

Since the beginning of time men have stood in awe and fear of death, pondering its mysteries, desiring to know what happens after death. To understand death it is important to understand our origin. An incorrect understanding of our origin will lead to an incorrect understanding of our destiny.

Man is a dual being, composed of two parts – physical and spiritual. The physical (body) came from the dust. The spiritual (**soul**) came from God. *"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).

Death is inevitable. *"It is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment"*(Hebrews 9:27). Death was the result of disobedience to God in the Garden of Eden by Adam and Eve. They were re-moved from the garden where no one any longer had access to the tree of life. (See Genesis 3:22-24.)

In death the body and spirit separate. James says *"For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"*(James 2:26).

The body returns to the ground from whence it came. *"In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return"*(Genesis 3:19).

When the physical body returns to dust it will never again exist in the same form it was in while alive on earth. It will however in the day of resurrection inherit a new body. Paul says, *"It is sown a natural body, it raised a spiritual body"*(1 Corinthians 15:44).

The spirit goes back to God. As Stephen was being stoned to death he cried out, *"Lord Jesus receive my spirit"*(Acts 7:59). Jesus said, *"Father, into your hands I commend My spirit"*(Luke 23:46).

On her way to Bethlehem Rachel died in childbirth. It is said, *"And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni"*(Genesis 35:18).

While the soul returns to God it does not go directly to heaven or hell. God places all souls in Hades where they are confined with a place for the disobedient and another place for the righteous.

Peter said, *"For David is not ascended into the heavens"*(Acts 2:34).

### If not in heaven where?

He was in Hades. Jesus told Mary following his resurrection, *"Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father."* At death Jesus went to the realm of Hades.

**Luke 16:19-31** gives us the story of the Rich Man and Lazarus. Some say it is a parable. It really makes no difference as truth is being taught by Jesus. Here we have pictured the Hadean realm. Both the rich man and Lazarus were in Hades.

The word Hades occurs **11 times** in the Greek N.T. It is unfortunate that some translations render this word as hell which is incorrect. It is equivalent to the word Sheol in the O.T. meaning the place of departed conscious spirits. It is the state of spirits between death and the resurrection. Its literal meaning is unseen, hidden, and indiscernible.

It is immediately obvious that these men are in different places in the Hadean realm. It is said of the rich man, *"being in torments in Hades, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off and Lazarus in his bosom."*(Luke 16:23).

Peter describes further this place in **2 Peter 2:4**. *"God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to hell and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment"*

The word **"hell"** in this passage **is** a mistranslation. Instead of hell it is the Greek word Tartarus, a place of confinement in Hades for the wicked.

The word Paradise describes the place in Hades where Lazarus was in Abraham's bosom. Jesus told the thief on the cross, *"Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in Paradise (Luke 23:43).*

This was not heaven as Jesus told Mary after his resurrection he had not yet ascended to the father (**John 20:17**).

We also notice that there was a great **"Gulf"** which separated them. Abraham said it was impossible to cross from one side to the other. (**Luke16:26**). This impassable gulf between Paradise and Tartarus suggests the impossibility of changing one's eternal state or condition after death.

Those in Hades are conscious. The rich man had conscious faculties such as seeing, hearing, remembering, speaking, reasoning, recognition, and feelings as noted by his statement: *"For I am tormented in this flame"*.

We see that on Abraham's side Lazarus was comforted. He was with Abraham and all the redeemed of all ages. Death in no way destroys the conscious personality of the soul. However, in death the body becomes an empty house to be left behind.

The real person (**the spirit**) moves out. The faithful Christian has nothing to fear about death. We know what takes place immediately after death so with Paul we can say, *"O death, where is your sting? O Hades, where is your victory?"* (1 Corinthians 15:55).

With the second coming (**and only coming**) of the Lord there will occur the resurrection of all the dead. It seems that the resurrection of the dead, the end of the Universe and judgment will all occur instantaneously but there seems to be a certain order to these events.

**First**, there will be the sudden appearance of the Lord. Paul says, *"You who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, in flaming fire taking vengeance on those who do not know God, and on those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ"* (2 Thessalonians 1:7, 8).

**Second**, the dead in Christ will arise. Paul writes in 1 Thessalonians 4:16 *"For the Lord Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of an archangel, and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first."*

**Third**, those who are alive at His coming will be caught up with the dead to be with Christ. Paul says, *"Then we who are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds to meet the Lord."* (v. 17).

**Fourth**, we will meet the Lord in the air, not on earth, and we will remain with Him throughout eternity. Paul says *"thus we shall always be with the Lord."* (v. 17).

A *"rapture"* and *"tribulation"* are not taught in these verses as some have assumed. The word "rapture" does not appear in Scripture. There is no indication the Lord will ever set foot on earth again.

He is already ruling as *"King of kings"* (1 Timothy 6:15) over his kingdom (Colossians 1:13), thus there is no need for him to return to earth to set up a kingdom as some teach.

In Mark 9:1 Jesus made it very clear the kingdom would be established in the life time of his listeners. John indicates tribulation was in progress when he wrote Revelation. (See Revelation 1:9.)

At the moment of the resurrection we will be given new bodies. Paul writes, *"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. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality"*(1 Corinthians 15:51- 53).

In **Philippians 3:21** Paul uses the word **transform** to describe the change that will take place. Jesus will, *"transform our lowly body that it may conform to His glorious body."*

John says, *"It has not yet been revealed what we shall be."*(1 John 3:2). We do not know yet exactly what it will look like.

With the second coming there will occur the end of the universe. Peter informs us; *"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"*(2 Pet. 3: 10).

No one knows when this will occur, not even the angels in heaven. Jesus said in **Matthew 24:36**, *"But of that day and hour no one knows, no not even the angels of heaven, but My Father only."*

Following the resurrection there will occur the Day of Judgment. *"Because he hath appointed a day, in which He will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained"*(Acts 17:31).

Some ask why a judgement day for those in Hades who already know their destiny?

Judgment day finalizes God's great scheme of redemption for the human race. The deeds of the human race will be open for inspection and man will know that God has been righteous in his judgment.

Judgment will be on the basis of what one's total life has been, his relationship or lack of relationship to Christ. God will exercise mercy on the obedient rewarding them with heaven and mete out punishment in hell to the disobedient

Are you ready? Are you prepared for death?

*"And the Spirit and the bride say, 'Come!' And let him who hears say, 'Come!' And let him take the water of life freely."*