

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

Death and The Intermediate State: What Happens After We Die?

JACOB TOMAN

1

One of the more common questions I've been asked since 2020 relates to death. Covid-19 has brought a sense of urgency to many. That urgency has led some to search the scriptures to find the answers to their deepest questions: What happens after we die?



Many people have been taught a generic “afterlife” concept. There is a generalized cartoony afterlife in mind among some of my friends who are unbelievers (some quite staunch atheists). This cartoon takes on either a “darkened red glow” or a “blue shining glow”. The red place is a place of torment, torture, and pain. The red place in many Americans’ minds is a place of a general deprivation of all things entertaining, lovely, and delightful. The blue place is a place of happiness, light, relief, rest, music, and peace. The blue place in many Americans’ minds is a place of general presence of all things pleasing, akin to an eternally open theme park or beach.

There are other generalizations that accompany these two cartoonish pictures of eternity. Some have vague notions that the afterlife spells an eternity spent floating on clouds. Others speak of disembodied souls. Some have hope of reunification with lost loved ones, though they know not how this is possible when the bodies once inhabited are long since decayed. Some have an ascension in mind, that this life is dirty and less than the life to come, and that in that life to come a loss of the physical state is a new promise of freedom.

If you would rather listen to this post, you can do so by clicking [here](#) to listen on Youtube.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'



“The blue place in many Americans’ minds is a place of general presence of all things pleasing, akin to an eternally open theme park or beach.”

2

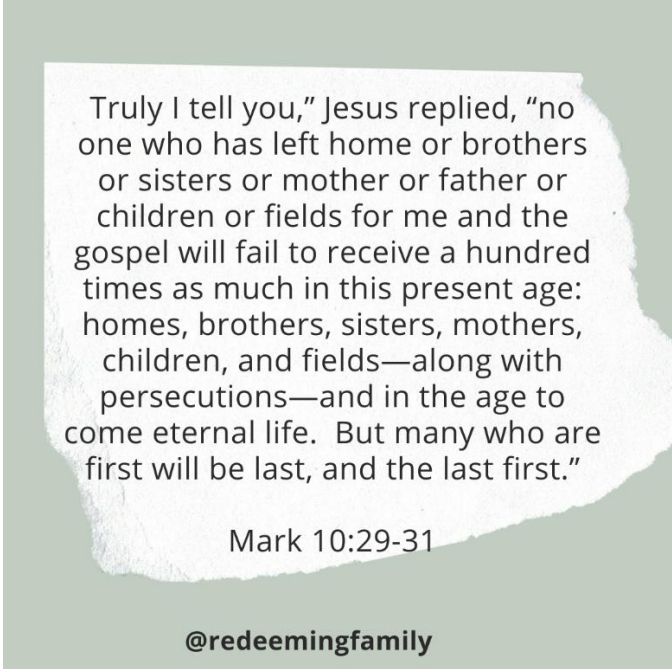
These questions are partially what has led me to preach on this topic in August of 2021, and the two audio read-aloud series we are doing currently on YouTube. [The Saint's Everlasting Rest](#) by Richard Baxter is a beautiful book of devotional delights as Baxter contemplated and expounded what God's Word has to say about the believer's eternal life after death ([you can click here](#) to access that playlist and join along listening to the book). [Andrew MacLaren](#) preached a set of sermons on the book of Philippians, a letter from the Apostle Paul to a church without a hint of rebuke, but instead an abounding measure of praise and joy. Often this praise and joy Paul speaks of in Philippians come from reminders of the eternal joy Christians have awaiting them after death.

So as I've been pondering these things, studying these things, and preaching on these things, we come again to the question at hand.

WHAT DOES GOD'S WORD HAVE TO SAY ABOUT WHAT HAPPENS AFTER WE DIE?

