

This first part on the Biblical teaching concerning “last things” concerns what each person can individually expect rather than things in God’s program. The reading reminds us of the certainty of death and the fact that there is life after death and punishment for some. This should motivate us all to pay attention to what God has said about the five events or stages of our future.

1. *Physical death*

- a. The term “death” can refer Biblically to physical death, spiritual death (a person’s separation from God) or the “second death” (*cf.* Rev. 2:11; 20:6, 14; 21:8).
- b. Physical death involves the separation of the spirit from the body leading ultimately to the dissolution of the body. Various terms are used for dying. (*Cf.*, *e.g.*, Gen 35:18, Luke 23:46, 2 Cor 5:1, Genesis 3:19.)
- c. Physical death can be the expected future of every person until Christ returns (Hebrews. 9:27; Romans 5:12) with the exception of those who belong to Christ at the time of His return.

Psalm 90:12 gives us an important lesson, that we “number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.” (See also James 4:14-15)

2. *A conscious existence beyond the realm of the living in heaven or Hades*

- a. Prior to the ascension of Jesus, the place of the dead (Sheol in the O.T. and Hades in the N.T.) received the unsaved (in “lowest Sheol”) and the saved (in paradise or “Abraham’s bosom”). Neither death, “hell” nor the “grave” are equivalents though some translations confuse these terms. At death the ultimate destiny of the person has been determined.
- b. After the ascension of Jesus every believer goes to be with Him, as was Stephen’s and Paul’s confidence (Acts 7:59-60; 2 Cor 5:8; Phil 1:21-23), and the fate of tribulation martyrs (Rev 6:9-11).
- c. The dead are also certainly conscious. This is true of the dead martyrs of Rev 6:9-11, Moses and Elijah on the Mount of Transfiguration (Mt. 17:3), and the rich man and Abraham (Luke 16:19ff)..
- d. From this place of the dead there is no communication with the living (*cf.* Luke 16:26-31, the righteous dead and the evil dead cannot meet, nor are they permitted to return to the living). Trying to contact the dead is clearly forbidden in the Bible (Deut. 18:10-11; Lev. 19:31). The activity of a medium or spiritists appears to be attributed to having a demon, like the fortune-telling girl in Philippi (Acts 16:16-18).

Death without Christ should be feared, since it means torment but the believer in Christ need no longer fear death (1 Cor 15:56-57; Rom 8:38; Phil 1:21-23). We have hope and do not need to fear for ourselves or grieve for deceased brethren in the manner of those who have no hope (1 Thess 4:13).

3. *The resurrection of the body*

- a. All mankind, both the righteous and unrighteous, will one day be resurrected (Daniel 12:2; John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15), except for those who are living and transformed at the return of Jesus.
- b. Biblically the body is as an essential part of being fully human. Therefore when Jesus speaks of giving life, it is both spiritual life (John 5:24-25) and physical life (John 5:28-29). Physical death is the last great enemy. Paul argued strongly in 1 Corinthians 15 that the resurrection of the body is an essential teaching.
- c. The resurrection body of the righteous – the nature of the resurrected body of the unrighteous is uncertain – is like that of Jesus: it is a genuine physical body capable of eating and drinking (*cf.* John 2:19-21; Luke 24:36-43). But it will be a transformed body, associated with the old body but different (1 Cor 15:37-38). Our new bodies, called spiritual bodies, will be particularly adapted to living in the world in which God and angels dwell though having flesh and bones.

Our future resurrection is the basis to stand firm and give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord (1 Cor 15:58). Every believer will stand again in a resurrected body and receive the rewards for what he or she has done.

4. *Official final judgment*

- a. Final judgment will reveal the works of people and will reward accordingly (*cf.* Rev 20:13; 1 Cor 3:13).
- b. God has the sole authority to judge (Deut. 1:17; Hebr. 12:23) has committed that work to the Son (John 5:22) as the Son of Man (*cf.* John 5:27).
- c. Christians will be judged according to their works, even revealing motives, and rewarded accordingly at the judgment seat of Christ (Romans 14:10-13; 2 Cor. 5:10; 1 Cor 3:13-15; 4:5).
- d. The unsaved will appear at the great white throne judgment (Revelation 20:11-15). Their works will be evaluated but their condemnation arises from their absence from the Lamb’s book of life.

Though we thank and praise God for our salvation in Jesus Christ, we should remember to abide in Him that we not be ashamed at his coming.

5. *Eternity, the final state, a conscious existence with God or in hell*

- a. The saved will live forever with God on a new earth and in a new heaven (Rev 21:1-3).
- b. The lost or unsaved will endure everlasting punishment in hell also pictured by Jesus as Gehenna (*e.g.*, Matt. 5:22, 29, 30; 10:28; *cf.* Rev 19:0; 20:10, 15). Their punishment will be eternal (Matt. 18:8; 25:41, 46; 2 Thes 1:9), as long as the salvation of the righteous (Matt 25:46). There also seems to be degrees of punishment (*cf.* Matt. 11:20-24).

None should forget the sure events which every person must face. “Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God’s wrath remains on him.” (John 3:36, NIV) Death is followed by judgment (Heb 9:27). There is either torment or eternity with Jesus. Those who are separated from God should come to Jesus (Rev 22:17; John 6:35) for abundant life through His death and resurrection. Believers should stand firm and continue to work fully for the Lord.