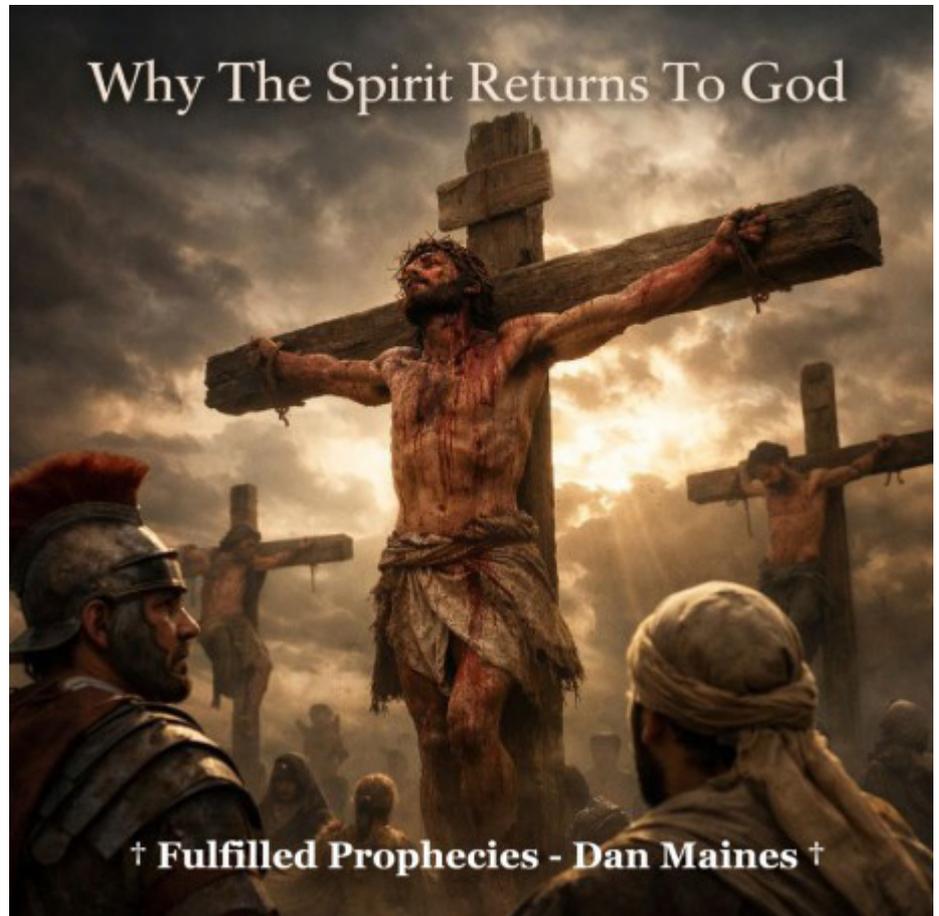


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Spirit - Why The Spirit Returns To God



By Dan Maines

Why The Spirit Returns To God

Introduction

† This message addresses a common question that's often framed the wrong way, as if Scripture gives us two competing options about what happens to the spirit at death. (Job 34:14-15)

† From the fulfilled, biblical perspective, it's not either option the way they're usually framed, and Scripture itself settles the issue clearly and consistently. (Isaiah 55:8-9)

† The Bible never teaches that the spirit returns to God because of belief, nor does it teach that death itself sends the spirit anywhere. It teaches something deeper and more foundational. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Ecclesiastes 12:7

the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.

† This statement is universal and unconditional, it applies to every human being because it's rooted in creation, not covenant standing. (Genesis 2:7; Job 33:4)

† The verse doesn't say the spirit returns to God because of faith, righteousness, or unbelief, it says the spirit returns to God because He gave it. (Numbers 16:22; Zechariah 12:1)

† God is the giver and owner of life, and what He gives remains accountable to Him regardless of belief. (Psalm 24:1; Acts 17:24-28)

Genesis 2:7

Then the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being.

