that the whole person does not die, but only his body.
- The soul lives on either to await resurrection (1 Enoch 102) or to enjoy its natural immortality free from the body (Wis. 3:4; 4:1; 4 Macc. 16:13; 17:12), which was an essentially Greek idea.
- There is thus an increasing acceptance of suicide being in some cases better than an ignoble life (e.g., Josephus, War 7.325 ff.).
- On the other hand, those who believed in resurrection also spoke of an eternal death which corresponded to resurrection life (2 Esd. 7:31-44).

# Death in the NT



- In the NT, which focuses on a crucified and resurrected Lord, death is a theological problem.
- Immortality belongs to God alone (1 Tim 6:16), so humans naturally live in fear of death (Matt 4:16; Heb 2:15).
- If God is the source of all life (Rom 4:17), death must be the result of being cut off from God, a process which Adam began (Rom 5:15,17-18; 1 Cor. 15:22) and in which every human being now participates (Rom 3:23; 5:12), bringing upon himself the inevitable result of such separation from God (Rom 6:23; Heb 9:27).
- Death, then, is a power dominating the present life of the individual, not just something that happens at the end of life.
- It is in separation from God, a spiritual death, that the person lives all his life.

# Death in the NT



- Death or estrangement from God is the common factor in all natural human life (life according to the flesh, Rom 8:6; 1 John 3:14), for sin with its resulting death lives within the person despite God's law (Rom 7:9; 1 Cor 15:56; James 1:15).
- The arch rebel Satan is the lord of death (Heb 2:14); indeed death itself may be seen as a demonic power (1 Cor 15:26-27; Rev 6:8; 20:13-14).
- Christ, then, breaks the power of death over his followers, those who are joined to him or "baptized into Christ" (Rom 6:3-4) and thus die with him to the world and to sin (Rom 7:6; Gal 6:14; Col 2:20).
- The Christian passes through the experience of death in Christ but is now separated, not from God, but from the world and sin, which are dead in the sense of separation, for the life in him is the life of Christ (2 Cor 4:10; 5:14-15; Col 3:3).

# Death in the NT



- The effect of Jesus' ministry was to give life or to raise the dead, not in the end of the age only, but immediately.
- Those who commit themselves to Christ pass now from death to life (John 5:24) and never see real death (John 8:51-52), although the world as a whole is already dead (Rev 3:2) and headed toward eternal separation from God, a second death (Rev 20:14).
- Physical death is an enemy potentially conquered by Christ, but still undefeated in individual physical experience (Rom 8:9-11; 1 Cor 15:26).
- Yet its teeth are pulled, for it cannot separate the Christian from Christ, but rather puts him even closer to Christ (Rom 8:38-39; 2 Cor 5:1-10; Phil 1:20-21), who as the resurrected one will call all believers back to transformed physical life as well as the spiritual life they already enjoy (1 Cor 15:20; Col 1:12).



# Death and the Church



- The early church lived in the consciousness of both the tragedy and mortality of human physical existence and the victory of Christ over death in which Christians shared.
- Death for them was the door to eternity, a great step forward on the road from estrangement in sin to life in God.
- Thus, the death of martyrs could be celebrated and the death of the faithful, while sorrowful, could be spoken of with confidence and joy.

# Death and the Church



- While at times this was combined with a body-denying Greek dualism that virtually rejected the possibility of possessing God's life before physical death, this early view was largely shared down through the ages, including the Reformation.
- Death was not denied nor sorrow suppressed, but death was seen as hopeful, an event in Christ, an event for which one could prepare.
- This idea produced a literature on holy dying and elaborate descriptions of the deathbeds of holy persons.
- For the Christian, death was an enemy whose sting had been pulled; thus, he could face death with confidence and hope, since he already lived in Christ.

# The Tragedy of Dying Outside Christ



- The greatest tragedies in the world are not the problems of crime, disease, starvation, war, etc. but rather those who die outside of Christ.
- The destruction of the world by a flood in the time of Noah was the greatest human tragedy in history because of the eternal separation from God.
- Other human tragedies such as 9/11, the holocaust, the aids epidemic, etc. pale in comparison.
- The greatest human tragedy is yet to come when Christ is revealed at His second coming and so many will be lost because they will have rejected Him.
- How does one compare 70-80 years of life on this earth to eternal life in the presence of God?
- What can you and I do to bring people to Christ before it is everlastingly too late?

# The Second Death



- Christian use of the phrase "second death" is based upon its occurrence in Revelation, in which it is found four times (2:11; 20:6,14; 21:8), the only biblical instances of this expression.
- It is defined as the "lake of fire" into which are placed at the very end of God's judgment all those not found in God's book of life and finally, Death and Hades themselves.
- Those who are God's faithful people are promised that the second death has no claim on them.
- The expression presupposes that the first death is physical death at the end of one's life.

# The Second Death



- The identification of second death with the lake of fire may reflect the tradition within apocalyptic language identifying final judgment with fire (e.g., Ezek 38:22; 2 Esd 7:36-38; Matt 25:41; Rev 14:10).
- Presumably the "second death" terminology was a common phrase in at least some circles of ancient Judaism.
- In Christian theology second death refers to the final condition of those outside of God's salvation.
- There is debate as to whether the term indicates eternal punishment, probably the majority view of the church's theology, or annihilation, a view held by Adventists and others.



