

# Death and the Resurrection

**Reading: Philippians 1:21-24** “...to live is Christ, and to die is gain...”

## **Introduction:**

They say that, in life, there are two certainties – death and taxes. While some may be able to avoid the taxes, death is something that will eventually come to all of us (unless the Lord comes first). However, death is not something that we care to think about a lot, particularly when we are young.

Death is something that lies in the future for us. Except for those instances recorded in the scriptures of people being raised from the dead, it is a “one way trip”. It is not something that we experience as a part of life and then tell others about it<sup>1</sup>. As a result, there are many different beliefs in the world today as to what actually happens when we die. Some of these beliefs include;

- that there is no life after death, *i.e.* that after the body dies, there is absolutely no conscious existence.
- that everybody will go straight to Heaven when they die.
- that most people will go to Heaven, but the really evil people (like Stalin and Hitler) will go to Hell.

But what does the Bible teach about death. Is there really life after death? And if there is life after death, where do people go when they die? And what will happen when the Lord returns?

This lesson will look to see what the Bible has to say in answer to these questions, and what the implications are for both the Christian and the non-Christian.

## **1) What is man?**

In answering these questions, we first need to look at what constitutes “man”<sup>2</sup>. He is merely either another type of animal that has evolved from one or more of the other animals we see around us. Or, he can be something different; a special creation, fundamentally different from the animal kingdom.

When God created the birds, the fish, and the animals, they were simply spoken into existence (**Genesis 1:20-21, 24-25**). But from **Genesis 1:26-27**, we can see that there was something different about the creation of man, compared to the creation of all the other living creatures. When God created man, He said, “*Let Us make man in Our image, according to our likeness....*”. And so, man was created “...in the image of God...male and female...”. God is a Spiritual being (**John 4:24a**), an immortal Spirit (**1 Timothy 1:17**), and as we are “*His offspring*” (**Acts 17:29a**), we too are spiritual beings. In fact, man was created a little lower than the angels (**Psalms 8:5**) - those spiritual beings who are in the presence of God (**Hebrews 12:22; Revelation 5:11; 7:11**).

From other passages, we can also see that man is made up of two parts; an outward man and an inner man (**2 Corinthians 4:16**);

---

<sup>1</sup> a) There have been occasions where people have been pronounced as being “clinically dead”, and then returned to life, or claim to have experienced the “after-life. However, this lesson will be based on what the Bible teaches, not on what people claim to have or have not experienced.

b) The apostles Paul and John had visions of Heaven (**2 Corinthians 12:1-6** and **Revelation 4:1 f.f.** respectively), but it was not in the context of death.

<sup>2</sup> By the term “*man*”, I am referring to all of mankind – both male and female.

## Death and the Resurrection

- the outward part was created from the “*dust of the ground*” (**Genesis 2:7; 3:19**). This is the tangible part that people can see. The apostle Peter referred to his body as “*a tent*” (**2 Peter 1:13-14**)<sup>3</sup>.
- the inward part is a man’s soul; a man’s spirit<sup>4</sup>, and it is formed within man by God Himself (**Zechariah 12:1**). While we are alive, our spirit lives within our physical body (**Daniel 7:15**) – our “*tent*”.

To further highlight the fact that there is a difference between these two parts, we can see from **Matthew 10:28** (and **Luke 12:4**) that while man can kill the body, only God can kill both the body and the soul. In other words, there is a part that man can destroy, but there is another part that man can’t destroy<sup>5</sup>.

### 2) Physical death – a separation of body and spirit

#### a) The physical body dies and decays

Physical death happens when the body ceases to function in any capacity of its own accord. It is at this point that there is a separation between the inner person and the outward – the (inner) spirit leaves the (outward) body. In **Ecclesiastes 12:7** we read, “...*the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it.*” When Rachael (the wife of Jacob) was dying, we read in **Genesis 35:18-19** that “...*her soul was departing (her body), for she died....*” And in the context of showing the relationship between faith and works, **James 2:26** tells us that “...*the body without the spirit is dead....*”.

Unless special measures are taken to preserve it, the physical body decays once it is dead. God Himself told Adam what would happen to his body when his life here on earth had ended, “...*from dust you are, and to dust you shall return.*” (**Genesis 3:19b**).

