

What Happens After Death?

Introduction

A drunken driver loses control of his car and careens headfirst into a van, killing a family. A mother dies of breast cancer, leaving confused children and a grieving husband. An infant boy succumbs to a birth defect. A gentle, elderly lady dies quietly in her sleep. A desperate, depressed teenager commits suicide.

Maybe death would be different if it were predictable or consistent. But death can be so capricious. It hardly seems fair.

To us life is precious. But death is everywhere! We don't want to die. We don't want to see our loved ones die.

Self-preservation is a powerful instinct. We design special diets and exercise programs to keep us young and fit. Through medical science we seek to isolate the gene that makes us age, hoping somehow to eliminate death. A few have even arranged for their bodies to be preserved cryogenically in the hope that they can be brought back to life when the cure for what killed them is finally discovered.

Yet, for all our efforts, hopes and wishes, *death* is the one thing in life that remains certain. Whether through old age, illness, accident or violence, whether we are rich, poor, male or female, no matter if we're good or bad, all of us—regardless of race or creed—die.

Scientists cannot tell us what happens after death. Too many aspects of life itself are intangible—too elusive to measure and record. Philosophers disagree on death and the afterlife.

Religions also disagree. Traditional Christian denominations generally teach that the souls of the dead live on in a place or condition of heaven or hell. Many non-Christians believe in the transmigration or reincarnation of souls at death. Still others believe the

dead will never live again, that this life is all there is.

What *really* happens at death? Why do we even have to die? Can we know if there is life beyond the grave? Where can we go for meaningful, believable answers?

Only the Creator of life can reveal its purpose and the state of the dead. By looking into the Word of God for answers to our questions about death, we can learn a great deal about both life and death.

Join us now for a look at what God, our Creator, says about life and death in His inspired Word, the Bible. You may be both surprised and challenged by what you learn.

The Wondrous Gift of Life

To understand death, we need to first consider: *What is life?* The world's greatest thinkers, including the Greek philosophers Plato, Aristotle and Socrates, have struggled with this question. Scientists and theologians have dedicated lifetimes to trying to find the keys that unlock the mystery of human existence.

But only the One who created life in the first place can supply the answers we so desperately need. We must look at the very *beginning of life* to understand it.

Religion, philosophy and science acknowledge that physical life had a beginning. Some believe that life evolved over millennia. But the Bible reveals a God who boldly claims that He is the Creator of all life and that He created human life for a tremendous purpose. Through His Word, God gives us His answers to life's most important questions.

Much of humanity is familiar with the account in Genesis, the first book of the Bible. *Genesis* simply means "the beginning" or "the origin." In Genesis God reveals the origin of the forms of life we find on planet earth.

Why humans differ from animals

Notice what God says about human life in Genesis 1:26: "Let Us make man *in Our image, according to Our likeness*; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over

the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth" (emphasis added throughout). Other forms of life exist to serve man in his fulfillment of a greater purpose, but man has an extraordinary *God-given purpose* for his existence.

Only mankind was created *in God's very image*—a designation that applies to no other part of His creation. Humans are unique among God's physical creation in their godlike abilities to make decisions, plan and create. Rather than providing us with animal-like instinct, God created within us intellect, self-awareness, the capacity to learn, reason, communicate and produce.

Human brains are physically quite similar to some animal brains, yet humans have vastly higher abilities. The Bible reveals that the difference between the human mind and the animal brain is the spiritual essence God included in humans. "For what man knows the things of a man except [by] *the spirit of the man* which is in him?" (1 Corinthians 2:11).

Something is still missing in humans

Paul refers to the "*spirit of the man*" as that which makes humans intellectually superior to animals. It separates us from animals, allowing us to know "the things of a man," to think and understand on a higher plane.

We were created to possess certain intellectual capacities similar to those of the Creator Himself (Genesis 1:26), enabling us to develop skills in mathematics and science, invent written languages, build great civilizations, learn from the past and plan for the future.

When God breathed the "breath of life" into Adam (Genesis 2:7), He gave the first human being more than physical existence. He imparted to Adam that spiritual and intellectual essence that gives mankind the remarkable capacities of the human mind.

But the apostle Paul shows that something is still missing: "So also no one comprehends what is truly God's *except [by] the Spirit of God*" (1 Corinthians 2:11, New Revised Standard Version). Here Paul is speaking of another Spirit, the Spirit of God.

He continues, "Now we have received not the spirit of the world, but *the Spirit that is from God*, so that we may *understand* the gifts bestowed on us by God" (verse 12). Spiritual understanding that

surpasses our normal human intellect comes only through the extra help, influence and power of the Holy Spirit.

“Those who are unspiritual,” Paul adds, “do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned” (verse 14, New Revised Standard Version). We will see that this *spiritual link with God* is vital in coming to know and experience the purpose of life.

Human life created for a higher purpose

Compared with plant and animal life, humans are created by God with a spiritual dimension for a much higher purpose. Several scriptures reveal that the reason for human life is preparation for *eternal, immortal, spirit life*.

God created us so that “whoever believes in Him [Jesus Christ] should not perish *but have eternal life*. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish *but have everlasting life*” (John 3:15-16).

God gave Jesus Christ “authority over all flesh, that He should give *eternal life* to as many as You have given Him” (John 17:2).

God “will render to each one according to his deeds: *eternal life* to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor, and immortality” (Romans 2:6-7). We have the “hope of *eternal life* that God, who cannot lie, promised before time began” (Titus 1:2).

That is the reason for human life—that we may ultimately receive *eternal life*.

Summary

God is the Creator and sustainer of life. He created human life on a level different from that of plants and animals to fulfill a far greater purpose. Our lives consist of relationships, goals and experiences that at times are enjoyable, at times difficult. But the ultimate purpose of our lives greatly exceeds merely meeting the needs and fulfilling the pleasures of our daily circumstances.

(To learn more about the incredible purpose of human life, be sure to request your free copy of *What Is Your Destiny?* from our Web site, www.ucg.org, or from the address nearest you at the end of this

booklet. From the Scriptures it explains in greater detail God’s purpose and plan for you and all mankind.)

Now that we have briefly considered the meaning of life, we will examine the part death plays in the fulfilling of the purpose of human life. Why do we die? What happens when we die? What is the hope that lies beyond death?

The Mystery of Death

Death is a fearful, often traumatic event. Sometimes it is preceded by suffering, the result of the infirmities of age, disease or injury. Often death is shocking and unexpected. Family and friends suffer the pain of loss. The Scriptures refer to death as “the last enemy” to be conquered (1 Corinthians 15:26) and note mankind’s innate fear of death (Hebrews 2:15). Death remains one of life’s greatest mysteries.

Religions offer a variety of answers, some credible and some beyond belief. Their explanations often contradict one another, adding to the confusion and uncertainty about what happens after death. Some teach that people are born *with* immortal souls; some say people *are* immortal souls. Many believe that after death the soul is conscious and proceeds to a literal place or condition of bliss or torment. Others teach that upon death the soul is absorbed into a “greater consciousness.” Some expect to be reincarnated, coming back to earth as another person or as an animal.

Can we pinpoint just what death is? Are we immortal souls? Are we conscious after we die? Are we destined to go somewhere to experience some form of reward or punishment? What is really going to happen when we die?

To understand, let’s continue with the biblical account of the first human beings.

God personally instructed Adam and Eve, but they chose to

disobey Him. They let Satan influence them into choosing their own will rather than obeying God’s instructions. God informed Adam and Eve that, because they had disobeyed Him, their lives would grow difficult and, as He had warned, they would die. “In the sweat of your face,” God said to Adam, “you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, *and to dust you shall return*” (Genesis 3:19).

Our lives are physical; we age and eventually die. Like Adam and Eve, we eventually return to dust. Solomon made an elegantly simple but profound observation when he wrote that there is “a time to be born, and a time to die” (Ecclesiastes 3:2). Look around the world at the example of nature. All living processes eventually break down and cease, then the physical remains begin to decay.

Solomon, after observing the cycles of life, noted that we human beings yearn for an eternal existence (verse 11). Knowing that death is inevitable, we search for a deeper meaning of life.

What is a soul?

Much misunderstanding about death is directly related to confusion concerning the “soul.” What is a soul? Does it exist? If it exists, is it separate from the physical body? Does it live on after death?

The Hebrew word most often translated into English as “soul” or “creature” in the Bible is *nephesh*. *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* succinctly defines this word as “a breathing creature.” When used in the Bible, *nephesh* usually means a living, breathing creature. Occasionally it conveys a related meaning such as breath, life or person.

Surprising to many, *nephesh* refers to humans *and* animals. For example, notice the account of the creation of sea life: “And God created great whales, and every living creature that moveth, which the waters brought forth abundantly, after their kind, and every winged fowl after his kind: and God saw that it was good” (Genesis 1:21, King James Version). The Hebrew word translated “creature” in this verse is *nephesh*. In the biblical account, these “souls,” creatures of the sea, were made before the first humans were formed and given life.

Nephesh and man

Let’s see how this word is used to refer to mankind in the Scriptures.

The first place we find *nephesh* referring to mankind is in the second chapter of Genesis: “And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul” (Genesis 2:7).

The word translated “soul” in this verse is again the Hebrew word *nephesh*. Other translations of the Bible state that man became a living “being” or “person.” This verse does not say that Adam had an

Does the Bible Teach That We Have an Immortal Soul?

Some believe that various scriptures support belief in an immortal soul. Let’s consider some of these passages and understand what they really say.

Matthew 10:28

“And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell” (Matthew 10:28).

Is Jesus teaching in this verse that the soul is immortal? If you look at this scripture closely you see that Jesus is actually saying that *the soul can be destroyed*. Jesus is here warning about the judgment of God. He says not to fear those who can destroy only the physical human body (*soma* in the Greek), but fear Him (God) who is also able to destroy the soul (*psuche*).

Simply stated, Christ was showing that, when one man kills another, the resulting death is only temporary; God can raise anyone to life again either in this life (see

Matthew 9:23-25; 27:52; John 11:43-44; Acts 9:40-41; 20:9-11) or the life to come. We must revere God, who alone can remove this physical life and all possibility of any later resurrection to consciousness. When God destroys one in “hell,” his destruction is permanent.

What is the “hell” spoken of in this verse? The Greek word *gehenna* is used here, which comes from the combination of two Hebrew words, *ge* and *hinnom*, meaning “valley of Hinnom.” The term originally referred to a ravine on the south side of Jerusalem in which pagan deities were worshiped.

Because of its reputation as a place of abomination, it later became a garbage dump where refuse burned. *Gehenna* became synonymous with “a place of burning.”

Only God can utterly destroy human existence, with no hope of a resurrection. The Scriptures teach that God will send a future all-consuming fire to burn up the wicked and turn them to ashes (Malachi 4:3).

immortal soul; rather it says that God breathed into Adam the “breath of life,” and Adam *became* a living soul. At the end of his days, when the breath of life left Adam, he died and returned to dust. In death his life and consciousness simultaneously ceased.

The soul (*nephesh*) is *not immortal*, because *it dies*. This is clear in the Bible. For example, the prophet Ezekiel quoted God: “Behold, all souls are Mine; the soul of the father as well as the soul of the

1 Thessalonians 5:23

Many are confused by an expression the apostle Paul uses in his letter to the Thessalonians: “Now may the God of peace Himself sanctify you completely; and may your whole spirit, soul, and body be preserved blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” (1 Thessalonians 5:23).

What does Paul mean by the phrase “spirit, soul, and body”?

By “spirit” (*pneuma*), Paul means the human mind, which gives us the ability to reason, create and analyze our existence. By “soul” (*psuche*), Paul means physical life and its consciousness. By “body” (*soma*), Paul means the flesh of a physical body. Paul wished for the whole person, including the mind, vitality of life and physical body, to be sanctified and blameless.

Revelation 6:9-11

“When He opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of those who had been slain for the word of God and for the testimony which they held. And they cried with a loud voice, saying, ‘How long, O Lord, holy and true, until You judge and avenge our blood on those who dwell on the earth?’” (Revelation 6:9-11).