It is good to expose whatever we may believe, think, or imagine to the truth of God's Word (Psalm 139:1). Like a patient in need of life-saving surgery, we risk much by coming to the Word of God. In searching God's Word, are we open to what God has to say? Are we willing to listen and follow where Jesus speaks and leads (Or will we come away sad like the rich man before Jesus in Mark 10:21-22)? If God's Word says something very different from what we've been taught, will we lay aside our own notions and cling to the revealed truth of God? It is a dangerous thing to submit to the sword of the Spirit (Hebrews 4:12). We may lose face, our friends may think our faith strange, and our relatives may betray us (As they did to Jesus, thinking him crazy in Mark 3:21)! Yet for all that we lose by seeking God's revealed truth, we gain much more (Mark 10:29-31).

Lion and Lamb Apologetics



Truly I tell you," Jesus replied, "no one who has left home or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for me and the gospel will fail to receive a hundred times as much in this present age: homes, brothers, sisters, mothers, children, and fields—along with persecutions—and in the age to come eternal life. But many who are first will be last, and the last first."

Mark 10:29-31

@redeemingfamily

3

When we come to God's Word we do not enter into a conversation with a friend over coffee, offering speculations. When we come to the Word of God we are on holy ground. We are in the presence of Truth revealed. What a blessing God has given to us in His Word! It pushes the darkness of doubt away and lays open the treasures of reality.

So recall your cartoony thoughts. Remember what you've been taught about what happens after we die. Bring to mind what you've considered while mourning for lost loved ones in the Lord. Bring these thoughts and beliefs captive before the Lord of glory and face the exposure of the truth of God's Word.

Passages from God's Word

1. God's Word makes clear that death itself is a consequence of sin. Death is not natural to God's created order for mankind. In other words, without sin, there would be no death. Death first came to humanity as a result of Adam's sin. Death is not a glory in itself, death is a consequence.

☞ *By the sweat of your brow, you will eat your food until you return to the ground since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust, you will return. (Genesis 3:19 NIV)*

☞ *Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned. (Romans 5:12 NIV)*

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

2. God's Word makes clear that mankind has been given a physical body inhabited with a living soul. At death, the body ceases its activity, while the spirit or soul continues. There are at the foundations of who and what we are as humans these two components; a body and a soul. We ought to guard that we do not overemphasize either of these two components which can lead to new-age paganism, agnosticism, or materialism. The sacred scriptures speak of both the body and the soul as being impacted at death.

☞ *Then the LORD God formed a man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. (Genesis 2:7)*

☞ *And the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. (Ecclesiastes 12:7)*

☞ *Because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay. (Psalm 16:10)*

☞ *You, LORD, brought me up from the realm of the dead; you spared me from going down to the pit. (Psalm 30:3)*

3. God's Word makes clear that in death our body and soul are separated. Our bodies return to the ground (to dust is the often-used expression), while our spirits depart from our bodies. The speech of Jesus to the thief on the cross in Luke 23:43 is particularly telling as it indicates that the bodies of the thief and Jesus would be dead yet, Jesus spoke of the thief being with him in paradise. It is this separation of body and soul which occurs at death. The material body after death to experience decay (or corruption is often the term biblically), and the immortal soul to dwell outside the body in another place.

☞ *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell. (Matthew 10:28)*

☞ *Jesus answered him, "Truly I tell you, today you will be with me in paradise." (Luke 23:43)*

☞ *When he opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God and the testimony they had maintained. (Revelation 6:9)*

4. God's Word makes clear that there are multiple destinations or locations for those who have died. There is after death awaiting God's people eternal rest, and awaiting the

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

enemies of God an absence of rest. These destinations are spoken of biblically in many word pictures throughout various passages.

☞ *Then he will say to those on his left, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, I was a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me."*

They also will answer, "Lord, when did we see you hungry or thirsty or a stranger or needing clothes or sick or in prison, and did not help you?" He will reply, "Truly I tell you, whatever you did not do for one of the least of these, you did not do for me." Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life." (Matthew 25:41-46)

☞ *If anyone causes one of these little ones — those who believe in me — to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, where "the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched." Everyone will be salted with fire. (Mark 9:42-49)*

☞ *Then Jesus went through the towns and villages, teaching as he made his way to Jerusalem. Someone asked him, "Lord, are only a few people going to be saved?" He said to them, "Make every effort to enter through the narrow door, because many, I tell you, will try to enter and will not be able to. Once the owner of the house gets up and closes the door, you will stand outside knocking and pleading, 'Sir, open the door for us.' "But he will answer, 'I don't know you or where you come from.' "Then you will say, 'We ate and drank with you, and you taught in our streets.'*

