

What Happens When We Die?

Many people fear death.

Psalm 55:4-5 - "4 And the terrors of death have fallen upon me. 5 Fearfulness and trembling have come upon me, and horror has overwhelmed me."

In **Job 18:14** Bildad, Job's friend, characterized death as the "king of terrors."

Hebrews 2:15 spoke of those "who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." These statements express the sentiments of vast multitudes who have faced the prospect of death.

The good news is that we don't have to fear death. The Bible reveals how we can face the mysteries of death with calmer spirits. We can learn to say with the apostle Paul that we even look forward to the day we die as he said in **Philippians 1:23** "having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."

Numerous theories exist regarding life after death - from annihilation to reincarnation. Some speak of a place they call purgatory. But the human spirit or soul is not annihilated and it is not recycled into a series of fleshly bodies through reincarnation. Neither can the spirit or soul be elevated to higher spiritual levels after death. Their spiritual destiny is determined while they live. The Bible does not answer all of our questions, but it does speak definitively and decisively regarding life after death. Let's begin our study with Jesus' story about the rich man and Lazarus.

The Rich Man and Lazarus

One of the most clear and comprehensive descriptions of life after death is seen in **Luke 16:19-31**. Jesus tells the story concerning a certain rich man and a beggar named Lazarus. He shows the vivid contrast between these two men before and after their death.

Is it a Parable?

Many Bible scholars consider the account in **Luke 16:19-31** to be a parable. Even if it were a parable, that would not minimize the facts contained within the story because a parable is confined to that which is real. A parable is not a fairy tale. In a parable the events must be possible or likely to have happened. The descriptions always present a narrative which is true to the facts and experiences of human life. Bible parables use true life situations to teach a basic lesson of truth. The people in a parable are real and they do what people can do. They draw from reality that people can understand in order to drive home a spiritual point.

It is likely that this story is not a parable. For example, it would be the only parable in which the characters are actually named. No parable ever named a person as Lazarus is named in this story. Furthermore, the Bible does not call this a parable.

Deciding whether it is a parable is not really necessary. The description Jesus gives of life beyond the grave are true to the facts elsewhere taught in the Bible. Jesus never taught anything untrue or contradictory to the Scriptures.

It is sometimes alleged that this account cannot represent actual facts, because the rich man and Lazarus had died. Their bodies were decaying in the earth and references are made to their physical features - eyes, tongue, and finger in **Luke 16:23-24**.

But these references do not invalidate the facts presented in the story. The Lord is describing only the condition of the souls of these men. The resurrection has not occurred since there are still people upon the earth in **Luke 16:28**. We are not yet prepared to understand the nature of pure souls, so

God must somehow accommodate ideas regarding the soul to our current level of comprehension. This is done by figuratively applying physical traits to the description of the soul. It is similar to the use of physical characteristics in describing God - **Isaiah 59:1-2**; **1 Peter 3:12**, even though we know He is not human - **John 4:24**.

The facts of the story recorded in Luke 16:19-31.

A certain rich man dressed in the finest clothes and enjoyed great luxury every day. He lived in an expensive house that even had a gate - **verses 19-20**. By way of sharp contrast Lazarus was a beggar. This Greek word for beggar means the poorest of the poor. He was dumped, as the original language indicates, daily at the wealthy man's gate. He was simply hoping only for the crumbs or leftovers that fell from the rich man's table. Any small comfort that Lazarus enjoyed was provided by the scavenging street dogs who licked the diseased sores of his weak body.

Finally, both men died and their state of affairs was dramatically reversed. The rich man was subjected to agonizing torment while Lazarus was honored and comforted.

Verses 22 - 23 contrasted what happened when they both died.

Angels transported Lazarus to Abraham's bosom - **verse 22**.

The rich man's body was buried - **verse 22**.

The rich man was in **Hades** - **verse 23**.

The details recorded in **verses 22-31** make it very clear that the dead, both righteous and wicked, are conscious after death. Let's note some of these indications of consciousness after death.

1. Satisfaction

Verse 22-23 describes Lazarus as being in Abraham's bosom. This biblical expression suggests a state of comfort and honor - **John 1:18**; **13:23**. It implies that Lazarus was in a warm and respected fellowship with Abraham. The language suggests that the former beggar now shares Abraham's happiness. Clearly, this indicates consciousness.

2. Perception

Verse 23 says that the rich man could see and recognize Abraham and Lazarus. Therefore, he possessed perception. Perception involves an awareness of objects which requires consciousness.

3. Recognition

In **verse 24** the rich man recognized Lazarus and requested his services by name. Recognition involves consciousness.

4. Sensation

Verse 24 says that the rich man is being tormented in this flame with thirst and burning pain. On the other hand, **verse 25** says that Lazarus is comforted. Their conditions certainly affirm a conscious state.

5. Recollection

In **verse 25** Abraham reminded the rich man of his earthly status, "Son, remember that in your lifetime you received your good things." Where there is memory, there is consciousness.

6. Communication

Verses 24-31 show that the rich man could both speak and be spoken to. Communication is possible only with conscious beings. The suffering rich man had not been annihilated.

7. Comprehension

The rich man made two requests of Abraham.