To understand this scripture we must remember the context. John was witnessing a vision while he was “in the spirit” (Revelation 4:2). Under inspiration he was seeing future events symbolized. The fifth seal is *figurative* of the future great tribulation, a time of world turmoil preceding Christ’s return. In this vision John sees under the altar the martyred believers who *sacrificed their lives* for their faith in God. These souls symbolically cry out, “Avenge our blood!” This can be compared to Abel’s blood symbolically “crying out” to God from the ground (Genesis 4:10). Though neither souls nor blood can actually speak, these phrases figuratively demonstrate that a God of justice will not forget the evil deeds of mankind perpetrated against His righteous followers.

This verse does not describe living souls that have gone to heaven. The Bible confirms that “*no one has ascended to heaven* but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man who is in heaven” (John 3:13). Even righteous King David, a man after God’s own heart (Acts 13:22), was described by Peter as being “dead and buried” (Acts 2:29), not alive in heaven or some other state or location.

son is Mine; *the soul who sins shall die*” (Ezekiel 18:4, see also verse 20). Again, the Hebrew word translated “soul” in this verse is *nephesh*. Ezekiel states that *the soul can die*. It is mortal—it is in no way immortal—*because it is subject to death*.

The History of the Immortal-Soul Teaching

Several times we have mentioned the words *immortal soul*, but the phrase is found nowhere in the Bible. Where did the idea of an immortal soul originate?

The concept of the soul's supposed immortality was first taught in ancient Egypt and Babylon. “The belief that the soul continues in existence after the dissolution of the body is . . . speculation . . . nowhere expressly taught in Holy Scripture . . . The belief in the immortality of the soul came to the Jews from contact with Greek thought and chiefly through the philosophy of Plato, its principal exponent, who was led to it through Orphic and Eleusinian mysteries in which Babylonian and Egyptian views were strangely blended” (*Jewish Encyclopedia*, 1941, Vol. VI, “Immortality of the Soul,” pp. 564, 566).

Plato, the Greek philosopher who lived 428-348 B.C., as a student of Socrates taught that the body and an “immortal soul” separate at death. The *International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* comments on ancient Israel's view of the soul: “. . . We are influenced always more or less by the Greek, Platonic idea, that the body dies, yet the soul is

immortal. Such an idea is utterly contrary to the Israelite consciousness, and it is nowhere found in the [Old Testament]” (1956, Vol. II, “Death,” p. 812).

Early Christianity was influenced by Greek philosophies even as the gospel of Christ was preached to the Greek and Roman world. By A.D. 200 the doctrine of the immortality of the soul became a controversy in the established church.

The *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology* notes how Origen, an early and influential church theologian, was influenced by Greek thinkers: “Speculation about the soul in the subapostolic church was heavily influenced by Greek philosophy. This is seen in Origen's acceptance of Plato's doctrine of the preexistence of the soul as pure mind (*nous*) originally, which, by reason of its fall from God, cooled down to soul (*psyche*) when it lost its participation in the divine fire by looking earthward” (1992, p. 1037, “Soul”).

Secular history reveals that the concept of the immortality of the soul is an ancient belief embraced by many pagan religions. But it is not a biblical, Hebrew or apostolic teaching.

What happens to the dead?

Superstitions and assumptions, all kinds of beliefs, abound about the state of the dead. Many enjoy being frightened by books and movies about ghosts and other weird twists on the afterlife. Movies and television programs portray apparitions and angels sent back to earth to accomplish some final good deeds or rescue people from difficult situations. Cartoons entertain our children with ideas about animals going to heaven and the antics of friendly ghosts.

Of course, many religious groups teach that at death one goes immediately to his reward or punishment. But the reality of what happens after death is quite different. There are no disembodied spirits of dead people wandering about and haunting houses, frightening or taking revenge on people—or even helping them.

The Bible simply does not speak of the dead going to and living forever in a place or condition of “heaven” or “hell.” Solomon observed that mankind and animals are destined for, in death, a common fate. “For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other . . . All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust” (Ecclesiastes 3:19-20).

Daniel refers to the state of the dead in his inspiring prophecy. “And many of those *who sleep in the dust of the earth* shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt” (Daniel 12:2). In explaining the condition of the dead, Daniel compares death to sleep. The Bible analogously refers to death as sleep. How could people who have died be asleep in their graves and profoundly unconscious—as revealed in the Bible—yet be residing in heaven and looking down at us on earth (or, presumably, in hell looking up)?

Solomon noted that the dead have no awareness, nor are they in some other state of consciousness: “For the living know that they will die; *but the dead know nothing . . .*” (Ecclesiastes 9:5). The person who has died is unconscious and unaware of the passing of time.

Life is transitory

The patriarch Job contemplated the transitory nature of physical life. Man “comes forth like a flower and fades away; he flees like a

shadow and does not continue” (Job 14:2). Referring to the physical limitations common to all men and women, he remarks, “Since his days are determined, the number of his months is with You; You have appointed his limits, so that he cannot pass” (verse 5).

Job notes the stark reality of death: “So man lies down and does not rise. Till the heavens are no more, they will not awake nor be roused from their sleep” (verse 12). Job understood that death was the absolute absence of life.

Notice that in Genesis 2:17 God told Adam and Eve that disobeying Him by taking from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil would lead to *death*. Then, in Genesis 3:4, we read that the serpent (Satan) told Eve that, after eating from that tree, she would “not surely die.” Simply put, God said that man is mortal and will die. Satan contradicted God and said that man will not die.

Isn’t it amazing that, as evidenced by the pervasive belief in the immortality of the soul, more people accept Satan’s teaching than God’s? Again, maybe that’s not so startling after all. The Bible does say that Satan “deceives the whole world” (Revelation 12:9), and he has certainly deceived many about what happens after death.

The Hebrew scriptures, commonly called the Old Testament, teach that, upon death, the soul ceases to exist. It does not live on in some other condition. It does not transmigrate into another form. It is not reincarnated into another creature. It simply *dies*.

What does the New Testament say?

The apostle James understood the *temporary* nature of life. He compared life with a mist: “. . . You do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even *a vapor* that appears for a little time and then *vanishes away*” (James 4:14). Another epistle also discusses this subject, stating that “it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment” (Hebrews 9:27).

The New Testament uses a word similar in meaning to *nephesh* to characterize the life or vitality of our *physical* existence, the Greek word *psuche*. According to *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, this word means “breath.” This word is similar in meaning to the Hebrew word *nephesh*. In 1 Corinthians 15:45, where Genesis 2:7 is paraphrased as “The first man Adam became a living being,” the

Greek word substituted for “soul” or “being” (*nephesh*) is *psuche*.

Both of these words, often translated “soul,” convey the concept that man is a *living, breathing* creature subject to death. Notice Christ’s use of the word *psuche*: “For whoever desires to save his life [*psuche*] will lose it, but whoever loses his life [*psuche*] for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul [*psuche*]? Or what will a man give in

What About Reported Life-After-Death Experiences?

Occasionally the news media report the story of someone who supposedly came back to life after he or she had died and returned to consciousness to relate the incident. Sometimes these happenings seem truly remarkable and appear to contradict the many biblical passages describing death. How can that be?

The basic premise of these accounts is that the people describing their experiences actually died. True, many of them were declared “clinically dead.” However, as with life itself there is much that medical science has not grasped about the nature of death. Doctors and scientists do not agree on exactly what constitutes “death.” Some people, for example, may be brain-dead or comatose while the rest of their body functions for years. Others whose hearts or lungs have stopped have been successfully resuscitated with no permanent ill effects.

In the Bible death is described as a state of total unconsciousness devoid of awareness, knowledge or percep-

tion (Psalm 6:5; Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10). If we accept the Bible’s description of death, we realize that those who returned to consciousness or were revived and later related their experiences were not really dead but in some unconscious state. Some vital organs, such as the heart, may have temporarily ceased functioning, but not all brain activity had stopped.

Researchers have found that the human nervous system and brain operate largely through electrical impulses. The brain requires blood and oxygen to properly function, and when breathing or blood circulation is impaired the brain begins to malfunction. If these functions are interrupted long enough, the brain eventually ceases all activity.

Some researchers conclude that the unusual sensations, including lights and sounds, reported by those revived after being *clinically* dead can be attributed to malfunctions of the nervous system and brain brought about by the shock to the body brought on by *nearly* dying.

exchange for his soul [*psuche*]? (Matthew 16:25-26).

Notice that Jesus, as recorded by Matthew, uses *psuche* four times in this passage. It is translated into English as both “life” and “soul.” Christ was simply saying that following Him and His message is more important than life itself. What good is it if you gain the whole world and then lose your existence? Jesus knew the soul was temporary and mortal. It could be lost or sacrificed for something of less value.

What did Peter teach?

What did Jesus’ early disciples teach about death? The book of Acts records Peter’s powerful sermon in which he talked about King David and his lack of consciousness while awaiting his resurrection.

“Men and brethren,” exhorted Peter, “let me speak freely to you of the patriarch David, that *he is both dead and buried*, and his tomb is with us to this day. Therefore, being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him that of the fruit of his body, according to the flesh, He would raise up the Christ to sit on his throne, he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in Hades, nor did His flesh see corruption. This Jesus God has raised up, of which we are all witnesses. Therefore being exalted to the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, He poured out this which you now see and hear. For *David did not ascend into the heavens . . .*” (Acts 2:29-34).

If anyone other than God the Father and Jesus Christ is in heaven, surely it is King David. But Peter said David is dead and buried and David’s soul is in *hades*, the Greek word for *the grave*.

David’s hope, and ours, is to live again through the sacrificial death of Jesus Christ and the *resurrection* available through Him.

Paul’s teachings about death

Paul comments on the state of the dead. In his letter to the Corinthians the apostle compared the condition of the dead with sleep: “For this reason many are weak and sick among you, *and many sleep*” (1 Corinthians 11:30). Notice how Paul, like the ancient prophet Daniel, likens death to sleep. Paul comments that many in the Corinthian church were weak and sickly. Many had

God’s Plan of Redemption

God gave us physical, temporary life. Since we are physical, we all eventually die. This is no accident of evolution but came about as a result of circumstances knowable only from the Bible and from decisions made by our first parents in the Garden of Eden.

In the beginning of God’s plan for mankind, God made available to Adam and Eve His gift of eternal life represented by the tree of life (Genesis 2:9, 16). This tree represented God’s way of life, belief in and obedience to God’s revealed will.

The garden contained another tree as well, the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (verse 9). This tree represented something altogether different: man choosing his own way of life rather than following God’s revelation. Man’s way is the way of deciding for himself what is right and wrong. By choosing this way rather than God’s revealed way, Adam and Eve made a fundamental choice that has affected humanity ever since.

Influenced by Satan, Adam and Eve chose to decide for themselves what is right and wrong. Refusing to believe and obey God, they followed Satan’s deceitful ways. As a result, they made the wrong choice and took of the forbidden fruit, which led to their deaths (Genesis 2:17).

Had Adam and Eve taken of the tree of life, they would have received eternal life (Genesis 3:22). This is why, after they had made the wrong choice and had taken of the wrong

tree, God shut them off from the tree of life “lest they live forever.” God could not allow them to live forever in their sinful, rebellious state.

Because of their disobedience, God told them of their sure fate: “You [shall] return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return” (Genesis 3:19).

It is important to realize that God’s original plan to give mankind eternal life, which was rejected by Adam and Eve, is available to each of us today as a result of God’s personal calling.

