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What Happens When You Die?

Each time we attend a funeral we are reminded that we, too, will die someday. That raises the question, "Where is my loved one now? Where do people go when they die?" And for each of us the most important question is, "Where will I go when I die?"

The world's various religions give differing answers to this question. Some say you go to heaven if you've been good and to hell if you've been bad. Others say you return to live in a different body - an idea that's called "reincarnation." Still, others say that death is an unconscious, sleep-like condition from which God's people will be resurrected at the second coming of Christ. People who don't believe in God claim that death is an eternal sleep from which no one will ever awake.

How we were made:

To answer our question, we must first ask, "Are humans basically immortal spirits encased in mortal bodies?" If so, then the individual continues a conscious existence on another plane when the body dies. This is the view of those who believe that at death one immediately goes either to heaven, hell, or purgatory, or is reincarnated.

On the other hand, if humans are essentially physical beings with a life force implanted by God, then at death this life force is extinguished much as the lights go out in a bulb when the switch is turned off. This view is held by those who believe that death is a sleep, either temporary or permanent.

So which view is right? We can begin to answer this question by looking at how God made human beings in the first place. Describing the creation of Adam, the Bible says "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) Most people believe the soul and the body are two separate things. However, the Bible says that the soul includes the body (the dust of the ground). We can diagram it like this:

BODY + BREATH OF LIFE = SOUL

If the body and the soul are separate, then perhaps the soul can exist apart from the body. But if the soul includes the body, then it couldn't possibly exist apart from the body. Rather, when the body dies, the soul also dies. And, according to the Bible, this is indeed what happens: "The soul who sins shall die." (Ezekiel 18:4)

This combination of body and breath is broken up at death. The body and breath of life are separated: "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit [the Hebrew word is breath] shall return unto God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Does this mean that the spirit that returns to God is conscious? No; the Bible says that "the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing." (Ecclesiastes 9:5)

LIFE AFTER DEATH

If the dead have no consciousness, can we have any assurance that we'll live again after we die?

Absolutely! The Bible says that "God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life." (John 3:16)

How simple! By trusting in Jesus, putting our faith in Him, we can have eternal life! John, one of Jesus' disciples once said that "he who has the Son has life." (1 John 5:12)

The Bible goes on to explain that when Jesus comes the second time He'll raise His people of all ages from their graves and give them life again. "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." (1 Thessalonians 4:16) The first thing that will happen when Jesus returns to this earth is the resurrection of all His faithful followers! The Bible goes on to say that "we who are still alive and are left will be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air. And so we will be with the Lord forever." (1 Thessalonians 4:17).

What a wonderful promise!

So where are your friends and loved ones when they die? Where will you be when you die? The answer is very simple: asleep, unconscious - but only till Jesus comes. The Bible says that at that time "the dead in Christ shall rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16)

Next time you attend a funeral, you can rejoice that if your friend or loved one died knowing Jesus as a Friend, then he or she will live again. You can also be sure that if you know Him as a Friend, you, too, will spend eternity with Him in His kingdom, even if you die before He comes.

The real question, then, is whether you know Jesus as a Friend. If you haven't accepted Him into your life, why not do it now?