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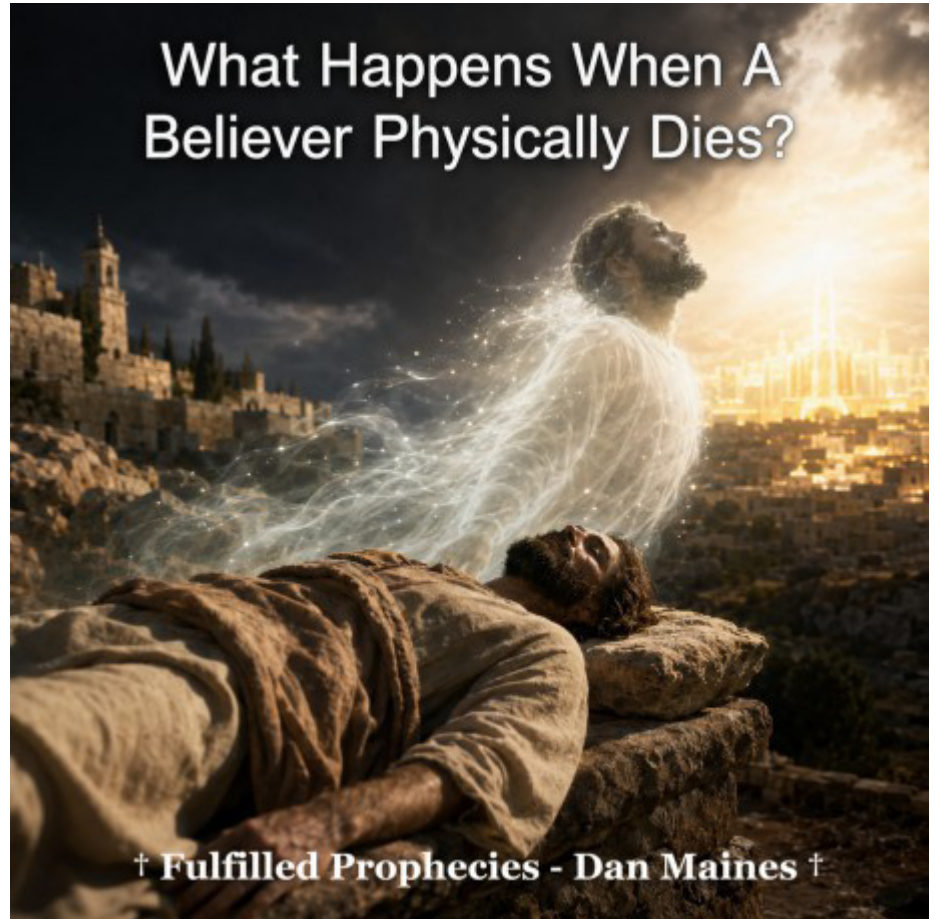
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What Happens When A Believer Physically Dies?



By Dan Maines

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Introduction

† There has been a lot of confusion over this subject because people often mix physical death, spiritual life, resurrection, heaven, and the unseen realm into one idea without carefully defining the terms biblically.

† Some believers say we immediately go to heaven far away in another dimension. Others say we remain on earth somehow. Others say the spiritual realm is all around us right now. Many simply say we go be with the Lord, but rarely explain what that

actually means.

† The fulfilled perspective recognizes that covenant separation ended through Christ, the resurrection was fulfilled, and believers are alive in Him now. Because of that, physical death is not separation from God for the believer. Physical death is simply the laying aside of the mortal body while remaining alive in Christ. (John 11:25-26; Romans 8:38-39)

† The Bible never presents believers as sleeping unconsciously in the grave waiting thousands of years for life. Christ destroyed death covenantally and opened access into the presence of God. (Hebrews 10:19-20; 2 Timothy 1:10)

† The question is not whether believers are with Christ after physical death. Scripture clearly says they are. The real question is what that means and where that takes place.

2 Corinthians 5:1-8

1 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. 2 For indeed, in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our dwelling from heaven, 3 since in fact after putting it on, we will not be found naked. 4 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. 5 Now He who prepared us for this very purpose is God, who gave us the Spirit as a pledge.

6 Therefore, being always of good courage, and knowing that while we are at home in the body we are absent from the Lord- 7 for we walk by faith, not by sight- 8 but we are of good courage and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

† Paul did not fear physical death because he understood that

believers remain alive with Christ. He said to be absent from the body is to be at home with the Lord. (Philippians 1:21-23)

† Paul never described soul sleep or unconsciousness. He expected conscious fellowship with Christ immediately after physical death. (Luke 23:43)

† The phrase eternal in the heavens does not require a far away location somewhere beyond the universe. Scripture often uses heaven to speak of God's spiritual realm and authority. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

† Paul also said believers already had access into heavenly places while still physically alive. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

† This shows that the presence of God is not limited by physical geography. The spiritual realm and the physical realm are not separated by millions of miles.