#### b) The spirit leaves the body and lives on

But while the physical body decays, the spiritual person, the “*inner man*”, lives on after it has departed the body. There are various examples of either death, or impending death, in the scriptures that teach us this fact. Both Jesus and Stephen, when about to die, called on God to receive their spirit (**Luke 23:46; Acts 7:59**). Jesus told the thief on the cross that, “...*today you will be with me in Paradise.*” (**Luke 23:43**). We know from the Biblical account that this statement was made not long before Jesus died. Jesus was not referring to a physical place, because both He and the thief remained on the cross until their death (**Luke 23:46; John 19:31-35**) – hanging on a cross could hardly be referred to as Paradise. The only alternative is that Jesus was referring to a place where their spirits would be going to – a place of rest.

In many of his writings, the inspired apostle Paul referred to the fact of an “*after-life*” – the life of the spiritual person after the physical body has died. In **Philippians 1:23-24**, he spoke about how on the one hand, he could see a need for him to stay here living on earth, but on the other hand, he had a desire to depart and be with Christ (who is now in Heaven – **Acts 1:9-11; Hebrews 8:1; 12:2**).

---

<sup>3</sup> Paul also used the term “tent” when talking about our physical body – **2 Corinthians 5:1, 4**.

<sup>4</sup> The terms “*soul*” and “*spirit*” are often used interchangeably throughout the scriptures.

<sup>5</sup> **2 Corinthians 4:16** also shows us that the inward and outward parts are different.

## Death and the Resurrection

### 3) Where do our spirits go after death

We have seen above that when physical death takes place, the spirit, the inward person, leaves the body. But where does it go? Do the righteous go immediately to Heaven, and the unrighteous immediately to eternal punishment? Or do they go someplace else?

To answer these questions, we need to look at what the apostle Peter said in his sermon in Acts 2. In verses 25-28, he quotes from a Psalm<sup>6</sup> written by David many centuries before. The passage is about someone who has died, and then was subsequently raised from the dead. From verse 29, we can see that David was not talking about himself in the Psalm. Rather, from verses 30-31, we see that he was talking about the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus. We can see from this passage that after Jesus died, His soul went to Hades. This is implied from the statement that God "...will not leave my soul in Hades.." (vs.27a).

Hades is described as being "*the unseen world*", "*the place of departed souls*"<sup>7</sup>. It has two different areas: Paradise<sup>8</sup>, and Tartarus<sup>9</sup>. Before He died on the cross, Jesus told the thief that "...today you will be with Me in Paradise.." (Luke 23:43). That is where the souls of both Jesus and the thief would go once they died. It was not until around 40 days later that Jesus actually ascended into Heaven (Acts 1:3-11; Luke 24:50-51; John 20:17a). Therefore, the soul does not go to its eternal destination at the time of death - it goes to Hades.

While Jesus and the thief went to Paradise, the unrighteous dwell in a place of torment – the other part of Hades. In Luke 16:19-31, Jesus told a story<sup>10</sup> about a rich man and a poor man. Both of these men died and found themselves in different places. The poor man was resting and being comforted in Abraham's bosom (vs.22, 25). However, the rich man was in a place of torment (vs.22b-23)<sup>11</sup>. The fact that these two men were in different places would indicate that some sort of judgement had already taken place. However, it was not the final Judgement – that will happen when the Lord returns (Matthew 25:31-46).

### 4) The Resurrection

One day, all that we see around us will come to an end. On a day set by God, the Lord will return (Acts 1:11). There will be no warning – it will happen when people least expect it (1 Thessalonians 5:2-3; 2 Peter 3:4-7 ). On that day, several things will happen;

---

<sup>6</sup> Psalm 16:8-11.

<sup>7</sup> Strong's Concordance, Greek word 86.

<sup>8</sup> Strong's Concordance, Greek word 3857. The word is also used in reference to our eternal home (2 Corinthians 12:4; Revelation 2:7), so you need to look at the context, etc, to see which meaning is being used.

<sup>9</sup> Strong's Concordance, Greek word 5020, often translated as "Hell".

<sup>10</sup> Some suggest that this is just a parable, implying that we cannot take it literally. But even if it is a parable, it does not change the truth of what Jesus is saying, because parables were based on known, everyday facts.

<sup>11</sup> Note: From the context, it would appear that the rich man was not in torment because he was rich in life, but because of his selfishness and neglect of the need of others (vs. 19-21). Consider also Luke 12:48; 1 Timothy 6:17-19; 1 John 3:17.

## Death and the Resurrection

- a) The Lord will descend from Heaven with a shout.

When Jesus first came to earth, there were angels singing praises to God to herald His arrival (**Luke 2:13-15**). When Jesus comes again, there will be the voice of the archangel in the sky, and the sound of the trumpet will be heard (**1 Thessalonians 4:16; 1 Corinthians 15:52**).

- b) Those who have died will be resurrected first.