First, in **verse 24** he asked that Lazarus be permitted to dip his finger in water in order to cool his parched tongue. Abraham reasoned that such was impossible because a great impassable gulf separated the righteous from the wicked. In **verse 26** Abraham made it clear that their respective locations were irreversible.

Second, in **verses 27-28** the rich man requested that Lazarus be allowed to go and warn his brothers not to come to that place of punishment.

Verse 27 says that the rich man's brothers still occupied his father's house on earth.

The rich man remembered those whom he loved in his former life. And he understood the justice of God in deciding their eternal destiny.

In **verses 29-31** Abraham replied that those brothers had access to the Old Testament Scriptures and that was sufficient to prevent them from dying lost if they were willing to heed the message.

Verse 29 says that the Law of Moses was still in effect.

The rich man's plea to send Lazarus to his living relatives would require Lazarus to return "from the dead" - **verse 30** and to "rise from the dead" - **verse 31**. And that did not happen.

This entire conversation requires consciousness.

8. Emotion

Verse 28 says that when the rich man reflected upon the spiritual condition of his earthly brothers, he showed concern and urged that they be warned not to enter this dreadful place of torment in **Hades**. People without consciousness express no concern for others.

A careful consideration of the information contained in this story can only lead to the conclusion that the dead are conscious. Theories which teach the extinction of the wicked or soul-sleeping of the righteous dead are not consistent with the divine teaching given by Jesus Christ.

What Happens to the Body?

When the human body dies, it decomposes and goes back to the earth.

Genesis 3:19 - "In the sweat of your face 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."

Ecclesiastes 12:7 - "Then the dust will return to the earth as it was, and the spirit will return to God who gave it."

John 6:44, 54 says that the body remains in the earth until it is raised up by Jesus "at the last day."

"At the last day" the body will be raised in a new form, an immortal body.

1 Corinthians 15:35, 42, 52-54 - "³⁵ But someone will say, "How are the dead raised up? And with what body do they come?" ⁴² So also is the resurrection of the dead. The body is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. ⁵² 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.

⁵³ For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality. ⁵⁴ 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."

Our bodies will be different from the ones we had in this life.

All bodies will be raised from the dead at the time of Christ's return.

John 5:28-29 - "²⁸ Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹ and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Acts 24:15 - "I have hope in God, which they themselves also accept, that there will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust."

In **1 Thessalonians 3:13** Paul writes of "the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints."

1 Thessalonians 4:13-18 continues "¹³ 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. ¹⁴ For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so God will bring with Him those who sleep in Jesus. ¹⁵ 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. 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. ¹⁷ 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. ¹⁸ Therefore comfort one another with these words."

In this letter to the Thessalonian saints, Paul stresses that Christians who have died still enjoy their "in Christ" relationship - **4:16**, and that at the time of the Lord's return, those whose bodies have "fallen asleep" or died would be brought "with him" - **4:13-14**. All faithful saints - the living and the dead - maintain their "with the Lord" experience - **4:17**.

2 Thessalonians 1:7-9 also referred to this occasion. "⁷ when the Lord Jesus is revealed from **heaven** with His mighty angels, ⁸ 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. ⁹ These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

What Happens to the Soul and Spirit?

God places within each body a soul and spirit.

Zechariah 12:1 observed that God "forms the spirit of man within him."

The Bible teaches that human beings are complex. We are composed of physical and spiritual elements. **Genesis 2:7** says "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 being."

Genesis 1:26-27 says that we possess a spiritual dimension "in the image of God" that transcends the body and physical life on earth.

Several Hebrew and Greek words are used in the Bible to define a person like nephesh and ruach in the Old Testament and psuche and pneuma in the New Testament.

They are translated by various English words like soul, spirit, breath, wind, heart, mind, self, body, and flesh. They can mean different things depending on the context in which they are used.

The words soul and spirit are used interchangeably at times. For example:

John 12:27 says "Now My soul is troubled," and **John 13:21** says "He was troubled in spirit,"

The soul and spirit live on after the body dies.

Our soul and spirit make each one of us a distinct person that will live on throughout eternity.

At death they separate from the body and exist in a conscious condition in the spirit realm.

Ecclesiastes 12:7 says that at death "the spirit will return to God who gave it."

1 Kings 17:21-22 says "²¹ And he stretched himself out on the child three times, and cried out to the Lord and said, 'O Lord my God, I pray, let this child's soul come back to him.' "²² Then the Lord heard the voice of Elijah; and the soul of the child came back to him, and he revived."

Psalms 49:15 - "But God will redeem my soul from the power of the grave, for He shall receive me."

Psalms 86:13 says "You have delivered my soul from the depths of **Sheol**."

Sheol is the Hebrew Old Testament word that is the same as **Hades** in the New Testament.

The soul's home in **Hades** is distinguished from the grave where the body normally decomposes.

When a person dies, the soul and spirit do not go into the grave. The conscious soul enters **Hades** to wait until the second coming of Christ and the final judgment. At the second coming of Christ, all souls will come forth from **Hades** and be resurrected and reunited with their new immortal bodies. -

1 Corinthians 15:35-54.

No single text contains the full picture of the disembodied state of the soul and spirit.

The complete understanding must come from various passages dealing with the same subject.