"But he will reply, 'I don't know you or where you come from. Away from me, all you evildoers!' "There will be weeping there, and gnashing of teeth, when you see Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and all the prophets in the kingdom of God, but you yourselves thrown out. People will come from east and west and north and south, and will take their places at the feast in the kingdom of God. Indeed there are those who are last who will be first, and first who will be last." (Luke 13:22-30)

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

☞ *There was a rich man who was dressed in purple and fine linen and lived in luxury every day. At his gate was laid a beggar named Lazarus, covered with sores and longing to eat what fell from the rich man's table. Even the dogs came and licked his sores. "The time came when the beggar died and the angels carried him to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried. In Hades, where he was in torment, he looked up and saw Abraham far away, with Lazarus by his side. So he called to him, 'Father Abraham, have pity on me and send Lazarus to dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue because I am in agony in this fire.'*

"But Abraham replied, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, while Lazarus received bad things, but now he is comforted here and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you a great chasm has been set in place, so that those who want to go from here to you cannot, nor can anyone cross over from there to us.' "He answered, 'Then I beg you, father, send Lazarus to my family, for I have five brothers. Let him warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment.'" (Luke 16:19-28)

☞ *Whoever believes in the Son has eternal life, but whoever rejects the Son will not see life, for God's wrath remains on them. (John 3:36)*

For while we are in this tent, we groan and are burdened, because we do not wish to be unclothed but to be clothed instead with our heavenly dwelling, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life. (2 Corinthians 5:4)

5. God's Word makes clear that persons are sent into these two destinations based on a judgment made by God. It is God himself who presides over the sentencing of eternal destination. Specifically, it is Christ Jesus who will judge the living and the dead when he comes again (as the Apostle's Creed states summarizing what is taught in scripture).

☞ *All this is evidence that God's judgment is right, and as a result you will be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you are suffering. God is just: He will pay back trouble to those who trouble you and give relief to you who are troubled, and to us as well. This will happen when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven in blazing fire with his powerful angels. He will punish those who do not know God and do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of his might on the day he comes to be glorified in his holy people and to be marveled at among all those who have believed. This includes you, because you believed our testimony to you. (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10)*

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

- ☞ *In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge. (2 Timothy 4:1)*
- ☞ *Nothing in all creation is hidden from God's sight. Everything is uncovered and laid bare before the eyes of him to whom we must give account. (Hebrews 4:13)*
- ☞ *Therefore let us move beyond the elementary teachings about Christ and be taken forward to maturity, not laying again the foundation of repentance from acts that lead to death, and of faith in God, instruction about cleansing rites, the laying on of hands, the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. (Hebrews 6:1-2)*
- ☞ *Just as people are destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him. (Hebrews 9:27-28)*
- ☞ *If this is so, then the Lord knows how to rescue the godly from trials and to hold the unrighteous for punishment on the day of judgment. (2 Peter 2:9)*

6. God's Word makes clear that after death, there is still existence. This existence is not spoken of in a far-off distant sense. Life after death is not one that begins only after the great resurrection of the dead or with the 2nd coming of Christ. Even after the body and soul have been separated in death, there is an ongoing existence of the soul even after the body has decayed.

☞ *But about the resurrection of the dead—have you not read what God said to you, “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. (Matthew 22:32)*

☞ *I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. (Philippians 1:20-24)*

7. God's Word makes clear that there is a resurrection yet to come. This resurrection ends the intermediate state when the body and soul are separated. The resurrection of the dead is nothing short of the remaking of the perishable and making it imperishable. The soul and body will never again be separated after the resurrection, but will instead exist either permanently outside the presence of Christ, or within the presence of Christ.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