Adam and Eve introduced sin to mankind, and all humans springing from them are “appointed” to die because all have sinned (Romans 5:12; Hebrews 9:27). Yet God’s purpose for mankind stands; His purpose to give mankind eternal life will succeed! Throughout the rest of the Bible we see the unfolding of God’s plan of redemption: the *purchase of mankind for a price*. Man, we see, is rescued from death by the priceless shed blood of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The little-understood truth is that God’s initial purpose for mankind is that he *not die*. The temporary existence that ends in death is not God’s original purpose for mankind. It is part of the curse for sin brought on humanity by the wrong choice made by our first parents, and all have chosen to follow that sinful way ever since (Romans 3:23).

died. Paul uses the word *sleep* to describe death as *a state of unconsciousness*.

But that is not the end of the matter. Paul writes in the same letter, “Behold, I tell you a mystery: *We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed*” (1 Corinthians 15:51).

But when are we changed? Our change takes place at *the time of judgment*, rather than at the moment of death (Hebrews 9:27).

In addition to comparing death to the unconscious state of sleep, Paul specifically points out that we are now mortal—destructible—and that to receive everlasting life we must somehow become immortal—*indestructible*.

“For this corruptible must put on incorruption, *and this mortal must put on immortality*. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

Paul expresses a similar message to the church at Thessalonica. “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning *those who have fallen asleep*, lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him *those who sleep in Jesus*” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-14).

Paul here again describes the dead as being in an unconscious state comparable to sleep.

Is the spirit in man the immortal soul?

Earlier we noted a special spiritual aspect of the human mind that gives us our intellectual abilities, separating us from animals in function and purpose (see 1 Corinthians 2:11).

What we’ve seen so far is that the Bible shows a dead person is in no way immortal; his life has perished.

So what happens to the spiritual essence that separates man from animal? Does it continue as an immortal soul independent of the physical body? Certainly not!

The Bible shows that the spirit in man, which originally came from the Creator God, returns to Him. “Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the *spirit* will return to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:7).

This *spirit* that returns to God is neither the source of human life, nor is it human consciousness. Life and consciousness both perish when one dies. God does not tell us *why* this spirit returns to Him, just that *it does*. This may be the way God preserves the characteristics of each person until the resurrection.

Summary

In this chapter we looked at the mystery of death. The good news is that it doesn’t have to be a mystery. The scriptures we have reviewed make clear that a human being *is* a mortal soul and does not *possess* an immortal soul. Upon death, life ceases. It does not continue in some other form; a dead person is not reincarnated or transmigrated into another being.

Since the time of Adam and Eve, *all* people have died a physical death—even Jesus Christ. *But death is not the end*. As Paul wrote, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ *all shall be made alive*” (1 Corinthians 15:22). Even though our life is temporary, God has not left us without hope and a greater purpose for living.

Another vital step, which we will take up in the next chapter, brings us from death back to life.

The Promise of Life After Death

In the first chapter we dealt with God’s gift of physical life. In the second chapter we discussed death itself. We have learned that we are mortal; life is temporary. Now we will focus on *what happens after death*. Even though our bodies are temporary and designed to eventually die, God has planned for us much more than just this limited, physical existence.

Thousands of years ago the patriarch Job asked the same question we ask ourselves: “If a man dies, shall he live again?” (Job 14:14). He went on to answer the question: “All the days of my hard service I will wait, *till my change comes*. You shall call, *and I will answer you . . .*” (verses 14-15).

After death a person is unconscious, waiting for God to call him from the grave and restore him to life. For some, as we will see, the “change” will be an astounding transformation, even more amazing than the dead being raised to life again.

What does the Bible say about the remarkable phenomenon of restoration to life? When will it take place? What else happens at this time? Will the resurrected still be flesh and blood, or will they be brought back to a different kind of life?

The answers to these questions go to the core of the meaning of our existence. As we study the Bible to find the answers, we can be encouraged, motivated and inspired by God’s plan for life after death.

The promise of the resurrection

Just as Job spoke of his future “change,” Paul spoke of a change when he referred to both *the resurrection of the dead* and the state of *those who remain alive* at the time of the resurrection at the return of Christ. A marvelous transformation must occur before we can receive the gift of eternal life. The dead in Christ will be resurrected to an “incorruptible” existence, and those in Christ who are still alive will be changed from a mortal, physical existence to an incorruptible state.

Notice Paul’s description of this astounding event. “Behold, I tell you a mystery,” he wrote: “We shall not all sleep [die], but *we shall all be changed*—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and *the dead will be raised incorruptible*, and *we shall be changed*” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Those who have died are *unconscious*, as if they are sleeping, awaiting their time to be called out of the grave and resurrected to a new life. The period from the last moment of consciousness until they are awakened in the resurrection will seem as if no time had passed at all, just as if they were waking from sleep.

Paul shows clearly that this resurrection will occur when Jesus Christ returns to earth: “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. For this we say to you by the word of the Lord, that we who are alive and remain until the coming of the Lord *will by no means precede* those who are asleep.

“For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trumpet of God. And the *dead in Christ will rise first*. Then we who are alive and remain shall be *caught up* together with them *in the clouds* to meet the Lord in the air. And thus we shall always be with the Lord” (1 Thessalonians 4:13-17).

Two groups resurrected at Christ’s return

In both passages Paul distinguishes between two groups—the dead and those who are still alive when Jesus returns—both of which will be in this resurrection. Although “it is appointed for men to die once” (Hebrews 9:27), some will remain alive when Jesus returns. What

will happen to the faithful followers of Jesus Christ alive at that time?

At His return, these people's physical lives will end because they will be miraculously and instantaneously changed to incorruptible spirit, inheriting the gift of eternal life.

Paul describes this wonderful change a little earlier in the same chapter. "So also is the resurrection of the dead," he wrote. "The body is sown in corruption, *it is raised in incorruption*. It is sown in dishonor, *it is raised in glory*. It is sown in weakness, *it is raised in power*. It is sown a natural body [flesh and blood], *it is raised a spiritual body*. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:42-44).

Paul continues: "And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man [Christ]. Now

this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God; nor does corruption inherit incorruption" (verses 49-50).

At the end of our physical lives—this temporary and mortal existence—comes death. After that comes a resurrection at which we must be changed because, as Paul wrote, mortal "flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God." Those who are "in Christ"—who have been called, repented, been baptized and were led by God—will be transformed in that resurrection to eternal, spiritual life, glorified like the resurrected Jesus Christ (Romans 8:16-17).

What happens after the resurrection?

The scriptures quoted from 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17 describe Jesus' triumphant return to earth. Heralded by the shout of an

Pre-Christian Belief Concerning Heaven

The idea that "souls" go to heaven upon death long predates Christianity. A brief look at ancient history reveals that the people of Babylon and Egypt, as well as subjects of other ancient kingdoms, held similar beliefs.

According to *This Believing World*, by Lewis Brown, the Egyptian god Osiris was killed and reputed to be resurrected and taken to heaven: "Osiris came to life again. He was miraculously resurrected from death and taken up to heaven; and there in heaven, so the myth declared, he lived on eternally" (1946, p. 83).

Brown explains: "The Egyptians reasoned that if it was the fate of the god Osiris to be resurrected after death, then a way could be

found to make it the fate of man, too . . . The bliss of immortality that had formerly been reserved only for kings was then promised to all men . . . The heavenly existence of the dead was carried on in the realm of Osiris, and it was described in considerable detail by the Egyptian theologians. It was believed that on death the soul of a man set out at once to reach a Judgment Hall on high . . . and stood before the celestial throne of Osiris, the Judge. There it gave account of itself to Osiris and his forty-two associate gods" (p. 84).

If the soul could satisfy the gods, "the soul was straightway gathered into the fold of Osiris. But if it could not, if it was found wanting when

weighed in the heavenly balances, then it was cast into a hell, to be rent to shreds of the 'Devouress.' For only the righteous souls, only the guiltless, were thought to be deserving of life everlasting" (pp. 86-87).

Brown continues: "Mankind everywhere, in Mexico and Iceland, in Zululand and China, makes more or less the same wild guesses in its convulsive effort to solve the riddle of existence. And that is why we find this complex idea of a slain and resurrected god common in many parts of the world.

"In very early times that idea flourished not alone among the Babylonians and Egyptians, but also among the barbaric tribes in and around Greece . . . These mysteries [came] down from Thrace or across the sea from Egypt and Asia Minor . . . They declared that for every man, no matter how poor or vicious, there was a place in heaven. All one had to

do was to be 'initiated' into the secrets of the cult . . . then salvation was assured him, and no excess of vice and moral turpitude could close the gates of paradise in his face. He was saved forevermore" (pp. 96-99).

Man has always wanted to live without ever dying. This world and all it offers has never been able to satisfy humanity. For centuries mankind has searched for security and happiness in the hope of going to heaven upon death. Unfortunately, he has embraced beliefs that he cannot prove true.

God alone knows the answers to the mysteries of life and death and reveals them in His Word, the Holy Bible. Contrary to what so many think, God does not promise heaven as the reward of the saved. Instead, He will grant eternal rulership in the Kingdom of God, to be established on earth at Christ's return (Revelation 5:10; 11:15).

archangel and the sounding of a trumpet, God will resurrect the dead in Christ to eternal life; the living who are Christ's will be changed from mortal to immortal and will ascend to meet and greet Him.

Scriptures show that those in this resurrection will not stay in "heaven" (in this case the earth's atmosphere; see Daniel 7:13) with Christ, but will descend with Him as He takes control of and begins to reign over the nations (Daniel 2:44; 7:13-18; Zechariah 14:1-4; Acts 15:15-17; Revelation 11:15; 19:15).

The resurrected saints will reign with Christ on earth in His Kingdom: Jesus Christ has "made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God, and they will reign on the earth" (Revelation 5:10, New International Version). (To learn more about these incredible events, be sure to request your free copy of *The Gospel of the Kingdom*. Write or phone us at the address or number nearest you at the end of this booklet.)

Who will be resurrected?

Now let's look at another important detail regarding the resurrection: Some will be resurrected to receive eternal life, but others will be resurrected to a coming judgment. Jesus makes this distinction Himself: "Do not marvel at this; for an hour is coming, in which all who are in the tombs shall hear His voice, and shall come forth; those who did the good deeds to a resurrection of life, those who committed the evil deeds to a resurrection of judgment" (John 5:28-29, New American Standard Bible).

God gave us this temporary, mortal life to prepare us for eternal life. The hope and promise of that resurrection is intriguing and inspiring. But knowing there is also a "resurrection of judgment" gives us reason to pause. Why might one person be resurrected to life and another resurrected to judgment?

The resurrection of life is through Jesus Christ

When challenged by religious leaders, Peter made the point that the only way to salvation is through Jesus Christ (Acts 4:12). Paul points out that our resurrection can take place because God first resurrected Jesus Christ. Unless Jesus was resurrected before us, we have no hope (1 Corinthians 15:12-19).

Jesus promised: "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, *though he may die, he shall live again*" (John 11:25). One of the best-known verses in the Bible, John 3:16, promises that "whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life."

The simple truth is that we can receive the gift of eternal life only through Jesus Christ. How do we demonstrate our belief in Him? What obligations does that carry?

Jesus said those who are His disciples must be willing to place everything else in life secondary to their seeking of the Kingdom of God (Luke 14:25-33; Matthew 6:33; 13:44-46). People have devised many ways to live, with many false values and distractions (Matthew 6:19-20; 7:13-14), but the reality is that there is only one right way and only one Savior.

After the first recorded sermon given after Jesus' death, Peter called on believers in Christ to repent, undergo baptism and

Words of Encouragement

Paul noted that God revealed details about what happens after death to encourage and comfort us, to give us hope in times of personal loss, that we not "sorrow as others who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). God's promise of eternal life is certain; we can safely trust in it as long as we are faithful to Him. Writing to a fellow minister, Paul spoke of his confidence in the "hope of eternal life which God, who cannot lie, promised before time began" (Titus 1:2).

When a family member or friend dies, there is no denying the sense of loneliness and emptiness and the feeling of unfinished business—that we should have said or done more. Gaining a more-complete under-

standing of death and life can help us face our own mortality. We find courage, comfort and hope by viewing life in a larger context. We realize that, just as our present existence is temporary, so is death. A time is coming when we will reunite with those who have died and renew our relationships.