What Does the Bible Say about Death?

1. Death is called sleep.

Daniel 12:2 says "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, some to shame and everlasting contempt."

In **John 11:11-14** Jesus spoke of Lazarus' death as sleep.

1 Thessalonians 4:14 speaks of "those who sleep in Jesus."

The term sleep is used in the Scriptures to describe the body in death. Only the body of a person sleeps in death. The term sleep does not refer to the soul or spirit.

In the New Testament the word "asleep" in the Greek literally means "to lie down."

The Greeks used the word to describe a place where traveling strangers could stop for sleep.

From that word we also get our word cemetery, a place where the bodies of the dead lie sleeping.

The use of the word sleep conveys the idea that as the sleeper's spirit continues to exist while his body sleeps, so the dead person's spirit continues to exist after the body is no longer alive.

Just as sleep is temporary, so the death of the body will be temporary until the resurrection.

2. Death is a state of rest from the toils and cares of the world.

Job 3:17 - "There the wicked cease from troubling, and there the weary are at rest."

Revelation 14:13 - "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on. Yes, says the Spirit, that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them."

3. Death is a departure.

The soul and spirit leave the body at death.

Genesis 35:18 - "And so it was, as her soul was departing (for she died),"

James 2:26 says "For as the body without the spirit is dead."

Acts 9:39 - "Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them."

When Dorcas died, her body was still there, but "she," was no longer with them. Her soul was gone!

In **Philippians 1:23** Paul described death as a departure. - "For I am hard-pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better."

During Paul's two-year Roman imprisonment he was certain of one thing. If he were executed, his non-earthly state would be "far better" for he would "be with Christ." The preposition "with" is not simply being close to Christ but in active communion with Christ. The language suggests a period in which one is with the Lord after death.

Another interesting word that reveals death as a departure or journey is the term **exodus**.

Jesus talked of his impending death as a "decease" or exodus in **Luke 9:31**.

Peter wanted his words remembered after his death or "decease" or exodus in **2 Peter 1:15**.

This is the same word used for the Israelites' departure or exodus from Egypt in **Hebrews 11:22**.

We also know the word as the title of the Book of Exodus. The Hebrews continued to consciously exist after their exodus from Egypt into the wilderness of Sinai. Likewise, we will continue to consciously exist when our departure is made from this earthly life to the spirit world.

4. Death is a reunion with righteous loved ones.

Genesis 25:8 - "Then Abraham breathed his last and died in a good old age, an old man and full of years, and was gathered to his people."

"Gathered to his people" cannot refer to the burial of Abraham's body. He was buried near Mamre in Palestine. Yet his ancestors had been buried hundreds of miles away in distant lands.

The expressions "gathered to his people" in **Genesis 25:8** and "gathered to their fathers" in **Judges 2:10** do not refer to being buried. They describe a reunion with loved ones in **Sheol**, the place of departed spirits.

In **Matthew 8:11** when Jesus suggested that many would "sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the **kingdom of heaven**," he implied a reunion with those three.

5. Death is union with the Lord for those who die in Christ.

In **Luke 23:43** Jesus informed the dying thief "Today you will be with Me in **Paradise**."

2 Corinthians 5:8 is full of comfort. Paul affirms that "We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord."

Paul says that when the Christian is "absent from the body," in other words, when his spirit has left his body and he is dead, he is "present with (pros) the Lord." The preposition (pros) in this context, as in the case of **John 1:1** which expresses the relationship between the Word (Christ) and God, implies a close personal relationship with the Lord when we die. The apostle longed for this kind of total full fellowship with Christ which would be possible after his death.

The expression "to be present" literally means "to be at home" or "one among his own people" in contrast to be "one away from home." Also, the phrase "with the Lord," as used here, means to be in the presence of the Lord. At death there is immediate entrance into closer fellowship with Christ.

And according to **Ecclesiastes 12:7**, at death "the spirit will return to God who gave it."

6. Death begins an eternity of suffering for the wicked.

The doctrine of **hell** is not a popular theme in today's society, but it is a vital part of the Bible.

At death, all who have lived in rebellion to God will enter a spirit state of "pains, trouble, and sorrow" - **Psalms 116:3**.

Jesus said in **Matthew 25:46** that "These will go away into everlasting punishment."

Paul said that "those who do not obey the gospel . . . shall be punished with everlasting destruction." - **2 Thessalonians 1:8-9**.

7. Death calls for preparation.

Amos 4:12 declares "Prepare to meet your God." One cannot live wrong and die right. After death there is no opportunity for repentance or salvation. Beliefs such as a second chance after death, baptism for the dead, and purgatory are totally without basis in the Scriptures.

God gives people this life on earth to prepare their souls for their eternal home.

One must believe in Christ - **John 8:24**, turn from sin - **Luke 13:3**, and unite with the Lord in the likeness of his death through baptism in water - **Romans 6:3-5**. Then, "Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life." which Jesus promised in **Revelation 2:10**.

Many people live life as if they will live forever. It is easy to ignore the reality of death and the certainty of existence beyond the grave. We must go to the Bible and find out what will happen after we die.

There are many things about death that we do not know and the unknown can be troubling.

