

## What Happens When We Die?

“It is appointed for men to die” (Heb. 9:27, also Psa. 89:48). To understand death, it is important to know how man was created and given life.

Life was given to the first man, Adam, when God made him out of dust from the ground, and then breathed the *neshamah* of life into his nostrils. “Then the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life (*neshamah hayyim*); and man became a living being” (Gen. 2:7). *Neshamah* has the meaning of “puff, vital breath.”

The result is that man became a *nephesh hayyah*, which is translated “living being” (NASB) or “living soul” (KJV, Gen. 2:7; see also Gen. 3:19; Job 27:3, 33:4, 6; Psa. 103:14). *Nephesh* has the meaning of a breathing creature (soul) or vitality and includes flesh, life, emotion, mind, self. The living man is characterized by animation and thought.

Death is the undoing or opposite of life. Death means life has ended; there is no life (Isa. 38:1). When spirit or breath (Hebrew *ruach*, Greek *pneuma*) leaves a body, that body returns to the ground (Psa. 104:29). God gives a definition of death when He tells Adam what will happen after the toil of life has ended (Gen. 3:17-19). When the breath (spirit) leaves the body, this is death (see also Job 34:14-15; Psa. 146:4; Eccl. 12:7; Jas. 2:26).

Characteristics of death (opposite of life/animation):

- Compared to (but not same as) sleep, rest but with no physical or mental activity (1 Kings 2:10; Job 3:11-19; Psa. 13:3; Eccl. 9:10; Dan. 12:2; John 11:11-14; Acts 7:59-8:2; 13:36; 1 Cor. 15:6, 17-18, 20, 51-52; 1 Thess. 4:13-15; 5:10)
- No conscious thought or emotions (Psa. 146:4; Eccl. 9:5-6, 10)
- Not able to praise God (Psa. 6:5; 30:9; 88:10-12; 115:17; Isa. 38:18-19)
- No knowledge of or interaction with the living (Job 7:21; Eccl. 9:5-6; Isa. 38:10-11)
- Decay, return to dust (Acts 13:36; Dan. 12:2; Isa. 26:19)
- Death of man and animal is alike (Gen. 6:17; 7:21-23; Eccl. 3:19-20; 9:4; Psa. 104:24-30).

Life and death are opposites (Deut. 30:19; Isa. 38:1 [NASB, NKJV]; John 5:24; Rom. 5:17; 6:21-23; 8:13). Jesus was dead, but now is alive (Rev. 1:18).

**There is no life after death without resurrection.** Jesus Christ is called the firstfruits of the resurrection since he is the first (only) human who has died and then lived again to never die (1 Cor. 15:20-23). (See Bible Guide: Resurrection.)

The Hebrew *sheol* and Greek *hades* (literally “not seen”) (Ps. 16:10; Acts 2:27, 31) are translated “grave,” “hell,” and “pit,” referring to the place of the dead (see Isa. 38:18). The Greek word *gehenna*, sometimes translated “hell” or “hell fire,” is derived from the name of an ancient Jerusalem valley where garbage was incinerated and symbolizes the final

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judgment and destruction of the wicked in the “lake of fire” “prepared for the devil and his angels” (Rev. 20:14-15; Matt. 25:41).

The concept that some part of man does not die originated with the lie of the serpent in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:4) which directly contradicted the word of God (Gen. 2:16-17). God does not lie (Num. 23:19; Titus 1:2). Man’s adoption of this lie in opposition to God’s word of truth perpetuates misunderstanding God’s Kingdom plan for mankind, which includes bodily resurrection to life for believers in Jesus Christ.

The idea that some part of man is immortal (an intangible spiritual substance referred to as “soul” or “spirit”) and lives on (has consciousness) after death (and in some religions, pre-exists birth) is found in ancient religions and in the philosophy of Plato. Plato’s idea of death is separation of body and “soul.” This teaching was brought into Christianity by early “church fathers” such as Origen and Augustine who were influenced by Platonic philosophy. According to Gen. 3:22-24, God prevents man from living forever except according to His own plan.

Resurrection to eternal life is found in believing Jesus is the Messiah (Anointed One, Christ) of the Kingdom of God (John 3:36, 20:31; 1 John 5:11-12) and provides salvation (Mark 16:15-16; John 3:14-18; Acts 4:12; Rom. 1:16; 6:20-23; 10:8-10; Eph. 1:13-14; Titus 3:7; 1 Tim. 1:15-16). (See Bible Guides: Salvation and Eternal Life).

#### **FOR FURTHER STUDY:**

##### Mortality of Man:

Job 14:7-15  
Isaiah 40:6-8; 53:12  
Acts 2:22-32  
Romans 2:7; 6:12  
1 Corinthians 15:42-44, 50, 53  
2 Corinthians 5:4  
Hebrews 9:27  
James 4:14  
1 Peter 1:24  
Revelation 20:5

##### First Death:

Job 7:21; 34:15  
Ecclesiastes 12:7  
John 11:1-44  
Acts 2:29, 34  
2 Peter 3:4

##### Second (Eternal) Death (see Bible Guide: Judgment):

Revelation 20:6, 11-15; 21:8  
Malachi 4:1-3

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