# Death: Be Not Proud

*Death is inevitable*



- Mary and Martha both tell Jesus, *"If you had been here, my brother would not have died"* (v. 21, 32).
- The truth is that Lazarus might not have died then, but he would have died sometime.
- Ecclesiastes tells us that there is a time to be born and a time to die.
- From the moment we are born, we are moving toward our death.
- Unless Jesus returns first, everyone born will also die.

# Death: Be Not Proud



*Death distresses God and is against his original purpose*

- When Jesus comes to the grieving sisters and friends, he is "deeply moved and troubled" (v. 33, 38).
- The Greek word used here describes a gut-wrenching outrage and anger.
- Death is not God's original purpose.
- It is part of the brokenness introduced by human sin.
- Death is not our friend but our enemy.
- God is the God of life.
- Jesus is the source of life, the prince of life, the lord of life.
- Death will not have the final word.

# Death: Be Not Proud



*The raising of Lazarus was a "sign," signifying that God through Jesus would soon conquer death*

- Jesus encountered Satan one-on-one and was truly tempted. Unlike the rest of us, Jesus did not sin and Satan gained no power over him (1 Cor. 15:56-57).
- Not long after Lazarus' resuscitation, Jesus died and Satan celebrated, but that rejoicing was premature.
- In his death Jesus entered Satan's "house," tied up the Evil One, took his keys and rose again (Rev. 1:17-18).
- In this way, Jesus destroyed the devil, who had the power over death, and liberated us from the fear of death (Heb. 2:14-15).

# Death: Be Not Proud

*One day God will destroy death forever*



- The prophet Isaiah looked forward to a day when God would "swallow up death for all time" and "wipe away tears from all faces" (Isa. 25:7-8).
- When Jesus returns, he will raise his people in bodies that are powerful, spiritual, eternal and that will never die (1 Cor. 15:42-54).
- Like Lazarus' sister Martha, we anticipate "the resurrection at the last day" (John 11:24).

# Death: Be Not Proud



*To believe in Jesus is to begin experiencing eternal life now*

- Jesus says to us, as he did to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life."
- Those who believe in Jesus will live, even though they die (v. 25).
- This is our strong hope as we approach Easter Sunday, but also every day of the year.



# Death: The Great Equalizer



- The deaths of young people show us just how short life really is and how we must deal with that fact.
- Death comes when it comes and there truly is no set time.
- Seeing younger people die makes us look at our own lives.
- How long do I have? That is a common question and totally appropriate.
- People often pretend they have "forever" when in reality a person is very lucky to have eighty years.
- With all of the advancements of medicine and various surgeries, the average age for men is about seventy-five and for women about eighty. That's it.
- We are not going to live for two hundred years.
- America plays down death except for sensationalism purposes.
- It is a good thing to explore death in one's mind because it is going to happen.

# Death: The Great Equalizer



- Anyone over the age of thirty-five should slowly start making plans—certainly mentally—for the inevitable.
- Dying is an incredible thing in another way: It truly makes us all equal.
- You could be a billionaire or not have a thing. Both are going in the same direction.
- It does not discriminate in terms of race or gender; it comes the way of all.
- The thought of death is certainly a scary thing. But it is very common, almost too common.
- We are meant to die. Coming to terms with that fact makes for a saner life instead of denial and game playing.
- The end will come for every living thing and for all of us, dealing with it and asking God for strength are the only ways to look at it.

# Wrong Attitudes Toward Death

## The Attitude Of The "Christian Scientist"...



1. Who believes that "matter, sin, sickness, and death have no reality."
2. I.e., who in essence denies the reality of death..
3. Who might read **Gen 5:5,8,11,14,17,20,27,31** and observe how often the Scriptures record "and he died".
4. Discuss what kinds of attitudes about death are wrong.
5. Discuss what kinds of attitudes about death are biblical.
6. How is death "the great equalizer?"

# Wrong Attitudes Toward Death

## The Attitude Of The "Escapist" ...



1. Who fears death, and so tries to avoid all mention of it.
  - a. Louis XV forbade his servants to mention the word "death" in his presence.
  - b. Some Chinese are afraid that the mention of "death" invites it.
2. But that approach cannot provide any true comfort.

# Wrong Attitudes Toward Death

## The Attitude Of The "Fatalist" Or "Stoic"...



1. This person appears to accept it without any emotion, one way or the other.
2. E.g., saying "When I die, I rot...and what of it?"

# Wrong Attitudes Toward Death

## The Attitude Of The "Blatant Infidel"...



1. This individual curses death and the God (if there is one) who allows it.
2. Who might say, "This is a dirty trick!"

# Wrong Attitudes Toward Death

## The Attitude Of The "Despairing Pessimist"...



1. Tired of life, and in despair commits suicide.
2. But there is at least one passage that teaches us to have more respect for our physical body - cf. 1 Co 6:19-20.