But the inspired word of God provides enough information to give us hope and courage to face death. We know that for the faithful child of God, death will be an absolutely thrilling experience.

Hades, Paradise, Heaven, Tartarus, and Gehenna

These five words can help us understand where the soul and spirit go after we die. The word **hell** is found twenty-three times in the King James Version of the English Bible. People are confused regarding the word **hell** because the English word **hell** has been used to represent three different words from the Greek New Testament - **Hades, Tartarus, and Gehenna**.

Hades

Hades represents a region of the spirit world.

Hades refers to the temporary unseen abode of the souls of the dead, whether good or evil. Depending upon the context, that region may either be one of reward or punishment.

Hades is the place where disembodied souls of the dead, righteous and unrighteous, wait until the second coming of Christ and the resurrection.

Hades is found eleven times in the Greek New Testament and is accurately translated Hades.

Most recent versions transliterate the word directly from Greek into English letter for letter as **Hades**. The meaning of the word must be determined by the context in which it is found.

Jesus warned that the wicked inhabitants of Capernaum who had rejected his teaching would go down to **Hades**.

Matthew 11:23 - "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."

Luke 10:15 - "And you, Capernaum, who are exalted to heaven, will be brought down to **Hades**."

In **Matthew 16:18** Christ declared "on this rock I will build My church; and the gates of **Hades** shall not prevail against it."

Jesus predicted that His death and entrance into **Hades** would not stop Him from accomplishing His divine purposes. **Hades** would not retain His soul and prevent the establishment of His church. The church would share in His victory over death at the time of His second coming and the resurrection.

After Christ died on the cross, His soul was in Hades three days while His body was buried in Joseph's tomb.

The gates of **Hades** would not prevent Him from coming back out of **Hades**.

Acts 2:27 - "For You will not leave my soul in **Hades**, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption."

Acts 2:31 explains "he, foreseeing this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in **Hades**, nor did His flesh see corruption."

His body was resurrected and He established His church a few weeks later on the Day of Pentecost as recorded in **Acts 2**. At that time, Peter and the apostles preached the good news of Jesus. They used the keys of the kingdom that Jesus promised them in **Matthew 16:19** and the power of the Holy Spirit sent by Jesus - **Acts 1:5, 8; 2:4**.

It was through Jesus' death, His resurrection from the grave three days later, and His departure from **Hades** that Jesus would "destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil," - **Hebrews 2:14**. **1 Corinthians 15:55** declares "O Death, where is your sting? O **Hades**, where is your victory?" **1 Corinthians 15:25-26** - "²⁵ For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. ²⁶ The last enemy that will be destroyed is death."

Jesus' personal victory over death and **Hades** explains why He could declare in **Revelation 1:18** that "I am He who lives, and was dead, and behold, I am alive forevermore. Amen. And I have the keys of **Hades** and of Death."

Jesus possessed the authority to open Death which involved the body and **Hades** which is the abode of the departed soul.

What will happen to this intermediate place of spirits called Hades?

Revelation 6:8 says "So I looked, and behold, a pale horse. And the name of him who sat on it was Death, and **Hades** followed with him."

In this vision the apostle John sees Death riding a pale horse, followed by **Hades**.

Revelation 20:11-15 says "¹¹ 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. ¹² 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. ¹³ The sea gave up the dead who were in it, and Death and **Hades** delivered up the dead who were in them. And they were judged, each one according to his works. ¹⁴ Then Death and **Hades** were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. ¹⁵ And anyone not found written in the Book of Life was cast into the lake of fire."

This presents a picture of the final judgment. Everyone who has ever lived will be there. We will all face God in judgment and receive our eternal sentence. We will then be delivered to one of two places - everlasting **heaven** or **hell**.

Hebrews 9:27 says "It is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment,"

2 Corinthians 5:10 says "For we must all 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."

Hades is a temporary realm that will be terminated at the judgment.

The unseen realm of the dead where conscious souls reside until judgment will have served its purpose. **Hades** will be cast into **Gehenna hell**.

Both Death and **Hades** will be emptied at the time of the judgment. The grave will give up the body, and **Hades** will surrender the soul.

Hades then will complete its purpose since both the righteous and the wicked will be assigned their final destinies with their incorruptible bodies reunited with their immortal souls.

Thus, at the time of the Lord's return, when body and soul are reunited, the term **Hades** becomes obsolete because there will no longer be a "soul-only" state.

Luke 16:22-26 shows us that Hades contains two regions.

One is for the deceased righteous and the other for the deceased wicked people.

One is referred to as **Abraham's bosom** which means near or in the presence of Abraham.

The other region in **Hades** is described as torments in flame.

Every passage in the New Testament that refers to **Hades** is consistent with this description of the intermediate realm of the dead where the deceased wait for the resurrection and judgment.

In **Hades**, the righteous souls will reside in a place of **Paradise**, but the unrighteous souls will be confined to a place of torment. Our souls will not reside there forever, but they will be raised for the day of judgment. And on that day the righteous souls will be welcomed into eternal life in **heaven**, but the unrighteous souls will be sentenced to eternal punishment in **hell**.

Paradise

Paradise is the region of Hades for the souls or spirits of the righteous dead.

Upon death believers go immediately to a place and condition of blessedness.

