

## INTRO

In 1973, American author Ernest Becker wrote *The Denial of Death*. In it, **Becker argues** that the driving force behind most human action is the threat of death, and humans' efforts to avoid or ignore death's reality. Becker won the Pulitzer prize for his work in 1974...after he died.

There are many ways that both religious and non-religious people conceptualize what happens after death. Some people expect no afterlife, and regard death as ashes to ashes, and no more. Some religious people think likewise, but many hold beliefs about an afterlife. Hindus think about it differently than Christians, Buddhists differently than Muslims, and Jews differently than Mormons.

This Brewed Theology explore various ideas about the afterlife, and wonders about their hybrid merging within popular culture. We're not going to debate the existence of an afterlife, but rather discuss different beliefs and understandings of life after death.

As these prompts (and these authors) come from a Christian faith and lens, we will also ponder the gospels' Easter story, wonder at what the women saw and heard at the empty tomb, and consider why the early creeds of the Church insisted on describing the experience as resurrection.

# AFTERLIFE: RESURRECTION Body, Soul, & What's Next

a Brewed Theology  
conversation starter\*

## QUESTIONS TO PONDER

Do you worry about death? In what sense? What images, stories, analogies, or metaphors have been helpful to you when considering death and what comes next? What are Christian understandings of death? Do Christians differ on that? What do you know about other religions' ideas about death and an afterlife? Are they compatible with Christianity's ideas (and does it matter)? What was the earliest death you experienced, and had to really think about?

## BIBLE BASICS

- **Mark 16** – The (probably) first and earliest gospel's resurrection story. What do you notice about it?
- **John 20:1-21** – The resurrection story in the Gospel of John.
- **Matthew 28:1-10** The resurrection story in the Gospel of Matthew.
- **Luke 24:13-16, 28-35** – The resurrection story in the Gospel of Luke.
- **Luke 23:32-43** – Jesus, on the cross, promising “paradise” to his neighbor.
- **Revelation 21:6-8** – A new heaven and new earth. Where is Jesus in all this?

## ESSENTIAL READINGS and VIDEOS\* (click the **headings** for links to knowledge)

### **BROAD RELIGIOUS OVERVIEW** (~2 min)

A brief video overview of major religious understandings of an afterlife. By Patheos, on YouTube.

### **THREE ARTICLES on the AFTERLIFE**

Read these three essays by Jason D. Gray (Professor of Philosophy at Auburn University) on the afterlife:

- “Comparing and Contrasting the Afterlife Beliefs of Six Prominent World Religions”\*
- “Christianity and the Afterlife”\*\*
- “Islamic Belief about the Afterlife”\*\*\*

### **THE RESURRECTION IS...TRANSFORMATION?**

Mark Sandlin on why the “Resurrection is Real, But Not How You Think It Is.” On Patheos.com.

### **WHY WE NEED THE RESURRECTION**

Ellen Painter Dollar, writing for Patheos, on why we (or Christians) need the resurrection.

### **“I NEED HEAVEN TO BE REAL”**

This quote opens this article by Debie Thomas, written for *Christian Century Magazine* in 2022, entitled, “A theology of heaven for our time.”

## **BONUS: FOR THE OVERACHIVERS**

### **LUTHER ON THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY (& MORE)**

You may be familiar with Martin Luther’s *Small Catechism*. He wrote a *Large Catechism*, too. Skim his discussion of the Apostle’s Creed phrase “resurrection of the body” here.

### **THE DALAI LAMA, CHINA, AND A REINCARNATION CONUNDRUM**

An episode of John Oliver’s comedy show *Last Week Tonight* from March 2017, in which he offers a potential problem with Buddhism regarding the Dalai Lama, his reincarnated successor, and the Chinese government.

**Profanity Warning:** strong, crass language. **Fast-forward** and begin your viewing at 5:29 if you’re offendable.

\*Gray, Jason D. “Three Questions for Comparing and Contrasting the Afterlife Beliefs of Six Prominent World Religions.” *The Immortality Project*, 2018, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1zedt90SohodqtkqEJ5R1lct9a-R-bkF/view>

\*\*Gray, Jason D. “Christianity and the Afterlife.” *The Immortality Project*, 2018, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/19rMfOYKPL0yK0\\_jyIMcrsFTJ4bzagHdN/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/19rMfOYKPL0yK0_jyIMcrsFTJ4bzagHdN/view)

\*\*\*Gray, Jason D. “Islamic Belief about the Afterlife.” *The Immortality Project*, 2018, [https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kOO779J6Cxqm\\_Azz1qFLzjR5JC-A9lbs/view](https://drive.google.com/file/d/1kOO779J6Cxqm_Azz1qFLzjR5JC-A9lbs/view)

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