

The Afterlife

Part 1

LIFE-CHANGE OBJECTIVE

- To give you a deep understanding and gratitude for God's rescue from the certainty of an eternity without him.
- To change the way you think about yourself and others: from a focus on the here and now to focus on eternity.

All of us wonder about the end of our lives: how much time we have left, under what circumstances we will die, and just exactly what death will be like. The Bible gives us some clear truths about the end of our lives that we all need to understand. These truths affect the way we live today and the way we see the future.

In this session we'll look at what the Bible says about Hell. We'll cover Heaven in the next session (bad news first, then end on the Good News!)

ECCLESIASTES 7:4 (TLB)

Yes, a wise man thinks much of death, while the fool thinks only of having a good time now.

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The most frequently asked questions asked about Hell include:

- Is there really a literal Hell?
- Why was Hell created? Who will be in Hell?
- What happens to people in Hell?
- Where do people go when they die?
- How can I be sure that I won't go to Hell?

IS HELL A REAL PLACE?

Jesus taught that hell is a real place of judgement. (In fact, there are more verses in which he taught about Hell than about Heaven.)

MATTHEW 25:46 (NIV)

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

JOHN 5:24, 28-29 (NKJV)

“Most assuredly, I say to you, he who hears My word and believes in Him who sent Me has everlasting life, and shall not come into judgment, but has passed from death into life... for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice and come forth—those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation.”

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The Bible speaks of a time of judgement that all human beings will have to go through. It is referred to in several verses as being a time of “separating” of “sorting” the righteous from the unrighteous.

VERSE	METAPHOR
Matthew 13: 47-51	A dragnet catching fish
Matthew 25: 31-46	Shepherd sorting sheep and goats
Matthew 13: 24-30	Harvester pulling weeds and wheat

Who is the one who judges and does the separating? _____,
the only righteous one.

ACTS 17:31 (NLT)

“For he has set a day for judging the world with justice by the man he has appointed, and he proved to everyone who this is by raising him from the dead.”

WHY WAS HELL CREATED?

- Hell was not created originally for any human being, but for _____.

MATTHEW 25:41 (NIV)

“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.’”

These are the angels who followed Satan when he tried to lead a rebellion against God in Heaven. They are also called demons.

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- Contrary to popular opinion, Satan is not yet confined to Hell. He now resides _____.

Three times in the Gospels, Jesus called Satan the “prince of this world.”

JOHN 12:31 (NIV)

“Now is the time for judgement on this world; now the prince of this world will be driven out.”

- One day (according to the book of Revelation), God is going to cast Satan, death, and Hades into the _____ (another name for Hell).

REVELATION 20:10 (NIV)

And the devil, who deceived them, was thrown into the lake of burning sulfur, where the beast and the false prophet had been thrown. They will be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

REVELATION 20:14 (NIV)

Then death and Hades were thrown into the lake of fire. The lake of fire is the second death.

WHO WILL BE IN HELL?

Hell was created for Satan and the demons, but they, sadly, will not be the only ones in Hell for eternity.

The facts of life and eternity that we must all eventually face are:

- We were all headed for an eternity without God in Hell.

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ROMANS 3:23 (NCV)

All have sinned and are not good enough for God's glory.

- Jesus came to rescue us from this certainty of separation from God.

1 THESSALONIANS 1:10 (NLT)

He is the one who has rescued us from the terrors of the coming judgement.

Only Jesus can rescue us because only he can offer us forgiveness for the sin that is the reason we would spend eternity in Hell.

- Those who trust Jesus are rescued!

HEBREWS 7:25 (NLT)

Therefore he is able, once and forever, to save everyone who comes to God through him. He lives forever to plead with God on their behalf.

- Those who do not trust Jesus are not rescued from Hell and separation from God.

1 JOHN 5:11-12 (NIV)

And this is the testimony: God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. Whoever has the Son has life; whoever does not have the Son of God does not have life.

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KEY PERSONAL PERSPECTIVE

What about the people I love?

After we ourselves have been rescued from Hell by trusting in the grace and love of Jesus, our minds immediately turn to those we love. The thought of their spending eternity separated from God is almost too painful for us to bear.

If they're still living, _____!

Let those you love know the Good News that God can rescue them, too. Many who initially rejected God's invitation to life and forgiveness through Jesus end up accepting him. (The apostle Paul was one of those.)

If they've already died, _____.

Remember that God is the ultimate judge of eternity; you are not. Instead of getting caught up in worrying about changing what you cannot change, leave it with God. Let your concern motivate you to share with those who are still living the hope that Jesus gives. And make sure that those you love have no doubt about your faith in Christ and the fact that you know you are going to Heaven when you die.

WHAT HAPPENS TO PEOPLE IN HELL?

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

MATTHEW 25:46 (NIV)

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

EMOTIONAL/RELATIONAL TORMENT

MATTHEW 8:12 (NIV)

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

MATTHEW 10:28 (GNT)

“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.”

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PHYSICAL TORMENT

MARK 9:43-48 (GNT)

“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.’”

SPIRITUAL TORMENT

MATTHEW 25:41 (NIV)

“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.’”

2 THESSALONIANS 1:9 (NIV)

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

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 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 judgement, 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.

SHOEL

The Hebrew word *Shoel* is used 66 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 Shoel. The earliest thought of Shoel indicates there was no distinction made in the minds of people between morally good and the bad; all went to Shoel (Genesis 25:8; 37:35). As time went on, people began to believe that Shoel had sections; there is a contrast between the "lowest part" and the "highest part." While not clearly stated, it seems like the wicked are

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the lowest part, while the righteous are in the highest part (Deuteronomy 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 Shoel had progressed to the stage where it was believed that Shoel 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 _____.

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LUKE 16:19-31 (NASB)

“Now there was a rich man, and he habitually dressed in purple and fine linen, enjoying himself in splendor every day. And a poor man named Lazarus was laid at his gate, covered with sores, and longing to be fed from the scraps which fell from the rich man’s table; not only that, the dogs also were coming and licking his sores. Now it happened that the poor man died and was carried away by the angels to Abraham’s arms; and the rich man also died and was buried. And in Hades he raised his eyes, being in torment, and *saw Abraham far away and Lazarus in his arms. 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 a great chasm has been set, so that those who want to go over from here to you will not be able, nor will any people cross over from there to us.’ And he said, ‘Then I request of 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 come to this place of torment as well.’ 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.’”

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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.

PHILIPPIANS 1:23 (NIV)

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

THE INTERMEDIATE STATE AND THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY

2 CORINTHIANS 5:6-8 (NIV)

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For 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.

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.

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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.

LUKE 24:2-3 (NIV)

Therefore we are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord. For 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.