This view is consistent with the ample evidence of a heavenly reward at the point of death.

The word **Paradise** is of Persian origin and referred to a grand enclosure, preserve, hunting ground, garden, or park which was shady and well-watered. The Jews used the term as a garden, pleasure ground, grove, or park. They applied it to that portion of **Hades** that was the abode of the souls of the righteous until the resurrection.

The word Paradise is used in three senses in the Bible.

1. In the Septuagint which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament, **Paradise** refers to the literal Garden of Eden on earth where Adam and Eve lived - **Genesis chapters 2 and 3**. It normally is translated garden in our English versions.

2. It is used in **Revelation 2:7** to refer to the final abode of the saved - **heaven**.

3. It is also used in connection with **Hades**.

In **2 Corinthians 12:2-4** Paul described an experience that he, or someone he knew, had in the **third heaven or paradise**. - ²"I know a man in Christ who fourteen years ago - whether in the body I do not know, or whether out of the body I do not know, God knows - such a one was caught up to the **third heaven**. ³And I know such a man - whether in the body or out of the body I do not know, God knows - ⁴how he was caught up into **Paradise** and heard inexpressible words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter."

Twice Paul stated that he was not certain whether the person described was "in the body or out of the body." Paul recognized that the spirit of a human could exist in a conscious state apart from the body.

Revelation 2:7 - "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. To him who overcomes I will give to eat from the tree of life, which is in the midst of the **Paradise** of God."

Revelation 22:1-2 - ¹"And he showed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding from the throne of God and of the Lamb. ²In the middle of its street, and on either side of the river, was the tree of life."

There is an obvious relationship between **Paradise** and the **third heaven**.

The **third heaven** is the spirit realm where God and other celestial beings reside -

Deuteronomy 26:15; 1 Kings 8:27, 30; Nehemiah 9:6.

It often is referred to as the **heaven of heavens** meaning the highest or ultimate **heaven**.

The **second heaven** is outer space where the sun, moon, and stars are situated -

Genesis 15:5; 22:17; Deuteronomy 4:19.

The **first heaven** is the earth's atmosphere where the birds fly -

Genesis 1:20; 8:2; Isaiah 55:10.

Jesus specifically describes His location in Hades as Paradise.

While nailed to the cross, Jesus told the thief on the cross beside Him, "Assuredly, I say to you, today you will be with Me in **Paradise**." - **Luke 23:43**.

Jesus called it **Paradise** even though he was in **Hades** according to **Acts 2:27, 31** - ²⁷"For You will not leave my soul in Hades, nor will You allow Your Holy One to see corruption. ³¹he, foreseeing

this, spoke concerning the resurrection of the Christ, that His soul was not left in **Hades**, nor did His flesh see corruption."

Where was it that Jesus and the thief went on that very day? Certainly not to extinction. Extinction would not be **Paradise**. They did not go to the grave together. The thief was not placed in the tomb with Jesus. And the tomb certainly would not be a **Paradise**. Nor did Jesus go to **heaven**, for in **John 20:17** after His resurrection, Jesus told Mary that He had "not yet ascended to My Father." So, where is **Paradise**? Where did Jesus and the thief go after dying on the cross? Where had Jesus been for those three days between His death and resurrection?

Peter gave the answer to those questions in his sermon in **Acts 2:25-28** when he quoted **Psalm 16:8-11**. **Acts 2:27** states that God would not abandon Christ's soul in **Hades** nor allow Christ's body to undergo decay. So while Christ's body was placed in a tomb for three days, Christ's soul went to **Hades**. Peter stated that David, who penned **Psalm 16**, was not referring to himself. How do we know? Because David's body was still in the tomb - **Acts 2:29**. David's spirit was still in **Hades** because Peter also said that David had not yet ascended into **heaven** - **Acts 2:34**. **Acts 2** implies that a person does not go straight to **heaven** or **hell** when he dies. It also affirms that a person does not cease to exist or pass into a state of unconsciousness at death.

This location of the righteous dead is also called Abraham's bosom.

Luke 16:22 says "So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to **Abraham's bosom**." **Verse 25** adds that the beggar, Lazarus, was comforted in that place.

While Jesus, the thief, and Lazarus went to the **Paradise** region of **Hades**, the rich man went to the dreadful area of **Hades** which included torment and flame - **Luke 16:23-24**.

Heaven

Many Scriptures assure us of a home in heaven when we die.

Matthew 5:12 speaks of our reward in **heaven**.

In **2 Corinthians 5:1-2** Paul spoke with certainty about our future home in **heaven**.

Colossians 1:5 tells about our hope "which is laid up for you in **heaven**."

2 Timothy 4:18 - "And the Lord will deliver me from every evil work and preserve me for His **heavenly kingdom**. To Him be glory forever and ever. Amen!"

The term "**heavenly**" is a compound term, literally meaning "**in heaven**." Paul is speaking of Christ's kingdom in **heaven** and saying that after he dies he will be brought safely into that **heavenly kingdom** and remain in it from then on.

Hebrews 12:23 speaks of "the spirits of just men made perfect" referring to deceased saints who remained faithful to God during their life on earth, but who had since passed into the spirit realm.