Luke 23:42-43

42 And he was saying, "Jesus, remember me when You come into Your kingdom!" 43 And He said to him, "Truly I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise."

† Jesus told the thief he would be with Him that very day. There is no indication of unconscious waiting. (Philippians 1:23)

† Paradise is associated with the presence of God and covenant life restored through Christ. (Revelation 2:7)

† Jesus Himself physically died, yet remained alive in the unseen realm. Physical death did not end conscious existence. (1 Peter 3:18-19)

† Since believers are united with Christ, physical death likewise does not destroy fellowship with Him. (Romans 14:8)

Philippians 1:21-23

21 For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain. 22 But if I am to live on in the flesh, this will mean fruitful labor for me; and I do not know which to choose. 23 But I am hard-pressed from

both directions, having the desire to depart and be with Christ, for that is very much better;

† Paul plainly said departing the body meant being with Christ.

† He did not describe death as nonexistence, soul sleep, or waiting in silence.

† If Paul believed he would sleep unconsciously for thousands of years, death would not have been immediate gain. (2 Corinthians 5:6-8)

† The believer's life is hidden with Christ now. Physical death cannot separate that union. (Colossians 3:3-4)

John 14:1-3

1 "Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. 2 In My Father's house are many rooms; if that were not so, I would have told you, because I am going there to prepare a place for you. 3 And if I go and prepare a place for you, I am coming again and will take you to Myself, so that where I am, there you also will be.

† Jesus went to the Father, and believers are gathered into Him. (Hebrews 9:24)

† Some argue that because Jesus ascended into heaven, believers must travel somewhere far away after death. But scripture focuses more on union with Christ than movement through physical space. (John 17:20-24)

† Heaven is consistently presented as God's dwelling and authority, yet believers already participate in that heavenly reality now. (Ephesians 2:6)

† The New Testament does not describe believers flying through outer space after death. It describes believers entering the presence of Christ. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

† The spiritual realm is not bound by physical dimensions the way earthly bodies are. God is spirit and fills all things.

(Jeremiah 23:23-24)

Acts 7:55-56

55 But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, looked intently into heaven and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God; 56 and he said, "Behold, I see the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God."

† Stephen saw into the spiritual realm while still standing physically on earth.

† This shows the spiritual realm is not unreachable or separated by physical distance.

† Heaven was opened to his understanding. The unseen realm was present even while he remained physically here. (2 Kings 6:17)

† This supports the understanding that the spiritual realm exists alongside the physical realm, though normally unseen to human eyes.

Hebrews 12:22-24

22 But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to myriads of angels, 23 to the general assembly and church of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the Judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, 24 and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood, which speaks better than the blood of Abel.

† Notice the text says you have come, not you will come someday.

† Believers already had access into the heavenly Jerusalem while physically alive on earth.

† The spirits of just men made perfect were already present in that heavenly assembly.

† This shows that the heavenly realm was already accessible

through Christ before physical death.

Matthew 22:31-32

31 But regarding the resurrection of the dead, have you not read what was spoken to you by God: 32 'I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob'? He is not the God of the dead, but of the living."

† Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were physically dead, yet Jesus said they were living unto God.

† This destroys the idea that the faithful cease conscious existence at death.

† Covenant life continues in God's presence beyond physical death. (Luke 20:38)

† The faithful are alive to God even when absent from the earthly body.

Hebrews 9:8

8 The Holy Spirit is signifying this, that the way into the holy place has not yet been disclosed while the outer tabernacle is still standing,

† Under the Old Covenant, full access into God's presence had not yet been openly revealed.

† The veil represented separation and restricted access. (Hebrews 10:19-20)

† Through Christ's finished work, believers now have bold access into the presence of God.

† This helps explain why scripture distinguishes conditions before and after Christ's covenant victory.

Revelation 1:18

18 and the living One; and I was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore, and I have the keys of death and of Hades.

† Christ declared victory over death and Hades.

† Hades did not continue holding the righteous after Christ

fulfilled redemption.

† The old covenant barriers associated with death were broken through Him. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

† Believers now belong to the realm of life in Christ.

Matthew 22:30

30 For in the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven.

† Jesus did not say believers become angels.

† He said they are like angels regarding marriage and covenant continuation.

† Scripture never teaches that redeemed humans transform into angelic beings.

† Believers remain the redeemed people of God united with Christ. (1 John 3:1-2)

Revelation 21:1-3

1 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. 2 And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. 3 And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among the people, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them,

† Notice the direction here. The dwelling of God comes down to man.

† Fulfillment is about union between God and His people, not escaping the earth forever.

† The fulfilled perspective sees the presence of God fully opened through Christ after the end of the Old Covenant age. (Hebrews 12:18-24)

† The New Jerusalem is not about believers abandoning

creation, but about covenant access and fellowship with God through Christ.

Historical References

† Ignatius wrote of believers departing to be with Christ and spoke of martyrdom as entering His presence.

† Polycarp expressed confidence that faithful believers continue in the presence of the Lord after death.