- ☞ *As for you, go your way till the end. You will rest, and then at the end of the days you will rise to receive your allotted inheritance. (Daniel 12:13)*
- ☞ *“Lord,” Martha said to Jesus, “if you had been here, my brother would not have died. But I know that even now God will give you whatever you ask.” Jesus said to her, “Your brother will rise again.” Martha answered, “I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day.” Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. The one who believes in me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in me will never die. Do you believe this?” “Yes, Lord,” she replied, “I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world.” (John 11:21-27)*
- ☞ *And if the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead is living in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will also give life to your mortal bodies because of his Spirit who lives in you. (Romans 8:11)*
- ☞ *I declare to you, brothers and sisters, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed — in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: “Death has been swallowed up in victory.” (1 Corinthians 15:50-54)*
- ☞ *Then I saw a great white throne and him who was seated on it. The earth and the heavens fled from his presence, and there was no place for them. And I saw the dead, great and small, standing before the throne, and books were opened. 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 it, and death and Hades gave up the dead that were in them, and each person was judged according to what they had done. Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death. Anyone whose name was not found written in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire. (Revelation 20:11-15)*
- ☞ *Then I saw “a new heaven and a new earth,” for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Look! God’s dwelling place is now among the people, and he will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. (Revelation 21:1-3)*

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

A RECAP OF WHAT WE'VE OBSERVED

1. Death comes as a consequence of sin, first inaugurated due to Adam's sin (Genesis 3:19, Romans 5:12).
2. Humanity has been made with a body and a soul. Both are impacted at death in different ways (Genesis 2:7, Ecclesiastes 12:7, Psalm 16:10, Psalm 30:3).
3. Separation of body and soul occurs at death and the body remains in one state, while the soul goes to another (Matthew 10:28, Luke 23:43, Revelation 6:9).
4. There are two destinations for the soul after death, rest or unrest (Matthew 25:41-26, Mark 9:42-49, Luke 13:22-30, Luke 16:19-28, John 3:36, 2 Corinthians 5:4)
5. It is God alone who pronounces judgment and sentencing regarding the destination of a person after death (2 Thessalonians 1:5-10, 2 Timothy 4:1, Hebrews 4:13; 6:12; 9:27-28, 2 Peter 2:9).
6. After death and judgment comes an ongoing existence of the soul even after a person's physical earthly body has decayed (Matthew 22:32, Philippians 1:20-24).
7. Resurrection is a reunifying of the body and soul and is something both believers and unbelievers will experience in the 2nd coming of Christ. Believers can look to this with hope, while unbelievers with dread (Daniel 12:13, John 11:21-27, Romans 8:11, 1 Corinthians 15:50-54, Revelation 20:11-15, Revelation 21:1-3).

SOME QUICK QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS BASED ON THE ABOVE

Q: Does the Bible teach "soul sleep"? That people after death are in a "holding pattern" or "stored on layaway" until the 2nd coming of Christ?

A: The Bible often speaks of those who are dead as still existing in some conscious way. While the Bible often uses the language of rest, or sleep in connection with death, this sort of language is more euphemistic of the body than statements regarding the soul. Often statements of rest or unrest are made regarding the eternal status of those who have died. While we can certainly affirm that there is a distinction to be made, a waiting period of those who have died until the last day and the great resurrection, we cannot with any confidence teach or assert what the Bible simply does not say or imply. There is no implication that the souls of the dead sleep in an unconscious way, but rather often are active in their own ways as depicted in scripture. We read of souls crying out (Revelation 6:9), we read of warnings regarding necromancy

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

(Deuteronomy 18:11), of the disturbance of the soul through necromantic mediation (1 Samuel 28:15), and the dead still being able to speak in some way with observations and a will of their own (Luke 16:25). Scripture simply does not teach that after death a person somehow ceases to consciously exist. Rather, souls after death still consciously exist in states of rest or unrest until the final judgment.

Q: What should we do when a loved one who has faith in Christ dies? How do we respond to death as survivors?

A: There are a couple of things for us to do: we should *grieve* with *hope*, while *honoring* the Lord, and grow in *joyful expectation of the resurrection*.

We can and should *grieve*. Jesus wept at the tomb of Lazarus (John 11). David mourned the death of Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:17-27). Job, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all demonstrated tremendous mourning. Death is not something to rejoice over in itself. Let us not forget the 1st thing we observed today, death comes as a result of sin. Death is worth *weeping* over.