1 Peter 1:4 says we have an inheritance reserved in "**heaven**."

Stephen understood that he had a spirit that could be received by Jesus as life was being stoned from his body. **Acts 7:55-59** says "⁵⁵ But he, being full of the Holy Spirit, gazed into **heaven** and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing at the right hand of God, ⁵⁶ and said, "Look! I see the **heavens** opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God!" ⁵⁷ Then they cried out with a loud voice, stopped their ears, and ran at him with one accord; ⁵⁸ and they cast him out of the city and stoned him. And the witnesses laid down their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul. ⁵⁹

And they stoned Stephen as he was calling on God and saying, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit."

Surely Stephen anticipated that his prayer would be answered, just as Jesus did as He was dying on the cross when He "cried out with a loud voice, He said, "Father, into Your hands I commit My spirit."

- **Luke 23:46**.

Revelation 6:9-11 speaks of those who had been murdered for their faith in the word of God and their testimony. They are described as souls who are conscious. They are aware of the means by which they were killed and they knew that their blood had not yet been avenged.

Verse 9 says "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."

John sees this group of souls under the altar. They are distinguished from those on earth in **verse 10**. The altar identifies the location as **heaven** in **Revelation 8:1-3**.

Tartarus

Tartarus is the punishment region of Hades.

Tartarus is the place that is commonly translated **hell** in **2 Peter 2:4**.

2 Peter 2:4 says "For if God did not spare the angels who sinned, but cast them down to **hell** (**Tartarus**) and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved for judgment;"

The more accurate translation is **Tartarus**. The word commonly translated **hell** in **verse 4** was translated from the Greek word *tartarosas*, a participle, the noun form of which is **Tartarus**. This is the only time the word occurs in the New Testament.

2 Peter 2:9 says "then the Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptations and to reserve the unjust under punishment for the day of judgment,"

The present participle "under punishment" in **verse 9** reveals that the penalty was already being inflicted. The word punishment clearly implies pain that is being inflicted. The same word for punishment in **2 Peter 2:9** is used to refer to the punishment that the apostles narrowly avoided in **Acts 4:21**.

Peter described the condition of rebellious angels who are chained by darkness and reserved until their ultimate deposition in **Gehenna hell**. **Gehenna hell** is the final dwelling place of all the wicked - both rebel angels (including Satan) and evil humans.

The parallel passage in **Jude 6** speaks of "the angels who did not keep their proper domain, but left their own abode, He has reserved in everlasting chains under darkness for the judgment of the great day;"

Originally **Tartarus** simply meant a deep place. Homer, the Greek poet, spoke of "dark **Tartarus** . . . the deepest pit." The ancient Greeks applied the word to the region of the wicked dead.

Since there is no indication that Peter assigns a different meaning to the term, it is reasonable to conclude that **Tartarus** is that area of **Hades** in which both rebel men and angels are punished prior to the day of judgment. This describes the place where evil angels are held prior to their banishment to **Gehenna**, their final destiny. **Matthew 25:41** says "Then He will also say to those on the left hand, "Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels:"

Tartarus is most likely the specific name of the part of **Hades** where the soul of the selfish cold-hearted rich man who died was in anguish and torment in the flame. **Luke 16:23-24** - "²³ And being in torments in **Hades**, he lifted up his eyes and saw Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.

²⁴ 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."

The word **Hades** in **Luke 16:23** is accurately translated from the Greek word **Hades**.

Hades is not to be confused with the word **Gehenna**. **Hades** is not **hell** even though it has many of the same characteristics.

Gehenna

Gehenna is a transliteration of an Old Testament Hebrew expression, "the valley of Hinnom," which refers to a ravine on the southern side of Jerusalem. This valley was used by certain unfaithful Hebrews as a place where their children were offered into the fiery arms of the pagan god Molech - **2 Chronicles 28:3; 33:6**. It was an area of suffering and weeping. When King Josiah launched his reformation, this valley was regarded as a site of wicked abomination - **2 Kings 23:10-14**.

It finally became the garbage dump of Jerusalem where there was a continual burning of refuse.

Gehenna serves as a symbolic name for the place of eternal suffering to which the souls of evil persons will be sent following the Lord's coming and the judgment.

Gehenna hell is the final and eternal abode of those who die apart from God.

Gehenna hell refers to the place of eternal, everlasting punishment. It is also called the lake of fire where Satan, his angels, and all wicked people will be delivered after the second coming of Jesus and the judgment.

The word Gehenna occurs twelve times in the Greek New Testament.

It is accurately translated **hell**. In eleven of these instances Jesus himself employs the term as **hell**.

Jesus spoke of Gehenna hell three times in His Sermon on the Mount.

The first is found in **Matthew 5:22** - "But I say to you that whoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment. And whoever says to his brother, 'Raca!' shall be in danger of the council. But whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be in danger of **hell** fire."

This does not mean that a proper use of the word "fool" or similar terms is prohibited - **Psalms 14:1**.

Rather, the Lord condemns the explosive use of insulting barbs for the sake of venting one's personal rage.

Six times Gehenna hell is employed by Jesus as examples of hyperbole or exaggeration for the sake of emphasis.

