

1. WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU DIE

I can predict with certainty that unless Jesus comes first, you and I will face death. Surveys show that worldwide, over 70% of people believe there is an afterlife. They may have different ideas of what that afterlife looks like, but they believe death is not the end. This is because God has set eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11). God has wired us to believe that there is more than this present life.

In this series, we will teach from the bible, for it is the truth of God. The bible has stood the test of time for two thousand years and longer. Men have suppressed it, the devil has fought it, people have burned it, but this word of God still lives and it is the number one bestselling book in the world.

A LOOK AT DEATH

Hebrews 9:27 says, *“It is destined that each person dies only once and after that comes judgment.”*

Note: 1. We are destined to die. It was not God’s intention that people die, but when Adam and Eve sinned, death came into the world. While we are in this fallen world, and until Jesus comes back and gives us bodies that will live forever, we will die.

2. We are destined to die only once. There is no reincarnation. We die once and immediately after that comes judgment, a judgment on how we have lived our lives.

What is death? The bible gives a very good definition of death. **James 2:26** says, *“As the body is dead without the spirit, so faith is dead without good deeds”*. James is talking about faith but makes an interesting statement about death: the body is dead without a spirit.

Thus, death is the departure of the spirit and soul from the body. Medical science is now verifying this with numbers of resuscitated people reporting near death experiences where their spirits left their

bodies. Now the question is where does the spirit go? The answer is one or two places, depending on whether you are a believer or a non-believer.

1. Believers

Believers are those that have believed that Jesus Christ is God, that he died on the cross for their sins, and that he rose again. They have both believed in, and received him.

John 1:12 *“As many that believe in him and who receive him, he gives them power to become children of God.”*

For a believer:

Body → grave spirit → heaven

A believer’s spirit goes to heaven at death.

2 Corinthians 5: 8, *“We would rather be away from these bodies said the apostle Paul for then we would be home with the Lord.”*

Acts 7:59, *“And as they stoned him, Stephen prayed, ‘Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.’”*

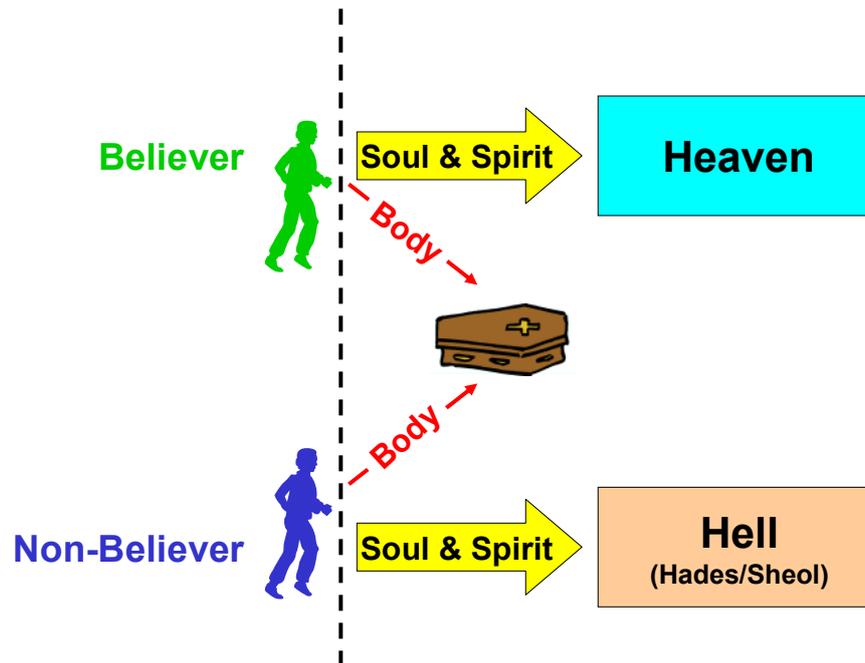
Stephen expected his spirit would go to be with the Lord. The bible does not teach soul sleep as some mistaken Christian groups do. That is, your spirit goes to sleep until whenever Jesus raises you from the dead. No, your body goes into the grave but your spirit - the entity that really is you - just moves into a different realm and you go to heaven.

2. Non-believers

Body → grave spirit → Hades

Non-believers are those who do not believe in God or who have rejected his offer of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Bible teaches that their bodies go to the grave like a believer, but their spirits go to Hades, the place of departed spirits. Hades is the Greek name, Sheol is the Hebrew name. In English, we use the term hell, but as we will see, it is a different place to the final lake of fire, also called hell, at the final judgment.