All of those who have died previously will be raised first (**1 Thessalonians 4:16b**),— both the just and the unjust (**John 5:28-29; Acts 24:15**). Hades, the home of the dis-embodied spirits, will give up her dead, and then Hades itself will be destroyed in “...*the lake of fire*..” (**Revelation 20:13-14**).

- c) Those who are still alive will then be “raised”.

Once the dead are raised, then those who are still alive will also be raised (**1 Thessalonians 4:15, 17**).

- d) Everyone will receive a new body.

Because we will be leaving a physical world to go to a spiritual realm, we will have new “bodies”. Paul says in **1 Corinthians 15:50-53** that, “...*flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.....we shall all be changed...mortal must put on immortality....*”.

Earlier in the chapter, when talking about death and the resurrection he said that “...*it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body...*” (**15:42-44**). We are going to a spiritual realm, and so we will have spiritual bodies.- “...*heavenly bodies...*” (**15:49**).

Note: All of this will happen very quickly - “...*in the twinkling of an eye...*” (**1 Corinthians 15:52**).

- e) The heavens<sup>12</sup> and the earth will be burned up.

The heavens and the earth are currently being preserved by the word until the last day. Then they will all be destroyed by a fervent heat. All the works that are in them will be burned up (**2 Peter 3:7, 10, 12**). They will no longer be needed, because we “...*look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells...*” (**2 Peter 3:13**).

- f) The final Judgement.

Once everybody has been raised, we will all stand before God in Judgement to give account of how we have lived our lives here on earth (**2 Corinthians 5:10; Hebrews 9:27**). We learn from **John 12:48-49** that the words of Jesus - the words that He received from the Father – is what we will be judged against (**Revelation 20:12**).

It is not just what we believe that is important (**John 3:16; Romans 10:1-2**), but also what we have done, or not done (**Matthew 16:27; Romans 2:5-11; James 2:14-26; Revelation 20:13**).

- Those who have obeyed Him and done His Will will be granted entrance into eternal life (**Matthew 25:31-40, 46b**).
- But those who “...*do not know God, and those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ...*” will be cast out to suffer

---

<sup>12</sup> The sky and the universe.

## Death and the Resurrection

eternal punishment (**2 Thessalonians 1:7-10; Matthew 7:21-23; 25:41-46a; Hebrews 10:26-31; Revelation 20:15**).

It is because of these things that Paul saw the urgency in preaching the gospel (**2 Corinthians 5:9-11**). Peter, also, exhorts us to be mindful of these things and to live our lives accordingly (**2 Peter 3:11-12**).

g) The kingdom handed to the Father

The final act will be when Jesus hands the kingdom over to the Father (**1 Corinthians 15:24**). Those who have faithfully and obediently followed Jesus will now spend eternity "...with the Lord..." (**1 Thessalonians 4:17b**) in the place that He has prepared beforehand (**John 14:2-3**). They will spend eternity in a place where "...God will wipe away every tear from their eyes, there shall be no more death, nor sorrow, nor crying. There shall be no more pain..." (**Revelation 21:4**).

### Conclusion:

I mentioned at the start of this lesson that death is not something that we like to talk about often. It is not a topic that we would normally choose if we wanted to try and encourage people, or cheer them up. However, it is a topic that has its place. There were some concerns within the Thessalonian church about what had happened to those brethren who had already died. Paul told them about the things I have mentioned in this lesson, and his reason was to "...comfort one another with these words" (**1 Thessalonians 4:18**).

For the Christian, there is nothing to fear from death – although we may have some concerns about the manner in which we die. But what we see from the scriptures is that, for God's people, the next life will be better than this one (**Philippians 1:21-23**) – it is something that we can look forward to.

For the non-christian, or the un-repentant erring christian, the outlook is very different. "*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*" (**Hebrews 10:31**).

- If you are not a christian, I would encourage you this day to give serious consideration to;
  - Hearing the gospel (**Matthew 28:19-20; Romans 10:14**),
  - Having faith and belief in Jesus, the Son of God (**Acts 16:31; Hebrews 11:6**),
  - Repenting of your sins (**Luke 13:3; 2 Corinthians 7:10**),
  - Confessing Jesus as Lord (**Romans 10:9-10**),
  - Washing away your sins by being buried in the waters of baptism (**Acts 2:38; 22:16; Romans 6:3-4; 1 Peter 3:21**), and,
  - Living faithfully for the Lord (**Ephesians 5:8-10; Colossians 1:10**).
- If you are an erring Christian, then repent of your sins, ask the Lord's forgiveness, and live faithfully unto death (**Acts 8:22; 1 John 1:9; Revelation 2:10b**).