



The Afterlife

PART 1.5

BUILD YOUR LIFE ON THE FOUNDATION OF 11 CORE BIBLICAL TRUTHS

What Happens to People in Hell?

The Bible clearly teaches that hell is a place of never-ending torment, torture, and anguish.

Then they will go away to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.

—Matthew 25:46

Emotional/relational torment

But the subjects of the kingdom will be thrown outside, into the darkness, where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

—Matthew 8:12

Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather be afraid of God, who can destroy both body and soul in hell.

—Matthew 10:28 (GNT)

Physical torment

So if your hand makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a hand than to keep both hands and go off to hell, to the fire that never goes out. And if your foot makes you lose your faith, cut it off! It is better for you to enter life without a foot than to keep both feet and be thrown into hell. And if your eye makes you lose your faith, take it out! It is better for you to enter the Kingdom of God with only one eye than to keep both eyes and be thrown into hell. There “the worms that eat them never die, and the fire that burns them is never put out.”

—Mark 9:43–48 (GNT)

Spiritual torment

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.”

—Matthew 25:41

They will be punished with everlasting destruction and shut out from the presence of the Lord and from the majesty of his power.

—2 Thessalonians 1:9

Where Do People Go Now When They Die?

According to New Testament teaching, believers go immediately into the presence of God to await resurrection of the body and the eternal joy of heaven. Unbelievers go to Hades for punishment and to await the resurrection of the body and final punishment in hell.

This simple statement brings up a *lot* of questions! These include the growth in New Testament and Old Testament teaching concerning the afterlife, the intermediate state between now and Jesus' final judgment, and the future resurrection of the body. Because a great deal of false teaching and unfounded fears grow out of a misunderstanding of these truths, we'll take an in-depth look at them.

The progressive revelation of the afterlife in the Bible

1. In much of the Old Testament, the afterlife was seen as shadowy and unknown.

Sheol

The Hebrew word *Sheol* is used sixty-six times in the Old Testament. The Old Testament consistently refers to the body as going to the grave, and the soul of man as going to Sheol. The earliest thought of Sheol indicates there was no distinction made in the minds of people between the morally good and the bad; all went to Sheol (Gen. 25:8; 37:35). As time went on, people began to believe that Sheol had sections; there is a contrast between the "lowest part" and the "highest part." While not clearly stated, it seems like the wicked are in the lowest part, while the righteous are in the highest part (Deut. 32:22).



A Closer Look

While the Old Testament saints did not have a clear and precise understanding of what happens after death, this lack of understanding did not keep them from enjoying eternal rewards. They may not have known they were going into God's presence, but they certainly did go there.

2. During the intertestamental period (the 400 years between the final events of the Old Testament and the first events of the New Testament) the Jewish concept of Sheol had progressed to the stage where it was believed that Sheol had two distinct compartments.

One section was a place of torment for the wicked, called _____.

The other was a place of conscious bliss, often called _____ or _____.

Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, joyously living in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed with the crumbs which were falling from the rich man's table; besides, even the dogs were coming and licking his sores. Now the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham's bosom; and the rich man also died and was buried. In Hades he lifted up his eyes, being in torment, and saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his bosom. And he cried out and said, "Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus so that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool off my tongue, for I am in agony in this flame." But Abraham said, "Child, remember that during your life you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus bad things; but now he is being comforted here, and you are in agony. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great chasm fixed, so that those who wish to come over from here to you will not be able, and that none may cross over from there to us." And he said, "Then I beg you, father, that you send him to my father's house—for I have five brothers—in order that he may warn them, so that they will not also come to this place of torment." But Abraham said, "They have Moses and the Prophets; let them hear them." But he said, "No, father Abraham, but if someone goes to them from the dead, they will repent!" But he said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the Prophets, they will not be persuaded even if someone rises from the dead."

—Luke 16:19–31 (NASB)



A Closer Look

Jesus' story in Luke 16 teaches us two hard-to-hear truths:

1. There is _____ from torment.
2. There are no _____.

3. After Christ's resurrection, the New Testament teaches that believers who die enter immediately into the presence of Christ and that unbelievers enter immediately into a place of punishment and separation from God.