Jesus stressed that it would be better to proceed through life with great loss like losing your eye, hand, or foot rather than having **hell** as a final destiny. This shows how terrible **hell** is.

Matthew 5:29 - "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into **hell**."

Matthew 5:30 - "And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into **hell**."

Matthew 18:9 - "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into **hell** fire."

Mark 9:43 - "If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to **hell**, into the fire that shall never be quenched."

Mark 9:45 - "And if your foot causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life lame, rather than having two feet, to be cast into **hell**, into the fire that shall never be quenched."

Mark 9:47 - "And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out. 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."

On another occasion, the Lord taught where to redirect our fear.

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**."

Luke 12:5 - "But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into **hell**; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

In his blistering rebuke of the Jewish leaders who were about to crucify their own Messiah, Jesus charged them with these words.

Matthew 23:15 - "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you travel land and sea to win one proselyte, and when he is won, you make him twice as much a son of **hell** as yourselves."

Matthew 23:33 - "Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of **hell**?"

The final use of Gehenna hell in the New Testament is James 3:6.

"And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity. The tongue is so set among our members that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire by **hell**."

This may suggest that the ability to control one's tongue or speech is about as difficult as containing the raging flames of **Gehenna hell**. It may also refer to the destructive tongue that often spews poisons that are deadly in nature.

Gehenna hell involves both the resurrected body and the soul.

Unrighteous people will be resurrected from the dead, just as the saints will.

John 5:28-29 - "²⁸Do not marvel at this; for the hour is coming in which all who are in the graves will hear His voice ²⁹and come forth - those who have done good, to the resurrection of life, and those who have done evil, to the resurrection of condemnation."

Acts 24:15 - "There will be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and the unjust."

The resurrected body, as well as the soul, will suffer the agonies of Gehenna hell.

Matthew 10:28 - "But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in **hell**."

Matthew 5:29 - "If your right eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast it from you; for it is more profitable for you that one of your members perish, than for your whole body to be cast into **hell**."

The Lord describes Gehenna hell as a place of eternal duration.

The punishment of those in **Gehenna hell** is unending.

The Bible frequently speaks of the final state of both the good and the wicked as being eternal.

Matthew 18:8-9 identifies **hell** fire or **Gehenna** as "everlasting fire."

The parallel passage in **Mark 9:43** states that **hell** is a place of fire that "shall never be quenched."

This image is from **Isaiah 66:24** and is intended to make the point that the fire of **hell** will be always burning, yet never consuming. Fire here is a symbol for the extreme punishing torment which the wicked suffer after they die. The wicked will be tormented with the fire of **Gehenna hell**.

In **Mark 9:43-48** Jesus says five times that it is a place where the fire is "unquenchable." The Greek word for "unquenchable" is asbestos, a term which means that it cannot be extinguished.

Verses 47-48 states that **hell** fire is a place "where their worm does not die and the fire is not quenched." This means their punishment after death will never stop. The never-dying worm is a symbol of the unending torment of the condemned.

2 Thessalonians 1:9 uses the same description - "These shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power."

Hebrews 6:2 speaks of "eternal judgment."

Jude 7 speaks of those who will suffer "the vengeance of eternal fire."

Revelation 20:10 says that the devil will be cast into the lake of fire and brimstone and "tormented day and night forever and ever."

Matthew 25:46 also describes the punishment as "everlasting."

But some falsely teach that the punishment in **Mathew 25:46** shall have an end.

In His description of the final judgment in **Matthew 25:46**, Jesus used the same Greek word *aiōnios* for everlasting and eternal to refer to the respective conditions of both the good and evil people who inhabited the earth. If everlasting punishment is not eternal, then life eternal is not eternal either.

The Bible is very clear. **Hell** will last just as long as **heaven**. The same word is used to express the duration of the punishment, kolasin aionion, as is used to express the duration of the state of heavenly glory, zoen aionion. The original word aion must be understood here in its proper grammatical sense as never ending.

The Bible clearly answered these questions. Does the human soul exist beyond physical death and the grave in a conscious state? Or, at death, does the soul cease to exist in a state of "soul sleep?" Does a person's consciousness become extinct? Is the soul annihilated at death?

The Sadducees believed that souls die with the bodies. "Sadducees say that there is no resurrection - and no angel or spirit." - **Acts 23:8**. They denied the immortality of the soul and the existence of the spirit realm. There are religious groups today who falsely teach the same thing.

In **Luke 20:27-38** Jesus showed the fallacy of such thinking by showing that when Moses was at the burning bush in **Exodus 3:6**, God declared Himself to be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. At the time God made that statement, the bodies of those three patriarchs had been in the grave for hundreds of years. Yet Jesus concluded in **Luke 20:37-38** ³⁷ But even Moses showed in the burning bush passage that the dead are raised, when he called the Lord 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' ³⁸ For He is not the God of the dead but of the living, for all live to Him." That proves that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob - though separated from their physical bodies - were still in existence. They were not extinct. They would one day be reunited with their bodies in the resurrection.

Gehenna hell involves a state of awareness and consciousness.

It is very important that this point be made, because of those who allege that **hell** will result in the wicked being annihilated. In their view, the occupants of **hell** will eventually cease to exist. Those who contend that the wicked will be annihilated are in error. This is an important issue. Any theory or false teaching which undermines the full consequences of rebelling against God has to be considered dangerous.

