

What happens to the unsaved when they die?

In sharing the Gospel with the world, I would be remiss if I didn't share what happens to those people who die without having accepted Jesus as their Savior and so continue onwards down the path to judgment. What's going to happen to them?

Those people who have died never having accepting Jesus' lifeline of salvation have an entirely different destination from Heaven. They are going to die in their rebellion, and they have no hope whatsoever. As Jesus in John 3:36 warned, "God's wrath remains on him." The following is what's going to happen to them after they die.

1. Hades

After an unsaved person dies, they go to a place called Hades. The Bible also calls it Sheol or Torments. You can read all about it in Luke 16. Hades is a holding place for the dead, a prison. It at one time had two compartments, a place called Paradise and a place called Torments. The Old Testament Saints used to go to the Paradise part as they couldn't go to Heaven yet because Jesus' blood hadn't yet been shed to cover their sins. By faith they were there as Hebrews explains, but Jesus' blood finally allowed their freedom and Paradise was taken up to Heaven with Jesus after His crucifixion. What we have in Hades now is just what is left — Torments — a place of torment.

2. Judgment

At the end of Jesus' Millennial Kingdom, there will be the Great White Throne Judgment. That's a special name basically for the Resurrection of the Unjust. We can read about this final judgment in Revelation 20:11-13:

"Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it and earth and sky fled from his presence and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead great and small standing before the throne and the books were opened. And another book was opened which is the book of life, the dead were judged according to what they had done as recorded in the books. The sea gave up the dead that were in them and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them and each person was judged according to what he had done."

Those from Hades are going to be judged based on their works, but without the saving work of Jesus Christ — the only work that matters, they will be found wanting. God's the perfect litmus test, and so no matter how good our works have been, they just cannot add up to God's standard of perfection. Everyone who tells you that you have to work your way to Heaven is lying to you, because the Bible says otherwise in Ephesians 2:8-9. Jesus' work on the cross is the only work that matters, and our response in faith.

3. Hell

When they are all found guilty, their next and final destination is a place called Hell. Revelation 20:14-15 explains that awful sentence of condemnation, "Then death and Hades were thrown into the Lake of Fire." The Lake of Fire is called the Second Death. If anyone's name was not found written in the books of Life, they will be thrown into the Lake of fire.

Misconceptions About Hell

A lot of people have some really false ideas about what Hell is like. One misconception about Hell for instance is that Satan is down there stoking the fires and that he's already there waiting to punish and torment people with pitchforks. No, Satan doesn't rule Hell. There are no demons waiting to torment us in Hell.

Actually, believe or not, there is not a single person in Hell right now. Hell is the punishment created for Satan and his demons. Matthew 25:41 says Hell was created for them when they rebelled against God. When we rebelled in sin, that same punishment fell upon us. Hell was never meant for us, but when we sinned, we fell under the same judgment as Satan and his followers.

Hell Described

What is Hell actually like? We can read all about it in the Bible.

Is Hell a place where we party down? Is it a place where it is just a little too warm, but where we hang out with our old friends? No, Matthew 25:46 tells us it is a place of punishment for rebellion. Punishment is not good, and so Hell is not a good place.

Hell is where the wrath of God is finally fulfilled.

In John 3:36, we read about the wrath of God. The wrath of God is whenever God judges the earth in its entirety. We saw it with the Flood. We will see it poured out at the Tribulation. God will judge all who have rejected Him at the Second Death. These are demonstrations of God's wrath.

Hell is called the Second Death in Revelation 21:8. It is also called Eternal Destruction in 2 Thessalonians 1:9. Look at the word "eternal." Eternal means just that — forever destroyed.

With Hell, there is just no escape. Luke 16 says there is no way out of it. It's not like there can be some fancy Star Trek episode escape where they hitch a few wires and the doors open and they always escape. No, it's not like that in Hell. There is absolutely no way to escape from Hell.