Although adjusting to the loss and loneliness caused by death takes time, we need to remember that even this most extreme experience does not separate us or our loved ones from God's plan or His love: "For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, . . . nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Romans 8:38-39).

receive the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:38). Repentance is a sincere and heartfelt realization of our own sinfulness and inadequacy.

But it is also our resolve to forsake our former way of life to begin a new life in Christ. Baptism portrays that resolve (Romans 6:1-6). (To better understand these topics, request your free copy of *The Road to Eternal Life* by contacting us at the address or number nearest you at the end of this booklet.)

Many scriptures show us the actions we must take to demonstrate our belief in Jesus.

For example, Colossians 3-4 is a long passage that describes the complete commitment we must make. We must allow God to *change our very nature*, and we must learn to imitate Jesus Christ in everything we do. If we are truly yielded to God, Christ will live His life in us through the power of the Holy Spirit (Galatians 2:20).

We also learn that our personal reward will be based on how we

live: God gives “eternal life to those who by patient continuance in doing good seek for glory, honor and immortality; but to those who are self-seeking and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness—indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish, on every soul of man who does evil . . . but glory, honor and peace to everyone who works what is good . . .” (Romans 2:6-10).

More than one resurrection

The Scriptures reveal to us another aspect of the resurrection: The dead come back to life *in a particular order*, in sequence, according to a plan. Not all will be resurrected at the same time. “But now Christ is risen from the dead, and has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man came death, by Man [Christ] also came the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive. But *each one in his own*

Did the Apostle Paul Expect to Go to Heaven?

“For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. Nevertheless to remain in the flesh is more needful for you” (Philippians 1:23-24).

Is Paul saying in these verses that he wants to depart from earth and be with Christ in heaven? What did he mean when he expressed his desire to be with Christ?

Before focusing on what this scripture says, let’s notice what it does not say. It does not say *when* or *where* Paul would be with Christ if he departed. Nor is there any reference to heaven in these verses. To conclude otherwise is to read

assumptions into Paul’s words.

When writing to the Philippians, Paul was struggling with two desires. He wanted to depart this life and be with Christ, but he also wanted to remain with God’s people. In his second letter to Timothy he speaks dogmatically; he knows the end of his physical life is near, and he is ready to depart: “For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me *on that Day*, and not to me only but also to all

who have loved His appearing” (2 Timothy 4:6-8).

Here we learn what Paul means by being “with Christ.” He understood that he was not to receive his reward *immediately at death*. Instead, there was laid up for him a crown of righteousness that he would be given “*on that Day*” of *Christ’s appearing*, at Jesus’ second coming. As Paul noted, Jesus will bring Paul’s reward with Him. Paul will receive it at that time, not before, along with all others who will be resurrected at Christ’s return.

“Behold, the Lord God shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him” (Isaiah 40:10; see also Revelation 22:12).

Paul explained to the Corinthians: “Behold I tell you a mystery: We shall

not all sleep, but we shall all be changed—in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed” (1 Corinthians 15:51-52).

Paul knew he would receive his reward at Christ’s coming: “For we all must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad” (2 Corinthians 5:10).

The time from Paul’s death until his resurrection will seem to him but a mere moment. He will be with Christ and will be a glorified son of God in the next moment of his consciousness. No wonder Paul, weary of his sufferings in this life, desired to depart and be with Christ.

Are Saved Human Beings Alive in Heaven?

“After these things I heard a loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying, ‘Alleluia! Salvation and glory and honor and power to the Lord our God!’” (Revelation 19:1).

What is that great multitude? Are these voices praising God those of saved human beings now living in heaven? Have any human beings ever ascended to heaven?

The popular teaching is that when Christians die they immediately go to heaven, where they take up residence in their permanent abode.

But can we find such a teaching in the Bible?

Notice John 3:13: “*No one has ascended to heaven* but He who came down from heaven, that is, the Son of Man [Jesus Christ] who is in heaven.”

This scripture makes two significant points. First, these are Jesus Christ’s own words. If anyone had gone to heaven, Jesus would know about it. Second, John recorded these words many years after Jesus died and ascended to heaven—still affirming that *no one other than Jesus* had gone to heaven.

Whose voices, then, did John hear when he recorded in the book of Revelation what he heard and saw? He refers to voices many places in the book. Let’s notice two such examples. “And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were

full of eyes around and within. And they do not rest day or night, saying: ‘Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come!’ Whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fall down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying: ‘You are Worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created!’” (Revelation 4:8-11).

The Bible shows us that many thousands of angels appear before God’s throne, and they speak with loud voices. “Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice: ‘Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!’” (Revelation 5:11-12).

We have seen that the Scriptures show no human has ever entered heaven. The voices referred to in Revelation 19, then, are those of angelic beings who surround God’s great throne.

order: Christ the firstfruits, *afterward those who are Christ’s at His coming*” (1 Corinthians 15:20-23).

In his letter to the church at Rome, Paul writes that we must have God’s Spirit within us if we are to be resurrected to life: “If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also *through his Spirit that dwells in you*” (Romans 8:11, New Revised Standard Version).

The resurrection we have described so far occurs when Jesus returns. It will include “those who are Christ’s” (1 Corinthians 15:23), also called “the dead in Christ” (1 Thessalonians 4:16); that is, those who have understood that salvation is through Jesus Christ and who have shown their belief in Him through the commitment of repentance, baptism and obedience as they are personally led by the Holy Spirit. As we have seen, they will be transformed to immortal spirit at Christ’s return, thus inheriting eternal life (1 Corinthians 15:50-53).

Others who have died

Now we have a dilemma. What happens to people who never had the opportunity to come to that understanding and make that commitment? Are they the ones Christ spoke of who will be resurrected to judgment?

What about infants and other young children who die long before they can understand or gain the maturity to receive the Holy Spirit and seek God’s Kingdom? What about people who live and die in nations where they may never even hear the name of Jesus Christ, much less make any kind of commitment to Him? What about people who adhere to high moral values but don’t hold to any particular religious beliefs or commitment?

What will happen to them and when? Will the treatment these people receive be just? Is God fair? Will He give everyone equal opportunity to receive eternal life?

Or is He selective, offering eternal life only to some?

The first resurrection

Let’s begin with what John describes as the *first* resurrection.

He speaks of “those who are Christ’s,” some of whom had suffered martyrdom and all of whom had rejected false religions and deceptive teachings.

He writes: “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (*The rest of the dead did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.*) This is the *first* resurrection. Blessed and holy are those who have part in the *first resurrection*” (Revelation 20:4-6, New International Version).

Notice that some come to life *after* the 1,000-year reign of Christ. Those given eternal life at the beginning of that period, at Christ’s return, represent the *first* resurrection. But here we plainly see that others do not come to life again until 1,000 years have passed. If only one resurrection is to occur, John would simply have referred to this event as *the* resurrection. However, since it is called the *first* resurrection, at least one more resurrection must follow.

Summary

We have learned from the highest written authority—the Bible—that at Jesus Christ’s return He will resurrect those who have died in the faith and grant them the incredible gift of eternal life. Yet *only* those who “are Christ’s” at His return will have a part in this resurrection.

We’re told in 1 Timothy 2:3-4 that “God our Savior . . . desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” To accomplish this, God’s plan must include another step we haven’t yet discussed. We must consider the thousands of millions of people who have already died and never had the knowledge of the truth. Is it too late for them?

This brings us to a discussion of what may be the most amazing aspect of all in God’s plan for life and death—what God has in store for the *rest* of the dead.

Those Who Died Without Knowing Jesus Christ

Death does not discriminate. The righteous and sinners all die. Jesus used two widely known tragedies of His day to acknowledge that death can be arbitrary and to draw an important lesson from it:

“There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish. Or those eighteen on whom the tower of Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all the other men who dwelt in Jerusalem? I tell you, no; but unless you repent you will all likewise perish’” (Luke 13:1-5).

The details are unclear. Apparently some Jews were viciously slaughtered by Roman soldiers during a religious ceremony at the temple in Jerusalem. On another occasion a tower collapsed, killing some. Both incidents are examples of the random deaths of innocent people. Jesus says these people weren’t any worse than others. They just happened to be in the wrong place at the wrong time.

Similar events are all around us. We’re especially disturbed when children’s lives are cut short by accidents, crime or illness. We

The Biblical View of ‘Hell’

Is eternity in an ever-burning inferno the fate of the wicked? Many assume that it is, but is that what the Bible says? To answer that question, we need to understand the four Hebrew and Greek words translated “hell” in most versions of the Bible.

Sheol is the Hebrew word translated “hell” throughout the Old Testament. It refers to “the state and abode of the dead; hence the grave in which the body rests . . .” (William Wilson, *Wilson’s Old Testament Word Studies*, “Hell,” p. 215). The *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* explains, “Thus there are no references to eternal destiny but simply to the grave as the resting place of the bodies of all people . . .” (Lawrence O. Richards, 1985, p. 336).

Reflecting its true meaning, many more-recent Bible versions translate this word as simply “the grave” or leave it untranslated as *Sheol*.

Among those who knew that they were going to *sheol*—the grave, not an ever-burning inferno—were such men of faith as Jacob (Genesis 37:35), Job (Job 14:13), David (Psalm 88:3) and Hezekiah (Isaiah 38:10). Clearly, *sheol* does not refer to a place of eternal torment.

Greek words translated ‘hell’

The counterpart of *sheol* in the Greek language is *hades*, which also refers to the grave. In the four New Testament verses that quote Old Testament passages containing *sheol*, *hades* is used for *sheol* (Matthew

11:23; Luke 10:15; Acts 2:27, 31). As with *sheol*, *hades* is rendered as “the grave” or “death” or left untranslated as *Hades* in recent Bible versions.

Hades likewise does not refer to a place of fiery torment. Indeed, the apostle Peter refers to Christ Himself as having been in “Hades” (Acts 2:27, 31) or “hell” (King James Version), referring to the time He was entombed before His resurrection. Both words simply refer to the grave.

A second Greek word, *tartaroo*, is also translated “hell” in the New Testament. This word is used only once in the Bible (2 Peter 2:4), where it refers to the place where the fallen angels, or demons, are restrained awaiting their judgment. The *Expository Dictionary of Bible Words* explains that *tartaroo* means “to confine in Tartaros” and that “Tartaros was the Greek name for the mythological abyss in which rebellious gods were confined” (p. 337). Peter used this reference to contemporary mythology to show that the sinning angels were “delivered . . . into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment.” These fallen angels are in a condition or place of restraint awaiting their ultimate judgment for their rebellion against God and destructive influence on humanity.

Tartaros applies only to demons. Nowhere does *tartaroo* refer to a fiery hell in which people are punished after death.

It is only with the remaining word

translated “hell”—the Greek word *gehenna*—that we see some elements people commonly associate with the traditional view of hell. However, this word also has significant differences from the popular concept of hell.

Gehenna “is derived from the Hebr[ew] expression, ga-Hinnom, Valley of Hinnom . . . Religiously it was a place of idolatrous and human sacrifices . . . In order to put an end to these abominations, Josiah polluted it with human bones and other corruptions (2 Kgs. 23:10, 13, 14)” (Spiros Zodhiates, *The Complete Word Study Dictionary New Testament*, 1992, p. 360).

Thanks in large part to its evil reputation, this valley bordering Jerusalem came to be used as the city garbage dump. Trash was burned there, along with the bodies of dead animals and criminals. Fires day and night consumed the refuse.

Inferno to destroy the wicked

Gehenna is used 12 times in the Bible, with 11 of those recording Christ’s words. When Jesus spoke of *gehenna*, His listeners knew that this “hell” was a *consuming* fire in which garbage and the bodies of the wicked were *destroyed*. He bluntly warned that this destroying fire would be the fate of the incorrigibly wicked (Matthew 5:22, 29-30; 23:15, 33; Luke 12:5).