A couple of well-known religious groups do not believe that human beings exist in a state of consciousness after death. One group claims that "The dead are shown to be conscious of nothing at all and the death state to be one of complete inactivity." The Bible very clearly teaches otherwise and establishes the fact that the dead are aware of their after-life existence.

Some say the word destroy or destruction means annihilation or extinction. They go to a passage like **Matthew 10:28** where Jesus said, "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**." They insist that destroy in this passage means annihilation. But that cannot be. For if physical death inflicted by one's fellowman brings extinction and unconsciousness of the soul, what is there to fear from God? Why would Jesus say there is no need to fear other people who can take your physical life? For in taking your physical life, they also would cause your soul to be annihilated, in which case they have as much power as God. If the soul dies with the body, then he who kills the body kills the soul, too.

When Jesus affirmed in **Matthew 10:28** that God will "destroy" both body and soul in **hell**, he used the Greek word apollumi which is used about 92 times in the New Testament. It is translated by such terms as destroy, perish, loss, and lost. The word does not suggest annihilation or extinction. It is used here to describe a condition of eternal misery.

The parallel passage in **Luke 12:4-5** makes this point even clearer. Jesus said "Do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He hath killed, has power to cast into **hell**; yes, I say to you, fear Him!" If physical death brings annihilation of the soul, then it is ridiculous to speak of casting the soul into **hell** after killing the body.

In every instance where the word *apollumi* is found in the New Testament, something other than annihilation is being described.

John 17:12 says "While I was with them in the world, I kept them in Your name. Those whom You gave Me I have kept; and none of them is lost except the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled." Jesus was referring to Judas, the "son of perdition," who had not yet hung himself. Obviously, Judas was not extinct or annihilated. But he was destroyed in the sense that he lost his spiritual well-being. He had perished spiritually.

When the prodigal son was in the far country, he was "lost" (*apololos*), or separated from the blessings of his home. But he was not annihilated - **Luke 15:11-32**.

Jesus affirmed in **Luke 19:10** that "the Son of Man has come to seek and to save that which was lost" (*apololos*). The Lord did not come to save folks who were in a state of non-existence. Jesus wants to save souls from **hell** so they can enjoy eternity with Him in **heaven**.

Will Christians See Jesus Before the Resurrection?

Some Bible scholars believe that Christians who die may see Christ before the resurrection. Other Bible scholars argue that the righteous dead will not be in **heaven** until after the resurrection. Several Scriptures are used to support their viewpoint.

John 3:13 - "No one has ascended to **heaven** but He who came down from **heaven**, that is, the Son of Man who is in **heaven**."

Does this passage teach that no one has yet entered **heaven**? The statement is difficult if isolated from the immediate context. One principle of Bible interpretation is that an unclear text must harmonize with clearer passages on the same theme. No single statement can be allowed to set aside a doctrine which is clearly established by other passages.

If there is solid evidence that there are souls in **heaven**, this passage must not be forced into conflict with that fact. In **John 3:13** Christ is speaking of His inherent ability to teach regarding heavenly things. He is not discussing the general theme of who may or may not be in **heaven**.

In **John 20:17** when Mary Magdalene took hold of Jesus on the morning of the resurrection, "Jesus said to her "Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.'" Some assume from this that Jesus had not been to the Father, who is in **heaven** since He had been in **Hades** according to **Acts 2:27**.

We must consider related passages and consider the immediate context of Jesus' statements.

First, at the point of his death Christ cried with a loud voice: "Father, into your hands I commit my spirit." - **Luke 23:46**. Did He at this time? Or was His spirit committed forty days later?

The present tense, middle voice form of the verb commit suggests He was handing over, giving, or entrusting His spirit to the Father for His care at this time. At the time when He is about to die and when His spirit leaves Him, He commits it to His Father. The Father received the spirit of Jesus.

Second, when Jesus said "I have not yet ascended (perfect tense) to My Father," the tense suggests a permanent state, not a mere act. Further, Mary was holding on to His body. He referenced His body when He affirmed that He had not yet ascended. He was not denying His spirit having been with the Father during the previous three days. He was cautioning Mary that His stay on earth was temporary. Permanent association with Him would be in the future - in **heaven**.

Another reason offered to support the idea that no one but the Godhead and the angels currently dwell in **heaven** is Peter's statement on the day of Pentecost regarding David. Hundreds of years after the great king's death, Peter declared in **Acts 2:34** - "For David did not ascend into the **heavens**, but he says himself: "The Lord said to my Lord, "Sit at My right hand," To use this text as proof that David's soul was not in heaven is not appropriate. Peter's statement was that the prophetic Psalm foretells the Messiah's resurrection and enthronement, and that Israel's great king could not have spoken concerning himself, for David's body was still in his undisturbed tomb according to **verse 29**. Thus, **verse 34** has to do with David's body, not his soul.

The Bible is clear that upon death of the body the soul and spirit of the righteous will be with the Lord. The entire Bible is inspired of God and is not in conflict. As we attempt to understand these Scriptures, disagreements in this area of study should not be a point of contention.