To summarise: -



In **Luke 16:19 – 31**, Jesus tells a story about a rich man and a beggar who both died. He was not making a comment on whether riches or poverty determines if you get into heaven or hell. It is a story about someone who leaves God out of his life.

The rich man was very selfish, enjoyed the good life, and did not worry about helping anyone else, especially the beggar. He did not give two thoughts about God and one day he died and around the same time, the beggar died. The beggar went to be with Abraham in Paradise and the rich man found himself in Hades. In the distance, he saw this beggar being comforted in the arms of Abraham in a beautiful place while he was in torment. And he said, *“Please father Abraham, send Lazarus with some water, even enough just to touch my tongue for I am in torment in these flames.”* And Abraham said, *“That can’t happen.”* *“Well at least send him back to earth to warn my family not to come to this place.”* Abraham replied, *“That can’t happen either. They have the law of God – let them listen to that.”*

[**Note:** Many believe that before Christ’s death, Hades had two compartments. Lower was a place of torment; upper was paradise

where spirits of righteous OT believers waited. Jesus then opened the way into heaven and took them with him when he ascended into heaven. Today paradise is in heaven. See **Hebrews 9:8-12, Matthew 27:50-53, Ephesians 4:8.**]

It is a very sad thing that though death is a beginning, it will be an end for some people, because the opportunity to believe in God has gone. We only have one life and that is why it must be lived well. And it must be lived for God. Today many people gamble. They gamble that there is nothing after death. They gamble there is no God; they gamble there is no hell. Some even gamble there is no heaven because if there were a heaven they would have to admit there is a hell.

Thus, they are staking their eternity on a gamble. What a foolish thing to do. The fool says in his heart that there is no God. The apostle Paul said that what can be known about God is plain to everybody because God's nature is revealed in creation (Romans 1:19-20) And yet today people say the universe is here by chance. The devil is very good at deceiving people into believing this lie.

EXTRA BIBLICAL EVIDENCE

You may ask if there is any evidence outside of the bible for this. In the last few decades, because of CPR techniques and modern medicine, numbers of people who die are now being resuscitated. Many claim to have been to either heaven or to hell.

(See books like *"The Final Frontier"* by Richard Kent & Val Fotherby; *"Beyond Death's Door"* by Maurice Rawlings, or the excellent DVD *"The Evidence for Heaven"*.)

I would like to mention two stories from the *"The Final Frontier"*.

The first is about a woman who wasn't a believer. She was in hospital having major surgery to her legs, when she died. She felt her spirit descending into hell. She saw many lost souls in agony, heard terrible screams of torment, and was terrified. The smell of sulphur

was dreadful, and she felt the scorching heat of the lake of fire. Begging God to help her, she was revived and found herself back in her body. Later she became a believer. Which you would do if you had been to hell! (See page 51 for the full story).

The second story is about a man who was a believer. He had a heart attack. His spirit went to heaven. There he saw the city of God, describing it as huge and the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. There were gold streets, and numberless mansions. He saw millions of shining lights which he realised were the souls of departed believers from all history. He knew them and they all knew him. This man's pastor came and prayed for him and he was raised up and went on to live a meaningful life for the Lord. (See page 71 for full story)

There are many stories like this today and that is why many are becoming increasingly convinced that an afterlife exists.

WHAT ABOUT OUR BODIES?

If our spirits leave our body at death and go either to Heaven or to Hades, then what happens to our bodies? They will be raised from the grave later. Jesus said in **John 5:28-29**: *“The time is coming when all the dead in their graves will hear the voice of God’s Son and they will rise again. Those who have done good will rise to eternal life, and those who have continued in evil will rise to judgment.”*

There will be a day where all the dead of history will be raised up: people who died in the flood of Noah’s day, who have died on battlefields, or who have died in their sleep – all will hear the voice of the Son of God saying, **“RISE!”** and in a moment of time their bodies which were dust and bones shall be raised from the dead and become whole again.