As we grieve, we do so differently than the world. *Hope* is a distinguishing aspect of Christian grief. Our dear ones in the Lord are not lost to the void. They are now with the Lord. When David's child died, he had confidence he would be reunited with his son (2 Samuel 12:23). When a loved one who has faith in Christ dies, we mourn, but we do so with *hope* in the reality that we will once again be together in eternity with life never-ending (1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). In the death of dear loved ones in the Lord, we encourage one another that our present separation is only for a time. We genuinely mourn, but we do so with the *hopeful* expectation of our reunion.

We *honor* the Lord and the loved one by continuing in the work God has given us to do. The Lord called our loved one home, but he has not yet called us home. Therefore, he has a great purpose in our still being present in this life, and in this way we *serve the Lord mightily by submitting to the Lord's timing*. We might very well say with the Apostle Paul that it is better to be with the Lord, but that for the benefit of the kingdom we remain in the body (Philippians 1:22-26).

As we grieve and miss our loved one we ought to grow in our *longing* and love to be with Christ. What a *tremendous joy* it is that through the grace and mercy of God we have a day to look forward to, where we will see our loved ones again in glory. When our bodies shall be as Christ is (1 John 3:2). What a savior we have! It is Jesus who has made a reunion possible through his merciful sacrifice on behalf of us who believe and our long-gone loved ones. Apart from Christ, our sorrow would be truly darkness with no end. But because of Christ, our sorrow has an end, and we say to death where

Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

is your sting (1 Corinthians 15:55)? Our Lord has conquered you (Revelation 1:18)! This is a joy that we grow towards, or perhaps it is better to say, *this is a joy that grows more within us as we lean on the Lord in the midst of grieving, hoping, and honoring the Lord after the death of a loved one in Christ.*

I hope this is helpful to you and encourages you in your faith. It has certainly been helpful and encouraging to me to consider the tremendous wealth and joy stored for us in heaven to be revealed in eternity!

SOME ADDITIONAL RESOURCES FOR YOU TO ENGAGE

[Martin Lloyd Jones preaching on the topic of the intermediary state](#)

[A brief Ligonier devotional on the topic passage of Philippians 1:21-23 -](#)

[Dr. Kim Riddlebarger's brief piece on the misunderstandings \(Soul sleep, purgatory, and permanent disembodiment\) and proper understandings of what happens after death.](#)

[Dr. Michael Bird's lengthy piece on a survey of what the scriptures teach regarding the intermediate state.](#)

Of great help to me in this conversation was [Hodge's systematic volume 3](#) on the topics of the intermediate state and the soul after death. ~

~ Jacob Toman

Why Redeeming Family?

Over the past few years God has placed a burden on our heart to encourage and train families to grow in the Lord. To teach what Gods word says about how we are living, how we are to raise our families, and how we are to spend our time. Too often, we hear of Christians who are unequipped to become people of God. Christ has redeemed our life and I pray that He would use this page to help us redeem our families. To bring our families back to Christ and learn to read and seek God's will through His Word.

What are your beliefs?

- We believe in Jesus Christ, as the only incarnate son of God.
- We believe in the Trinity, as 3 in one persons. God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.
- We hold to the truth that the Bible is God's infallible and authoritative word.

Lion and Lamb Apologetics

- God made the world, the universe, and all that is therein contained in the span of 6 days, resting on the 7th day.
- Every human being is guilty of rebellion against God both by association with Adam and Eve, and through personal rebellion by failing to keep God's revealed word.
- All knowledge that is needed for salvation in God is to be found in the revealed word of God.
- The work of each member of Christ's body is to encourage one another to do good works, to stir up the using of gifts given by God for the blessing of the whole of creation, and to share the eternally relevant news of the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus the Christ.

We appreciate the Reformed Confessional faiths that many of our beliefs on various topics are found. These are best summarized in the Westminster, Belgic, Heidelberg, and Cannons of Dort.

© Jacob Toman, redeemingfamily@gmail.com, December 30, 2022. Retrieved February 1, 2023.
<https://www.redeemingfamily.com/originals/9z50xnmjw76z8obwicb8565bfaepwz>