But when would this take place? Many of those who opposed Christ were among the religious and civil leadership of His day; they weren’t treated as criminals, with their bodies

burned in the city dump. Christ knew that their ultimate judgment, along with that of the overwhelming majority of humanity throughout history, would be far in the future (as made clear throughout this booklet).

After being resurrected, those who are shown God’s way but still refuse to repent will face *gehenna* fire, an all-consuming inferno that will completely destroy them and all memory of them, with no hope of further resurrection (Matthew 10:28).

The book of Revelation calls this inferno “the lake of fire” (Revelation 19:20; 20:10, 14-15). In the time frame revealed in the Bible, this follows 1,000 years of Christ’s reign on earth (Revelation 20:1-6) and a resurrection to physical life of all those who have never known God and His ways (verses 5, 11-13). Those resurrected at that time will have the opportunity to learn God’s ways, repent and receive His gift of eternal life.

Some, however, will refuse that gift. The Bible records their tragic epitaph: “And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire” (verse 15).

Those who willingly choose to reject God’s way will not be allowed to continue living in the misery their choice will bring. They will *die*, not suffer forever. They will be consumed in this fire, leaving nothing but ashes (Malachi 4:1-3). An examination of all the words translated “hell” shows that the traditional view of an ever-burning place of torment where the wicked are punished for eternity cannot be found in the Bible.

shake our heads in bewilderment when an airplane crashes, a house burns, a bomb shatters a shopping center, business or school. Victims of these tragedies were in the wrong place at the wrong time; God didn't single them out for punishment. As Solomon explained, we are all subject to the uncertainties of time and chance (Ecclesiastes 9:11-12).

Are life and death arbitrary?

In the previous chapters we discovered that God has a tremendous purpose for our temporary, physical existence: It prepares us for the eternal, spiritual life He wants to give us. Those who in this age believe in Jesus Christ and demonstrate their commitment by the way they live will receive the gift of eternal life in a resurrection that takes place as He returns to earth.

In the example we just considered, Jesus made the point (in Luke 13:3-5) that life and death are aimless unless we repent and seek the Kingdom. But what about all those who lived, did their best and died without the opportunity to make those choices and commitments? Were their lives and deaths random, without purpose? Is there no hope or promise for them? Will they not be given an equal opportunity to receive the gift of eternal life?

Scriptures include many assurances that God is serious about His promises. Peter says that God's will is that everyone will eventually repent: "The Lord is not slack concerning His promise as some count slackness, but is longsuffering toward us, *not willing that any should perish but that all should come to repentance*" (2 Peter 3:9). This verse assures us that God will not fail. It also implies that some were thinking that God was unconcerned and inconsistent.

Not all are called now to salvation

At times Jesus' disciples were confused and frustrated because of His teaching methods. They asked Him why He spoke to other people in parables instead of being more direct. He told them why: "Because it has been given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given" (Matthew 13:11).

Jesus then quoted from a prophecy in Isaiah that predicted that people would have closed minds, not able to accept His teachings

or understand who He was. Then He explained, "But blessed are your eyes for they see, and your ears for they hear" (verse 16). We can see here a difference between the disciples, who at this point had at least some faith and understanding, and the mass of people who had neither.

The people in Jesus' time frequently tried to determine exactly who He was. Was He just a rabbi? Was He the prophesied Elijah or John the Baptist? Was He a fraud, a false messiah? Was He the one true Messiah?

At one point Jesus asked the disciples who they thought He was. "And Peter answered and said, 'You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.' Jesus answered and said to him, 'Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah, for flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father who is in heaven'" (Matthew 16:15-17).

God must grant understanding

Jesus taught His disciples that God must grant spiritual insight. No one can come to Jesus unless God the Father "draws him" (John 6:44).

God originally worked with the nation of Israel, establishing a relationship with the Israelites through the Old Covenant. But as a nation they continually violated that covenant and finally rejected Christ Himself. Since His own people rejected Him, the promises of the New Covenant, which Jesus came to establish, were now extended to people of all nations.

Paul had this in mind when he addressed both the religious Jews (a segment of the people of Israel) and the gentiles in his letter to the church in Rome. In Romans 11:8 Paul paraphrased Isaiah 29:10: "God has given them [Israel] a spirit of stupor, eyes that should not see and ears that they should not hear, to this very day."

Paul was explaining that even the majority of the people of Israel remain spiritually blinded (Romans 11:7). In Ephesians 4:17-18 Paul shows that the gentiles equally share in this near-universal spiritual blindness.

Paul cited another Old Testament precedent (Romans 11:2-4). The faithful prophet Elijah thought he was the only man alive who had not been seduced into the worship of the false god Baal. But God revealed to Elijah that He had also preserved others who remained faithful to Him. Paul drew an important lesson from this

example: “Even so then, at this present time there is a remnant according to the election of grace” (verse 5).

A remnant is just a trace, a remaining vestige. And the “election” Paul mentioned refers only to a relatively small part of mankind. Clearly, God has revealed that He will call only a few to salvation in this age. Notice how Jesus explains this: “Enter by the narrow gate; for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leads to destruction, and there are many who go in by it. Because narrow is the gate and difficult is the way which leads to life, *and there are few who find it*” (Matthew 7:13-14).

God doesn’t take this approach so He can exclude most of mankind from His promises. In fact, God has chosen this method to extend His promises to all. “For God has committed them all to disobedience, that He might have mercy on all” (Romans 11:32).

Paul acknowledged that this method may seem illogical at first glance, but in His wisdom God knows exactly what He is doing. Our place is not to advise God on how He should accomplish His plan:

“Oh, the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His judgments and His ways past finding out! ‘For who has known the mind of the LORD? Or who has become His counselor? Or who has first given to Him and it shall be repaid to him?’ For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things, to whom be glory forever” (Romans 11:33-36).

A judgment to come

Because God created life, He has the authority to take and restore life. He has the power to provide the opportunity for salvation in an age yet to come.

Consider again a scripture cited near the end of the preceding chapter. “I saw thrones on which were seated those who had been given authority to judge. And I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their testimony for Jesus and because of the word of God. They had not worshipped the beast or his image and had not received his mark on their foreheads or their hands. They came to life and reigned with Christ for a thousand years. (The *rest of the dead* did not come to life until the thousand years were ended.) This is the *first* resurrection” (Revelation 20:4-5, NIV).

Will the Wicked Be Tormented Forever?

“He shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels and in the presence of the Lamb. And the smoke of their torment ascends forever and ever; and they have no rest day or night, who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name” (Revelation 14:10-11).

At first glance this may seem to confirm the traditional idea of a seething, sulfurous hellfire, mercilessly and eternally tormenting helpless immortal souls. But, if we don’t already hold to a preconceived mental picture of hell, we can quickly grasp that this passage describes a quite different circumstance.

First, notice the setting for this passage. From the context we see that the events it describes aren’t in hell or the afterlife at all, but rather *on earth* amid the earth-shaking events and disasters occurring immediately before Jesus Christ’s return. This warning describes the punishment that will befall all of earth’s inhabitants “who worship the beast and his image, and whoever receives the mark of his name.”

Chapter 13 describes this “beast”—an end-time dictatorial superpower opposed to God—and its mark. Those who accept this mark show that their allegiance is to this powerful system rather than God, and in chapter 14 God reveals the consequences of that choice—warning of the terrifying punishments that will precede Christ’s

return (see verses 14-20 and the following two chapters).

Notice also in this passage that the *smoke* from these terrifying events ascends forever—it does not say that the people’s *actual torment* continues forever. The smoke is no doubt associated with God’s wrath poured out on earth as described in chapter 16—which includes widespread destruction, great heat, warfare and a massive earthquake. All these events will generate massive fires and a huge amount of smoke.

The properties of smoke are such that it “ascends forever”—meaning that nothing will prevent or stop it. Being a column of heated gas containing tiny, suspended particles, it rises, expands and eventually dissipates. The Greek word translated “forever” does not always mean eternity or infinity. It can simply refer to something that will not be stopped, that will continue as long as conditions allow. This passage is simply describing fires associated with this devastation that burn as long as they have fuel to consume, after which they simply burn out.

The reference in Revelation 14:11 to the wicked receiving “no rest day or night” speaks of those who continue to worship the beast and his image during this time. They will be in constant terror and fear for their lives, and thus aren’t able to find a moment’s rest during this terrifying time of God’s anger.

John is writing here of the same resurrection that Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 15 and 1 Thessalonians 4, calling it the “first” resurrection. Since it is called the *first* and not just “the” resurrection, at least one more resurrection must follow. He also states that the *rest* of the dead will live again after the 1,000 years.

Let’s consider what those in the first resurrection will be doing during this 1,000-year period (commonly called the Millennium, Latin for “thousand years”).

Physical restoration follows Jesus’ return

Daniel 7 gives a prophetic overview of mankind’s history. Daniel briefly describes a series of great empires (Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome) that would dominate the Middle East from Daniel’s time forward. Those powers are represented respectively by a lion, bear, leopard and “dreadful and terrible” beast.

Finally, Christ will return and set up God’s everlasting Kingdom, which will never be usurped. “I was watching in the night visions, and behold, One like the Son of Man, coming with the clouds of heaven! He came to the Ancient of Days, and they brought Him near before Him. Then to Him was given *dominion* and *glory* and a *kingdom*, that all peoples, nations, and languages should serve Him. His dominion is an *everlasting* dominion, which shall not pass away, and His kingdom the one which shall *not be destroyed*” (Daniel 7:13-14).

The prophecy continues: “Those great beasts, which are four, are four kings which arise out of the earth. ‘But the saints of the Most High shall receive the kingdom, and possess the kingdom forever, even forever and ever’” (verses 17-18).

Christ brings restoration

Jesus Christ will return to earth with power and authority. He will establish God’s Kingdom. The “saints of the Most High”—the people resurrected at His return—will reign with Jesus over the earth. Assisted by those resurrected to eternal life at His return, Christ will fill the earth with the knowledge of God “as the waters cover the sea” (Isaiah 11:9).

The apostles taught that Jesus will return and reestablish the

nation of Israel. At that time He will also offer the gift of salvation and eternal life to all of mankind. Said the apostle James: “And with this the words of the prophets agree, just as it is written: ‘After this I will return and will rebuild the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down; I will rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up; so that the *rest of mankind* may seek the LORD, even all the Gentiles who are called by my name, says the Lord who does all these things’” (Acts 15:15-17).

James here quotes the Old Testament prophet Amos, who then describes the conditions that will be extant after Jesus reestablishes the nation of Israel (“the tabernacle of David”).

The following passage includes the verses James cited in Acts 15. The original context concerns the *physical restoration* of the world after Jesus returns:

“‘On that day I will raise up the tabernacle of David, which has fallen down, and repair its damages; I will raise up its ruins, and rebuild it as in the days of old; that they may possess the remnant of Edom, and all the Gentiles who are called by My name,’ says the LORD who does this thing. ‘Behold, the days are coming,’ says the LORD, ‘when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it. I will bring back the captives of My people Israel; they shall build the waste cities and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and drink wine from them; they shall also make gardens and eat fruit from them. I will plant them in their land, and no longer shall they be pulled up from the land I have given them,’ says the LORD your God” (Amos 9:11-15).

In poetic language Amos describes the prosperity and peace that the nations will enjoy after Jesus returns.

Spiritual restoration follows Jesus’ return

As appealing and satisfying as physical blessings are, God is working out a far greater purpose. Everything physical is temporary, including the physical prosperity of the Millennium and even human life. God has much more to offer than just a comfortable physical life.

The prophet Jeremiah speaks not just of a physical restoration

(Jeremiah 31:1-4), but of the *spiritual* restoration that Jesus Christ will also accomplish when He returns: “Behold, the days are coming says the LORD, when I will make a *new covenant* with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah—not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day that I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt, My covenant which they broke, though I was a husband to them, says the LORD. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says the LORD: I will put My law in their minds, and *write it on their hearts*: and I will be their God, and they

Are the Wicked Punished in an Ever-Burning Hell?