† Life begins with God's breath, not man's decision or obedience, which means the spirit has always belonged to God from the beginning. (Job 27:3; Isaiah 42:5)

† The breath of life doesn't become human property, it remains God's gift entrusted to the body for a time. (Job 34:14-15; Psalm 104:29-30)

† Death doesn't change ownership, it simply ends the bodily stewardship of what God gave. (James 2:26; Luke 12:20)

Hebrews 9:27

And inasmuch as it is appointed for men to die once and after this comes judgment.

† Death is an appointment, not a spiritual transportation system, it marks the separation of body and spirit. (James 2:26; Ecclesiastes 3:19-21)

† Judgment follows death because the spirit returns to God's authority, not because death sends it somewhere new. (Romans 14:10-12; Ecclesiastes 12:14)

† Death is the occasion, not the cause, it reveals where the spirit has always belonged. (Job 12:10; Psalm 146:4)

† Hebrews 9:27 doesn't teach a future trial to decide outcomes, it states order, death, then judgment. For the one IN Christ, judgment has already occurred, there is now no condemnation at all. (Romans 8:1; John 5:24) For the wicked, judgment has also already occurred, the wages of sin is death. (Romans 6:23) Death itself is the punishment, not a doorway into another conscious state. Scripture never defines death as continued life somewhere else. If a person is dead, they are not alive anywhere. This is why Scripture consistently speaks of the wicked as perishing, being destroyed, burned up, consumed, and brought to an end forever. (Obadiah 16; Malachi 4:1-3; Matthew 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:8)

Ecclesiastes 3:21

Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?

† This verse is often misunderstood because Ecclesiastes is speaking from the perspective of life under the sun, human observation apart from revealed conclusion. (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3)

† The question form doesn't deny truth, it exposes human limitation when God hasn't yet stated the final answer. (Ecclesiastes 8:17)

† Ecclesiastes 12:7 resolves what Ecclesiastes 3:21 questions,

showing progression within the same book, not contradiction.
(Ecclesiastes 12:7)

John 5:24

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life.

† Faith in Christ determines covenant standing, reconciliation, and life while living, not whether the spirit returns to God at death. (Romans 5:1-2; Ephesians 2:12-16)

† Eternal life is presented as a present reality, not something that begins only after physical death. (John 17:3; 1 John 5:11-13)

† Under the Old Covenant, separation existed because of sin, but that separation was fully dealt with in Christ and brought to completion in that generation. (Matthew 27:51; Hebrews 9:26)

Luke 23:46

And Jesus, crying out with a loud voice, said, Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit. Having said this, He breathed His last.

† Jesus doesn't introduce a new doctrine here, He demonstrates the creation truth that the spirit belongs to God. (Psalm 31:5)

† His death confirms Ecclesiastes 12:7 at the cross, the spirit returns to the One who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

† Christ's reconciliation work addresses covenant access, not spirit origin or destination. (2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

2 Corinthians 5:8

we are of good courage, I say, and prefer rather to be absent from the body and to be at home with the Lord.

† Paul doesn't describe death as creating access to God, he describes it as revealing what's already true for those reconciled in Christ. (2 Corinthians 5:18-20; Romans 8:1)

† Being at home with the Lord speaks to covenant relationship, not basic spirit origin or ownership. (Ephesians 2:19; Hebrews 12:22-24)

† The contrast here isn't belief versus unbelief, it's reconciliation versus alienation. (Colossians 1:21-22)

† Yes, you heard that right, alienation. It's either Romans 8:1, therefore there is now no condemnation at all for those who are IN Christ Jesus, or Obadiah 16, where the end of the wicked is to become as though they had not been. Scripture doesn't present a third category. Life is in Christ, outside of Christ there is death, not relocation, not continued conscious existence. This is why Scripture consistently describes the wicked as coming to an end, being burned up, consumed, destroyed, and reduced to nothing. (see also Isaiah 1:28; Isaiah 66:24; Malachi 4:1-3; Matthew 3:12; 2 Thessalonians 2:8)