# Wrong Attitudes Toward Death

## The Attitude Of The "Sentimentalist" ...



1. This person gushes over death-bed scenes, grows very sentimental, but actually enjoys it!
2. Just like there are those who enjoy thrillers", there are those who delight in "tear-jerkers".
3. Why? You will have to ask a psychologist for that one...

# Wrong Attitudes Toward Death

## The Attitude Of The "Religious Fanatic With A Martyr-complex" ...



1. Not to be confused with true martyrs who faced inevitable death with great courage.
2. This person actually looks for opportunity to die for the Lord.
3. Who should probably study such verses like 1 Cor 13:3b; Phil 1:22-24.

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

## Precious In The Sight Of God...



1. Ps 116:15--*Precious in the sight of the LORD is the death of his saints.* NIV
2. Viewed from God's perspective, death simply means that one of His children is finally "coming home".

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

## Removed From Evil, And At Peace...



1. Isa 57:1-2—*1 The righteous perish, and no one ponders it in his heart; devout men are taken away, and no one understands that the righteous are taken away to be spared from evil. 2 Those who walk uprightly enter into peace; they find rest as they lie in death.* NIV
2. In times of general turmoil, the righteous and merciful are often caught up in the loss of life.
3. But we can consider it from a positive perspective, that such no longer have to endure the evil, and are now in peace!

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

A Being Carried Away By Angels To Bliss...



1. Lk 16:22—“ *The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried.*” NIV
2. It appears from this text that those righteous who have suffered are immediately released from that suffering and are carried away by the angels to a place of comfort.

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

## A Going Away To Paradise...



1. Lk 23:43—*Jesus answered him, "I tell you the truth, today you will be with me in paradise."* NIV
2. So Jesus promised the thief on the cross.

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

## A Departure, An "Exodus"...



1. Paul viewed his impending death as a "departure", using "a metaphor drawn from loosing from moorings preparatory to setting sail" (2 Ti 4:6—*For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure.* NIV).
2. Peter used the Greek word "**exodos**" {ex'-od-os} (translated "decease"), meaning "exit", the same word used to describe the Exodus of Israel from Egyptian bondage (2 Pe 1:15—*And I will make every effort to see that after my departure you will always be able to remember these things.* NIV).



# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

A "Gain", Something Far Better Than Living...



1. Phil 1:21, 23—*For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain.* NIV
2. This was another way Paul viewed his death.

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

To Be With Christ, At Home With The Lord...



1. Phil 1:23—*I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far, NIV.*
2. 2 Cor 5:6-8—*6 Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. 7 We live by faith, not by sight. 8 We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord. NIV*
3. This is why death was considered by Paul to be a "gain", rather than a loss.

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

## "Asleep" In Jesus, Yet Living With Him...



1. 1 Thess 4:13-14—*13 Brothers, we do not want you to be ignorant about those who fall asleep, or to grieve like the rest of men, who have no hope. 14 We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him. NIV*
2. 1 Thess 5:9-11—*9 For God did not appoint us to suffer wrath but to receive salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ. 10 He died for us so that, whether we are awake or asleep, we may live together with him. 11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. NIV*
3. Those who have died "in Christ", are said to "sleep in Jesus".
4. Whether this phrase ("sleep in Jesus") supports what some teach as "soul sleeping" will be examined more carefully later, but Paul does say that those who sleep in Jesus still "live together with Him" possibly implying awareness - 1 Thess 5:10.

# Biblical Attitudes Toward Death

## A Blessed Rest From Their Labors...



1. Re 14:13—*Then I heard a voice from heaven say, "Write: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on."*  
*"Yes," says the Spirit, "they will rest from their labor, for their deeds will follow them." NIV*
2. One of the many blessings promised to those who patiently keep the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus (**Re 14:12**).

# gracEmail: Mortality



- As I write these words, I face a small and treasured family picture on my desk. Melanie appears to be four or five years old, Jeremy about two. Both are now grown and married. Where did those years go? Can I really turn 57 this year? The folks I once knew as grownups are now either old or dead. My contemporaries are showing their own years. The youths are taking over the world. Thus it has been from the beginning, is now, and ever shall be. And -- we might add, before saying "Amen" -- thus it ought to be, as well.
- A preacher in the New Testament once remarked concerning King David, that "after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, he fell asleep" (Acts 13:36). That's the best we can hope for on this earth, isn't it. It is a fitting summary of the truly successful person. The standard mortality tables offer my generation about 20 more years on average. The hardier might last 30 or 40. Yet how soon that, too, will pass. But it is okay. Someone has said that the two most important things in life are love and death. Love makes life sweet. Death makes it precious.
- Let us live our lives fully—conscious each day of God and seeking his presence, using the opportunities he gives us for that day, thankful for his blessings. And when our appointed time arrives to leave this mortal life, we can lie down and sleep peacefully in Jesus, who has blazed that trail already, knowing that one day he will wake us again to enjoy immortal life in a sinless world forever.

# Questions for Discussion



1. What does the Bible teach about physical death? Compare the OT with NT scriptures.
2. What does the Bible teach about spiritual death? Note Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8.
3. Why is death the last enemy? Read 1 Cor. 15:26-56 and comment.

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