“It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire—where ‘their worm does not die, and the fire is not quenched’” (Mark 9:47-48).

Did Jesus here warn of an eternal punishment in hellfire?

The words in the phrase *hell fire*, above, are translated from the Greek word *gehenna*. Jesus here referred to the valley of Hinnom, just outside of Jerusalem. In His day this area was a garbage dump in which fires burned constantly, fueled by trash and the dead bodies of animals and criminals.

Jesus used this desolate and miserable place as symbolic of the fate of unrepentant sinners. Notice that Jesus says the *worm* does not die, not that the people punished in hellfire do not die. The punishment is eternal, meaning that it is permanent and complete. But this does not mean that the incorrigible are kept

alive and tortured by a vengeful God.

Burned remains of the bodies in the original *gehenna*, the Valley of Hinnom, decomposed and were infested with maggots. The fire was not extinguished—it burned as long as there was trash to keep it burning—and the maggots (the “worms” of Mark 9:48) were not destroyed. Maggots are the worm-like larvae of flies. Flies swarm over the decaying refuse and keep it continuously infested with maggots. Then, instead of dying, those creatures turn into more flies in a continuing cycle.

The bodies of animals and people thrown into *gehenna*, however, either decayed or burned up and, of course, were eventually completely consumed. Similarly, unrepentant sinners will not be tormented forever; they will be completely and eternally destroyed in the lake of fire, referred to in Revelation 20:14.

shall be My people” (verses 31-33).

Remember James’ words in Acts 15. Speaking of the physical nation of Israel, he says God promises to “rebuild its ruins, and I will set it up, so that the *rest of mankind* may seek the LORD” (verse 17). This physical and spiritual restoration will spread from Israel and Judah to the rest of the world. God plans to use those nations to extend His promises to all mankind (Galatians 3:26-29).

The spiritual restoration is the most important work Jesus Christ will accomplish at this time, offering the gift of salvation to everyone. No more will worldly politics confuse people, because Jesus will rule over all the nations (Revelation 11:15; Daniel 7). No more will religious confusion be found on the earth, because at that time God will open the minds of *all people* and draw them to Jesus Christ (Ezekiel 36:26-27; Isaiah 11:9; Joel 2:27-28).

This is where those in the *first* resurrection play a vital part in God’s plan. Those resurrected immediately at Christ’s return will reign with Him on the earth, assisting in the teaching of God’s truth to humanity (Revelation 5:10; 20:6).

Those who never really knew God

So far we’ve seen that salvation is offered to some people even before Jesus’ return. We’ve also seen that after Jesus returns He will offer salvation to mankind in general.

But what about all those who died and were never called to salvation? This group represents the majority of all people who have ever lived. What is their eternal fate?

John said those not resurrected at the time of Jesus’ return (“the rest of the dead”) will live again at the end of the Millennium: “But the rest of the dead did not live again *until the thousand years were finished*” (Revelation 20:5).

A few verses later comes a further description of the scene of this resurrection: “Then I saw a great white throne and Him who sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away. And there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, standing before God, and books were opened. And another book was opened, which is the Book of Life. And the dead were *judged* according to their works, by the things which were written in the books. The

sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and Hades [the grave] delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works” (Revelation 20:11-13).

Jesus spoke of a future time of *judgment* when all will understand His teachings. He described a time during which people from all generations will live and be judged *at the same time*: “Then He began to upbraid the cities in which most of His mighty works had been done, because they did not repent: ‘Woe to you Chorazin! Woe to you, Bethsaida! For if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Tyre and Sidon, they would have repented long ago in sack-cloth and ashes. But I say to you, it will be more tolerable for Tyre and Sidon *in the day of judgment* than for you. And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to Hades; for if the mighty works which were done in you had been done in Sodom, it would have remained until this day. But I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the *day of judgment* than for you’” (Matthew 11:20-24).

In similar examples, Jesus refers to the long-dead people of Nineveh, to the queen of the south of Solomon’s time and even to ancient Sodom and Gomorrah, the epitome of wickedness (Matthew 10:14-15; 12:41-42). He doesn’t tolerate perversion and sinfulness, but He has not finished working in their lives. The people from those generations lived and died without having the opportunity to learn of God and His plan to offer the gift of eternal life through Jesus Christ.

Jesus described a time during which people from all past ages will live at the same time. Together they will come to understand the truth about who Christ was and the purpose of life. Those from different generations will find it remarkable that the people of Jesus’ time rejected Him.

Prophecy of resurrection

From the prophet Ezekiel we learn that those who are part of this resurrection are again restored to *physical* life. In chapter 37 Ezekiel sees a vision concerning this astonishing future event—a resurrection in a valley of ancient bones (verses 1-7).

He watched as the dry bones appeared to reassemble themselves into skeletons, then were covered with flesh and stood as a great multitude

of resurrected people (verses 8-10). The context reveals that these people will be resurrected to physical, mortal life. Their bodies are of flesh, covered with skin. They must breathe to live. God will bring them out of their graves to place His Spirit in them (verses 12-14).

At the end of the Millennium (the first 1,000 years of Jesus’ eternal reign), all who have not yet been accounted for in previous steps of God’s plan will stand before Him. For the first time in their lives they will correctly understand God’s Word, the teachings of the Bible. God will offer them the opportunity to receive eternal life (“And another book was opened, *which is the Book of Life*,” Revelation 20:12; see also Philippians 4:3). They, like each previous generation, will be judged by their works.

The basis for judgment

What does it mean to be judged? Will people be immediately rewarded or condemned at the time of their resurrection based on what they had done in life before their resurrection?

Are Some Tortured Forever in a Lake of Fire?

“The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the beast and the false prophet are. And they will be tormented day and night forever and ever” (Revelation 20:10).

Does this verse say that the beast and false prophet will be tormented for eternity?

The beast and false prophet are human beings. While still alive, they will be cast into the lake of fire. “Then the beast was captured, and with him the false prophet who worked signs in his presence, by which he deceived those who

received the mark of the beast and those who worshipped his image. These two were cast alive into the lake of fire burning with brimstone” (Revelation 19:20).

We see from Malachi 4:1-3 and Mark 9:47-48 that any human being thrown into the lake of fire *will be destroyed*. He will perish. His *punishment* will be eternal. But he will not be *tormented* for eternity.

Satan, being spirit, is the one who will be tormented forever. The evil angels—the demons—will be included with Satan in his torment (Matthew 25:41).

Judgment is more than the final decision to reward or condemn. Judgment is a *process* that takes place over time and ultimately culminates in a final decision.

The principle of judgment is illustrated in other scriptures. When Jesus returns He will reward each according to His works (Matthew 16:27), the positive fruits that result from an accumulated attitude and character developed over time. People of previous generations who by this time have received the gift of eternal life will have been judged according to their *works*. Many scriptures describe the results God is looking for in our lives (Romans 12; Colossians 3-4, Ephesians 4-6; James 2:20-24; Revelation 22:14).

God is concerned with our hearts, our innermost thoughts and motivation. He looks upon the heart, seeing what we are really like (1 Samuel 16:7). God expects us to emulate Jesus Christ in all we think and do (Philippians 2:5; 1 Peter 2:21). Someone who is Christ-like is genuine. His or her outward actions—conduct and works—reflect the heart, the inward person. We all will be judged for our habitual actions, for these show what we have become (2 Corinthians 5:10). The way that we live—how we treat others and respond to God’s laws—will reflect what we believe, whether we are in harmony with God’s ways or not.

Judgment based on decisions and actions

God will give sufficient time to those resurrected after the 1,000 years to prove by their actions and decisions that they do indeed believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior and are willing to submit to His way of life, surrendering their own will. Jesus said that the person who will receive the gift of eternal life—who will “enter the kingdom of heaven”—must be one who “*does the will of My Father in heaven*” (Matthew 7:21).

Those who are part of this second resurrection will have their minds opened to the truth of God’s plan. They will have the opportunity to decide whether they will do the Father’s will or not. After having had their spiritual eyes opened and this truth revealed to them, they will be judged according to their works, their response to their new understanding. They will be given the same responsibility that was extended to others at other stages of God’s plan. They will have

the opportunity to develop faith in Jesus Christ and demonstrate their belief and commitment by the way they live.

Being judged according to works does not imply that one *earns* the gift of salvation. It simply means that a person demonstrates by his life that he believes in Jesus Christ and is willing to do the will of the Father (Matthew 7:21). A person living that commitment will naturally demonstrate in his life the positive results of that choice and way of life (Galatians 5:22-23; James 2:14-26).

The plan of God—just as He promised—is a perfect and complete plan. Following His plan, He will ultimately offer salvation to all who have ever lived (Ephesians 1:9-10).

What is judgment?

As we saw before, Jesus addressed the fact of more than one resurrection when He said that “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 [or judgment]” (John 5:28-29).

The more common meaning of the word *krisis*, translated “condemnation” in this verse, is *judgment*, as it is usually translated. This word refers to a *process of evaluation* rather than an act of punishment. *Krisis* means “the process of investigation, the act of distinguishing and separating, . . . a judging, a passing of judgment upon a person or thing” (W.E. Vine, *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, 1985, p. 119). *Krisis* is to be distinguished from *krima*, which refers to “the sentence pronounced, a verdict, a condemnation, the decision resulting from an investigation” (ibid.).

As we saw earlier, those who are called in this life and respond by hearing and believing God will be given eternal life; it will not be necessary for them to go through this time of judgment (verse 24). They are being judged now (1 Peter 4:17), not later. This judgment is a *process*, with those who are called by God responding faithfully to His truth and bearing fruit over time (John 15:2-8; Galatians 5:22-23)—or turning from that calling (2 Peter 2:20-22).

Eventually all others will be judged, “for God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or

Lazarus and the Rich Man: Proof of Heaven and Hell?

Jesus gave a parable:

"There was a certain rich man who was clothed in purple and fine linen and fared sumptuously every day. But there was a certain beggar named Lazarus, full of sores, who was laid at his gate, desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man's table. Moreover the dogs came and licked his sores.

"So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom. The rich man also died and was buried. And being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom. Then he cried and said, 'Father Abraham, have mercy on me, and send Lazarus that he may dip the tip of his finger in water and cool my tongue; for I am tormented in this flame.'

"But Abraham said, 'Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things, and likewise Lazarus evil things; but now he is comforted and you are tormented. And besides all this, between us and you there is a great gulf fixed, so that those who want to pass from here to you cannot, nor can those from there pass to us.'

"Then he said, 'I beg you therefore, father, that you would send him to my father's house, for I have five brothers, that he may testify to them, lest they also come to this place of torment.'

"Abraham said to him, 'They have

Moses and the prophets; let them hear them.'

"And he said, 'No, father Abraham; but if one goes to them from the dead, they will repent.'

"But he said to him, 'If they do not hear Moses and the prophets, neither will they be persuaded though one rise from the dead'" (Luke 16:19-31).

When we look at this account in light of other scriptures and in its historical context, it becomes apparent that this is an allegory, a familiar story of the age that Jesus used to point out a spiritual lesson to those who knew the law but did not keep it. It was never intended to be understood literally.

The Victor Bible Background Commentary, New Testament, in discussing this passage, explains that Jesus used contemporary Jewish thought about the afterlife to point out a spiritual lesson:

"Not only was Hades thought to be divided into two compartments, popular belief held that conversations could be held between persons in Gan Eden [the abode of the righteous] and Gehinnom [the abode of the unrighteous]. Jewish writings also picture the first as a verdant land with sweet waters welling up from numerous springs, while Gehinnom is not only a parched land, but the waters of the river that separated it from Gan Eden recede whenever the desperately thirsty wicked kneel and try to drink.

". . . In Christ's story God was the

beggar's only source of help, for the rich man was certainly not going to do a single thing for him! . . . It is important to see this parable of Jesus as a continuation of His conflict with the Pharisees over riches. Christ had said, 'You cannot serve God and Money' (16:13). When the Pharisees sneered, Jesus responded, 'What is highly valued among men is detestable in God's sight' (16:15).