Historical References

† Second Temple Jewish thought understood the breath of life as returning to God at death, rooted in Genesis and Ecclesiastes. (Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7)

† Philo of Alexandria wrote that life originates from God's breath and returns to Him by divine order, not moral achievement. (Acts 17:28 reflects this worldview)

† Early Christian writers consistently taught that Christ restored fellowship with God, not ownership of the soul, which was never lost. (Hebrews 10:19-22)

How It Applies To Us Today

† This truth removes fear-based theology that treats death as a reward system instead of a created reality. (Romans 8:15; Hebrews 2:14-15)

† It keeps faith grounded in life and reconciliation now, not

reduced to a mechanism for postmortem outcomes. (John 10:10; 2 Corinthians 6:2)

† It reminds us that belief in Christ transforms how we live before God, not whether we belong to Him at death. (Galatians 2:20; Colossians 2:12-13)

Anticipated Objections

† Objection: Ecclesiastes 12:7 can't mean everyone because Scripture elsewhere speaks of judgment and separation.

† Response: Judgment addresses covenant standing and accountability, not spirit ownership, which Ecclesiastes grounds in creation, not belief. (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Romans 14:10-12)

† Objection: If everyone's spirit returns to God, then belief in Christ doesn't matter.

† Response: Belief determines reconciliation, life, and access to God, not the basic fact that the spirit belongs to Him. (John 5:24; Romans 5:1-2)

† Objection: Ecclesiastes is wisdom literature and shouldn't be used doctrinally.

† Response: Jesus and the apostles repeatedly used wisdom literature to establish foundational truth, and Ecclesiastes itself resolves its own questions. (Matthew 7:24-27; Ecclesiastes 12:7)

† Objection: The wicked can't be said to return to God.

† Response: Returning to God doesn't imply fellowship, it affirms accountability to the One who gave life. (Job 12:10; Ecclesiastes 12:14)

Clarifying Judgment Language vs Fellowship Language

† Scripture uses judgment language to describe accountability before God, not ownership of the spirit, which is already established by creation. (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Romans 14:10-12)

† Fellowship language describes relational access, peace, and reconciliation with God, which was broken under the Old Covenant and restored in Christ. (Isaiah 59:2; Ephesians 2:13-16)

† Confusing judgment with fellowship leads to false conclusions about where the spirit belongs, Scripture keeps these categories distinct. (Ecclesiastes 12:14; 2 Corinthians 5:18-19)

† Judgment answers to responsibility, fellowship answers to relationship, and Christ's work addressed relationship, not God's original ownership of life. (Acts 17:24-28; Hebrews 10:19-22)

Q and A Appendix

† Q: Does the spirit return to God because a person believes in Jesus Christ?

† A: No, Scripture says the spirit returns to God because He gave it, belief determines reconciliation and life, not spirit ownership. (Ecclesiastes 12:7; Romans 5:10)

† Q: Does death itself send the spirit to God?

† A: No, death is the separation of body and spirit, it's the occasion, not the cause. (James 2:26; Job 12:10)

† Q: What does faith in Christ actually determine then?

† A: Faith determines covenant standing, peace with God, and participation in eternal life while living. (John 5:24; Romans 5:1)

† Q: Was there separation before Christ?

† A: Yes, under the Old Covenant sin brought exile and separation, which Christ fully removed in that generation. (Isaiah 59:2; Matthew 27:51)

† Q: Is eternal life something we wait for after death?

† A: No, eternal life is a present possession for those in Christ. (John 17:3; 1 John 5:11-13)

† This is the fulfilled perspective we proclaim at Fulfilled Prophecies †

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Source Index

† Ecclesiastes 12:7; Ecclesiastes 3:21; Genesis 2:7; Hebrews 9:27; John 5:24; Luke 23:46; 2 Corinthians 5:8

† Philo of Alexandria; Augustine, Confessions; Athanasius, On the Incarnation

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