

## Comfort One Another with These Words

If the answer to a question is not addressed specifically in the Bible, a reasonable technique is first to evaluate longer passages and list the obvious points. Shorter passages then add details.

### 1 Thessalonians 4:13 – 5:3

- (4:13) The following concerns people who have died. Does this address physical death or spiritual death? Verse 14 specifies those who have fallen asleep in Jesus, so faithful people who have died physically will return with Jesus.
- (4:14) God (not Jesus) will bring with Jesus the faithful dead. Verses 16 and 17 show that the “preceding” of v15 means that the faithful dead will rise to meet Jesus in the clouds, in the air, before the still-breathing faithful. The faithful dead came with Jesus and then rose, so the faithful dead will be changed.
- Only the assembling of the faithful with Jesus is mentioned. The unfaithful are not in this picture.
- The story stops when the dead and living faithful are both with Jesus in the air.
- (5:2 – 3) The date of the event will be a surprise to everyone.

### 1 Corinthians 15:20 – 26, 35 – 58

- (15:20) The following describes faithful people who have died physically. Jesus was not the first fruits of spiritual death.
- (15:23) Only the faithful who have died physically are mentioned in this passage.
- (15:26) The time of this event coincides with the end of physical death.
- (15:42) At this final defeat of death, the faithful dead receive new bodies of a different type: incorruptible, spiritual.
- (15:51 – 52) Both the living faithful and the dead faithful will receive these new bodies.

### Revelation 6:9 – 7:17

- (6:9) Before the end, “souls of those who had been slain for the Word of God” were under the altar, in heaven.
- Those under the altar were told to wait, so they experienced more than one disposition.
- (7:9) An uncountable number of faithful (a greater number than the 144,000 of 6:4) were praising God in heaven. They died in “the great tribulation.” (7:14) The 144,000 are also mentioned in 14:1 – 5.
- The same spirits are mentioned again in 20:4 – 6.

### Revelation 20:11 – 15

- (20:12, 15) Both the faithful and unfaithful are raised.
- (20:13) The realm of the dead will no longer exist.

### Luke 16:19 – 31

- Jesus would not tell a parable based on a false scenario, so the spirits of dead people were somewhere before Jesus’ resurrection. We cannot draw a conclusion concerning if this changed after Jesus returned to heaven.
- The realm of the dead (Hades) had a good side and a bad side.

Philippians 3:20 – 21

- Our citizenship is in heaven. Can we be citizens of a place we have never been?
- The resurrection body is referenced: “transform our lowly body that is may be conformed to His glorious body.”

Ephesians 2:6

- The spirits of the living faithful are already where Jesus is.

Before Jesus came to earth, heaven (the abode of God) was not perfect. Satan had access (Job 1:6, Zechariah 3:1) so sin was present even in the presence of God. There were bad angels (Jude 6, 2 Peter 2:4). There was even a war (Revelation 12:7 – 12). But, the Tree of Life was there (Revelation 2:7), and it was still pretty nice (Psalm 16:11).

Even after Jesus returned to heaven after His resurrection, heaven wasn't perfect. Those under the altar complained, “How long?” (Revelation 6:9 – 11). There was wickedness in the “heavenlies” (Ephesians 6:12). Jesus had to cleanse the furniture by sprinkling His blood (Hebrews 9:11 – 12). Satan is bound (Revelation 20:1 – 6), so he cannot intrude or “deceive the nations any longer.”

There will be a new heaven and a new earth when Death is abolished (1 Corinthians 15:24-26). The old heaven and earth will be forgotten (Isaiah 65:17). Heaven will be called the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21-22).

In summary, the spirits of the faithful reside with Jesus now. At physical death, this does not change. However, at Judgment (resurrection day, when Jesus returns), the faithful dead come back with Jesus. Upon arrival, the faithful dead followed by the faithful living will receive a new, incorruptible, spiritual body. Using the figure of speech that Paul used in 1 Corinthians 15, our physical bodies are like seeds, sown into the earth. At Judgment, they will be like new plants that grew from those seeds. Between physical death and resurrection, we are seeds in the ground, perhaps growing spiritually, certainly with Jesus. But this will change for the better at His return.