"There's no doubt that the Pharisees remained unconvinced . . . And so Christ told a story intended to underline the importance of what He had just said.

"During this life the wealthy man would surely have been featured on the 1980s TV program, 'Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous.' The cameras would have focused on his marble mansion with its decorative wrought iron gates . . . and the fabulous feasts he held for his important friends.

"As the TV equipment was taken into the rich man's home, a cameraman might have stumbled over the dying beggar, destitute and abandoned just outside the rich man's house . . . Surely he was beneath the notice of the homeowner, who never gave a thought to the starving man just outside, though all Lazarus yearned for was just a crumb from the overlaid tables . . .

"But then, Jesus says, both men died. And suddenly their situations are reversed! Lazarus is by 'Abraham's side,' a phrase which pictures him reclining in the place of honor at a banquet that symbolizes eternal blessedness. But the rich man finds himself in torment, separated from

the place of blessing by a 'great chasm' (16:26). Even though he begs for just one drop of water, Abraham sadly shakes his head. No relief is possible—or appropriate!

". . . The rich man had received his good things, and had used them selfishly for his benefit alone . . . This rich man's indifference to Lazarus showed how far his heart was from God and how far his path had strayed from God's ways. They were his riches, and he would use them only for himself . . .

"And so Jesus' first point is driven home. You Pharisees simply cannot love God and Money. Love for Money is detestable to God, for you will surely be driven to make choices in life which are hateful to Him . . .

"But Jesus does not stop here. He portrays the rich man as appealing to Abraham to send Lazarus to warn his brothers, who live as selfishly as he did. Again Abraham refuses. They have 'Moses and the Prophets' (16:31), that is, the Scriptures. If they do not heed the Scriptures they will not respond should one come back from the dead . . .

"In essence then Christ makes a stunning charge: the hardness and unwillingness of the Pharisees and teachers of the Law to Jesus' words reflect a hardness to the Word of God itself, which these men pretend to honor . . .

"This entire chapter calls us to realize that if we take this reality seriously, it will affect the way we view and use money, and the way we respond to the poor and the oppressed" (Lawrence Richards, QuickVerse software, 1992-1998).

evil” (Ecclesiastes 12:14). This judgment will also take place over time in the “resurrection of judgment” of which Christ spoke.

Timing of this judgment

When does this resurrection to judgment take place? Revelation 20:11-13 describes a time after “the thousand years were finished” (verses 5, 7). Satan is removed from influencing humankind (verse 10), then the dead are brought back to physical life and *judged* (verses 12-13). The Greek word translated here as “judged” is *krino*, meaning “to separate, select, choose” (Vine, p. 336).

“The dead, small and great,” who stand before their Creator are those who died without ever having known the true God or His purpose for them. The books (*biblia* in Greek, from which we get *Bible*) are the Scriptures, the source of the knowledge that leads to eternal life. All people given physical life in this resurrection, raised from the grave (Hades) and the sea (verse 13), will have an opportunity at last to fully understand God’s plan for them.

This resurrection is not a *second* chance for salvation; for them it is their *first* opportunity to really know God. Those in this resurrection are “judged according to their works, by the things which were written in the books” (verse 12). This judgment will take place over time as they have the opportunity to hear, understand and grow in God’s way of life, having their names inscribed in the book of life (verse 15).

There are two important principles here. First, as we’ve just seen, all will have a fair and equal opportunity for repentance and forgiveness so they can receive eternal life. Second, we see that some—by their choice—will *not* receive that wonderful gift of eternal life.

Describing their fate, John wrote: “Then Death and Hades were cast into the lake of fire. This is the *second* death. And anyone *not found written in the Book of Life* was cast into the lake of fire” (Revelation 20:14-15).

Who are the ones not found in the Book of Life? Remember that by this time God will have given the opportunity to everyone to receive and accept the gift of eternal life, represented in these verses as the Book of Life. Those whose names are not written in it will themselves have *chosen* by their own actions and decisions *to be*

excluded. God will not *force* eternal life on anyone. If a person knowingly *chooses* not to repent and be included in God’s plan of eternal life, that person will be judged by his actions and destroyed. This is an act of mercy; such a person would bring only perpetual unhappiness to himself or herself.

Are the unrepentant tormented forever?

We have already seen that man is mortal. Death is to be compared with a deep sleep, a state of unconsciousness. One reason God gave us a temporary, physical life was that, if we choose not to accept the terms, conditions and requirements of eternal life, our lives could be mercifully but permanently brought to an end.

Many people believe in a literal, ever-burning hellfire or a condition of spiritual torment in which evil people are tortured throughout eternity. But the Bible’s simple teaching conveys nothing of the kind. Our God is a loving, merciful Father who does not want to consign anyone to that fate.

In a familiar verse Paul tells us, “For the wages of sin is *death*, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Romans 6:23). Eternal life is a *gift* that God grants to those who will be in His family forever. Death from which there is no hope of a resurrection is reserved for those who reject God’s offer of eternal life in the Kingdom of God. They do not exist forever in torment. Those who choose not to receive that gift will *cease to exist*.

The unrepentant will be punished

We learned earlier that since human life is physical everyone will die (Ecclesiastes 3:2; Hebrews 9:27). Death is part of the natural course of life. Those who have fulfilled the purpose of physical life will be resurrected to receive the gift of eternal life. Those who were never called will be brought up by a resurrection to a physical existence and judged, given their opportunity for eternal life. Those who reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and eternal life that comes through His sacrifice will be cast into the lake of fire (Revelation 20:15).

Jesus said some will fall into this category. He warned the Pharisees in Matthew 23:33: “Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you

escape the condemnation of hell?” Later Jesus said the righteous would be given eternal life, but the wicked would go into everlasting punishment (Matthew 25:41-46). Notice that Jesus does not say that the condemned will be tortured for eternity. He said the *punishment* is to be everlasting; that is, everlasting death, complete unconsciousness from which there is no resurrection (Revelation 20:14).

Some might conclude that such a fate is cruel. But God, after all, is the Creator of life. He has the authority and power to eliminate the life of all who choose to reject the purpose for which He created them.

Throughout the ages some have been given the opportunity for eternal life through Jesus Christ. The vast majority have not been called in their lifetimes to understand God’s plan. As Jesus explained in the parable of the sower (Matthew 13:3-23), others may have been called, but for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the powerful deception and influence of Satan and his demons—they have failed to fully respond to God’s calling. All will be sorted out by a merciful God in the time of judgment.

The Scriptures overwhelmingly show that God’s great purpose and desire are to give eternal life to His children and to keep them from failing (Jude 21-24; Romans 8:31-32; 2 Timothy 4:18; Luke 12:32). All will be given the opportunity to believe in Jesus Christ, accept eternal life through Him and prove their commitment to God by their works, the actions in their lives. Only those who knowingly, purposefully and willingly defy God and reject the sacrifice of Jesus Christ will be refused eternal life (Hebrews 6:4-6; 10:28-31; Revelation 21:8).

Even the final death of the incorrigibly wicked in a lake of fire (Malachi 4:1-3) is an act of justice and mercy on God’s part. To allow the corrupt to continue to live on in unrepentant, eternal rebellion would cause themselves and others only great sorrow and anguish. Therefore God will not grant them eternal life, neither will He torture them for all eternity. Both soul (life, mind, consciousness) and body will be completely destroyed (Matthew 10:28).

Summary

After Jesus Christ returns, He will expand the process of offering salvation to all mankind. Everyone who lives during the 1,000 years

immediately after He returns will receive the opportunity to accept the gift of eternal life available through Christ.

At the end of the Millennium will come a physical resurrection of all who did not receive the calling to salvation during their lifetimes. Then they, too, will have the opportunity to receive that gift of eternal life and be judged by their righteous works. However, God will mercifully destroy those who choose to defy Him, knowingly refusing to accept Jesus Christ’s sacrifice and follow God’s way of life.

Steps in Dealing With Grief

God, in His great love for us, has revealed answers to some of the greatest questions we face: What is life? What is death? What happens after death? We can find great comfort in the knowledge that God has a plan for all of mankind and that death is a temporary separation. We will be reunited with our loved ones through the resurrections God has promised.

Ultimately this understanding can help us better cope with a loss caused by death. Yet we cannot deny or diminish the feeling of loss created by death. We still sorrow and grieve. How can we deal with our grief? And how can we encourage others who are grieving?

Grief is a deeply personal and traumatic experience. In dealing with grief, you may find it helpful to understand the grieving process. Writers on the subject have identified several stages of grief, including denial, anger, bargaining, depression and acceptance. (For example, see the Dr. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross model in *On Death and Dying*, 1969.)

We will briefly examine each stage to help you understand grief and be prepared to deal with death. But bear in mind that a person in mourning may not experience these stages sequentially. No timetable for working one's way through grief exists. Someone may feel several of the stages described here but not others. Another may experience various stages simultaneously. Because

one has gone through one stage doesn't mean he or she can't return to it. Each person's experience can be different.

Stages of grief: denial

When one experiences denial, his physical responses might include sweating, faintness, nausea or a racing heart, just as with any other victim of shock. The mind and emotions become overwhelmed. Some simply may not be able to deal with the reality of death.

Some withdraw from the world around them. Others may feel as though they must be having a bad dream and that they'll soon awaken from it. Perhaps this is God's way of providing us a protective buffer. It's during this time we can begin to sort out and process our feelings at our own pace and comfort level.

Several important principles should be considered at this stage of the grieving process. First, it helps to talk about one's thoughts and feelings. Those who are grieving have been deeply hurt by their loss. They need the opportunity to heal, to be taken care of. They can help those around them to be of assistance by letting those who want to help know what they are experiencing. You can help by encouraging them to talk openly about their grief, to talk about the circumstances surrounding the death of their loved one.

Encourage them to share the relationship they enjoyed with their loved one, what it was that made that person different, why they loved him or her. To cope with their grief, they should feel free to talk from the heart, to share their feelings regarding the loss they've suffered and the loneliness they are enduring.

At times like these the support of friends and loving family is invaluable to those in distress. "A friend loves at all times" (Proverbs 17:17), and "there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother" (Proverbs 18:24). The day will come when they will be happy to do the same for you. No matter how deep their sorrow, let them know that they are not alone, that others have been there and will help share the load if given the opportunity.

At such a time those who are grieving often lose sight of the need to take care of themselves physically. Caring for their health and well-being is often the last thing on their minds. Help them to realize that they are important, that their lives are valuable.

During times of grief it is easy to grow emotionally and physically depleted. Those who have suffered loss need to watch their diet, avoid fast food and eat well-balanced and nutritious meals.

Exercise, another must, is good for relieving stress buildup and discharging anger and frustration. It helps the appetite and promotes better sleep. Exercise can be as simple as a 20-minute walk several times a week.

Rest is yet another way to take care of one's body. Grief is exhausting. Going without rest only compounds the difficulty.

Stages of grief: anger

Once denial begins to wear off, our natural tendency is to want to blame somebody—anybody—for our loss and pain. This anger may not be rational. We might even find ourselves angry with the deceased because of what the loss is doing to us. We may be angry because of the timing of the death. When we are grieving, anger might be vented toward authority figures—the doctor, the hospital staff, family members or even God. We may wonder why God did not intervene in the situation to prevent the death. This anger may also lead to feelings of guilt.

Anger is a powerful emotion. It can lead to negative behavior or be harnessed for our own benefit. Remember that God says to “be angry, [but] do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). We can take the energy our anger generates and channel it into positive action. For example, we can do those odd jobs around the house that we have been putting off. Taking up a new hobby, or perhaps continuing our education by enrolling in some evening classes, can help us positively channel our emotions. An outstanding way to displace anger is to be of service to others. Helping others will ease their burdens and lighten our emotional load during our grieving.