There are TWO resurrections:

1. Believers – the First resurrection.

1 Thessalonians 4: 16-17: *“For the Lord himself will come down from heaven with a commanding shout, with the call of the archangel, and with the trumpet call of God. First, all the Christians who have died will rise from their graves. Then, together with them, we who are still alive and remain on the earth will be caught up in the clouds to meet the Lord in the air and remain with him forever.”*

When Jesus returns, believers’ bodies will be raised from the dead, changed into glorious new bodies (see next message), and reunited with their spirits that have been in heaven. Living believers will be transformed too. This is called the Rapture (Latin: snatching).

Your resurrection body will be similar but different to what you have now. It will be an extreme, extreme makeover! This will happen when Jesus returns to earth. Jesus will come at a certain point in history. There will be a great seven-year tribulation on earth, unlike anything in history. There will be a world ruler the bible calls the Anti-Christ, who will set himself up against God, and the nations will worship him, because he brought peace (a counterfeit one) to the earth.

At some point in or at the end of that troubled time, Jesus will snatch the church off the earth, change our bodies, and raise us from the dead and then come back, defeat his enemies, and reign on the earth for a thousand years. His rule on earth will be incredible and paradise like conditions will result.

There are a number of theories of about the timing of the rapture in relation to the tribulation. Three main ones are:

Pre-tribulation Rapture: Jesus snatches the church away before the tribulation starts, and returns to earth at the end of it.

Mid-tribulation Rapture: Jesus snatches the church in the middle of the tribulation (the last three and a half years of which are the worst) and returns at the end of it.

Post-tribulation Rapture: Jesus snatches the church at the end of the tribulation, as he is returning to the earth.

There are also different theories about the thousand years (called the Millennium):

Premillennial Return: Christ will return to earth and then there will be a literal thousand-year reign by him on earth.

Postmillennial Return: The church will powerfully establish the Kingdom of God, and then Jesus will come.

Amillennial Return: The millennium is not a literal thousand years but symbolizes God's rule through history.

(For a much more detailed explanation of these and other theories concerning the rapture, tribulation, and second coming, see my book *Afterlife*.)

Theories about the details of Christ's return should not divide us however. I like the man who said he was a pan-millennialist. When I asked him what he meant, he said, "*I believe it will all pan out in the end!*")

2. Non-believers – the Second Resurrection

Revelation 20:4-6, 10-15

V.4-6: *"Then I saw thrones, and the people sitting on them had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded for their testimony about Jesus, for proclaiming the word of God. And I saw the souls of those who had not worshipped the beast or his statue, nor accepted his mark on their forehead or their hands. They came to life again, and they reigned with Christ for a thousand years.*

This is the first resurrection. (The rest of the dead did not come back to life until the thousand years had ended.) Blessed and holy are those who share in the first resurrection. For them the second death holds no power, but they will be priests of God and of Christ and will reign with him for a thousand years."

V. 10-15 (at the end of the thousand years): *"And I saw a great white throne, and I saw the one who was sitting on it. The earth and sky fled from his presence, but they found no place to hide. I saw the*

dead, both great and small, standing before God's throne. And the books were opened, including the book of life. And the dead were judged according to the things written in the books, according to what they had done.

The sea gave up the dead in it, and death and the grave (Hades) gave up the dead in them. They were all judged according to their deeds. And death and the grave were thrown into the lake of fire. This is the second death – the lake of fire. And anyone whose name was not found recorded in the book of life was thrown into the lake of fire.”

Lake of fire and sulphur = Gehenna (Greek) = hell (English)

Hades is like the remand prison where one awaits trial. Gehenna is like the state prison where one is sent when sentence is passed. There is no such place as Purgatory.

God's justice demands this final, public trial and sentencing. (See third message).

PEOPLE SAY THERE IS NO HELL AND JOIN ANY 'ISM' THAT TEACHES THIS.

The Bible says 162 times in the New Testament alone that there is a hell.

Picture the scene: Jesus has come back with his saints and defeated all his enemies. Now the second resurrection occurs. These are predominantly (see last message) the dead of all history that have not believed in God. Their spirits are raised out of Hades, the holding prison. Their bodies are raised out of the grave and they stand before God in what the bible calls the Great White Throne judgment. Books are opened - books recording what they have done, plus the Book of Life.

Your name is written in the Book of Life when you believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and believe that he is God and that he died for you. That is why Jesus said do not rejoice that devils are subject to you but rejoice that your name is written in Heaven. God checks everything

people have ever done. He will especially highlight the times they had a chance to believe in God but rejected him. They had a chance to read his word, to listen to the Christian workmate who tried to explain the Gospel to them, and to listen to the family member who was trying to tell them that Jesus was real. But they wouldn't listen.