† Athanasius taught that Christ destroyed the power of death through His resurrection life.

† Eusebius recorded early Christian confidence that death no longer separated believers from Christ.

† Clement of Alexandria described believers as continuing in fellowship with God beyond physical death.

† Modern fulfilled scholars commonly affirm that believers consciously continue in covenant life with Christ after physical death, though many admit scripture does not fully explain the mechanics of the unseen realm.

† Most fulfilled scholars reject soul sleep because of passages like Philippians 1:23 and 2 Corinthians 5:8.

† Many also recognize that heaven in scripture is often covenantal and spiritual language connected to God's presence and authority, not merely a physical location beyond the stars.

How It Applies To Us Today

† Believers do not need to fear physical death because life in Christ cannot be broken. (Romans 8:38-39)

† Our hope is not in escaping creation but in living in union with Christ forever. (John 17:3)

† The presence of God is already accessible now through Christ. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

† Physical death does not separate believers from the Lord for even one moment. (Philippians 1:23)

† We should stop thinking of heaven as merely a distant location and understand it primarily as the realm of God's presence and authority. (Ephesians 2:6)

† The spiritual realm is real even if we cannot presently see it with natural eyes. (2 Corinthians 4:18)

† Believers should live confidently knowing Christ has already conquered death and opened the way into fellowship with God. (Hebrews 2:14-15)

Q & A Appendix

Q: Do believers go to heaven when they die?

A: Believers go to be with Christ in the presence of God. Scripture emphasizes union with Christ more than physical travel to a location. (Philippians 1:23; 2 Corinthians 5:8)

A: Physical death does not begin fellowship with God, it continues the fellowship believers already possess in Christ. (John 17:3)

Q: So basically when a believer dies, does he or she pass from this physical realm into the spiritual realm of the New Jerusalem and the presence of God?

A: In a sense, yes, though scripture does not describe it as walking through literal doors on earth into another dimension. The Bible presents believers as already being connected to the heavenly Jerusalem and the presence of God while still physically alive. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

A: Physical death is the laying aside of the mortal body, but the believer remains alive in Christ and fully enters the unseen spiritual realm of God's presence. (2 Corinthians 5:1-8)

A: The New Jerusalem is not presented as a physical city sitting somewhere on planet earth, but as the covenant dwelling of God with His people through Christ. (Revelation 21:2-3)

A: The spiritual realm appears to exist beyond the limitations of

the physical world we presently experience, though scripture does not fully explain its nature or dimensions. What scripture does make clear is that believers remain consciously alive with the Lord after physical death. (Philippians 1:23)

Q: Is Heaven where Christ is now?

A: Yes. Scripture says Christ ascended to the Father and reigns at the right hand of God in heavenly authority and glory. (Acts 2:33-36; Hebrews 9:24)

A: Heaven is the realm of God's presence, authority, and glory where Christ reigns as King. Yet scripture also teaches that Christ is spiritually present with His people now. (Matthew 28:20; Colossians 1:27)

A: The Bible does not present Christ as absent from His people because He is in heaven. Rather, He reigns in heavenly glory while also dwelling with and within believers through the Spirit. (John 14:23)

Q: Are we in heaven now?

A: Physically, no. Believers still live in the earthly realm and mortal bodies.

A: Spiritually, believers already have access to heavenly fellowship and covenant life in Christ. Scripture says believers are seated with Christ in heavenly places. (Ephesians 2:4-6)

A: Hebrews says believers have already come unto the heavenly Jerusalem and the assembly of the firstborn. (Hebrews 12:22-24)

A: This means believers already participate in heavenly life spiritually while still living physically on earth. Physical death does not begin that relationship, it continues it in the full presence of Christ.

Q Is heaven a physical place or a spiritual place?

A Scripture describes heaven as the spiritual realm of God's

presence, not a physical planet somewhere in outer space. Paul said believers are already seated with Christ in the heavenly places, Ephesians 2:6. Hebrews says we have come to the heavenly Jerusalem, Hebrews 12:22-24. Yet we're still physically on Earth. That shows heaven is a real spiritual realm, not limited by physical geography.

Q Is heaven where believers are now?

A Yes. Believers already belong to the heavenly kingdom while still living physically on Earth. Scripture says our citizenship is in heaven, Philippians 3:20, and that we've already come to the heavenly Jerusalem, Hebrews 12:22-24. In Christ, believers live in both the physical realm and the heavenly realm of fellowship with God. † **This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at**

Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† 2 Corinthians 5:1-8; Luke 23:42-43; Philippians 1:21-23; John 14:1-3; Acts 7:55-56; Hebrews 12:22-24; Matthew 22:31-32; Hebrews 9:8; Revelation 1:18; Matthew 22:30; Revelation 21:1-3

† Ignatius, Letter to the Romans; Polycarp, Letter to the Philippians; Athanasius, On the Incarnation; Eusebius, Ecclesiastical History; Clement of Alexandria, Stromata

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