Stages of grief: bargaining

In the bargaining stage some want to play let's make a deal with God. They imagine that, if they promise to do this or that, God will return things to the way they used to be. At this point, those grieving often begin their pursuit of understanding of the death of their loved one. This is a normal part of the healing process. They come

to realize that there is no bargaining with death. It is only through acceptance of the facts that the reality of death can be turned into hope and positive action.

In their pursuit of understanding, those who have suffered loss should not leave out the source of information that has the answers to the very questions they ask regarding death: God's Word, the Bible.

As is emphasized throughout this booklet, God has a plan. You and all of your loved ones are very much a part of it. God doesn't want anyone to be overcome with sorrow or be without hope. With those thoughts in mind, remember that the apostle Peter said to

How Can We Help Those Who Are Grieving?

There are practical ways we can help friends and loved ones who are grieving. Here are a few:

- **Listen carefully.** A heavy burden lies on the hearts and minds of those who are grieving. They need to know that they can grieve without being criticized or judged by anyone, especially someone with whom they share their deepest thoughts. We shouldn't worry about what we will say or about having to say something profound. That isn't what is needed by those who are grieving.

- **Show compassion.** We show our compassion for others by recognizing their suffering and desiring to relieve them of it. We can be compassionate people by helping them with the tasks at hand. How do we know what to do? We can simply ask. We might help notify family and friends of the death. We might pre-

pare the home to receive the many visitors who may arrive. We could organize the collection of food that others will bring. We might ask if we could watch the children for the family to give parents some time to themselves. We can help in everyday, practical ways.

- **Stay close after the funeral.** After the funeral we should not immediately forget about those grieving. They will realize a great deal of support in the hours and days immediately after the death of their loved one, but will anyone be there to listen and be compassionate a week later, a month later, several months later? It's at times like those, when we go back to our routines, that those who are grieving remember that their loved one isn't in their routine any longer.

Those are the times the grieving most need our support.

submit to God, “casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you” (1 Peter 5:7).

Stages of grief: depression

Reality eventually sets in. We are confronted with the necessity to go on with life without the one we loved. It is easy to begin to plague ourselves with the thoughts of what should have or could have been.

For many, this can be the most difficult stage to go through. Signs of depression include a feeling of melancholy, unconcern about the outside world or a loss of interest in eating and sleeping. Feelings of guilt, helplessness, hopelessness and worthlessness are common.

During this stage we should remember the positive aspects of the life we shared with our loved one. Memories are golden. We will forever carry with us times spent and enjoyed with the one we have lost. These are a treasure that nobody can take from us and are part of the legacy our loved one left for us.

We need not ever walk alone in our grief. God is still with us, even in times of mourning. “For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: The LORD is my helper; I will not fear” (Hebrews 13:5-6).

At times like these we must remember to keep lines of communication open with God. He can help us deal with grief. Ask Him for strength and courage. “Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need” (Hebrews 4:16). He is the “God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our tribulation” (2 Corinthians 1:3-4).

Stages of grief: acceptance

Eventually, as we deal with our grief, we come to understand and accept that we are beginning a new chapter in life. We come to know a new normality. New realities must be adjusted to because we are in a new situation. Because of the trial we are going through, we become stronger, deeper and better for having faced and overcome this great difficulty. Emotional balance returns little by little, like the healing of a physical wound.

The time required for the healing process can be different for each person. Some will still feel emotions such as guilt, depression or

anger. This isn’t necessarily negative. It just means that the loved one impacted their lives in a powerful way and is still missed. These feelings are to be expected; they’re normal.

No one can ever take the place of a loved one we have lost. But we will come to the point to which we’re ready to move forward and meet new challenges.

Moses was a man beloved by the nation of Israel, but there came a time when God allowed him to die. The nation had to move forward even though the Israelites grieved for their beloved leader. “After the death of Moses the servant of the LORD, it came to pass that the LORD spoke to Joshua the son of Nun, Moses’ assistant, saying: ‘Moses My servant is dead. Now therefore, arise, go over this Jordan, you and all this people, to the land which I am giving to them—the children of Israel’” (Joshua 1:1-2).

Life went on for Israel without one of its greatest leaders. “No man shall be able to stand before you all the days of your life; as I was with Moses, so I will be with you. I will not leave you nor forsake you. *Be strong and of good courage*” (Joshua 1:5-6).

God gives us the same promise today. We just need to look to Him in faith. If we draw near to Him, just as He was near Moses and Joshua, He will be with us. He is there to help us enter a new phase of our life with new challenges. God will provide the same strength and support He gave His faithful followers Moses and Joshua.

This, too, shall pass away

Time is a great healer. This is especially true in the case of the loss of a loved one.

In a speech before the Wisconsin State Agricultural Society in 1859, Abraham Lincoln commented: “It is said an Eastern monarch once charged his wise men to invent him a sentence to be ever in view, and which should be true and appropriate at all times and situations. They presented him with the words, ‘And this, too, shall pass away.’ How much it expresses. How chastening in the hour of pride. How consoling in the depths of affliction.”

As bleak as life seems after the death of one we love, we must remember that this, too, shall pass away. The joy of life can return. With the help of God, with the understanding of His great purpose for life,

with the hope of the future, we can find the strength to overcome grief.

Solomon wrote that “to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: . . . a time to die; . . . and a time to heal; . . . a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance” (Ecclesiastes 3:1-4). Emotional healing will occur. A time to sing, a time to laugh and a time to dance will return.

Everlasting Life Conquers Death

Death has always been humanity’s enemy. It brings loneliness, sadness, disorientation. But it need not be a mystery nor be entirely devastating. Even though it is inevitable, death is not the end. Though at times death seems unfair and arbitrary, it does not thwart God’s plan for eternal life. Through a resurrection God will reunite us with family and friends and extend His promises to everyone who has ever lived.

Eventually there will come a time when death itself will be banished. Writing about the resurrection that will take place when Jesus returns, Paul paraphrased from the book of Hosea: “For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. So when this corruptible has put on incorruption, and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory. O Death, where is your sting? O Hades [grave] where is your victory?’” (1 Corinthians 15:53-55). Death will be swallowed up and defeated in the victory of eternal life.

Taking this view of the future can give us hope and optimism at a time of great loss. “But I do not want you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning those who have fallen asleep [died], lest you sorrow as others who have no hope” (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

What is our eternal reward?

Some are put off by the thought of eternal life. Some feel this life is painful and difficult enough, so why would anyone want to live

forever? Others may think that eternity sounds vague and uninteresting, that if it means they have to give up pleasure in this lifetime it just isn't worth the effort. They would rather experience all the good times they can for now and worry about eternity some other time.

Interesting, isn't it, that in all our discussion of eternity and in all the scriptures we've read the Bible makes no mention of going to any place or condition called "heaven"? We've read that God wants to give us an everlasting, eternal, immortal life. We are assured that it is more valuable than any physical treasure (Colossians 1:26-27; 2:2-3). But exactly what will we be doing for eternity? If receiving eternal life requires effort and sacrifice in this life, is it going to be worth it?

Let's remember the limitations of our human experience and observation. God is so far above us that it is difficult for us to understand His ways and thoughts (Isaiah 55:8-9). What God is preparing to give us is beyond our wildest imaginations and fantasies. "Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly *above all that we ask or think*, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever" (Ephesians 3:20-21).

God is preparing our future

God is Creator. He plans, builds, implements. He designed the universe and devised His plan and our reward before He even started creating it (Matthew 25:34). He is planning and preparing an infinitely more exciting and rewarding life for us in His family (John 14:1-3). We can only try to begin to imagine the incredible, fulfilling and eternally enjoyable life He wants to give us—an eternal life free from human limitations and disappointments, weaknesses and suffering.

Pain, disappointment and death will be no more. John wrote of the "new heaven and a new earth" (Revelation 21:1): "And 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*, for the former things have passed away" (verse 4).

From Revelation 21 and 22 we learn that those who receive eternal life will be a family, the children of God, with communitylike relationships in the New Jerusalem. Relationship principles that God is now teaching us will be as applicable then as they are today. That is why God wants us to learn and apply His ways in our lives now. What we

can take with us for all eternity is our love and concern for one another.

The full hope and meaning of an eternal existence with God and Jesus Christ are truly beyond our ability to grasp or express. "Beloved, now we are children of God; and *it has not yet been revealed what we shall be*, but we know that when He is revealed, *we shall be like Him*, for we shall see Him as He is" (1 John 3:2).

John states that God hasn't revealed everything that He has in mind for us. We have seen prophecies that take us into the future about 1,000 years beyond Christ's promised return. As Paul wrote, we see spiritual concepts and promises in a kind of vague outline as if we were looking through steamed glass (1 Corinthians 13:12). But someday, as Paul also says in this verse, we *will* see clearly.

We face a choice

Is it worth it to seek God's Kingdom rather than sinful pleasures or priorities in this world? Many are not so sure.

But God assures us that His promise of eternal life is more than worth the effort, struggles and disappointments of life and death: "Therefore *do not lose heart*. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but *for a moment*, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things *which are not seen*. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are *eternal*" (2 Corinthians 4:16-18).

Everlasting life is, after all, a matter of faith (John 3:16). Faith is not just a warm, vague feeling that Jesus has done everything for us. Faith is a frame of mind that is expressed by the kind of person you choose to be, the actions that express what you believe (James 2:20-24). When all is said and done, we must have faith that eternal life is worth anything we might be required to endure to receive it (Romans 8:18; Philippians 3:12-14).

How does death affect your life?

Learning more about life, death and what happens after death should make quite an impact on how you live. That knowledge should make you pause and consider what use you are making of the

precious gift of life and whether you are using it to prepare for the eternal life God has offered you.

Psalms 90 was composed by Moses. In it he contrasts the power of God with the frailties of man. He writes of God's view of time, the comparative moment that represents our lifetime, and of the punishment that is sometimes necessary to correct man's ways. In verses 10-12 he writes: "The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knows the power of Your anger? For as the fear of You, so is Your wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a *heart of wisdom*."

Regrettably, most people seem only to notice that life is short after much of it has slipped away. We must learn to number our days, keeping in mind that our time will pass and we must take care to make the most of it. Solomon told us to remember the Creator in the days of our youth (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

What will you do?

Peter wrote of the culmination of God's plan. He prophesied of the time during which everything physical will be burned up and replaced by new heavens and a new earth. Then he asks a challenging rhetorical question: *How does that knowledge change your life?* "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, *what manner of persons ought you to be*, in holy conduct and godliness . . . ?" (2 Peter 3:10-11).

Understanding the meaning of life, death and what follows this physical life can give priceless comfort and hope in the face of death. It should also have a great impact on the *kind of person you are*, motivating you to live carefully and make wise choices. Knowing that the purpose of this life is to prepare you for an eternal life of power and ability beyond anything you can imagine should encourage you to turn to God so He can begin to fulfill His purpose in you!



Recommended Reading

If you would like to study more about the purpose of your life and what you can do to fulfill it, we invite you to request your free subscription to *The Good News* magazine.

This booklet has touched on many subjects that are vitally important to understanding God's purpose for humanity and for you. Many other booklets are available that discuss these crucial topics in much greater detail. All are yours free for the asking when you contact one of our offices at the address or number nearest you at the end of this booklet. As always, there is never any cost or obligation, and no one will call on you.

- For more information about the awesome purpose of human life, request your free copy of the booklets ***What Is Your Destiny?*** and ***Transforming Your Life: The Process of Conversion***.
- Is this the only time for salvation? Are those who are not true Christians destined for eternal punishment? Does God have a timetable for working with all of humanity? Call or write for the free booklets ***Heaven and Hell: What Does the Bible Really Teach?*** and ***God's Holy Day Plan: The Promise of Hope for All Mankind*** to discover the wonderful truth about God's plan.
- What is the true gospel Jesus Christ taught and commanded His Church to proclaim to the world? What is the "different gospel" the apostle Paul warned Church members not to accept? Is it possible that most of Christianity accepts and teaches a different gospel from the one Jesus Christ taught? Request your free copy of ***The Gospel of the Kingdom*** to discover the answers.

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