I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ.

—Philippians 1:23

The intermediate state and the resurrection of the body

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. We live by faith, not by sight. We are confident, I say, and would prefer to be away from the body and at home with the Lord.

—2 Corinthians 5:6–8

The “intermediate state” is the phrase used by theologians to describe the state that those who die are in between now and the time that Jesus comes again.

Why the difference? Because while our souls go immediately to be with God or to suffer in Hades, our bodies have not yet been resurrected as Jesus’ body was resurrected.

They found the stone rolled away from the tomb, but when they entered, they did not find the body of the Lord Jesus.

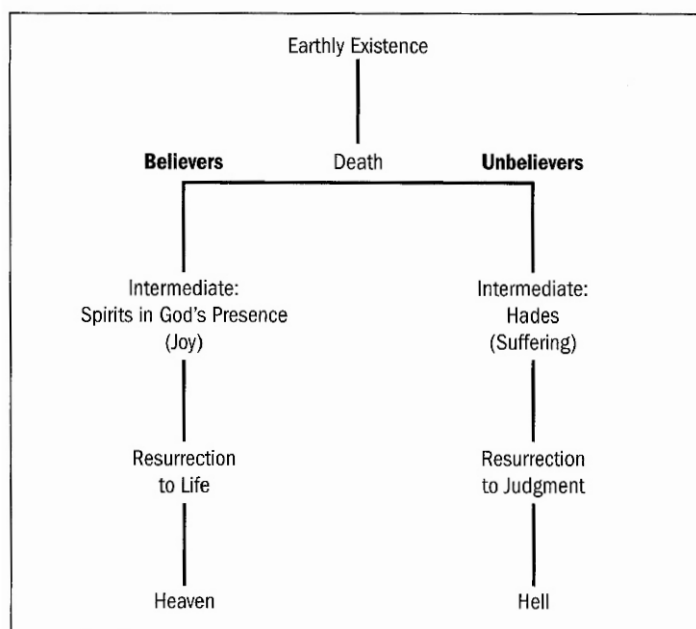
—Luke 24:2–3

The Bible tells us clearly that:

- When Jesus was resurrected he had a resurrected body (John 20:19–20).
- We too will one day have a resurrected body (1 Corinthians 15:42–44).
- We receive that resurrected body when Jesus returns (1 Thessalonians 4:16–17).

Do not fear. Although the body awaits resurrection, when you die your spirit immediately goes to be with the Lord.

Picture it like this:





Key Personal Perspective

How Can I Be Sure I Won't Spend Eternity in Hell?

What kind of crime does a person have to commit to be sent to such a horrible place? The crime that will send a person to hell is:

_____ Jesus Christ as the Son of God, the Savior we all need.

For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe stands condemned already because he has not believed in the name of God's one and only Son.

—John 3:16–18

Remember: If you decide (by desire or by neglect) to live separate from God in this life, you'll live separate from him in the next life! But if you accept God's offer of a relationship with him through Jesus in this life, you'll live with God in the next life!



Discussion Questions

1. What do you think most strongly influences most people's beliefs and opinions about the afterlife?
 - The Bible
 - Other world religions
 - New Age thinking
 - Wishful thinking
 - Movies and television
 - Other _____
2. We've learned that there is a hell. What is it that most clearly reminds you that hell is a real place? Why is it important that there is a hell?
3. Take some time together as a group to pray two things:
 - Prayers of praise for Jesus' willing sacrifice on the cross to save us from hell.
 - Prayers for those you know who have not yet trusted Christ to save them.
4. Why do you think the Bible so clearly and graphically tells us that hell is a place of suffering?
5. How does it make you feel to realize that you, as a Christian, will never have to stand before God to be judged on whether you'll be in heaven or hell—it's already settled! Talk together about the confidence and the joy of knowing that we've already made the most important decision in our lives.