What is Hell physically like? Matthew 25:41 and Revelation 20:15 describe it as a Lake of Fire. Some people speculate that maybe it is located in the underworld of our planet, as we see lava flows from a volcano like a lake. I tend to think Hell is a star. If you ever get a good close picture of a star, you will see superheated energy plasma boiling and rolling like lakes. It could be in a star, but the Bible doesn't tell us. But, it is described as a place of flames. It's a place of burning.

With all that fire, one would think it would be a very bright place, but Matthew 8:12 tells us it is a place of utter darkness. There is no light. No one will get to see in Hell.

And, the stench of it! Luke 16 tells us that Hell stinks. It has a bad smell to it.

The people who are sentenced there will be conscious. They will not be knocked out. They won't be driven so mad that they won't think about the horrible reality crushing them. They will have to exist with a conscious existence as Deuteronomy 18:11 demonstrates, and what they are consciously aware of is that they chose to separate themselves from the Father, as Luke 16 relays. God says to us all with no exception, "I love you. Come to me." You can choose to respond to that, or you can reply with, "No, way!" Those who rejected God's love will spend eternity regretting that decision.

Being separated from God has other consequences, for God is life, and without Him the universe doesn't hold together. You may hear about physicists trying to find the God particle or the String Theory. Well, in part they are correct. The underlining force that holds everything together is God. Jesus says it is Him. He is the bread and the life. He's what's holding us together.

Without God there is only loneliness and separation. There's just you being convicted by your memories filled with regret and despair.

Luke 16 says in Hell you thirst. In Hell there is nothing to quench one's awful, mind-burning thirst.

Because of all the agony and destruction that you feel in Hell, it says in Matthew 8:12 that there is gnashing of teeth. There will be nothing from you but weeping and crying with no comfort and no water to supply your tears.

Hell is truly a place of torment, as Revelation 14 describes. It's an awful place of torment where you are alone with yourself forever. You wanted God to leave you alone and so you didn't accept Jesus' salvation, and well, you got what you wanted.

Living With an Eternal Perspective

Our forever destination is why we need to think about something bigger than just our life here on earth. Where the road ends is why we need to have an eternal perspective, because our life on this earth is really very short, isn't it? It's just like a breath. And so, it makes sense that we need to look at the bigger picture in life. You need to know where you are going.

You can't just live for the now, because if you die this very minute without preparing for the next minute, then where will that get you?

A friend of mine had this happen to him. While his mother was making him dinner she slipped on some water on the floor. While she was making something as innocent as dinner, she fell and banged her head against the cabinet. The fall snapped her neck and she died instantly. One minute she is making the meatballs, the next minute she is dead with her son standing over his dead mother.

Life happens that way. We don't think it can happen to us, especially the younger we are. We think life doesn't end so suddenly, but it will. Death will catch up to us usually when we are unaware.

Death is inevitable, unless you are raptured, so live with an eternal perspective. If you live with an eternal perspective, then everything else in life will make sense. Life will have purpose.

Your Eternal Decision

Have you made the choice for Jesus? Have you asked Jesus to forgive you of your sins and be your Savior? Have you cried, "Jesus, forgive me of my sins and be my savior!"

An amazing, wonderful, awesome future lays ahead of us with Jesus Christ! So, what on earth are you doing that's just so important that you won't grab hold of that future? What sins are you committing that are so temporarily enjoyable that you wish to stay here, when you've got so much better ahead of you in Heaven? Turn to Jesus right now and ask Him to forgive you of your sins and be your Savior.

Think of the future that you have. Don't write Hell off as not a real place. The God of the Universe who is outside of time and who knows what is beyond here has told us in the Bible exactly what our afterlife will be like. In the Bible we can know our future.

You have a decision to make today. Have you accepted Jesus as your Savior, or have you not? Will you be rescued from judgment and Hell, or will you be saved for Heaven by placing your trust in Jesus Christ?

By Nathan Jones.

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