God will highlight those times and will do a final check to see if their names are in the Book of Life. If not, then he will cast them into the lake that burns with fire and sulphur, called Gehenna. Again, we use the word hell to describe it, but it is different from Hades. It is the final place of judgement. It is not a place of annihilation; it is a place where people will spend eternity separated from God.

If people spend all their lives distancing themselves from God saying, *"Stay out of my life!"* then God will give them what they want. It is not God who sends people to hell, though he makes that judgment; it is people who send themselves there. Many feel that Christians are callous preaching this message. But God has gone to extreme measures so that nobody should have to go to hell. He sent his Son who died on a cross to take the punishment of hell and judgment on himself so that all could be free.

John 5:24: *"He who hears my words and believes him who sent me has eternal life. He does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life."*

That is what Jesus said. When you believe on him, you are spared that judgment. God created hell for the devil who rebelled. Satan (or Lucifer as he was called) was in heaven, saw the glory of God, rebelled, and took a third of the angels with him. The devil is not yet in hell. He is the prince and power of the air but knows his day is coming. He knows that at the end of time, God will cast him there, and his one goal is to drag as many people on the earth into hell with him. And so the deceiver of the nations blinds the minds of unbelievers so that they cannot see the Gospel. But when you have met Christ you see the truth.

How do you think God is going to feel on Judgment Day? I think he will take no pleasure in sending people to hell. I think he will be saying things like:

Why didn't you believe?

Why didn't you see the evidence I put in the earth for my existence?

Why didn't you believe on my Son? I made it so clear why he came. He died so that you would not have to go to this place.

He will say, *"You have made your choice, and I am now obliged by my justice to give you what you wanted."*

That is tragic and it is why the church must preach the Good News of Christ. That is why we are to pray for our unsaved family members, neighbours, and work mates, praying that harvest will come to this nation and people will give their lives to Christ. That is why we must throw off our passivity as Christians and be stirred awake, because these things we believe in are things of life and death and eternity.

Revelation 21:8 *"But as for the cowardly, the faithless, the polluted; as for murderers, fornicators, sorcerers, idolaters, and all liars, their lot shall be in the lake that burns with fire and sulphur. This is the second death."*

AMAZING GRACE

Praise Jesus for his amazing grace! He has come so that you and I would never have to face that terrible fate. I am not preaching that holy people get to heaven. I am preaching that those who trust in Christ get to heaven. I am no saint and neither are you; I was a sinner who is now washed in the Blood of Christ. The more I go on in God, the more I appreciate that his grace washes me, cleanses me and accepts me. I only rely on the blood of Jesus Christ and faith in his name. That is all that saves me and saves you. We will never be good

enough to escape the judgment of hell. Only Christ has done that for us. He is wonderful!

Eternity is knocking, the clock is ticking, that day will come. Keep going no matter how hard it gets, no matter how tough it is, no matter what problems you face. HOLD ON TO HIM. Do not throw away your confidence, which has very great reward. Our light, momentary afflictions are nothing compared to the eternal glory that is coming. Run this race with perseverance. Know that we are surrounded by a cloud of witnesses - the people who have gone on before, the spirits of dead believers who are looking on saying, "*Come on you can do it, you can get to the finish line*".

WHERE DO WE STAND?

Where do you stand?

1 John 5:11-13: *"And this is the testimony; God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. He who has the Son has life; he who has not the Son of God does not have life. I write this to you who believe in the name of the son of God, that you may know that you have eternal life."*

You can know that you have eternal life and it is all dependent on whether you have the Son of God or you don't have him. You say how do I get him? By receiving him, saying, "*Come Lord Jesus, take control of my life, forgive my sins.*" By believing in him, that he died to take the punishment for your sin.

John 11:25 *"I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live."*

The Bible says, *"Now is the acceptable time, behold today is the Day of Salvation"*

Why delay? You need to give your life to Christ. If you have been away from him you need to come back to him. I invite you to pray this simple prayer and as you really mean it, Jesus will answer you.

“Lord Jesus, forgive me all my sins. I don’t want to go to hell and be separated from you forever. Lord I want to be with you for always. I believe you died for me, that you took my punishment so that I could be forgiven. Lord Jesus I receive you. I open the door of my life and ask you come in and take control. Lord, I give you my life Amen.”